

2020

Middle School Teachers' Experiences Using Independent Reading in the Language Arts Curriculum

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Tara Anne Baker

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Middle School Teachers' Experiences Using Independent Reading in the
Language Arts Curriculum

by

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MA, State University of New York College at Cortland, 2008

BS, William Smith College, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2020

Abstract

To increase students' reading achievement, the assistant superintendent of a school district in the Northeastern United States recruited an expert for a 1-day workshop on independent reading. The problem was that little was known about teachers' experiences using independent reading in Grade 5 through Grade 8 English language arts (ELA) classes, despite current researchers' recommendation that students spend time independently reading in school to develop learned reading skills. The purpose of this study was to explore Grade 5 through Grade 8 ELA teachers' experiences using independent reading. The study, framed by Vygotsky's theory of social and cognitive development, examined ELA teachers' implementation of instructional activities that lead students to develop reading independence, how teachers scaffold student reading levels of growth, and the use of assessment data as an informant for teachers' instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development. This qualitative case study included 9 participants who taught ELA for 2 or more years at the local middle school who were selected for semi-structured interviews. Inductive data analysis of the interview transcripts and descriptive analysis of ELA meeting minutes were grounded in elements of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, use of data, and scaffolding. The results of the study provided insight into teachers' lack of understanding of the use of student data and scaffolding to provide instruction in independent reading in the ELA curriculum. A professional development training using these constructs in planning and instruction was developed as a project from the results. Successful independent reading implementation may enhance student learning, increase reading achievement, and may contribute to focused, long-term professional development for teachers.

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Dedication

This doctorate is dedicated solely to my mom, Diane M. Baker, who passed away on October 12, 2017. My mom was, and will continue to be, the driving force behind my successes in life. She taught me what it takes to accomplish your goals. From the time I was born, my mom supported me, motivated me, and pushed me to reach my goals. My mom was determined to be the best woman she could be, and she was dedicated to teaching me, her only child, to be the best woman I could be. I will never forget the values that my mom instilled in me. This is for you, mom!

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

At a rural middle school in the Northeast, English language arts (ELA) teachers who use independent reading recommend that students practice their reading skills at home (Middle school ELA department chairperson, personal communication, March 16, 2018). Home practice does not allow administrators and teachers to understand how teachers are supporting reading and providing additional instructional support for the ELA curriculum. More recently, researchers have recommended that teachers include independent reading in the classroom to encourage students to develop and practice learned skills (Bates et al., 2017; Brannan & Giles, 2018; Flowers, 2017). At the beginning of this study, little was known about local teachers' experiences using independent reading in fifth grade through eighth grade ELA classrooms. This study addresses the gap in practice between recommended independent reading instruction in the ELA curriculum (Raney, 2017; Serravallo, 2017; Williams, 2017) and how independent reading is used by ELA teachers at the local setting as an approach to support, or scaffold, student learning.

Typically, teachers do not implement independent reading in the ELA curriculum without clear directives from administrators (Woulfin, 2015). Scholastic (2016b) survey results of teachers and principals nationwide suggested that principals and teachers wish there was more time in the ELA curriculum to include daily independent reading time. Teachers and principals felt significant barriers to implementing independent reading in the ELA curriculum due to curriculum demands and mandates (Scholastic, 2016b).

Routman (2016) found that independent reading was seldom practiced in ELA classrooms and suggested that little is understood about teacher experiences with the method of independent reading. Brannan and Giles (2018) similarly found that little time was allocated for independent reading in schools.

In 2000, the U.S. National Reading Panel released a report stating more research is needed to determine if independent reading could be deemed an effective means for increasing students' reading fluency, skills, and motivation. Cullinan (2000) also released a review of research identifying the importance of independent reading in relation to school achievement. Cullinan considered reading at home, reading at school, and free reading and used several terms for independent reading, including voluntary reading and free reading. Inclusive of all terms is the fact that students are not engaged in a lesson; rather, they are practicing reading (Cullinan, 2000). Cullinan concluded that independent reading does have a positive impact on student learning and achievement. In 2014, the International Reading Association released a report based on significant research findings that policymakers and school administrators should support independent reading in the classroom. Literacy researchers in 2019 focused on the role of the teacher as the pivotal change agent in independent reading as a current research topic (Brooks & Frankel, 2019).

Rationale

The local school district has made attempts to educate teachers on the importance of providing independent reading time in the ELA classroom with the presence of the ELA teacher. The assistant superintendent of Peregrine School District (pseudonym) saw

that student reading outcomes at Falcon Middle School (pseudonym) were not advancing and invited a presenter for a 1-day professional development workshop on independent reading. Table 1 shows 3 years of flat reading data with students in Grade 5 through Grade 8 (Department Chair, personal communication, June 18, 2019).

Table 1

Three Years of Falcon Middle School Reading Results

School year	Tier 1 (On/above level)	Tier 2 (One level below)	Tier 3 (Two or more levels below)
2016-2017 (AIMSweb)	47%	29%	24%
2017-2018 (i-Ready)	40%	25%	35%
2018-2019 (i-Ready)	45%	24%	31%

Note. AIMSweb is a benchmark and progress monitoring system that provides curriculum-based measurement student assessments (Pearson Education, 2009). i-Ready is an individualized reading program aimed at differentiating reading instruction for students in order to meet the needs of all learners (Curriculum Associates, 2018).

On the second day of the 2018-2019 school year, elementary and middle school teachers at the local setting attended a workshop directly related to independent reading time in the classroom. Teacher and author Donalyn Miller presented three major components of independent reading to teachers and administrators: free choice of which books students may read, designated time in the curriculum for independent reading, and a classroom environment that fosters a love of reading. Miller shared research-based tips from her own successful classroom experiences. The goal of the presentation was to encourage elementary and middle school teachers at the local setting to support

independent reading in their classrooms to increase student growth and achievement while also fostering a love for reading.

Miller's visit was an attempt made by the local school district to educate teachers on the importance and value of using independent reading in the ELA classroom (Assistant superintendent, personal communication, August 27, 2019). The assistant superintendent acknowledged the link between teacher-supported independent reading and student outcomes, which researchers support (Bates et al., 2017; Brannan & Giles, 2018; Flowers, 2017, Raney, 2017; Serravallo, 2017; Williams, 2017). Peregrine School District has an ongoing goal of getting all students reading on grade level, knowing that research shows that children who read more often are better at reading. In order to get students reading more, it is necessary to instill a love of reading (Assistant superintendent, personal communication, August 27, 2019). The district felt Miller's approach to independent reading would fit best into what they wanted teachers to use in their classrooms (Assistant superintendent, personal communication, August 27, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to explore, after Miller's visit and guidance, fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. This qualitative case study will help address the gap in practice between best practices concerning independent reading and what is occurring in the local setting. A stronger understanding of teachers' experiences with independent reading will be beneficial because it will provide stakeholders with information about independent reading that will inform efforts to develop and improve an ELA curriculum that is best for all students (Woulfin, 2015).

Definition of Terms

Listed below are definitions of special terms associated with the problem, including variables and conceptual terms.

Academic intervention services: Students who are in jeopardy of not meeting state standards or who have scored below that state requirement on state issued exams must receive additional academic services within the school day. Academic intervention services require a change in a student's teaching program to increase student success (New York State Department of Education [NYSED], 2009).

AIMSweb: AIMSweb is a benchmark and progress monitoring system that provides curriculum-based measurement student assessments (Pearson, 2009).

Book talks: Book talks are conversations about books given by teachers meant to introduce and entice students to those books, explore new genres, or read books by specific authors (Fisher & Frey, 2018; Serravallo, 2017).

Classroom library: Classroom libraries are in classrooms and provide students with immediate access to books. Classroom libraries include a variety of genres and books pertaining to student interests (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Routman, 2016).

Free choice reading, free voluntary reading, self-selected reading: Free choice reading, free voluntary reading, and self-selected reading describe when the reader has the choice to read what he or she wants, without any means of accountability measures attached (Krashen, 2016).

i-Ready: i-Ready is an individualized reading program aimed at differentiating reading instruction for students in order to meet the needs of all learners. The program

includes assessments, online instruction, and teacher resources (Curriculum Associates, 2018).

Independent reading: Independent reading occurs when students are provided time during the school day to engage in authentic reading experiences that are manageable by the students, independent of any supports. Students choose their own books and are encouraged to practice learned skills while reading. Teachers support independent reading time by focusing on student-centered learning and providing scaffolding through conferences with students about their reading (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Routman, 2016).

International Literacy Association: For the past 60 years, the International Literacy Association (ILA), formerly the International Reading Association, has worked to enrich literacy instruction through research endeavors and professional development for educators (ILA, 2018a).

Matthew effects in reading: Children who are more proficient readers and have proficient vocabularies will read more, increasing their vocabularies further, which increases the amount of word learning they experience, leading them to read better. Children who have smaller vocabularies read slowly and with minimal enjoyment, causing them to read less, which then leads to reduced vocabulary development, slowing reading growth (Stanovich, 1986). Those who read well, read more, become more proficient readers, and then read more often (Fisher & Frey, 2018).

National Reading Panel: The National Reading Panel is a United States government body originated in 1997 at the request of Congress in order to assess the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching reading (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Purposeful reading: With teacher support and modeling, guided by the teachers' purposeful instruction strategies, students see a purpose in their independent reading (Sanden, 2014; Trudel, 2007).

Reading conferences: During reading conferences, teachers meet with students independently or in small groups to discuss students' independent reading. During teacher-student conferences, teachers have an opportunity to scaffold instruction for students, discuss reading choices, and assess reading behaviors (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Serravallo, 2017).

Reading fluency: Reading fluency is the rate at which a student reads automatically, with accuracy and speed (Fisher & Frey, 2018).

Reading motivation: Reading motivation (extrinsic or intrinsic) consists of what draws a student to read, such as independent reading, classroom libraries, and choice (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Serravallo, 2017).

Reading stamina: A student's reading stamina is the amount of uninterrupted time a student is able to spend reading during independent reading time (Routman, 2016).

Reading volume: Reading volume is the amount of reading students engage in, both in and out of school, and have engaged in throughout their lives. Reading volume is believed to have an impact on a student's reading achievement (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2018).

Scaffolding: Scaffolding is the act of providing support, followed by the gradual release of support, to the point where the child can control frustration and successfully complete a task without the adult (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018).

Sustained silent reading: Sustained silent reading (SSR) is a specific time set aside daily for students to read during school. Often, teachers will also read during this time. Students may choose what they read, and there are no means for accountability associated with sustained silent reading (Krashen, 2016).

Texts: Texts refer to the books students are reading or teachers are using for classroom instruction (Serravallo, 2017).

Title I: Title I is financial assistance provided to local agencies and schools that have high numbers of children from low income families based on local census reports. The financial funding is meant to help ensure that all children meet demanding academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it may generate deeper understanding about how teachers are using independent reading at the local setting. Researchers and experts in the field of reading have identified the importance of providing students in-school time for independent reading (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Hudson & Williams, 2015; Krashen, 2016; Routman, 2016). The results of the study may lead to the creation of professional development that could improve teachers' understanding of independent reading and how to successfully embed, support, and assess it in the ELA curriculum.

The findings may also contribute to school district leaders' efforts to prioritize independent reading instruction in the ELA curriculum.

This study may further contribute to positive social change by providing information about teachers' instructional practices, which could lead to improvements in students' academic skill development. Researchers have determined that independent reading in school leads to increased reading achievement and reading motivation and, ultimately, higher skill jobs that may offset poverty (Fisher & Frey, 2018; Krashen, 2016). Highlighting ELA teachers' instructional practices at the local level may encourage curricular change regarding independent reading practices, influencing both teaching and learning. Students may be motivated to read and to develop into independent learners, thus becoming college and career ready (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015).

Research Questions

Gaining a greater understanding of teachers' experiences in using independent reading could both benefit the local school district and inform practitioners nationwide about how teachers are using independent reading, providing information to move forward with relevant professional development for educators. The results of the study will assist stakeholders in developing a blueprint for future practices in ELA curricula. The following questions, written through the lens of Vygotskian theory, guide this study.

RQ1: How do ELA teachers implement instructional activities that lead students to develop reading independence?

RQ2: How are ELA teachers scaffolding student reading levels of growth during independent reading in the ELA curriculum?

RQ3: How does ELA assessment data inform ELA teachers' instructional choices for supporting students' growth and independence in reading development?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social and cognitive development was the conceptual framework for this case study. Social development theory is the basis for constructivist teaching, which holds that cognitive growth and learning require social interaction, a knowledgeable teacher, and the student's zone of proximal development (ZPD), also known as the cognitive space between working with the assistance of another and working independently. Students play an active role in their own learning as they co-construct knowledge with a teacher and gradually gain independence. Vygotsky's cognitive development theory asserts that learning takes place in social interactions. According to Vygotsky, the ZPD "is the distance between the actual development level ... and the level of potential development ... under adult guidance" (p. 33). At the core of the ZPD concept, teachers help students reach their full reading potential (van Rijk, Volman, de Haan, & van Oers, 2017). Teachers accomplish this goal through scaffolding instruction based on observation of students' progress and targeted guidance to help them develop the targeted skill (van Rijk et al., 2017). The most relevant elements of ZPD and scaffolding to this study are (a) establishing activities to support learning, (b) evaluating

the effectiveness of the activities to support learning, and (c) gradually allowing the student to accept independent responsibility for the activities.

ZPD and scaffolding are used for the framework of this study by providing a means of interpreting how teachers support their students' independent reading efforts. Both the problem and the purpose of this study are framed by ZPD and scaffolding because I explored the experiences of the teachers according to their use of "adult guidance" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 33) from the concept of ZPD. The data collection interview protocol used in the study was constructed to include the relevant constructs of the conceptual framework. The data analysis was grounded in the named conceptual framework by using an inductive coding process for the interviews and a descriptive coding process for the meeting minutes based on the relevant elements of ZPD and scaffolding, including the establishment of activities to support learning, the evaluation of activity effectiveness to support learning, and the gradual allowance of students to accept independent responsibility for the activities. The active agents in Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, with a foundation in adult guidance, may include books, videos, and displays that adults have prepared for students that will lead to development in students' learning and independent responsibility (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). With this study, I looked to determine if any activities or other active agents were used to support student learning, and if so, which specific activities or active agents were employed by teachers to support and scaffold student learning.

