Reading achievement in a large urban school district: an analysis of the effects of four reading programs on the reading growth of four reading ability groups.

Deborah Patrice Anderson  
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READING ACHIEVEMENT IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF FOUR READING PROGRAMS ON 
THE READING GROWTH OF FOUR READING ABILITY GROUPS

By

Deborah Patrice Anderson  
B.A. University of Louisville, 1986  
M.A.T. University of Louisville, 1993

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville  
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Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2014
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A Dissertation Approved on

December 2, 2014

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful parents and grandparents

Mr. Frank Howard Anderson Jr.

Mrs. Shirley Anderson

Mr. Frank Howard Anderson Sr.

Mrs. Thelma Jean Anderson

Mr. Albert Edward. Smith

and

Mrs. Theodora E. Smith

who gave me so many opportunities to learn and broaden my horizons, and helped me

through the highs and lows of life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my amazing dissertation chair, Dr. Tom Tretter, for all his guidance, encouragement and patience. I know I would not have made this journey successfully without him. I would also like to thank Dr. Brenda Overturf, without whom I would not have even gotten on the right track to finish. Her help and life coaching has been invaluable. I would like to also thank Dr. Diane Kyle who remained on this committee even though the chair changed three separate times.

Still, I want to acknowledge my other committee members, Dr. Penny Howell, and Dr. James Chisholm who have been so amazing to serve on my committee when some of my committee members left the university. I needed more professors of the same stellar quality of those that I already had on the committee and they definitely fit the bill! Your feedback and comments have helped me to grow so much. I’ll never forget it.

Finally, I want to thank my phenomenal dad, mom, and brother who have been so incredibly helpful to encourage and to spur me on to higher heights. Still, I have to thank God for His grace and His mercy to finish this dissertation. His love never fails it never gives up, it never runs out on me, and I am so glad about it!
ABSTRACT

READING ACHIEVEMENT IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF FOUR READING PROGRAMS ON THE READING GROWTH OF FOUR READING ABILITY GROUPS

Deborah Patrice Anderson

December 2, 2014

Reading underachievement among adolescent students, specifically in urban areas, has been well documented in the literature. This unfortunate reality may point to two problems in America. Many schools possess neither the skill to prepare students for college and career nor possess the capacity to prepare them for a workforce that is becoming more and more high tech and in need of literate workers. Some schools are at a loss when it comes to teaching students to think of literacy as a critical tool for self-advocacy and identity development. Sociocultural perspectives on literacy view reading as an activity that develops as one interacts with the surrounding environment. It is not illogical to think that schools and school districts would have a positive impact on how adolescents read how much they read, and how successful they are at that particular task of reading.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter begins with an overview of the state of adolescent literacy in America and in Unity School District (a pseudonym), where the study takes place. There is a discussion of the definition of sociocultural theory which is the theory that grounds this study, and how that plays a part
in student literacy learning. Motivation theory is discussed and how student motivation plays a part in the use of scripted reading programs.

That discussion is followed up by a discussion of the high stakes testing environment and the use of scripted reading programs in many urban school districts. Motivation theory is discussed and how student motivation plays a part in the use of scripted reading programs. Some scripted programs are described and a rationale for this present study is made.

The second chapter begins with a review of major legislation over the past fifteen years that affected not only literacy but every content area. I discuss current changes due the Obama administration that have helped states reach their goals. Reading trend data is given as well as what is considered to be effective literacy instruction for adolescents.

The focus is narrowed to discussing African-American males due to the fact that only 17% in this subgroup at the eighth-grade score at or above the proficient level in literacy (NCES, 2013). This subgroup makes up the great majority of the students in scripted interventions.

Chapter Three focuses on the research methods utilized to answer each research question. This study was mixed methods using quantitative methods, descriptive statistics as well as qualitative methods for one-on-one interview questions with a subgroup of students in the study.

In Chapter Four, the results of the quantitative data is featured, showing that all four reading programs yielded student reading growth. Findings from the interviews helped to shed light on the reading growth experienced from the quantitative analysis.
Chapter Five gives an interpretation of the data through a sociocultural lens and provides suggestions for future research and next steps.

This study will help to deepen our understanding of some of the complexities of the adolescent reader as well as what pedagogical practices will help these students want to engage in reading. This study will help to inform the classroom teacher as to which instructional practices motivate the adolescent reader more than others.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

I was working as a reading teacher in a persistently low achieving (PLA) large urban middle school. All of the students in my scripted reading class were African-American males. Most of them were eighth graders who stood much taller than myself but who had reading levels well below their grade levels. We started each day with the usual script. I said, “First word, what word?”

The students responded in unison, “That word is sound!”

“Yes sound,” I replied. “Next word, what word?”

“Sight!” All the boys responded correctly except for one. He pronounced the word as “Sit.”

I performed a correction and said, “That word is sight! Say sight!”

The students responded, “Sight!”

“Now spell sight!”

“S-i-g-h-t,” they spelled aloud.

“Yes, sight! Next word, what word?”

The student who had originally pronounced the word incorrectly, pushed his book away and said, “I’m not doing this, this stuff is for babies!!”

This story is one of many stories I could tell about the experiences I had with the students in my scripted reading intervention class in this school. These recurring experiences have become the motivation for my doing this study. I keep these
experiences at the forefront of my mind as I try to give voice to the students who were in those classes.

**National Adolescent Literacy Data**

Illiteracy is a huge problem in America. National concern for the lack of reading proficiency of U.S. adolescents has grown over the past twenty or so years and has reached a level that has been described as a crisis (Jacobs, 2008). On the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in 2013, the average reading score of twelfth-graders was below the average reading score of twelfth-graders on the first NAEP in 1992 (NAEP, 2013). The average reading score of twelfth-graders in 1992 was 292 out of 500 (scale score). The average reading score in 2013 is 288 out of 500 (scale score), the same as the average reading score of 2009. There was no change (NAEP, 2013). Consequently, 62 percent of U.S. twelfth-graders are still below proficient levels in reading and 69 percent of eighth-graders in the U.S. are still below proficient levels in reading (NAEP, 2013). Furthermore, 77 percent of eighth-graders in urban areas performed below proficient levels (NAEP, 2013). Although these numbers categorically confirm the underperformance of adolescents in reading, they should also confirm that many schools lack the ability to prepare students for higher education and the work force as college and jobs become increasingly more literacy-based (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010).

**Schools and Adolescent Literacy Underachievement**

In that group of struggling readers are many cultural minority students as well as children of low income families. The current emphasis on K-12 public education accountability adds even more pressures to public school educators. Poor readers are the
result of many factors (Papelweis, 2002). Many of those factors such as school attendance and poverty, schools cannot control. In an effort to remedy the problem, literacy scholars and policymakers have called for, and have documented, a growing understanding of how classrooms and school cultures can help to advance struggling adolescent readers’ development (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010). Nevertheless, despite help from literacy scholars and policymakers, schools across the country have yet to be successful in preparing students to develop strong literacy skills.

**Reading Programs and Reading Motivation Research**

Our schools have been inundated with dozens of different programs to help students who struggle with reading. Trends in underperformance call for further research to increase our knowledge about schools' ability to effect positive growth among adolescent readers. Various reading programs promise positive effects on adolescent student reading. A number of studies have been conducted on many reading programs. Studies regarding instructional practice effects on students’ reading achievement do exist in the literature. However, reading motivation is often linked to that reading achievement. Motivation to read is an important construct to consider and to investigate. Classroom teachers of reading and reading interventions have often sought to understand how to improve students’ reading motivation. In light of the NAEP reading scores over the past decade, adding knowledge in this area could help to support a positive trend in reading scores for U.S. adolescents.

Much of the research on reading motivation has been conducted with elementary school subjects (Gambrell et al., 1997; Wigfield, Eccles, & Yoon, 1997; Guthrie,
Some older struggling readers eagerly engage in reading while others devalue and disengage in the reading process. Researchers of motivation theory often attribute these distinct motivational orientations to intrapersonal cognitive processes (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988, Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Other researchers may attribute motivation to the interpersonal relationships between the teacher and the student (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Pianta, 1992; Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

Still, it is commonly believed that in order for children to become good readers, they must spend more time reading (Allington, 2000). Research has shown that early success in reading is one of the cornerstones to a lifetime of reading habits. It is now understood that students who are able to manipulate the spelling-to sound code early appear to enter a positive feedback loop (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1992). Furthermore, a reciprocal effect occurs where reading increases their ability to read (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1992). This may further explain the “Matthew Effect” evidenced in literacy development, where the “rich-get-richer” and the “poor-get-poorer” phenomenon has yielded faster rates of growth not only in reading achievement, but in other cognitive skills as well (Stanovich, 1986; Walberg & Tsai 1983).

This present study will focus on three research questions:
1) What is the trajectory of reading growth for students of differing reading ability experiencing different reading programs (Corrective Reading (CR), Read 180, Read XL and the McDougall Advanced literacy series)?

2) What strategies/practices motivate a subgroup of students experiencing these reading programs to read?

3) What are the subgroups’ attitudes toward the reading programs/interventions they experience every day?

In order to understand the trajectory of growth of the four reading programs/interventions that could impact adolescents’ reading progress in school, data collection occurred at Unity Middle School. Unity is an urban public middle school in a very large district in the Midwest. Reading assessment data of 608 students --- approximately 70 percent of the student body---in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades was collected over the course of a year (broken up into two semesters). Additionally, interviews were conducted with a subgroup of African-American male students to explore what strategies teachers/adults do to get them motivated or excited to read. Finally, the same subgroup of students was interviewed in order to capture students’ voices regarding their attitudes about the reading programs.

**Review of Literature**

An electronic search was conducted using the ERIC system. Research included studies from 1954 to 2012. Separate searches using various combinations of key words: *reading, scripted reading, scripted reading programs, Direct Instruction, reading achievement, urban schools and reading achievement, and reading motivation* yielded over 200 articles and studies. Research concerning adolescent reading and scripted
reading interventions were included as well as research regarding reading achievement and adolescent reading motivation in urban school settings.

**Sociocultural Theory**

Though we are increasing our knowledge base of effective classroom instruction for adolescents, we do not seem to be gaining much traction when it comes to adolescent literacy progress as a nation. Since reading is a social practice (Dyson, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978) literacy research situated in a sociocultural perspective is very useful in grounding a study that investigates adolescents’ reading progress. A sociocultural perspective on reading asserts that individuals' contexts shape how individuals read and how well they read (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1995).

Even though there is a long established view that schools and contexts are paramount to an individual’s reading development, there seems to be the trend to place the reading problems only within the struggling reader. Even the term *struggling reader* can cause one to think of the tremendous challenges that adolescent students face as they try to read proficiently. Undoubtedly, the term *struggling reader* fits based on the latest data on the NAEP previously quoted.

Nevertheless, some literacy researchers assert that this broad stroke approach of struggling readers relays only a portion of the story. Alvermann & Eakle (2003) contend that we must acknowledge that “traditional school culture is making struggling readers out of some youth, especially those who have turned their backs on a version of reading and writing commonly referred to as school literacy” (p.19). This point
of view has shifted the source of the adolescent reading crisis from adolescents onto the institutions that are designed to teach them.

Gallagher (2009) takes this assertion even further. He contends that schools are furthering the decline of reading in varying ways. He posits that schools value “the development of test-takers over the development of lifelong readers, mandate breadth over depth in instruction, and drown great books with sticky notes losing sight of authentic instruction in the shadow of political pressures,” (p.7). Literacy experts have given suggestions about what some of the issues with the current classroom instruction.

**What Constitutes Good Literacy Instruction?**

The idea or concept of what constitutes good reading instruction has progressively changed over the past few decades. There are many things to consider in the case for reading success. While a range of instructional interventions have proliferated in US middle and high schools to target adolescent readers and have yielded variable success (Deshler, Palincsar, Biancarosa, & Nair, 2007; Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008), of great interest is the role of meaningful interaction through classroom discussion.

**Classroom discussion.** Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long (2003) found that discussions that included open-ended questions, multiple student responses, and elaboration had positive effects on struggling middle school readers. Langer (2002) found similar results in her series of studies of successful schools for poor-performing adolescent students as she identified literature dialogue and scaffolded critical thinking skills at the core of instructional practice. These findings are key in that they highlight the
benefits of "literate thinking"—inviting different perspectives, enabling participants to take intellectual risks, and cultivating analytic literature environments. These studies hold important implications for reading research, practice, and policy for struggling adolescent readers because they mark a pedagogical shift from compensating for reading skills deficiencies to creating a context of literacy-focused academic rigor.

**Academic press.** Research on the positive effects of classroom discussion among adolescents suggests that even students who are struggling to read can engage meaningfully and intellectually with the texts they read and the activity of reading. As such, this literature resonates with academic press, a concept that describes the "extent to which school members experience a normative emphasis on academic success" (Lee, Smith, Perry, & Smylie, 1999, p. 10). When schools and classrooms exhibit academic press, teachers maintain high expectations of their students and make instructional choices based on what is best for student learning. Though academic press sounds like it would be a given in any school context, it is an especially important concept to consider in schools that serve Black and Latino students as studies have found that in these settings, teachers often have lower expectations for student achievement (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Ferguson, 2003). Langer's (2002) and Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long's (2003) works have depicted practical models of literacy—focused academic press for traditionally underperforming adolescent students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Ferguson, 2003).

Whereas, the practice of literacy-focused academic press helps to support critical thinking and critical reading, school districts across America often choose programs that promise positive gains for adolescent struggling readers and a script for teachers to read.
Urban school district use of scripted reading programs

Many large urban school districts have opted for scripted programs for high poverty, low achieving, struggling adolescent readers. The theory supporting such programs includes components of reading that are “research-based” or “research-proven” (Shanahan, 2002). They are an extension or an example of what some would refer to as the “science of reading” (Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006).

The “science of reading” is a body of research studies from the past four decades on early reading or aspects of reading. The studies included in the “science” are only those designed to compare in randomly formed groups, demonstrating the effectiveness of one method over another. This science was built primarily from the summaries of these studies (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; NICHD, 2000).

The science of reading is often cited as the current reason for schools to adopt scripted models of reading instruction. Scripted reading instruction is defined as reading instruction where the commercial reading program, not the classroom teacher, determines what the teacher says during instruction (McIntyre, Rightmyer & Petrosko, 2008). The program sets the lesson pace (a certain number of lessons within a certain number of days). The teacher’s job is to execute the pre-made plan of the scripted program without making adjustments for the instructional needs of the children in the classroom. In fact, in most cases, districts pay people (instructional coaches/literacy leaders) to observe teachers to ensure that they are following the commercial program verbatim (Delpit & Bradley, 2003).
Beyond the aspect of exerting control over education professionals (Duncan-Owens, 2009) there is an aspect to this scenario that should include student attitudes and perceptions of these scripted reading programs.

**Literacy Curriculum and High-Stakes Testing**

Federal and state legislation have increased the public demand for accountability in the form of high-stakes testing. These tests take an inordinate amount of time and to a great extent dictate what type of instruction will occur in the classroom. The instruction that generally follows this high-stakes testing mentality often works against students learning to think at higher levels. Lisa Delpit (2003) speaks of a reductionism spawned by the testing mania that has created settings in which teachers and students are treated as objects to be manipulated and managed. “As a result of the all-consuming testing enterprise, classrooms—particularly those in low-income, urban areas—are inundated with scripted instructional programs, packaged classroom management schemes, and consultants whose job is to ‘police’ teachers to ensure that all of the scripts are followed and all of the management policies implemented” (Delpit & Bradley, 2003, p.284).

It has been proven in landmark government studies commonly referred to as the “First Grade Studies” that teacher excellence, not method, was the single biggest factor in student achievement in reading accounting for 33% of the variance in children’s reading achievement (Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Pearson, 1997; Graves & Dykstra, 1997; Dewitz & Jones, 2013; O’Connor & Vadasy, 2013). Nevertheless, school districts turn to “silver-bullet” programs in the hopes that the strict adherence to a script and a “one-size-fits all” approach will lead to better performance and higher achievement under the cloak of improved test scores (Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Alvermann, 2002). Higher
standardized test scores may not signify that children are better readers nor critical thinkers.

**Direct Instruction vs. direct instruction**

If instruction is to be intentional, it must be systematic and focused. Intentional instruction identifies a “framework rather than offering a script,” (Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2011, p. 359). Highly scripted reading programs have not given the consistent nor sustained success promised. A study conducted by Rosenshine and Stevens (2002) found that students seem to learn reading most efficiently when they are systematically taught, monitored and given feedback by the teacher (p.787). The study also found that the essential parts of direct instruction include teacher demonstration, guided practice, and feedback.

Teacher demonstration or *modeling* involves the teacher presenting the new material to the students. *Guided practice* involves the students practicing the skill, while the teacher provides feedback and additional modeling, when needed. *Independent practice* involves the student performing the skill without teacher assistance and continuing until a level of mastery is achieved. However, in Direct Instruction interventions, students are taught at a brisk pace. They are rewarded for producing high rates of correct responses, but teachers implement predetermined correction procedures for incorrect responses.

Direct Instruction has evidenced significant statistical improvement with students with learning disabilities (Lloyd, Forness, and Kavale, 1998). It is a type of explicit instruction with tightly sequenced lessons and a teacher script. There are many reading programs that utilize this method of delivery. However, some of the most popular models
of Direct Instruction are *Open Court, Success for All, SRA Reading Mastery,* and *SRA Corrective Reading* developed for adolescent struggling readers. All of these programs are very similar in their scope and sequence and some are authored by the same people.

There are numbers of studies on the efficacy of Direct Instruction. However, few of these studies are published in peer-reviewed journals by researchers with no financial or academic interest in reading models (McIntyre, Rightmyer, & Petrosko, 2008). “Further, many studies are published in journals housed or associated with the universities where the models were developed” (p. 8).

Having stated above, the findings from the following studies indicate a positive effect on many measures and for several groups on studies comparing students who have received Direct Instruction compared to those in the control group. One study (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Livermon, & Nolan, 1990) of pre-schoolers through third graders showed that students receiving *Success for All* scored significantly better on individually-scored reading and language assessments than did children in control groups after one year. Seventy-six percent of these students were participants in the government free lunch program and the kindergarteners and third graders scored especially well. While the children in this study did not score better on standardized tests, a later study (Ross, Smith, & Casey, 1997) found that the children receiving the *Success for All* intervention scored better than students in a control group on both standardized and individually-administered tests through second grade, although not in third grade.

However, Hanselman, & Borman (2013) conducted a study to evaluate the impact of SFA on literacy instruction in later elementary grades. They found that the impact of
SFA may depend on early exposure. Due to this fact, educators might have difficulty reproducing the positive achievement impacts children experienced in the earlier.

While there are very few research studies on the effectiveness of Direct Instruction found in peer-reviewed journals, it is clear that these reading models can be of some benefit to some students, but there may be no success for all.

Moustafa and Land (2002) conducted a study on the reading achievement of economically disadvantaged children in urban schools using the *Open Court* scripted reading program. In the study they compared a similar and comparably disadvantaged group of children using non-scripted reading programs. The study took place in California and compared the average SAT 9 reading scores of these two groups.

The non-scripted reading programs used across the schools in the district in 1998-99 were *Invitations to Literacy* (Houghton-Mifflin Co.), *Literacy Places* (Scholastic, Inc.), *Signatures* (Harcourt-Brace), and *Spotlight on Literacy* (McGraw-Hill). The study was limited to schools on the traditional schedule in the district. They further limited the study to schools that either used *Open Court* not in combination with another program or used one of the non-scripted programs used across the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1998-99 not in combination with other programs. The scores used were second through fifth grade scores (p. 11).

One hundred fifty-three elementary schools met the research criteria for inclusion in the study. They found the SAT 9 reading scores in schools using the scripted reading program were significantly more likely to be in the bottom quartile than the SAT 9 reading scores of the schools using the non-scripted reading programs.
Another study conducted by Land and Moustafa (2005) studied test scores of two California school districts. This longitudinal study followed test scores of a group of students who had received a scripted reading model for a period of five years. Overall, the test scores did rise; however, upon follow up, one group of students did not sustain the reading gains. Furthermore, their scores declined. Scores may have increased for all students overall, but the percentage of students at or above the 50th national percentile on a standardized test was significantly lower in classrooms using scripted programs (Land & Moustafa, 2005).

**Summary**

Illiteracy is a huge problem in this country. The literacy landscape has changed many times in the past few decades. There have been varied views as to how to remedy this problem. There is some evidence for the efficacy of Direct Instruction and scripted reading programs even though many of those studies have not been able to meet the requirements to appear in peer-refereed journals. Nevertheless, this type of instruction may work for some children, but not for all children.

**Rationale for present study**

Adolescent literacy is increasingly drawing more attention. It is a general belief and expectation that children learn how to read in elementary school. However, if this does not occur in those formative years then secondary schools are faced with the dilemma of having to teach children how to read.

There is research which address the efficacy of the various reading programs and interventions. Still, there is not a great body of research on the attitudes of the adolescent children for whom many of the programs/interventions are prescribed. Motivation plays a
huge part in getting struggling readers to read (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, MacIver, & Feldlaufer, 1993). If students are not motivated to do these reading programs/interventions, they are a waste of instructional time and financial resources.

**Research Questions**

This current study has three research questions:

1) What is the trajectory of reading growth for students of differing reading ability experiencing different reading programs (Corrective Reading (CR), Read 180, Read XL and the McDougall Advanced literacy series)?

2) What strategies/practices motivate a subgroup of students experiencing these reading programs to read?

3) What are the subgroups’ attitudes toward the reading programs/interventions they experience every day?

The base of knowledge that is currently available regarding successful reading interventions is vast. However, there is not a vast amount of research that captures the voices of the students that experience the reading programs/interventions every day. Also, most existing studies are usually a quantitative design. The current study is a mixed method design. This study will add to the existing literature about reading interventions so abundantly prescribed for adolescents in districts with low achievement, high poverty urban schools with large numbers of culturally diverse students.
CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literacy is a social practice (Diaz, 2007; Dyson, 1993; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). This view of literacy acknowledges and asserts that meanings represented in oral, written and visual texts are socially constructed. The conceptual framework for this study is based in sociocultural theory. The basic tenet of this theory is that higher order functions (i.e., literacy learning) develop out of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1986).

