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Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Achievement for Kindergarten-3 rd Grade Students of Low Socioeconomic Status

Vicki L. Curtis
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2012

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Achievement for Kindergarten- 3rd Grade Students of
Low Socioeconomic Status

By

Vicki L. Curtis

M.A., Marshall University, 1996

BS, Concord College, 1991

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

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Abstract

The three tiered reading model and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are two initiatives being used to identify struggling readers of low socioeconomic status. While there is abundant information with statistical reports from various researchers, there is little research available as to what educators implementing DIBELS in the school environment perceive about the instrument, what it measures and what it fails to take into account. It is important to examine all aspects and views of an initiative being widely used across the nation to close the reading achievement gap. Educators working with students of low socioeconomic status will benefit from the insightfulness of this phenomenological qualitative research study investigating classroom teachers' perceptions of the two initiatives. Data were collected from K-3 teachers at three target schools located in a mid-southeastern state of the United States via surveys and interviews to establish teachers' perceptions of the strength and weakness of the two initiatives. The data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. Participants indicated DIBELS should not be the only measure used to determine skill deficits in the struggling reader and that the two initiatives work well together to identify struggling readers and promote reading achievement in students of low socioeconomic status. Effectively educating students of low socioeconomic status will not only close the reading achievement gap but also break the generational poverty cycle by empowering the individual to be a productive member of society.

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Dedication

I would not have been able to complete my study without the support of my husband. He has always supported me whole heartedly in my academic endeavors. First and foremost, I dedicate my study to him. Secondly, I dedicate my study to my daughter. We have traveled this road together and it has drawn us closer as mother and daughter, as friends, and as each other's supporter and motivator. Lastly, but most important, I thank my Savior who gave me the ability and opportunity to complete my journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

The achievement gap between students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers has been the focus of debates, legislation, and innovative programs for many years. Due to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the implementation of the general education Response to Intervention (RtI) mandate, the interaction between special education and general education has changed. In order to meet these changes, DIBELS and the three tiered reading model are being used across the United States.

Locke, Ginsborg, and Peers (2002) stated that literacy is universally seen as an essential goal of education and is imperative to all areas of life including accessing information, employment, and as a means to understanding all aspects of the global culture. Howse, Lange, Farran, and Boyles (2003) found children from students of low socioeconomic status homes begin school at a greater risk for reading difficulties than their more affluent peers. Children, as young as three years, whose economic status has been identified as below the poverty line (Appendix A), may have already fallen below average on tests of school readiness (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). The issues created by living in poverty and how it affects a child's education have been documented by researchers such as Payne (2005) and Olson (2000). Early identification and early intervention of children from students of low socioeconomic status homes where education may be lacking is imperative to the student's academic success.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 changed the dynamics of the interaction between special education and regular education personnel by allowing states to use alternative methods of identifying learning disabled students. Determining successful interventions and positive assessment measures is vital in the efforts to close the reading gap. According to the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NCLD), RtI may be used as a process for identifying learning disabled students. NCLD depicts the three tiered reading model as the framework for RtI. The three tiered reading model merges the core reading program and special education into the policies of the NCLB Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. The model allows clear standards to be identified, meaningful measurement, and effective instruction to benefit all students including the learning disabled (Wedl, 2005). Tier1 represents approximately 80% to 85% of students who are successful when presented with the core curriculum. In addition to the core curriculum, approximately 15% of students require 30 more minutes of intense, small group intervention daily to be successful which they receive in Tier 2. If after the additional 30 minutes of intervention given in Tier 2 the students are still not successful, Tier 3 students receive an additional 30 minutes of intervention for a total of 60 minutes in addition to the core curriculum instruction.

According to VanDerHeyden, Witt, and Ellis (2007), educational initiatives that seem to make sense do not always work in actual practice. However, the importance of early literacy is widely recognized. Kavale, Kauffman, Bachmeier, and LeFever (2008)

stated "...RtI as a diagnostic model, revealing that it is conceptually flawed, practically inadequate, and politically rather than scientifically motivated" (p. 132+). However, Greenfield, Rinaidi, Proctor, and Cardarelli (2010) identified RtI as a method by which schools do not have to wait for a formal evaluation, but are able to provide interventions earlier in the child's education. The conflicting data surrounding RtI establishes the necessity for further study to investigate the perceptions' of teachers working with RtI. Teachers working in the field with the students of low socioeconomic status student have hands on experience of RtI and reading achievement. DIBELS is often used as a screening instrument with the general education RtI initiative. Kaminski and Cummings (2007) describe the DIBELS as being a formative assessment instrument to evaluate interventions. Although the Dynamic Measurement Group's website has abundant statistical information on DIBELS, there is little research data as to what the perceptions are of educators implementing DIBELS in the school environment. Education is not a static environment and we need more than statistics to determine what is happening in the classrooms of schools serving the students of low socioeconomic status.

Research is needed to determine whether educators perceive DIBELS and the three tiered reading model as effectively raising the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status and to ascertain their knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach mandated by districts across the United States. Classroom teachers and other educational staff are the informal experts of what is effective in

instructing their students to be successful readers. This study examined teachers' perceptions of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS being used by one county in a mid-southeastern state of the United States. As the first phase of the study, 51 educators in three target schools were surveyed as to their perception of the effectiveness of the two initiatives. Of the 51 personnel, four classroom teachers, two special education teachers, and four NCLB teachers who indicated a willingness to be interviewed more in-depth, were selected for this phenomenological qualitative research study NCLB teachers are the reading specialist meeting the federal mandates.

Educators working with students of low socioeconomic status who may be considering using the three tiered reading model in conjunction with the Dynamic Educators of Basic Early Literacy Skills to meet the mandates of the Response to Intervention (RtI) initiative will find this study informative and beneficial for its insight into the daily classroom of these students who are struggling readers. Educators already using the two processes will be interested in the study's findings' documenting what their peers are experiencing in classrooms using the two initiatives to identify and instruct young children from students of low socioeconomic status areas in reading.

Problem Statement

Although Kaminski and Cummings (2007) described the Dynamic Indicators of Early Basic Literacy Skills as being a formative assessment instrument to evaluate interventions, they stated there are many misconceptions about what DIBELS is and how it is to be used. They reported what they consider the myths associated with the screening

instrument on the Dynamic Measurement Group's website. The web site presents statistical data for each component of DIBELS in copious detail. While there is plentiful information with statistical reports from various researchers, there is little data from researchers as to what educators implementing DIBELS in the school environment perceive about the instrument, what it measures, and factors it fails to take into account. It is important to examine all aspects and views of an initiative being used widely across the nation to close the reading achievement gap. Critics such as Goodman (2006), state that it is political pressure driving the success of DIBELS and not student achievement and that DIBELS is not research based.

DIBELS is often used as a screening instrument with the general education initiative (RtI). According to the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NCLD), RtI may be one process for identifying learning disabled students. Literature, such as that presented by researchers Barnes and Harlacher (2008), portray RtI as a multi-tiered delivery model. According to Barnes and Harlacher, RtI is flexible in its nature with a set of unchanging principals, but variable in its implementation. NCLD presents the three tiered reading model as the framework for RtI. The problem addressed by this study was the need for information attained from teachers' experiences with the three tiered reading model, the (DIBELS), and the reading achievement of their students of low socioeconomic status. Research was needed to determine and document clearly whether DIBELS, in conjunction with the three tiered reading model, are effectively raising the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status. The data for this study was

established by surveying and interviewing educators implementing the interventions in the educational setting. Strengths and limitations in the use of these tools were extrapolated from the resulting conversations with participants. I use rich, indepth descriptions of DIBELS and the three tiered reading model from those seeing the results or lack thereof in the achievement of their students of low socioeconomic status. The process of learning to read using the target tools will be further elaborated on in the teacher interviews. The results of the study are of great importance to other educators striving to raise the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status.

Research Questions

The overarching qualitative research question investigated by this study was as follows:

The (DIBLES) screening instrument screens Phonemic Awareness, Alphabetic Principle, Fluency with text, Vocabulary, and Comprehension (Kaminski, Cummings, Powell-Smith, & Good, 2008), thus allowing the educator to form effective reading groups. Interventions are designed to meet specific needs of the students in the homogeneous groups.

The three tiered reading model merges the core program and special education into the policies of NCLB. According to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) (2008), Tier1 represents approximately 80% to 85% of students who are successful when presented with the core curriculum. In addition to the core curriculum,

approximately 15% of students require 30 more minutes of intense, small group intervention daily to be successful. If after the additional 30 minutes of intervention given in Tier 2 the students are still not successful, Tier 3 students receive an additional 30 minutes of intervention is given for a total of 60 minutes in addition to the core curriculum instruction.

To answer the fundamental research question, the following sub questions provided opportunities for participants to elaborate.

1. How effective do teachers perceive DIBELS as being in identifying skill deficits in students of low socioeconomic status?
2. How effective has DIBELS been in accurately identifying struggling readers?
3. How effective do teachers perceive the three tiered reading model as being for the child receiving intervention in Tier 2?
4. In the perception of teachers in this study, does receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention benefit the students of low socioeconomic status more in the classroom than just Tier1 whole group instruction?

The results of the data collected were assessed and reported using descriptive analysis.

The Nature of the Study

I chose the phenomenological qualitative study based in part on Johnson and Christensen (2004) description of phenomenology in education assuming there are common attributes, essential or invariant structures, among the research participants. According to Meriam (2009), qualitative research recognizes the world is not a set, fixed

reality. In the world of education, the needs of the population served are diverse and ever changing not ideal and static. However, there are common threads among research participants and their experiences. Thus, the phenomenological qualitative research methods fit well with this study. Use of this paradigm established an appropriate format to answer the question as to teachers' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the three tiered reading model and (DIBELS) for students of low socioeconomic status. A pilot study was conducted in three students of low socioeconomic status schools in a mid-southeastern state to ascertain the feasibility of the study. The preliminary information gathered from the participants of the pilot study demonstrated the need for a more in-depth study of teachers' perceptions relating to DIBELS and the three tiered reading model.

A purposive sample of participants was obtained through the use of two researcher developed surveys questioning participants about the strengths and weaknesses of the Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills and the three tiered reading model. The surveys enabled me to select possible interviewees to obtain phenomenological data necessary to answer the research questions of the study. The data collected is presented in narrative and table formats. Each survey consisted of 10 closed ended questions. However, each question included a further comment section. The survey responses and the comments were taken into consideration when compiling the resulting data of all participant responses. The data from the surveys were compiled and analyzed to determine teacher perceptions and to identify the participants for the in depth

phenomenological interviews that followed. The teachers surveyed have implemented DIBELS for a minimum of three years and have been trained in both processes. The training teachers received was spearheaded by district and Title 1 reading specialists who were trained in a workshop with the developers of DIBELS, Drs. Kaminski and Good. Likewise, the personnel implementing the three tiered reading model have had extensive training in reading instruction beyond DIBELS and the three tiered reading model.

After collecting and analyzing the survey data, I selected 10 of the participants who indicated a willingness to be interviewed more in-depth by giving their name on the survey and who were verbose in their response in the comment section of the surveys. I conducted the interview session using the interview guide approach for a qualitative interview with predetermined topics and questions, but the questions were open ended allowing the interviewer to deviate as needed to maintain the relatively unstructured discussion (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The results of the interviews are presented in a narrative report pertaining to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the two processes investigated for this research study. The resulting research is valuable to educators and administrators considering implementing DIBELS and the three tiered reading model in students of low socioeconomic status areas such as the schools targeted. According to Creswell (1998), the conclusions derived by researchers are presented at the end of a study and can be in the narrative form (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), visual pictures (Morrow & Smith, 1995), or tables and charts (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phonological study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the two initiatives being implemented, the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS in an endeavor to close the reading gap and improve reading skills in all children. The research focused on the students of low socioeconomic status as identified by free and reduced lunch counts (Appendix B). RtI is a general education initiative using a research based prevention model, the three tiered reading model, providing an instructional framework for all students (WVDE, 2010). Struggling readers are identified and grouped in small groups with similar skill needs. Progress is monitored on a frequent schedule to determine the effectiveness of the interventions. The DIBELS is often used in conjunction with the three tiered reading model. While there is an abundance of information presented on the DIBELS web site with statistical data showing its value as a diagnostic instrument, teachers' perceptions of the benefit or lack thereof for using the DIBELS measure has very little research available. RtI is a general education initiative that may be used to determine learning disabilities eliminating the Discrepancy Model. However, according to Barnes and Harlacher (2008), RtI is a multi-tiered method of instructing all students with evidence based methods. RtI's goal is to reform education through early intervention. The multi-tiered delivery model provides all students' instruction with research based methods at their academic level. A culminating synopsis of the data gathered from surveying and

interviewing educators involved in the implementation of DIBELS in conjunction with the three tiered reading model is presented in the conclusion portion of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study evolved from the work of researchers such as Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) and Chall and Jacobs (2003). According to Chall and Jacobs (2003), reading does not develop in the same format from beginning reading to the more skilled reading of a mature individual. Chall's developmental model of reading (1995) identifies six stages in the reading process. The six stages are:

- 1) Stage to Pre-reading: The child is in the Pre-reading Stage until the approximate age of 6 years. This stage is when the child is developing knowledge of sounds and the use of spoken language. The child is acquiring vocabulary and gaining an understanding of word structure.
- 2) Stage 1 develops during grades 1 and 2 for the child. During this stage, the child learns the alphabet and the correspondence between the letters and the sounds they make.
- 3) Stage 2 is evident in grades 2 and 3. The child applies what was learned in Stage 1 to increasingly more complex words and narratives which are read with a greater degree of automaticity and expression.
- 4) Chall divided Stage 3 into two sub phases, Phase A and Phase B. Phase A encompasses grades 4 through 6. During Phase A, the child still has a limited

vocabulary and background knowledge. Chall stated it is best to use materials and read material focusing on one viewpoint. As they move into Phase B, grades 7 through 8 and sometimes 9, the student encounters more than one view point and begins to analyze and critique readings to gain information.

- 5) Stage 4 encompasses the high school years. In Stage 4, the student encounters more than one viewpoint in greater depth, more than one set of facts, theory, and interpretations of information. Stage 5 is the 18 year and above individual.
- 6) The individual at Stage 5 selects reading material with a purpose. They analyze, synthesize, and judge what is read. The reader constructs knowledge and understanding from what others have written. Chall (1995) qualified the points made in the developmental stages of reading by noting the ages and grades were approximations. Paris (2005) reinterpreted the development of reading by addressing the constraints that influence reading development. He grouped the constraints into three categories: conceptual, developmental, and methodological. According to Paris, concepts of print, letter knowledge, and phonics ability are highly constrained; phonemic awareness and oral fluency are less constrained; and vocabulary and comprehension are the least constrained of the three categories.

Good and Kaminski (2007), the developers of the Dynamic Indicators of the Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) measurement process, have revolutionized screening and assessment for districts across the nation who are striving to meet the mandates of the (RtI) legislation. Good, Gruba, and Kaminski's (2001) publication: *The*

Best Practices for the use of DIBEL in an Outcome Driven Model presented explanations and information related to the success of DIBELS.

Goodman and Pearson (2006) produced a study they proclaimed as the truth about DIBELS in which the process was not favorably portrayed. Pearson noted, “DIBELS is the worst thing to happen to reading....” (2006). According to Goodman and Pearson, educators and researchers across the nation are opposing the use of DIBELS in their districts.

The general education initiative, RtI, was implemented as a result of the reauthorization of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, '97). The act was reauthorized in 2004 and became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). IDEIA changed the dynamics of the interaction between special education and regular education. RtI is a process that is a result of the change to help all children gain adequate reading achievement.

Batsche (2007), Bradley (2007), Gettinger and Stoiber (2007), and Wedl (2005) are a few of the researchers who have presented studies of RtI and its implementation. The three tiered reading model is one of the tiered models being used to meet the objectives of RtI. Researchers such as Allington (2006), Gettinger (2007), Hagans (2008), and the National Reading Panel (2000) have reported positive documentation of the success of the three tiered reading model. The National Reading Panel set the components for successfully teaching children how to read. The five components set by the NRP are phonemic awareness, alphabetic principal, fluency, vocabulary, and

comprehension. The three tiered reading model addresses these components.

DIBELS supporters proclaim their skills screening and monitoring also address the components of reading and are the best method of monitoring progress.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and phrases are defined as used in this study:

Achievement gap: Howse, Lange, Farran, and Boyles (2003) stated that children from students of low socioeconomic status homes begin school with significantly poorer readiness skills than their more average peers and are at a greater risk for reading difficulties in school. For the purpose of this study, the achievement gap will encompass the gap in reading achievement between children raised in low socioeconomic status homes as relative to their more affluent peers.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS): an instrument used to screen phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency with text, vocabulary, and comprehension (Kaminski, Cummings, Powell-Smith, & Good, 2008).

Educational personnel: For the purposes of this study educational personnel will be used to designate classroom teachers, special education teachers, and NCLB teachers working directly with kindergarten through 3rd grade students at the target schools.

Income: “Income” refers to parent or caregivers’ monetary gain before deductions such as taxes, insurance premiums, charitable contributions, and bonds (Federal Registry, 2009).

*OSEL*A: The Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement.

According to Li and Zhang (2008), Clay (2002) developed the OSEL A which became the primary informal Reading Recovery assessment and evaluation instrument. The OSEL A consists of six subtests; Running Record of Text Reading, Letter Identification, Concepts About Print, Writing Vocabulary, and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words.

RtI: Response to Intervention initiative that merges the core reading program and special education into the policies of the NCLB Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

School readiness: According to Rofoth, Buchenauer, Crissman, and Halko (2004), school readiness means that the child is emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively ready to enter a social environment that is focused on learning.

Students of low socioeconomic status: a student who receives free or reduced breakfast and lunch as established by federal guidelines. The 2012 to 2013 federal guideline for free and reduced lunch is given in Appendix B (Federal Registry, 2012).

Teachers: For the purpose of this study teachers will refer to the classroom educator, special education educator, and NCLB teachers who are working with students of students of low socioeconomic status at the three target schools.

Three tiered reading model: The three tiered reading model merges the core reading program and special education into the policies of NCLB. The model allows clear standards to be identified, meaningful measurement, and effective instruction to benefit all students including the learning disabled (Wedl, 2005). Tier1 represents approximately

80% to 85% of students who are successful when presented with the core curriculum. In addition to the core curriculum, approximately 15% of students require 30 more minutes of intense, small group intervention daily to be successful which they receive in Tier 2. If after the additional 30 minutes of intervention given in Tier 2 the students are still not successful, Tier 3 students may receive an additional 30 minutes of intervention for a total of 60 minutes in addition to the core curriculum instruction.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the teachers were trained and implement the three tiered reading model, DIBELS, and the core reading programs adopted by the district in the appropriate prescribed manner.

Scope and Delimitations

This study included Kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers, special education teachers, and NCLB teachers working with students of low socioeconomic status attending three target schools implementing the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS screening measure. Delimitation of this study was achieved by selecting the three schools with the highest report of free and reduced lunch. Schools with high free and reduced lunch reports receive funding and teachers under the NCLB Act. Students in grades Kindergarten through 3rd grade were selected because of the focus on early intervention also an aspect of NCLB.

Limitations

A possible limitation to the study was whether the school had sufficient staff to implement small group instruction. Another limitation always possible with surveys, questionnaires, and interviews was whether the participants answered truthfully and thoughtfully. The researcher also had no control of where students of low socioeconomic status attend school, how long they are in attendance at the target school, or staffing issues.

Significance of Study

This study examined the perception of educators working with students of low socioeconomic status in three low economic schools in a mid-southeastern state in the United States. The significance of this study lies in the insight an educator working with students of low socioeconomic status may gain from professionals who are using the two initiatives with their own students to close the reading achievement gap.

At the minimum, being able to demonstrate functional literacy is imperative in the global world of the 21st century. Closing the reading achievement gap between students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers will promote a social change for generations to come. According to Payne (2005), generational poverty is a family being in poverty for two generations or more. In order to make the positive social change desired for the students of low socioeconomic status, it is crucial educators know what works and what does not work with their most vulnerable students.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 of this study presents a brief overview of the educational gap between students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers. Literacy is universally seen as essential to all areas of life. The endeavor to close the reading gap is hindered by the lack of readiness skills seen in the students of low socioeconomic status child upon kindergarten entrance. A summary of legislation formulated to close the gap, the NCLB Act, and two initiatives being used across the nation resulting from the federal mandate is investigated through current literature. In addition to the NCLB mandate, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 changed the dynamics of special education and special education's interaction with the general education classroom.

RtI is a general education initiative which can be used to help struggling readers and to identify a student with a learning disability. The three tiered reading model, and DIBELS are two initiatives being used throughout the nation to meet the demands of RtI and to close the reading achievement gap. I found a gap in the literature as to what classroom teachers are witnessing in their students of low socioeconomic status reading achievement. While there is literature that pertains to the success of DIBELS in working with students, there is little or no literature addressing teacher perceptions of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of DIBELS in classrooms where educators are working with students. This study, through in-depth interviews with educators working with the students of low socioeconomic status in the classroom, analyzes and synthesizes their

experiences into a qualitative essay. Questions were asked during the interviews gathering information as to whether all skills and skill deficits are addressed with the two initiatives and if all students are being successful. Also, there is a gap in the literature about using the two processes together. There is an abundance of studies on each one separately but not in conjunction.

Three schools with a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch, which determines whether the school is a school wide NCLB (Title 1) school, were selected for this qualitative study. All three schools are a school wide Title 1 school. In order to determine the teachers' perspectives about the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of the two processes, surveys were presented to the staff in the kindergarten through 3rd grade programs involved in the two initiatives. To ascertain a greater understanding of the benefit of the two endeavors, ten educators of the surveyed staff were interviewed. The ten were selected from those indicating a willingness to be interviewed further by signing the survey and adding contact information. For the purposes of this study, it was assumed all staff had received adequate training of the two processes.