Adults primarily read in their heads, without the support of others. Children begin to develop their reading abilities by first relying on adults to read aloud to them (Prior &

Welling, 2001). Vygotsky's (1978) cognitive development and social development theories support the social interactions of parent to child, teacher to child, and child to child (Prior et al., 2011; Prior & Welling, 2001). A child's earliest stages of learning development begin with the support of a more knowledgeable being, most often an adult (Prior & Welling, 2001). Once students reach school age, they build on their reading development by reading aloud with another experienced adult, their teacher (Prior et al., 2011; Prior & Welling, 2001). The teacher has the child read aloud to determine where the child needs reading support. Students eventually move from reading orally to their teachers to reading silently (Prior & Welling, 2001). Prior et al. (2011) found that by sixth and seventh grade, students' silent reading comprehension skills are similar to or stronger than their oral reading skills in first grade through fifth grade. A child's oral reading fluency skills support the development of his or her silent reading fluency, and as children reach middle level grades, their silent reading comprehension begins to improve to where it is stronger than their oral reading comprehension (Price, Meisinger, Louwse, & D'Mello, 2016; Schimmel & Ness, 2017).

Vygotsky (1978) pointed out that there is a difference between learning and developing. Even if students have learned to read silently, they still need support to develop the skill. As students develop and strengthen their internal reading skills, there is still a need for teachers to provide activities through adult guidance that will continue to support student development. For example, student support from adult guidance once students have internalized the skill of reading helps with the development of student comprehension skills (Prior et al., 2011). All readers must know the difference between

reading words and understanding complex ideas, exercising comprehension skills (Allington, 2014; Krashen, 2013; Price et al., 2016; Prior et al., 2011; Schimmel & Ness, 2017; Spichtig et al., 2016).

Thompson's (2013) research supports Vygotsky's theory that writing, like reading, is a socially developmental process of learning and teaching. Through the complexities of ZPD, Thompson's study supported the development of collaborative relationships between teachers and students and that students may move fluidly through the phases of ZPD in both reading and writing. The process, Thompson suggested, is both social and individual. Brownfield and Wilkinson (2018) emphasized the impact of scaffolding on literacy learning. While Vygotsky's ZPD is the gap between what the child can accomplish alone and what the child can do with adult guidance, scaffolding is what needs to be done to fill in that gap (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018). In this study, I interviewed teachers at the local middle school to determine what activities they were implementing to support each student's ZPD and their long-term growth as lifelong readers.

Review of the Broader Problem

The review of literature contributed to the foundation for this study by identifying and connecting the broader problem of teachers in a rural middle school in the Northeastern United States and their experiences using independent reading in fifth grade through eighth grade ELA classrooms. The literature review also focused on how teachers plan instructional activities to support students' independent reading development and how teachers plan assessments for supporting students' independence in

reading development. After establishing the conceptual framework of the study, I demonstrated how independent reading has evolved from sustained silent reading into independent reading, a practice that encompasses Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD through adult guidance. Through a description of the development of independent reading as a classroom practice, I showed what the literature indicates motivates students to read and what specific classroom practices support independent reading as part of an ELA curriculum. I reviewed the literature that is centered around independent reading and research that addresses ways to assess independent reading practices in the classroom. I addressed barriers that are key components of independent reading in the ELA curriculum. I then discussed the role of principals, administrators, and school culture in the development of independent reading in ELA curricula.

Prior to submitting the project study proposal for University Research Reviewer (URR) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I conducted an exhaustive search of current literature using peer-reviewed journals assessed through the Walden University's Library. I initially identified the keyword search terms, *independent reading*, *sustained silent reading*, and *middle school*. I then conducted a Boolean search using various combinations of terms: *independent reading*, *sustained silent reading*, *middle school*, *teacher*, *adolescents*, *conferencing*, *reading instruction*, *reading*, *motivation*, *assessments*, *curriculum*, *time*, *principals*, *administrators*, *scheduling*, *sustainable professional development*, *Vygotsky*, and *ZPD*. I targeted sources published within the past five years using the following search engines to generate over 1,000 journals and books related to the project study: Academic Search Complete, Education Research

Complete, SAGE, EBSCO, ERIC, Thoreau, and Google Scholar. I also searched over 25 online websites, including NYSED website, Curriculum Associates, and the ILA. The 2011 New York State (NYS) ELA Learning Standards were revised to the new 2017 Next Generation ELA Learning Standards, requiring a thorough review of the new NYS ELA Learning Standards.

The revised 2017 Next Generation ELA Learning Standards include a new aspect titled the Lifelong Practices of Readers and Writers (NYSED, 2017). The new addition to the NYS ELA standards outlines the practices of reading widely and often, reading for both learning and for pleasure, and self-selecting texts to read. The encouragement for schoolwide independent reading programs has been established, specifically stating that an important component of instruction includes providing students time to read (NYSED, 2017). Providing time during the school day for students to read independently allows students to practice the skill of reading, with the support of a teacher acting as an adult guide to further develop the skill. Even after a skill is learned, students need support to continue to develop the skill (Vygotsky, 1978).

Shift from Sustained Silent Reading

A section of the 2000 National Reading Panel report focused on independent silent reading, defined in the report as reading that students engage in with little or no support from a teacher. The results reported did not provide evidence to support large amounts of independent reading as a means to help students improve in reading achievement (National Reading Panel, 2000). Since the 2000 National Reading Panel report, many teachers have shifted from sustained silent reading time to a scheduled

independent reading time for practicing reading skills and completing work that is included in the ELA curriculum. Independent reading programs are widely implemented based on research conducted supporting the growth of students as readers (Bates et al., 2017; Brannan & Giles, 2018; Flowers, 2017).

The power of independent reading is a logical outcome of Stanovich's theory of reading inequalities. Stanovich (1986) suggested in his *Matthew effects* example that children who are reading well will have larger vocabularies and will read more than children who do not read as well and who have less significant vocabularies, resulting in less time spent reading. Differences in reading among students have the potential to continue to increase as the better, more exposed readers develop stronger reading skills and, in turn, read more (Fisher & Frey, 2018; Stanovich, 1986). Current research on the presence of the Matthew effect in reading has produced mixed results. While researchers have tested for Matthew effects in reading and found that gaps between high- and low-performing groups can be closed with appropriate reading support, other researchers have found it more likely for there to be steady growth within categories of students (Huang, Moon, & Boren, 2014; Kwiatkowska-White, Kirby, & Lee, 2016; Pfof, Hattie, Dörfler, & Artelt, 2014). Students who do not read well do not read as much, unlike students who do read well and who are more likely to read often (Huang et al., 2014). Especially for struggling readers, independent reading in school is a key component to reading growth and development (Pfof et al., 2014). When provided independent reading time in school, teachers have the opportunity to scaffold instruction based on observations of students' progress or lack of progress (Van Rijk et al., 2017).

The shift from sustained silent reading to independent reading practices was developed based on the concept of sustained silent reading time daily in school. With sustained silent reading as a foundation, Trudel (2007), Walker (2013), and Sanden (2014) provided clarification and support for the shift from sustained silent reading to independent reading classroom practices. Traditional sustained silent reading is time provided to read independently in the school day, without any additional components and with no set goal in mind besides providing time to read (Trudel, 2007). The student's teacher could also be reading for pleasure during this time, but the teacher is not conferencing with students about their reading and is not providing any form of skill-based guidance or instruction to support student reading growth.

Trudel (2007) shifted from traditional sustained silent reading to independent reading time during the same school year. Sanden (2014) researched the classroom practices of teachers and found that the classroom practices did not reflect traditional sustained silent reading. Results of both studies confirmed the significance of the new practices focused on student reading growth (Sanden, 2014; Trudel, 2007). Independent reading practices consisted of student collaboration around reading, increased teacher and student communication about what students were reading, mini lessons that provided purposeful reading, and student accountability (Sanden, 2014; Trudel, 2007). The more structured independent reading programs encouraged students to not only read for pleasure, but to also practice learned reading skills to grow as readers. The teachers in the two studies would provide support in some areas and then encourage student independence in other areas (Sanden, 2014; Trudel, 2007). Teachers would scaffold

instruction to fill in the gap between what students could do independently and what the students could do with adult guidance (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018). Walker (2013), a professor of reading, supported the shift from sustained silent reading to structured independent reading programs for adolescent readers based on research and visits to schools that do not implement independent reading programs. In addition to setting time aside daily for reading at the secondary level, Walker saw the value in providing secondary students with teacher support and guidance, coupled with structure and accountability, as part of a newly implemented independent reading program.

Independent Reading

The ILA (2018b) released a publication supporting the development of lifelong readers through time during the school day for independent reading. In-school time for independent reading is a time for adult guides to provide explicit instruction directly connected to students' reading choices, a time for students to self-select books with the guidance of adults, a time when adult guides are able to monitor and support students' reading, and a time when adult guides and students alike can participate in authentic and meaningful conversations about the books that students are reading (ILA, 2018b). The recent ILA (2018b) publication aligns with the 2017 Next Generation ELA Learning Standards that were written in support of schoolwide independent reading programs, with a focus on providing students in-school time to read (NYSED, 2017).

Teachers' experiences using independent reading. Independent reading is not a strategy for success, but a reading practice that should be implemented wide and often in all ELA classrooms to foster a love of reading and a lifetime of literacy. Through

independent reading practice in the ELA classroom, students play an active role in their learning and reading development, with the support of a knowledgeable teacher and social interaction with peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Fowler (2015), Radlauer (2017), and Raney (2017), three educators who endorsed independent reading, exercised the practice of independent reading in their classrooms daily. Fowler, a middle school ELA teacher, provided class time daily for independent reading, encouraged her students to read, and was a model herself for wide reading. Radlauer, a veteran upper elementary school teacher, invested in the practice of daily in-school reading with her students, while also acting as a model reader herself. Raney, a high school English teacher, found that once he fully supported and implemented independent reading into his high school English curriculum, students became fully engaged in reading and were on their way to becoming lifelong readers.

Krashen (2016) found that research throughout the past 30 years has shown that free voluntary reading (independent reading) supports reading ability, writing ability, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. Independent reading supports these skills indirectly, yet proves to be an effective means of indirect instruction surrounding these core literacy skills. In some studies of independent reading implementation, at worst, students either show no improvement in reading comprehension, and at best, students show improvement in reading comprehension; students do not digress in their independent reading skills due to the implementation of independent reading (Krashen, 2016). In a study comparing current silent reading efficiency in the United States to performance in 1960, Spichtig et al. (2016) found that students need to nurture their reading skills by

engaging in sufficient reading practice. There is a steady decline in time spent reading in the United States, and to raise academic achievement in the United States, a recommendation is to increase reading volume as a national priority (Spichtig et al., 2016). The Finnish perspective, which is highly regarded due to their consistent successes in education, is that as children get older, the need to set time aside during school hours to read becomes increasingly important because children are busier outside of school with many extra-curricular activities, leaving them less likely to set time aside outside of school to read (Aerila & Merisuo-Storm, 2017). Even once students have developed the skill to read, they still need support from a knowledgeable teacher to continue developing the skill of reading (Vygotsky, 1978).

To determine if in-school independent reading had a positive impact on students' reading ability, Cuevas, Irving, and Russell (2014) conducted a quantitative study with 145 ninth and 10th graders from a Southeastern, Title I United States high school. The results of the study showed that the independent silent reading group did improve in their overall reading ability. Based on the results, teachers can help students improve their reading abilities by providing in-school independent reading time regularly (Cuevas et al., 2014). In a similar study that examined the reading habits of high school juniors in a Southeastern U.S. high school, Whitten, Labby, and Sullivan (2016) found that, on average, the students who engaged in self-selected reading for pleasure performed better academically than students who did not. Little, McCoach, and Reis (2014) conducted a large-scale study with 2,150 middle school students and determined that the inclusion of self-selected independent reading time and differentiated teacher instruction through

individual conferences with students resulted in higher reading fluency scores and similar reading comprehension scores for students. Liu and Wang (2015) found that for fourth grade English language learners, the implementation of independent reading activities motivated English language learners to read and helped develop their reading comprehension in preparation for reading at higher grade levels. The results of the studies support the need for providing in-school time in middle school classrooms for independent reading.

Instructional activities for supporting students' independence in reading development. Classroom practices centered around independent reading make a difference in students' independent reading habits and successes. Routman (2016) is a staunch proponent of daily, in-school independent reading time for developing reading success in students. Daily in-school independent reading time is supported with classroom practices, such as teachers coaching students on self-selecting books, teachers modeling comprehension strategies for students to practice while independent reading, conferences and conversations between teachers and students about books, and book talks by teachers and students (Hudson & Williams, 2015; Noortyani, 2018; Serravallo, 2017). Pruzinsky (2014), an International Baccalaureate English teacher, believed in and supported building a reading culture in the classroom, no matter what level a teacher taught.

In classrooms where an independent reading program is successfully implemented, teachers set forth with a plan of action (Pruzinsky, 2014). Pruzinsky's (2014) reading plan of action for his high school English students consisted of 15 minutes

every class for reading, students hearing book talks every single class, conducting reading conferences with as many students as possible each class, students setting reading goals, a classroom library, and a comfortable reading area in the classroom. In their qualitative study of three second grade teachers, Brannan and Giles (2018) found that the second grade teachers in their study believed the quantity of time students got to read daily was an essential part of an independent reading plan. This included the quality of what students were reading, which was determined when teachers conferenced with students as part of their classroom independent reading plans (Brannan & Giles, 2018). Reutzell and Juth (2014) developed a framework for Grade 3 through Grade 6 based on research to support the plan of providing time to read, having a supportive reading environment, engaging students in what they are reading through choice, and providing scaffolds through teacher conferences with students.