Sociocultural theory draws heavily on the work of Vygotsky (1986) as well as later theoreticians (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). “Through participation in activities that require cognitive and communicative functions, children are drawn into the use of higher functions in ways that nurture and scaffold them” (Kublin et al., 1989, p.6). Vygotsky described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment (Vygotsky, 1986). Tharp and Gallimore (1988) argue that these learning communities are paramount in fostering child development and higher order learning. Even as a dialogic practice, literacy must be thought of as more interaction between individuals and individual participation in groups (Langer, 1991; Kirkland, 2014).
The purpose of this literature review is to examine the existing studies and related literature regarding scripted reading programs and the efficacy of these programs in urban school districts. Many reading interventions students are experiencing are not based on social practice. As such, many reading interventions that students are experiencing have no social interaction. Much of the instruction occurs in isolation on a computer or by repeating a predetermined script with little to no interaction with classmates nor the teacher. It is questionable whether there is sustainable growth in this style of literacy learning (Moustafa & Land 2002; Land & Moustafa 2005; McIntyre et al., 2008). Further, if there is little to no social interaction nor dialogue occurring regarding text, students may be hindered from becoming more literate. This is an important context for this kind of study because many of these programs have flooded urban school districts (Delpit, 2004; Kirkland, 2014).

A second purpose for this literature review is to help shed light on the importance of student choice in the instructional programs students experience and the motivational levels they have to actually participate in those programs (Rosalie, 1995; Allington, 2007; Tatum, 2006). This literature review will help to establish the conceptual framework for the study and substantiate the importance of it in this field of educational research (Creswell, 2013).

This chapter begins by reviewing some of the major changes and legislation over the past fifteen years in education that have affected not only literacy, but every content area. I set the stage by discussing legislation and standards that U.S. schools are required to meet in order to get students to proficiency in reading and in math. I then follow up by looking at current changes as a result of the Obama administration that help states
accomplish their goals in reading and in math. I continue by discussing more current changes to national literacy and how that has impacted classrooms and the diagnosis of learning disabilities.

The second section goes further to discuss the current reading trend data for adolescents in the U.S. to set the stage for where we are and how far we need to go to get U.S. students to a level of proficiency in reading and writing. This then opens the discussion for targeting the unique needs of struggling adolescent readers. Some of the current theories regarding contributing factors to low adolescent achievement in literacy learning are discussed. That discussion helps to pave the way to look at what would be considered effective literacy instruction for adolescents.

The next section deals with literacy and the nuances of working in an urban classroom. This section is important because this is the context of this particular study as well as the setting in which many reading programs/interventions discussed later are used. Some current thoughts or mindsets about the students in urban settings are outlined followed by a discussion about race and literacy. Within the same section, I begin to narrow my focus to African-American students and literacy, followed by an even more specific discussion regarding African-American males and literacy.

After discussing African-American males and literacy, I follow up with an analysis of scripted reading programs. This analysis is significant because these types of programs have flooded urban classrooms in the past decade and two in particular are utilized in this study. This section follows a discourse regarding African-American males and literacy due to the fact that only 17% of African-American male eighth graders score at or above the proficient level in literacy (NCES, 2013). They make up a great majority
of the students in these types of interventions (Fasholo, 2005). I make a contrast between Direct Instruction (DI) and direct instruction that is explicit teaching. I review the genesis of DI and the research surrounding many of the programs it has generated. Conversely, I talk about direct instruction which some believe to be more holistic in delivery and in scope (Goeke, 2008). Some criticisms surrounding these instructional methods are considered and examples of programs based on these instructional methods are given. However, some of those programs will be discussed in greater detail later on in chapter three.

In the final section of this literature review, I delineate some elements that promote best practice literacy for all students. I begin to outline some examples and elements of best practice literacy that will help children based on their varying needs. There are elements that are included in the home as well as in the school environment working in tandem to promote student literacy achievement. I have also included some approaches that I have used as a classroom teacher as well as a literacy coach that have been proven to be very effective in enhancing student achievement in literacy as well as other content areas. Overall, this literature review frames this dissertation’s examination of the efficacy of reading interventions and students’ motivation to do them.

**Sweeping Changes in Literacy**

A high number of American students are struggling to read. Many attempts to correct this problem often result in a search for a “magic bullet” or a “skills-in-a-box” approach to literacy learning (Alvermann, 2002, p. 191). School districts across America have tried many approaches to help struggling readers. Many research based programs have been implemented in American schools. Some common examples of these reading
programs are Accelerated Reader, Success for All, SRA Corrective Reading, Scholastic’s Read 180, Achieve 3000, America’s Choice—Ramp-Up Literacy and many others. All the aforementioned programs were used at one time or another in the district of this current study. The number of research based reading programs and interventions available to schools have proliferated over the past decade. Unfortunately, the results of many of those programs have not been as successful nor sustainable over a period of time as claimed (Hafner et al., 2003; Allington, 2007; McIntyre, Rightmyer & Petrosko, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Students still experience reading deficiencies, especially at the middle school level.

Shanahan & Shanahan (2008) posit that adolescents may have strong literacy skills in early childhood education. However, it does not guarantee and may not be enough to ensure future reading and academic success. Reading and writing proficiency are critical determinants of students’ overall success in school and college readiness (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Students who experience difficulty with reading commonly experience a lack of academic success (Shaywitz, 1999; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Perle et al, 2005). Students who are identified as deficient readers often begin pullout special education services in the primary grades (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). In middle school they are often given intervention programs where text is presented on a lower reading level, and students practice literacy strategies to help them become better readers (Alvermann, 2002).

However, text complexity is of great importance when thinking about readers becoming better readers. Text complexity also plays a large role in the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS will be discussed in more detail
in a subsequent section. Still, standard 10 of College and Career Readiness of the CCSS states that students should be able to “read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p.10). Hiebert (2012) asserts that many texts often used in secondary schools have been “dumbed down over the past fifty years” (p. 26).

On the 2013 Nation’s Report Card, only 34% of the U.S. 8th graders scored at or above proficient in reading (NCES, 2013). The very fact that so few scored at or above proficient might be explained by the “dumbing down” of texts in secondary schools as mentioned by Hebert (p.26). It could also be linked to a lack of connection between home literacies and the literacy students encounter at school ((McCollin, 2005; McIntyre, 2008). Maybe it is because many students just don’t like the reading/intervention programs that are chosen for them (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006; Gambrell, 2011). This current study hopes to delve deeper into the latter statement to find out what adolescents really think of a few of the reading programs/interventions they are asked to complete every day.

There are a myriad number of reasons to explain why many adolescents are not becoming better readers and why many are not performing better on the NAEP. However, literacy experts and educators would both agree that there is a need to challenge and strengthen students in reading text that is more complex (Hebert, 2012; IRA, 2014). Morgan, Wilcox & Eldridge (2000) found that students learn more when they are taught with challenging texts. O’Connor, Swanson & Geraghty (2010) came to the same conclusion as well.
Fisher, Frey & Lapp (2012) noted that for years teachers have been taught that quality instruction requires a careful matching of materials to students. This is actually not in dispute. Albeit, the goal has been to select materials that are neither too difficult nor too easy for the students. However, to the extreme, this phenomenon can be called the Goldilocks Rule (Olhausen & Jepson, 1992). This rule basically states that when students are given or choose text that is “just right” or at a comfortable reading level, with no checks and balances from the teacher, they, over a period of time, will stay at that level and will not challenge themselves to move beyond that level (p.34). As a result, students will continue to eat more of the same kind of porridge (same level of books in which they feel comfort) and never improve (Olhausen & Jepson, 1992).

Athletes become better athletes by varying their routines and challenging their muscles to reach higher levels of performance, flexibility, and stamina. In the same way, struggling readers need to be exposed to a range of varied genres and text difficulties and lengths in order to improve their reading abilities (IRA, 2014). Teachers are the coaches who “must provide more skillful instructional scaffolding – employing rereading, explanation, encouragement, and other supports within lessons” (IRA, 2014, p. 1).

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) states that if a child is not reading proficiently in the fourth grade, there is a 78% chance that child will not catch up (NAAL, 2014). By the time many of these struggling readers reach high school, the discrepancy in reading skills commonly spans five to six grade levels (Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen, & Campbell, 2001; Perle et. al, 2005). Many of these children are targeted for failure due to their inability to comprehend the written language of their high school texts. These inabilities carry long-term consequences for students as they
become adults (Kortering & Braziel, 2002; Moats, 2001; Scheffel, Shroyer, & Strongin, 2003). As a result, the federal government stepped in to pass legislation intended to enact change that would help better the literacy lives of struggling readers and close the achievement gap.

**No Child Left Behind**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law on January 8, 2001. It was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. It represented a fundamental shift in thinking about the role of the federal government in public education (Miaz, 2004). The focus for NCLB was to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to a high quality education. It was also intended to help students reach a basic level of proficiency on state academic standards for reading and math.

Since that time, much has changed regarding NCLB. While the law did much to highlight the achievement gap and increase state accountability for groups of high needs students, it failed to recognize or reward growth or progress in student learning. The law was due for congressional reauthorization in 2007. However, Congress did not act upon the reauthorization. Consequently, President Obama announced in September of 2011, that he would grant waivers from NCLB to qualified states. The very first waivers were granted in February of 2012 (Kentucky was one of the states that applied for, and received a waiver).

The states were given flexibility regarding specific requirements of NCLB in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. States must also agree to a plan to implement college
and career-ready standards. They must create comprehensive systems of teacher and principal development. They must also provide evaluation and support that include factors beyond test scores, such as principal observation, peer review, student work, or parent and student feedback.

States receiving waivers no longer have to meet 2014 targets set by NCLB but they must set new performance targets for improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps. They also must have accountability systems that recognize and reward high-performing schools and those that are making significant gains, while targeting rigorous and comprehensive interventions for the lowest-performing schools. Under the state-developed plans, all schools will develop and implement plans for improving educational outcomes for underperforming subgroups of students. State plans will require continued transparency around achievement gaps, but will provide schools and districts greater flexibility in how they spend Title I federal dollars (U.S. D.O.E., 2012).

Kentucky, being one of the states having received a waiver, is in the process of implementing a new teacher evaluation system that includes the previously mentioned components (principal observation, peer review, student work and student feedback). The new evaluation system is called The Professional Growth Evaluation System (TPGES). It was designed on the basis of a framework for teaching developed by Charlotte Danielson. Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) schools in the district of this study were strongly encouraged to pilot TPGES with master teachers who volunteered to be observed in non-evaluative years. The researcher was one of those master teachers who participated in the pilot program.

More Changes on National Literacy Landscape
Common Core Standards

In an atmosphere of such high accountability and radical change, the release of a national set of common standards occurred in 2010. These standards are called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These standards were developed to help ensure that all students in the United States are adequately prepared for college and careers. The Common Core State Standards Initiative “is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governor’s Association Center for Best Practice (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p.1). The standards were developed with the help of K-12 education professionals, administrators and experts in varying content areas. Initial feedback was received by the NGA Center and CCSSO from national organizations representing many other stakeholders. Teachers, postsecondary educators (including community colleges), civil rights groups, and teachers of English language learners and students with disabilities were included in the groups offering feedback (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

These standards have also been developed based on input from highly effective standard and curriculum models across the country and countries around the world (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). The standards provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn. The CCSS are designed to begin in kindergarten and will gradually build toward a set of College and Career Readiness Standards culminating at the end of high school (Overturf, 2011). Consistent, unified standards have the potential to provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live (Overturf, 2011). Policy experts truly believe that
“consistent, rigorous, unified standards” have the potential to ensure that students in the U.S. have the skill to compete in a global 21st century economy (Overturf, 2011, p. 24).

The standards are aligned with college and work expectations; are clear, understandable and consistent; include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills; build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards; are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society, and are evidenced-based. (NGA & CCSSO 2010, p.1).

To date, 45 states have adopted the CCSS. Indiana agreed to adopt the standards in 2010, but recently decided to repeal that decision (U.S. News, 2014). They have become the first state to do so, but may not be the last to repeal and charge their State Board of Education with devising their own college and career readiness state standards (U.S. News, 2014). Indiana has to have these state standards in place by July 1, 2014.

The CCSS for English Language Arts (ELA) and Response to Intervention (RTI) are two of the most recent initiatives that have the potential to greatly improve the literacy lives and literacy learning of U.S. students. The CCSS for English Language Arts (ELA) describes what a mature, effective reader looks like as a 21st century literacy learner (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). It provides a common content standard by which RTI curriculum, instruction and assessment can be evaluated (Wixson & Lipson, 2012).

RTI, however, focuses on determining whether students are actually responding to instruction and intervention in a measurable way that indicates they are “gaining the knowledge and skills characteristic of mature, effective readers” (Wixson & Lipson, 2012, p. 388). Since the CCSS will direct the curriculum, instruction and assessment (for
at least the 45 states that have adopted them to date) in ELA, they will definitely have a significant impact on instruction and intervention within an RTI approach to teaching and learning. It is expected that 80%-85% of students will have their needs addressed within the first tier of the RTI approach in the regular classroom (Wixson & Lipson, 2012). Due to such a large group of students affected or served in the regular classroom, RTI becomes relevant to this current study since I examine a few of those reading/intervention programs. RTI is more fully explained in the following section.

**Response to Intervention**

RTI is a revised law of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). IDEA was originally enacted by Congress in 1975 to ensure that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive a free appropriate public education, just like other children. The law has been revised many times over the years. The most recent amendments were passed by Congress in December 2004, with final regulations published in August 2006 (Part B for school-aged children) and in September 2011 (Part C, for babies and toddlers). So, in one sense, the law is very new, even though it has had a long, detailed, and significant history.

RTI was developed to remediate some of the many problems with the discrepancy model for identifying students with learning disabilities (Stanovich, 2005; Walmsley & Allington, 2007). According to 1977 federal regulations and language, a learning disability was defined as “a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability” (U.S. Department of Education, 1977, p.1082). Schools were given the task to administer IQ tests and achievement tests. Then they then examined these data for discrepancies between intellect and achievement to identify a learning disability.
The latest revision of the law is different from previous versions in at least one important aspect. As mentioned above, practitioners were previously encouraged to use IQ-achievement discrepancy to identify children with learning disabilities. Now however, they may use RTI to make this determination. When schools have the flexibility to utilize RTI instead of the discrepancy model, classrooms can be impacted in various ways. Of import to this current study is the ability to help reduce the number of minority students, specifically African-American males, who are generally overrepresented in special education classes (Kunjufu, 2005; Allington, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Harry & Klingner, 2014).

**RTI as a Process**

In 2004, IDEA, Public Law 108-446, introduced language to include RTI (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In the section entitled “Specific learning disabilities” (§300.307) it is implied that states cannot be required to use the discrepancy model for identifying learning disabilities. However, they may “permit the use of a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention” (p.115). This is the methodology of RTI. It is a process.

This process is used to measure whether a learner’s academic performance improves when provided with well-defined, scientifically based interventions (Mesmer and Mesmer, 2008). “In an RTI model, the ‘tests’ of whether students possess learning disabilities are not standardized measures but students’ measured responses to interventions. Within RTI, student potential (IQ) is replaced by a goal that allows for the evaluation of a performance relative to a defined academic standard” (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008, p. 282). Students responding more readily and more significantly to
interventions are less likely to possess a disability than students responding more slowly or not at all. However, the data derived from a student’s response to an intervention serves as only one piece of data for determining whether a learning disability is present. “Learning disabilities cannot be diagnosed when appropriate instruction, socioeconomic status, culture, sensory issues, emotional issues, or English as A Second Language may be of concern” (Walmsley & Allington, 2007, p 5).

RTI has had a strong impact and influence on the design and delivery of literacy programs in many U.S. schools (Allington, 2009). It is being considered a more comprehensive strategy that includes more universal screening and high-quality instruction for all students (Gerston, et. al, 2008). As a result, RTI, even though emerging from IDEA, is being offered and utilized in schools as a system of remediation and instruction for every student (Applebaum, 2009; Commission on RTI, 2010). This makes this initiative relevant to this current study. A portion of the money utilized to pay for the implementation of many of the programs/interventions involved in the current study came from the RTI budget. Due to the language of the law, schools were able to utilize as much as 15% of their special education dollars to pay for early intervening services (EIS) and to support professional development for teachers and literacy instruction for more students (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

RTI is relevant to this current study also because the law states that schools are required to institute preventative measures that attempt to reduce the number of students who experience initial failure. Within RTI the first tier of defense is the regular education classroom where every student is supposed to receive high quality instruction. Many of the students participating in the current study are benefitting from RTI. Since it is
designed to promote early identification as well as pre-referral intervention, many students were identified and received interventions before they reached the middle school level. They were not caught in the cycle of “waiting to fail” where they would eventually receive services if they continued to lag behind or could not participate in classroom reading activities in a meaningful way (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998 p. 26). Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998) define “waiting to fail” as a phenomenon that occurs as a result of the previous system of diagnosing the need for special educational services. This model demonstrates a lag time which waits for the student to fail, and by that time, the optimal years to teach many reading skills will have passed (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

**Adolescent Literacy**

The definition of adolescent literacy is multifaceted. The National Governor’s Association (2005) defines it as “the set of skills and abilities that students need in grades four through twelve to read, write, and think about the text materials they encounter” (p.26). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has a definition of adolescent literacy that states that it is more than reading and writing (NCTE, 2006). “It involves purposeful social and cognitive processes. It helps individuals discover ideas and make meaning. It enables functions such as analysis, synthesis, organization, and evaluation. It fosters the expression of ideas and opinions and extends to understanding how texts are created and how meanings are conveyed by various media, brought together in productive ways” (p. 5).

Many researchers and educators have written about and are very concerned about reading, or the lack thereof, in the middle schools (Ippolito, Steele & Samson, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Moje, 2008). Poor literacy skills are far too common in America’s middle
schools. While there has been increased attention paid to reading at the secondary level accompanied by a push for standards-based learning, testing and funding, currently most of the attention and resources are focused on the reading needs of students through grade three (Deshler, Palinscar, Biancarosa, & Nair, 2007). Nevertheless, it is that critical transition between learning to read and reading to learn that makes middle school reading so very different from reading at the elementary school level (Chall, 2000). Meanwhile, the “reading slump” that is well-documented after grade four in U.S. schools still persists (Chall & Jacobs, 2003, p. 50; Jacobs, 2008; Stockard, 2010).

**Reading Trend Data**

Data collected on trends in reading achievement on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) shows improvement for grades 4 and 8. The average score for fourth-graders was higher in 2013 than it had been for all previous assessment years with the 2011 assessment year being an exception (Nation’s Report Card, 2013). Eighth-graders’ scores were higher in 2013 in comparison to all previous assessment years. Twelfth-graders’ performance in reading, however, showed no significant change from 2009 to 2013 (NCES, 2013). In comparison to the results from the 1992 assessment year, twelfth-graders' reading scores in 2013 were 4 points lower (NCES, 2013).

The average score for fourth-graders was 222 (out of 500) for 2013. This was higher and significantly different from the scores in 1992, but not significantly different from the scores in 2011 (NCES, 2013). The average score for eighth-graders was 268 (out of 500) for 2013. This score was higher and significantly different from the scores in 1992, and significantly different from the scores in 2011 (NCES, 2013). Twelfth-graders had an average score of 288 (out of 500) for 2013. This score was actually lower than the
scores in 1992, as stated above, and significantly different from the scores for 1992, but not significantly different from the scores in 2009.

More specifically, looking at 2013 reading data on The Nation’s Report Card for Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) reveal that the average score of fourth-grade students in reading was 221. This average score was not significantly different from the score in 2011 (223) nor was it significantly different from the average score in 2009 (219). Still, the average score in 2013 for students in the fourth-grade in other large cities was 212. Sixty-six percent of JCPS students scored at or above basic. Thirty-three percent of JCPS fourth-graders scored at or above proficient and nine percent of JCPS fourth-grade students scored advanced. All three percentages were greater at each achievement level than the percentages of other fourth-graders’ achievement levels of other large cities.

The average reading score in 2013 for students in the eighth-grade in JCPS was 261. This score is the highest of the past 3 testing cycles. Notwithstanding, these scores are not significantly different from the average reading score in 2011 (260) nor the average reading score in 2009 (259). Still, it is higher than the average reading score of other eighth-grade students in large cities. Sixty-nine percent of eighth graders scored at or above basic in reading. Twenty-nine percent scored at or above proficient and four percent of the JCPS eighth-graders scored advanced in reading. All of these percentages were not significantly different from the average reading score percentages of eighth graders of other large cities.

Students in the twelfth grade were not assessed in reading in Kentucky in 2013. The assessment was voluntary and only 11 pilot states took part in the 2009 and 2013
reading and math assessments. However, the latest data available from NAEP stated that the average score for twelfth-graders was higher in 2008 than in 2004 but it was not significantly different from the score in 1971 (NAEP, 2010).

We are making some strides in reading achievement. However, basic level literacy achievement is woefully insufficient in a world where literacy tasks required of adolescents are continuing to become more complex and more demanding (Ippolito, Steele, & Samson, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). In an official position statement published by the International Reading Association (IRA) it was noted that “adolescents deserve instruction that builds both the skill and desire to read increasingly complex materials” (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999, p. 5). High quality literacy instruction for all students should enable them to keep up with the ever-changing societal demands of living in an informational/communication technology (ICT) age. However, students who lack strong skills for finding, understanding, and evaluating written information cannot easily arm themselves with that information or use it to advance the causes they hold dear. As our society increases its demands on the students, schools will need to respond with more diverse and creative ways of getting higher quality instruction to our students. If we do not respond with high quality instruction, the demands of our society will continue to write a check that our students’ intellectual ability cannot cash.

Increasing Literacy Demands

Students in the U. S. have experienced some improvement in reading and writing achievement (NAEP, 2013). Further, there has been a modicum of success in Jefferson County in comparison to national reading scores. Nonetheless, this country is not
experiencing great success at helping our students become proficient readers (NCES, 2013). We can simply continue to analyze data from the NAEP and find that over a decade, there has been no significant change in reading achievement for adolescents (Nations Report Card, 2013). The small gains we had made seem to have dwindled. In JCPS alone fourth-graders’ reading scores have regressed during this last testing cycle of the NAEP instead of progressed (NAEP, 2013). Shanahan & Shanahan (2008) suggest that success is not guaranteed to be continued. One must wonder if we as a nation are at a standstill when it comes to literacy education and closing the achievement gap for our children. School systems are now dealing with the fact that promising early performance and gains in reading achievement often dissipate as students move through the middle grades (Carnegie, 2010). The solutions to this problem are multifaceted. Nevertheless, literacy experts do have some suggestions.

Shanahan & Shanahan (2008) suggest that there should be a collaboration between the reading language arts class and the content area classes. If reading and writing strategies were taught throughout all content areas, and not just in isolation, students would begin to experience greater success in reading achievement (Jacobs, 2008).