Chapter 2 will examine current literature focusing on the achievement gap, RtI, the three tiered reading model, and the DIBELS screening instrument. The literature will examine theories of current researchers as to why there is a gap in reading achievement between the students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers. The

study will also explore what other researchers have found to be relevant to closing the gap with the implementation of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS.

Chapter 3 will present the design and methodology of the study as well as the researcher's role in data collection procedures and analysis. The chapter will conclude with a summary of findings. Chapter 4 will present the analysis of the data and who will benefit from the research. The research study will conclude with Chapter 5 by drawing conclusions from the data gathered and discussing what the significance of the study will be to those working with students of low socioeconomic status. Recommendations for further study of methods to close the reading achievement gap will also be presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of the Achievement Gap

The achievement gap between students from low socioeconomic homes and their more affluent peers has been the focal point for legislation, debates, and research for many years. Education in general and reading in particular have been the platform for many political campaigns. According to Gardner (2007) it is not surprising that achievement is higher in the higher socioeconomic school than in the lower socioeconomic schools where poverty is common among the minorities. Gardner (2007) stated that among the varied reasons for the achievement gap between students of color and their Caucasian peers are poverty, racism, and an external locus of control. Gardner dated the achievement gap back to the first mass administered achievement tests given in WW I by the U.S. Army, which demonstrated an achievement gap between African American recruits and Caucasian recruits that is still in evidence today. Gardner stated that funding schools as if all students are the same and have the same needs is one hindrance to closing the achievement gap. Another factor he attributes to the achievement gap is the unconscious assumption by educators that children of color are inherently less intelligent and less capable thereby transferring the blame for the gap from educators' responsibility to the students' Gardner advocated the role of poverty in the achievement gap and the areas poverty touches such as self esteem, resources available, anger and resentment, and negative feelings toward school influence the achievement gap and it will cease to exist only when these areas are addressed and eradicated.

Murane (2007) reported children living in poverty are concentrated in low performing schools staffed with ill qualified teachers. Murane asserted that these children are more likely to leave school without the skills necessary to break the cycle of poverty. Likewise, according to Risko and Walker-Dalhouse (2007), students whose language, ethnicity, and race are not the majority population in the educational setting exhibit continual gaps in reading achievement. Researchers have consistently found that poor and minority children, as young as three years of age, have already fallen below average on tests of school readiness when compared to their more affluent peers (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). Parents struggling to provide basic needs do not have the time or energy to meet other needs preparing the child for school. The students of low socioeconomic status child's life experiences may have been different from their more affluent peers and therefore, may not have allowed the same prior knowledge to be acquired. Janus and Duku (2007) reported that research conducted by Early Child Care Research Network ([NICHD] 2005) found that in addition to psychosocial problems, children displayed lower cognitive ability from toddler through third grade; thus, the gap in prior reading readiness knowledge. The Council of Great City Schools (2007), reported that the reading achievement gap has slightly narrowed for students in urban schools. However, the African American student's scores are still significantly below state and national averages. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported statistical results of a significant achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students. According to Kerachsky (2009), scores for both the African American students

and non African American students have been increasing. However, he stated the statistics are not showing much progress in closing the gap between their more affluent peers. Kerachsky also pointed out that NAEP reports results from public school students at the state level. He asserts that in some states the gap closed a little and in some it stayed the same. However, in no state did the gap widen. In most states the gap was less than the national average in reading. Only Wisconsin had a larger than national average gap. Kerachsky stated that overall scores in reading have increased in both groups, but for the gap to close the African American group must not only increase, but increase more than the non African American group of students.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the importance of key factors in reading achievement, the reading achievement gap, initiatives being used to close the gap, and the perceptions of educators as to the success or lack thereof of the initiatives being examined to close the reading achievement gap. A brief historical summary will be presented documenting the achievement gap between students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers. Researchers have presented several possible factors contributing to the achievement gap which will be examined through available literature.

Current legislation addressing the achievement gap will be addressed as it is the foundation of two concepts being used throughout the United States in an effort to close the reading achievement gap. The two concepts being examined are the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS. There are several screening and assessment tools to determine a child's reading skills achievement level. The NCLB Act (2001) produced

ideas on what and how to assess for literacy. The DIBELS and the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSELA) are two screening measures used in balanced literacy programs. A summary and discussion of DIBELS and OSELA measures are presented to show readers more than one screening instrument.

In addition to the in-depth examination of DIBELS, the general education RtI initiative, and the three tiered reading model are explored in-depth. Existing research pertaining to RtI, DIBELS, and the three tiered reading model are presented in the literature review to document what is currently known and not known. I examined the research to determine what effect the two initiatives are having on the reading achievement gap. I also examined the responses of teachers participating in my study to the surveys and in-depth interviews to determine what they were seeing in their classrooms as to whether the reading achievement gap was closing among their students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers.

Current research related to this study was obtained through Walden Databases and library, Questia on line database, and peer reviewed scholarly journals such as Reading Today, Reading Teacher, and Reading Quarterly. Search terms included literacy, students of low socioeconomic status, DIBELS, Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSELA), three tiered reading model, achievement gap, NCLB Act of 2001, NCLB Act of 2004, Title I, teacher perceptions, and Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM). The literature reviewed relating to DIBELS, RtI, and the three tiered reading model was written in the last five years. Research articles from earlier

years were used for background information on the reading achievement gap, its history, and efforts having been made to close the reading gap.

Today's View

Today's view of school readiness is based on current research in neuropsychology (Janus & Duku, 2007). A child is not just magically ready for school at the age of five years old. School readiness is a result of life prior to five years of age. According to Forget-Dubois, Lemelin, Boivin, Dionne, Seguin, Vitaro, and Tremblay (2007), school readiness is a “multidimensional construct that refers to the cognitive, communication, behavioral, and emotional skills, as well as basic knowledge that facilitate the child’s learning and adjustment at school entry” (p. 736). If the child has not had stimulating activities and experiences to form the foundation for the skills needed at five, then he enters school with a gap in prior knowledge. According to Entwistle, Alexander, and Olson (1999), academic ability differences found in children at the beginning of school will continue at the entry level or increase. Their research study found that third grade achievement scores were stable and were an indicator of future school achievement. Duncan and Magnuson (2005) asserted that the school entry gap is not only between racial groups but also “between poor and non poor children” (p. 36) in other words, students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers. Haskins and Rouse (2005) also consistently found that poor and minority children are behind on school readiness skills.

Frechtling, Zhang, and Silverstein (2006) advocated that children need to know how to read and read well. According to The White House (2010) reporting information related to education and the United States future, it is imperative that all children receive a high quality education. President Barack Obama has stated that he is committed that all children receive access to a complete and competitive education preparing them for the global economy (Sarrentino, 2008). Gettering and Stoiber (2007) noted that children with low literacy skills at the end of elementary school are often those who had low literacy skills in preschool and kindergarten. The child with low literacy skills has also been shown to perform considerably lower on measures of cognitive, linguistic, and pre reading assessments. Upon evaluation two years later the child had not caught up with their more affluent peers (Howse, 2003).

Fass and Cauthen (2007) reported African American, Latino, and American Indian children are disproportionately poor. The National Center for Children in Poverty (2011) reported that poverty is not just an urban or minority problem. According to Wight, Chau, and Aratani (2011), more than 15 million American children live in homes with an income level below the national poverty guidelines. In 1997, 5.2 million children younger than the age of six years lived in poverty with 60 % of those being outside the urban area. The NCCP (2007) reported 13 million American children living in poverty; the number increased by 11 % between 2000 and 2006. Three point eight million more children were reported to live in poverty in 2000 (Wight, Chau, & Aratani, 2011). Research has consistently found that poor and minority children, as young as three years

old, have already fallen below average on tests of school readiness when compared to their more affluent peers (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). Parents struggling to provide basic needs do not have the time or energy to meet other needs such as preparing the child for school by helping them gain prior knowledge.

Contemporary theorist, Payne (2005) declared there is a hidden framework in poor communities that educators and others need to understand when working with students of low socioeconomic status. Payne stated that each ethnic, racial, and economic group has its own hidden rules (Payne, 2005). Hidden rules are the unspoken understanding of acceptable actions within a class letting the others in the group know whether the individual belongs to that particular group or not. Payne asserted that an individual maintains the hidden rules of the class he was raised in even when the income of the individual may drastically change. Understanding the hidden rules may alleviate some of the frustration of educators working with students living in poverty. However, Evans (2005) stated that there are social and economic factors involved in the achievement gap that are outside a school's control. Evans advocated that focusing on schools as the sole problem and implementing accountability through high stakes testing is a simplistic, narrow focal point. Evans also proclaimed that poverty, color, and ethnic group alone do not determine academic achievement. There are impressive individuals from all students of low socioeconomic status and minority groups. However, Evans stated that a substantial number of students of low socioeconomic status African American and Hispanic children begin kindergarten behind their peers in school

readiness. According to Forget-Dubois, et al. (2007), school readiness refers to the cognitive, behavioral, communicational, and emotional skills as well as basic background knowledge that prepare the child for attendance to school.

Another aspect viewed as possibly contributing to the reading gap was investigated by Dickens (2005). He explored the differences in genetics and the role genetics plays in the achievement gap. Dickens believed that environment affects the gap between African Americans and Caucasians more than genetic factors. Dickens stated that the gap is not only in achievement and cognitive abilities but also in readiness behaviors such as attention to task and impulse control. He found evidence in the research that genetics (heritability) are important in the differences *within* a race or ethnic group but the evidence does not support genetics as a factor in the differences between achievement of a race or gender. Dickens and Flynn (2006) developed a model integrating genetics and environment to account for the African American and non African American achievement gap, but state the need for further research.

There is an unconscious assumption by educators that children of color are inherently less intelligent and less capable (Gardner, 2007). In doing so, the blame for the gap is transferred from the educators' teaching capabilities to the students' ability to learn. Gardner (2007) stated that it is frequently said that minority or non white parents do not care as much about their child's education as white parents. This stereotyping affects educators' interactions with African American or other minority children. He also contended funding of schools contributes to the gap. Funding schools as though all

populations of students are the same, having the same problems and needs, is an ineffective method of approaching the gap. All student populations are not the same. Regardless of the cause for the reading achievement gap, educators must address the needs of students upon their entrance to the classroom. However, government officials do not accept any of the previously mentioned rationales for the gap. Legislation states that all students should achieve proficiency in reading (Marlow, 2003).

Legislation

Although the educational gap has narrowed somewhat in the last 30 years, there remains a significant gap in test scores. Kerachsky (2009) reported the findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) documenting the results of state and national assessments. The report describes the difference between African American and Caucasian students' achievement at the state level. According to Kerachsky, the 2007 report documents higher scores in reading and math for both African American and non African American students. Kerachsky summarized the test results by addressing the gap at state level using test data from the states participating in the assessment process. In mathematics, the gap narrowed slightly in 15 states and did not increase in any state. Likewise, reading scores were examined and overall the reading gap did not widen nor did it decrease significantly in any state. Policymakers have implemented high profile educational initiatives to close the gap. The NCLB Act ([NCLB], (2002) is one such endeavor aimed explicitly at closing the achievement gap. Larocque (2007) claimed that NCLB established accountability for all schools, kindergarten through 12th grade.

Marlow (2003) stated that standardized and state mandated test show a broad gap in reading achievement between the African American student and the non African American student. According to Cavanagh (2009), the reading gap was unchanged in the nine year olds in the NAEP report, but narrowed in the 13 year old group.

The Education Trust was established by the American Association for Higher Education to support K through 12 reform efforts. The mission of this nonprofit organization is to attain higher academic achievement for all students at all levels. The Trust provides information and updates relating to NCLB and other federal and state initiatives. Among other services, the Education Trust provides research and propagation of data patterns among different populations of students. The data aids in tracking the achievement gap. President of the Education Trust, Kati Haycock, stated the NAEP report shows academic progress however, the pace is slow. The trust has found that many minority and students of low socioeconomic status attend underfunded inner city schools. These students often receive poorer quality instruction and do not have access to many resources needed for the 21st century's technological age.

Measures to Close the Gap

According to Frechtling, Zhang, and Silverstein (2006), children need to know how to read and read well. Former First Lady, Laura Bush (2006) advocated the importance of the years from birth to five when the child begins public kindergarten. Bush worked with the White House and the departments of health and human services to capitalize on this important period of growth in the young child. Federal, state, and local

initiatives are constantly focused on improving the reading of all students and closing the reading gap shown by students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers. Former President Bush initiated the *Good Start, Grow Smart* plan Title 1, Part A (2002) supporting preschool education. The Good Start, Grow Smart (2006) initiative's goal is to ensure children enter kindergarten with necessary skills to be successful. The objective is to improve early education programs, improve Head Start programs, and provide research based information to those working with young children. States are encouraged to develop guidelines for early education programs which are aligned with K through 12 standards, implement necessary staff development, and coordinate federal and state funded programs including Title 1 preschool.

More recently, President Obama vowed to reform public schools so that all children will be successful in the 21st century workplace (White House, 2010). According to the on line journal Education (2008), Obama stated education reform required new resources and a new look at reforms. Obama also declared reform requires a president who is honest about what the challenges to education are and who is not afraid to speak about the challenges and not to just say what everyone wants to hear. Obama (2008) addressed standardized testing by saying it should assess the quality of teaching the child is receiving. According to Obama, funds provided to states will allow for the assessment of higher order skills including technology, problem solving, and scientific investigation. Race to the Top (2009) is Obama's educational initiative which has states competing for grant money. Race to the Top (RTTT) was authorized by the American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act of 2009. Federal goals for education are set by RTTT and \$4.3 billion in grants is available to be awarded to states meeting or having met the federal goals. The goals of RTTT are to close achievement gaps between higher and lower performing schools, increase student achievement, improve graduation rates, and encourage postsecondary achievements.

In order to fully understand the process of becoming a good reader, Goodman (2006) ascertained that the ability to hear, recognize, and manipulate phonemes is a solid measure of a young child's later reading achievement. Systematic teaching of phonics is recognized as a valid instruction for reading success. Wang and Algozzine (2008) reported three obstacles known to hinder children's ability to develop appropriate reading skills: (a) an ability to understand and use the alphabetic principle, (b) an inability to transfer spoken language to reading, and (c) a lack of motivation to read. The National Institute of Child and Human Development (2000) supported this view of basic obstacles to reading success and asserted that the reading deficits should be addressed in early childhood at the elementary age. President Obama has committed to providing the necessary support to ensure the success of all children from the youngest age. According to the National Research Council (2009), the implementation of early literacy interventions in a high quality preschool can prevent reading problems in elementary school. Providing programs for the early childhood years, such as Head Start, are needed to implement what research is proving about the deficits students of low socioeconomic status are demonstrating at the beginning of school.

Essential Components of Reading

In order to close the reading gap, teacher workshops should focus on a balanced literacy approach as identified by the National Reading Panel (2000). Arkebauer, MacDonald, and Palmer (2002) found struggling readers may be able to phonetically read a word, but may not have the strategies to comprehend, analyze, or regulate their reading content. According to Meisinger, Bradley, Schwanenfluge, and Kuhn (2010, p. 55) and Stanovich (1986) this type of struggling readers are referred to as “word callers” (p. 372). The five essential components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) as determined by scientific research based reading instruction comprises:

1. Phonemic awareness-the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in oral language.
2. Phonics-understanding and connecting letters of written language with sounds of oral language.
3. Fluency-reading text accurately and quickly.
4. Vocabulary-oral or reading language needed for effective communication.
5. Comprehension-purposeful and active strategies for understanding written language.
- 6.

Since former President Bush enacted the NCLB Act of 2001, animated discussions of the basic issues of literacy have been prevalent across the United States.

Importance of Vocabulary

According to Neuman (2006), words and their meanings are the foundation of literacy. Vocabulary, a component of the balanced literacy approach, is paramount to understanding and reading comprehension. Coyne, McCoach, and Kapp (2007), reported that children begin kindergarten with differences in vocabulary and the gap grows larger as the child progresses through school. Some children may have had extensive exposure to books and extensive oral language; others may have limited oral language and exposure to books. Coyne, et al. stated students with lower vocabulary knowledge than their peers are at risk of reading disabilities and that new words are not learned incidentally through listening to a story. As texts become more complex, vocabulary becomes a hindrance to comprehension.

According to Becker and Engelmann (1978), the best way to increase achievement in students of low socioeconomic status is to provide explicit, systematic instruction in the basic skills needed for success in reading and mathematics. Becker stated that the decline of reading comprehension evident after second grade resulted from the lack of vocabulary knowledge. Russell (2001) contended that many of the ideas Becker fought for in the educational arena are now incorporated into legislation such as the Reading Excellence Act, the Comprehensive School Reform Act, and other national and state legislation.

According to Begley, Eckert, Montarello, and Storie (2008), teachers often overestimate their low to average student's reading fluency skills, but are fairly accurate

in their evaluation of more fluent, accomplished readers. A balanced reading program integrating decoding, fluency, and comprehension is imperative to effective reading instruction (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). The reauthorization of the IDEA (2004) changed the manner children with learning disabilities were identified. No longer is there a discrepancy method of identification, waiting to establish a discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability, to be used. States are to use a process that “determines if the child responds to scientific, research based intervention...” (Section 1414(b)(6)(B). The RtI model in conjunction with DIBELS is widely used across the United States to meet the mandates of NCLB (2001).

Another reading achievement measure used in some states is the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSELA). According to Li and Zhang (2008), the OSELA is an individually administered informal, untimed assessment and evaluation measure of early literacy development developed by Marie Clay used predominately during the Reading Recovery initiative. The OSELA consists of six sub tests assessing and evaluating Concepts About Print, Letter Identification, Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, Word Reading, Running Record of Text Reading, and Writing Vocabulary. Researchers Reynolds and Wheldall (2007) reported OSELA was implemented in 9,901 schools in the United States during 2002 to 2003. There is an ongoing debate concerning the DIBELS and OSELA. This study examined the two

measures, but focused on DIBELS, which is being used in the school district in which the three target schools are located, as the primary measure of early literacy.

Defining RtI and the Three Tiered Reading Model

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act ([IDEIA], 2004) changed the dynamics of the interaction between special education and regular education. RtI is a general education strategy to work with struggling readers. RtI provides quality education and interventions matched to student needs and uses learning rate and the level of performance over time to make educational decisions. An important difference compelled by the reauthorization of IDEIA (2004) was that educators could now “use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific research based intervention as part of the evaluation procedures...” [P.L. 108-446, §614(b)(6)(B)] The RtI model provides instruction for all students at three levels. It is a process, not a program. Data from assessments guide the interventions (WVDE, 2006). RtI models have some common characteristics such as: multiple tiers, differentiated instruction, instruction delivered by staff other than just classroom teacher, and varied frequency and time of interventions. Likewise, RtI has many common components; a three Tierreading model, screening of all students, progress monitoring, collaboration of educators, and decisions based on data. The RtI model is replacing the discrepancy model (wait to fail model) of evaluation. The discrepancy model uses the difference between the IQ score and an achievement score to determine eligibility. Historically, most states have used the discrepancy model to identify students with learning disabilities (LD). IDEIA (2004)

allows states to discontinue use of the IQ achievement model and instead use alternative methods to identify learning disabled students such as the three tiered reading model (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

The three tiered reading approach merged special education into the policies of NCLB (2004). The model allows clear standards to be identified, meaningful measurement to be conducted, and effective instruction to benefit all students including the learning disabled (Wedl, 2005). Carnine (2001) attested that several states have seen significant improvement in academic performance and a decrease in the number of children needing a special education curriculum, The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) defined *the three tiered reading model* as:

-the practice of providing high quality instruction and intervention that match student needs and using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions. The three tiered reading model is a general education strategy for working with struggling learners...

The three tiered reading model has a strong focus on early literacy and requires frequent assessment allowing teachers to monitor interventions and the effectiveness of the interventions. Presentation of the three tiered reading approach has the following essential components:

1. Universal screening.
2. Progress monitoring.
3. Teaming and collaboration.

4. Databased decision making.
5. Ongoing professional development.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) maintain that Tier1 consists of the core curriculum presented to all students and is effective for approximately 80% to 85% of students. The interventions in Tier1 are characteristically preventive and proactive. At this level, the question is whether the curriculum is being effective for the majority of students. The educator must also ask questions about who the curriculum is not being successful for. If the instruction is indeed successful for the majority of students, then those at risk must be identified and grouped with others having similar difficulties and proceed to Tier 2.

Tier 2 students continue to receive Tier1 instruction in addition to interventions based on performance data. The interventions at Tier 2 serve approximately 15% of the students and are small group interventions. The interventionist can deliver intervention in the classroom or outside the classroom setting. The interventions administered focus on particular skill areas assessment has shown as weak. Batsche (2007, p. 2)) stated that at Tier 2 intervention phase, 70% of students will be successful. Students move fluidly between Tier1 and Tier 2. If the student still lacks success at this tier, then the student moves to Tier 3.

Tier 3 students receive additional high intensity interventions. A very small percentage of students, approximately 5%, will be at Tier 3 receiving intensive

instruction. Intervention at this phase is either very small group or individual.

Tier 3 students continue to receive Tier1 instruction in addition to the most intervention time of the tiers. If at this point the student still does not exhibit progress, further assessment is warranted.