Libraries and librarians can also have an impact on students' independent reading habits. Flowers (2017), a high school English teacher, worked in conjunction with her school library and librarian to grow and nurture her students' independent reading lives. Book access and the commitment of her librarian made a significant difference in ensuring that all her students found just the right book to read (Flowers, 2017). Webster (2017), a sixth grade English teacher, contributed the success of her school's independent reading program to the support of their school librarian. Library circulation increased at Webster's middle school due to an increase in relevant and popular book titles the librarian sought out after observing students' reading habits more closely (Webster, 2017). When serving as a middle school librarian, Grigsby (2014) worked with her

middle school students to foster independence with book selection and focused on student interests to connect students to literature. Through Grigsby's support, students were playing an active role in their learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). Loosvelt (2015) worked with her school principal, other school librarians, and teachers within her high school to find time in the busy high school schedule for independent reading. Having the support of a school librarian acting as an additional adult guide for students can help to build a schoolwide community of readers.

Assessing independent reading development. While teachers' assessment of students' reading development varies, the goal is to use assessment to inform instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development. Teachers implementing independent reading in their classrooms may assess students' reading growth and development through student conferences, students' written responses in journals, and standardized reading assessments (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Hudson & Williams, 2015; Kern & Bean, 2018; Pruzinsky, 2014; Serravallo, 2017). Reading response activities assess students' ability to implement skills taught in class lessons or during individual teacher and student conferences (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Sanden, 2014; Serravallo, 2017). Independent reading assessments assist teachers in scaffolding instruction based on their observations of student progress (van Rijk et al., 2017).

A commonly used program in schools called Accelerated Reader is an assessment tool and an estimate of student reading growth. Students take literal comprehension quizzes based on their independent reading and earn points if they pass the

comprehension quiz (Foster & Foster, 2014). Topping (2017) found that the more points and higher word counts students earned in Accelerated Reader, the better they performed on a standardized reading comprehension assessment.

What is observed during independent reading time in a classroom and the culture built into the classroom environment provide the true assessment of independent reading success and help guide ELA classroom instruction (Jang, Conradi, McKenna, & Jones, 2015; Kern & Bean, 2018). In a classroom where students have free choice of books to read, time is set aside daily to read as part of the ELA curriculum, students engage in their books and are motivated to continue reading, conversations with classmates and teachers about books happens regularly, and teachers act as adult guides to scaffold reading development through teacher-student conferences. Cognitive growth requires social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). This is a classroom where students are highly likely to develop and grow as readers (Hudson & Williams, 2015; Moses & Kelly, 2018). Student reading motivation and engagement can also be assessed.

Reading Motivation

Beyond the efforts of teachers, administrators, and schools is the underlying concept of student motivation. Teachers' knowledge of what motivates students to read, based on students' values, goals, and beliefs, can unlock students' reading potential (Groenke, 2017; Merga & Moon, 2016). Motivated students play an active role in their learning (Vygotsky, 1978). According to the teens in Wilhelm and Smith's (2016a, 2016b) studies, pleasure contributes significantly to teens' reading motivation. Rather than trying to motivate students, teachers must consider the students' motivations

(Groenke, 2017; Ivey, 2015), or points of reading pleasure (Hudson & Williams, 2015). Of the eighth graders interviewed, four different kinds of pleasure through reading were discovered: “play, intellectual, social, and work” (Hudson & Williams, 2015, p. 27). When we play, we are experimenting with our ZPD, as outlined by Vygotsky (1978). The role-playing aspect of reading helps young readers navigate their ZPD and grow as readers (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016a). Through each of these pleasure domains applied to the students’ personal life journeys, teachers can support students’ reading pleasures by providing choice and by leveraging for students to use what they read by asking questions that encourage responses from within (Groenke, 2017; Hudson & Williams, 2015; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016a, 2016b).

Social motivators to read. Students’ social lives are intertwined with their academic lives, and often their motivators and pleasures are significant in bringing value and substance to their education. Students have been observed feeding off of each other’s reading motivation, such as when excitement about a book is shared among classmates or peers (Chiu, Chow, & Joh, 2017; Hudson, 2016). Classmates who model positive attitudes toward reading serve as motivators to peers who may lack the same motivation to read independently (Chiu et al., 2017). When given reading choice, students choose books to read that connect to their lives socially and bring them pleasure or understanding, which in turn allows students to apply meaningful conversations from what they are reading with their peers and their teachers (Aerila & Merisuo-Storm, 2017; Hudson & Williams, 2015; Ivey, 2015; Miller, 2015; Mitchell, 2016; Wilhelm, 2016). Students’ reading choices could stretch to include digital and audio copies of books to

meet a variety of reading preferences and needs (Loh & Sun, 2018; Mitchell, 2016).

Access to e-reader technology serves as a strong motivator for some adolescents, and e-reading devices provide scaffolding support for students when an adult is not available (Mitchell, 2016). Without pleasure, personal connection, cultural connection, or social connection, reading is without meaning, and motivators disappear (Gambrell, 2015; Wilhelm, 2016).

Teacher and classroom practices serve as motivators to read. Teachers and the practices they carry out in their classrooms are distinct indicators of reading motivators for students (Gambrell, 2015; Merga & Moon, 2016; Neugebauer & Fujimoto, 2018; Noortyani, 2018). In studies of adolescents' recreational reading habits and intrinsic reading motivation, student results showed that teacher excitement about books, teacher interest in reading, and teacher recommendation of books served as motivating factors for students to read (Merga, 2015; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016a). Providing a structure of required reading at home and at school, with a de-emphasis on testing coupled with teacher support through guidance and feedback, were also found to be motivating factors for students (De Naeghel et al., 2014; Merga, 2015; Merga & Moon, 2016). Students were motivated to read when their teachers showed investment in their social relationships and their personal interests (De Naeghel et al., 2014). Multiple levels of involvement and support lead to students' motivation to read and students who are motivated readers.

Motivated readers will not only read in school, but they will also read outside of school. By raising reading volume in school, providing access to books of interest and

relevance, centering classroom discussions around books, and sharing about books through book talks, teachers can develop a culture around reading that results in students reading more outside of school (Aerila & Merisuo-Storm, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Gambrell, 2015; Hudson, 2016; Merga & Moon, 2016). Teachers who maintained continued support of the four components observed a significant impact on students' academics and an increase in the number of books students were reading (Fisher & Frey, 2018). Families indicated that students were reading more due to the change in the classroom set forth by teachers. Mitchell (2016) found that both access to reading material and choice of the reading material outside of school also determined adolescent motivation to read.

Assessing student reading motivation. Jang et al. (2015) concluded that six factors—attitude, interests, value, self-efficacy, self-concept, and goals—move or motivate students to read. The factors that motivate students to read can be assessed in two different ways, through reactive assessments and through nonreactive assessments (Jang et al., 2015). Reactive assessments require students to self-report and are quick and easy for teachers to assess. One reactive tool that teachers could use to determine students' motivation to read is the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile survey (Groenke, 2017). This adaptation of the more elementary focused Motivation to Read Profile consists of a 20-question, group-administered survey and a 14-item interview administered in a one-on-one conversation setting with a teacher and a student (Groenke, 2017). According to beginning ELA teachers who used the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile with high school students, the results were varied, with some inconsistencies

to observations that the teachers were also making in the classroom regarding students' reading habits (Groenke, 2017). Nonreactive ways to assess students include teacher observations of students and teacher assessment of student reading journals (Jang et al., 2015). Determining student motivation can assist teachers in predicting students' level of engagement in reading (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017). Motivating students to read and motivators for students to read include many factors that teachers must consider when determining what instructional strategies to implement in their classrooms to guide student growth and independence in reading development.

Developing reading growth through motivation. Students who are not reading on grade level or who struggle to gain reading independence can develop reading motivation that will support their independent reading growth. When determining appropriate reading interventions to support reading growth, in addition to a focus on reading skills, teachers should also spend time finding ways to motivate students to read (van Bergen et al., 2018). While it is common that children who do not read well tend to read less and that children who read well are more likely to read more, it is vital that teachers develop supportive strategies in the classroom to motivate their students to read (van Bergen et al., 2018). The three pillars of cognitive growth—social interaction, support of a knowledgeable teacher, and the student's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978)—are best supported during independent reading by student motivation.

Barriers to Implementing Independent Reading

To be fair to teachers, there exist barriers to implementing an independent reading program effectively. As far back as 2013, Krashen investigated barriers to independent

reading and found that access to interesting books and time to read are vital to literacy development, especially for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or who are living in poverty (Krashen, 2013). Common core standards, however, contributed to funding loss for school libraries, and standardized tests contributed to less time spent independently reading for pleasure. Students need to spend time reading to become proficient, lifelong readers, and teachers must find time during class to allocate for independent reading (Reutzler & Juth, 2014; Williams, 2017). Dedicating time daily for independent reading is a challenge in packed middle school ELA curricula, which include increased demands on high-stakes standardized testing and state-mandated curriculum requirements, coupled with a lack of focus on reading for pleasure (Manuel & Carter, 2015; Radlauer, 2017; Rutherford, Merga, & Singleton, 2018; Scholastic, 2016b; Whitten et al., 2016). Integration of common core standards requires teachers to invest significant time in their instruction and curriculum to effectively align student learning to the new standards (Nadelson & Jones, 2016). Teachers must constantly work to bridge the gap between new instructional policies, reforms, initiatives, and effective classroom practices (Woulfin, 2015).

In the *Teacher & Principal School Report: Focus on Literacy* (Scholastic, 2016b), 94% of 4,700 public school Pre-K through Grade 12 teachers and principals surveyed throughout the United States felt that students should have time during the day to read a book of choice independently. Ninety-one percent of New York educators agreed that students should have time set aside to read independently a book of their choice (Scholastic, 2016a). An overwhelming percentage of teachers and Pre-K through Grade

12 principals found value in providing students at all grade levels time during the school day to read independently a book of choice. While more than three-quarters of the teachers surveyed did set time aside in school for students to read independently, less than half set time aside for students to read independently on a daily basis (Scholastic, 2016b).

Of the teachers surveyed nationwide, more than half wished there was more time for independent reading in school, but felt curriculum demands and mandates were the primary barrier to providing daily time for independent reading (Scholastic, 2016b). Additional barriers are that some teachers felt that independent reading was not considered an important use of class time, lack of books that appeal to students or not enough books, and not knowing how to best incorporate independent reading time into instruction (Scholastic, 2016b). Of the principals surveyed, many wished that more time was available in the school day for independent reading (Scholastic, 2016b).

The National Reading Panel (2000) cast a shadow over in-school independent reading practices for many years. As teachers move away from the practices of sustained silent reading, which the National Reading Panel conclusions were based upon, and toward structured independent reading programs, support for in-school independent reading grows. Independent reading programs that focus on teachers acting as adult guides by conferencing with students and providing support through activities that hold readers accountable encourage students' growth as lifelong readers (Sanden, 2014). New York State Next Generation ELA Standards (2017) have a newfound focus toward developing Pre-K through Grade 12 students into lifelong readers and writers. The

support in this document may be the reinforcement that middle school ELA teachers need to begin implementing independent reading programs consistently as part of their ELA curricula. Woulfin (2015) found that what teachers implemented most regarding new school policy, reform, and initiatives was determined by how much professional support and emphasis was provided about certain policies, reforms, and initiatives. Reform in Pre-K through Grade 12 curricula is complex and requires extensive professional development support for educators in order for educators to make meaningful shifts at the classroom level (Asunda, Finnell, & Berry, 2015; Nadelson & Jones, 2016). Teachers in New York State want more ongoing, effective, and relevant professional development opportunities (Scholastic, 2016a). Possessing an openness for change is necessary to begin the reform process.

Principals' and Administrators' Supporting Role

School culture, set by teachers, principals, and other staff and administrators, contributes to students' motivation to read and to fostering a lifelong love of reading (Francois, 2015). Louick, Leider, Daley, Proctor, and Gardner (2016) conducted a mixed methods study with struggling middle school readers between two different sites. Students' socioeconomic status was not found to be predictive of students' growth, leading the researchers to conclude that students' school environment likely plays a role in students' reading comprehension development, positively or negatively. Researchers determined the need for teachers to offer students a multidimensional approach to reading and that school environment plays a role in students' affect and performance (Louick et al., 2016). Dr. Chantal Francois (2015), a literacy coach and 10th grade English teacher,

through student and teacher interviews, learned that a school can shape students' motivation to read and students' reading identities. The involvement of the entire school in the independent reading program shaped students' view of the school and developed a strong reading culture.

In addition to the teachers, the principal has a role in the reading lives of his or her students (Francois, 2015). In 1989, Sanacore wrote about how the principal of a school serves as a key component for creating a positive professional attitude toward independent reading. Administrators and teachers must work together to create a positive environment where students will want to read in school (Loosvelt, 2015; Sanacore, 1989, 1994). Staff development efforts and supervision are two key components of successfully adopting effective school reading cultures (Sanacore, 1989). District leaders and administrators can support teachers' implementation by providing professional learning opportunities and time within the curriculum or daily schedule for independent reading (Loosvelt, 2015; Woulfin, 2015).

Implications

The limitations and challenges that teachers face when developing ELA curricula are well established in current research (Raney, 2015; Routman, 2017; Whitten et al., 2016; Woulfin, 2015). Teachers' ability to design, implement, follow, and enhance ELA curricula with students' best learning interests in mind varies widely. The purpose of this study was to explore fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. Using a qualitative case study methodology, I gathered data from participants through interviews. Based on the findings, the district

will be able to ascertain teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. The findings may provide stakeholders and district administrators the guidance needed to create professional development options that will enhance teachers' ability to implement independent reading in the fifth grade through eighth grade ELA curriculum. Based on the findings in this study, I developed a professional development training for stakeholders and district administrators to implement with middle school teachers. The professional development training focuses on providing middle school teachers the tools and knowledge to foster students' independence in reading development. This professional learning option also focuses on establishing independent reading activities to support and scaffold student learning, assisting teachers in evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of such activities, and assisting teachers in developing ELA lessons that gradually allow students to accept individual responsibility for the activities (van Rijk et al., 2017; Vygotsky, 1978).