The Carnegie Foundation reports, “Beyond grade three, adolescent learners in our schools must decipher more complex passages, synthesize information at a higher level, and learn to form independent conclusions based on evidence” (Carnegie, 2010, p. ix). They must develop special skills and strategies for reading text in differing content areas (such as English, science, mathematics and social studies) and a student who is adept in one subject may struggle in another subject.
There is a wealth of knowledge on reading instruction for primary grades K-3. However the knowledge base and literacy supports for adolescent readers tend to present varied instructional challenges and require a more diverse range of strategies (Alvermann, 2002; Carnegie, 2010). Middle and high school students must learn from texts which, compared to those in earlier grades:

- are significantly longer and more complex in word, sentence and structural levels;
- present greater conceptual challenges and obstacles to reading fluency;
- contain more detailed graphic representations (as well as tables, charts and equations linked to text) and
- demand a much greater ability to synthesize information (Carnegie, 2009, p. ix).

Furthermore, each content area has a specific set of literacy skills students need to acquire to be successful and transition fully from the phase of “learning to read” to “reading to learn” (Carnegie, 2009, p.ix). Adolescents who fail to master these more complex tasks are more likely to become unskilled workers in a world where literacy is an absolute prerequisite for success (Kutner et al., 2005).

New Literacies

To compound the issues of mastering more complex literacy skills, students are faced with new literacies. Alvermann (2009) posits that the barrage of new literacies to which our adolescents are exposed create a greater challenge for the struggling reader. The term new literacies has many meanings (Gee, 2000; Henry, 2006, Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu et al., 2004; Street, 2003). For the purposes of this discourse, this term shall describe “the new skills, strategies, and dispositions that are required to successfully identify important questions, locate information, engage in critical
evaluation, synthesize information, and communicate on the internet” (Leu et al., 2004, p. 98). New literacies are a must if students are to participate in the digital world in which we live (International Reading Association, 2001). Although these new literacies are not included in the assessments to measure student achievement as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), these skills are extremely important to the viability of our students’ academic futures (International ICT Literacy Panel, 2003; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2004).

New literacies build upon the traditional foundational literacies that have always been taught in schools. Further, new literacies encompass the new reading, writing, navigating, viewing, and communication skills required by the many information and communication technologies (ICTs) that continually resurface in day to day tasks and media (Leu et al., 2004). New literacies require students to search the internet for information and require a level of sophistication to decipher and “surf” the web to find answers (Henry, 2006). The process of navigating within and between websites, anticipating what information might be connected to a hyperlink on any given site, synthesizing information found at various locations, and critically evaluating online sources also require new skills and strategies (Coiro, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). To take complete advantage of the Internet’s wealth of information, readers must acquire the new literacies needed to use them effectively (Leu, 2002; Spires & Watson, 2013). We are living in an information/technology age that is constantly changing and shows no sign of slowing down.

**Targeting the Needs of Struggling Adolescent Readers**
Since the passage of NCLB our nation’s students have made some gains in reading achievement. However, more than a decade later many of those gains have stagnated, or regressed (NCES, 2013). From 2002 to 2013, most states have experienced no statistically significant positive gains in reading achievement in this country. It has been established that literacy success in early grades does not necessarily translate to gains in later grades (Alvermann, 2002; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Carnegie, 2010). Many students do well on third and fourth grade reading accountability tests, then progressively lose that momentum by the time they reach middle school. Many of the skills students use up to the fourth grade are critical to future success. However, they are not proving to be enough to ensure success at the secondary level (Perle, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005)

Decoding, comprehension and fluency. Many primary schools have placed an emphasis on decoding. However, good decoding does not mean that students comprehend what they have read (Chall, 2000). Struggling secondary school readers often have challenges in various areas of reading. This may include decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension or phonemic awareness.

Shankweiler et al. (1999) and Pikulski & Chard (2005) assert that decoding and fluency are the critical foundations on which all other reading skills are built. Studies even suggest that developing decoding skills have a positive effect on reading abilities of elementary school students (Chall, 2000). However, “reading is too complex a process to refer to it simply as decoding alphabetic print or making meaning of text. To read critically, one must go beyond asking ‘What does this text mean?’ to asking ‘How does it come to have a particular meaning and not some other?’” (Alvermann, 2002, p.190).
Reading comprehension and its development are highly dependent on a reader’s ability to read written words accurately and fluently. The general consensus is that the automaticity of word reading is directly related to the cognitive ability to construct meaning from text (e.g., Frederiksen & Warren, 1987; Jenkins, Fuchs, van den Broek, Espin, & Deno, 2003; Just & Carpenter, 1987; Perfetti, 1985; Walczyk, 2000). For that reason, many researchers regard word reading as the only skill—other than listening comprehension required to understand written text. This is a view summed up in a theory called the simple view of reading (SVR), (Gough, Hoover, & Peterson, 1996; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). This framework asserts that reading comprehension is the product of a reader’s decoding (or word reading) skill and linguistic (or listening) comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990).

Further, reading comprehension will be more greatly restricted by decoding in younger readers than in older ones (Gough, P. B., Hoover, W. A., & Peterson, C., 1996). Gough et al. (1996) reported correlations among decoding, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension. Ten studies were reviewed. These studies reported 17 strong correlations between decoding and reading comprehension. However the statistical strength of the correlations decreased with increasing age of participants from Grade 1 to college students (see also Curtis, 1980; Francis, Fletcher, Catts, & Tomblin, 2004; Jenkins & Jewell, 1993; Vellutino, Tunmer, Jaccard, & Chen, 2007). Keenan, Betjemann, & Olson (2008) have also shown that decoding makes a larger contribution to reading comprehension for younger than for older readers. Still, there are also studies in which, despite a wide age range and consequently, a wide range of reading level, age does not
influence the relative contribution of decoding to reading comprehension (e.g., Cutting & Scarborough, 2006).

Perhaps longitudinal studies could add to this subject of the change in the relationship between decoding and reading comprehension. However, longitudinal studies to date provide a diverse view which might add to a lack of clarity. Some longitudinal studies show a very clear weakening of the relationship between decoding and reading comprehension from the first to the last time point of evaluation (e.g., Abbott, Berninger, & Fayol, 2010; Burgoyne, Whiteley, & Hutchinson, 2011; Deacon & Kirby, 2004; Juel, 1988; Kim, Wagner, & Foster, 2011; Kim, Wagner, & Lopez, 2012), while some longitudinal studies find that the correlations at the first and last time points are similar in magnitude (e.g., Cain & Oakhill, 2011; Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004; Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, Elleman, & Gilbert, 2008; Manis, Seidenberg, & Doi, 1999; Oakhill, Cain, & Bryant, 2003; Torgesen, Wagner, Rashotte, Burgess, & Hecht, 1997; Wood, 2009).

A critical factor that might contribute to the discrepancies in findings between longitudinal studies could be the age range that is included. Other factors to consider may be various reader and assessment characteristics. Although age is theoretically a plausible mediator for the strength of the association between word reading and reading comprehension, it does not appear to be the only factor that may account for the variability found in correlations between decoding and comprehension (Cain & Oakhill, 2011).

More reasons why adolescent readers struggle
Vocabulary knowledge and word recognition can also create problems for struggling adolescent readers. Vocabulary knowledge not only has a strong correlation to discourse-level reading comprehension (Carroll, 1993) but also will support decoding (Protopapas, Mouzaki, Sideridis, Kotsolakou, & Simos, 2013; Tunmer & Chapman, 2012). The importance of vocabulary knowledge may differ for different types of readers or varying age groups. As a result, not all adolescents that struggle with comprehension have weak vocabulary skills (Cain et al., 2004; Stothard & Hulme, 1992).

Many researchers have found that word recognition is also a fundamental process of reading and is needed to support vocabulary attainment and reading comprehension (Stanovich, 1996). A lack of word recognition skills is highly pervasive and extremely debilitating for struggling readers. Furthermore, inability to pronounce individual words in the text adds to a struggling reader’s consternation.

Another piece of this puzzle to consider when discussing factors that plague struggling adolescent readers is the fact that sometimes adolescent readers may have a listening comprehension that is higher than their reading comprehension. When listening comprehension exceeds reading comprehension, inaccurate and slow word recognition producing a lack of fluency may be the cause (Shankweiler et al., 1999). Still, many students who are able to read fluently may be unable to comprehend well (Pressley & Block, 2002).

According to the National Reading Panel (2000) there are two distinct groups of secondary struggling readers with regard to decoding skills. A small group is comprised of students who are still reading at the first and second grade levels. These students have not mastered beginning reading skills: phonemic awareness skills of blending and
segmenting, letter-sound associations, reading of decodable words, recognition of high-
frequency irregular words, and reading of decodable text. Chall’s (1983) stages of
reading development also contend that many older students struggle because they are
deficient in, or lack the phonological awareness skills, or specifically the phonemic
awareness skills that are normally acquired in Chall’s pre-reading and decoding stages of
reading.

A second group of struggling readers in secondary school is identified as students
who read between 2.5 and 5.0 grade level (NRP, 2000). These students can most often
decode single-syllable words and recognize some high-frequency irregular words. Most
children in this particular category have the most difficulty trying to decode multisyllabic
words (NRP, 2000). Still, students who are poor decoders, even those who are able to
decode single-syllable words, have problems with multisyllabic words (Just & Carpenter,
1987). The inability of poor readers to decode long words produces a lack of fluency
while reading. This produces a qualitative difference between good and poor readers
(Perfetti, 1985). Furthermore, Allington & Franzen (2014) assert that there are three
groups of struggling readers: those with poor decoding skills, poor comprehension skills,
or poor skills in both areas.

As a result of student inability to decode, read fluently, comprehend and interpret
text, many adolescents enter middle school with huge deficits in reading. Some of these
students will be labeled as “special needs” (Walmsley & Allington, 2007). Currently, the
number of children and young people ages 3-21 receiving special services was 6.4
million in 2011-2012 (United States Department of Education, 2013). This is thirteen
percent of the public school population. Of that population, thirty-six percent are students
with specific learning disabilities. Approximately ninety-five percent of those students ages 3-21 served under IDEA were enrolled in regular schools (NCES, 2013). The majority of these students have significant deficits in their reading abilities.

**Secondary schools’ lack of change.** The needs of struggling adolescent readers continues to draw more national attention. Consequently, the Carnegie Corporation published a report entitled *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success* (Carnegie, 2010). The report outlined several ways that literacy demands change for adolescent learners:

1) texts become longer
2) word complexity increases
3) sentence complexity increases
4) structural complexity increases
5) graphic representation become more important
6) conceptual challenge increases and
7) texts begin to vary widely across content areas (p.16).

Amidst all this change in literacy demands for adolescent learners, America’s secondary schools have not changed (Carnegie, 2010). Some researchers believe that there has been a “developmental mismatch” between our nation’s youth and the secondary schools for many years (Eccles et al, 1993, p. 36). At the point when students are making the developmental change to become more independent, many schools begin to enforce more control (Goodenow, 1993). In this same way, adolescent literacy instruction has remained largely unchanged and has become mismatched to the children it is supposed to educate (Daeshler et al., 2007).
Adolescents outpace secondary classroom literacy instruction. Adolescents already use multiple social literacies involving discourses that are part of popular culture. They use these literacies to shape their environments by creating meanings in social contexts (Moje, 2007). However, teachers may not use these extra-curricular literacies when they believe that they are distractions or controversial. Therefore, these literacies are largely invisible in many classrooms (Kim & Monique, 2004; Moje, 2007). Research shows that students need bridges from the classroom communities to those that are part of their everyday literacies (McIntyre et. al, 2008; Moje et al., 2004). They also benefit from recognizing that “texts are written for social reasons and in social settings” (NCTE, 2007, p. 3).

Leander (2007) completed a study regarding adolescents’ abilities to multitask in regular classrooms where the curriculum was a very traditional reading of text. In the midst of that curriculum, students were engaging in instant messaging, blogging, online chatting, web browsing and other online tasks totally removed from classroom instruction. Students also gamed, shopped and downloaded music online. As mentioned above these activities are very common to a youth culture that multitasks and engages in them outside a school-directed learning environment. These activities were self-selected and mostly outside the instructional goals of the teacher. One of the findings in the study was the fact that many students interviewed said that they could actually complete these activities while in class completing classwork.

Furthermore, the data suggested that the students who were on-task had no advantage over the multitaskers during whole group discussion participation. The multitaskers were highly versed in navigating the expected norms of the classroom
instruction and even suggested that the web surfing helped to relieve the monotony and boredom.

Lankshear and Knobel (2007) refer to this as having a cyberspatial mindset. A cyberspatial mindset recognizes the fact that schools cannot be the same learning environments we had even fifteen years ago simply because this generation of adolescents are exposed to a new level of communication technology that is more easily accessed than previous generations. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) assert that new literacy activity is thought of and accessed in the spare of the moment while other activities are still in process thus the multiliteral multitasking.

Tierney (2009) comes to the same conclusion regarding adolescents and literacy curriculum. In a world that is growing more and more tech savvy and more digital by the minute, “the literacy field has tended to maintain a tradition of theorizing literacy and studying texts in a fashion which is singular and separated from the growing fabric of digital literacies with which most of us most of the time engage as primary sources” (p. 276). If students become bored with the instruction and are sorely mismatched with the curriculum we are teaching, then it is no great mystery as to why the NAEP reading scores have stagnated or have not yielded significant growth. What we are doing has not proven to be instructionally effective for our struggling adolescent readers up to this point. Notwithstanding, experts do have some suggestions for what effective literacy instruction should look like for struggling adolescent readers.

**Effective Literacy Instruction for Adolescents**

There are several characteristics of effective adolescent literacy instruction. The first tenet of effective adolescent literacy instruction is to incorporate it throughout the
It is insufficient for literacy instruction to only occur in an English Language Arts (ELA) class (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Draper, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Moje, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Effective reading strategies and instructional practice should be interwoven across the curriculum. Incorporating content area texts in ELA classes and utilizing good literacy instruction in content area classes brings about more continuity in student learning (Daeshler et al., 2007; Draper, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

The James R. Squire Office of Policy Research under the auspices of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) periodically produces a research brief to update knowledge of research practices that affect policy decisions. This Adolescent Literacy Policy Research Brief was published in 2007. The brief was published to address concerns of decline in adolescent literacy performance as measured by the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress and the 2005 ACT college readiness test; the brief states that tests scores do not represent the actual complexity of adolescent literacy issues. Nevertheless, the brief puts forth research based instructional practices to help teachers to help adolescent students become successful readers. One such practice was the use of content area literacy instruction:

*Instruction is most successful when teachers engage their students in thinking, reading, writing, speaking, listening, and interacting in discipline-specific ways, where literacies and content are not seen as opposites but rather as mutually supportive and inextricably linked. When put next to literacies, then, disciplines represent unique languages and structures for thinking and acting; disciplines are*
spaces where students must encounter, be supported in, and be expected to
demonstrate a plurality of literacies. This means taking a much more nuanced
approach to disciplines and at the same time affirming the plurality of literacies.
As such, all teachers play an equally important role because no one class or
teacher can best develop students’ literacies apart from discipline-informed
strategies (NCTE, 2007, p. 6).

Effective adolescent literacy instruction should work to build and sustain student
motivation and bolster their ability to direct their own learning (Alvermann, 2002;
Ippalito, Steele, & Sampson, 2008). Reading activities that promote student engagement
and self-directed learning help to promote motivation, self-efficacy, reading
comprehension and strategy use (Guthrie & Alao, 1997; Guthrie, Anderson, Alao &
Rhinehart, 1999). Furthermore, providing students with choices in their reading and
learning are ways to help adolescent learners direct their own learning (Reynolds &
Symons, 2001; Gambrell, 2012). Still, students should be held accountable for their
learning and set learning goals for themselves. In this way they can increase student
learning and motivation (Schunk, 2003).

**Motivation and Engagement**

Motivation as an aspect of engagement grows as students progress to secondary
schools. Students are less likely to be engaged the higher in education they progress
(Guthrie et al., 2006). Without engagement, students who are capable of reading and
writing may choose not to, a condition which McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, (1995) term
“aliteracy” (p. 954). Engagement can be encouraged through connections to choice and
responsive classroom environments (Guthrie, 2001; Guthrie & Alao, 1997).
Motivation and Self-efficacy

Motivation and self-efficacy are inextricably linked in the success of the struggling adolescent reader. Self-efficacy is grounded in the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory. This theory basically postulates that human functioning results from interactions among personal factors (e.g., cognitions, emotions), behaviors, and environmental conditions (Bandura, 1986, 1997). From this perspective, self-efficacy affects one’s behaviors and environments (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Self-efficacy is hypothesized to affect individuals’ task choices, effort, persistence, and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Research supports the hypothesized relation of self-efficacy to academic motivation (effort, persistence) and achievement. Among students of different ages, significant and positive correlations have been obtained between self-efficacy for learning (assessed prior to instruction) and subsequent motivation during learning (Schunk, 1995). Studies conducted across varying disciplines using children and adolescents as study participants have yielded significant and positive correlations between self-efficacy and academic achievement (Lent, Brown & Larkin, 1986; Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991; Schunk, 1995).

Another tenet of effective adolescent literacy instruction is the use of cooperative/collaborative learning (Alvermann, 2002). While motivation is increased when students are able to collaborate or work cooperatively, student comprehension increases as well (NICHD, 2000). When students are grouped to read and complete focused tasks, students in upper elementary and secondary schools have been shown to experience increased comprehension (Bryant, Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Ugell & Hamff, 2000).
Effective literacy instruction for adolescents includes the use of graphic organizers and representing ideas by using story maps. Combining words, symbols and lines to organize information also helps to increase comprehension (Alvermann, 2002). While students are reading text, they need to interact with the text by monitoring their own comprehension as well. Knowing when understanding fails or breaks down and knowing which “fix up” strategy to use helps students to comprehend text more readily (Alvermann, 2002).

Finally, scaffolding struggling readers in content areas is vital when providing effective literacy instruction for adolescents (Allington, 2002). Chall (1983) pointed out that the demands of reading increase dramatically for students as their learning begins to rely more on textbooks. The vocabulary they encounter is less conversational and less familiar with more specialized technical terms (especially in science and in math). The sentence structure becomes more complex and demanding. Schools perpetuate this problem even further by purchasing the same text for every student (Allington, 2002). “This one-size-fits-all approach works well if we want to sort students into academic tracks. It fails miserably if our goal is high academic achievement for all students” (Baumann & Duffy, 1997, p 6).

The Florida Center for Reading Research (2006) published a report on adolescent literacy. They concluded in their research that there were five areas of improvement/change by content area teachers that would enhance literacy. They are outlined below:

1) More explicit instruction and guided practice in the use of reading comprehension strategies.
2) Increasing the amount of open, sustained discussion of content and ideas from text.

3) Maintaining high standards for the level of conversation, questions, vocabulary, that are used in discussions and in assignments.

4) Adopting instructional methods that increase student engagement with text and motivation for reading.

5) More powerful teaching of content and use of methods that allow all to learn critical content (FCRR, 2006, p.18).

These areas of improvement have to be accompanied by teacher preparation and professional development. There are some reading strategies and approaches that are discipline specific. Students spend the majority of their day with content area teachers, therefore content area teachers are able to have an enormous impact on furthering the literacy needs of struggling adolescent readers (FCRR, 2006; Moje, 2007).

Further, in priority school classrooms, we find a type of “double jeopardy.” Many students in these schools are not just struggling readers, but their families are struggling financially. This makes for an intense classroom situation. The priority school classroom teacher not only has to instruct the struggling reader but she/he must also speak to the emotional needs of many students who are caught in a pernicious web of not having enough just to live. Further, these teachers are often faced with the challenge of countering the negative attitudes /perceptions many students have about education and learning in general. The priority school classroom is an extremely unique environment and is worthy of a closer look in regards to literacy learning.

**Literacy and the Priority School Classroom**
Classroom teaching has changed tremendously over the past few decades (Cooter, Matthews, Thompson, & Cooter, 2004). Due to many teachers leaving the profession, U.S. school districts end up staffing classrooms with a wide variety of professionals (Moore, 2004). Students may be taught by brand new teachers right out of college, veteran teachers, or those participating in an alternative certification program who are learning to teach as they teach (NCTQ, 2006). Other urban classrooms may be staffed with people with emergency certification, or a long-term substitute with as little as a high school diploma and 2 semesters of college. After much study of teacher strategies and objectives for instruction, it can be said that many teachers engage in what is termed “random acts of teaching” instead of research-based practices informed by assessment data (Cooter et al., 2004, p.24).

Classroom management also continues to be a serious concern for classroom teachers and especially for teachers in high needs priority schools (Milner & Tenore, 2010). The cross section of diversity and classroom management is a staple on the canvas of these schools. These two aspects of classroom teaching are repeatedly named as areas of concern for veteran as well as new teachers (Melnick & Meister, 2008). Students’ languages, experiences, ethnicities, religions, and abilities may be highly diverse and may or may not be shared by the teacher (Milner, 2006). The classroom learning environment is of paramount importance when educating students.

The connection between student engagement and classroom management are inextricably linked (Emmer, Evertson & Anderson, 1980; Emmer & Sabornie, 2015; McGarity & Butts, 2006). Studies have consistently shown the practices used during the first days of school establish a teacher’s leadership and fairness (Bear, 2015; Lewis,
Mitchell, Trussell, & Newcomer, 2015) as well as scaffold students’ success and self-regulated behavior (Bohn, Roehrig, & Pressley, 2004). However, novice teachers continue to identify classroom management as a major concern (Hertzog, 2002; Meister & Melnick, 2003; NCTQ, 2006). Unfortunately, in high needs classrooms, up to 50% of new teachers leave the classroom within the first three years (Berry, Hopkins-Thompson, & Hoke, 2002;).

Classroom Mismatch

Another issue that plagues urban classrooms is the “mismatch” between students and the schools and teachers that teach them. “The differences between schools, and many urban students can be thought of as a mismatch between the structure of schools, the social, cultural and economic backgrounds of the students” (Deschenes, Tyack, & Cuban, 2001 p. 525). Many would view these differences as problems. Furthermore, some educators would explain the achievement gap between whites and students of color as a result of these aforementioned differences (Deschenes et al., 2001). However, some researchers, in response to the data on achievement gap disparity between whites and students of color hold that the problem with the lack of student achievement is a product of the educational system rather than the students’ backgrounds, cultures, socioeconomic status, families or neighborhoods (Delpit, 1995; Scheurich, 1998; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). These researchers have suggested that many public school educators function with a deficit thinking perspective when examining the achievement disparity associated with students of color.