The inclusion of an individual in Tier 3 does not automatically warrant special education placement. It is one criterion that may be used for an eligibility decision when the possibility of a specific learning disability is being considered. Batsche (2007) stated that the components of the three tiered reading model first encompass the regular education program and the special education program secondly. Batsche characterized the three tiered model as being another term for “data based decision making”. First, the student’s problems must be identified using reliable and valid methods. Then, the interventions must be research based. Batsche also maintained that the interventions must consider the student demographics (gender, race, language, socioeconomic), and setting relevant to instruction (number of students in classroom, amount of supervision). Lastly, there must be evidence the interventions were implemented with veracity and an accurate level of implementation must be documented.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2006) has developed a report on the myths surrounding the three tiered reading model. The number one myth is that the major goal of the model is to determine special education eligibility and Tier 3 is only special education. If this were so, the process would be linear ending in special education instead of circular and fluid. Data collected during intervention in the

tiers can be used as one source of information in the eligibility process.

NASDSE proclaimed the new model as being a dramatic redesign of the special education and regular education programs. Collaboration between the two is imperative.

According to Wedl (2005), assessment is one of the most important components of the three tiered reading model. Frequent assessment allows quick interpretation of the data collected to determine if the interventions being used are effective. Scott and Paris (2005) state reading comprehension instruction and its assessment is an important outcome of the reform movement intended to improve reading achievement. NCLB's demand for accountability necessitates more effective tools to measure effectiveness of reading instruction. Changes in assessments include longer passages, more challenging questions and variety in question formats (Paris and Scott, 2005). Questions are more open ended and may have more than one correct answer. "High stakes" assessments are used to make decisions about placements and funding among other issues and are required to prove validity, reliability, external accountability, and ability to generalize (Linn, 1999).

Allington (2006) stated that although the three tiered reading model has been enthusiastically embraced by educators, no one has tested the process comparative to other intervention models. He questions why this is so when states and federal government are stressing research based interventions to close the achievement gap. Allington advocates the need for a three tiered model based on coherent instruction implemented by reading specialists versus fragmented instruction implemented by

nonqualified personnel. Barnes and Harlacher (2008) defined five principles inherent to RtI delivery models: (1)a preventative scheme of education, (2)matching student skills to curriculum and intervention, (3)data based decision making and problem solving, (4)using effective researched based interventions, and (5)applying the principles of RtI to the whole school and not just one student or one classroom. In order to effectively implement the three tiered reading model in the RtI format teachers need extensive training and will have new responsibilities added to their jobs. Because 93.6% of students with disabilities spend an average of 4.8 hours per day in the general education classroom teachers must implement new practices and address new responsibilities each day (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007). According to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2005), among other teacher responsibilities will be progress monitoring and implementing interventions. Hale (2008) stated it is not clear that RtI is a justified method of determining a child has specific learning disabilities (SLD). He gave several reasons as to why the child may not respond to intervention; teacher not adequately trained in using the research based intervention, intervention not presented in a consistent faithful manner, that RtI does not address the psychological processes of ability and achievement, and measures to identify the response may not be reliable and valid.

Since the 1970s when Bloom's taxonomy drove objectives, reading assessment has undergone a change in manifestation. The 1980s framework focused more on the literature being read. The 1990s framework portrayed the response based curriculum. The

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Framework was updated in 2002 to provide more details in order to understand how students negotiate complex interactions with what they have read. The new guidelines involve critical evaluation, comparing, contrasting, and understanding the impact of what has been read. A future research study that would benefit reading teachers would be to answer questions as to whether the two measures being investigated address these guidelines. Current assessments, such as the SAT-9 standardized tests, use a mixed model assessment including some constructed response items (Scott, et al., 2004). Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM), Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSELA), and DIBELS are three of the methods available to assess student literacy skills. In order to attain and understand the DIBELS and RtI processes, it is necessary to investigate both CBM and OSELA.

Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSELA)

According to Li and Zhang (2008), there is an ongoing debate involving the DIBELS and the OSELA measurement tools. The OSELA was the primary assessment of the Reading Recovery movement of the 1970s developed by Marie Clay. OSELA consists of six untimed, informal, individually implemented measures. The six measures are: Running Record of Text Reading, Letter Identification, Concepts about Print, Word Reading, Writing Vocabulary, and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words. Clay (2002) stated OSELA was developed for educators who wanted a systematic method for observing how young children learn to read and write. OSELA allows the instructor to

observe performance, monitor progress, identify emerging skills, and determine an individual's specific weaknesses. However, in order for an educator to use Clay's OSELA measure a wide range of knowledge is needed of the reading process and literacy development (Li & Zhang, 2008). OSELA sees the teacher as a facilitator and the child as an active learner; this is the strength of the measure. However, a weakness of OSELA is the assumption the educator has an extensive knowledge of the assessment process and its application to literacy instruction. Phonological awareness is another area of weakness for the OSELA. The National Reading Panel (2000) declared a strong relationship between phonological awareness and reading progress. Chapman, Tunmer, and Prochnow (2001) found that when students were tested after Reading Recovery intervention, phonological processing deficiencies were not rectified.

Li and Zhang considered the educational philosophy bases of using DIBELS and OSELA. Li and Zhang ascertain DIBELS is of essentialist educational theory. An essentialism educational theory is based on a positivist philosophical paradigm (Ornstein & Haukins, 2004). Essentialists consider teachers a distributor of knowledge and the student is seen as the receiver of the knowledge; a teacher driven classroom. Evaluation in the essentialist classroom is usually standardized tests such as DIBELS. According to Ornstein and Haukins, OSELA on the other hand, is purported to be a progressive child centered learning classroom where the students learn through activities, problem solving, and projects. The teacher is the facilitator and the student is an active learner, evaluations involve teacher and student and are more informal in nature. Another point defining the

differences between DIBELS and OSELA focuses on the varying perspectives. DIBELS is a behaviorist perspective; OSELA is contemporary cognitive psychology (Goodman, 2006). Likewise, DIBELS is founded on reading readiness theories; belief that learning to read begins after specific prerequisite skills are mastered; OSELA is founded on the theory literacy begins very early in life and that children move through the phases of literacy in different ways and at different rates. Emergent literacy theory stresses meaningful literacy development and assessment (Clay, 2002).

Investigating these CBM and OSELA further is recommended as a future study. Answering the questions regarding as to why school districts across the United States are encompassing the teacher driven DIBELS measure as opposed to the student centered, problem solving model of OSELA in the endeavor to develop stronger critical thinking skills.

Overview of DIBELS

Hall (2006) believed students must have early literacy screening immediately followed by an intervention for any student falling below benchmark. According to Hall the screening measures must have four critical standards.

1. The instrument must have established reliability and validity.
2. The instrument must be quickly and easily administered.
3. The instrument must be examiner friendly.
4. The instrument must provide the examiner with relevant data on the student.

The U.S. Department of Education's appointed Reading First Assessment Committee (2002) found DIBELS to be valid and reliable for use as a screening measure, progress monitoring, and outcome measure. Dr. Roland Good, PhD and Dr. Ruth Kaminski, PhD, researchers at the University of Oregon developed DIBELS assessment measures for Kindergarten through third grade. DIBELS is an acronym for the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. The DIBELS screening instrument screens Phonemic Awareness, Alphabetic Principle, Fluency with text, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. Hall (2006) proclaimed DIBELS to be "one of the best early literacy assessment instruments available today." An assessment takes approximately ten minutes per student and provides teachers with easily accessed and understood information on the student's literacy skills in the five essential areas of reading instruction. The assessments allow educators to determine student progress and areas of weakness. Good and Kaminski (2007) reported DIBELS assessment helps identify specific needs of students which aids in creating reading groups, making more effective decisions for students below benchmark, and in monitoring progress easily throughout the year. Students who are having difficulties are considered high risk or some risk students and allows educators to closely monitor their progress. According to Kaminski, DIBELS is part of a formative assessment process to evaluate the effectiveness of chosen interventions.

The relationship between Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM), the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (OSELA), and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

Stecker and Lembke (2005), stated that curriculum based measurement (CBM) is a type of progress monitoring that has been scientifically validated and incorporates standard methods for test development, administration, and scoring and data usage. CBM has over 30 years of scientific research to validate its effectiveness.

Important features of CBM are:

1. The testing samples a year's curriculum.
2. Tests are brief and easily administered.
3. Testing is conducted frequently usually from every two weeks to monthly.
4. There are alternate forms to appraise the same types of skills at the same level of difficulty.
5. Long term goals are determined by student performance.
6. Scores are graphed and used by teachers to determine the effectiveness of student progress.
7. The data are used to compare and contrast the effectiveness of different instructional methods.

Several web based or computerized models of progress monitoring are based on CBM (Stecker & Lembke, 2005) and its reliability and validity. According to the developer of CBM, Deno (2003), CBM went far beyond what its original development foresaw. CBM's purpose has always been to assess the effectiveness of instruction and intervention to individual students. The CBM format is being used to screen and identify students at risk for academic failure, assessing reading readiness, and predicting

achievement on high stakes tests. CBM, according to Deno, specifically refers to procedures measuring basic skills in student achievement. Deno reports that the generic measurement format of CBM has made it possible for measurement of skills with stimulus materials and the development of such measures as DIBELS and General Outcome Measurement (GOM) (Fuchs & Deno, 1994).

One model utilizing the CBM format is DIBELS model which this study will investigate in more depth. DIBELS, OSELAs, and CBM have several aspects in common; the assessment of basic skills in reading, spelling, and written expression. The focus of this study was DIBELS and the three tiered reading model. A recommendation for a future study is to make a comparison of DIBELS and OSELAs in order to determine which best meets the needs of struggling readers of low socioeconomic status.

DIBELS Assessment of the Five Essential Components of Reading

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness refers to a critical reading skill represented by the ability to use the forty one phonemes in the English language in spoken language (Stecker & Lembke, 2005). During DIBELS screening, phonemic awareness is assessed through the Initial Sound Fluency (ISF) measure and Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (Good & Kaminski, 2007).

Alphabetic Principle

The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) reported the importance of the beginning reader learning the alphabetic principle as being essential to reading

development. The individual must learn the letter sound correspondence, spelling patterns, and how to apply these to their reading endeavors. Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) is the measure to assess the student knowledge of the alphabetic principle.

Fluency

The NRP states fluent readers can read text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Fluency is dependent on strong word recognition skills. Fluent readers focus on making connections among ideas in text and their own background knowledge thereby, focusing on comprehension (Stecker & Lembke, 2005). The less fluent reader focuses more on decoding individual words and their meaning thus, hindering comprehension. DIBELS assesses fluency with the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) component.

Vocabulary

The National Reading Panel found that oral vocabulary is important in making the transition from oral to written forms of learning. Developing a strong reading vocabulary is critical to the comprehension of a good reader. Research by Stecker and Lembke (2005) found that some vocabulary is learned indirectly through conversation, listening to others read, or reading independently. Direct vocabulary instruction aids in comprehension. Vocabulary is assessed by the Oral Reading Fluency component.

Comprehension

Comprehension is the purposeful active reason for reading (Stecker & Lembke, 2005). Good readers think about what they are reading as they read it. The good reader uses metacognition strategies to understand what is being read. Metacognition strategies refer to “thinking about thinking” strategies such as monitoring understanding, applying strategies such as rereading, and checking self for understanding as text is being read (Stecker & Lembke, 2005). The National Research Panel analyzed the research relating to comprehension and found three predominant themes:

- 1) Reading comprehension is a cognitive process that integrates complex skills and cannot be understood without examining the critical role of vocabulary learning and instruction and its development.
- 2) Active interactive strategic processes are critically necessary to the development of reading comprehension.
- 3) The preparation of teachers to best equip them to facilitate these complex processes is critical and intimately tied to the development of reading comprehension.

DIBELS screens comprehension through Oral Reading Fluency and Retell Fluency measures.

Benchmark Assessment Screenings are administered in the fall, winter, and spring and are given to all students to determine if they are gaining the skills needed for academic success. The results of the screenings and other classroom information help the teacher when determining appropriate group placement for a student. DIBELS does not

tell a teacher everything they need to know about a child's reading progress, but it does give important information about the child's progress toward becoming an efficient reader (Hall, 2006).

Hall stated that the progress monitoring aspect of DIBELS may be its strongest component. Frequent progress monitoring gives evidence as to whether an intervention is working or if a different avenue is warranted.

DIBELS Validity and Reliability

According to Good, Gruba, and Kaminski (2007), DIBELS is a reliable instrument to determine student reading achievement. Timing is an important component of all the DIBELS measures. Each measure has a fluency element and student scores are configured on the number correct per minute. It is important the student be able to process the reading task, such as decoding an unfamiliar word, quick enough to process the information automatically and comprehend what was read. The handheld computer flashes yellow when there is only 5 seconds of an assessment left and then gray with the word Done at the end of a minute. Evaluators immediately receive screening results under the report menu.

DIBELS requires standardized administration in order to preserve its validity and reliability. Staff administering the measures must be trained and aware that deviation from the standardized conditions will invalidate the reliability and validity of the measures (Hall, 2006).

Analyzing DIBELS Data

DIBELS is not a diagnostic instrument. DIBELS is a screening measure to determine if a student is reaching the benchmarks appropriate for the grade level or if there is a need for intervention. However, the score does not tell you where the deficit lies, but the testing booklet or student report will give information for analysis to determine where the errors were incurred. Careful analysis of a student's error patterns allows grouping with other students with similar deficits and aids in planning interventions. The teacher monitors progress to determine the effectiveness of interventions. If the student is not progressing with the intervention, then a different intervention, more intervention time, or a smaller group may be needed. If the student continues to not show progress after intensified intervention efforts, more assessment may be conducted to diagnose the problem.

Goodman (2005), stated that DIBELS has many problems inherent to the process. The DIBELS process pits children against a stopwatch, completing meaningless tasks that are performed out of context thereby emphasizing speed over thoughtful response (Goodman, 2005). DIBELS, according to Goodman, does nothing in the way of establishing the ability to make sense of print. The credibility and consistency possible with the use of various testers is also questioned by Goodman. Goodman sums up his view of DIBELS as being “a mixed bag of silly little tests”.

Pearson (2006) was noted as stating that DIBELS is the worst thing that could have happened to reading. He supports this radical statement by further stating DIBELS

encourages students to engage in activities not advancing reading achievement.

Pearson maintains there are several reasons why so many states, districts, and schools are encouraging or even mandating the use of DIBELS in the classroom. One reason being, the significant amount of scientific prestige presented on the DIBELS website. Statistics are given for reliability, validity, indicators, and how many are currently using DIBELS. The lowest criterion related validity is for Nonsense Word Fluency with 42% and the highest criterion related validity is 98% for letter naming fluency (Whalen, 2006). The reliability data are impressive and have proven to be stable when viewed for a short term. Pearson (2006) in his critique of the DIBELS process asserted we must be careful to assess to indicate the relevance of the curriculum not to guide the curriculum.

The three tiered reading model and DIBELS working together

DIBELS measures give the educator information to plan an individual student's instructional program (Kaminski, 2007). DIBELS is a formative measurement system measuring literacy skills and oral reading fluency that are a key component in a RtI model. DIBELS utilizes a handheld computer compatible with Wireless Generation. On the Wireless Generation website, the educator is able to view and print out reports and graphs for specific students or a specific classroom as a whole. The DIBELS palm has a link to activities for a specific child allowing the teacher to see what instructional activities would be beneficial in the area the student is having problems.

DIBELS is not to be used alone to measure a student's success in school (Kaminski, 2007). DIBELS was meant to be part of a strong literacy model. RtI uses the

three tiered reading model that correlates well with the DIBELS assessments.

The assessments provide screening and program evaluation of the interventions presented to the students. Another aspect of assessment is progress monitoring. If the student is in the intensive group, that student can be progress monitored weekly or every two weeks if more appropriate. The strategic group will be monitored monthly. In the three tiered reading model, schools may plan for substitute teachers to continue regular classroom instruction while the regular educator administers the assessments to the students.

Teachers' perceptions of the DIBELS and the three tiered reading model

The purpose of this study was to question classroom teachers' perceptions of the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS as related to the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. Specifically the study presents an unbiased look at whether teachers perceive the reading achievement gap between the students of low socioeconomic status and their more typical peers as being lessened using the combined efforts of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS. Greenfield, Proctor, and Cardarelli (2010) conducted a qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of RtI in an urban elementary school to determine the achievement gains of students. They chose consensual qualitative research analysis (CQR) because it allows questioning participants without having a predetermined idea of what their responses will be. At the conclusion of their research report the researchers' state they found educators must constantly review the reasoning behind RtI, reviewing the federal recommendations surrounding RtI often.

Roehrig, Duggar, Moats, Glover, and Mincey (2008) conducted a qualitative study of teachers' opinions about using progress monitoring data to form literacy instruction. The majority of teachers (8 out of 10) believed using data from progress monitoring strengthened their students' literacy skills. The teachers also reported what they perceived as contextual variables barriers to using assessment data to drive instruction. The variables included adequate support, not knowing what to do as interventions after receiving the data, and being willing to look at their own teaching practices in conjunction with the assessment data. Roehrig, et al. concluded providing mentors or coaches for teachers to help make instructional or intervention recommendations after data is gathered may be effective in encouraging positive results in student literacy.

Hagans (2008) conducted a quantitative study of the intervention validity of the Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). As a result of the study, the researcher found that DIBELS measures being used to formulate instructional interventions for phoneme segmentation skills increased phonological awareness, an important skill in learning to read. However, Hagan stated the study was not generalizable to all students of low socioeconomic status because the participants in the study were white and English speaking. The researcher recommended a need for future studies to include ethnic and racial students to more accurately represent a sample of the low socioeconomic status student population.

Surveys and interviews to gather data about teacher perceptions have been useful to educational researchers. Thomas (2004) stated that only social scientists ask questions, use surveys and interviews, in order to collect data. According to DeMarrais and Lapan (2004), most survey research falls into the framework of non experimental research designs. The data gathered is often used for explaining relationships between variables. According to Fink (2006), surveys may be used to collect information, describe, explain, or compare. They can question knowledge, values, and feelings. Surveys can be self administered, face to face, by phone, electronic format, or mail. In 2008, Spectrum K-12 School Solutions and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) conducted a K-12 survey of district administrators to determine the extent of RtI adoption in US schools. They found in the majority of districts the general education and special education personnel were in a unified effort to implement the process from the bottom grades up.

While there is abundant research on the process of RtI available, research questioning the perceptions of educators implementing the three tiered reading model as a way in which to meet the mandate of RtI is limited. Likewise, there is abundant information on the DIBELS, a lot of which is publicized by the founders and Dynamic Measurement Group, there is little on teachers perceptions of the use of DIBELS. There is a literature gap relating to teacher perceptions of the use of the three tiered reading model in conjunction with DIBELS to improve reading achievement.

In order to be unbiased, I gathered information from credible sources detailing both the positive and the negative views and experiences utilizing the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS by going to the “trenches”; the educators working with the students. Educators in three schools with students of low socioeconomic status were questioned in an anonymous survey as to whether they found the two processes to be successful with their students of low socioeconomic status. Ten educators from the three schools were interviewed in-depth with open ended questions to attain a more detailed perception. The interviewees consisted of four classroom teachers from kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. In addition two special education teachers and three NCLB teachers were interviewed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The qualitative phenomenological research methodology was used to answer the essential question and the sub questions of this study. I developed two surveys and five in-depth interview questions to collect the data to answer the primary and sub questions of the study. My role as the researcher in data collection and data analyzing procedures was to examine the data collected through surveys and interviews in detail, analyzing the responses given by the participants. Finally, a summation of this chapter is presented to report the findings of the study, the importance of the findings to other educators, and possible avenues of future study. The primary research question relating to teachers' perceptions of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS was investigated and reported in copious detail.

Research Questions

What are teachers' and other educational personnel's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS as they relate to the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status in Kindergarten through 3rd grade?

To answer the fundamental research question, the following sub questions were asked and answered:

- 1 . How effective has DIBELS been in accurately identifying skill deficits in students of low socioeconomic status?

- 2 . How effective has DIBELS been in accurately identifying struggling readers?
- 3 . How effective do teachers perceive the three tiered reading model as being for the child receiving intervention in Tier 2?
- 4 . In the perception of teachers in this study, does receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention benefit the students of low socioeconomic status more than just Tier1 whole group instruction?

Research Design

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the perceptions' of classroom teachers implementing the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS screening measure to students of low socioeconomic status. The method of tradition selected was due to the need of research examining the experiences of individuals working with students of low socioeconomic status and their reading achievement. All teachers used as participants had received staff development training given by the NCLB teachers in both the three tiered reading model and DIBELS. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), the qualitative methodology is appropriate for the evaluation of specific programs, practices, policies, and innovations. Creswell (1998) defined *qualitative research* as:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

According to Dick (2005), qualitative research is different from quantitative research in that it does not test a hypothesis. Trochim and Donnelly (2006) stated that the process of questioning, gathering, and analyzing the data allows themes to be identified and linked. Johnson and Christensen (2004) explained phenomenology as a type of qualitative research attempting to understand how an individual or individuals perceive a phenomenon; to understand their perceptions and experiences. Creswell (2006) defined the phenomenological study as the study of several individuals and their experiences of a phenomenon. According to Creswell, phenomenological research has been used by social and human sciences, health sciences, and education sciences. Husserl's writings of phonological philosophy began in 1913. He gave emphasize to several points; phenomenological researchers look for the invariant structure, the essence, meaning of what is being studied. The data collected is analyzed for meaning. Each statement is examined for a central theme.

In this instance, how teachers perceive the two initiatives being investigated answering questions relating to the reading achievement of their students of low socioeconomic status and whether the two processes being investigated are helping close the reading gap between them and their more typical peers.