Summary

In Section 1, I introduced the local problem that little is known about fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum and introduced a conceptual framework based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social and cognitive development. In addition to the overview, Section 1 included evidence of the problem from the professional literature and at the local level. In the literature review, I connected the broad problem to the local problem of a rural middle school in the Northeast United States. Focus points of the literature review included shifts from sustained silent reading to independent reading and teachers' experiences using

independent reading. I discussed instructional activities for supporting students' independence in reading development and ways to assess independent reading. I also discussed reading motivation, barriers to implementing independent reading, and the supporting role of principals and administrators. Throughout Section 1, I reference several implications of the potential study. In Section 2, I describe my methodology through the research approach, design, participants, data collection, and data analysis methods.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

In this qualitative case study, I aimed to explore fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. A case study provides an in-depth investigation into the research questions (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). This case study helped me identify teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. The research questions focused on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development within the social interactions of a mentor, or adult guide, who scaffolds cognitive growth and learning. With the first research question, I looked to gain information about how teachers implemented their instruction in order to build a strong scaffolded approach for learning reading independence that will develop students' reading growth. The second research question seeks information about teachers' ongoing support for growth during independent reading, with a goal for the student to master grade level reading. The final research question seeks information on how teachers use formative and summative assessment data to monitor the cognitive growth that occurs when students practice reading at the independent level. The goal of this case study was to gain a broader understanding of Grade 5 through Grade 8 teachers' experiences in using independent reading in the ELA curriculum.

The research questions developed by the researcher are the glue that binds all aspects of the qualitative research design together (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The descriptive and explanatory type research questions of this study supported a qualitative

study, rather than an experimental quantitative study that is testing a theory (Burkholder et al., 2016). Quantitative research focuses on a relationship between variables and requires numerical data, which is not the focus of this study (Thomas, 2013). The purpose of qualitative research is to explore and describe a phenomenon through observation and research (Burkholder et al., 2016). While all qualitative research is descriptive in nature, the type of descriptive research varies (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Case studies provide a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through an in-depth investigation of multiple data sources (Burkholder et al., 2016). A case study is used for this study as it allows for an in-depth explanation of Grade 5 through Grade 8 teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. For this study, I assumed the role of nonparticipant observer, unlike an ethnographic researcher who becomes immersed in the culture of study (Burkholder et al., 2016). The participant teachers in this study were from one location, unlike phenomenological studies, where many teachers from multiple locations would be interviewed in order to develop themes around the shared experiences of the group (Burkholder et al., 2016). The focus of this study was to develop a deep understanding of fifth grade through eighth grade ELA teachers' practices using independent reading at one setting. A narrative study is meant to tell the chronological story of a participant's life, which would not provide an in-depth explanation of teachers' experiences in using independent reading in the ELA curriculum (Burkholder et al., 2016).

The research questions were based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development within the social interactions of a mentor who scaffolds cognitive growth

and learning. I developed descriptive questions because I sought to describe fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences with independent reading curricula. Data were collected in the natural setting, a commonality of qualitative research (Burkholder et al., 2016). I used interviews and meeting minutes for extensive data collection at the school to paint a comprehensive picture of teachers' experiences, a distinct feature of case studies (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Participants

This single case study took place in one middle school. Falcon Middle School is a Grade 5 through Grade 8 school located in the Peregrine School District in the Northeast. Falcon Middle School is a Title I, high-poverty school, with 645 students for the 2016-2017 school year. Of these students, 96% are White and more than half of the total students are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Purposeful sampling is a criterion that is frequently used in qualitative case studies. Purposeful sampling is implemented in qualitative research, as opposed to random probability sampling used in quantitative studies, because purposeful sampling provides context-rich and detailed accounts of a specification population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In qualitative studies, participants are purposefully selected because they can answer the research questions of the specific qualitative study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study included one type of participant: certified teachers from Falcon Middle School. The participant pool of the study was 21 Grade 5 through Grade 8 teachers who taught at least one ELA class. I selected the teachers from Falcon Middle School because

it is the only middle school in the Peregrine School District. I invited ELA teachers from Falcon Middle School who had taught at least one ELA class at Falcon Middle School the past 2 consecutive years or more to participate in the study. Teachers who had taught at least one ELA class at Falcon Middle School the past 2 consecutive years or more would have been invited to attend the 1-day Donalyn Miller workshop, which the assistant superintendent organized at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year. Miller's presentation was focused on the integration of independent reading in the ELA curriculum. The participant pool of 21 Grade 5 through Grade 8 teachers at Falcon Middle School could provide context-rich and detailed accounts about their experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum.

Justification for Number of Participants

Participation from the participant pool was not 100%, but this provided me fruitful time with each of the nine participants who consented to the study. The goal of purposeful sampling and qualitative research is not to generalize; the number of consenting participants is not as significant as in quantitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The goal of qualitative research is to gather enough data to answer the developed research questions with a complex and multi-perspective understanding of the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Of the 21 teachers invited, 11 teachers returned the recruitment flyer stating possible interest in participation in the study. Of the 11 teachers who returned recruitment flyers stating interest in the study, nine returned the consent form agreeing to participate in the study. The nine teacher participants all taught in one or more ELA classes for 2 or

more years. All four grade levels were represented, with four of the participating teachers identifying as teaching more than one grade level. Four teachers identified as teaching fifth grade, three teachers identified as teaching sixth grade, four teachers identified as teaching seventh grade, and four teachers identified as teaching eighth grade. Five of the nine teachers identified as general education teachers, and the other four teachers identified as special education teachers. I interviewed all nine teachers to gain an understanding of middle school ELA teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. The interviews provided first-hand knowledge and perspectives of Falcon Middle School teachers' experiences using independent reading in their ELA classes. A participant chart is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Study Participants

Participant	Grade	General education or special education
I1	7, 8	Special education
I2	5, 6	Special education
I3	8	General education
I4	5	General education
I5	6	General education
I6	5	Special education
I7	5, 6, 7, 8	Special education
I8	7	General education
I9	7, 8	General education
	Grade	<i>n</i>
	5	4
	6	3
Totals	7	4
	8	4
	General education	5
	Special education	4

IRB Permission and Obtaining Participants

Before conducting the study, I obtained permission from Walden University IRB (Walden University approval number 11-12-19-0653747), ensuring that the research procedures were ethical for my study. Any risk factors associated with this study were identified and addressed during the IRB application process to ensure minimal risk to the participants in the study. To ensure the protection from harm to any participants in the proposed study, I submitted a copy of my certificate for the National Institutes of Health training course with my IRB application. I obtained a signed approval through a letter of cooperation from the assistant superintendent of Peregrine School District, which was included with the IRB application. In a meeting with the assistant superintendent, I addressed the purpose of the study, the time required with participants, the use of data

and results, the possible benefits to the school district, and the ways in which participants would be protected. The assistant superintendent requested that the participant recruitment flyer be shared with her prior to placing the flyers in potential participants' school mailboxes and that the final results of the study be shared. The participating school district had no other requirements. I did meet with the principal of the participating school to notify her of the study and when it would be conducted. I shared the participant recruitment flyer and consent form with the principal of Falcon Middle School at that time.

Once IRB and school district approval were obtained, the study began. A mail distributor at Falcon Middle School placed an envelope with a recruitment flyer in the school mailbox of each teacher in the participant pool, which included a clear explanation of the study. All 21 potential participants received an envelope with the flyer on a Monday morning, with a return request of Friday of that week. The flyer contained a brief overview of my research goals, a statement about the voluntary nature of the study, a list of the requirements for participation, and my contact information, if the potential participant had any questions or concerns (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). If any of the potential participants were interested in participating in the study, they were asked to respond to me within a 1 work week period by placing the bottom portion of the flyer in a specific envelope in the school mailroom. Only those who were interested were asked to return the form. Within the 1 work week time period, potential participants had time to ask questions and voice objections or concerns about aspects of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Once confirmation was received, I emailed each of the interested participants the

consent form. Each interested participant was provided one week to ask questions and return the signed consent form. Of the 11 participants who returned the recruitment flyer, nine signed and returned the consent form to participate in the study.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

To establish a researcher-participant relationship, I ensured the participants understood the goals of the study, how data were to be collected, confidentiality, and ethical issues (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The information in the recruitment flyer and the consent form made it clear that I hold a dual role as both a researcher and a colleague to the consenting participants, as I work in the same school district. I explained in the informed consent form that my obligations were to conduct, review, and personally transcribe the interview. To maintain transparency with participants, I explained that they were required to participate in a 30-minute to 1-hour interview, depending on the participant's schedule. I also explained that they would be asked to participate in a transcript review process to verify the accuracy of my interpretation of the data. The process was described to take approximately 15 minutes of the participant's time. Participants had 1 week to contact me and ask questions prior to signing and returning the informed consent form.

When working with the consenting participants, I made all contact and requests by email to be as unobtrusive as possible. Participants determined where and when they would like the interview conducted. Eight out of the nine participants chose to do the interview in my classroom. Through common professional bonds shared between myself and the participants, I was able to establish a rapport that was carried out during the

interviews and transcript review procedures. We all share a common goal as educators in our school district to see our middle school students grow as readers.

Prior to beginning each interview, I reviewed the goals and purpose of my study with each participant. I reminded each participant that the interview would be audio recorded and later transcribed by me. As the interviewer, I made every attempt to maintain a balance of mutual engagement during the interview, while also being non-judgmental of the participants' responses to the interview questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). At the culmination of each interview, I thanked each participant and also followed up with an email of thanks to show my gratitude for their participation.

Protection of Participants' Rights

In the consent form, I presented measures that were taken for the protection of participants' rights, including confidentiality, previously discussed informed consent, and protection from harm. In the consent form, I informed participants that all data collected would be kept confidential by replacing names with numbers and that all location names would be changed and replaced with pseudonyms. I explained that all data would be kept on a secure personal computer or locked in a personal home file cabinet and maintained for five years. After five years, the data will be destroyed by permanently deleting all information kept on the secure personal computer and cross shredding all documents kept in the locked cabinet. I discussed and disclosed any risks and benefits to participants. I reminded participants that their participation in the study was voluntary, and they were free to change their mind at any time during the study without any consequences by stopping participation, and they would then be removed from the study.

Data Collection

For this qualitative case study, I conducted interviews and reviewed official documents in the form of ELA meeting minutes as data for collection. These forms of data collection led me to look at the topics of focus from different angles and to utilize different methods for considering the data (Thomas, 2013). In-person participant interviews provide the interviewer an opportunity to relate to the interviewees (Thomas, 2013). In interviews, the researcher has the opportunity to establish rapport with the participant and can watch for nuances of behavior, which can give important clues as to how participants feel about a topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Thomas, 2013). Interviews conducted well can provide deep, rich, and individualized information that help to understand multiple individual perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I performed the participant recruitment process, interviews, and transcript reviews over the course of a 10-week time period.

Data Collection Instruments

Individual interviews gave fifth grade through eighth grade teachers the opportunity to describe in depth their processes and experiences using independent reading. I developed and used a semi-structured interview protocol to guide the interview, while maintaining flexibility to follow up on certain points, as deemed necessary. Structured interviews would be limiting in scope. Unstructured interviews are suited best for interpretive research where the participants would set the scene, which may not address the research questions (Thomas, 2013). I developed the interview protocol from interview questions used in a previous study. I requested and was granted permission to

use the questions by the National Council of Teachers of English. I developed additional interview questions based on the ILA's guidelines set for independent reading. In the consent form participants signed prior to interview participation, I included a statement regarding the use of an audio recorder. All participants consented to the use of an audio-recording device during the interviews when signing the consent form agreeing to participate in the study. The audio-recorded interviews were then used to transcribe the interviews.

Official documents, by means of ELA department meeting minutes, added to understanding of the formal and organizational context of the topic of study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Falcon Middle School ELA department meeting minutes are public documents and were provided by the ELA department chairperson. A document review protocol developed with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social and cognitive development in mind helped inform the data analysis of the meeting minutes.

Data Collection Processes

A school mail distributor placed recruitment forms in manila envelopes in each possible participant's school mailbox. The participant pool consisted of all Grade 5 through Grade 8 ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School at the time of recruitment. The total number of teachers in the participant pool was 21. Those who were willing to volunteer to participate were considered based on the parameters of the study. I considered ELA department members who indicated that he or she had taught at least one ELA class in the last 2 school years valid for participation in the study. Of those teachers who returned a recruitment flyer showing interest in participating in the study, I sent a

consent form via email. Each interested participant indicated an email address on the returned recruitment form to use for the duration of the study. Email was an unobtrusive way to communicate with participants and allowed me to establish a rapport going forth with the study.

Interested teachers had 1 week from the time they received the consent form to review it and return it to the researcher signed. Once a consent form was received, I then began working with the teacher via my Walden University email to schedule the interview location and time. After the consent form was signed and returned, the interview was scheduled based on participant availability within a specific time period provided by the researcher. All one-on-one interviews took place in the participant's location of choice, either prior to work hours, during the participant's lunch period, or after work hours, depending on each participant's personal preference. Eight out of the nine teachers participating in the study chose my classroom for their interviews. All interviews took no more than 30 minutes of each participant's time.

Participants were asked in the signed consent form for permission to audio record the interviews. I personally transcribed the audio-recorded interviews after the interviews were conducted. The written transcripts are vital to rigorous data collection and analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While the interview was taking place, I took notes of behaviors that gave additional clues about how the participants felt about particular topics (Thomas, 2013). Participants' names were replaced with numbers, transcripts were assigned numbers, each transcript page had a page number, and each transcript line was numbered.