Deficit Thinking Theory
Deficit thinking theory refers to the labeling of poor minority students and their families as disadvantaged, at risk, and uninvolved (Johnson, 1994). This type of thinking tends to blame school failure on the students’ lack of readiness to learn in the classroom, the parents’ lack of interest in student education, and the families’ overall lifestyle (Johnson, 1994). In addition, some who have this deficit view hold that compared to the students of the more affluent dominant culture, students who are culturally different innately have less competence, less intelligence, less capability, and less self-motivation (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

Deficit thinking theory has implications for classroom practice. This paradigm can be used by educators as an excuse for failure (Delpit, 1995; Valencia, 1991). It can also produce a huge disconnect in instructional practice and delivery (McCollin & O’Shea, 2005). These disconnects can be pervasive throughout the curriculum thus causing minority students to struggle to understand the presentation of new concepts and information because it is packaged in a manner that students cannot relate to and is unfamiliar.

**Literacy Learning and Funds of Knowledge Theory**

Huge disconnects follow with literacy learning and teaching as well. School-based reading practices can create reading discrepancies between majority students and their non-majority peers (McCollin & O’Shea, 2005). “Too often literacy practices of the home are far removed from the literacy practices students are expected to exercise in the classroom,” (Waldbart, A, Meyer, B., & Meyer, J., 2006, p. 775). Research has proven that when teachers understand and infuse modes of home literacy practices, students are more meaningfully involved in schools, students perform better in academic, behavioral,
and emotional domains (Comer, 1984; Darling & Westberg, 2004). Children who have rich preschool literacy experiences that stimulate interest in script are at less risk for delays in reading development (DeJong & Leseman, 2001; Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992). These experiences include the availability of environmental print in the home as well as parents who read for themselves and with their child (Morrow & Young, 1997). However, African-American children arrive at kindergarten with fewer reading skills than Whites, even when their parents have equal years of schooling (Phillips, Crouse, & Ralph, 1998). In a perfect world, schools could remedy these disparities. But the reality is that the Black-White test score achievement gap is persistent from primary to secondary grades (Ferguson, 2002).

Recognizing the importance of family involvement in literacy learning is paramount to bridging the gap between home and school literacy to foster success for the student in the classroom (Morrow & Young, 1997). Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, many do not see the importance nor honor the literacy learning that is present in minority low-income homes (Waldbart et al, 2006).

As such, these “funds of knowledge” are the starting points to determine a student’s literacy history and background (Moll, et al., 2001, p. 116). According to Moll (2001), funds of knowledge are defined as a way “to refer to the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p.133). When teachers are able to take off the role of teacher and expert and replace that role with that of learner, they can begin to know and understand their students and their families in very new and unique ways (Moll et al., 2001). A reciprocal learning relationship takes place between student, parent, and
teacher. With this new knowledge, they can begin to see that the households of their students contain rich cultural and cognitive resources and those resources can be utilized to help provide culturally responsive and meaningful lessons that tap the students’ prior knowledge (Moll, et al., 2001).

Donna Alverman (2002) noted:

> Effective literacy instruction for adolescents acknowledges that all uses of written language (i.e., studying a biology text, interpreting an online weather map, and reading an Appalachian Trail guide) occur in specific places and times as part of broader societal practices (e.g. formal schooling, searching the internet, and hiking). Typically, it’s the case that book reading is privileged in middle and high school classrooms. This privileging elevates the importance and value of academic reading but tells teachers little about their students’ everyday uses of language and literacy. Effective instruction builds on elements of both formal and informal literacies. It does so by taking into account students’ interests and needs while at the same time attending to the challenges of living in an information-based economy during a time when the bar has been raised significantly for literacy achievement (p. 190).

The method of how to increase the literacy achievement of minority students is embedded in social, cultural, economic, and historical dynamics (Tatum, 2000). Gay (2000) also points out that a lack of cultural congruence between home and school can lead to lowered expectations for students in addition to a lack of meaningful participation in school. Furthermore, several research studies have concluded that incorporating a culturally relevant approach to teaching literacy can lead to gains in
student achievement (Gay, 2000). As our classrooms become more and more diverse, knowledge and understanding of the literacy practices of varying cultures and races is more important than ever. Literacy, race and culture are inextricably linked (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003). The classroom setting should become a place where students are aided in deciphering the literacies they experience at home and in their own cultural settings. The classroom should be a place that creates a community of practice whereby all students, regardless of race or ethnicity feel valued and can attain high levels of literacy achievement. The role of the classroom teacher is critical in helping students preserve their racial and cultural identity. Students enhance their literacy achievement when introduced to text that is culturally relevant yet challenges them to think more critically (Tatum, 2000).

**Race and Literacy**

Lopez (2000) defines race as “a group loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and /or ancestry… Neither an essence nor an illusion, [race] is an ongoing process of social and political struggle” (p. 165). Following Lopez’s definition, race becomes a persistent factor in social practices including literacy. As a result, race raises critical questions about power and desire in the nature of literacy learning. Gee (1990) commented “to situate literacy in the individual person rather than in the society of which that person is a member…obscures the multiple ways in which reading, writing, and language interrelate with the working of power and desire in social life” (p. 27). Subsequently, literacy is not only a social practice, it is also a cultural/political one.
Literacy educators argue that literacy learning (the learning of hidden rules and cultural codes of dominant culture) sanctions struggle and regulates mobility (Delpit, 1988). To successfully navigate school and society, minorities must be able to function and move both within their own cultural communities and within the dominant society (Mahiri, 1998; Ogbu, 1974, 1978; Tatum, 1999). Delpit (1988) asserts that non-Whites may find that their racial backgrounds may result in unequal and limited access to education and other resources that can facilitate social or economic progress. Due to racial backgrounds, some individuals are marginalized in society, and their cultures, languages, and moral codes are frequently dismissed as inferior social practices, even in school settings (Delpit, 1995; Dyson, 2003). Individuals who are relegated to marginalized social positions consistently experience a lack of privilege and power. Therefore, they often internalize this experience (Ogbu, 1978), and internalized oppression, or believing that the self is somehow “less than” and “less worthy” than the other, which results in lowered expectations in school and for life chances (Ferguson, 1998).

**Literacy and African-American Students**

Since the passage of NCLB, reading achievement scores for adolescents, as discussed above, are slowly beginning to improve. Data collected on trends in reading achievement on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) for Jefferson County Public Schools reveal that the gap between average reading scores of Black students and White students continues to persist (NCES, 2013). The gap in the scores of fourth-grade Black students and White students is 27 percentage points. In the eighth grade, Black students scored 22 percentage points lower than the White students.
Furthermore, the fourth and eighth grade students who were eligible for free/reduced price school lunch, an indicator of low income, had an average score 28 and 23 points lower than that of students who were not eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch. These score gaps are not significantly different from the scores and gaps of public school students in this category of other large cities.

These data would suggest that the need for intervention is paramount to improve the literacy skills of students who are culturally diverse and those who live in poverty. Although the gap between minority and majority achievement has narrowed some, the achievement differences are still substantial by the end of middle school (Allington, 2001). As the knowledge base surrounding adolescent literacy continues to grow, and as the issue continues to draw more attention from policymakers and educators, some fear that the current era of accountability will actually negatively impact minority students in terms of literacy skills (Tatum, 2000). For example, as a result of the current emphasis being placed on high-stakes assessments which are linked to state standards, some educators feel that the drive to attain minimum standards will not be enough to adequately address the achievement gap that currently exists (Hilliard, 1995; 2003). Scholars concerned about this possibility believe that the emphasis on preparation for a statewide test is forcing educators to adopt a less critical and less comprehensive approach to literacy instruction (Guilfoyle, 2006).

Tatum (2000) cites an example in Chicago as a case in point of “the proliferation of standards and the high rates of retention” that resulted from students not meeting identified standards (p. 52). Several years ago, Chicago, one of the largest urban school districts in the United States, created alternative high schools to accommodate students...
who repeatedly failed to meet standards. These alternative schools were referred to as “warehouses for underachieving students of color” (p. 53). These schools were plagued by many of the same characteristics that are found in many high-poverty schools (brand new teachers and less qualified teachers). In addition, many citizens in the city viewed this practice to be reactionary in nature, perpetuating the issue of inadequate instruction in literacy for large percentages of the city’s struggling adolescent readers (p. 53).

The term *warehouse* could also be utilized to describe another educational issue when referring to the literacy needs of African-American and minority students. It is the over-identification of minority students in special education. McCollin and O’Shea (2006) noted the research that has been conducted on the “recursive dilemma of minority student overrepresentation in special education classes” (p.93). It is still occurring in our nation’s classrooms (Walmsley & Allington, 2007). Minority students are still being placed in special education programs at an astonishingly disproportionate rate. African-Americans were 2.28 times more likely to be designated as Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) and 2.75 times more likely to be designated as ID (Intellectual Disorder) (Harry & Klingner, 2014). The National Research Council (2005) indicated that the proportion of minority students in special education programs has risen 38% since 2000. Due to the fact that more than half of all students receiving special education services are classified with a learning disability and more than 90% of these students struggle with reading, the importance of improving literacy skills for this group of students has now become the focus of several federal initiatives to improve education (McCollin & O’Shea, 2006).

**African-American males and literacy practices.** Literature and research on African-American males and their literacy practices is becoming more abundant. Trying
to close the literacy achievement gap between African-American males and other groups has been an extremely difficult task for American educators. Methods and strategies used up to this point have not been very effective as evidenced by NAEP reading scores and trend data for the gap that continues to persist between African-American males and other students (NAEP, 2013). This achievement gap has been the subject of discussion for many educators. Nevertheless it still exists. Subsequently, there is an even greater need to study the literacy practices of African-American males.

In regard to the plight of African-American males in our society, Lee (1991) contends, “Young black males in contemporary American society face major challenges to their development and well-being” (p.1). African-American males perform well below other students in basic subject areas (Reed, 1988; NAEP, 2013). They are more likely to be remediated or placed into classes for students with learning disabilities than other students (Klingner & Hart, 2005; Mason & Schumm, 2003; Ryan, 2006; Tatum, 2008a; Walmsley & Allington, 2007). African-American males are suspended from school more often and for longer periods of time than other students (Meier et al., 1989; Lee, 1991, Kunjufu, 2009; Tillman, 2009). Highlighting only these examples, it is not surprising that there is such an achievement differential between African-American male students and others.

Not only are there achievement differences between them, the school experiences of African-American males are vastly different than any other student (Coleman et al., 1966; Ferguson, 2000; Tatum, 2008b). An increasing body of literature on African-American male school experiences shows that being African-American and male most definitely exposes some of the most poignant issues we have in literacy achievement in
this country (Hunsander, 2002; Pollard, 1993; Tatum, 2000; Tillman, 2009, Toldson, 2009; Weatherspoon, 2006). According to the NAEP (2009), nearly 65% of African-American males read below grade level, compared with 27% of White children. Even Hispanic and Asian fourth graders have fared better on reading exams than African-American males, although, for many, English is their second language. The NAEP (2013) reading achievement score have yielded no significant changes in the achievement gaps between Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Specifically, there were no significant changes in NAEP reading achievement scores for African-American males. As a whole however, Blacks did see a significant increase in reading achievement average scale scores between the years of 2009 and 2011, (246-249) (NAEP, 2013). In 2013 there was a significant increase in score (250) (NAEP, 2013). Still, it’s not enough to move some groups in our country’s demographics and not move others. It affects our entire society. Black males have the lowest average scale score in reading of all ethnic/racial/gender groups. It would seem that we are just not improving the literacy lives of African-American males.

While many try to explain why African-American males do not perform well on literacy tests, Jones and Esch (2002) confirm the observation stated above. These researchers assert that many African-American youngsters do poorly in school due to language differences between the home environment and the school environment. Many times, teachers penalize students who speak a cultural language that many African-Americans speak at home (Hilliard, 1991, 2004; Hale, 2001; Weatherspoon, 2006). African-American males are confronted with a series of barriers that make it more challenging for them to achieve academic and social success (Kunjufu, 1985; Moss & Tilly, 1995; Noguera, 2001; Council of the Great City Schools, 2010). Smith and
Wilhelm (2002) give a general warning regarding literacy education and boys, “Schools seem to be failing boys in literacy education. And while this failure may be rooted in a complex amalgam of issues, perceiving a problem of any group of students obligates us to try to understand it, so we can do something about it” (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p.3).

It is extremely important to understand the issues concerning literacy and boys. However, doing something about the multiple and alarming issues surrounding African-American males and literacy is most urgent (Ogbu, 1990; Kunjufu, 2009). Urban African-American males are by far the most threatened demographic in our population both in school and out (Kunjufu, 1985; Gibbs, 1988; CGCS, 2010; Weatherspoon, 2006). Educational policies and literacy programs have not proven to be successful thus far. School districts implement reading programs and interventions that fail to acknowledge the social dimensions of African-American males’ patterns of literacy learning (Tatum 2002, 2009; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012; Tillman, 2009; Toldson; 2009) By far and large, these programs are situated around social practices that are unfamiliar to African-American males and literally exclude their way of learning from the learning context (Tatum, 2002, 2008b, 2009; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012; Tillman, 2009).

Many of the interventions these young men are directed to complete hold the common characteristic of teacher-directed instruction with an emphasis on scripted instructional materials and teaching. Many proponents argue that these programs are “teacher proof” so that ineffective and novice teachers are provided with a script and standards-based lesson plans designed to improve instruction (Holcomb, 2005; Colt, 2010). In contrast, opponents argue that scripted programs are rigid and restrict teachers’ creativity. Further still, some believe these type programs exacerbate student literacy
achievement over a period of time and do not produce sustained literacy learning (Moustafa & Land, 2002).

**Scripted Reading**

The scripted reading instruction we see in today’s classrooms come in one form or another from Siegfried, Engelmann, and Breiter, who developed Direct Instruction programs in the 1960’s (Commyras, 2007). Direct Instruction, which is synonymous with scripted reading instruction, should not be confused with “direct instruction” which is another method of instruction that serves to scaffold student learning. Direct Instruction is interchangeable with scripted instruction. Direct Instruction distinguished by capital letters indicates an instructional model that features tightly sequenced delivery of instruction read from a teacher’s script. Such programs make the assumption that teachers do not make the best instructional decisions (Duffy, 2002). The belief is that these programs include components of reading that are research-based or research proven (Shanahan, 2002). Scripted programs also make the assumption that all learners need the same instruction at the same level and in the same way. Duffy (2002) makes the distinction between the direct instruction found to be an essential part of improving comprehension and the Direct Instruction that is synonymous with scripted reading programs that teach decoding. Two models of Direct Instruction used in the district of this study are Success for All and SRA Corrective Reading. These programs are not only utilized in middle schools, but they are also used in elementary as well.

In direct instruction (distinguished by small case letters), teachers evaluate student need to determine what needs to be taught (Beers, 2003). The teacher determines the order of instruction and listens critically to student responses to inform the plan of what
to do next. The teacher decides when and how much to reteach and responds to the needs of the students. The teacher also embeds explanations into authentic learning experiences (Beers, 2003).

As mentioned above, scripted programs have been criticized as being reductionist in nature due to the extensive focus on phonological skill (Altwerger, 2005). This type of instructional model is created when basic skill is the goal and there is no time left for developing a love for literature nor little time given for the critical creative thinking needed for full participation in our society (Altwerger, 2005). (Delpit (2007), in her essay on power and pedagogy, questioned the effectiveness of many scripted Direct Instruction programs used in today’s high needs schools.

I do not advocate a simplistic ‘basic skills’ approach for children outside the culture of power. It would be (tragic and has been) tragic to operate as if these children were incapable of critical and higher-order thinking and reasoning (p.1).

SRA Corrective Reading and Direct Instruction

SRA Corrective Reading published by McGraw-Hill is a Direct Instruction scripted reading program. It is one of many scripted programs that has been used to fill the NCLB requirement of scientifically-research based reading programs (Addison & Yakimowski, 2003; Viadero, 2002). Direct Instruction programs include placement tests to establish drill groups, defined student and teacher behaviors utilizing a script, immediate correction of errors, skill and drill activities, regular interval testing and ongoing teacher training (Donaldson, 2001; Heubusch & Lloyd, 1998). In studies comparing Corrective Reading programs used with middle school students who were below level reading to control groups in resource classes, the study groups made
significantly greater improvements in reading in areas of decoding and spelling (Arthur, 1988; Din, 2000; Fuzio, 2001; Podhajski, 2001; FCRR, 2004).

A study was also conducted with rural high school students with learning disabilities (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Orlob, & Ebey, 2000). Students receiving this intervention showed relatively stable performance in vocabulary and an increase of 1.5 grade levels in comprehension after 80 school-days of instruction. As evidenced by the studies above, Direct Instruction has yielded promising results. Some scholars have found Direct Instruction to be useful to develop basic decoding skills. However, there have been mixed results in the area of comprehension (Fuzio, 2001; Donaldson, 2001; Marchand-Martella, Martella, Orlob, & Ebey, 2000).

**Criticisms of Direct Instruction and the Research**

Much criticism has been leveled against Direct Instruction and the research that has been done to support its use in classrooms. One of the main criticisms is that the highly structured and repetitive teaching format can be boring to the teacher and the students (Schung, Tarver, & Wester, 2001).

Second, as discussed previously, many of the research studies use a non-random assignment of participants in the studies. This fails to provide a control which can contaminate the data and the results (Troia, 1999). Utilization of appropriate research techniques such as fidelity of treatments, measurement sensitivity and detailed descriptions of study samples have all been criticisms leveled against the research plaguing the validity of Direct Instruction studies.

Another criticism regarding the quality of research advocating for Direct Instruction programs is the lack of studies that are published in peer-reviewed journals.
“Most studies were published by researchers who had a financial or academic interest in the reading models. Further still, many of these studies are published in journals housed or associated with the universities where the models were developed” (McIntyre et al., 2008, p. 378).

SRA Corrective Reading was created to give inner-city students remediation in reading. An overview of the program is available in the Corrective Reading Series Guide (Engelmann et al., 1999). It is made up of two components-- decoding and comprehension skills. Decoding Skills focuses on word attack skills and word identification. The comprehension portion helps readers build vocabulary and deals with word meanings to comprehend text.

Teachers and teaching assistants attend training for the implementation of Corrective Reading. The training includes a three hour session prior to beginning the intervention. It includes an overview of the program, as well as a detailed demonstration (modeled lesson) of what a Corrective Reading lesson should look like in the classroom. After the training is completed, the teachers and assistants are expected to model a Corrective Reading lesson and must score proficient in every area outlined by the observation instrument. This instrument is customized by the school district purchasing the program and McGraw/Hill as a way to monitor the instruction to give “consistency” of delivery. It is also expected that district curriculum personnel will monitor progress to make sure the teacher is adhering to the integrity of the program. Students are given a placement test within the SRA Corrective Reading program (Engelmann et al., 1999) to place them in the appropriate level reading book. Based on their performance on this assessment, they will be placed in level A (lowest), B1, B2, or level C (highest).
The basic structure of the program uses signaling (with up and down hand motions), specific correction procedures when errors occur, rapid pacing, and positive reinforcement for students in the form of a Teacher-Student game (Engelmann et al., 1999). Students respond in chorus and are encouraged to stay on cue with the teacher as they signal the correct moment to give response.

Teachers adhere to a script and mandate the students to “track” with their fingers across the page as she/he reads. If students are not “tracking”, the lesson stops and they are brought into the proverbial fold or they can lose a point in the Teacher-Student game.

Students are given “check outs” every day. These check outs are timed readings that the students take for speed and fluency. The check-outs are completed one-on-one with a teacher or a peer. They record their results to these check outs in their program workbooks. Homework is given every day in Corrective Reading. Students simply complete independent practice of what was learned during that day.

More than four million African-American males are enrolled in K-12 schools in the United States, denoting that they are seven percent of the school-aged population (Council of the Great City Schools, 2011). Scripted reading programs like CR have flooded educational markets. Many students experiencing Direct Instruction programs are African-American males since they constitute the largest group differential in the reading gap as compared to their White male counterparts. (NCES, 2010). The failure of the scripted reading approach for African-American males is captured by Tatum (2009), “No reading strategy, no literacy program, no remediation will close the reading achievement gap or life outcome gap for adolescent African-American males. We will
continue to fail our students unless meaningful texts are at the core of the curriculum and educators know how to mediate such texts” (p.xii).

How to get those meaningful texts to adolescent African-American males is still quite the conundrum. When there is such a huge nationwide push to adopt high-stakes testing for students, many teachers do not have the liberty to pick and choose what literature their classes will read or teach. Instead, teachers are told to adopt a test-driven approach to increase the achievement of struggling adolescent readers. Under these conditions and mandates many students (including African-American males) may still be left behind.

**More Examples of Popular Adolescent Literacy Programs**

The district where this study was conducted, like many other large urban districts, has utilized several different literacy programs in an effort to satisfy the needs of struggling adolescent readers. I will give a brief description of some of those programs. As a core reading program for students in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades students use Scholastic Read XL. This text can be utilized for students reading between one to three grade levels below grade. Students can be taught to an instructional reading level that should not frustrate them.

The district utilizes Accelerated Reader (AR). This reading program is aimed at struggling readers as well as developing readers. In most cases it has been used as an intervention in this district. This program is computer-based and encourages students to read in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Students work on fluency, vocabulary, and basic comprehension. Many studies have been conducted on this reading program. Several studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals (Biggers, 2001;
Krashen, 2003; Mallette, Henk, & Melnick, 2004; Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipielewski, 2002). The Florida Center for Reading Research also conducted an independent study of AR. The Florida Center for Reading Research noted the lack of assessment of “inferential or critical thinking skills” as weaknesses of the software (FCRR, 2006). Nevertheless, the majority of studies have shown gains in reading comprehension as evidenced by the Accelerated Reader comprehension tests. There was also evidence of increased time spent reading in study results.

America’s Choice Ramp-Up Literacy developed by America’s Choice, Inc. was implemented in high schools in this district. Ramp-Up Literacy was designed for students in the sixth and ninth grades who are two or more years below grade level in reading. Students are intended to get a ninety minute block of class time which replaced the regular ELA class. The curriculum consists of three eighteen week units and lessons are structured in a reading workshop model. The program addresses struggling readers, students with learning disabilities, and English-Language Learners (ELLs). While this program doesn’t deal so much with grammar and spelling, it does have components to address decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension strategies and skills, and critical thinking as well as writing. It is considered a comprehensive reading program.