Another qualitative research method considered was the case study. Case study research can be used to give detailed information of one or more occurrences of phenomena. The research is descriptive and exploratory. However, phenomenology focuses more on the individuals' experience of the phenomenon (Johnson and

Christensen, 2004). According to Lester (1999), phenomenological methods are very effective in studies of individuals' perspectives of their own experiences and perceptions. Therefore, after conferencing with my dissertation committee and careful consideration on my part, I decided the phenomenological qualitative research study was the best methodology for this study.

Surveys questioning perceptions of DIBELS and the three tiered reading model were the initial data collection venue for the study followed by in-depth interviews with select participants. According to DeMarrais and Lapan (2004), a simplistic definition of survey research is a means to gather information in a self reporting format using questionnaires and interviews. Interviews, conversations, observation, and meetings are useful methods of research in phenomenological research (Lester, 1999). Creswell (2003) recommended that researchers conduct a pilot study to determine the feasibility of the process to answer the research question. In anticipation of the dissertation research study, a survey pilot study was conducted involving three target schools' students of low socioeconomic status and their teachers. The results of that study showed the topic to warrant a more in-depth examination.

Methodology

Role of Researcher

I developed surveys, questioning experiences with the three tiered reading model and DIBELS assessment. Using the school district's mailbox system, I delivered the surveys to kindergarten through 3rd grade classroom teachers, NCLB teachers, and

special education teachers within three target schools having a low socioeconomic status population located in a mid southeastern state of the United States. As a follow up to gather more in-depth information, I conducted interviews with ten selected teachers who had indicated willingness to be interviewed by signing their name to their survey and providing contact information and who demonstrated an ability to elaborate in their answers in the comment section at the end of each survey. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), purposive sampling selects individuals by predetermined criteria the researcher has established. Purposive sampling was the method for nonrandom sampling technique used for this study. The interviews allowed the selected participant to vocalize their experiences in more detail yet I guided the interview with five predetermined questions.

Population

The population of this study consisted of classroom teachers, NCLB teachers, and special education teachers working with students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade at the three target schools. The aforementioned personnel at the three target schools were trained in the use of DIBELS and the three tiered reading mode by the school district or the schools NCLB staff. The three tiered reading model is part of the initiative to close the reading achievement gap between students of low socioeconomic status and their more typical peers. The district uses DIBELS in conjunction with the three tiered reading model. Schools using the two initiatives with higher socioeconomic status were

eliminated for the purpose of this study. The three target schools have a low socioeconomic status population greater than the state average of 55%.

The target schools have a student population of 70% or more of students of low socioeconomic status as determined by their free and reduced lunch demographics. School A is predominately comprised of students of low socioeconomic status as represented by 89% free and reduced lunch enrollment; school B's population consists of 82% free and reduced lunch enrollment; and School C's population consists of 74% free and reduced lunch enrollment. These high numbers of free and reduced lunch students lead to each target school being a school wide Title 1 school, meaning all the schools students were serviced by the NCLB staff.

Sampling Procedure

According to Leech (2005), the concept of sample size has not been considered an important factor in qualitative research. The basis of this assumption is that quantitative research reports statistical data whereas, qualitative does not. Curtis, Gesler, Smith, and Washburn (2000) stated: "It seems essential to be explicit about these decisions rather than leaving them hidden and to consider the implications "(p. 1012). Janesick (1998), stated "...preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual story being told" (p. 390). However, Leech noted that selecting appropriate cases to study and an appropriate number of cases adds to the saturation of topic. Saturation lends credibility to the data. According to Lester (1999), qualitative studies normally have a smaller sample size than quantitative. Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003) stated one

reason for this as more data does not always lead to more information because the appearance of one piece of data or code places it in the analysis framework. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) stated qualitative research is focused on meaning not proving or disproving hypothesis.

For the purposes of this study, the sample was drawn from 51 personnel at the three low socioeconomic target schools engaged in the two initiatives being questioned, the three tiered reading model and DIBELS. The sample was large enough to include most or all of the possible perceptions as explained by Lester, (1999). Four classroom teachers, four NCLB teachers, and two special education teachers were selected for in-depth interviews from the fifty one teachers surveyed. The ten teachers were selected from those who had indicated on the surveys a willingness to be interviewed in more depth. The interviews were conducted face to face, by email, or by telephone.

Protection of Participants

Permission for the participation of the selected county schools was obtained from the county Test Coordinator and each school's administrator before submitting to Walden's Institutional Review Board for approval (Appendix C). Teachers participating in the study were informed in a consent letter requiring their signature of the reason for the research study and assured that all responses would be anonymous with no identifying information being divulged (Appendix D). I was the only one to know who was interviewed in-depth and neither names of participants or schools were used in the study. Therefore, there were no foreseeable risks involved.

Instrumentation and Validation

After receiving the consent forms from the voluntary personnel, two self administered surveys were the first phase of data collection. The surveys questioned the participants about their experiences with the DIBELS and RtI phenomenon (Appendices E and F). Examination of responses identified possible participants for the in-depth interviews. DeMarrais and Lapan (2004) stated most survey research is within a non experimental framework design with no independent variable being manipulated. The data gathered is usually for descriptive purposes or investigation of relationships. Survey research is attractive to researchers conducting studies where it is not feasible or ethical to manipulate variables. Surveys can be large scale such as national surveys or small scale such as a classroom survey. DeMarrais and Lapan (2004), stated that survey research is not a quick and easy method of collecting data. A good survey takes extensive planning and detail. The surveys were designed using guidelines from researchers such as Johnson and Christensen, DeMarrais and Lapan, and Creswell. As stated, each question was carefully developed so as to gather as much information as possible without leading the respondent in their answer in any way.

A sample of ten teachers consisting of four classroom teachers, four NCLB teachers, and two special education teachers were interviewed in-depth using the same questions for all ten participants. The in-depth interviews and the comment sections at the end of each survey gathered qualitative phenomenological information analyzed for the study.

According to DeMarrais and Lapan (2004), inexperienced researchers believe reliability and validity are not relevant to survey research. However, the survey is a medium to collect data and does not exclude accuracy in measurement principles. Factors affecting the reliability of the data might include fatigue, ambiguous questions, unclear instructions, and forgetfulness. Factors such as biased language and inconsistency in responses may affect the validity of data. Johnson and Christensen (2004), reported the very nature of qualitative research leads to possible bias. I used reflexivity as described by Johnson and Christensen as one strategy to control research bias while interpreting data gathered from the in-depth interviews. Reflexivity is the act of critical self reflection to become more self aware of possible biases. The use of closed ended questions with a rating scale also helped eliminate bias. Investigator triangulation was also used by having a second researcher examine the data and concur with the numerical results. The comment segment, close ended questions, and the in-depth interviews with open ended questions used in conjunction produce a stronger study.

I used cross sectional surveys, data collected at one point in time (Creswell, 2002). According to Golafshani (2003), the most important test of a qualitative study is its quality. Eisner (1991) stated a good qualitative study can help us “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (p. 58). Likewise, Patton (2002) stated that reliability is an outcome of validity in a research study. I also engaged in peer review as a strategy to improve reliability and validity. An unbiased peer was used to discuss results of survey and interpretation of data.

In addition to these issues being addressed, I conducted a pilot study successfully at three target schools to determine the feasibility of a more in-depth study. The pilot study consisted of surveys presented to all educational staff, kindergarten through third grade at three comparable schools. The number of respondents showed that educators were interested in expressing their experiences using the two initiatives being investigated. Therefore, I developed open ended interview questions for a more in-depth interview with selected participants.

Data Analysis Process

According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), there are three methods of coding used in qualitative research: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Data analysis in the study began with the first survey received from a participant. By beginning immediately (open coding), it allowed me to begin looking for patterns and similarities. During the second stage of data analysis, axial coding, I organized the data into categories. In the final stage of analysis, selective coding, I determined the main concept revealed by the data. I then looked at what was determined through open coding, axial coding, and analysis to determine the main concept occurring throughout the data.

Summary

Chapter 3 reviewed the research questions, discussed the design and methodology. My role in obtaining necessary permissions and disclosing information to the participants was described in detail. The qualifications to be met in order to be a participant in the study were presented and how the target schools were selected was

described. The process for developing, presenting, and securing the surveys and interviews was given. Data collection and analysis were described and along with how I took measures to insure the study was not biased was detailed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the strength and weaknesses of two initiatives being implemented in districts throughout the United States; the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS. The goal of the three tiered reading model is to identify the skill level of the struggling reader in order to provide interventions to improve the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status. DIBELS is a screening instrument often used with the three tiered reading model to screen phonemic awareness, alphabetic principals, fluency with text, vocabulary, and comprehension (Kaminski, Cummings, Powell-Smith, & Good, 2008). The three tiered reading model allows literacy instruction to be administered at the instructional reading level of the individual student. The tiers allow more time to be allotted in a small group if needed to attain the appropriate reading level per grade level.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), the qualitative methodology tradition is appropriate for the evaluation of specific programs, practices, policies, and innovations. Data may be collected through the use of interviews, surveys, observation of the phenomena being investigated, and accumulation of documents relevant to the subject matter. A qualitative research study investigates and describes, searching for commonalities in the narrative data collected. Creswell (2003) stated the phenomenological research process involves studying a small group of participants to discover patterns and relationships surrounding a phenomenon. Byrne (2001) stated that

we must set aside preconceived beliefs about the phenomena being studied disregarding of our preconceived notions. According to Creswell, purposeful sampling is useful to find participants who have experienced or have experience with the same phenomena. The phenomenological study focuses on participants' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions of the phenomena being investigated. After careful consideration, I determined qualitative phenomenological research best fit the research goals of my study because the study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of several individuals related to the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS.

The overarching qualitative research question investigated by this study is as follows:

What are teachers' and other educational personnel's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS as they relate to the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status in Kindergarten through 3rd grade? The following sub questions provided opportunities for elaborations and descriptive analysis was used to assess the data collected:

1. How effective do teachers perceive DIBELS as being in identifying skill deficits in students of low socioeconomic status?
2. How effective has DIBELS been in accurately identifying struggling readers?
3. How effective do teachers perceive the three tiered reading model as being for the child receiving intervention in Tier 2?

4. In the perception of teachers participating in the study, does receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention benefit the students of low socioeconomic status more than just Tier 1 whole group instruction?

Design

The phenomenological qualitative research method assumes there are common attributes, essential or invariant structures, among the research participants of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Leedy and Ormrod (2005), also stated that qualitative methodology is appropriate for the evaluation of specific programs, practices, policies, and innovations. According to Merriam (2002), qualitative research recognizes the world is ever changing not ideal and static thus, a need for qualitative methods. In the world of education, the needs of the population served are diverse. The phenomenological qualitative research method met needs of this study.

Data Collection Procedures

Surveys

I developed two ten question surveys to address the essential research question and the sub questions. In addition, five interview questions were developed to administer to ten teachers who indicated a willingness to be interviewed further by signing their name and providing contact information on the survey. I initially contacted personnel at the three target schools through their schools mailbox system to alert them of the purpose of the research study, the consent forms, and surveys being delivered to their mailboxes at work and to assure them of confidentiality (Appendix D). The surveys were given to

all kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers, NCLB teachers, and special education teachers at the three target schools with a return request. There was a request for identifying information only on the survey of the interviewees willing to be interviewed more in-depth (Appendix E). No identifying information was used in the conclusive research summary. The surveys were in the participants' mailboxes the first day of the work week and were picked up from the school secretary via the collection envelope on the last day of the work week. The cover letter with the surveys again gave descriptive information, instructions, and contact information for any questions. I sent a reminder at the middle of week to the target personnel reminding them to do the survey and of the pickup date.

The surveys for this research study differed from the pilot study by giving the respondent an opportunity to comment at the end of each question. The surveys gathered demographic information as to the participant's teaching position in the targeted school and their evidence of training through staff development. Both surveys questioned the level of training and support received for the two processes (Appendix F). The reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status is the focus of the study as exemplified by the selection of the target schools with a high population of students with low socioeconomic status. The surveys focused on the teachers' perceptions of DIBELS and the three tiered reading model. The participants were questioned as to whether they were seeing improvement in the reading skills of students in the classroom (Appendix G).

Knowledge acquired in the small group must generalize to the whole group setting and other settings to become intrinsic.

Interviews

After reviewing the collected surveys, I separated those with identifying information into stacks by grade level taught to determine the interviewees (Appendix H). I wanted to have as much grade level representation as possible. I selected 1 participant from kindergarten through 3rd grade for a total of 4 classroom teachers. Special education teachers from School A and School B volunteered to be interviewed but none from School C. I selected 1 from each school for a total of 2 special education teachers. NCLB teachers from all 3 target schools responded. I selected one from each school and then mixed up remaining NCLB volunteer names from all 3 schools and drew a 4th name. The result for NCLB interviewees were 2 from School A, 1 from School B, and 1 from school C. Special education teachers from School A and B volunteered but none from School C. I selected 1 volunteer from School A and 1 from School B. I contacted those indicating a willingness to be interviewed in-depth by phone to schedule interviews. If it was not possible to schedule an in person interview, a telephone interview format, or an email was used to gather information. All but 2 interviews were conducted in person; those 2 were written format.

Five predetermined questions were asked of each interviewee. I asked the question as written to each of the interviewees. I wrote their responses down on the appropriate question and read back to them what I had written. By reading the response

back to them it allowed them to clarify or expound on what was originally stated. I was able to gather more information in this manner than I would have by just tape recording their answers. The 2 interviews conducted by the interviewee writing their response via email were more limited since I was not able to observe body language and reiterate their response for clarification and more discussion.

The data collected for the purpose of this study, in survey format and the written interviews and interview notes, are stored electronically with a password required for access and in paper form in a secured location for five years.

Data Analysis

School Selection

The three schools with the highest population of low socioeconomic status students in the school district were selected for this study. Because of the high count of free or reduced lunch in these schools, they are Title 1 schools. According to the United States Department, Title 1 schools are schools whose student population is 40% or more of low socioeconomic status families. These schools operate school wide programs.

The schools will be identified as School A, School B, and School C. Fifty percent of West Virginia's students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. The target schools have a population of low socioeconomic status of 70% or more and exceed the average for free and reduced lunch as determined by their free and reduced lunch demographics. School A is comprised of students of low socioeconomic status represented by 89% free and reduced lunch enrollment; school B's population consists of 82% free and reduced

lunch enrollment; and School C's population consists of 74% free and reduced lunch enrollment.

Participants

The participants of this study were classroom teachers, NCLB teachers, and special education teachers trained in the use of DIBELS and three tiered reading model and working with students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade at the three target schools. The surveys were presented to 51 personnel at the target schools via their school mailboxes. In order to be presented with the survey, the participant had to be trained in both the use of DIBELS and the three tiered reading model by the district through staff development. Each question on the survey was accompanied by a comment section to allow the respondent to elaborate on their perceptions relating to the question if they so desired. I received a response from 38 of the 51 surveys sent out which was 75% of the possible respondents. Four classroom teachers, four NCLB teachers, and two special education teachers were selected for in-depth interviews from the teachers indicating, by giving contact information on their surveys, their willingness for further participation.

The survey questions gathered more comprehensive information relating to teachers' experience with the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS. Data analysis began with the first question answered on the first survey. Each question was followed by an area for a brief written response to allow the participant to elaborate on their answer.

Table 1 illustrates the number and percentage of respondents to the DIBELS survey.

Although 38 respondents returned their surveys, not all respondents answered all questions. The percentages were based on the returned responses.

Results

Data analysis began with determining the teaching position or grade level of each respondent. I then determined the percentage of positive response for each teaching position. The data is labeled School A, School B, and School C. The first 2 survey questions were to establish the parameters of the study by establishing the participants teaching area and the form of DIBELS administration, electronic or paper. Several respondents elaborated on their answers in the comment section of the surveys. I included the participants' survey comment responses along with the interview data. Table 1 depicts the question 1 and responses per grade level.

Table 1

DIBELS survey question #1: What is your primary teaching role?

<u>Grade Response</u>	<u>School A</u>	<u>School B</u>	<u>School C</u>	<u>Percent Responded</u>
Kindergarten	2	1	3	100%
1 st grade	1	2	2	83%
2 nd	2	2	1	83%
3 rd	1	2	2	83%
Special Education	2	2	0	67%
<u>NCLB</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>92%</u>

Note. (NCLB) No Child Left Behind

Kindergarten and NCLB teachers were the highest responders, while more than half of 1st and 2nd grade teachers presented with the survey responded. Special education teachers had the lowest response rate. One specialist stated that she worked with her reading students in the regular education classroom and made many adaptations to meet their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. Therefore, she did not feel she was a qualified responder so she was excluded from the study.

DIBELS may be administered through the use of a small hand held computer, a Palm PDA, laptop, or through paper and pencil format. Table 2 shows the method of administration each target school utilizes.

Table 2

DIBELS survey question #2: What form of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment instrument does your school use?

School	Paper and pencil	Palm PDA
School A		100%
School B		100%
School C		100%

The three target schools use the hand held Palm PDA which is provided by the district as their assessment instrument. The small hand held computer allows the data collected to be easily manipulated to generate reports on the groups or individuals demonstrating their progress.

The 3rd survey question helps answer the 1st research sub question: How effective do teachers perceive DIBELS as being in identifying skill deficits in students? Survey respondents' answers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

DIBELS survey question #3: Have you found the DIBELS assessment instrument helpful for determining skill deficits in students?

School	Very Helpful	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	73%	27%	
School B	23%	31%	46%
School C	75%	17%	8%

When questioned as to whether DIBELS proved to be helpful in identifying student skill deficits, 73% of the respondents at School A found DIBELS to be very helpful and 27% found it to be somewhat helpful. School A had no negative responses. One responder noted in the comment section that DIBELS helps target at risk students quickly allowing them to receive instruction on the appropriate skill in a small group. Twenty three percent of school B respondents found DIBELS to be very useful and 46% found DIBELS to not be useful at all. Out of the respondents at School B, 31% found the measure to be somewhat useful. Another participant states that DIBELS is a good indicator, but other assessments are still needed to meet child's needs. A kindergarten teacher respondent at School B stated DIBELS is somewhat useful, but cautions not to rely only on DIBELS results. According to one special education teacher at School B, DIBELS is weak in assessing comprehension and comprehension skills. The results of School C respondents reported 75% found DIBELS to be very helpful in determining skill deficits while 17% found it to only be somewhat helpful to assessing skill deficits.

Eight percent of the respondents found DIBELS to not be helpful at all. The more in-depth interviews will address some of these comments.

The research data collected demonstrate that 83% of both kindergarten and NCLB teachers interviewed found DIBELS very helpful in identifying skill deficits in their students. Sixty percent of 1st grade teachers and 50% of special education teachers surveyed found DIBELS very helpful. Second grade teachers had the highest percentage of teachers finding the program of no use at all in identifying skill deficits with 60% of the survey participants answering in the negative. Forty percent of 1st grade teachers found DIBELS to not be helpful at all, 40% of 3rd grade teachers also stated DIBELS was no help at all identifying deficits, and 50% of special education teachers likewise reported it to not be helpful. Special education teachers and 1st grade teachers' responses were very similar.

The 4th survey question addresses the 2nd research question: How effective has DIBELS been in accurately identifying struggling readers? Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions as to the accurate identification of struggling readers.

Table 4

DIBELS survey question #4: Have you found DIBELS accurately identifies struggling readers?

School	Very Helpful	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	55%	45%	
School B	15%	70%	15%
School C	67%	33%	

Fifty five percent of participants at school A stated that DIBELS has been very helpful and the other 45% found it to be somewhat helpful. No participants at School A responded that they had found DIBELS did not help at all. School A 1st grade participant cautions that if a good reader is a slow reader he may show up in Tier 2 or even Tier 3 although their comprehension and reading ability is good. The need for assessment other than just DIBELS was again stressed. School B participants did not have as much confidence in DIBELS accurately identifying struggling readers. Only 15% of the respondents found DIBELS to be very helpful and 70% found it to be somewhat helpful. Of the three target schools surveyed, 15% of School B respondents were the only ones who stated that DIBELS is not helpful at all. An area of further investigation could be as to why School B responded negatively. Of the twelve respondents from School C, 67% found DIBELS to be very helpful and 33% found it to be somewhat helpful.

According to the survey data, 83% of kindergarten teachers have found DIBELS identifies struggling readers and 17% report it somewhat helps to identify struggling

readers. Sixty percent of 1st grade teachers reported they had found DIBELS to be very helpful with another 40% saying they had not found it helpful at all. A future research study asking what other assessment would be useful after the DIBELS screening measure was administered. Only 4 special education teachers, 5 second grade, and 5 third grade teachers responded to this question and the respondents felt that DIBELS was somewhat useful. Since the surveys were anonymous, there was no way to ask why the respondents did not answer this question. NCLB teachers felt DIBELS was either greatly helpful, 45%, or somewhat helpful, 65%. Even though more NCLB teachers thought DIBELS was only somewhat helpful in identifying struggling readers than greatly helpful, no negative responses were given.

The 5th survey question was to establish the level of support teachers were receiving from their local and district administration. Table 5 represents respondents perception of their administrator's knowledgeable of the DIBELS process.

Table 5

DIBELS survey question #5: Have you found your administrator to be proficient in the DIBELS process?

School	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	44%	56%	
School B	50%	50%	
School C	92%	8%	

Respondents overall thought their administrators were proficient or at least somewhat proficient in the DIBELS process. Responses from School A state that 44% of respondents believe the administrator is very proficient and 56% think he is somewhat proficient. Fifty percent of School B respondents state the administrator is very proficient and 50% stated the administrator was somewhat proficient. Ninety two percent of respondents at School C felt the administrator was very proficient and another 8% responded the administrator was somewhat proficient. I followed up on this question during the in-depth interviews. I found that teachers at School A had a new principal and the principal was not yet as proficient in the use of DIBELS as the previous principal. Although all stated the principal was rectifying that by including academic coaches for the district and other Title personnel in meetings involving DIBELS results in order to further his knowledge.