After transcription of each participant's interview, I asked the participant to review his or her interview findings through a transcript review process. I provided each participant 1 week to review the findings. Each participant performed a transcript review of his or her interview transcript to offer comments, feedback, and a review for accuracy. Of the nine interviews, six participants did not make any changes, two participants made minor changes for clarification, and one participant requested the research questions when reviewing and did add to the transcript.

Data Tracking System

I used fieldwork and data collection memos to record observations and reflections about various parts of my study. Engaging in memo writing throughout the duration of a study helps maintain focus on emerging understandings and also helps to make sense of the data collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I kept fieldwork research journals as a means to record personal thoughts, questions, and ideas about the study and research processes. I kept research logs to track any adjustments or changes made to the research methods and processes, with entries dated.

Access to Participants

I selected the participants based on their willingness to volunteer for the study. The district assistant superintendent and the school principal provided access to the participants. I obtained a signed letter of cooperation from the assistant superintendent following a meeting with the assistant superintendent explaining the study and answering questions about the study. Once the assistant superintendent approved the study, I met

with my building principal to explain the goals and purpose of the study and the needs related to teacher participants.

Immediately after obtaining permission to conduct the research from the IRB, a mail distributor at Falcon Middle School delivered a participant pool flyer to each of the 21 ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School via each teacher's school mailbox. As flyers of interest were returned, I emailed consent forms to each interested teacher. After I revealed full disclosure of the study and the purpose of the study, the interested teachers signed letters of consent. The teachers who consented to volunteer in the study worked with me to determine an interview time and location that would best meet their scheduling needs. The goal of the individual interviews was to give teachers the opportunity to describe in depth their processes and experiences using independent reading.

Role of the Researcher

At the research setting, I have been employed as a teacher for 14 years. Of the possible participants, some will have worked longer at the research setting than me and some will have been employed less years at the research setting than me. I do not hold, and have never held, a supervisory role in relation to any of the participants in this study. As a reading teacher and a past special education teacher at Falcon Middle School, I do have an interest in students' reading growth. For this case study, I acted as an outside researcher to learn about fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in ELA classrooms. Mapping out a researcher identity memo helped me determine where my biases were, so I could address or avoid these biases throughout

the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I made known my dual role as researcher and employee of the same school district as the consenting teachers in the participant pool flyer and in the participant consent form.

Data Analysis

In this study, I used two forms of data collection tools, teacher interviews and analysis of ELA meeting minutes, to obtain two sets of rich data. One data source was teacher interview transcripts, which I transcribed from the interview audio files following the interviews. Another rich data source were the ELA meeting minutes provided by the Falcon Middle School ELA department chairperson. I analyzed the two sets of data through multiple phases of reading, rereading, organizing, reorganizing, and sorting in order to synthesize the data for interpretation and to draw conclusions.

Yin (2016) suggests a cycle for working with qualitative research data. Phase 1 is the compilation of data into a database for organizing. Within this phase, trends or themes may seem evident. Phase 2 is a step of disassembling the data and coding all the formal data. Phase 3, reassembling, allows researchers to understand the patterns that are found within the data. Phase 4 is interpreting the data. Phase 5 is drawing conclusions (Yin, 2016).

Data analysis of ELA meeting minutes and participant interviews took place once all interviews had been conducted (Yin, 2016). After I interviewed the participants, I transcribed each audio file into written text. I read the transcription again while the audio file was playing to ensure accuracy. I assigned a number to each transcript and removed participant names, included page numbers on each page, and numbered each line on the

pages (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I saved the data on a password-protected computer in two separate file folders. One folder remained as raw data and another file folder was working data (Thomas, 2013).

The first analysis of the data was through a precoding process. During precoding, I read through the data, questioning and engaging with the data to familiarize myself with the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2016). After precoding, I marked the transcribed interview data with inductive codes in the form of abbreviations, names, marks, and colors (Thomas, 2013) that were based on the Vygotskian theory of social and cognitive development centered around scaffolding, teacher support, assessment, and growth. I used descriptive coding to analyze the meeting minutes, rather than an inductive or in vivo coding process I used with the interview transcripts. Descriptive coding was used to provide a detailed inventory of the meeting minute contents (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo coding was a better suited method for the interviews in order to focus specifically on the participants' perspectives. The goal of the coding process was to emerge with themes that capture and summarize the data and to recognize patterns that help to create categories from the themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Thomas, 2013; Yin, 2016).

Coding Procedures

The coding process occurred in phases, or cycles. I employed a first cycle coding method of descriptive coding for the meeting minute documents in order to gain a detailed inventory of the content of the documents (Saldaña, 2016). I used in vivo coding when first cycle coding the interview documents, with a focus on participant perspectives

and actions (Saldaña, 2016). To aid with transition to second cycle coding, I employed code mapping to organize codes and to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis (Saldaña, 2016). A recoding, or second cycle of coding, took place after code mapping. Axial coding occurred after first cycle coding using the categories derived from the themes to determine interconnectedness (Burkholder et al., 2016). The process of axial coding helped define the dominant codes and the less dominant codes (Saldaña, 2016). The final stage was the process of synthesizing all the information into a cohesive understanding of the topic related to the phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016; Yin, 2016).

Evidence of Quality of Procedures

Ravitch and Carl (2016) described establishing credibility by using more than one source for data collection, presenting thick description, discussion of discrepant cases, and the use of peer debriefers or reviewers. To assure accuracy and credibility of the findings, transcript reviews helped me to check my assumptions and to ensure internal validity. I returned interview transcripts to the participants to check their own data for accuracy. I employed the transcript review process during the research process as a participant validation strategy (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked participants to conduct a transcript review of their own personal interview transcripts to check for accuracy of my interpretation of each individual participant's data and asked participants if my interpretation in the transcripts resonated with them (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I secured the assistance of a peer reviewer to check for logical development of coding and theme

development for findings. The goal of sharing my research with another peer was to challenge my interpretations of the research process and data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

To ensure credibility, a method of validity suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016) is the use of multiple sources of data. By collecting data from interviews and archived documents, establishing a system to track the data, and using transcript reviews to verify the interview data, I satisfied the validity criteria described by Ravitch & Carl (2016). I collected data from the participant interviews and the archived meeting minutes, recorded and identified the data collected, and had all participants review their own interview transcripts.

The findings from this study might be transferable (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) or helpful to other middle schools that have low student reading scores or who implement independent reading programs in middle school ELA classes. These schools might be able to transfer the insights and information provided from the perspectives of the participating teachers at this middle school and implement them at their schools. There are other middle schools in the area with similar reading struggles and independent reading programs that could benefit from the insights gained from this study to help improve the academic success of their students. This study could also help in identifying ways to improve independent reading programs in ELA classrooms. The context of the study has been clearly described in a way that readers and stakeholders would be able to transfer results to similar contexts.

Discrepant Cases

If discrepancies between my interpretation and my participants' interpretation of the data had occurred and could not have been resolved, then both interpretations would be presented with commentary in the final analysis of my paper (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Discrepancies that occurred when transcript review took place were resolved. Evidence that challenged the findings served as a tool to help confront any preconceived notions and themes that were being developed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The more that is challenged and questioned adds to the complexity of my interpretations of the data.

Data Analysis Results

Data were generated through the interviews of ELA teaching staff of a rural, underprivileged, Grade 5 through Grade 8 middle school and were focused on teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. Data were also gathered through ELA meeting minutes provided by an ELA chairperson. I recorded data using the study protocols, and the processes included the use of the study tools. Tools included the participant pool flyer, participant consent form, interview protocol, and a document review protocol. I audio recorded interviews and then transcribed for data analysis. I recorded data observations and reflections in fieldwork research journals. The overall process of interview data generation, data gathering, and data recording included delivering hard copies of participant recruitment forms to potential teacher participants, emailing participant consent forms to teachers interested in participating in the study, obtaining hard copies of signed consent forms from teachers, selecting voluntary teacher participants, scheduling interviews with teacher participants, conducting interviews with

consenting teachers, having participants participate in the transcript review process, and obtaining peer reviewer feedback.

I sorted the data analyzed from interview transcripts and ELA meeting minutes into patterns and categories that eventually developed into themes. I used typed files and handwritten files to keep track of the data during analysis. I manually performed coding for both the interview transcripts and the meeting minutes over several rounds. I used descriptive coding to provide a detailed inventory of the meeting minute contents (Saldaña, 2016). I used in vivo coding with the interview transcripts in order to focus on participant perspectives and actions, verbatim (Saldaña, 2016). Following first cycle coding of the meeting minutes and the interview transcripts, I employed axial coding to help determine the dominant versus the less dominant codes (Saldaña, 2016). I analyzed data based on the Vygotskian theory of social and cognitive development centered around scaffolding, teacher support, assessment, and growth.

My goal was to obtain data to address the purpose of my study and to use the findings to determine ways middle school ELA teachers can best use independent reading in their curriculum to support student growth as readers and develop reading independence. The findings are related to three research questions:

RQ1: How do ELA teachers implement instructional activities that lead students to develop reading independence?

RQ2: How are ELA teachers scaffolding reading levels of growth during independent reading in the ELA curriculum?

RQ3: How does assessment data inform ELA teachers' instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development?

Coding Processes

I used different coding processes for the analyses of the ELA meeting minutes and the transcribed interviews. The coding processes were determined based on the different data sets. Descriptive coding, used in the first cycle of coding the meeting minutes, provided a detailed inventory of the data, while in vivo coding (see Appendix B), used in the first cycle of coding the interview transcripts, focused on direct quotes that supplied participant perspectives and kept the data rooted in each participant's own language (Saldaña, 2016). From the initial in vivo codes that were determined from each of the three research questions, I derived descriptive codes (see Appendix C). Descriptive codes were determined from each participants' in vivo codes for each of the three research questions. From the descriptive codes, I employed the process of axial coding to determine the dominant codes (see Appendix D). I used code mapping to map the codes from both data sets and axial coding in later cycles of coding both data sets to determine interconnectedness and to define dominant and less dominant codes (Saldaña, 2016). From the dominant codes, I identified and determined each of the themes.

Meeting minutes. I analyzed ELA meeting minutes provided by a Falcon Middle School ELA chairperson once all interviews were conducted, but prior to analyzing the transcribed interviews. These included ELA meeting minutes from the 2018-2019 school year and the first half of the 2019 school year up until the date that the interviews began. The timeframe of the meeting minutes was determined based on when teachers attended

the workshop where Donalyn Miller presented, which was on the second day of the 2018-2019 school year. All ELA teachers interviewed, unless sick or given other directives by administrators on the day of the workshop, were required to attend the presentation about independent reading implementation in the ELA curriculum. All identifiers were removed from the meeting minutes prior to coding.

As the meeting minutes were prepared for the first cycle of coding, I observed that of the 11 different recorded meetings from September 2018 to December 2019, three different agenda formats were used. From September 2018 to December 2019, three different chairpersons developed the supplied meeting minutes. One chairperson left the district to go to another school district and one chairperson went on maternity leave. Each agenda contained a range of items discussed. Although identifiers were removed from the meeting minutes, the chairperson taking the minutes recorded the number of people in attendance at six of the meetings, and the number of employees in attendance varied from meeting to meeting. Over the year and a half, some of the teachers at the meetings changed because from one school year to the next some of the teachers' teaching roles changed. Some teachers changed from teaching ELA to another subject area and vice versa. On average, 11.6 teachers attended the ELA meetings. The school librarian and the school principal each attended one of the ELA meetings over the year and a half. The principal attended to hand out test data reports. The superintendent and the assistant superintendent did not attend any of the meetings from September 2018 to December 2019.

Based on the information supplied in the 11 sets of meeting minutes, the meetings took place in at least three different locations within the middle school building. For some of the meetings, the location was not recorded. At least four of the meetings took place during school professional development days, and at least five of the meetings took place after students had left school for the day. The day of the week that the 11 meetings took place changed. This may have been due to a change in chairperson or change in the school year or depending on if a meeting was held on a regularly scheduled school day or a professional development day. Four of the meetings were on a Friday, three on a Monday, two on a Wednesday, and two on a Thursday. Table 3 represents some of the above described ELA meeting minute observations.

Table 3

Meeting Minutes Observations

Day/Date	Time	Location	Participants
Friday, 9/7/18	unknown	unknown	unknown
Wednesday, 10/31/18	1:00 p.m.	Media center	unknown
Thursday, 11/29/18	2:30 p.m.	Room 253	14 teachers
Friday, 2/1/19	2:30 p.m.	unknown	unknown
Friday, 3/1/19	2:30 p.m.	Room 253	unknown
Friday, 5/17/19	unknown	unknown	unknown
Wednesday, 9/4/19	9:30 a.m.	Room 260	14 teachers 1 principal 1 librarian
Monday, 9/23/19	2:30 p.m.	Room 260	10 teachers
Thursday, 10/31/19	12:00 p.m.	High school	4 MS teachers
	2:00 p.m.	Room 260	12 teachers
Monday, 11/25/19	2:30 p.m.	Room 260	10 teachers
Monday, 12/9/19	2:30 p.m.	Room 260	10 teachers

I used a descriptive coding method for coding the first cycle of meeting minutes.

While coding the meeting minutes, I asked myself repeatedly what was going on in the

meetings in relation to what my study was about (Saldaña, 2016). I based the descriptive codes obtained from the ELA meeting minutes on the research questions and through the lens of the conceptual framework of the study. I made a list of all of the different codes and then tallied the number of times each descriptive code was repeated. I then took that list of 24 different codes (124 total codes) and put the descriptive codes in order of most frequently occurring to least frequently occurring. From this list, I was able to develop patterns, relationships, and themes supported by the ELA meeting minute data.

Interviews. After I coded the meeting minutes, I began coding the interview transcripts. I adjusted all typed interview transcripts to a two-column format. The first column contained the typed interview, numbered by line, and the second column was blank. The blank column was space intended for manual coding. I organized the typed interview data by interview questions in the order that I, as the interviewer, asked the interviewee, the participant, the questions. I manually performed coding over several rounds. I used in vivo codes (Appendix B) to capture each participant's perspectives on independent reading in the ELA curriculum based on the lens of the conceptual framework. The in vivo codes were derived from each of the three research questions.