The University of Pennsylvania’s Consortium of Policy Research in Education (CPRE) was under contract to complete the external evaluation of the program. Independent reviews and evaluations comparing schoolwide reform models have shown positive results, but the actual impact of the program results have varied (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003; Legters, Balfanz, & McPartland, 2002; Mason, 2005).
Earobics is a computer based intervention. It reports that it is based on ten years of research and is multisensory. The instructional model is based on the five areas of reading as set by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2001). The intervention focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The intervention claims to be aligned with the Common Core State Standards and is designed to help and appeal to the struggling early reader. However, I have seen it used for children as high as the seventh grade due to their reading levels.

The program includes materials, you are given readers that are leveled and teacher guides that are reportedly aligned to the Common Core State Standards., Instruction is reportedly guided to in such a way to complement major core reading curriculum. The software reportedly provides content in a real world and relevant way as to engage the reader. The program includes software to report data and encases tools to perform extensive reporting and data monitoring. Students, as well as teachers, are able to access the program at home.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt contracted the Educational Research Institute of America (ERIA) to conduct a one semester study of the effectiveness of Earobics. The study was conducted during the 2013 first semester. The program was conducted with three groups of students, those in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, those in grade 1, and those in grades 2 and 3. The study included Earobics students in two different schools in 2 different states. The Earobics program had not been previously used in the schools by any classes. Assessments were developed for each of the three groups based on the specific skills and strategies taught in the program. Material reviews substantiated the content validity of the assessments. Reliability analyses showed that the tests had strong internal consistency and were appropriate for making conclusions about students’ reading achievement within the program. The data showed that the students at all 3 grade level
groups made statistically significant gains. The data also showed the Earobics program proved equally effective with both higher and lower pretest scoring students. For all three groups, the low pretest scoring group made similar or greater gains than the higher pretest scoring group.

More research is still needed and more research with quasi-experimental design with a counter factual needs to be done. No mention of the two populations being similar was included in the information. Therefore, the research results are not necessarily the most reliable nor was it conducted on older struggling students. In practice, the program has been used by older struggling readers that may have been reading on a k-3 reading level. However, developmentally there was no research base to give this program to older struggling readers.

REWARDS is an intervention program for struggling readers grades four to twelve. The intervention serves students with learning disabilities as well as English-language learners. The program has components to help with decoding, fluency, basic comprehension skills and writing. This intervention has had more than ten evaluations (conducted by the developers) and has had independent studies conducted that have been in peer-reviewed journals.

The instructional model has twenty lessons that are explicitly taught. However, it is scripted and a part of the Direct Instruction genre. In fact, that seems to be a big selling point for this program…that “it is a program that anyone can teach” (Sopris Learning, 2014). The lessons are in 50 to 60 minute intervals. The first twelve lessons focus on the prerequisite skills to decode multisyllabic words. The final lessons focus on applying strategies to decode long words, word lists, sentences and passages. Fluency is also a
component of this intervention as students read and reread passages to increase fluency. The newest version is said to be aligned to the Common Core State Standards and contains more content area literacy strategies (Voyager Sopris Learning, 2014). The developers do say that this program is a temporary program to help students get the decoding skills they need to decode words in content area classes like science and social studies. Six weeks is the time frame that the program says you will see results if you follow the program and script.

The developers of the program evaluated the program. The Florida Center for Reading Research (2008) completed one of two independent studies on this reading intervention. The study included two Direct Instruction models—Corrective Reading and REWARDS. The data revealed that after the 6-week intervention, students showed significant gains (p < .01) in word reading efficiency, reading rate, reading accuracy, and reading fluency regardless of the Direct Instruction program used. While the results were significant, the effect sizes were small for time, d = .40, level, d = .45, and treatment group, d = .24 indicating that although students made gains, they were still performing poorly in important areas of reading. Another limiting factor in this study pertains to the variation in fidelity of implementation across teachers. More independent research needs to be conducted.

**Best Practice Literacy**

Many education officials have adopted the view that high-stakes testing will foster improved learning outcomes for children. In contrast, research has shown that lower reading achievement is associated with test-driven instruction (Smith, 1991). Further, other scholars have argued that standardized testing is not a sufficient measure of
academic achievement (Lattimore, 2005). Nevertheless, our nation’s educational system continues to buy into a test-driven curriculum. So much of classroom teaching rises and falls on a state test score.

Still, an ever widening gap persists between a comprehensive approach to literacy teaching and the overall best practice of teachers of African-American adolescent students with poor reading skills (Tatum, 2000). “Standardized testing and the high rates of retention as a result of failure to meet minimum standards is being emphasized at the expense of nurturing African-American males’ identities” (Tatum, 2000, p.53). Darling-Hammond and Falk (1997) asserted:

Depending on how standards are shaped and used, either they could support more ambitious teaching and greater levels of success for all students, or they could serve to create higher rates of failure for those who are already least well-served by the education system (p. 191).

This persistent problem of how to reach and teach our nation’s minority population continues to be a topic of discussion. However, some literacy educators may have possible solutions to this dilemma. Best practices include a varied approach to literacy practices in and outside the classroom.

**Community Involvement**

Delpit (2007) gives a few suggestions to incorporate best practices for children of color and children living in poverty attending school. She states, “I am suggesting that appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture. Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of
what kind of instruction is in their children’s best interest. Good liberal intentions are not enough” (Delpit, 2007, p.1). She further asserts that students need to have access to the resource of the teacher’s expert knowledge, but begin to acknowledge their own “expertness” as well. “Even while being assisted in learning the culture of power, they [students] must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power of the relationships they represent” (Delpit, 2007, p.1).

**Balanced Literacy Approach**

A balanced literacy approach has increasingly become an accepted best literacy practice. Research is very clear that implementation of a balanced literacy approach to early reading and writing instruction supports diverse learners to read and write (Alabama Reading Initiative, 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Bergson, Ciardi & Miller, 1998). Balanced reading is often described as a combination or blend of whole language and phonics instruction for elementary students (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997). However, what needs to be considered now is how to bring that balanced literacy model to benefit struggling adolescent readers.

Bergson et al. (1998) examined literature from several relevant fields, including cognitive psychology, English Language Arts instruction and assessment, linguistics, motivation theory, English as a Second Language, education and discourse analysis. The literature seems to suggest that effective, balanced literacy support has a threefold approach:

1) careful attention to the social and motivational issues attendant to adolescent learning,

2) explicit teaching and use of cognitive strategies,
3) integration of literacy instruction with content area learning, in ways that support teaching and learning in that discipline (p. 19).

“Balanced literacy is a philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support in multiple environments in which teachers use various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control” (Frey et al., 2005, p. 272). In balanced literacy, teachers try to create a balance between reading and writing activities, between teacher directed and student-centered assignments, and between skills based and meaning-based approaches to literacy instruction (Frey et al., 2005).

**Comprehensive School-wide Literacy Approach**

When contemplating balanced literacy at the secondary school level, no one area must be considered. A number of factors influence this approach at this level. New Zealand introduced *Balanced Reading Programmes* into their education system many years ago. It was a comprehensive approach to addressing the complexities of making all students literate. It encompassed issues of environmental design, assessment, classroom modeling, guided reading, interactivity, collaborative groups, independent practice, guided practice, student motivation, community building, writing and reading process (Reutzel, 1998). Several pieces come together to produce success for all students. The New Zealand approach was a school-wide effort. For primary students, this approach produced a “comprehensive, seamless blend of factors related to reading success, coupled with a solid cadre of reading instructional approaches: read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, interactive writing, independent reading and independent writing” (Reutzel, 1998, p.322).
Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is another method to utilize when approaching literacy learning for students of color and children of poverty. Culturally responsive pedagogy is grounded in sociocultural theory. Geneva Gay (2002) states that culturally responsive teaching is “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106).

Culturally responsive teaching is based on the premise that academic knowledge should be framed within the lived experiences that are personally meaningful for students. The students will have much more interest and learn concepts better (Gay, 2000). “As a result, the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters “(Gay, 2000, p. 106).

Gay (2010) goes even further to say that students of color are disempowered when they are not successful in the classroom and it is an unacceptable occurrence. Further she states that this condition has persisted for “far too long” (p. 1) and teachers need to honor the things that students do well and connect to whatever that positive is and begin to connect. Dialogue must occur between students and cooperative groups must be a part of the classroom strategy (Gay, 2002; 2010). Children begin to learn about one another and about themselves when they are able to engage in dialogue. This is how much of the children’s culture is transmitted and students learn how to live in our society.

Tatum (2000) asserts, “There is a fundamental tension between a basic skills approach to meet standards and a culturally relevant approach. A culturally relevant approach involves talking to students about the personal value, the collective power, and the political consequences of choosing academic achievement” (p. 53). Tatum (2000)
advocates restructuring of classrooms to create a supportive environment by establishing a learning community. Everyone is appreciated and included in the reading process. In this way students feel less pressure thereby reducing the possibility of embarrassment due to a lack of success in reading.

Students also need explicit strategy instruction coupled with culturally relevant literature (Tatum, 2000; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). African-American males need culturally relevant literature to help them understand the changes in history, substantiate their existence, and critically examine the present as a mechanism for political, social, and cultural undertakings that may arise in the future (Tatum, 2000, p. 60).

In an environment where success or failure depends on a test score, we must examine what we are actually doing to the literacy lives of children in this country. Gay states, “Achievement, or the lack thereof, is an experience or an accomplishment. It is not the totality of a student’s personal identity or the essence of his or her human worth” (p. 1). Due to a standards-driven curriculum and high-stakes testing, teachers are told to teach programs that may or may not be effective. Some programs may nurture children’s identities. Instead teachers are given programs that are scripted to remediate deficits in student reading levels. Currently, there are few studies conducted regarding students and their attitudes towards scripted reading programs. The purpose of this paper is to examine the trajectory of growth of four reading program/interventions (CR, Read 180, Read XL and McDougal Littell Advanced Reader series) over a school year. This study will also follow up with interviews of some students in these programs to understand how they feel about the reading programs adults so readily prescribe for them to do on a daily basis.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN and METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the trajectory of reading growth of four different reading programs on four groups of middle school students of differing reading abilities. This chapter will include the study design and research questions. It will include a description of the study population, research site and sample. A detailed description of the district literacy system and literacy curriculum will be discussed. This chapter will also include sampling procedures, the study sample, study variables, and data analyses plan.

Research questions:

The research questions are as follows:

1) What is the trajectory of reading growth for students of differing reading ability experiencing different reading programs (CR, Read 180, Read XL and McDougall literacy series)?

4) What strategies/practices motivate a subgroup of students experiencing these reading programs to read?

5) What are the subgroups’ attitudes toward the reading programs/interventions they experience every day?
Research Design

The research design is a multi-treatment mixed method design. For the quantitative research component to answer research question 1, a multi-treatment design was used to examine the trajectory of reading growth of participants’ reading comprehension during the course of one school year. In this quasi-experimental research design, there were four treatment groups (treatment groups A, B, C, and D). All groups received a standard reading program (Read XL) except for the advanced readers (treatment group D) who experienced an advanced literature series (See Appendix A). Treatment groups A and B were given reading interventions as a supplement to the Read XL reading program. Students in treatment group A were supplemented with the SRA Corrective Reading (Engelman et al., 1999) intervention program and students in treatment group B were supplemented with Read 180 (Scholastic, 2004). Treatment group C received the Read XL reading program for their grade level only. As mentioned above, treatment group D (advanced readers) experienced the McDougall-Littell advanced literature series.

Research questions 2 and 3 respectively, “What strategies/practices motivate a subgroup of students experiencing these reading programs to read?” and “What are the subgroups’ attitudes toward the reading programs/interventions they experience every day?” will be addressed by qualitative methods. This included one-on-one interviews (see Appendix C) with a group of 24 African-American male students (N=6 from each of the four groups) to add the student perspective about reading practices and student attitudes toward Corrective Reading, Read 180, Read XL and the McDougall literacy series.
Population, Research Site, and Sample

This study included a total sample of 608 (N=608) students. There were four treatment groups with the following numbers See Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

Reading Treatment Group Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading program/ Intervention</th>
<th>Treatment Group</th>
<th>Number Students Enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrective Reading and Read XL</td>
<td>Treatment group A</td>
<td>N=58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180 and Read XL</td>
<td>Treatment group B</td>
<td>N=96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>Treatment group C</td>
<td>N=327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougall Advanced. Literacy Series</td>
<td>Treatment group D</td>
<td>N=127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unity Middle School (pseudonym school name) is located in a large urban school district in America’s Midwest. In the 2011-2012 school year, the district had approximately 94,000 students enrolled. There are 155 schools and learning centers. There are 90 elementary schools, 24 middle schools and 21 high schools. There are also 20 additional learning centers to accommodate varying student needs.

Approximately 70% of the student population in Unity Middle School received free or reduced lunch. It is therefore a Title 1 school, and they were under federal guidelines of No Child Left Behind legislation for reading and math. Approximately 65% of the student population is Caucasian, 34% African-American, and less than 1% Hispanic or Asian. The entire student population in Unity was targeted as a potential participant in the study. All students were targeted for participation because all students had been tested and placed in a reading program or reading program with a supplemental
intervention based on Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) scores (Scholastic, 1999). The selection of students was purposeful due to the tiered literacy system that the district used to place students in specific reading classes based on a system of reading stanines (see Appendix A).

Assignment to Treatment and Treatment Groups

The Unity School District utilized a literacy system (See Appendix A) where a student’s reading program is based on the SRI score. Student SRI scores were first converted to a stanine level which was used to assign the student to a reading program. Stanines are derived by taking the normal curve and dividing it into nine “slices” of equal width (Metametrics, 2004). Each slice is one-half a standard deviation wide. Half of the fifth stanine is below the mean and half of the fifth stanine is above the mean. Since the stanine scale is based upon the normal curve and uses standard deviation to determine the boundaries of each stanine, converting scores to stanines becomes a simple process.

Students whose SRI scores were at stanines 0-1, at the lowest level of the stanine scale, were automatically assigned to receive the scripted Corrective Reading program as a supplemental class in addition to their regular language arts class that used Read XL; these students became treatment group A for this study. Students with stanines 2-3 automatically received the Read 180 program as a supplemental class in addition to their regular language arts class that used Read XL; these students became treatment group B for this study. These two groups (stanines 0-1 and 2-3) were both considered to be the lowest readers of all stanine levels. Students with SRI scores equivalent to stanines 4-6, automatically received the regular reading/language arts curriculum using the Scholastic Read XL textbook (level 6, 7 or 8 corresponding to grade level); this group constituted
the on-grade group (treatment group C) for this study. Students that scored in the 7-9 stanine range were considered to be advanced readers, and utilized the McDougall advanced readers literature series (McDougall, 2005). This group constituted treatment group D. All students were invited to participate. The final sample was comprised of the students who brought back their consent forms.

**Measurement of Reading for Program Placement**

The SRI is a research-based, computer adaptive reading assessment. The SRI is administered to all students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in the Unity school district. It was administered at the beginning of the school year, as well as in the middle of the school year to monitor progress. Results from those assessments plus teacher recommendations and a child’s overall academic performance were used to determine student placement in Corrective Reading, Read 180, or other appropriate reading intervention (See Appendix A). While the SRI is an assessment tool that is included in the Read 180 package, it was not developed specifically for this particular reading program. It is an evaluation instrument that can be used independently from Read 180 (Denman, 2004). It is available in print and in the form of an interactive computer program. For the purposes of this study, participants utilized the computer-adapted reading comprehension assessment.

The assessment consisted of answering comprehension questions from a bank of 3,000 questions. The items are solely based on nonfiction and fictional reading passages from children’s literature, as well as excerpts from periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and young adult classic literature (Scholastic, 1999). Results from the SRI were reported in both norm-referenced and criterion referenced terms, indicating students’ reading
comprehension levels through percentile ranks, grade equivalency scores, normal curve equivalent scores, and Lexile scores (Scholastic, 1999).

**Lexile framework for reading.** The SRI was developed in collaboration with Metametrics, Inc., the founders of the *Lexile Framework for Reading* (Denman, 2004). Lexiles provide a common scale for measuring difficulty and student reading ability. As the most widely adopted reading measure in use today, lexiles offer a scientific approach that facilitates learning and instruction by improving interpretability and informing educational decisions and instructional strategies (Metametrics, 2004).

Using lexiles enables teachers to match students with appropriate texts and track student ability over time using a common scale (Metametrics, 2004). The Lexile scale is a developmental scale for reading ranging from 200L for beginning readers to above 1700L for advanced readers. The Lexile Framework also incorporates a Lexile measure which enables educators to predict the level of comprehension a reader will experience with a particular text.

For example, if a student has a Lexile score of 600 (600L), and he chooses a book that has been identified as having a 600L (a difference of 0L), the Lexile framework for Reading would suggest that the student should be able to read the text with a comprehension level of 75%. The rate of projected comprehension adjusts as students select texts that have been labeled with a Lexile score that is higher or lower than the student’s identified Lexile score. For instance, if the same student (600L) chooses a text with an 850L, the difference of -250L would suggest that, while the text might be adequate for a guided reading with the teacher scaffolding the student efforts, the text would not be suitable for an independent sustained silent reading activity. The projected
level of comprehension would fall to 50%. The Lexile Framework for Reading can assist in helping students become stronger independent readers (Denman, 2004).

Besides the SRI scores, teacher recommendation is also considered when placing a student in a program. If a teacher thinks the student did not perform their very best on the SRI test, and there are anecdotal records to the contrary, the teacher may make a recommendation for placement. Teacher recommendation, as well as the SRI score can also help determine student placement.

**Reading Intervention Programs**

**Corrective Reading**

The primary components of the Corrective Reading decoding program included instruction in phonemic awareness, explicit phonics, letter-sound relationships, blending, accuracy and fluency building. The program emphasizes the use of decoding and provides correction procedures for improving reading skills (Engelman et.al, 1999). The program defines phonemic awareness as a student’s ability to hear separate words, syllables, and sounds in speech which leads to the ability to separate spoken words into their sound components as well as put sounds together to make words (Engelman et. al, 1999). Phonics is defined as a method that teaches students how to identify the phonemes of word sounds as they coordinate with letters of the alphabet in specific letter-sound relationships. Blending is defined as the method that teaches students the skill of how to decode unknown words by sounding out the letter-sound relationships, moving sequentially from left to right through the individual sounds of the phonemes. Accuracy and fluency are defined as a method for teachers to monitor via timed exercises for correct decoding, recognition and pronunciation of words. Students are given a set period
of time and must make no more than the designated maximum number of errors allowed by the program.

The decodable text is composed of only those letter-sound relationships that had been previously taught. Correction procedures are pre-established and require that every oral error is corrected and that the reading task be repeated to accuracy by the entire class. Teachers are instructed how to deliver each component of the program through professional development workshops, scripted lesson plans, and predictable cues and signals. Teachers are encouraged to stick with the script of the lesson plans as they work on building the momentum of skill of each daily lesson. In addition, district literacy resource teachers visit classrooms every two weeks to monitor progress and to determine appropriateness of program delivery.

At the beginning of the year, students in the SRA Corrective Reading program are given an assessment to place them in the appropriate level reading book. Based on their performance on this assessment, they will be placed in level A (lowest), B1, B2, or level C (highest). Teachers have 10-12 students per class. Most often, if students test into level C, teachers were instructed to simply place them into a reading program on a higher reading level.

Teachers and assistants attended training for the implementation of Corrective Reading. The training includes a three hour session prior to beginning the intervention. It includes an overview of the program, as well as a detailed demonstration (modeled lesson) of what a Corrective Reading lesson should look like in the classroom. After the training is completed, the teachers and assistants were expected to model a Corrective
Reading lesson and must score proficient in every area outlined by an observation instrument.

Instruction began the third or fourth week of school. The students were assigned Corrective Reading in lieu of a related art or elective class. The students receiving Read 180 are under the same schedule. Instead of going to a related art or elective class, they attend Read 180. Both the Corrective Reading students (treatment group A) and Read 180 students (treatment group B) receive supplemental language arts instruction for approximately 50 minutes each day from the language arts teacher. This was an extra language arts class in addition to their regular language arts class that used the on-grade-level curriculum Read XL.

Read 180 is a multifaceted instructional reading program. It was originally developed by Dr. Ted Hasselbring of Vanderbilt University as a prototype for computer software that would assist the teacher to differentiate reading instruction for an individual or a small group of students. In 1994, Dr. Hasselbring partnered with Janet Allen of the Orange County Florida Literacy Project where the computer component was used for the instructional initiative. The original model consists of a 90 minute instructional block divided into 20 minute rotations covering a teacher directed lesson to a small group, a 20 minute computer segment, and an independent reading component with introductory and closure elements specified in the design. The design is based on a reading workshop format.

**Small group instruction.** The small group instruction consists of approximately 4-5 students working with the teacher. This may include a mini-lesson having to do with a reading or writing skill. It may also include, but may not be limited to, a mini-lesson in
problem solving, inferencing, modeling the use of a reading strategy or a further in-depth look at a character of a story.

**Instructional software.** The computer-assisted portion is divided into four zones. Each student was given the SRI assessment at the beginning of the program. Depending on the lexile score generated from the SRI assessment, individual work is matched with appropriate reading difficulty for each student; this reading difficulty matching process is termed “leveling”. The first zone is the Reading Zone. Here the student initially views a short video to gain background information and then is asked to read independently one of four leveled passages with varying computer support. The computer program is also able to read the passage in five different languages. Once the story is read, the student is given a multiple choice quiz on the passage with immediate feedback on accuracy. If students do not make above a 75% on the quiz, they are redirected to another passage before moving to the next zone.

The second zone is the Word Zone. Students will identify words from their individualized leveled reading lists. In this zone, students see and hear the words and make their own recording of the word pronunciations. The students then review previously mastered words and heard their own recordings of the vocabulary words. After this, students listened to their recorded pronunciation and compared it to the announcer’s pronunciation. Students then move to rapid word identification and select a study or review word. The final component was the review of words the students had yet to master. These words were pronounced rapidly for identification.

The third zone is the Spelling Zone. In this zone the student hears and spells words from the passage and received immediate feedback as to what is spelled
incorrectly. The second part of this zone required the student to spell the words for the recorder. The next segment prompted the student to spell the words correctly and swiftly. Finally, the student is shown passages and he or she must proofread them for accuracy and misspellings.