Kindergarten and 3rd grade teachers both felt their administrators were proficient in the DIBELS process. Sixty percent of special education teachers believed their administrator was proficient in DIBELS procedures and 40% thought they were somewhat proficient. Second grade teachers believed only 43% of their administrators were proficient, 29% were somewhat proficient, and 28% believed they were not proficient at all. NCLB teachers also had a low belief in the administrators' proficiency with 38% feeling they were very proficient and 62% feeling they were somewhat proficient.

Survey question number 6 relates to research question 1: How effective do teachers perceive DIBELS as being in identifying skill deficits in students? As with number 3 survey question this question again questions the identification of skills the struggling reader needs. Table 6 shows how accurate the respondents have found DIBELS to be.

Table 6

DIBELS survey question #6: Have you found DIBELS accurately identifies skills needed by the students of low socioeconomic struggling readers?

School	Very Helpful	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	45%	55%	
School B	8%	69%	23%
School C	75%	25%	

School A has the highest low socioeconomic status population and has found the use of DIBELS to be helpful in identifying skills that struggling readers need to increase reading achievement. Forty five percent of School A respondents thinks DIBELS is very helpful and 55% found it to be somewhat helpful. School A had no negative responses in the comment section of the surveys. Sixty nine percent of the respondents at School B have found DIBELS to be somewhat helpful. Only 8% of respondents have found it to be very helpful and 23% have found it to not be helpful at all in identifying skills the struggling reader needs. School B respondents who felt DIBELS had not been helpful at all identifying deficit skills did not comment in the comment section of the surveys.

During the follow up interviews, I made note of what the interviewees had to say about the skills of struggling readers at the 3 target schools. The reasons given from the interviewees at School B were DIBELS did not address comprehension adequately; DIBELS must be used in conjunction with other assessment measures because it is a screening instrument; and that DIBELS did not accurately identify readers who were slow speaking. All 3 target school interviewees mentioned this aspect of DIBELS, that it was a race against the clock and those students who were slow speaking or a little slower processing were not testing well with DIBELS even though their comprehension and reading skills may be adequate for their grade level. Seventy five percent of respondents from School C stated they found DIBELS to be very helpful and 25% found it to be somewhat helpful. School C had no survey respondents who found it to not be helpful at all. Although during the follow up interviews, School C respondents did comment on the time factor making it a race against the timer and that their slower paced readers did not score well even if they were a very good reader with good comprehension.

The three target schools are low socioeconomic status schools, which is the reason for having NCLB teachers and being considered a Title 1 school, meaning the whole student population is serviced as needed. Only 29% of the NCLB teachers surveyed found DIBELS to be very helpful in identifying struggling readers and 71% found it to be somewhat helpful. Fifty percent of special education teachers found DIBELS to be very helpful and 50% found it to be somewhat helpful. Forty percent of 1st grade teachers found DIBELS very helpful, 40% found it somewhat helpful, and 20%

found it not helpful at all. One first grade teacher stated it is a baseline and you must dig deeper to identify the skills the individual needs to be a successful reader. More 2nd grade teachers found DIBELS to be not helpful at all (40%) than they did very helpful (20%). Forty percent of 2nd grade teachers found the process to be somewhat helpful.

Question 7 is to establish that the 3 target schools are implementing the three tiered reading model as dictated by the local school district. Table 7 establishes that the three target schools are implementing the three tiered reading model as dictated by their school district.

Table 7

DIBELS survey question #7: Does your school use the Three Tiered Reading model?

School	Yes	No
School A	100%	
School B	100%	
School C	100%	

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 stated the discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability was no longer the means of identifying specific learning disabled students. Specific Learning Disabilities is to be determined by using a process to determine if the child responds favorably to research based interventions. RtI is a general education initiative, a way for general educators and special educators to work together to identify and help the struggling reader. RtI uses a tiered model of intervention to meet student needs. The state of West Virginia uses the three tiered reading model to meet

these student needs. Thereby, the three targeted schools use the three tiered reading model in conjunction with DIBELS. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) joined together at the Council for Exceptional Children (2006) in order to advance the collaboration and understanding of both general education and special education in successfully implementing RtI.

Question 8 gathers information relating to both research questions 1 and 3:

1) How effective do teachers perceive DIBELS as being in identifying skill deficits in students? 2) How effective do teachers perceive the three tiered reading model as being for the child receiving intervention in Tier 2? Table 8 displays the answer as to how well DIBELS works as an assessment tool when used in conjunction with the three tiered reading model.

Table 8

DIBELS survey question #8: Do you believe DIBELS works well as an assessment tool with the three tiered reading model?

School	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	36%	64%	
School B	43%	50%	7%
School C	75%	25%	

The participants surveyed at the three target schools believed DIBELS worked well with the three tiered reading model. Thirty six percent of School A respondents,

43% of School B respondents, and 75% of School C respondents found the two initiatives to work together very well. There were no respondents at Schools A and C who felt the two initiatives did not work at all together. However, 64% of School A respondents, 50% of School B respondents, and 25% of School C respondents found the two to only somewhat work together to assess struggling readers. School B had the only negative response to this question, 7% responded DIBELS did not work well at all with the three tiered reading model. Investigating what might be more effective in use with DIBELS or what screening instrument might be more effective with the three tiered reading model may be an area for future study.

Kindergarten and NCLB teachers believed the two processes work well together; 83% of kindergarten teachers and 75% of NCLB teachers. Only 25% of first grade teachers, 20% of second grade teachers and 3rd teachers believed the two processes strongly complemented each other. Fifty percent of the special education teachers surveyed believed the two processes were very helpful and 50% of the time they were only somewhat helpful. One respondent in special education and one 1st grade respondent gave a negative response of not at all. However, there was no explanation in the comment section from either respondent for this question.

Survey question 9 asked respondents if they have found that a student's processing of the written word has a negative effect on their DIBELS assessment. Table 9 presents the response to this question.

Table 9

DIBELS survey question #9: Do you think students' individual processing pace hinders

DIBELS assessment scores?

School	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	36%	64%	
School B	46%	54%	
School C	75%	25%	

Seventy five percent of the respondents from School C found processing speed to greatly hinder assessment scores and 25% felt scores were somewhat affected. A first grade respondent at School A stated that sometimes fast readers were “word callers”. They could read the words but did not comprehend what they had read. Thirty six percent of School A respondents found that DIBELS scores were very influenced by the readers processing ability. Sixty four percent of the respondents at School A found the processing ability to be somewhat hindering to the student’s scores. Forty six percent of the respondents at School B found the students rate of processing hindered their DIBELS scores and 54% reported it somewhat affected their scores. None of the respondents at the three schools believed the student’s processing ability had no effect on the DIBELS scores.

Response to the question concerning the adequacy of staff development presented by the local school district is reported in Table 10.

Table 10

DIBELS survey question #10: Overall, do you think your district gives adequate staff development and support to teachers using the DIBELS assessment instrument?

School	Very	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	28%	36%	36%
School B	23%	46%	31%
School C	0%	92%	8%

The majority of respondents from School C, 92%, felt teachers were somewhat trained and supported in their use of the DIBELS process; eight percent did not think they received adequate training. Thirty six percent of School A respondents and 46% of School B respondents felt teachers were somewhat trained and supported. Of School A respondents, 28% felt they had been adequately trained and that they received adequate support in the use of DIBELS. Thirty six percent of respondents at School A felt they were not adequately trained. School B reported 23% of respondents felt they had been adequately trained and had received adequate support in the use of DIBELS. Thirty one percent did not think they received adequate training. It would be interesting to know which teachers went to the staff developments open to teachers at the beginning of the school year and if there was follow up training at individual schools and how many teachers may have come into the classroom after school was in session and initial

trainings were over. This could possibly be an avenue for study on the effectiveness of staff developments.

Three Tiered Reading Model Results

The second survey of the study asked teachers their perceptions' of the three tiered reading model and the level of support provided by their district. The results of their responses will be presented and discussed per school. Table 11 shows the primary teaching role of respondents at their school.

Table 11

Three tiered reading model survey question #1: What is your primary teaching role?

Grade	School A	School B	School C
Kindergarten	2	2	3
1 st	2	2	2
2 nd	2	2	1
3 rd	1	2	2
Special Education	2	2	0
NCLB	4	3	4

Note. No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The teaching position of respondents at each school is presented in order to determine a commonality among respondents and their responses.

Three Tiered Reading Model Responses

Table 12 shows the percent of respondents working at a specific Tier for each target school.

Table 12

Three tiered reading model survey question #2: When doing Tier instruction, what Tier do you primarily work with?

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
School A	50%	33%	17%
School B	62%	23%	15%
School C		100%	

Of School A's respondents, 50% work with Tier 1, 33% with Tier 2, and 17% with Tier 3. Sixty 52 percent of School B works with Tier 1, 23% with Tier 2, and 15% with Tier 3. School C was unique in its responses that all those who responded worked with Tier 2 students. I must note here that the 2 special education teachers at School C did not respond to the survey. According to other teachers interviewed, the special education teachers at their school work with Tier 3 students. However, they had to be excluded since they did not voluntarily respond to the survey.

Survey question 3 gathers information relevant to research question 3: How effective do teachers perceive the three tiered reading model as being for the child receiving intervention in Tier 2? Table 13 reports the responses to question 3 asking respondents the benefit of the three tiered reading model to their students.

Table 13

Three tiered reading model survey question #3: Have you found the three tiered reading model to be beneficial to your students?

School	Very Helpful	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	50%	42%	8%
School B	30%	60%	10%
School C	67%	33%	

Only 8% percent of School A's staff found the three tiered reading model not to be at all helpful to their students. The surveys were anonymous and the person from School A that responded negatively to this question made no comments in the comment section to explain the answer given. The majority of School A found the three tiered reading model to be either very helpful or somewhat helpful: 50% very helpful and 42% somewhat helpful. The respondents of school B reported finding the model very helpful 30% of the time, 60% somewhat helpful, and 10% found it not helpful at all. School C respondents were the most positive about the three tiered reading model with 67% finding it very helpful and 33% finding it somewhat helpful. Of the 34 respondents who answered this question, only 2 felt the three tiered reading model was not helpful at all to their students; 94% found the three tier reading model to be either very or somewhat helpful and 6% found it not to be helpful at all.

All kindergarten respondents have found the model to be very helpful. Seventy three percent of NCLB respondents found the tier model to be very helpful to their

struggling readers; 27% found it to be somewhat helpful. There were no negative responses from NCLB or first grade. Thirty three percent of first grade teachers found the Tier model to be very helpful and 67% found it to be somewhat helpful. Second grade surveys revealed 50 % of the teachers felt the three tiered reading model had not benefited their students at all. Another 25% have found it to be very helpful and 25% found it to be somewhat helpful. Third grade teachers had no strong response to the question as to being very helpful or not at all; they all responded it was somewhat helpful. Special education teachers were equal in their responses, 50% thought the three tiered reading model was very helpful and 50% found it to be somewhat helpful.

Tier 2 interventions meet the needs of students lacking specific reading skills necessary to be successful readers. Table 14 reports the respondents' perceptions of the three tiered reading model being very helpful, somewhat helpful or not helpful at all to their Tier 2 students.

Table 14

Three tiered reading model survey question #4: Have you observed improvement in the reading skills of students receiving Tier 2 intervention?

School	Very Helpful	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	38%	62%	
School B	40%	60%	
School C	67%	33%	

The three target schools reported having seen improvement in the reading skills of all students using Tier 2 interventions. Sixty seven percent of School C respondents have observed improvement in the students' reading skills and 33% of respondents have found Tier 2 to be somewhat helpful. Forty percent of School B respondents found Tier 2 of the three tiered reading model to be very helpful while 60% found it to be somewhat helpful. Thirty eight percent of School A respondents found Tier 2 interventions to be very helpful to their struggling readers and 62% found Tier 2 to be somewhat helpful. Again, all respondents observed some level of improvement in students receiving Tier 2 interventions.

All of the groups surveyed saw reading improvement in their students receiving Tier 2 interventions reading skills. Teachers reporting the three tiered reading model as being very helpful are: kindergarten, 80%; first grade, 33%; third grade 33%; and NCLB, 77%. Second grade respondents all found their students to benefit somewhat from the Tier intervention. Seventy five percent of special education respondents found the three tiered reading model to be somewhat beneficial to their students and 25% found it very helpful. No group responded that they did not see any progress, all saw some progress.

Respondents were asked if students receiving the most intensive intervention during Tier 3 were demonstrating improvement in reading skills. Table 15 reports their responses.

Table 15

Three tiered reading model survey question #5: Do you see improvement in the reading skills of students receiving Tier 3 intervention?

School	Very Helpful	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	30%	70%	
School B	20%	80%	
School C	50%	25%	25%

Thirty percent of School A respondents found Tier 3 to be very helpful while 60% of respondents found Tier 3 to be somewhat helpful. Two respondents from School A chose not to answer this question. School A respondents did not find there were any students who did not benefit from Tier 3. Twenty percent of School B respondents found that the three tiered reading model was very helpful with their students and 80% found it to be somewhat helpful. Twenty five percent of School C reported Tier 3 interventions had not helped to their students at all. However, 50% stated Tier 3 had been very helpful and 25% felt students were somewhat helped by Tier 3. The 25% with a negative response did not make any comments to explain why they gave a negative response.

Three tiered reading model survey question six also gives data to answer research question 4: Does receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention benefit the students of low socioeconomic status more than just Tier1 whole group instruction?

This study was investigating the reading achievement of low socioeconomic students. Question 6 asked if respondents if their low socioeconomic students were benefiting from Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Table 16 portrays their responses.

Table 16

Three tiered reading model survey question #6: Have you found the low socioeconomic student benefits from Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions?

School	Very Helpful	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	69%	31%	
School B	70%	30%	
School C	75%	25%	

The targeted schools' respondents have seen their students benefit from Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Sixty nine percent of School A respondents reported Tier 2 and 3 interventions benefiting students of low socioeconomic status; 31% found it being somewhat beneficial; and there were no negative responses. Seventy percent of School B respondents found tier interventions to be very helpful and 30% of respondents reported it being somewhat helpful. Seventy five percent of School C has found Tier 2 and Tier 3 very helpful to their students and 25% of respondents found it to be somewhat helpful to struggling readers. All respondents found Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions to be beneficial to some degree.

Eighty three percent of kindergarten and 1st grade respondents found the Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions very helpful to their students and 17% felt it was somewhat helpful. Seventy three percent of NCLB teachers surveyed found Tier interventions very helpful and 27% somewhat helpful. Twenty five percent of second grade teachers found Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction to be very helpful and 75% found it to be somewhat helpful. Sixty percent of 3rd grade teachers found the three tiered model to be very beneficial and 40% found it to be somewhat helpful. Twenty five percent of special education respondents found the three tiered reading program to be very helpful and seventy five percent of respondents found it to be somewhat helpful. There were no negative responses to this question.

Respondents were questioned as to the efficiency of support offered to teachers by the local school district. Their responses are presented in Table 17.

Table 17

Three tiered reading model survey question #7: Do you think the district offers efficient staff development and support to teachers implementing the three tiered reading model?

School	Very Helpful	Somewhat	Not at all
School A	42%	42%	16%
School B	30%	30%	40%
School C	8%	84%	8%

In the comment section, a respondent from School A and 2 respondents from School B remarked that when the three tiered reading model was first introduced the

county scheduled several staff development opportunities for teachers.

However, now a few years later, there is little training and new teachers or substitute teachers may have no training. Even substitute teachers who may work an entire school year at one school are not trained from a district level. Only 8% of School C participants felt the district offered sufficient staff development and support. Eighty four percent of School C found the training and support somewhat useful and 8% did not find useful training at all from the district. Of School A participants, 42%, found the staff development and support to be somewhat useful and 42% found it to be very helpful. Sixteen percent of School A participants found the training to not be helpful at all. School B reported the lowest level of support from the district office with 40% of respondents stating there was no support at all, 30% found district to be somewhat supportive, and 30% found the district to be very supportive.

Forty percent of teachers in kindergarten thought staff development for using the three tiered reading model was very helpful. Sixty percent of kindergarten respondents found the staff development somewhat useful. Fifty percent of 1st grade respondents did not think the district offered efficient staff development for the three tiered reading model. Although, 17% found the staff development very helpful and 33% found it somewhat useful. Sixty six percent of 2nd grade respondents found the Tiermodel to be somewhat helpful and 34% of respondents found it to not be beneficial at all. Third grade responses were the most negative with only 40% of staff development being somewhat useful and 60% not being useful at all. Fifty percent of special education respondents felt

the district offered efficient staff development while the other 50% felt it was somewhat beneficial. Sixty four percent of NCLB respondents felt the staff development was somewhat helpful and 36% found it very helpful.

Table 18 reports the number of students respondents at the target schools found to show reading improvement last year requiring movement from Tier 2 or 3 to Tier 1. Tier 1 is the core reading program where all students receive instruction. The goal for Tier 2 and 3 students is to be successful in Tier 1.

Table 18

Three tiered reading model survey question #8: Approximately how many students did you have show reading improvement by moving up from one Tier to another Tier last year?

School	0-3	4-6	More than 6
School A	50%	50%	
School B	64%	27%	9%
School C	50%	17%	33%

Eighty five percent of respondents reported having students move in the groups. Two respondents at School A chose not to answer this question. Fifty percent of the respondents at School A had four to six students moving tiers. School B reported 64% of participants had up to three students receiving Tier interventions moved up a Tier during the year, 27% of respondents reported having four to six students moving tiers, and 9% of respondents reported more than six students moved up tiers during the school year. Fifty

percent of School C respondents reported having up to three of their Tier groups move from one Tier to another, 17% had up to six students move tiers, and 33% had more than six to move up tiers to show improvement.

As would be expected, NCLB teachers had the most movement in their groups. However, all grades had movement with kindergarten, first and second grades having more than three students move from one Tier to another.

Respondents' response to the proficiency of their school level administrator is presented in Table 19.

Table 19

Three tiered reading model survey question #9: Is your administrator proficient in the implementation of the three tiered reading model?

School	Yes	No
School A	11	2
School B	13	
School C	12	

Fifteen percent of School A answered no when asked about administration's familiarity with the Three Tiered Reading model the other 85% believed the administrator had received adequate training and was proficient in the use of the three tiered reading model. No comments were made by those with negative responses as to why they believed the administrator was not proficient. During the course of the in-depth interviews, I addressed this question when it came up and found the common comment to

be the principal was new and never had the district training given on the three tiered reading model. Schools B and C felt their administrator was proficient in use of the three tiered reading model.

All of the surveyed teachers at the three target schools found that student processing pace hinder DIBELS to some extent. Seventy five percent of NCLB teachers felt processing pace hinders the student. I found NCLB and special education teachers answers of particular interest to all the survey questions since just by their job descriptions they work with the struggling readers the most. A 1st grade teacher and a NCLB teacher commented that a slow processing speed could result in a good reader with good comprehension not doing as well as a fast reader. A fast reader may be skimming through and reading words he knows without thought or self monitoring as to what is being read. He may not realize what he is reading does not make sense. Sixty percent of first and 2nd grade teachers agreed that processing speed was very hindering to students and 40% found processing to be somewhat hindering. Fifty percent of third grade respondents felt processing speed was very hindering and 50% found it was somewhat hindering. Seventy five percent of special education teachers found DIBELS to be somewhat helpful to struggling readers and only 25% found it to be very helpful. None of the participants surveyed believed pace to not being a hindrance to the student.

Table 20 presents the response from each target school to question 10 as to whether the struggling reader benefits more from Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction than just receiving Tier 1 whole group reading instruction.

Table 20

Three tiered reading model survey question #10: Do you find the student benefits more from Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction than what they would from whole group instruction?

School	Yes	No
School A	13	
School B	13	
School C	12	

Participants at the three target schools all agreed the students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 benefit more than they would from just whole group instruction. One first grade teacher stated the smaller group allowed for more focused instruction. Another comment was the student was less distracted in a small group than in the large group and the teacher could respond more individually to the student's needs. A first grade teacher commented that the skills in Tier 1 are above their level and they tend to not pay attention. Another gave an example of working on decoding for diagraphs when the student is still sounding and trying to blend consonant, vowel, and consonant words being a common occurrence in the whole group instruction classroom. She stated she has seen improvement in reading and decoding skills since the small group tiers have been implemented. There were no respondents who felt the students would benefit more from being in the whole group instruction without being given tier instruction. Comments made in the comment section of this survey question were that struggling readers benefited more from the more individual intervention they received in the small group and if they were taken to a room

away from the whole group they were more focused than when in the classroom where distraction was high.

Using the survey results

The surveys were used to identify participants willing to take part in the in-depth interviews. Before interviewee selection could begin I separated those who volunteered to be interviewed from those not interested. I analyzed the survey data in more than one manner to gain as much information relating to the research questions as possible and to determine the best possible participants to interview. First, I determined what positions the respondents held in the educational setting. I received responses from kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd grade teachers, NCLB teachers, and special education teachers trained and working with students using DIBELS and the three tiered reading model from the three target schools. I then developed a chart as shown in Appendix I and tallied the answers on the chart first by teaching position and question number. After getting a frequency count, I established the percentage of respondents at each grade level who answered very helpful, somewhat helpful, or not helpful at all. A separate chart was used for DIBELS and one for the three tiered reading model. I followed this process for each target school: School A, School B, and School C. Rather than using software for this cumbersome process, I chose to manipulate the data manually in order to be more personally aware of the answers and where they led. I included the percentage tables and a brief discussion in the data analysis section of my paper to give a clearer depiction of the participants' responses and some comments they may have made.