I in vivo coded each interview based on RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, the conceptual framework, and for discussion of professional development. Once all interviews were in vivo coded, I looked at the in vivo codes to determine which research question elements were discussed the most in each interview. This information provided clarity regarding where teachers were placing the most emphasis in the ELA curriculum. I then typed up all the in vivo codes based on RQ1 in a document, all the in vivo codes based on RQ2 in

a separate document, and all the in vivo codes based on RQ3 in a separate document. I also typed two separate documents of all the teachers' in vivo codes related to professional development and all the teachers' in vivo codes defining independent reading. Professional development in vivo codes as findings related to the project developed for the study. Using the separate documents of in vivo codes, I derived descriptive codes (Appendix C) for each research question. From the descriptive codes, I employed the process of axial coding to determine the dominant codes (Appendix D). I developed patterns, relationships, and themes from the axial codes.

Findings

Meeting Minutes

Of the ELA meetings taking place from September 2018 to December 2019 that had recorded meeting minutes, the meeting agendas showed a range in the topics discussed. Each of the chairpersons taking the meeting minutes at each of the 11 meetings used headings and subheadings to organize the meeting minutes. The 11 sets of meeting minutes did not follow any particular agenda for topics of discussion. Some of the topics of discussions were repeated throughout the 11 meetings and some topics were not repeated. One conclusion about the meetings is that not having a specifically set agenda for topics of discussion that remained the same for every meeting may have led certain topics to be left out of meeting discussions that were brought up in the teacher interviews. I identified 38 different agenda topics from the 11 different ELA meeting minutes. The four most frequent agenda topics were i-Ready assessment and individualized reading program, school spelling bee, Scholastic book fairs, and

supplies/money. i-Ready was an agenda topic seven different times, the school spelling bee was an agenda topic six different times, and Scholastic book fairs and supplies/money were both agenda topics five different times.

Reoccurring themes for the ELA meeting minutes are based on the initial descriptive codes, followed by axial coding to identify dominant versus less dominant codes. I identified code frequency to develop a list of the dominant versus less dominant codes, which helped to see patterns of discussion at the meetings. The categories derived from the descriptive coding process differed from the agenda topics that the chairperson used to organize the meeting minutes; although, I utilized the agenda topics and all parts of the meeting minutes when developing the descriptive codes.

Theme 1: Teacher Support of Reading

Of the 11 meetings in the data set, books and reading and school reading/literacy events were the most recorded topics of discussion. In an ELA meeting on October 31, 2018, the ELA chairperson recorded that teachers discussed a way to exhibit books in the main office display window throughout the school year to encourage reading among students. At that same meeting, the chairperson recorded that teachers discussed a plan to have a reading room after school for students to have a place to quietly read. The chairperson recorded that ELA teachers discussed possible reading events to host throughout the upcoming school year. On November 29, 2018, the ELA chairperson recorded that ELA teachers started the meeting with a discussion about an upcoming school spelling bee and then discussed an upcoming book fair where students could purchase books during their ELA classes and lunch periods. The plan continued

regarding a reading room after school. At the February 1, 2019 meeting, the ELA chairperson recorded that another upcoming school reading event was discussed, called One Book One School, which would occur at the start of the 2019-2020 school year. On March 1, 2019, the ELA chairperson recorded that middle school ELA teachers met with high school ELA teachers from the district to discuss reading and commonly taught books between the middle school and high school levels. Again, the chairperson recorded that the reading room after school was discussed. The chairperson recorded that ELA teachers discussed a student reading app meant to provide students e-book reading access, that a spring literacy night for students and parents was being planned, and another Scholastic book fair for students to purchase books was noted. The planning also continued for the One Book One School event for the fall of 2019. During a professional development day on May 17, the chairperson recorded in the meeting minutes that ELA teachers worked on organizing a multiple copy bookroom that all teachers in the middle school would have access to. The ELA teachers also made final plans for the last Scholastic book fair of the school year and the culminating school literacy night event for the year. The ELA chairperson recorded that teachers discussed developing reading goals for each grade level for the upcoming 2019-2020 school year.

At the start of the 2019-2020 school year, at the first ELA meeting on September 4, the ELA chairperson recorded in the ELA meeting minutes that the ELA teachers discussed reading material teachers would need for the upcoming school year and upcoming school reading and literacy events, including a spelling bee, a book fair, and the One Book One School event introduced at the February 1, 2019 meeting. New

conversation about books included a place for teachers to add to a list of books they recommended the librarian purchase for the school library and an opportunity to purchase a wish list of books for each ELA teacher's classroom library with extra funds that were made available thanks to the final book fair from the previous school year. At another meeting later in the month of September, the ELA chairperson recorded that teachers continued discussions of any ELA related supplies needed for instruction, the One School One Book upcoming month-long event, and an upcoming book fair. At the end of October when ELA teachers met again, the ELA chairperson recorded that topics of discussion included an upcoming school spelling bee and plans for the One Book One School event for the future. At both the November 2019 and December 2019 ELA meetings the chairperson recorded that discussions of the upcoming school spelling bee continued.

Based on the ELA meeting minutes between September 2018 and December 2019 recorded by ELA chairpersons, ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School spent a significant amount of time discussing student reading related to books and book access. ELA teachers are focused on providing students with opportunities to get books in the hands of students and on motivating students to read. ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School are focused on books and reading, whether through displaying books in the main office window, offering in-school book buying opportunities throughout the school year at book fairs, providing all teachers in the school with access to a book room with class sets of books, providing students a quiet space to read, collaborating with the school librarian to get books in the library that middle school students are interested in reading, or

conducting the One Book One School event, where each student and staff member of Falcon Middle School gets a free copy of a book to share a common reading of over the course of a month. Falcon Middle School teachers invest their meeting time in discussing student reading and book access and also schoolwide reading and literacy events to support this focus of literacy and reading throughout the school.

Theme 2: Administrative Control

Throughout the course of 11 ELA meetings, teachers spent a significant amount of time discussing professional development, assessment, i-Ready, and Next Generation ELA Standards. All four of these agenda topics were either district-, state-, or federally-related programs or initiatives. At the start of the 2018-2019 school year, the ELA chairperson recorded in the first set of meeting minutes for the school year discussion about the recent professional development workshop presented by Donalyn Miller. Based on what the chairperson recorded in the minutes on September 7, 2018, the ELA department's goal for the school year, inspired by Miller's presentation, was to continue to encourage students to read and develop a love of reading. Miller or her September 2018 presentation were not recorded as discussed in any of the other 10 ELA meeting minutes that were part of the data set.

Professional development discussions recorded at the ELA meetings included upcoming local presenters who focused on topics related to ELA or reading. Other recorded professional development discussions included technology training offerings and training related to new ELA Next Generation Standards. At the ELA meetings, recorded in the minutes, were department chairperson's information on dates for different

professional development opportunities. Also, as recorded in the minutes, ELA teachers were provided professional development time in the summer to attend workshops and to work together to develop curriculum for the upcoming school year. The department chairpersons provided ELA teachers with a schedule of professional development days for each school year and individual plans for each of the district planned professional development days. Based on the information in the recorded meeting minutes, department chairpersons made an effort to notify ELA teachers of professional development opportunities. There was no information in the recorded minutes that the ELA teachers developed the professional development plans for district scheduled professional development days.

According to observations made from the recorded ELA meeting minutes, assessment and i-Ready related discussions occurred in a variety of ways. As recorded in the meeting minutes, the i-Ready program includes a reading assessment the district required all middle school students take three times a school year. The i-Ready program also includes individualized reading related lessons that students are required by the district administrators to complete. In the 2018-2019 school year, according to what the ELA chairperson recorded in the September 7, 2018 meeting minutes, fifth grade and sixth grade students needed to work in the i-Ready program on reading lessons for a minimum of 80 minutes a month, and seventh grade and eighth grade students only were required to complete the i-Ready assessments. Teacher concerns and questions related to i-Ready were recorded by the ELA chairperson. At seven of the 11 ELA meetings between September 2018 and December 2019, i-Ready was a topic of discussion related

to the assessment of students' reading, student use of the i-Ready program, and class time spent on students completing mandated i-Ready lessons. Twice, at two different ELA meetings, the ELA chairperson recorded minutes about discussions of i-Ready data being reviewed. Based on data recorded in the ELA meeting minutes, aside from i-Ready being used as a reading assessment tool, the program was the main focus of assessment-related discussions at the meetings.

Other assessment-related discussion was less frequently part of the minutes recorded by the ELA chairpersons. On October 31, 2018, the ELA chairperson recorded teacher discussions of assessment related to the Accelerated Reader book test program. ELA teachers were interested in the continued use of the program. At the March 1, 2019 ELA meeting, a discussion about the Accelerated Reader program was recorded in the meeting minutes. At that meeting, ELA teachers were notified that the school district had decided to no longer pay for the program. Teachers would no longer have access to the program for students to take book tests based on the books the students had read for independent reading. At the start of the 2019-2020 school year, on September 4, 2019, the ELA chairperson recorded in the meeting minutes that the school principal came to the ELA meeting to distribute 2019 ELA state test assessment data. On October 31, 2019, it was recorded that one ELA teacher shared information about a new program to assess students' book knowledge after reading independent reading books.

The ELA chairperson recorded in the minutes that discussion about Next Generation ELA Standards began at the September 7, 2018 ELA meeting. A website in the minutes was provided to view the standards. At the next recorded ELA meeting in

October, new language related to the new standards was discussed. In November, the department chairperson recorded shared information regarding a Next Generation Standards professional conference that would be shared at a later meeting. In March and May 2019, the department chairperson shared information about possible summer work related to the new Next Generation ELA Standards. Based on recorded meeting minutes, the Next Generation ELA Standards were not discussed at a meeting again until November 25, 2019, and the recorded discussion was about possible 2020 summer training related to the standards and curriculum work.

Based on what was recorded in the 11 ELA meeting minutes provided for data analysis, some topics not recorded were individual teacher developed assessments, state-mandated assessments, and how or if teachers would use i-Ready assessment data to support student reading growth. The frequently recorded discussions of professional development, assessment, i-Ready, and Next Generation ELA Standards were all topics that were in some way directed by administration locally, statewide, or federally.

Theme 3: Focus on Student Needs

Coding the ELA meeting minutes helped to reveal what was least often discussed among ELA teachers at meetings between September 2018 and December 2019. Motivation, Title I, data use, time related to curriculum, and specifically a love of reading were all equally the least often topics coded. Developing middle school students' love of reading was only recorded as specifically referred to once in the ELA meetings from September 2018 to December 2019. That meeting was on September 7, 2018, the first meeting following the Donalyn Miller presentation, when the chairperson recorded the

ELA department's goal for students moving forward that school year. Despite making the declaration, developing a love of reading was not recorded specifically in the meeting minutes any other time over a 13-month period. Even though conversation around the name Donalyn Miller or the goal to develop a love of reading in students were not recorded again in ELA meeting minutes, seven of the nine teachers interviewed referenced developing a student's love of reading as a focus of their instruction.

Participant I1 remarked, "I think it's nice just to create an environment where kids like reading. I mean that's the point." Participant I3 noted, "I don't want kids to see books as school things, I want them to see them as tools for a better life." Participant I4 commented, "I'm hoping that it would just develop that desire to read." Participant I5 stated, "Even if it's they have a love for reading and they read a bunch of books, that's great." Participant I6 said, "They can pick any book and read it. I think that fosters a love for reading." Participant I8 noted, "Instead of trying to have a quiz that kids take at the end, just trying to foster a love of reading by designated time." Participant I9 explained,

So, the only way I can see to change that and make these kids love reading and be lifelong readers is to provide them with the time, materials, and the praise and encouragement to keep reading and find the enjoyment in reading.

It should be noted that while Miller was only recorded as discussed at the initial meeting after her presentation, three of the teachers interviewed referred to her or her work with reading. Participant I3 stated,

They also keep a list of books that they read throughout the year ... this is the point where I tried to embrace my inner Donalyn Miller, and just tell them when you successfully finish a book put your title on there.

Participant I4 remarked,

And there was an author study, or we read that 40 Book Challenge, I can't think of the author's name. White, Donna White? [I responded with Donalyn Miller]. Yes, yes! So, I think her whole philosophy was ... something that made me change.

Participant I9 said, "I would love to see more presenters like what we had with Donalyn Miller."

In the meetings, it was recorded only once that teachers had concern for student completion of mandatory weekly i-Ready lessons and mandatory assessments three times a school year. A recorded lack of discussion around data use in the ELA meetings is consistent with the conversation about assessment data use in the interviews. As was recorded in the ELA meeting minutes, the i-Ready reading assessment must take place at each grade level three times a school year. Students are being assessed for reading growth and development, and the data are available for all ELA teachers to access. It is possible that if the ELA chairperson had data use as a standard agenda topic of discussion for each meeting, the teachers might be more inclined to use the data because they would be focusing on it as a topic of discussion at each meeting. During the interviews, two of the teachers mentioned that they use i-Ready data as a tool for making instructional choices,

but one of the teachers did not prefer it, stating that the results lack accuracy. Participant I6 remarked,

We use ... i-Ready to assess student growth with reading. They take a diagnostic in the fall, middle of the school year, and in the springtime to show their progress. Students also complete at least one reading lesson a week (or more) to help them further develop their reading skills. The lessons are on their reading level and hone in on the skills the students need to improve. Areas in need of improvement are identified after the students complete their diagnostic. We monitor their growth based on the fall/winter/spring diagnostic tests.

Participant I7 noted, “We do use i-Ready, but I find that the i-Ready program does not give an accurate picture of where my kids are at, what they can do.”