The last zone of the computer assisted instruction is called the Success Zone. Students reach this zone only after successfully completing the prior three zones. In this zone the students make a final oral recording of the entire passage. During this segment, the students read several summary passages and choose the most appropriate one, as well as fill in the blanks of the passage and complete a final recording and word check.

The final component of the program rotations was the independent/self-selected reading period. During this time, students selected from a library of leveled high interest paperback books. These stories have gripping themes and great compatibility with adolescent interests (Scholastic, 2010).

Data gathering is a continuous part of this program. The computer software collects data throughout the zone exercises. Teachers are able to pull several reports, as well as monitor student performance, time on task and decoding accuracy.

Treatment group B students in this study spent 50 minutes in Read 180 every day and rotated into three fifteen-minute rotations during this 50-minute period. Teachers who used Read 180 attended training on the implementation of Read 180. This training was conducted by district personnel. The teachers of Read 180 were also given the expectations for consistency of delivery and adhering to the integrity of the program as given. Read 180 teachers are also coached by district personnel and required to perform a lesson after the training.
Read XL

Read XL is a reading program designed by Scholastic to respond to the needs of a variety of adolescent readers. This curriculum was used for all groups except group D in this study (treatment groups A and B as well as the comparison group) as their regular 60-minute language arts class. The instructional text in Read XL begins at a level that is approximately three years below grade level, but gradually progresses to grade level text (Scholastic, 2001). This program utilized a combination of direct instruction, reading strategies, and engaging materials (Scholastic, 2001). It incorporated high interest relevant content while placing an emphasis on nonfiction reading. This reading program included an anthology as well as electronic text. Over sixty percent of the anthology was made up of expository text. Teachers were expected to scaffold the reading of the anthology with specific strategies to help students transfer the strategy usage to content area reading.

Read XL is a reading model that incorporates scaffolded reading instruction and sustained independent reading (Scholastic, 2001). There is also incorporation of explicit and systematic skills instruction while developing varying vocabulary concepts (Scholastic, 2001). See Table 3.2 for Read XL daily schedule.

Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Schedule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Reading (2/3 of each class period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading (1/3 of each class period)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sampling Procedures

This study employed purposive sampling due to district mandates of student reading program assignments within a literacy system. The requirements to participate in this study were: students were enrolled in CR, Read 180 (hence they are described as struggling readers); they were enrolled in Read XL 6,7 or 8; or they were in the advanced reading group that received the McDougall literacy series for advanced readers. Students were given a form to take home to inform parents about the study. The study information was introduced as a regular part of the instructional curriculum and was used to inform instructional practice. However, parents did have the opportunity to opt out of the research component (but not the curriculum, which is mandated by the district) if desired. Unity Middle had been chosen as a proposed site for the study as a result of researcher accessibility to the participants.

Study Sample

Treatment Group A

Treatment group A (the Corrective Reading group) consisted of a group of 58 ($N=58$) students. By district policy, students in stanine group 0-1 based on a score from the SRI were placed in reading classes that use CR as the reading intervention. All CR classes were selected, stratified by grade level (6, 7, or 8). Based on class sizes of 10-15 students, all classes at each of the 3 grade levels participated. The researcher gained access to the students in these classes through her ongoing professional relationships with the language arts teachers.

These students read on a grade level that is equivalent to 3-5 grade levels below their academic grade level. The CR lessons last 50 minutes. During that time the students
get highly scripted direct instruction from the teacher. Students were not involved in very much comprehension. They received more decoding and some vocabulary work within the context of the reading selection they had for the lesson. Students received fluency checks and had homework every night. Treatment group A were given their regular block of 50 minutes of Read XL on their respective grade levels with the language arts teachers in addition to the special 50 minute intervention period.

**Treatment Group B**

Treatment group B (the Read 180 group) consisted of 96 students (N=96) and included students in all three middle grade levels (sixth, seventh and eighth). All Read 180 classes were selected and stratified by grade level (6, 7, or 8). Based on class sizes of 10-15 students, all classes at each of the 3 grade levels were selected. The researcher gained access to the students in these classes through her ongoing professional relationships with the language arts teachers.

By district policy, students in stanine group 2-3 based on a score from the SRI were placed in reading classes that use Read 180 as the reading program. These students spent 50 minutes in Read 180 every day and, as previously described, rotated into three fifteen-minute rotations during this 50-minute period. As stated above, treatment group B was also given their regular block of 50 minutes of Read XL on their respective grade levels with the language arts teachers in addition to the special 50 minute intervention period.

**Treatment Group C**

Treatment group C (Read XL group) consisted of a group of 327 (N=327) students. All Read XL classes were selected. The classes were stratified by grade level (6,
7, or 8). Based on class sizes of approximately 30 students, every class at each of the 3 grade levels was selected. The researcher gained access to the students in these classes through her ongoing professional relationships with the language arts teachers.

By district policy, students in stanine group 4-6, based on a score from the SRI were placed in reading classes that used Read XL as the reading program. These students were reading on a grade level that was equivalent to their academic grade level. The Read XL lessons lasted 50 minutes. During that time the students had a textbook with high interest stories for adolescents. They received explicit and systematic literacy skills instruction from the teacher. They were also engaged in the writing process, vocabulary development, comprehension and self-sustained reading. These students did not receive an extra 50-minute reading period as was true for treatment groups A and B.

**Treatment Group D**

Treatment group D (McDougall Literacy series for advanced readers) consisted of an anticipated group of 127 (N=127) students. All advanced reading classes were selected. The classes were stratified by grade level (6, 7, or 8). Based on class sizes of approximately 26 students, every class at each of the 3 grade levels were selected. The researcher gained access to the students in these classes through her ongoing professional relationships with the language arts teachers.

By district policy, students in stanine group 7-9, based on a score from the SRI were placed in reading classes that used the McDougall literature series as the reading program. These students read on a grade level that was above their academic grade level. The lessons lasted 50 minutes. During that time the students had a textbook with high interest stories for adolescents. They received explicit and systematic literacy skills
instruction from the teacher. They were engaged in the writing process, vocabulary
development, comprehension and self-sustained reading. These students did not receive
an extra 50-minute reading period as was true for treatment groups A and B.

**Study Variables and Measures**

**Reading**

Reading comprehension (reading growth) was measured by SRI scores (see
earlier description of this instrument). Students took the computer-based SRI at the
beginning of the school year, in the middle of the school year, and again at the end of the
year in order to measure their reading comprehension ability at 3 points throughout the
year.

**Independent Variable**

The independent variable is the assignment to a reading program, CR, Read 180,
Read XL, or McDougall literacy series. The dependent variables for research question
one are the SRI scores at 3 different points in time throughout the semester. The variable
of interest for questions two and three were student responses to the interview questions.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data was collected in the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year. Table 3.3
outlines the data collection sources and timeline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources/Instruments</th>
<th>Variable measured</th>
<th>Instrument administrator</th>
<th>Pretest administration</th>
<th>Posttest administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SRI</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>District and Researcher</td>
<td>September 2011</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading comprehension. The initial reading comprehension SRI score was administered by the district in September of 2011 – that SRI score was used to place students in a reading program as described above. This study collected outcome measures of reading growth by administering the SRI to classes of students in the computer lab, so that each student independently completed the computer-based SRI. All students were taken to the computer lab as part of their regular instruction, and did this at the three times indicated in Table 3.2 above. SRI scores for each student were then stored in the computers for later access by the researcher.

Interviews

The researcher conducted tape recorded interviews of 24 purposefully selected African-American male students (6 from each of the four reading programs; CR, Read 180, Read XL, and McDougall). The researcher conducted the interviews one-on-one to get their feelings and attitudes about the instructional programs (See Appendix C). Since the reading achievement gap between African-American males and their White male counterparts is the greatest (NCES, 2013) the attitudes of the African-American male students toward the reading programs and interventions they received was of great interest to the researcher. The researcher utilized a private area where the student was able to speak freely without any risk of reprisal or repercussions. This helped the researcher to build rapport with the students and to discover data a pencil and paper
measure cannot reveal (Glesne, 1999). This was particularly crucial to the process since this sample had many struggling readers who were not likely to be able to give nuanced, complex responses to a written survey. The researcher began with a structured interview, but was open for the data to inform questioning as well. The researcher also utilized depth-probing to uncover more in-depth information by using phrases like “tell me more” and “explain” (Glesne, 1999). “The intent of such interviewing was to capture the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents thought or felt about something; and how they explained or accounted for something.” (Glesne, p. 93).

Data Analyses Plan

Data Preparation

Data preparation included data screening and data cleaning for statistical analysis (e.g. checking for assumptions, identifying and dealing with missing data, outliers and miscodings). Data screening was performed using the Explore option (e.g. percent of missing values, tests for outliers, frequency distribution plots) and statistical assumption tests (e.g. skewness, kurtosis, Box test, Levene’s test, Mauchly’s sphericity test) available in SPSS. When appropriate, these analyses were performed separately for the different reading groups of students. Qualitative research methods were used to analyze responses to interview questions conducted one-on-one to ascertain what strategies/practices motivated students to read. Also, interview questions were utilized to understand students’ attitudes about the four reading programs.

Analytical Procedures

Analytical procedures include descriptive statistics, univariate and multivariate analysis of variance (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002) and qualitative analyses (Glesne,
A mixed model, two-factor Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to evaluate between-group (reading interventions) and within-group (repeated measure tests on SRI in December and April). A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the reading intervention outcomes. SPSS was used to carry out these statistical procedures.

**Data Analysis**

**Research question 1.** What is the trajectory of reading growth for students of differing reading ability experiencing different reading programs (CR, Read 180, Read XL and McDougall literacy series)? There are four assumptions that must be met when carrying out a mixed model two-factor ANOVA. The first assumption is independence. The scores for each individual participant were independent from all other subjects. This condition was met because the SRI was completed in a manner such that each person’s responses were from that individual only without influence from any other student. Each student had their own computer and the questions were accessible only via the computer program. The computer program randomly designed different questions for each student and increased or decreased the complexity of the questions as the student answered each question. Each student had their own password and username. Students could not access another student’s file. The supervising teacher had a master list of all passwords and usernames locked in a file cabinet.

The second assumption to satisfy when using a mixed model two-factor ANOVA was the assumption of multivariate normality. Because SPSS does not include a test for this assumption, univariate normality of each dependent variable is customarily assessed using histograms to graphically review if the distributions of SRI scores of the four student groups approached a normal curve. However, this assumption was problematic
due to the fact that the study design began with four different treatment groups and four different groups of students of non-equivalent ability based on the SRI measurement. Nevertheless, the ANOVA/ANCOVA was a very robust statistical procedure with respect to this assumption violation (Shavelson, 1996; Hinkle, Wiersma & Jurs, 1998; Wikiversity.org., 2012). The non-normality was assessed via skewness and kurtosis analyses (see chapter 4 results) and, if not too large, the ANOVA test would still work for this particular study design (Shavelson, 1996; Hinkle, Wiersma & Jurs, 1998; Wikiversity.org., 2012).

The third assumption for this procedure was homogeneity of the covariance matrices. The variances between the three groups must be similar and the difference between any two dependent variables should be roughly the same. This assumption was addressed by utilizing a Box test of equality of covariance matrices. Initial screening of the data showed that the test did not yield a significant statistic so the matrices were equal. This was supplemented by Levene’s test of error variances. This test also yielded a non-significant statistic so the error variances were equal.

The final assumption to be met for a mixed model two-factor ANOVA is sphericity. Sphericity requires that the variances for each set of repeated measurements are equal and the population correlations among all pairs of measures are equal (Shavelson, 1994). Mauchly’s Sphericity test was conducted. When the significance value is less than 0.05, the assumption does not hold. As a result, the possibility of a Type I error increases. However, the degrees of freedom of the univariate tests can be adjusted to account for violation of the assumption by utilizing the Greenhouse-Geisser test.

The mixed model two-factor ANOVA will tested three hypotheses:
(1) Is there a significant main effect of factor 1 (group: reading interventions)?

(2) Is there a significant main effect of factor 2 (time of midyear test 1 as compared to time of posttest 2)?

(3) Is there an interaction effect of factor 1 x factor 2 (group by test-time)?

There were two interactions possible, ordinal (non-parallel, non-intersecting lines) and disordinal (intersecting lines). If the factor 1 x factor 2 interaction is disordinal, then the “growth time” factor has one kind of effect in one reading group condition and the opposite kind of effect in another reading group condition. For example, a longer growth time may have a positive effect on the Read XL group but a negative effect on the CR group. If the factor 1 x factor 2 interaction is ordinal, then there may be a varying degree (but in the same direction) of effect of one factor (e.g. growth time) on the other factor (reading group membership).

The interaction effect was assessed. If sphericity is violated, the F-statistic associated with Greenhouse-Geisser test was interpreted. This assessed the significance of the main within-group effect. It also revealed the significance of the interaction effect. A test of between-subjects effects was conducted. This test assessed whether the overall main between-group effect was significant. Post-hoc tests were conducted to determine where any differences were found.

**Research questions 2 and 3.** In, May, twenty-four African-American male students from each reading group were purposefully selected as a representative group to be interviewed about what literacy/instructional strategies they liked most in their reading classes. They were also asked about their attitudes toward their reading program. Since there was such a large disparity in the national reading scores of African-American males
and other populations, many African-American males were enrolled in many of the reading programs in an effort to “catch them up”. Hearing what the African-American males in Unity Middle had to say about the interventions they are told to take was of great import to the researcher. The researcher conducted all interviews. The interview questions were selected from the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) questionnaire (Pitcher et al., 2007) (Appendix C). The students were interviewed individually in an office of the media center for privacy. All questions were open-ended. I used probing statements such as “tell me more” or ask “why” to further explore student attitudes (see Appendix C). The interviews took about fifteen minutes.

Trustworthiness of the data was addressed by triangulation of the data (Creswell, 2013). Several data collection methods (interview, SRI scores) were triangulated to increase trustworthiness. Rich, thick description was used to describe the student responses and context. Constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2013) was used as a means to allow themes to emerge from the field notes of the interviews.

Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis which was executed in a recursive loop which began early in the process of data collection (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher conducted a line-by-line analysis of the collected documents and interview responses. Recurring regularities (similar comments occurring at different times, in different contexts, and from different participants/documents) served as the basis for initial sorting of information into categories (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Data was continuously examined to ensure homogeneity within categories and heterogeneity among categories. As a result, these categories were subsumed under larger themes as data analysis continued.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This chapter starts with the descriptive statistics of the student sample. Following that, there is an explanation of the data cleaning. Finally, the statistical analysis performed and the results I derived for each research question addressed by this study are reported.

Descriptive Statistics

Student sample. The number of students that participated in the study who met the selection criteria—a) entire student population enrolled in Unity Middle School who had been tested and placed in a district reading program from August 2011 to May 2012, and b) returned a parental permission form, was 707. Within this group of students, specific data entries from two subjects were removed. An incorrect value on a single item was deleted due to a typographical error coding a student as a 1st grader instead of a 6th, 7th, or 8th grader. The other value on a single item was removed due to another typographical error coding the status for free/reduced lunch as a “4” which had no meaning. Finally, two students were deleted from the database because they were moved to lower reading programs. These students were part of a very tiny minority and were not representative of the group. Thus, the final study sample was n=705. Descriptive statistics and demographic data for participating students are summarized in Table 4.1.
Table 4.1. *Descriptive Statistics of the Student Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Gr. 6 (n= 215, 30.5% of sample); Gr. 7(n= 245, 34.8% of sample); Gr.8 (n=244, 34.5% of sample)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White (n= 404, 57.3% of sample); A-A. (n=251, 35.6% of sample); Hispan. (n=23, 3.3% of sample); Asian (n=5, .7% of sample); Two or more races (n=21, 3.0% of sample); Nat. Hawaiian (n= 1, .1% of sample)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/reduced</td>
<td>Free lunch (n=492, 69.9% of sample); Red. (n=77, 10.9% of sample)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Males (n=366, 51.9% of sample); Females (n=339, 48.1% of sample)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total sample is N=705
Data Cleaning

After screening for outliers and missing data, I had a final sample of 705 (n=705) students. That was approximately 80% of the student enrollment. However, before I could conduct the analysis on the data, I realized that some students switched from one reading program to another in mid-year due to reading improvement. For total year growth, any student who moved from one reading program to another reading program in mid-year was not part of this calculation because it isn’t clear to which program any yearly growth should be attributed. Thus, only the students who stayed in the same program for the full year (n=608) were included in this yearly analysis.

Following this calculation, I conducted a series of analytic procedures on the data set from the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). These data enabled me to determine changes in reading scores in each grade from fall to spring. These procedures also enabled me to understand subgroup differences in achievement of the student sample.

Trajectory of Reading Growth

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to determine the trajectory of growth for students of differing reading ability experiencing different reading programs (CR, Read 180, Read XL, and McDougal literature series for the advanced readers). Three hypotheses will be tested:

1) Is there a difference in annual growth for the four reading programs?
2) Is there a difference in growth trajectory between semester 1 and semester 2?
3) Is there an interaction in growth between reading program and semester?

First, these three hypotheses will be tested for the whole group. Then these three hypotheses will be tested and compared for two ethnic groups, followed by
dissagregating data by grade level 6, 7, or 8, African-American and Caucasian students. Finally, these hypotheses will be tested and compared across gender.

Annual Growth for Each of Four Reading Programs

Test Normality Assumption

Before testing if annual growth for each reading group was significant and if they differed significantly from each other, the normality of the distributions were explored because that is one key assumption underlying those statistical tests. The normality of the pre-SRI reading scores (in September), the normality of the post-SRI reading scores (in May at the end of that school year), and the normality of the growth (difference between the two) are each explored by computing the skewness and kurtosis of each distribution. A common rule of thumb is that if the absolute value of skewness and kurtosis are less than 2, then the data are typically considered approximately normally distributed and the normality assumption is met. The normality parameters are summarized in Tables 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4.

Table 4.2. Normality Parameters of Starting SRI Scores of Each Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>297.552</td>
<td>156.9748</td>
<td>-.454</td>
<td>-.746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>639.240</td>
<td>97.3499</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>-.979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>870.486</td>
<td>101.3744</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>1169.417</td>
<td>97.3387</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>.265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. These data were collected in September. All skewness and kurtosis statistics are less than an absolute magnitude of 2 which means that the score sets per group are normally distributed.
Table 4.3. *Normality Parameters of Ending SRI Scores of Each Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>351.50</td>
<td>166.32</td>
<td>-.644</td>
<td>-.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>669.33</td>
<td>134.24</td>
<td>-1.147</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>906.94</td>
<td>120.88</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>1203.93</td>
<td>95.46</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* These data were collected in May. Based on the scale of skewness and kurtosis mentioned above there is only one set of group scores greater than a magnitude of 2. However, it is only slightly over 2 at 2.3. However, this is not a major concern about violating the assumption of normality because ANOVA tests are robust with respect to this normality assumption (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1998; Wikiversity.org, 2012) and overall the score sets are reasonably normally distributed.

Table 4.4. *Normality Parameters of Annual Score Growth within Each Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>53.95</td>
<td>130.04</td>
<td>-.278</td>
<td>1.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30.09</td>
<td>120.23</td>
<td>-.703</td>
<td>.428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>36.45</td>
<td>99.63</td>
<td>-.154</td>
<td>-.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>34.51</td>
<td>84.67</td>
<td>.614</td>
<td>2.525</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* See the explanation above regarding only one group set of scores above the magnitude of 2. Based on the skewness and kurtosis, all yearly growth for all four reading programs/interventions are approximately normally distributed.
Comparing Annual Growth by Reading Program

I conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare students’ total year growth in reading for all 4 reading groups. The descriptive statistics for that sample are summarized in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Descriptive Statistics for Students Enrolled in Reading Programs (Total Year Growth)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Program</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Growth</th>
<th>SD of Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total sample for this one-way ANOVA is n= 608. These are students who did not switch reading programs, but stayed in the same program/intervention all year long.

Examining Table 4.5, students in all four reading program interventions experienced a measure of reading growth, with the CR group having the largest mean growth. The ANOVA test across these 4 groups yielded a *p* value of 0.561 which is not significant. Therefore, the difference in growth, between groups was not statistically different. There was no need to perform the post-hoc tests because they are only meaningful if the ANOVA is statistically significant.

In addition to comparing the magnitude of growth across groups to see if any group had stronger growth than another, the growth for each group was examined for significance over the course of the year. A within-group paired samples t-test on yearly
growth for each group was conducted. The results of this test are summarized in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. *Paired Samples T-Test for Testing Significance of Yearly Growth within Each Reading Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Program</th>
<th>Mean of Growth</th>
<th>SD of Growth</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The paired samples t-tests confirmed that the students in all four reading groups had statistically stronger scores by the end of the year. To obtain the effect size, how strong the growth actually was for each group, I calculated Cohen’s $d$ (see Table 4.6). For all four reading programs, the effect size was small (Cohen’s $d$ at a value of 0.2-0.5 is interpreted as small effect size.

**Reading Growth Trajectories for Whole Group**

**Data Structure and Demographics**

To analyze trajectories of growth from semester 1 to semester 2, and further to explore by ethnicity and grade level, the data were structured so that each student was placed into the database twice to account for each semester (fall and spring) the students were in the reading program. Due to the fact that students could switch reading groups at the end of the fall semester depending on performance, the individual student could not be used as the unit of analysis. Instead, “semester counts” will be the unit of analysis,
with each student contributing 2 “semester counts” to the data (one for semester 1, and one for semester 2). Those two semester-counts could be in the same reading program for a specific individual who did not switch reading programs midyear, or in some cases particular students were moved to another reading program at midyear and thus their semester 2 score performance would be categorized as belonging to the new reading program for semester 2. The descriptive statistics presented in semester counts are summarized in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7. Descriptive Statistics for Student Sample in Semester Counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Program</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>September Mean(SD)</th>
<th>December Mean(SD)</th>
<th>May Mean(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>318(157)</td>
<td>354(174)</td>
<td>386(183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>640(107)</td>
<td>677(127)</td>
<td>695(142)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>864(114)</td>
<td>888(117)</td>
<td>907(130)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>1154(112)</td>
<td>1179(112)</td>
<td>1195(105)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8 summarizes the distribution of ethnicity, gender, and free/reduced lunch price students for each reading program in semester-count units.