Each survey question ended with a comment section allowing the participant to expound on their answer. I developed a chart to document possible interviewees (Appendix H). On the chart, I noted the comments for each question on both surveys, the name of those who agreed to do a more in-depth interview, and their school of employment.

Interview Participant Selection

The possible interview respondents were separated into School A, School B, and School C stacks and further separated into a DIBELS stack and a three tiered reading model stack. I separated them in this way because an applicant may have been willing to be interviewed about one initiative and not the other. After reviewing all the surveys relating to both DIBELS and the three tiered reading model and separating them as described, I then determined what the primary teaching position was for each respondent in each target school. My goal was to have at least one respondent in kindergarten, first, second, third, special education, and NCLB at each target school. If there was more than one respondent in each category, I put the names in the proverbial hat and selected one to represent that category at that school. Utilizing the process as described, I selected four classroom teachers, four NCLB teachers, and two special education teachers for the in-depth interviews. I decided on this particular representation of the categories because I wanted classroom teachers' input along with NCLB teachers who normally have more training and more hands on experience with the two processes. Special education teachers

have a different experience with DIBELS and the three tiered reading model than the classroom teacher and the NCLB teacher. Therefore, I wanted their perceptions of the two initiatives being used with their students.

Interview Data Collection

Of the ten interviews conducted, two were by written response and eight were conducted face to face. They were all conducted during the work day at a time selected by the interviewee. I went to the place of the interviewee's employment to conduct the interviews that were in person. The interview was in the interviewee's classroom at a time the students were not present. A time constraint of up to 40 minutes was set for each meeting. If more time had been needed, I would have scheduled a similar time to follow through. However, the allotted time was sufficient.

Interviewing is often used as a qualitative research method to amass detailed information from participants. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), interviews allow respondents to express their perceptions of phenomena from their own experiences. At the same time the interviewer is able to observe the respondent's behavior, intonations, and body language while conducting the interview enabling the pursuit of more in-depth answers to fully explore the data. I used open ended questions to encourage responses that might lead to more a comprehensive study of teacher perceptions.

Each participant was asked the same five interview questions and given as much time to answer as necessary (Appendix K). I did not at any time give my personal opinions relating to each question and refrained from making comments that would

reveal personal biases. I made notes and reiterated answers back to the individual in a paraphrase manner to insure I was recording their answers accurately. If comments were added after I paraphrased their responses back to them, I made note of new comments and repeated the process. I recorded the responses to each question on an interview form for each respondent. As I reviewed my notes with the respondent I made any additions on the form at the appropriate question. I have the data from the ten interviews in written format stored in my home office in a secured file cabinet used only for the study documents.

The surveys served a twofold purpose. They identified respondents willing to be interviewed and gave an initial indication of respondents' opinion of the two initiatives. Open coding was utilized when looking at the data generated through the interviews. According to Creswell (2006), the researcher gathers information about the phenomenon being studied in this case teacher perceptions of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS. Open coding allows the researcher to segment information into categories. I began segmenting and categorizing with the first interview conducted.

Since I had hand written the interviewee's responses to each interview question and read the response back to them allowing them to clarify or expound on their answer, I highlighted key terms in the answer to each question. See Appendix L for the format of the chart I used to record responses after highlighting the key words in the responses. I decided to categorize by positive comments, negative comments, and by positive comments with a qualifier; in other words positive with a "but" attached to it. After open

coding was complete, I then used axial coding to determine the commonality of the responses of the three target schools for each question. Johnson and Christensen (2004) described axial coding as organizing concepts into categories that are mentioned many times, in my study the data is gathered from the interviews conducted with the volunteer respondents.

The next stage of analyzing the interview data was analyzed by selective coding. According to Johnson and Christensen, this depicts the common core of the respondents' experiences by reflecting on the results produced by open coding and axial coding. Statements or phrases made by the interviewee were evaluated for relevance to the interviewee's experience with DIBELS and the three tiered reading model and as to whether the specific question asked was answered. I looked at each participant's response to the question and noted the key words of their answers, commonalities in their responses, and strong statements; both alike and different. I used color coding to determine the common themes of responses. Since the interview responses were to be anonymous when presented in the study, I only identify the responses by grade level.

Interview Results

The interview questions were asked relative to the low socioeconomic student due to the nature and purpose of the study. Interview question 1 asked the respondent to describe their experience using the three tiered reading model and DIBELS with their low socioeconomic students. Key phrases from their replies are presented in Figure 1.

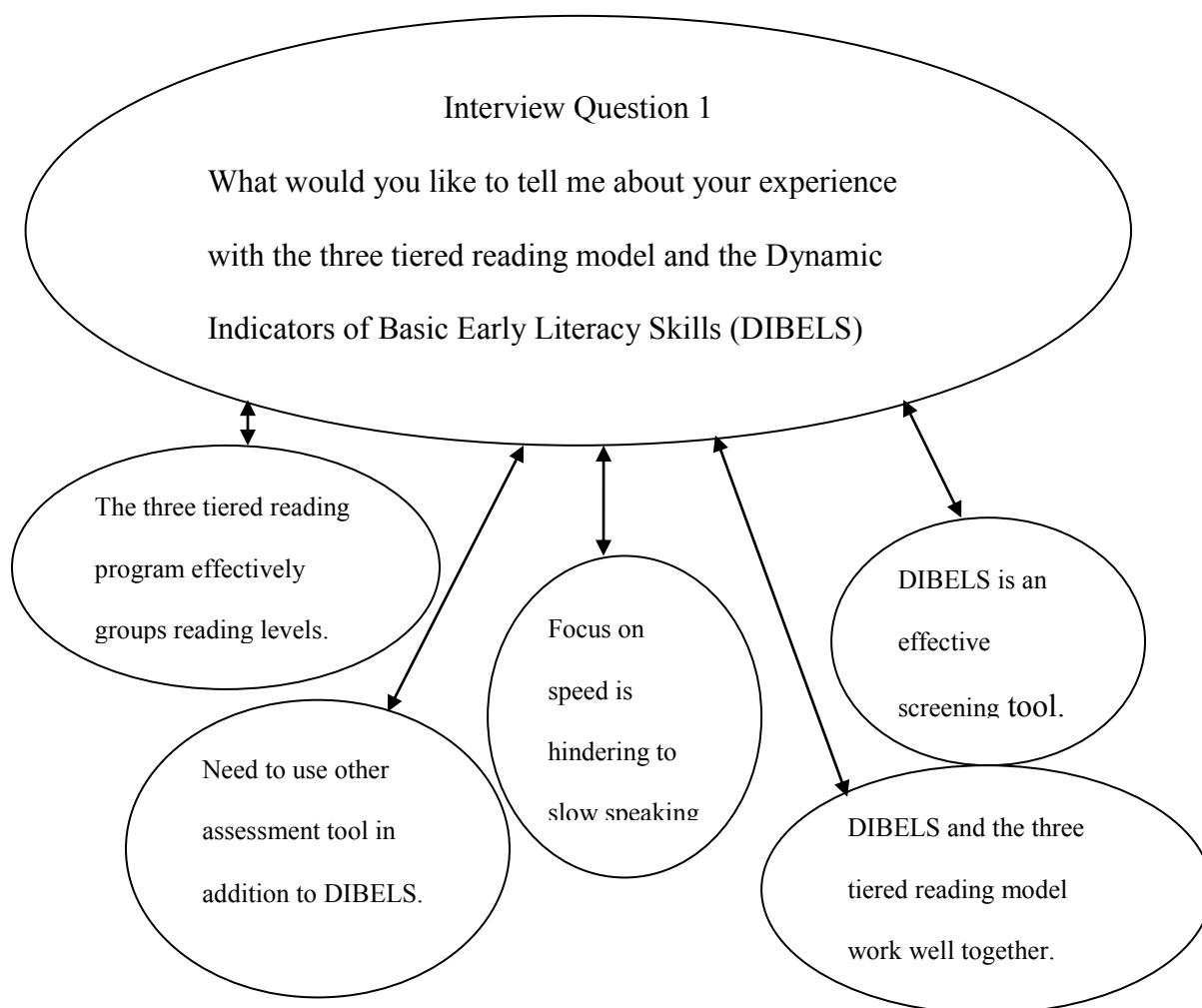


Figure 1. Teacher experiences with DIBELS and three tiered reading model.

More than one respondent noted that the students of low socioeconomic status may not be receiving help at home due to a variety of reasons including parents more concerned with basic survival needs such as food and shelter. As a result, more intense measures are needed at school to close the reading achievement gap. A common response among participants was that the DIBELS screening measure was an effective tool to obtain a baseline and eliminated guessing what skills the student lacked. However, interviewees cautioned other means of assessment, including teacher observation, should be used in conjunction with DIBELS. Participants stated comprehension screening was a very weak area of the DIBELS measure. Overall respondents believed the core reading program was a much stronger and relevant method of assessing comprehension. Interviewees also deemed the three tiered reading model as beneficial and effective for struggling students from a low socioeconomic status home in the effort to close the reading achievement gap. The tiered model is conducive to introducing background information that may be lacking. The three tiered reading model was stated to be a helpful organized framework in identifying and intervening with struggling readers. The books in the three tiered reading model are scaffold to progress in difficulty as the student's skills progress. The intensive intervention tier gives the student the most support and time from a reading specialist. The third tier is not special education, but it does help identify students who may need more formal testing in the special education arena. The reauthorization of Individualized Disability Education Improvement Act was acknowledged as changing the method of identifying students for

special education and how it is related to the three tiered reading model and the number of sessions needed in Tier 2 and Tier 3 before consideration for special education assessments. However, while respondents saw the benefits of the three tiered reading model, they also saw the negatives (Appendix L). The model was seen as a hindrance to the placement of some students into special education with spending time in a setting where the child was not able to function while being presented with the requisite number of lessons in Tier 2 and Tier 3. The mutual belief was that education would be more useful to the student in an appropriate placement instead of spending time in a classroom where they were frustrated and discouraged waiting until the required number of sessions was presented. They felt it would be more productive and beneficial to the student to shorten the number of sessions in Tier 2 or to use teacher recommendations as the professional they are trained to be to decide when Tier 2 is not benefiting the student and when it is time to move to Tier 3. Tier 3 of the three tiered reading model addresses the struggling reader at the appropriate instructional level which is a lower skill level than Tier 2. The student may only be in Tier 3 a short time until the skill needed is mastered and they are able to transition to Tier 2 or into the core curriculum of Tier 1. However, it may be discovered at Tier 3 that the student is still struggling and further testing is warranted by special education specialists.

Respondents overall have found the three tiered reading model to be very effective in scaffolding reading instruction and meeting the needs of struggling readers in small intervention groups and larger groups with literacy lessons at the instructional

reading level of students. Although it was believed there is a need for assessment other than just the DIBELS process and that there are some inherent flaws in the DIBELS comprehension component, DIBELS was seen as an effective screener to attain a baseline to identify what areas needed further assessment.

Interview question number 2 asked the interviewee to describe the academic day of the low socioeconomic student receiving Tier 2 intervention. The responses are presented in Figure 2.

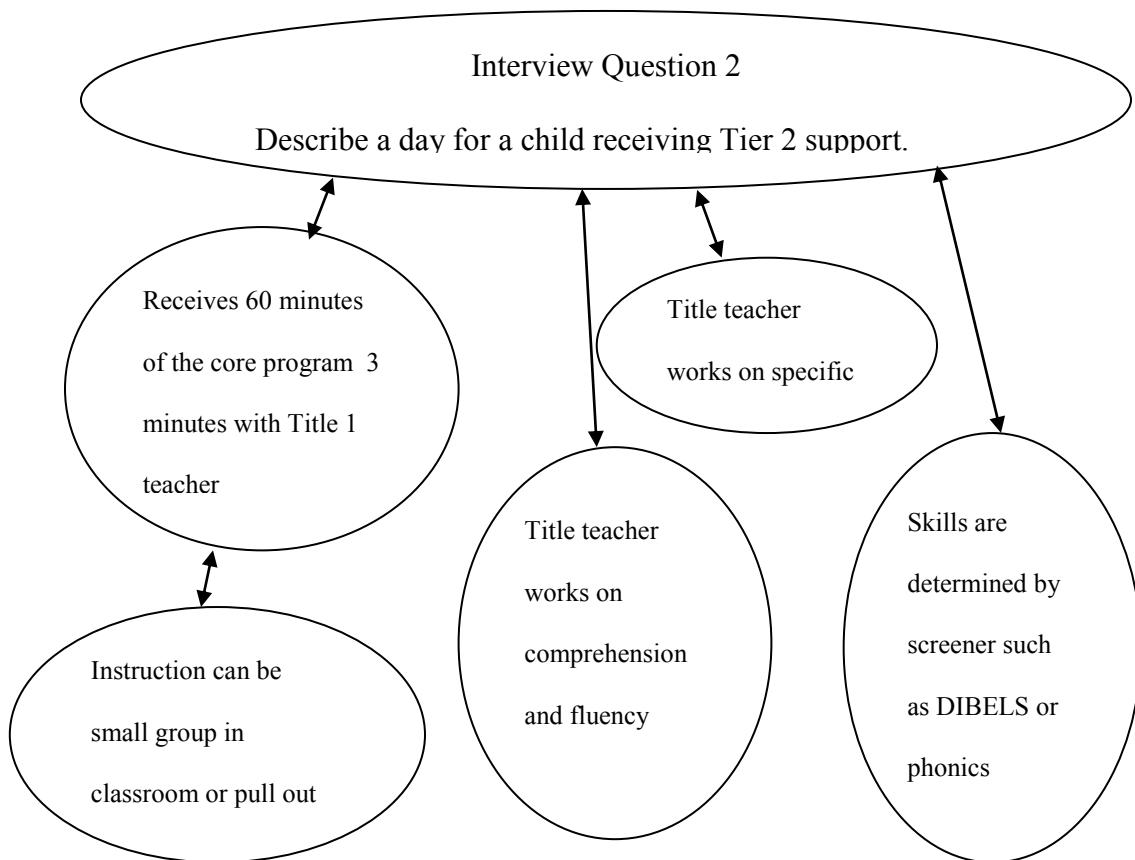


Figure 2. Student's day in Tier 2

A common thread among the interviewees who answered this question was the benefit of small groups. Small groups allow the students to be grouped homogenously, working on the same skills at the same pace. The small groups are fluid in that the students can move in and out of the groups as their need for specific skills change the groups change. While students are receiving instruction in the Tier 2 and 3 groups, the teacher monitors an independent group and works with a small group of independent students from the core Tier1 group. A concern as to whether the movement in and out of Tier 2 could cause regression if moved to soon was a frequent statement when discussing the fluidity of the groups. Specifically it was proposed that the student could possibly be removed from Tier 2 into the core group, Tier1, too soon after showing progress and regression would result in the child being placed back in Tier 2. There was discussion as to whether this moving back and forth would have a lasting negative effect on the struggling reader hindering his progress. Further study in this area is warranted.

Interview question 3 asked the interviewee to compare the assessment of the core reading program adopted for use by the local school district to DIBELS assessment. The results of the comments given are presented in Figure 3.

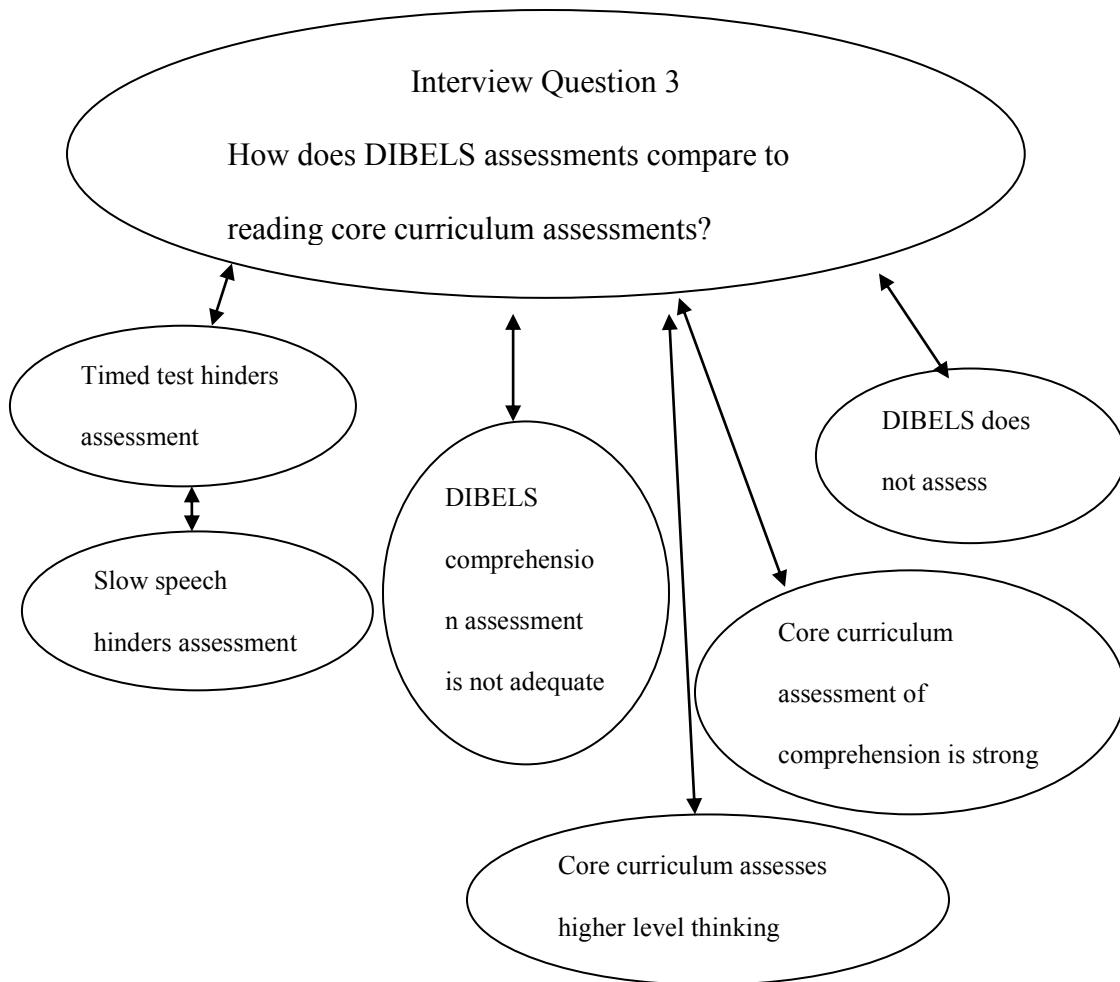


Figure 3. DIBELS compared to the core curriculum assessment

While respondents believed DIBELS was an effective screening tool to identify problem phonics skills, they were quick to point out the areas that were weak. The dominate statement concerning DIBELS among the respondents was that it does not adequately assess comprehension. The core program supports comprehension and does not penalize slow speaking readers by pitting them against a stop watch with one minute readings. Another concern of interviewees was the lack of critical thinking skills involved

in the assessment. DIBELS does not promote critical thinking and critical thinking skills; whereas the core program encourages critical thinking and higher level thinking skills. Another consideration pointed out by respondents was that DIBELS also does not consider writing skills and writing is not assessed in any manner. In addition to the other areas where the core reading program performs well, the core curriculum instructs and supports the writing process and good writing skills. However, respondents also pointed out that the core program addresses these areas over a week's work, week after week. DIBELS is a quick screener and is not intended to instruct students. It is intended to identify areas where the student needs additional instruction to be successful in the core program. The core program also has a component for differential instruction of those readers who just are not making progress with the core program as presented to the whole group. Respondents reported using the differentiated instruction component of the core program as intervention for students after DIBELS had been administered to screen deficit skill areas.

The respondents found DIBELS to be an effective screening tool, but pointed out the core program was a comprehensive instructional program and the core assessments assessed what was being taught. They recommended using the DIBELS results in conjunction with the differentiated instruction component of the core program to meet the instructional needs of the student.

Interviewees were asked to discuss the support they received from the district and the building administrator for using the three tier reading model and DIBELS with their low socioeconomic students. Figure 4 presents the results of the respondents' answers.