Falcon Middle School is a Title I funded school due to the socioeconomic demographics of the rural district. A set amount of funding is allocated each school year for Title I identified schools. Some of the funds are to pay for support teachers’ salaries, and some of the funds may be used for additional student needs and are determined by teachers. As mentioned in the February 1, 2019 ELA meeting and recorded in the minutes by the chairperson, the One Book One School initiative was a Title I funded schoolwide event. This included all the books purchased for staff and students, events related to the initiative, and any other supplemental supplies needed. The One Book One School event was a frequently recorded topic of discussion at the ELA meetings.

Although it appeared as though the topic of student motivation did not arise often during ELA meetings, teachers’ efforts around reading, books, and special events were

recorded. Teachers at Falcon Middle School appeared to do the best they could with the resources and information provided. After a detailed review of 11 different recorded ELA meetings from September 2018 to December 2019, some possible redirection of the meeting agenda, with a more consistent focus of topics, may help the ELA department and ELA teachers prioritize their needs for students in order to better support student reading growth and independence.

Interviews

All nine interviews took place at Falcon Middle School during a time that was most convenient for each interviewee. Each teacher interviewed volunteered to participate in the study. A copy of the same semi-structured interview protocol was used for all the interviews. The interviews varied in length depending on participant responses.

Reoccurring themes for the interviews are based on the initial in vivo codes (Appendix B), followed by descriptive coding (Appendix C), and then axial coding (Appendix D), to identify dominant versus less dominant codes. Code frequency was identified to develop a list of the dominant versus less dominant codes, which helped with identifying patterns. I in vivo coded each transcribed interview for associations with each of the three research questions.

Implementing instructional activities that lead students to develop reading independence was coded more frequently than how teachers scaffold student reading levels of growth during independent reading in the ELA curriculum and how assessment data informs ELA teachers' instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development. Based on the interviews, i-Ready assessment data

is not used frequently to inform the ELA teachers' instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development. All nine teachers do provide student instruction centered around the conceptual framework by establishing activities to support learning, evaluating the effectiveness of the activities, and by gradually allowing students to accept independent responsibility for the activities.

Theme 1: Teachers' Interpretation of Independent Reading Varies

I began each of the nine interviews with asking the participant to define independent reading. This question was also one of the example questions provided on the consent form. Teacher responses to this first question varied and could be the reason for some inconsistencies in teacher practices and experiences when using independent reading at Falcon Middle School. The key concepts of independent reading, as best defined by Brannan and Giles (2018) and Routman (2016), are students being provided time to read books of their own choice during the school day, independent of supports. During this independent reading time, students are encouraged to practice learned skills in the presence of an adult guide. Teachers provide support during independent reading time by conferencing with students about their reading.

Four of the nine teachers interviewed mentioned student choice as part of independent reading. Four of the teachers stated that independent reading is reading students do on their own. None of the teachers specifically mentioned that independent reading time is a time when students are encouraged to practice learned skills in the presence of an adult guide. One teacher did mention students decoding and comprehending what they are reading, which are both learned skills that students must

work on in order to apply successfully while independently reading. Another teacher mentioned that independent reading time is a time to challenge students as readers and to grow students' knowledge base as readers. Two of the teachers made reference to independent reading as independent reading time, which could mean that those two teachers view independent reading time more as a workshop that, in addition to reading independently, students and teachers work together during independent reading time reading, choosing books, practicing learned reading skills, modeling, and conferencing about books and skills. Although only one teacher referred to independent reading specifically as a classroom practice to help students grow their knowledge base as readers, it can be assumed that the other teachers invest part of their curriculum time in independent reading because they also see independent reading as a practice to help students grow as readers. All nine of the teachers interviewed did include at least one component of Donalyn Miller's independent reading workshop focus when describing independent reading. Of the nine teachers interviewed, their interpretations of independent reading did, however, vary. Participant I1 described independent reading as,

Independent reading is when the kids get to pick their own books. For their choice. It doesn't necessarily have to be alone, ... it could be teacher guided or ... I read a page, or you read a page, I read a page, you read a page, that kind of thing. But independent reading time is ... their time to read books that they like to read.

Participant I2 noted,

Independent reading for me is where the student is able to read completely on their own or at least attempt to read on their own. Independent reading is that child going through books and decoding and comprehending what they're reading.

Participant I3 explained, "Independent reading is giving students choice and control while keeping their interest in mind, but also trying to challenge them and grow their knowledge base as readers." Participant I4 described independent reading as,

Where students just pick out whatever book they choose, something of interest to them. I don't think it has to be on their level. A lot of them in here read at a lower level, but I think it's okay. And some try harder books, so I just think it's their choice and choosing whatever book they want.

Participant I5 explained, "Independent reading, I would define it as students self-selecting books at their level that they enjoy reading. It can be books; it can be anything. Anything that they're reading on their own without support." Participant I6 stated,

I think that independent reading is any type of reading that you're doing inside school or outside of school. So, whether it be the newspaper, a novel, even a poster in the classroom. I think anything kind of covers reading independently.

Participant I7 noted that independent reading is, "Students being able to read on their own and understanding what it is that they're reading." Participant I8 described independent reading as, "So, reading that's done outside the classroom. I suppose it could be inside the classroom, too. Yeah, any reading a student does on their own." Participant

I9 said, “I believe independent reading gives the students choice to read what they’d like to. During their independent reading time they can find something that they enjoy, rather than teacher given texts.”

Theme 2: Teachers Implement Instructional Activities to Develop Reading

Independence

Category 1: Independent reading. All of the teachers interviewed from Falcon Middle School use independent reading in some way as part of their ELA curriculum as an instructional activity. Participant I1 noted,

Sometimes we do it like, I’ll set a clock and we’re all going to read for 10 minutes or we’re all going to read for 12 minutes or we’re all going to read for 15 minutes and then talk about it.

Participant I2 said, “So, my students have 20 minutes of independent reading each day.”

Participant I3 explained,

Independent reading is an important part of the current eighth grade curriculum. I wish I could say it is the driving force, but it’s certainly balanced out with other curriculum demands. I look at my week, I guess, in five parts, Monday through Friday, and right now there is a full day dedicated to independent reading.

Participant I4 stated, “So, this year I’m trying them to pick out, choose any book they want, and then doing Status of the Class with them.” Participant I5 mentioned,

They’re supposed to be reading 15 minutes a night at home. I also give independent reading time in the classroom. It could be at the beginning of the

class or the end of the class or we could have Free Read Friday where they read independently in the classroom.

Participant I6 explained, “So, in our classroom we call it Status of the Class and we check in with our students to see what they’re reading.” Participant I7 noted,

I use it more for, to expose my students to different types of literature. My students don’t all read independently. I do read to some students and ... for those students we are looking to check comprehension, listening skills, that kind of thing.

Participant I8 remarked, “So, students are required, the minimum is one book every five weeks. And then they’re given, every Friday, 40 minutes of class time to read the book they selected.” Participant I9 said,

I don’t use it as much as I used to, nor do I use it as much as I would like to, but I do give them time every week to read something of their choice and not something that I have given them.

During the time students are independently reading or as a part of a teacher’s independent reading workshop format, the teachers implement instructional activities to help their students develop reading independence. The teachers spend time conferencing with students, encouraging social interactions about reading and books, encouraging student choice of the books they read, and modeling and teaching mini lessons of reading skills and strategies.

Subcategory 1: Conferencing. During the interviews, five of the nine teachers mentioned that they spend time conferencing with students. Teachers described the

teacher-student conferences as a time to meet with students individually to discuss the books students are reading and to touch base with students about their reading progress. During teacher-student conferences, teachers can scaffold instruction to meet the individual reading needs of students, discuss with students the reading choices students are making, and informally assess students' reading behaviors (Brannan & Giles, 2018; Serravallo, 2017). The conferences are an opportunity for ELA teachers to act as adult guides to assist students in developing reading independence. Participant I4 noted, "I just meet and record how long it takes them to read a book, if they finish a book, and I have different incentives for them to read more books." Participant I5 described, "I do brief conferences, one-on-one conferences, sitting with them, talking to them, referring back to the basics of the story." Participant I6 remarked,

Because I'm a special education teacher, I have a case load of eight and I have smaller class sizes throughout the day. I can touch base with them *much* more frequently and dig into what they're reading and find out what they like about it, help them find new books, and things they're interested in, and keep the reading going.

Participant I8 stated,

So right now, it's just, I'll have students read, again I'm off and reading, but every couple of weeks I'll call students back to my desk and we just interact with.

Alright, I talk about what book they're reading. Most of the time it's a book I'm familiar with, so that's one way I kind of monitor and support their reading.

Participant I9 described using a reading log and other assessment pieces by stating, “Those help me by giving me a jumping off point to know what to engage with student in my conversation with him or her.”

Subcategory 2: Social interactions about reading and books. Six of the nine teachers interviewed described an activity that was purposefully social to encourage students to read or engage with their peers about reading and books. Cognitive growth requires social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is a social activity, which was recognized as a key component of the reading process by these teachers. Participant I1 noted, “Honestly, the biggest thing, the biggest impact is how social they are with each other. That’s the biggest thing for me in my classroom, is that they can actually talk to each other about their books.” Participant I2 said, “They like to talk about their own books. I have a lot of my students that love to read.” Participant I3 stated, “I’m also embedding a presentation to get them up and talking about the book in front of their peers,” Participant I4 commented,

Towards the end of the marking period, we’re hoping to do a Flipgrid, where they videotape, you know, a short three-minute video, where they talk about and try to encourage other students to read this wonderful book that they’ve read.

Participant I6 said, “We do two-minute book talks in our class. This activity excites our students. In their book talks, they talk about plot, genre, etcetera. This promotes their book and gets other readers interested.” Participant I9 described,

I love that I have kids recommending books to other kids, engaging in discussions with me and other students about what they're reading. It shows me that they are really taking an interest in it and they're really absorbing what they're reading.

Subcategory 3: Book choice. Having free choice of books to read is a key component of independent reading. Krashen (2016) described free choice reading to be when the reader has free choice to read what he or she wants to read. Four of the ELA teachers interviewed specifically stated that their students have choice in the books that they independently read. Participant I2 noted, "We have a huge classroom library, so students are able to choose from any of those books." Participant I5 explained,

I don't want to discourage any student from reading something they like. It's very important to me and ... I want the kid to like what they read. The level to me isn't as important as the student reading. The level isn't as important as the student liking what they read.

Participant I6 described,

We're trying to strive to have them read at least 20 books this school year, so it's on them what types of books, the level of the book. We're not trying to lead them any which way, but just so that they're reading consistently through the school year.

Participant I9 stated, "I do give them time every week to read something of their choice and not something that I have given them."

Subcategory 4: Modeling and mini lessons. Many of the teachers interviewed described ways in which they model good reading practices or teach strategies and skills

for students to hopefully apply while independently reading. Participant I1 noted, “Throughout every novel or independent reading that I do we try to predict, we try to visualize, and we try to clarify.” Participant I3 stated, “I try to do a lot with literary elements because it works for, I would say 85% of their reading choices.” Participant I5 commented, “We also talk about how we would read ... so then hopefully when they’re reading their own books like that, they know the structure of different genres and what to look for.” Participant I6 noted, “I often select a skill/strategy, model it with a reading passage and then ask the students to do the same with their independent reading books. My hopes are for my students to utilize these skills/strategies independently.” Participant I8 noted, “I do a whole lesson. We talk about when we read outside of school, when we see other people reading, just try to show them that, you know, people do this.” Participant I9 said, “I do a lot of mini lessons on different things ... to try to help them with those skills.”

Category 2: Barriers to implementing independent reading in the middle school ELA curriculum. When asked in the interviews if there are any barriers to providing independent reading time during ELA class, the teachers had mixed responses. The most frequently mentioned barriers were time and curriculum demand. One teacher mentioned that a barrier is finding books that are engaging and appropriate for the students because their reading levels are significantly low because they are in seventh and eighth grade. This was a special education teacher, and this would not be uncommon for the special education students being referred to. Another teacher stated that a barrier is there is no big focus on making independent reading a part of the ELA curriculum, but

this is not consistent with the responses of the other eight ELA teachers interviewed.

Participant I1 described, “So, when I say time constraints, it’s really just because I think, I for some reason feel like I need to be doing some of the seventh and eighth grade curriculum that they are doing in English class.” Participant I2 said,

With my students, I already have to modify so much of the curriculum, so it already takes us double the time to get through the material, and then when you add independent reading on top of that, it does definitely take away the actual module type curriculum that we’re following.

Participant I3 noted, “In English class, in eighth grade especially, I feel an obligation to dedicate as much time as possible to writing. And writing takes up a tremendous amount of time.” Participant I4 stated, “Yeah, for me it’s a time constraint. You know, scheduling and trying to figure it all out and being the first year having 40 minutes only for ELA.”

Participant I5 commented, “Time. Having time to cover your content and what you want to get covered and allowing that time in the classroom. That’s probably the biggest barrier.” Participant I7 stated, “The IEP, because there are certain goals and objectives that I have to hit on that, so that takes away some of the time.” Participant I8 commented,

I mean again, we have a curriculum that we need to get to. Yeah, I guess just, there’s not enough time in a week to designate. Would I like to give more time than one day a week for independent reading? Yes, I would love to.

Participant I9 declared, “Time is a huge barrier for me because I mostly have classes that meet every other day.”

Theme 3: Teachers Scaffold Student Reading Levels of Growth

Eight of the nine ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School who were interviewed scaffold student reading levels of growth. Scaffolding is the gradual release of support, with a focus on the student developing independence (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018). Some teachers scaffold through reading instruction in a whole group lesson or in a mini lesson, with the intention of teaching reading skills and strategies that students eventually are able to implement independently while reading. Other teachers provide reading supports with a goal that the student eventually is able to read independently. A student may start reading a book with a teacher or teacher's assistant, then read a book with a buddy or listen to an audio book independently, and eventually be able to read a book independently.