Table 4.8. *Demographic Data of Students Enrolled in Reading Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CR n(%)</th>
<th>Read 180 n(%)</th>
<th>Read XL n(%)</th>
<th>McDougal n(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A-A</td>
<td>78(58.6)</td>
<td>117(44.7)</td>
<td>239(32.6)</td>
<td>68(24.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cau</td>
<td>48(36.1)</td>
<td>136(51.9)</td>
<td>429(58.4)</td>
<td>195(69.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>69(51.9)</td>
<td>135(51.5)</td>
<td>379(51.6)</td>
<td>149(53.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fem</td>
<td>64(48.1)</td>
<td>127(48.5)</td>
<td>355(48.4)</td>
<td>132(47.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>106(79.7)</td>
<td>192(73.3)</td>
<td>528(71.9)</td>
<td>158(56.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red.</td>
<td>13(9.8)</td>
<td>29(11.1)</td>
<td>81(11.0)</td>
<td>31(11.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>14(10.5)</td>
<td>39(14.9)</td>
<td>125(17.0)</td>
<td>92(32.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A-A=African-American, Cau=Caucasian, Fem=Female, Free=free lunch, Red.= reduced price lunch, Full=full price lunch. All numbers represented are in semester counts.

Examining Table 4.8 offers an overview of demographic distribution of students across reading programs. There is a huge disparity between African-Americans and Caucasians in CR, the lowest reading program. African-Americans make up 59% (in semester count percentage) of this group. This overrepresentation is countered by an underrepresentation of African-Americans in the McDougal advanced reader group. There are almost three times as many Caucasians represented in the McDougal advanced reader group. This disparate representation is consistent with findings of NAEP (2013). Inspecting the free/reduced lunch demographic, we can see that there is still a correlational pattern between poverty and reading program. The students on free lunch
are overrepresented in the two lowest reading programs (CR and Read 180) as compared to the students who pay a reduced rate for lunch and those who pay full price. However, the representation of males and females in each reading program is relatively even across all reading programs/interventions. What is surprising is that there are more males in the advanced reader group, which contradicts much of the research on males and reading (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

**Reading Growth by Semester for Whole Group**

Earlier results established that there was growth in reading scores across all four reading programs, and that the difference in growth between groups was not statistically different. The next hypothesis explored for the whole group was whether semester growth means showed a similar or different pattern of growth in semesters 1 and 2 across the four reading programs. I conducted a two-way ANOVA with two independent variables of reading program and semester, and the dependent variable was semester growth. Table 4.9 summarizes the growth of reading scores in each program/intervention for semester 1 and semester 2, and Figure 4.1 displays this result graphically.

Table 4.9.  

**Reading Growth in Reading Programs for Semester 1 and Semester 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Semester 1 growth (fall)</th>
<th>Semester 2 growth (spring)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>48.01</td>
<td>30.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>46.05</td>
<td>26.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>19.88</td>
<td>18.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>17.30</td>
<td>13.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.9 and corresponding Figure 4.1 reveal that students experienced growth each semester. However, the growth experienced during the second semester was not as strong in each case. A test of between-subjects effects revealed that the reading programs had a significant difference in growth over time (p < .001). Post Hoc tests (LSD) revealed that the mean reading growth change for CR and Read 180 were not different from each other. Furthermore, the mean reading growth change between Read XL and the McDougal Advanced readers were not different from each other. However, the mean growth change in CR and Read 180 pair was different from the mean growth change in the Read XL and McDougal Advanced pair.

**Reading Growth by Semester for African-Americans and Caucasians**
To further explore reading growth trajectories over the 2 semesters by ethnic group, I conducted a 3-way ANOVA where the dependent variable was semester growth. The three independent variables were reading program, ethnicity, and time. Ethnicity included only two groups, Caucasians and African-Americans, because these were the only two ethnic groups with sample sizes appropriately large to support this analysis. The data for the reading growth by semester, for each reading program, and separated by ethnicity are shown in Table 4.10 and graphically displayed in Figures 4.2 and 4.3.
Table 4.10

*Descriptive Statistics of 3-way ANOVA (Independent Variables: Reading Program, Time, Ethnicity)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>42.60</td>
<td>30.96</td>
<td>44.56</td>
<td>14.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>44.96</td>
<td>44.68</td>
<td>19.42</td>
<td>33.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>12.69</td>
<td>22.27</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>18.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>9.81</td>
<td>27.80</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>7.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: A-A= African-American; Cau= Caucasian; Sem= Semester*
A test of between-subjects effects revealed that there was no statistically significant three-way interaction between reading program/intervention, time and ethnicity with (p=.402). While the combination of all students into the two ethnic groups
did not show statistical differences, there were differences when analyzing separately by reading group.

African-American students in CR experience a mean growth of 42.60 L in semester one, while Caucasian students experience a mean growth of 30.96 L in the same semester. However, by the second semester, the African-American students have a mean lexile growth score that is slightly higher than the score that was achieved the first semester. The same cannot be said for the Caucasian students. The mean growth score has plummeted to 14.25 lexiles. Caucasian students are still growing, but they are not growing as much in the second semester.

In Read 180, African-American and Caucasian students experience very similar lexile growth in semester one. However, semester two lexile growth has greatly decreased for African-American students. The mean growth for Caucasian students has decreased as well, but not in the same amount as compared to African-American students in the same semester.

African-American and Caucasian students in Read XL both experienced growth in semesters one and two. Still, it was not as much growth as the two ethnicities experienced in CR and Read 180, nonetheless, there was a mean lexile growth. Moreover, African-American students’ mean growth increased slightly the second semester, but the growth Caucasian students experienced decreased.

African-American students in the McDougal Advanced reader group experienced growth in semester 1, but experienced three times the growth in semester 2. Caucasian students actually experienced the opposite effect. In semester 1 Caucasian students had a
mean growth score of 27.80. In semester 2, the growth score had decreased to 7.86 approximately 3.5 times less.

**Average Semester Growth for African-Americans and Caucasians**

Figure 4.4 shows the average semester growth for each reading group separated by ethnicity.

African-American students exhibited more growth in the CR intervention over the two semesters while the Caucasian students in CR did not experience that same average growth. However, the results of the mean lexile growth for Caucasians in the Read 180 program was higher than that of the African-American students. For the Read XL group, the Caucasian students experienced slightly higher average semester growth compared to the African-American students. Both ethnicities in the McDougall advanced reader group experienced very similar average growth.
Reading Growth by Semester for Grade Levels 6, 7, and 8

I conducted another 3-Way ANOVA using three independent factors; reading program, time (semesters 1 and 2) and grade assignment (6, 7, and 8). Reading growth scores (measured in lexiles) by semester was the dependent variable. I explored if the semester growth means were different across the four reading programs in semesters 1 and 2 based on grade level. The data for the reading growth by semester, for each reading program, and separated by grade level are shown in Table 4.11 and graphically displayed in Figure 4.5.
Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics of 3-way ANOVA (Independent Variables: Reading Program, Time, Grade Assignment

Dependent Variable: Semester Growth)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sixth Grade</th>
<th>Seventh Grade</th>
<th>Eighth Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sem 1</td>
<td>Sem 2</td>
<td>Sem 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>61.30</td>
<td>41.43</td>
<td>43.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>33.73</td>
<td>17.47</td>
<td>65.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>29.20</td>
<td>14.53</td>
<td>26.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>36.22</td>
<td>15.33</td>
<td>8.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Values are mean lexile (L) growth by semester
A test of between-subjects effects revealed that there was no statistically significant three way interaction between reading program/intervention, time and grade assignment at \( (p=.591) \). Post Hoc tests (LSD) revealed that the mean lexile growth between the sixth grade and seventh grade was not different. Furthermore, the mean reading growth between sixth grade and eighth grade was not different. However, the mean reading growth between seventh grade and eighth grade was significantly different.

Inspection of Table 4.11 revealed that seventh graders in Read 180 experienced the largest mean reading growth for semester one by increasing 65.41L. Sixth-graders experienced the second largest mean reading growth with an increase of 61.30 L in CR. On the other hand, the lowest mean reading score was reported by the eighth graders in Read XL. These students did not progress but regressed with a mean reading growth score of -0.77 L.
Comparing scores across all three grade levels, and reading programs, most mean reading growth scores had decreased by the second semester with two exceptions. Students were still progressing, however the rate of progression had slowed down quite a bit in most cases. One of the exceptions to this phenomenon were the seventh graders in the McDougal Advanced Reader group. These students experienced an increase in mean reading growth (from 8.13 L to 20.54 L). Also, the eighth grade students in Read XL with the lowest mean reading growth scores (-.077 L) experienced an increase in growth scores (20.67 L).

Another notable observation was found when comparing the difference between first and second semester reading growth scores for all three grade levels. The greatest decreases were found in the growth scores for the sixth grade students in all four reading programs with two exceptions. There was a decrease of 27.26 L for the seventh grade students in Read 180 in the second semester, while the sixth grade and eighth grade students decreased 16.26 L and 13.60 L respectively. Furthermore, the eighth grade students in CR in the second semester experienced a decrease of 24.83 L in comparison to sixth and seventh grade students who decreased 19.87 L and 8.04 L respectively.

Graphically in Figure 4.5, it’s easy to see the decrease in mean lexile growth scores. Overall, the sixth grade students experienced the greatest slowdown in the second semester. It is also apparent that the eighth and seventh grade students experienced decreases in mean lexile growth scores as well. However, the slope of the line assigned to the sixth grade students has a much larger negative slope than that of the seventh and eighth grade lines. This signifies a larger decrease of rate of growth scores over the same amount of time. Statistically though, there was no difference in the mean lexile growth
between grades six and seven. There was also no difference in mean lexile growth between grades six and eight. Conversely, there was a significant difference in the mean lexile growth scores between seventh and eighth grade over time.

**Average Semester Growth for Grades 6, 7, and 8**

Figure 4.6 shows the average semester growth for each reading group separated by grade level.

![Figure 4.6. Semester Reading Growth by Grade Level for each Reading Program](image)

**Reading Growth by Program for Each Gender**

Finally, I conducted another 3-Way ANOVA. This time my three independent factors were reading program, time, and gender. The dependent variable was mean reading growth (as measured in lexiles) by semester. I explored if the mean lexile growth was different across the four reading programs in semesters 1 and 2 based on gender. The
data for the reading growth by semester, for each reading program, and separated by gender are shown in Table 4.12 and graphically displayed in Figure 4.7.

Table 4.12

Descriptive Statistics of 3-way ANOVA (Independent Variables: Reading Program, Time, Gender)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sem 1</td>
<td>Sem 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>85.08</td>
<td>17.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>42.38</td>
<td>41.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>22.66</td>
<td>19.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDougal</td>
<td>26.79</td>
<td>6.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values are mean lexile (L) growth by semester

Figure 4.7. Semester Reading Growth by Gender for each of the Reading Programs
Inspecting Table 4.12 data offers various patterns among the student mean lexile growth scores disaggregated by semester. Males in CR have the highest mean lexile growth score (85.08 L) in semester one, but also have the greatest amount of slowed growth in mean lexile growth scores by semester two. By the second semester, the males have a mean lexile growth score of 17.60 L, whereas, the females seem to do just the opposite. Their beginning mean lexile growth score is 7.86 L for the first semester. However, by the second semester, the mean lexile growth score has increased to 45.07 L.

Another interesting phenomenon was that the males were consistent in growth in Read 180 semesters one and two (42.38 L and 41.08 L respectively). Yet the females had a semester one mean lexile growth score of 49.88 L and slowed to a growth of 11.13 L for semester 2. Both genders had consistent growth in the Read XL program, but the males in the McDougal Advanced reading group had a marked decrease in the mean lexile growth scores from semester one (26.79 L) to semester two (6.70 L). The females had a slight increase in scores from semester one (12.84 L) to semester two (13.68 L).

A test of between-subjects effects revealed that there was a statistically significant three way interaction between reading program/intervention, time and gender at (p=.001). Post Hoc tests (LSD) revealed that the mean lexile growth by semester between CR and Read 180 were not different. The mean lexile growth by semester for CR and Read XL were different, as well as the mean lexile growth by semester between CR and McDougal Advanced readers. The mean growth scores for Read 180 were different for the three other reading programs/interventions. The mean lexile growth scores for Read XL were different from those of Read 180 and CR. Finally, the mean lexile growth scores for the McDougal Advanced readers were different from CR and Read 180 but not Read XL.
Semester Growth Trajectories for Each Gender

Figure 4.8 shows the semester growth for each reading group separated by gender.

Figure 4.8. Semester Reading Growth by Gender

The interactions between reading programs and gender growth per semester are clear in Figure 4.8. Male and female students had substantially different experiences with the reading programs. In semester 1, males had a tremendous growth in comparison to females. However, in the second semester, there was very little difference in the mean lexile growth for males or females since the male growth rate dropped substantially and the female rate rose slightly. Overall, the rate which lexile growth rate had decreased was very dramatic for males.

Qualitative Analysis

After completing the quantitative analyses, understanding some of the reasoning behind the reading growth and the patterns found embedded in the quantitative data were of great importance. The final research questions are listed.
Research Questions

2) What reading practices/strategies motivate a subgroup of African-American males to read?

3) What are the students’ attitudes toward the reading programs/interventions they experience every day?

Student Interviews

In order to answer these research questions, interviews were conducted with 24 African-American males in all four reading programs/interventions. Two students in each reading program/intervention at each grade level were interviewed. African-American males were chosen due to the huge reading achievement gap nationally, as well as the existing one between African-American males and other populations in Unity Middle School’s district (NAEP, 2013). This subgroup is not the only demographic experiencing this dearth in reading achievement, however, they are a group that is overrepresented in scripted reading programs/interventions (Delpit, 2004; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). Scripted reading programs are being utilized to help close the aforementioned reading achievement gap. These types of reading programs seem to proliferate in high poverty low achieving schools (Delpit, 2006; Moje, 2004; Tatum, 2008; Tatum & Muhammed, 2012). Table 4.13 displays the demographic data of the twenty-four students interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name*</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Free/ Reduced</th>
<th>Rdg Prog/Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kai</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Adv Rdr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobe</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Adv Rdr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Read XL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mani</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Read XL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnie</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Read 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chucky</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>Read 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Free</td>
<td>CR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 4.13 shows, ninety-two percent of the students interviewed received free/reduced lunch, which is over the percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch in the school (approximately seventy-four percent for the school that year). However, this is in accordance with the literacy research that says that there is a strong correlation between poverty and reading achievement (Hernandez, 2012; Allington & Franzen, 2012; Bhattacharya, 2010). This is a nationwide trend that has been documented by literacy experts. Some students were in special education and had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). However, all students had Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) as mandated by the state.

In April, six African-American male students from each reading group were purposefully selected as a representative group to be interviewed. I chose students based on their varied reading programs/interventions. Teachers suggested students and I made the final decision as to who would be interviewed. I had three very basic criteria: 1) students had to be African-American males, 2) students had to be enrolled in a reading
program/intervention for the entire year, and 3) students had to be able to answer the interview questions honestly. We conducted interviews in an office in the library. No classes were held in the library that week due to some scheduled renovations/repairs. There was complete privacy and anonymity. The interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes and I talked with all students one at a time.

Students’ interview data added greater insight into the quantitative findings. These data also added a richness to the aforementioned data collected (Glesne, 1999). Student interviews were particularly helpful in providing insight into why this particular subgroup of students were or were not motivated to read. Further, it provided valuable information about students’ interest levels in the reading programs/interventions.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed that incorporated open-ended questions from the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) conversational interview. Pitcher et al. (2007) developed the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) as an adaptation of the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP), a survey created by Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mozzoni (1996) for elementary-aged students. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

In the interview students were asked to talk about various aspects of their reading and things the teacher did with literacy that they liked. The students were asked to talk about whether they shared what they were reading with others. The participants were questioned to elicit an expanded view of the students’ reading and reading motivation outside of class. So, questions were asked about students’ reading habits in their free time as well. In order to connect their home reading to the school reading to understand what literacies they were already using at home, questions into computer use were asked.
Students were asked if they had a computer at home and if they had Facebook and Twitter accounts. Each student was interviewed once in the spring semester.

**Data Analysis**

Student interviews were recorded. The interview transcripts were transcribed, and the data was coded. This analysis was executed in a recursive loop which began early in the process of data collection (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A line-by-line analysis of the interview responses to ensure a very careful analysis of the data was completed. Recurring regularities began to emerge (similar comments occurring at different times, in different contexts, and from different participants/documents). This served as the basis for my initial sorting of information into categories (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Richards, 2005). Recurring themes like “access to books” and categories like “adult modeling” as well as “teacher recommendation” began to emerge from the data as well.

Nevertheless, the data was continually examined and compared to ensure homogeneity within categories and heterogeneity among categories. Attending to both convergent and contradictory perspectives during the analytic process were critical for someone who is a teacher/researcher. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (2002) state that listening to the “repetitive refrain” (p. 193) while finding that dissonant “deviant voice” (p. 214) that emerges in the data is a very important step in qualitative research to ensure validity. In this way, researchers hear contradictions not in ways that undermine the emerging themes, but help to support and add complexity and integrity to the common narrative. This constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) resulted in some categories being subsumed under larger categories as the qualitative data analysis
continued until there were no more new categories or themes that emerged. This is called the point of saturation signaling that the data collection is complete (Creswell, 2013).

Results

Student Interviews

General Reading.

Sixty percent of students interviewed said that what got them excited about reading was when they could choose what they wanted to read. Twenty percent said that books about topics they liked really got them excited about reading. Still, another twenty percent said that they got excited if the book had certain characteristics or features like great book covers or had an amazing summary on the back of the book. These findings are not new. Literacy experts have found these conclusions in their own research as well (Gambrell, 1995, 1996, 2010; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Eccles et al., 1998). However, these studies were conducted on elementary school students. What is very telling is the fact that middle school students still get excited about the same things when it comes to reading. A seventh grade student commented, “I really don’t like to read….but I like to read The Game Informer to help me play games”. It is very telling that the participant didn’t like reading but in the same sentence said that he would read what he liked to read.

When asked what they would have to do to be a better reader, students listed everything from being able to use grammar and put in punctuation marks, to pronouncing words properly. Five students (21%) did say that you have to know vocabulary words and their meanings in order to be a better reader. Two students in special education said that you have to read faster to become a better reader. It was obvious that many students did not have a very clear picture as to what they needed to do specifically to become a better
reader. This may imply that adults may not be doing a great job of telling the students just what they need to do to be a better reader. It may also imply that many adults do not know what the students need to do to become better readers either.

When the students were asked who got them really excited and interested in reading, seventy percent said their moms. Thirty percent of students said their teachers. When asked what they did to get them interested, the students would say things like “My mom buys me books,” or “My mom reads a lot,” or “My granny reads to me.” The other students who responded the teacher got them excited about reading said that the teacher would read to them “and change her voice” when she read. They also responded that the teacher would introduce the book and that would get them excited about reading the book.

The majority of the students had computers at home (80%). Still, of that number, a lot of time was not spent on the computer. Seventy-five percent of those students (14) said that they would much rather go outside with their friends and play sports or play videogames. The average amount of time spent on the computer was approximately 1.5 hours a week. When they were on the computer, most of the students (70%) looked at sport sites. Only forty percent got on Facebook and only one student had a Twitter account.

**School reading in comparison to home reading**

When students were asked which class they most like to read, twenty students (85%) said that they liked to read most in the language arts class. They gave varied reasons. One student said “Because I do well in that class. I’m making an ‘A’ in there right now.” Another student said “We have fun and we read together.” Still, another
student stated that they enjoyed Language Arts because he needed to get his grade up. Only one student stated math or science as their favorite class in which to read.

On the other hand, when asked what class they least liked to read in, eighteen students (75%) said Science. When asked why, fifteen of the eighteen (83%) students responded because of the difficult words. The other three students responded that the reading was just boring. The other students that responded to the question said language arts and math were the two classes they liked least to read.

Students were asked if they shared and discussed books or other reading materials outside of class with friends. Ninety percent of the students said that they did not share books, magazines, or other reading materials outside of school with friends. The ten percent that did share the reading materials, shared Game Informers, Sports Illustrated, and X Games magazine. They shared those at their house or at a friend’s house.

When the students were asked the same question but asking if they shared with family members, the percentages changed. Forty percent of students said that they did share reading materials with their family members. Five students said that they read to their little brothers and sisters. Two students said that an older sibling read to them. The rest of the students shared materials (Bible, Sports Illustrated for Kids, Diary of A Wimpy Kid, Game Informer, Cheat Codes etc.) with family. A sixth grader named Kobe had a subscription to Sports Illustrated for Kids and he shared those with his cousins. He would read them then let his cousins have them. Five students said that they read and shared the Bible in their home.

When asked if they sent email or wrote letters to friends and family, 19 students (80%) said that they did not send emails nor did they write letters. However, the five
students (20%) that did write letters, wrote letters to parents or relatives who were incarcerated.

**Student Attitudes About Reading Programs/Interventions**

Students were asked various questions regarding their reading program/intervention. Table 4.14 gives the descriptive statistics and responses to questions about each program.

Table 4.14

*Descriptive Data of Student Interview Responses to Reading Programs N=24*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LP</th>
<th>DLP</th>
<th>LC</th>
<th>DC</th>
<th>RdgB</th>
<th>NRdgB</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>C (2.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read 180</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>B (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read XL</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>B (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McD (Adv.)</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>B (3.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* LP=Like program; DLP=Don’t like program; LC=Like coming to class; DC=Don’t like coming to class; RdgB=reading better; NRdgB=Not reading better; Grade= average grade they gave program

Students who said they did not like the reading program/intervention also said why they didn’t like the reading program/intervention. A few themes emerged like *too much time spent in the class, missing related arts class, coming to the intervention everyday.* Ayries, a seventh grade boy said, “Corrective Reading’s okay, I just don’t want to do it every day.” Artis, an eighth grade student, is in the Read 180 class. He said that he had been in Read 180 for the past three years. He commented, “I don’t like Read 180 because Mr. M (teaching Read 180) doesn’t like me and I don’t like him. Still another student, Tony, a seventh grader, is in the Corrective Reading class. Tony is a very capable young man who is very responsible. He commented, “I don’t like Corrective
Reading because it’s like stuff my little sister and brother do at their school. I take care of them until my mom gets home so I help them with their homework every day. This is like what they do. I’m not doing that!” Tony began to become a behavior problem in his Corrective Reading class, at the end of the year, he was removed from the intervention program and he began to come to school early to get extended school services since he couldn’t stay after school. His reading lexile scores did increase for the year.