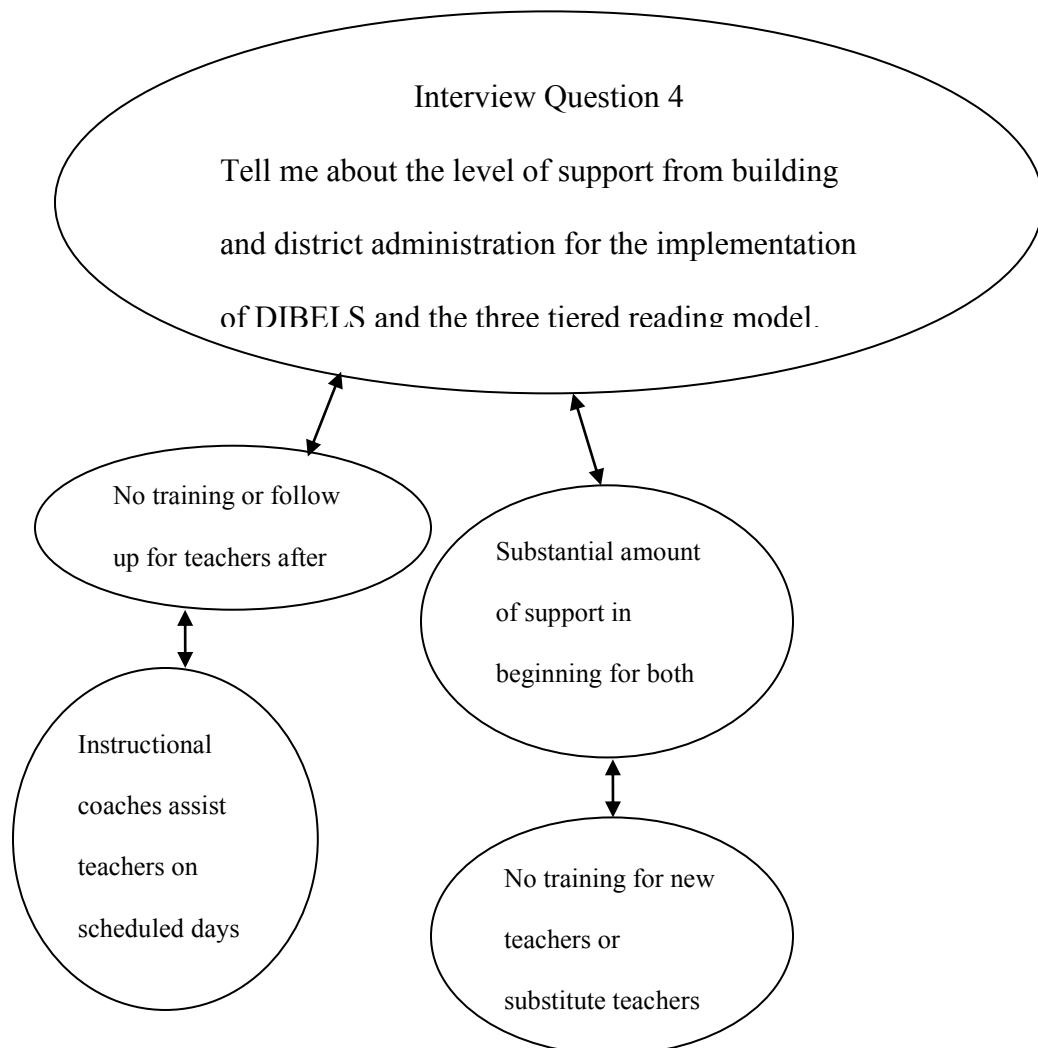


Figure 4. Administrative support.

The district began using DIBELS and the three tiered reading model six years ago. School A was a pilot school for both and therefore, received the most training of the three target schools and had a follow up training the next year. Schools B and C received DIBELS and RtI training with the other schools when the district began using the two programs district wide. Staff at all three schools stated there has been little to no training since the initial workshops. Substitute teachers and new teachers in the county have been trained by their coworkers or the county reading coaches. Their training has usually been a quick session just involving the very basics of do this, this, and this; not the in-depth training teachers received six years ago. Comments about the lack of follow up training were made by more than one participant at all grade levels. Overall, the primary staff interviewed at the three target schools felt they were well trained and due to the length of time the district has been using DIBELS and the three tiered reading program, felt they are very experienced. Primary teachers are confident in their ability to train new coworkers, but having the time to do more than a quick training is not available. I did not interview any of the long term substitute teachers who had not been trained by teachers. The answer to this question may have been different if I had, but as stated at the beginning of the study the participants were trained by the county in the two processes. A second grade teacher at School A stated that she felt her school was fortunate in that there were NCLB teachers available to work with the small groups and to do the assessing of students with both DIBELS and the three tiered reading program. She said she knew several teachers at schools with no NCLB teachers and the teachers

were trying to arrange their schedules and centers to work with the students on their own. The teachers at the non title schools had only a minimum of training. She pointed out though that the reason her school had NCLB teachers was because it was a school of low socioeconomic status with the free and reduced lunch count to warrant having the NCLB teachers thereby, having the majority of students requiring assistance.

As I interviewed each participant and after I heard their response, I told them the percentages of respondents at their school who answered this question with Very, Somewhat, or Not at All. Most interviewees had been positive about their administrators support and were surprised at the negative responses. All three target schools have fairly new administrators and respondents felt that may account for the percentage of staff stating the administrators' level of support was not very high. School C's administrator was a former Title 1 teacher and not surprisingly was the most informed and supportive.

Question 5 asked the interviewee what would make using the three tiered reading model and DIBELS more productive. The answers are presented in Figure 5.

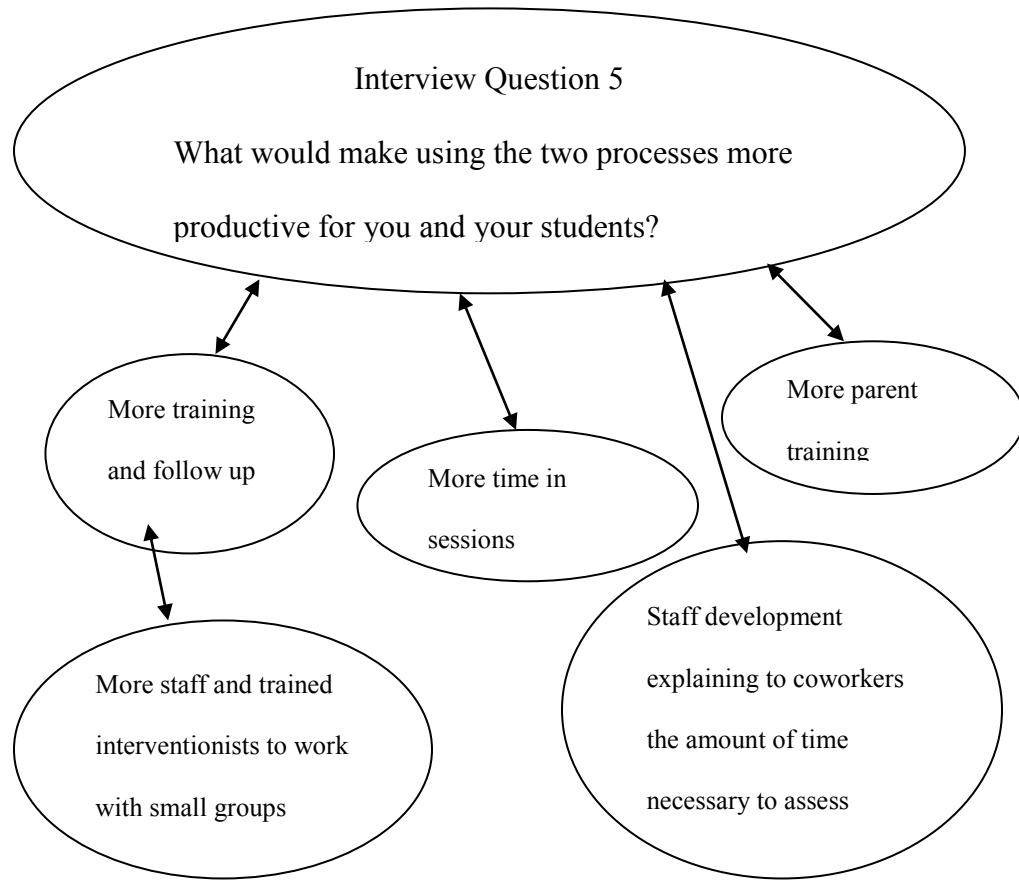


Figure 5. Improvements

This question elicited a lot of discussion from the respondents. Time was a common factor: time for teachers to collaborate with the NCLB teachers and interventionists; more time in sessions than 30 minutes; beginning Tier 3 sooner to have more time with Tier 3 students. School A had been meeting the collaboration need for more time between teachers and interventionists by having common planning for the entire six years involved in DIBELS and RtI. Schools B and C began having common planning approximately three years ago to meet the need for collaboration. The need for

more time with students during each session was paramount in the discussion.

When brainstorming how this could happen, more staff was seen as the way to accomplish this goal. Since hiring personnel was a district issue, it was suggested volunteers could be trained to conduct literacy lessons and interventions with students. The volunteers could be parents or caregivers making the need for parent training another area common to the schools. Teachers from all three schools stated a need for NCLB teachers to use assessments other than just DIBELS when benchmarking students. School A's NCLB teachers wished for a better location with less distractions for working with students. Teachers felt attendance and tardiness affected the students of low socioeconomic status success with the programs and would like the district to take a stronger stand on the issue.

The majority of the responses concerning DIBELS were positive. Some of the positive responses were:

- Effective screener
- Quick screener
- Helps determine baseline phonics skills
- Screens skills normed to where they should be for their grade level

Although the responses to DIBELS were mostly positive the comprehension component was seen as flawed and ineffective. Some of the negative responses were:

- Further assessment is needed
- Too speed focused, teaches students to beat the clock

- Comprehension component ineffective, in part due to the focus on speed
- Does not help group the students for literacy groups

Respondents also stressed the need for further assessment, because DIBELS is a quick screening tool more in-depth assessment is needed to attain specific skills the student needs. The lack of comprehension assessment was mentioned by all respondents.

Respondents also stated the oral reading fluency component only taught the students to race the clock. The comprehension assessment did not teach them to use decoding skills in order to read the word, it taught them to skip that word and go to the next one they might know. Of course skipping words when reading does not give the reader a clear understanding of the text they only call out the words, hence, the lack of comprehension.

Teacher perceptions of the three tiered reading model were very positive. Many positive comments were made by interviewees during interview. Some examples of the positive comments were as follows:

- Great way to service the students at their instructional level
- Scaffolds instruction to meet student needs
- After instructional reading levels are established and a screener,
- DIBELS, is used to determine skill deficits, the three tiered reading model in conjunction with DIBELS indicates the amount of additional time a struggling readers require to be successful reader.

- The three tiered reading model presents an intense intervention method of instruction to struggling readers.
- Teachers have found grouping students homogenously in the tiers is an effective means of instruction.
- Effective in identifying learning disabled readers.
Small groups with title teachers a very effective intervention.
- Allows teachers to work with small groups on comprehension and literacy skills.

The focus of this study was to answer the overall research question: What are teachers' and other educational personnel's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the Three tiered reading model and the DIBELS as they relate to the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status in Kindergarten through 3rd grade?

Overall, teachers found that the policies of NCLB merging the core reading program, special education, and the districts use of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS to be effective methods of identifying struggling readers among their students of low socioeconomic status. The three target schools are of low socioeconomic status schools with school wide Title programs due to their free and reduced lunch count. The focus of the study, all questions asked in the surveys and the interviews were specifically relative to the three target schools of low socioeconomic status, School A, School B, and School C. Respondents added comments to their answers regarding the effectiveness of

DIBELS that it was a beneficial screener but more assessment was needed to gather specific information about skill levels.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview

The purpose of this research study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) measure and the three tiered reading model. Teachers were questioned as to whether they were seeing improvement in their students of low socioeconomic status reading achievement in the classrooms where the two initiatives are being implemented. DIBELS and the three tiered reading process were described in detail for the reader to ensure understanding of the systems. The phenomenological qualitative research method was explained and how it was appropriate for this study was addressed. The primary research question investigated by this study was: What are teachers' and other educational personnel's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS as they relate to the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status in Kindergarten through 3rd grade? The following sub questions provided opportunities for gathering data relating specifically to how educators using the two initiatives have found them to work in their classrooms.

1. How effective do teachers perceive DIBELS as being in identifying skill deficits in students?
2. How effective has DIBELS been in accurately identifying struggling readers?
3. How effective do teachers perceive the three tiered reading model as being for the child receiving intervention in Tier 2?

4. In the perception of teachers in this study, does receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention benefit the students of low socioeconomic status more than just Tier 1 whole group instruction?

Overall, respondents to the study have found DIBELS and the three tiered reading model to be beneficial to reading achievement of their students of low socioeconomic status. A common comment in all three response categories, very helpful, somewhat helpful, and not at all, was that a more in-depth measure needed to be administered after the initial screening with DIBELS. DIBELS may show a weakness in an area such as phonemic awareness normed with other age appropriate students but not show exactly what the lacking knowledge may be. Another commonality among respondents was the opinion DIBELS taught the students to race the clock. For example, respondents found some students when being assessed with DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency measure they could skip any words they did not know and quickly read the words they did with automaticity and attain a higher score than if they slowed down and attempted to read all the words. Of course, there was very little comprehension. Comments from the respondents and those interviewed lead to the question as to whether there is a measure that would be more beneficial than DIBELS. This could possibly be a further research study.

Interpretation of Findings

Survey results were analyzed to determine the commonality of respondent answers and results were reported in Chapter 4. The survey data was viewed in several

ways to gain information as to the respondents' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS. The ten interviewees' responses were used in addition to the surveys to attain more in-depth answers to the research sub questions.

Research Question 1

How effective do teachers perceive DIBELS as being in identifying skill deficits in students of low socioeconomic status?

According to the data collected from the three target schools, 54% of the respondents found DIBELS to be very helpful, 27% found it to be somewhat helpful, and 19% found DIBELS to not be helpful at all. The respondents who believed DIBELS to be somewhat helpful felt other measures should be administered in addition to the DIBELS measure. I found it interesting that School B had the most negative response to this question. A high percentage of the respondents at School B, 75%, felt that DIBELS was not helpful at all in determining skill deficits in their struggling readers; unlike the 90% of interviewees at School A that perceived DIBELS as being somewhat or very helpful in identifying student skill deficits. During interviews I listened and observed closely while asking questions of School B to try to determine why the respondents were so negative in their responses concerning DIBELS. School B has a new principal who was a classroom teacher. Although classroom teachers had some initial training on the DIBELS screener, there was little follow up. Also, at School B, like the other target schools, NCLB staff administered DIBELS and the three tiered reading program interventions. How or if these

factors influenced the responses of the staff was unclear. The overall climate of School B was not as positive as that of School A and School C. Perhaps this underlying negativity influenced opinions of DIBELS. Seventy five percent of School C respondents found DIBELS very helpful and 17% found it somewhat helpful. None of the negative respondents elaborated on their response in the comment section.

During interview discussions, interviewees stated concerns about comprehension and critical thinking. Several commented that DIBELS does not adequately assess comprehension or promote critical thinking. Discussion also revealed concerns about what DIBELS was teaching, that it was teaching the students to race the clock with little emphasis on what was being read. These respondents felt the process was more of word calling activity than gaining meaning from what was being read. Teachers overall were also concerned about slow readers and slow speaking individuals who may score low on DIBELS monitoring and assessments even though they are very articulate in their reading and have good comprehension. Participants questioned whether DIBELS was accurately identifying struggling readers and their skill deficits considering these facts and whether the skills needed were being identified and addressed adequately to close the reading achievement gap. They stated that some students have learned to rush through the assessments. An example was given of a student during oral reading fluency assessment of quickly going through a line of text and reading just the words they know without attempting others and regardless of whether the words formed any manner of

logic. The words read may be words such as and, the, was, and other common words found in writing.

Research Question 2

How effective has DIBELS been in accurately identifying struggling readers?

Of the respondents at schools A, B, and C, 47% found DIBELS to be very helpful and 47% percent found it to be somewhat helpful in identifying struggling readers among their students of low socioeconomic status. Interestingly, School B yet again had the only negative response to this question with 6% of the respondents stating DIBELS does not help at all to identify struggling readers. Again, no elaboration was made in the comment section. During interview I listened carefully to what interviewees from School B were saying to ascertain why I had received some negative responses from the school. School B has had a change in administration and some staff changes. One possibility may be the new staff was not trained in the efficient use of DIBELS therefore the negative respondents may have not seen the positive results of other teachers. The majority of interviewees found DIBELS to be an effective tool for determining a baseline for a student's knowledge and skills that they may be lacking. However, interviewees cautioned other assessment measures should also be used in order to obtain a full understanding of the student's needs to close the reading gap. Although, DIBELS was found to be helpful, interview respondents questioned if there was not possibly another more research based program available that would better assess comprehension, phonemic skills, and sight word usage. Even though 94% found DIBELS to be very or

somewhat helpful they still perceived it as encouraging rushing through to beat the clock and not meaningful reading. I found discussion of this topic to be enlightening. If the study had just looked at the survey results, I may have thought 94% of participants found DIBELS to be very or somewhat useful. Therefore, this is the answer to closing the reading achievement gap for the students of low socioeconomic status. My thoughts may have been DIBELS will identify deficits without a doubt and tell us what to do to fix the problems. However, discussion with the participants shows that is not the case. The participants have found DIBELS to be useful, but it has not been the answer all its developers have portrayed.

Research Question 3

How effective do teachers perceive the three tiered reading model as being for the child receiving intervention in Tier 2?

DIBELS is used in conjunction with the three tiered reading model in the district where this study was conducted. Survey participants were questioned as to whether they have found the three tiered reading model to help close the reading achievement gap demonstrated by their students of low socioeconomic status. The three tiered reading model was found to be very effective in identifying struggling readers and skill deficits by 35% of respondents and then presenting an efficient means to meet their needs with the Tier groups of the three tiered reading model. Fifty six percent of found it to be somewhat beneficial. Only 9% of survey respondents, from School B found the three tiered reading model to not benefit their students at all. Respondents from School B did

not offer any direct explanation for their negative response. When asked specifically about Tier 2 and whether they have observed improvement in their students reading skills, 50% of survey respondents observed much improvement in reading skills and 50% noted somewhat improvement. No negative response was given on the survey for this question. Although interviewees were also positive in their responses to Tier 2 intervention as presenting an organized framework for meeting the needs of all students, they were also concerned with the amount of time lost before a child could be referred for evaluation of possible learning disabilities. It was felt the child remained in the classroom frustrated and discouraged far too long a length of time. They observed behavior, self esteem, and motivation are undermined in such a setting.

Research Question 4

In the perception of teachers in this study, does receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention benefit the students of low socioeconomic status more than just Tier1 whole group instruction?

All the respondents at the three target school have found their students benefit from Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction more than whole group Tier1 instruction. Statements were made by respondents as to the benefit of small groups and being able to give more focused attention to the individual student in the small group. Small groups were believed to have fewer distractions for the struggling reader, thereby aiding comprehension. The homogenous grouping of students allowed students working on the

same skills to receive effective instruction in small groups. The groups were fluid, thereby allowing the students to move in and out of groups as their skills progressed.

After analyzing the data gained from the surveys and interviews by Schools A, B, and C, I wondered if there were common responses in grade levels. For example, I wondered if one grade found more benefit from DIBELS or the three tiered reading model than another (Appendix I). I went back to the surveys and compiled the data by position taught.

Responses per Grade Level

Questions 1 and 2

How effective do teachers perceive DIBELS as being in identifying skill deficits and struggling readers in students of low socioeconomic status?

I found 100% of 3rd grade respondents at the three target schools found that DIBELS was helpful in identifying skill deficits and struggling readers. Special education respondents did not answer these questions. Of the kindergarten teachers who responded 83% found this to be true. During the interview phase of the study, I had the opportunity to interview a kindergarten teacher who stated DIBELS and the three tiered reading model were both beneficial to her students. I asked why she thought that to be true. She said most of her students did not have reading support at home and that most entered her class with very little readiness skills. She said it was not unusual for the students not to have books at home and no one to read to them. The majority of her students went to

Head Start so they were read to there and books were available to them at the school. According to the Administration for Families and Children Office of Public Affairs, Head Start programs are to work with the students of low socioeconomic status to promote school readiness.

Likewise, 83% of NCLB teachers also found DIBELS to be helpful identifying skills deficits for their intervention groups. When interviewed a common comment from the NCLB teachers was that DIBELS was great as a screening instrument but other measures should also be used to get an accurate account of the student's ability. Some student's just did not do well on DIBELS and needed a different form of assessment. Although 60% of second and 1st grade respondents found DIBELS to be useful to their students, they were also the most negative with 40% finding DIBELS to be not at all useful to their students. When interviewed, one 2nd grade teacher stated that DIBELS taught students to race the clock with no regard for comprehension or self monitoring of their reading. She said they did not pay attention to what they were reading; if they read a word totally wrong in context they did not notice and just kept going to beat the clock. Another stated DIBELS really misjudged the child who was slower in speech regardless of reading ability. She said she had students who were excellent readers with great comprehension who scored low on DIBELS assessments because they spoke slowly. The interviewees stated they had witnessed this happening each year the district has been using DIBELS.

Research Question 3

How effective do teachers perceive the three tiered reading model as being for the child receiving intervention in Tier 2?

All of the kindergarten teachers and 72% of 1st grade teachers surveyed have found their students benefited from the three tiered reading model. One hundred percent of special education, 2nd and 3rd grade teachers felt their students benefited from the process either greatly or somewhat. In the interview discussions, Rigby guided reading program was mentioned several times when discussing the three tiered reading program and literacy. The district uses Rigby to determine the instructional reading level of students. In the interviews, teachers presented a positive view of the three tiered reading model and of using Rigby to determine instructional reading levels of their students. Although one second grade teacher believed the Rigby levels were a little misleading in that some of her students who had leveled at the same instructional level demonstrated an obvious reading ability difference in the classroom. More than one interviewee in all teaching areas discussed that like DIBELS and other assessments, one measure does not present the whole picture of a student's reading abilities. Factors such as genre, interest, and motivation can influence reading.

Research Question 4

In the perception of teachers in this study, does receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention benefit the students of low socioeconomic status more than just Tier1 whole group instruction?

All respondents to this question agreed that the students who are struggling readers benefit more from Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction than if left in class with only whole group instruction. Interview respondents stated small groups were very beneficial to struggling readers and that if a struggling student were to only receive Tier 1 instruction it would be above their skill level and they would not progress. Respondents went on to comment that they have seen students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 instructions make progress throughout the year.

Primary Research Question

What are teachers' and other educational personnel's perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the three tiered reading model and DIBELS as they relate to the reading achievement of students of low socioeconomic status in Kindergarten through 3rd grade?

The theoretical background for this study was derived from researchers such as Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990). Chall's developmental model of reading (1983, 1996) identifies six stages of the reading process. The stages are presented as approximations as to how reading progresses. Chall's Stage 0 to Prereading, is from birth until the age of six. The prereading stage is when the child develops sound and the spoken language, vocabulary and word structure. Howse, Lange, Farran, and Boyles (2003) found children from low socioeconomic status homes begin school at a greater risk for reading difficulties than their more affluent peers. Children, as young as three years old, whose economic status has been identified as below the poverty line, may have already fallen

below average on tests of school readiness (Haskins & Rouse, 2005).