Maurice is an eighth grade student in Corrective Reading. Maurice is a very mature young man like Tony. Even so, Maurice is much more street wise and street savvy. He lives with his sister that is twenty-four years old. His sister has nine children and like Tony, he helps to take care of his nieces and nephews. Maurice is in special education due to the fact that he started school behind because no one registered him and he started very late. He seems like he is still trying to “catch up”. Maurice does not like Corrective Reading. When asked if he liked the intervention, he said, “This stuff is for babies!! I ain’t no baby! I’m a man!” Maurice did settle down and he did comply. Still, he said that he didn’t like coming to class. He quickly retorted, “I like coming to see you Ms. Anderson, no disrespect, but I don’t like coming to do this stuff!!” I told him, “No disrespect taken.” Maurice did not like this program but he did it anyway and said that he was getting better as a reader.

Mikel, a seventh grader in Read XL told me that he doesn’t like to read, but his mom is an avid reader so she makes him read as well. Mikel is reading on level. Mikel said he doesn’t like Read XL because he doesn’t like to read in his class. However, he does say that he is getting better as a reader.
For students who said that they like the reading program/intervention, when asked why, one seventh grade student named Stefan in Read 180 commented, “I like Read 180 because you learn more about reading and it helps you get better at it.” He looks forward to going to his Read 180 class every day. He gives the program an “A” for a grade because it has computers and he likes to read. Another seventh grade student named Randy likes his reading program/intervention as well. He is in Read XL. Randy told me that he likes Read XL. He likes the stories in the book, and his favorite is Rikki Tiki Tavi. He gave the reading program a “B” because he likes the book and he believes he is becoming a better reader.

Ninety-six percent (23 students) of the students said that they were better readers, even if they didn’t like the program. There was one student who said that he didn’t think the program made a difference. Brian is an eighth grader and very intelligent. He said that he likes to read if the story is interesting and the story can “pull you in and keep you in”. To become a better reader he said, “You have to get your vocabulary up and be able to interpret things in the story.” He spends time on the computer and reads some, but confesses that he really doesn’t like to read. His mom and dad read a lot so he has to read. He does not like the McDougal Advanced Literature series though. He says that it only has stories in which he’s not interested. When asked if he could change anything about the book what would he change. He commented, “I would make the book more current. I would include stories that were more up to date and contemporary.” He gave the book a “C-“. When asked why he gave the series that grade, he said, “The series is not that good! I don’t want to do it every day, but I am forced to.”

Summary
These are the voices of the students that are participating in the reading programs adults have prescribed for them. Overall, no matter what program in which the students are enrolled, they believe they are becoming better readers. This has been confirmed by the analysis of the quantitative data in this chapter. The next, and final chapter will serve to give more explanation for the data gathered as well as next steps for future research.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was threefold. The initial purpose was to explore the trajectory of growth of students of differing ability in four different reading programs. The second purpose was to examine which strategies teachers/adults used that motivated them to engage in reading. Finally, the study focused on exploring the attitudes of African-American male students toward the four different reading programs/interventions in which they were enrolled. This chapter first discusses the findings and conclusions based on each research question. Additionally, the significance and implications of the findings for further study will be considered.

Research Question 1

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to determine the trajectory of growth for students of differing reading ability experiencing four different reading programs (Corrective Reading, Read 180, Read XL, and the McDougall advanced literacy series). After an analysis and synthesis of the data, students in all four reading programs displayed growth using a pre-and posttest design. These results are no different from the results previous studies have had (Arthur, 1988; Din, 2000; Fuzio, 2001; Podhajski, 2001; IES, 2009; Haslam, White, & Klinge, 2006). Also, the difference in growth, between groups was not statistically different. Overall, students experienced growth each semester. However, the growth experienced during the second semester was not as great
in each reading program/intervention. The results suggest that the students may lose
interest in the reading programs during the second semester. One of the criticisms of
many Direct Instruction programs is that the students and the teacher get bored and don’t
want to do it (Schung, Tarver & Wester, 2001).

Another explanation might be that students in Unity Middle School are taken out
of a related art class to receive a reading intervention. In other words, while many of their
peers are in gym, music, band or orchestra, Spanish or art, these students are in a reading
intervention. This typically happens the entire year. This does not create the best situation
for students to enjoy reading when they are deprived of their related arts period all year.
In fact, it may produce the opposite effect, causing struggling readers to dislike reading
even more.

The mean reading growth between CR and Read 180 was not different. On the
other hand, the mean growth students experienced in CR and Read 180, was higher than
the mean growth students experienced in Read XL and McDougal Advanced readers.
Because the struggling readers in CR and Read 180 had much lower reading scores which
places them in these reading programs/interventions, their growth may tend to be higher
because they have more growth to achieve. These results suggest that the core goal of the
two reading programs for the lowest-scoring students – helping these students catch up to
their on-grade reading peers – may be partly achieved since their lexile growth tended to
be stronger than the on-grade readers. Whereas, in the reading programs for students that
are reading on level or reading on an advanced level, the growth may not occur as fast
because the students are already on level or advanced having a more difficult time
increasing in large amounts.
The demographics of this study were mostly consistent with current national literacy trends as well. African-Americans were 36% of the student body, but were 78% of the students (in semester counts percentage) in CR, the lowest reading program/intervention. This overrepresentation mirrors the Nations Report Card (2013). There is still a very large gap between African-American students and their Caucasian counterparts in literacy achievement.

Finally, looking at the free/reduced lunch demographic, there was still a great connection between poverty and reading program. Hernandez (2011) discusses the far reaching effects between poverty, reading levels, and graduation rates of high school students. In Unity Middle, students on free lunch are overrepresented on the two lowest reading programs (CR and Read 180) as compared to the students who pay a reduced rate for lunch and those who pay full price.

An analysis of the data disaggregated by gender revealed that males in CR had the highest mean lexile growth score in semester one (85.08 L), but also have the greatest amount of decrease in mean lexile growth scores by semester two (17.60 L). The females, on the other hand, performed in just the opposite manner. Their beginning mean lexile growth score was 7.86 L for the first semester. However, by the second semester, the mean lexile growth score has increased to 45.07 L.

This may suggest that females might perform better if they were allowed to go to their related arts classes in the fall and take the reading intervention (CR) in the spring. This may suggest the opposite for the males. Since their lexile growth was so high in the beginning of the school year, and had decreased so much in the spring, these students might be permitted to attend their related arts classes. Smith (2012) found that girls
outperformed males in literacy achievement and got more enjoyment out of the act of reading. This might be able to explain why the males’ rate of lexiile growth decreased so very much. If they do not enjoy the act of reading as much, then by the second semester their desire to comply and to stay in the reading intervention may’ve dwindled to the point that they will simply not perform as well.

The males were consistent in growth in Read 180 in semesters one and two (42.38 L and 41.08 L respectively). Yet the females had a semester one mean lexiile growth score of 49.88 L and decreased to a score of 11.13 L. Both genders had consistent growth in the Read XL program, but the males in the McDougal Advanced reading group had a marked decrease in the mean lexiile growth scores from semester one (26.79 L) to semester two (6.70 L). The females had a slight increase in scores from semester one (12.84 L) to semester two (13.68 L).

When examining the females’ scores, it is apparent that the females were consistent in mean lexiile growth except for the Read 180 program in the spring. As an insider/teacher researcher, I am privy to information that an outside researcher may not know. The Read 180 teacher replaced the previous teacher at the beginning of the spring semester. I remember some of the girls in my class commenting how much they didn’t like the “new teacher” for Read 180. Just from my years of experience as a middle school teacher, I know that kids will not work for teachers they don’t like.

Also, the males were pretty consistent in all reading programs/interventions except the McDougal Advanced series and the Corrective Reading. It is of note that it’s the highest reading program and the intervention for the lowest readers. It may mean that there needs to be something more for students in these two extremes.
The boys may not get as much enjoyment out of reading, therefore maybe those students may need more things infused into the programs for recognition competition and rewards. These are constructs that students appreciate and have shown effective in helping students to increase motivation to read (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Maclver, & Feldlaufer, 1993) The boys may also need to participate in the interventions in shorter amounts of time with the options to explore a different hands on approaches to literacy as well.

Since literacy learning involves a social dynamic, and sociocultural theory is the underpinning of the literacy learning process, it is not surprising that the scores of the lowest reading intervention program and the highest reading program are so very low. Students have very interaction with peers in these two reading programs. The CR is scripted and many advanced reader teachers are very traditional in their approaches to the book and text. One teacher commented, “I love my advanced readers because I set them to read and they just read!” Another teacher stated that the advanced kids don’t need a lot of frills because they are already good readers. Students will say various things like, “That class is so boring! All we do is read! We don’t talk, we read!!” It’s obvious based on the score growth that the students are not really growing at a great pace. However, the girls did experience a huge jump in CR in the second semester.

A final examination of the data disaggregated by grade level shows that all grade levels had experienced a drop in the lexile growth rate by the second semester. In most cases it was a decrease of at least fifty percent in lexile growth scores. There are two exceptions to this pattern.
The seventh graders’ lexile scores for in the McDougall program in semester two (20.54) were more than twice the growth scores from the semester one growth scores (8.13). Also, the growth scores of eighth grade students in Read XL increased in semester two (20.67) from a deficit score of (-0.77). The seventh grade teachers began a contest for the students and teams were given rewards for increases on district and class assessments. Students were also recognized for reading achievement as well. This could explain the increase in reading lexile growth.

The growth among the eighth grade students could be explained from a concerted effort by the administration to curtail poor study habits and a lack of discipline. Therefore the administrators instituted a study hall/study skills course for the eighth graders. They also received time for tutoring and help. Students were given incentives for academic proficiency and for doing well on the Reading Progress Assessments (RPAs) given by the district. This may help to explain the increase in the student lexile growth scores.

**Research Question 2**

The purpose of Research Question 2 was to explore what motivated students to get involved in reading. I interviewed 24 African-American boys, two from each program at each grade level. I chose this subgroup due to the huge gap in reading achievement between African-American males and other populations. Overall, students were motivated to read when they could choose what they wanted to read. This is consistent with findings of studies conducted by literacy experts (Gambrell, 1995, 1996, 2010; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Eccles et al., 1998). They were also motivated to read when the teacher introduced a book to them or read to them.
What was surprising was that only two students said that the teacher actually read to them. I went back to member check to ask the rest of the subjects if any of their teachers read to them. The subjects all told me, “No.” When the other students spoke of a teacher who did something they liked with reading, they mostly referred to an elementary school experience. This may suggest that middle school teachers still view reading or reading out loud as an elementary school skill.

Teachers need to model fluent reading for students by reading aloud from class texts frequently and regularly (NIL, 2007). Rasinski, Blachowicz & Lems (2012) assert that when students are able to recognize and decode words to automaticity, the brain is able to take on new tasks. The fact that students are able to recognize and decode words so easily helps to speed the process of reading. Many struggling readers have a problem with reading rate due to a lack of decoding and word recognition. Still, there is a caveat to all the aforementioned positives about fluency. Fluency is definitely important, but it is a part of a framework of skills that struggling readers, as well as proficient readers need to employ to become successful (Rasinski et al., 2012). Some teachers feel that oral reading in middle and high school classes is not necessary. However, if students don’t hear fluent reading or ever have it modeled, it will be very difficult for them to know how to read with prosody or become fluent readers.

Another phenomenon also emerged from the data. A great majority of the students interviewed said that their mom got them excited about reading. That was extremely surprising due to a cultural adage that says if you want to hide something in the African-American community, put it in a book because African-Americans don’t read. It’s great to see that may not be the case anymore. Once again this is a finding of many
literacy studies dealing with motivation (Gambrell, 1995, 1996, 2010; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Eccles et al., 1998). When children see parents or teachers (they admire or like) modeling reading, they become more inclined to do it as well.

Still another phenomenon emerged from the data regarding motivation. This particular subgroup of students proved that student motivation was not a static construct. Four boys gave the response, “I don’t like to read….” Nevertheless, in the same sentence they would say “unless I can read ……Game Informer or Sports Illustrated for Kids or go to Cheat Codes .com. I would read those things!” So I expanded the question and said “But you would like to read if…..” The students responded, “If I could read stuff about sports, stuff about videogames, stuff about skateboarding!” So motivation can change depending on the reading material offered or the context. Some scholars assert or assume that reading motivation is a fixed or stable construct (Neugebauer, 2011; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2007). Because motivation is in part about self-concept, sociocultural studies on literacy and identity suggest reading motivation is better understood as a fluid and dynamic construct that develops within a reader and is vulnerable to changes in the reader’s context.

**Growth Scores and Motivation Between African-American and Caucasian Students**

Motivation can also help to explain the changes in reading lexile growth scores among other student subgroups. When we compare mean lexile growth scores of African-American students and Caucasian students between the first and second semesters, there is a consistent growth in lexile scores between the first and second semesters of the African-American students. The exception is in the Read 180 classes. African-American students’ lexile growth scores diminished to less than half the score growth in the first
semester. However, that could have been due to a change in faculty. The previous teacher took another position in the district and someone else began to teach in the Read 180 classroom. There was much conflict between the students and the instructor.

Nevertheless, for the second year in a row, the district offered major sports teams all year in middle school. As evidenced from the interviews, one of the huge motivators for African-American boys is sports. This year, Unity Middle was involved in football, basketball and baseball finals. That fact alone would be enough to keep African-American boys engaged in all academic subjects. However, it was not just the African-American boys who benefitted from the sports as a motivator. The African-American girls also benefitted due the need for cheerleaders all year as well as a dance team. These were extracurricular activities that were well represented by African-American students.

Another consideration was the fact that the three coaches put an emphasis on reading proficiency because two of the three coaches were English/Language Arts teachers. As a result, the coaches made certain that the boys would get tutoring that was more personal and they had many of the boys and girls in class. It’s much easier to apply more emphasis regarding academic achievement when you see the students every day. The coaches also made certain that students maintained a 2.5 (on a 4.0 grade scale) according to district standards. More African-American students began to ask teachers about their grades. I would often get questions like, “What do I need to do to get my grades up?” “Are you going to stay after school today Ms. Anderson? I need help!” This is music to a teacher’s ears. The boys knew they would not be able to play if they didn’t have the grades. The girls knew they would not cheer, dance, nor work with any of the
myriad extracurricular activities offered at Unity Middle if they did not perform well in ELA classes and all academic areas in general.

On the other hand, the semester 2 growth scores for the Caucasian students decreased in every program. This may be due to the fact, as mentioned previously, that the students who don’t play sports or cheer, or dance, or have any other type of extracurricular outlet at the school have no related arts class. One student commented that he had not had a related arts class in three years because he was in an intervention during that time. I am certain that he is not unique in his fatigue with the intervention program.

**Research Question 3**

The purpose of Research Question 3 was to explore student attitudes about the reading programs they were assigned to complete. The majority of the students said that they did like the reading programs. Students in Corrective Reading were split down the middle in terms of liking or disliking the program. Fifty percent of students liked the program and fifty percent didn’t like the program. However, only two students didn’t like coming to the class every day. Everyone interviewed in CR thought they were becoming better readers. Students who said they didn’t even like the program still felt they were becoming better readers. They all did show improvement on the SRI.

Of the three students who did not like the program, two were enrolled in special education. However, of the three, two were very mature young men. They had great responsibilities at home. If you recall, Maurice lived with his sister who had nine children. His twenty-four year old sister was his legal guardian. His mom was incarcerated and his dad was as well on separate and different charges. He helped his sister take care of his nieces and nephews. He had to be very responsible, and he had to
be street wise. He really didn’t have any curfews and he would frequent clubs (according to him and other students). His disdain for this program may be due to the fact that he is socially and developmentally mature. On one hand he is taking the role of an adult. He is taking care of babies, feeding children, changing and dressing children. He wakes the children up, cooks for them and gives them baths. These are jobs my mom and dad did for my brothers and me. Similarly, Tony is in the seventh grade and takes care of his younger siblings. He is carrying out the same tasks Maurice is carrying out. After a period of time, Tony refused to do the work. He eventually began to cut class so administrators removed him from the program at the end of the year when testing was completed. He attended extended school in the morning since he had to take care of his siblings in the afternoon and get them as they got off the bus.

The difference between Maurice and Tony is that Tony still has his mom in the home. Maurice has extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, and a grandmother) but they do not live with him and his sister. So the day to day care for the children and the household are left up to him and his sister. America’s idea of the nuclear family has changed so much in the past twenty years. Many students do not have parents in the home. For all practical purposes, many children are the parent or they have begun parenting their own parents. This suggests that a program like CR may not address the developmental and maturity levels of students who face what these young men face every day. There needs to be an alternative for students that are far more advanced in mental and emotional maturity. I believe Tony summed things up well when he said, “I’m not doing this! This stuff is for babies!”
Overall, students in all three reading programs/interventions said that they liked it. Twenty-three out of twenty-four students said they thought they were becoming better readers and that the program/intervention was helping them. All the students’ SRI scores did increase. The highest average letter grade the students gave any program was a “B” or a 3.5 on a 4.0 grade scale. Those were given to Read 180 and Read XL. McDougal received a “B” as well but it averaged out to be a 3.0 on a 4.0 grade scale. The lowest grade went to the Corrective Reading with a letter grade average of a “C” and a numerical average of a 2.8 on the 4.0 grading scale.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has shown that the students in each reading program have shown growth. These programs do have some benefit and students as a whole said that they were benefitted and felt that they were becoming better readers. While the students did grow in lexiles, there is still a concern to know if the students grew enough. Also there is concern to know if the growth was enough to warrant the problems that it might cause in a school and in students who do not get to take exploratory courses as a result of not being able to read well.

Motivated readers are successful readers because they are active, establish goals when they read, monitor their comprehension, and display high levels of vocabulary (Cox & Guthrie, 2001; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Wang & Guthrie, 2000; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Most studies on reading motivation are quantitative and target younger populations, while this study focused on older students and used a mixed method design. Additional research into the area of reading motivation and older/adolescent students is needed. Adolescent literacy is having its day on the
literacy landscape at this moment. It’s time to complete more research regarding what motivates older students to read since it has been established that literacy learning does not stop at grade five.

Sociocultural research has established that literacy is in part about relating to others. Therefore, we should better understand that the contexts that surround adolescent readers can diminish or promote adolescents’ motivation to read. As a result, there needs to be more research with mixed methodology. The voices of the students add a richness to the conversation regarding motivation. After all, if students are actually doing the programs, it might be better to ask them what they like to do and what will motivate them to read. Research such as this would move our literacy agenda ahead tremendously and help to address a reading achievement gap that we have not closed for decades.

One possible finding from this study is that the programs may work for some students but definitely not for all students. Variety of approach could make a huge difference in the literacy learning for the struggling reader.

Also, since many of the students interviewed in this study were so motivated by choice, further research needs to be conducted with programs that allow the students to read whatever they choose. The parameters would be that the teacher might set the basket of what to choose. It would have to be developmentally appropriate and challenging as well. However, it would be very interesting to see a reading program based solely on student choice.

Another recommendation might be to include more research of a teaching model based on the premise of academic press. There is research and literature on the dialogic process and how it affects students. However, more research on how the students are
motivated to read by allowing them the opportunity to discuss text that they have chosen with peers. Since sociocultural theory states that students learn from their interactions with others, this would be a great way to understand these nuances between student interactions.
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APPENDIX A

Reading programs plus supplemental reading interventions assigned according to SRI stanine levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Stanine Levels</th>
<th>Core Reading Program 60 minutes</th>
<th>Reading Intervention Extra 50 minutes period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistently above level Stanines 7-9</td>
<td>McDougall literacy textbook</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently at level Stanines 4-6</td>
<td>Read XL (At Grade level)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently below level Stanines 2-3</td>
<td>Read XL (At Grade level)</td>
<td>Read 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Readers Stanines 0-1</td>
<td>Read XL (At Grade level)</td>
<td>Corrective Reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP; adopted from Gambrell et. al, 1996). The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) was used to aid elementary teachers in assessing the motivation of their students. The AMRP(Pitcher et al., 2007) was adapted to aid secondary school teachers in assessing the reading motivation and attitudes of their students. There are two parts to the AMRP: (a) a reading survey and (b) a conversational interview. This study will not use the reading survey since the MRQ is already going to be used. The researcher will use a portion of the interview questions that are relevant to this study supplemented by additional questions tailored for the needs of this study. AMRP(Pitcher et al., 2007)

A. General Reading
1. What are some things that get you really excited about reading?
   Tell me about......
2. What do you think you have to learn to be a better reader?
3. Who gets you really interested and excited about reading?
   Tell me more about what they do?
4. Do you have a computer at home? (If they answer yes, ask the following questions).
   a) How much time do you spend on the computer a day?
   b) What do you usually do?
   c) What do you like to read when you are on the Internet?
   (If they answer no they do not have a computer at home, ask the following questions.)
5. If you did have a computer at home, what would you like to do with it?
   Is there anything on the Internet that you would like to read?

B. Emphasis: School reading in comparison to home reading
1. In what class do you most like to read? Why?
2. In what class do you feel the reading is the most difficult? Why?
3. Have any of your teachers done something with reading that you really enjoyed?
   Could you explain what was done?
4. Do you share and discuss books, magazines, or other reading materials with your friends outside of school?
   What? How often? Where?
5. Do you write letters or e-mail to friends or family? How often?
6. Do you share any of the following reading materials with members of your family: newspapers, magazines, religious materials, games? With whom? How often?
7. Do you have a facebook or twitter account?
   Could you explain what kind of reading you do there?
How much time do you spend a day at these websites?

C. Other questions regarding student attitudes about the reading programs.
1. Do you like (CR, Read 180, Read XL or Adv. reader series)?
2. a) If so, what do you like about it?
b) If not, what is it you don't like about it?
3. Do you look forward to coming to the reading program class each day? Why or why not?
4. Do you think you are reading better as a result of being in this program?
5. How do you know if you're reading better or if the program does not seem to be helping?
6. If you could change anything about this program, what would you change?
7. Have you been in any other reading programs previously?
8. What did you like or dislike about that reading program?
9. How would you grade the reading program (A,B,C,D,U)?
10. Why did you give it that grade?

The researcher will conduct all interviews. The students will be interviewed individually in an office of the media center for privacy. All questions are open-ended. I will use probing statements such as “tell me more” or ask “why” to further explore student attitudes (see Appendix C). The interviews will take about fifteen minutes. Qualitative data will be analyzed using content analysis which will be executed in a recursive loop which will begin early in the process of data collection (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher will conduct a line-by-line analysis of the collected documents and interview responses. Recurring regularities (similar comments occurring at different times, in different contexts, and from different participants/documents) will serve as the basis for initial sorting of information into categories (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Data will continuously be examined to ensure homogeneity within categories and heterogeneity among categories. As a result, these categories will be subsumed under larger themes as data analysis continues.
CURRICULUM VITA

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