According to the Administration for Families and Children Office of Public Affairs, the Head Start program works with the students of low socioeconomic status helping to promote school readiness.

Upon entry to kindergarten, the district in which the three target schools are located use the DIBELS measures to determine areas of weakness for the students of low socioeconomic status struggling reader. DIBELS measures are often used in conjunction with the three tiered reading model to meet the needs of struggling readers of low socioeconomic status. The results of this research study, through responses to the surveys and interviews, established that teacher perceptions of DIBELS and the three tiered reading model as they pertain to their students of low socioeconomic status is positive. Their perceptions are that intervention in Tier 2 and Tier 3 promotes reading progress more than leaving a struggling student in Tier1 instruction. Respondents credit small group size and intense interventions that are skill specific as being responsible to their struggling students' progress in reading.

Implications for Social Change

The primary outcome of this study found that educators implementing DIBELS in conjunction with the three tiered reading model being employed in kindergarten through third grade in a school district located in a mid southeastern state in the United States are witnessing achievement in reading among their students of low socioeconomic status. Students of low socioeconomic status may begin school with no reading readiness skills.

Early childhood programs such as Head Start and prekindergarten programs are being implemented to address lack of readiness in the students of low socioeconomic status. The significance of this study lies in the insight an educator working with similar low socioeconomic status students may gain from professionals who are using the two initiatives with their own students of low socioeconomic status to close the reading gap. Being able to demonstrate functional literacy is imperative in the global world of the 21st century. Closing the reading achievement gap between students of low socioeconomic status and their more affluent peers will promote a social change for generations to come. According to Payne (2005), generational poverty is a family being in poverty for two generations or more. The three target schools of this study are a result of generational poverty. More than one generation has been on federal assistance as their primary source to meet basic human needs such as shelter and food. In order to make the positive social change desired for the students of low socioeconomic status represented by the students in the study, it is crucial educators know what works and what does not work with the most vulnerable students. Having research gathered from educators' working day to day with the students of low socioeconomic status will give insight into DIBELS and the three tiered reading model. The anonymity of the interviewees allowed for honest perceptive thoughts to be given knowing no negative consequences would result.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action resulting from this research study are needed to be implemented from the district level and are noteworthy to other districts considering

implementation of one or both initiatives to improve reading achievement of their students of low socioeconomic status. The surveys and the interviews disclosed a lack of staff development in the training of new teachers and long term substitute teachers on the implementation of the DIBELS and the three tiered reading model. Teachers were initially trained by the district in the two initiatives, but there was little follow up to the training. Long term substitute teachers in the NCLB program did not receive district training; their training may have been conducted on the job by a coworker. It is recommended that the district plan staff development for long term substitute teachers who have been engaged to fill a long term placement within the NCLB program; thus meeting the highly qualified mandate of NCLB.

Others considering the DIBELS screener would benefit from the perceptions of teachers who have been involved with the process for several years and their statements relating to the investigation of other measures to determine skill deficits and identification of struggling readers. Reoccurring remarks made by the teachers involved in this study were that DIBELS was teaching the students to race the clock; not necessarily presenting an accurate profile of areas of weakness, and lack of comprehension instruction will lead others to further investigation before making a decision affecting necessary reading skills needed to possibly break the cycle of generational poverty among their students. Along this line, exploration of other programs to be used with DIBELS to gather more in-depth information about the student should be

examined. DIBELS is a screening measure. Therefore a more in-depth evaluation is warranted.

Since lack of adequate comprehension assessment was a common point made from the survey data and from the interview, it is recommended that a more accurate and detailed measure of comprehension be investigated by the NCLB administration of the district. Due to the transit nature of the students of low socioeconomic status, another component to consider when investigating other measures is the accessibility of data to schools within the district.

Teacher perceptions' of the three tiered reading model were very positive. Administrators and teachers with a similar population of students of low socioeconomic status will benefit from the positive perceptions of teachers using the model in their daily instruction. According to the interviewees, the three tiered reading intervention is a strong component in the identification of learning disabled students. The third Tier gives additional time and support to the struggling reader before a referral is made for special education assessment.

There were no negative responses about the three tiered reading model, but there were concerning the support the teachers received from administrators. Teachers' perceptions of administrative support found it lacking. Interviewees stated that at the beginning of the implementation of the initiative, support from the district was strong. Staff development trainings were given before the new school year began and follow ups throughout the first year of implementation. However, there have been few follow ups

since for teachers and non for long term substitute teachers. Administrators reading this study should make note of what teachers involved for several years with the process have said about the lack of support and plan adequate support for their staff.

Another recommendation arising from the study is how to inform parents of the initiatives and how to explain the results of the DIBELS screener and the three tiered reading model. Parents and other caregivers need to be informed of the schools' reading programs and what they mean to their child. There is a great need to inform parents in "laymen's" terms about what we, as educators, are doing to improve the reading achievement of their child. Oftentimes, we forget not everyone is a reading teacher and likewise not everyone understands the scores in percentages or the graphs generated by various programs. Parent involvement activities are a very necessary component to closing the reading gap for students of low socioeconomic status. Parents and other caregivers must be educated in the importance of reading to the child's future and ability to break the poverty cycle in which the family is entangled.

Recommendations for Future Research

During the course of this study and analyzing the data, several areas needing further research became apparent. A study questioning specifically, why respondents were negative in their answers about DIBELS effectiveness identifying struggling readers and their skill deficits would benefit others using DIBELS. Second grade teachers overall at the three target schools had a negative response to DIBELS. A study asking why and including a larger sample group than just three target schools could be enlightening to

others teaching second grade. If the trend continues with negative responses in 2nd grade, the use of DIBELS in 2nd grade as an evaluation instrument may need to be reconsidered by school districts. Which leads to another possible study questioning what other assessment measure might work well with the three tiered reading model and students of low socioeconomic status. When thinking about the three tiered reading model and Tier1 and Tier1I, interviewees mentioned they sometimes felt the students were switched from Tier1I to Tier1 too quickly and sometimes ended back in Tier1I when progress monitoring was done. I have not seen any research in this area and believe it would be of benefit to others working with students of low socioeconomic status and using the three tiered reading model.

Reflections of the Researcher

I have been a kindergarten through 2nd grade teacher for over twenty years. This is my 14th year working in a school with a high population of students of low socioeconomic status and of a minority group, the highest in our district. I have seen the three tiered reading model and the DIBELS from the perspective of a classroom teacher and as a NCLB teacher. Reading is my passion and I have always believed if you can read you can do anything and tried to instill this belief in my own children as well as my students. I have met many educators, including myself, who have overcome less than ideal situations to attain goals they would not have been able to meet without the ability to read and read well. So not only is reading my passion, but helping those who are not in

the “ideal” middle income home where education is of utmost importance is also a passion.

I have reflected on the survey results and interviews to monitor my own biases, to ensure I do not misconstrue answers to my way of thinking. I have endeavored to keep an open mind. I manipulated the data without the aid of software in order to be as aware as possible of the respondents reflected beliefs. I noted nuances of voice and expression during the interviews and any notations present in the written survey responses. I have also made note of remarks made by educators from the three target schools when I have encountered them at district meetings. We often discuss among ourselves problems or success with programs in use in the district. Always, it has been in my mind to put aside my personal beliefs and opinions, to focus on the respondents and what they had experienced. In cases where I wanted an unmonitored opinion from one of the interviewees, I have refrained from making any type of statement myself and just listened to the conversation around me.

According to Creswell (2006), participants for a phenomenological study “must be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their experiences.” I viewed all survey responses and made note of those where the respondent not only answered the survey question, but also left comments in the comment section included after each question. I then selected the interviewees from those who were most verbose in their responses. I found this worked well, as those respondents were also vocal with their opinions during interview.

After concluding my research results, I reflected on how my answers to these questions would have been different now from the first year my school piloted the programs when I was a classroom teacher. My view of the three tiered reading model has not changed, however my opinion of DIBELS or the way in which to use DIBELS has changed. Asking participants how their perceptions from the first implementation of the processes had changed was not one of my research questions, but I think it would be a good study to conduct.

Conclusions

This phenomenological qualitative research study was an examination of teacher perceptions of DIBELS and the three tiered reading model and their effectiveness on the reading achievement of their students of low socioeconomic status struggling readers. After surveying and interviewing teachers at three students of low socioeconomic status schools, it was established that the DIBELS measures are effective in screening struggling readers. However, the participants stated further evaluation was needed after the screening to determine specific skill deficits. The three tiered reading model was perceived as being very effective in designing appropriate intense interventions to improve reading achievement in students of low socioeconomic status. The results of this study were positive concerning two methods to aid in closing the reading achievement gap at the three target schools and similar schools. However, closing the achievement gap is a monumental endeavor and more than one method will be needed to eliminate the gap

completely. More research will need to be conducted by educators, administrators, and researchers.

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Appendix A: Poverty Guidelines

2012 HHS Poverty Guidelines

Size of Family Unit	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$11,170	\$13,970	\$12,860
2	15,130	18,920	17,410
3	19,090	23,870	21,960
4	23,050	28,820	26,510
5	27,010	33,770	31,060
6	30,970	38,720	35,610
7	34,930	43,670	40,160
8	38,890	48,620	44,710
For each additional person add	3,960	4,950	4,550

SOURCE: *Federal Register*, Vol. 77, No. 17, January 26, 2012, pp. 4034-4035

Appendix B: Free and Reduced Lunch Guidelines 20012-2013

								INCOME ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES		
								July 1, 2012	To	June 30, 2013
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES ANNUAL	REDUCED PRICE MEALS - 185 %				FREE MEALS - 130 %				
		ANNUAL	MONTHLY	TWICE PER MONTH	EVERY TWO WEEKS	ANNUAL	MONTHLY	TWICE PER MONTH	EVERY TWO WEEKS	
48 CONTIGUOUS STATES, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, GUAM, AND TERRITORIES										
1	11,170	20,665	1,723	962	795	398	14,521	1,211	606	559
2	15,130	27,991	2,333	1,167	1,077	539	19,659	1,640	820	757
3	19,090	35,317	2,944	1,472	1,359	680	24,817	2,069	1,035	955
4	23,050	42,643	3,554	1,777	1,641	821	29,985	2,498	1,249	1,153
5	27,010	49,969	4,165	2,083	1,922	961	35,113	2,927	1,464	1,351
6	30,970	57,295	4,775	2,388	2,204	1,102	40,261	3,356	1,678	1,549
7	34,930	64,621	5,386	2,693	2,486	1,243	45,409	3,795	1,893	1,747
8	38,890	71,947	5,996	2,998	2,768	1,384	50,557	4,214	2,107	1,945
For each add'l family member, add	3,960	7,326	611	306	282	141	5,148	429	215	198
										99
ALASKA										
1	13,970	25,845	2,154	1,077	995	498	18,161	1,514	757	699
2	18,920	35,002	2,917	1,459	1,347	674	24,586	2,050	1,025	946
3	23,870	44,160	3,680	1,840	1,699	850	31,031	2,586	1,293	1,194
4	28,820	53,317	4,444	2,222	2,051	1,026	37,466	3,123	1,562	1,441
5	33,770	62,475	5,207	2,604	2,403	1,202	43,901	3,659	1,830	1,689
6	38,720	71,632	5,970	2,985	2,756	1,378	50,336	4,195	2,098	1,936
7	43,670	80,790	6,733	3,367	3,108	1,554	56,771	4,731	2,366	2,184
8	48,620	89,947	7,496	3,748	3,460	1,730	63,206	5,288	2,634	2,431
For each add'l family member, add	4,950	9,158	764	382	353	177	6,435	537	269	248
										124
HAWAII										
1	12,860	23,791	1,983	992	916	458	16,718	1,354	697	643
2	17,410	32,209	2,685	1,343	1,239	620	22,633	1,887	944	871
3	21,960	40,626	3,386	1,683	1,563	782	28,548	2,379	1,190	1,098
4	26,510	49,044	4,087	2,044	1,887	944	34,463	2,872	1,436	1,326
5	31,060	57,461	4,789	2,395	2,211	1,106	40,378	3,356	1,683	1,563
6	35,610	65,879	5,490	2,745	2,534	1,267	46,293	3,858	1,929	1,781
7	40,160	74,296	6,192	3,096	2,858	1,429	52,208	4,351	2,176	2,008
8	44,710	82,714	6,893	3,447	3,182	1,591	58,123	4,844	2,422	2,236
For each add'l family member, add	4,550	8,418	702	351	324	162	5,915	493	247	228
										114

Source Federal Register / Vol. 77, No. 57 / Friday, March 23, 2012

Appendix C: Administrative Letter of Consent

December 13, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

Vicki Curtis has requested permission to collect data via two surveys to be presented to teachers in Kindergarten through 3rd grade at (insert name) Elementary School concerning use of the Three tiered Reading Model and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment tool. Mrs. Curtis has also requested permission to conduct in-depth interviews with select individuals at a later date as part of the same study. I have been informed of the purpose of the study and the nature of the research procedure.

As a representative of (insert name) Elementary, I am authorized to grant permission to allow the researcher to collect survey data from school staff during non-instructional time during the school day or via email.

If you have questions, please contact me at (304)256-(insert number).

Sincerely,

Principal

Insert school name

UNSIGNED COPY

Appendix D: Participant Letter of Consent

February 15, 2011

Fellow Educator,

I need your help. My name is Vicki Curtis and I am a NCLB teacher at Stratton Elementary. I am also a PhD student at Walden University and I am conducting a research study examining teachers' perceptions relating to the Three tiered Reading Model and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment tool. My study involves the voluntary completion of an anonymous survey and voluntary interview follow up. However, I need your consent to put the anonymous surveys in your mailbox. You were chosen for this study due to your work with students at one of the three students of low socioeconomic status schools identified by their free and reduced lunch data. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to give you the details of the study before you are presented with the two surveys.

The procedures to be used for purposes of the study are as follows:

- Read and sign the consent form at the end of the explanation. There will be a collection envelope placed at the mailboxes for your convenience.
- At a later date, 2 surveys concerning the Three tiered Reading Model and another concerning DIBELS will be placed in your box to be fill out anonymously. A collection envelope will be placed at the mailboxes to collect the surveys.
- Please take ten minutes to help me with my research by filling out the survey when it arrives. This information will enable me to determine what teachers at the three primary students of low socioeconomic status schools in our area are experiencing with the programs and if you are seeing a lessening of the achievement gap in your endeavors to increase reading achievement in all students and particularly in the low SES groups.

There will be no names involved in the research, no risk of any kind to the participant, no compensation, there are no conflicts of interest, and you may keep a copy of this letter and the surveys for your records.

If you are willing to be interviewed more in-depth, please indicate your name and contact information. The interview will involve approximately 30 minutes of your time and will give the researcher more clarity pertaining to your experiences. Otherwise, do not put

your name on the survey when you fill it out. If you volunteer to be interviewed, your name will not be used in the findings of the study. Schools will not be identified, only named School A, B, or C. As the researcher, I will be the only one looking at the consent forms, the survey responses containing any identifying information, and the interview results. A compilation of the responses will be presented in the research document.

By completing the survey, you agree that I can use the information compiled in the manner I described above (no identifying names). It is also understood that there are no repercussions if you choose not to participate in filling out the survey or volunteering to be interviewed. The research not require a signature other than the one on this form which no one but the researcher will see and will not be used to identify participants in any way.

Thank you for your consideration of participating in this research study. If you have questions, email me at vcurtis@suddenlink.net or call 252-5057 after 5:00 pm. If you have any questions concerning your participant rights, you may contact Dr. Leilani Endicott at 1-800-925-3368, ext. 1210.

Sincerely,

Vicki Curtis

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement and the anonymity of my participation.

Printed Name of Participant_____

Date of Consent_____

Participants Signature_____

Researcher's Signature_____

Appendix E: Interviewee Letter of Consent

Participant,

If you voluntarily agree to participate in the interview process, as explained in the survey consent form, please fill out the information below and place in the collection envelope. I, as the researcher, will be the only one to see this form.

I have read the information about the research study presented with the consent forms and again with the two surveys and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my voluntary involvement and the anonymity of my participation in the interview process.

Printed Name of Participant_____

Date of Consent_____

Participants Signature_____

Appendix F: DIBELS Survey

Please fill in the circle or circle your answer.

1. What is your primary teaching role?

Kindergarten 1st 2nd 3rd Special Ed. NCLB

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

2.What form of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment instrument does your school use?

○ ○

3. Have you found the DIBELS assessment instrument helpful for determining skill deficits in students?

1

2

3

Very Helpful

Somewhat Helpful

Not Helpful

Comment

4. Have you found DIBELS accurately identifies struggling readers?

1

2

3

Very Helpful

Somewhat Helpful

Not Helpful

Comment _____

5. Have you found your administrator to be proficient in the DIBELS process?

1

2

3

Very

Somewhat

Not at all

Comment _____

6. Have you found DIBELS accurately identifies skills needed by the students of low socioeconomic status struggling readers?

1

2

3

Very

Somewhat

Not at all

Comment _____

7. Does your school use the three tiered reading model?

1

2

Yes

No

Comment _____

8. Do you believe DIBELS works well as an assessment tool with the Three Tiered Reading model?

1

2

3

Very

Somewhat

Not at all

Comment _____

9. Do you think students' individual processing pace hinders DIBELS assessment scores?

1

2

3

Very

Somewhat

Not at all

Comment _____

10. Overall, do you think your district gives adequate staff development and support to teachers using the DIBELS assessment instrument?

1

2

3

Very

Somewhat

Not at all

Comment _____

Please **check Yes or No as to whether you are willing to be interviewed (no names used) by the researcher: If yes add contact information**

Yes

No

Appendix G: Three Tiered Reading Model

Please fill in the circle or circle your answer.

1. What is your primary teaching role?

Kindergarten 1st 2nd 3rd Special Ed. NCLB

2. When doing Tierlnstruction, what Tierdo you primarily work with?

Tier1 Tier 2 Tier 3

90 minutes Additional 30 minutes Additional 60 minutes

3. Have you found the three tiered reading model to be beneficial to your students?

1 2 3

Very Helpful Somewhat Helpful Not Helpful

Comment _____

4. Have you observed improvement in the reading skills of students receiving Tier 2 intervention?

1 2 3

Very Helpful Somewhat Helpful Not Helpful

Comment _____

5. Do you see improvement in the reading skills of students receiving Tier 3 intervention?

1

2

3

Very Helpful

Somewhat Helpful

Not Helpful

Comment _____

6. Have you found the students of low socioeconomic status student benefits from Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions?

1

2

3

Very Helpful

Somewhat Helpful

Not Helpful

Comment _____

7. Do you think the district offers efficient staff development and support to teachers implementing the three tiered reading model?

1

2

3

Very Helpful

Somewhat Helpful

Not Helpful

Comment

8. Approximately how many students did you have show reading improvement by moving up from one Tier to another Tier last year?

0-3 students

3-6 students

4-6 students

9. Is your administrator proficient in the implementation of the three tiered reading model?

Yes

No

Comment

10. Do you find the student benefits more from Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction than what they would from whole group instruction?

Yes

No

Comment _____

Please check yes or no as to whether you are willing to be interviewed (no names) by the researcher: If yes, add contact information.

____ Yes

____ No

Appendix H: Interview Possibilities

Appendix I: Response Frequency Chart

DIBELS and the three tiered reading model responses for each survey question

Frequency chart

DIBELS question number:

Teaching Position	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful at All
Kindergarten			
1 st grade			
2 nd grade			
3 rd grade			
Special Education			
NCLB			

Frequency chart

Three tiered reading model question number:

Teaching Position	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful at All
Kindergarten			
1 st grade			
2 nd grade			
3 rd grade			
Special Education			
NCLB			

Appendix J: Percentage Response Chart

DIBELS and the three tiered reading model responses for each survey question

Percentage chart

DIBELS:

Teaching Position	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful at All
Kindergarten	83%	11%	
1 st grade	60%		40%
2 nd grade		40%	60%
3 rd grade		60%	40%
Special Education	50%	50%	
NCLB	83%	17%	

Percentage chart

Three tiered reading model:

Teaching Position	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not Helpful at All
Kindergarten	80%	20%	
1 st grade	33%	67%	
2 nd grade		100%	
3 rd grade	25%	75%	
Special Education	25%	75%	
NCLB	82%	18%	

Appendix K: Interview Questions

1. What would you like to tell me about your experience with the three tiered reading model and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy screening instrument?
2. Describe a day in your classroom for a child receiving Tier 2 reading support.
3. How does DIBELS assessments compare to reading core curriculum assessments?
4. Tell me about the level of support from building and district administration for the implementation of DIBELS and the three tiered reading model.
5. What would make using the two processes more productive for you and your students?

Appendix L: Interview Keywords Categories

Curriculum Vitae

Vicki Lynn Curtis

Education

Ph. D., Educational Leadership K - 12, Walden University

M. A., Special Education, Birth to Adult

M. A., Reading Specialist PreK - Adult, Marshall University

B. A., Multi-subject K-8, Concord College

Certifications

Administrative Certificate – Superintendent

Administrative Certificate – Supervisor General Instruction

Administrative Certificate – Principal

Professional Reading Certificate – Reading Specialist

Professional Teaching Certificate – Multi-Subject K - 8

Specific Learning Disabilities

Mentally Impaired

Behavioral Disordered

Autism

Experience

1991 – 1998 Special Education Teacher – Raleigh County Schools

1998 – 2010 Elementary Teacher K – 2 – Raleigh County Schools

2010 – Current – Reading Specialist – Raleigh County

Schools16