Category 1: Skills instruction to develop reading independence. Three of the teachers described forms of instruction they implement in their classes to assist students' skills and development of reading independence. Participant I4 noted, "And then we do different skills based on ... figurative language or word studies, or something like that." Participant I5 stated,

So we tie everything back to the writer is doing it for the reader and consider how does this piece help you read this type of novel or text, not necessarily a novel, this type of text and so we do a lot of that in our instruction time that I hope spills over to their independent reading.

Participant I6 remarked, “I often select a skill/strategy, model it with a reading passage and then ask students to do the same with their independent reading books. My hopes are for my students to utilize these skills/strategies independently.”

Category 2: Teachers providing scaffolded independent reading support. Six of the nine teachers interviewed described levels of support they provide to their students that they hope will eventually lead to their students’ full independence while reading.

Participant I1 described one level of support as, “It doesn’t necessarily have to be alone, ... it could be teacher guided or ... I read a page, or you read a page, I read a page, you read a page, that kind of thing.” Participant I1, later in the interview, added,

I have, if a kid is reading something that I know is above their reading level, but they seem to really want to read the book anyway, sometimes I’ll show them how to find it on YouTube to get it read out loud to them, but sometimes that’s also time consuming for them to pull it up on their own ... and it doesn’t really flow as well. So, if a kid ... was reading something that was a little bit higher of a level, I would probably read with them or have one of the other adults in my room read with them.

Participant I2 said,

I have a couple of students that will either be partnered up with myself or another T.A. [teacher’s assistant] and that will range from either they read, but we have to assist them on a lot of words, or I will read and they kind of fill in the blanks at specific words. I also allow them once in a while to read to a buddy and then after a certain amount of time, they switch.

Participant I2 also commented, “I do audio books for a couple of students.” Participant I5 commented, “I allow listening and read alouds with Chromebooks ... as independent reading. I do that as well because again, every kid is different.” Participant I7 said, “I do read to some students and they are, for those students we are looking to check comprehension, listening skills, that kind of thing.” Participant I7 also added, “Yeah, to get to sight word recognition, letter sound correspondence, that kind of stuff, to be able to be, at some point, independent.” Participant I7 noted, “Some of them use ... the books on CD, that kind of thing.” Participant I8 said, “If students want to read audio books, many of them have their own personal accounts and I let them do that.” Participant I9 commented, “I try to ... encourage them to find their reading buddies, the people that like the same thing they do. A lot of times they will read the same book at the same time so they can discuss it.”

Theme 4: Assessment Data as an Informant for ELA Teachers

All of the Falcon Middle School ELA teachers interviewed utilized some form of assessment as an informant for instructional choices when supporting student growth and independence in reading development. Assessment associated with independent reading varied among the ELA teachers. All of the teachers mentioned assorted methods of formative assessment. The ELA teachers used reading logs, reading forms, i-Ready or Fountas and Pinnell reading diagnostic results, and student comprehension based on conferences or observations as formative assessment data.

The 2019-2020 school year was the first year that Accelerated Reader book tests were no longer available in the school district for students to take after reading a book. In

previous years, students were strongly encouraged to complete a book test in Accelerated Reader after reading a book. With this form of summative assessment no longer available in the school district, Falcon Middle School teachers relied heavily on formative assessments to help determine instructional choices when supporting students' growth and independence in reading development. Two of the teachers described assigning their students summative assessments, in the form of book projects, two times a marking period. None of the nine ELA teachers interviewed mentioned using state assessment results as a tool to determine instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development.

Category 1: Teachers regularly use formative assessments as a way to gather data on students' reading development. All of the teachers interviewed described at least one method of formative assessment they used to gather information to determine instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development. Participant I1 commented, "When I ask them what's going on in their book and they can tell me, that's what makes me happy." Participant I2 described,

I do print out their ReadWorks.org passages and that's based on Lexile level. So ... I'll grade all of those and see where their Lexiles are. Once I figure out that, then I give them kind of a range to look for a book. So, if you're this Lexile level, you can look in bins two and three for example. Just so they're kind of in their range, but they still get a choice of what they're reading.

Participant I3 stated, "I try to keep up with them through conferencing. I realized it wasn't realistic to keep up through spoken conferences every week, so they have reading

reflection journals that they do.” Participant I4 noted, “I do, when I talk to them, I do ask them, but there is no way for me to verify that they have read the entire book. I take it on their word.” Participant I5 said, “Everything I do is an assessment. With observations and listening to the students read and everything, all of that stuff I take ... into consideration.” Participant I6 stated, “We use, what’s it called? i-Ready to assess student growth in reading.” Participant I7 commented,

We use, one of the other reading teachers will go back and do the Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment for me. It gives us, we do use the i-Ready, but I find that the i-Ready program does not give an accurate picture of where my kids are at, what they can do, so I rely more on the F and P.

Participant I7 continued by saying,

It shows me whether or not they’re increasing their reading level. If they’re at A, what I choose for them to do independently or as a group, I’ll look at, or how the groupings are done, I’ll look at what their levels are, if they’ve increased, if they’ve stayed the same. Maybe if they’ve regressed for some reason, it’ll effect the groupings and then again what I pull for them to work on. The skills we’re working on.

Participant I8 said, “I have a sheet that they fill out just to kind of monitor that they are in fact truly reading and how much progress they made and just kind of reflecting on what they read.” Participant I9 commented, “Since we no longer use a program to track ... I do that using a reading log, group discussions about their books, and one-on-one discussions about what they’re reading.”

Category 2: Teachers' opinion about Accelerated Reader book tests varied.

Eight of the nine teachers interviewed referenced book tests in some way when discussing student assessment or independent reading. Participant I1 was the only teacher who did not mention the use of book tests and I1 provided justification. It was clear that the Accelerated Reader book test program had a strong presence in most of the ELA classrooms at Falcon Middle School. Participant I1 said,

It's hard to assess something ... with a number like independent reading. But I personally don't feel it needs a number. You're either, you either like your book or you don't. Like, you either like it and you're engaged and you're ... trying to be a part of the community or you're not.

Participant I2 noted,

Each book has a code, and you're able to log onto this particular website, which our district used to have, but didn't purchase this year, and they were able to type the code in and there were questions, between five and 10, based on that book. So, you could really tell if the child was comprehending, you can tell which questions they got wrong, but they took that away this year.

Participant I3 commented, "In past years, our school has used a reading test system, reducing the reading to multiple choice questions using specifically Accelerated Reader, but this year without that being in place, I am not placing an actual grade." Participant I4 stated,

I would like to see or hear how other classrooms incorporate independent reading. Time wise, or just, you know how we used to have the AR book tests, like just some other way to verify that students are reading these books.

Participant I5 described,

I want a program that they can use with ease. It's not very demanding, they can get right to the point, go in, put in information, and be able to answer questions or something to prove through technology that they've read the book.

Participant I6 said,

In previous years, the kids would be forced to take reading comprehension quizzes and I think it kind of decreased their love of reading. Now since it's, that's not the focus, taking book tests, ... I feel like they're more apt to pick up a book and check it out and read it because there's not so much pressure for them to take a test, make sure you pass, and now they're just more willing to just read anything.

Participant I7 stated,

Now that we don't have the AR tests and that anymore, I can't read every book that is in my collection to be able to accurately have a book talk with the kids or you know, whatever. So, there's not really any way to check for their comprehension, their understanding of what they've read.

Participant I8 remarked, "This seems to be the most successful we've been with it.

Instead of trying to have a quiz that kids take at the end, just trying to foster a true love of reading by designating time." Participant I9 stated, "Well, since we no longer use a

program to track that, I do that using a reading log, group discussions about their books, and one-on-one discussions about what they're reading.”

Theme 5: Teachers Want Support for Implementation of Independent Reading

ELA teachers interviewed from Falcon Middle School want support through professional development. The teachers had a range of wants and needs to help them with their development of independent reading in their ELA curricula. Teachers' professional development needs at Falcon Middle School were consistent with current research. Current research has revealed that teachers want professional development support when faced with implementing new policies, reforms, or initiatives (Asunda et al., 2015; Nadelson & Jones, 2016; Scholastic, 2016a; Woulfin, 2015). The teachers interviewed described professional development needs based on their grade level, their level of experience, their students, and on what they are or are not observing in the school. One teacher specifically referred to the presentation by Donalyn Miller and the hope for more presenters like Miller. Another teacher mentioned professional development geared specifically toward a particular special education program.

Category 1: Teachers want collaboration. Four of the teachers interviewed wanted to know what other teachers or other school districts were doing with independent reading in their curricula, classrooms, or schools. Participant I3 commented, “You know, I think what I've come to value most is listening and having time to talk this over with other teachers and seeing how it's working in other people's classrooms.” Participant I4 said, “I guess I would like to see or hear how other classrooms incorporate independent reading.” When asked what a professional development to support the development of

independent reading in the ELA curriculum would be best, Participant I8 responded with, “Just listening to other people.” Participant I9 added, “What worked in other districts like ours.”

Category 2: Teachers want book recommendations for middle school

students. Three of the teachers from Falcon Middle School were looking for a workshop or conference where someone shared recommendations of books that are popular with middle school students or that middle school students would like. Participant I1 said,

Me personally, maybe like somebody telling me what books that are out there that kids like. Because I think how I do it is good and works for the environment that I’m in, but what I feel like I’m lacking is knowledge about what books to offer kids or ... to steer them in the right direction. Because ... once they find something, they’re happy.

Participant I3 added when asked about valuable professional development,

Oh, and ... another really helpful professional development, probably one of *the* most helpful, anything where books are being previewed or summarized or just like kind of trending. Information on literature is so helpful because I try to keep up, but it is overwhelming at times.

Participant I5 said when asked about professional development,

I want to know what the book is ... so then when I’m in the room I can fit it to different kids that I think it will fit. So, I like to learn about books that I haven’t had an opportunity to get to yet, to help them.

Category 3: Teachers want tips for curriculum implementation. Three of the nine teachers were looking for tips to best implement independent reading into their ELA curricula. Participant I2 commented,

I would like to see the different ways to implement different things. Like, I've heard about having them do commercials on the books that they've read or little video trailers. I would like to see some ideas with that and just easy activities.

Participant I5 stated, "I like trainings that kind of give me ideas ... that I can *really* use in a classroom to *get* the kids, get the book in their hand, get them reading it." Participant I6 said,

I think if there was something with how to embed ... their independent reading into your standards and your curriculum, I would likely be very interested in that because I have ... ideas, but I don't know how to execute them and I think that the other English teachers that I work with, they know we have to cover A, B, and C, but ... *how* to incorporate students' own personal reading materials into the curriculum is difficult.

Evidence of Quality

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), to establish credibility in research, the researcher should use more than one source, have participants participate in a transcript review, present a thick description of the research, discuss any discrepant cases, and have a peer reviewer analyze the findings. For my study, I used two sources of data, had my participants perform a review of their transcripts, presented a thorough description of the findings, discussed discrepant cases, and had a peer reviewer review the findings from

the research conducted. While conducting the study, I remained cognizant of these procedures in order to address accuracy of the data I have presented.

Multiple data sources were used. For this study, I used more than one source of data to paint a comprehensive picture of Falcon Middle School ELA teachers' experiences using independent reading in their curricula. An ELA chairperson provided ELA meeting minutes, which I analyzed through multiple rounds of coding procedures. The meeting minutes provided were from the time Donalyn Miller presented in September 2018 to the last meeting prior to when the interviews began in December 2019. I coded and analyzed 11 different meetings minutes that took place from September 2018 to December 2019. I reported a thick description of the meeting minute findings. I also received consent to interview nine Falcon Middle School ELA teachers. I conducted the interviews within the month of December in 2019, and I transcribed all of the interviews using the interview audio recordings. I reported a thorough description of the findings from the interviews.

Transcript review. Each of the nine teachers interviewed consented to also participate in a transcript review of their own data. After the interviews, I provided each of the nine participants a copy of their transcribed interview to conduct a transcript review. All of the teachers reviewed their transcripts, and three participants chose to have changes made to their data. The changes were agreeable and were made. The revised transcripts were the transcripts used when coding and analyzing the data.

Discrepant cases. I gave each of the teachers interviewed the opportunity to review their interview findings. Three of the teachers requested changes be made to their

transcripts after a transcript review. Participant I2 wanted a few minor grammatical changes made to the transcript to clarify some of the responses. The changes were made without any disagreement. Participant I6 requested the research questions with the interview transcript for review. The teacher added to some of the interview responses before returning the transcript. The addition to the responses provided more detailed explanations to a few of the original responses and were not disputed. Changes were agreed upon and made to the transcript. Participant I7 questioned two responses in the transcript and requested the audio recording of the interview be reviewed by me and changes be made to the transcript, if needed. After listening to the audio recording of the interview, I inserted two words into the transcript. Participant I7 reviewed the additions and agreed with the revisions to the transcript. All three of the teachers were pleased with the changes to their transcripts after the transcript reviews were complete.

Peer reviewer findings. The peer reviewer for this study completed her doctoral studies with Walden University in February 2018 from the Reading and Literacy Leadership program. My committee chairperson asked her if she would be willing to act in the role of peer reviewer for my study, and she willingly agreed. She signed a confidentiality form prior to reviewing the project study findings. The peer reviewer has worked in education for 18 years, having taught EL, second grade, and first grade. She earned a bachelor's degree and master's degree from Otterbein University in early childhood education, specializing in literacy education. Since 2004, she has been a member of her school district's RTI (response to intervention) team and both a district technology member and district curriculum development team member since 2005. In

2009, she obtained K-12 reading endorsement and was awarded master teacher distinction and national board certification in 2010. It has been a pleasure having such a colleague of distinction review my project study.

The peer reviewer felt that the introduction demonstrated the need for further research, while also making it clear what the gaps in present and past research are related to the topic. She stated that my research questions were insightful and compliment the rationale, which allowed for a broad collection of data. She felt the conceptual framework was formulated well and was balanced with research. The literature review contained an excellent depth of research and was well-researched, in depth, and comprehensive. The reviewer felt that the literature review supported the need for further research, while outlining current practices and research. She felt that as the reader, she was set up with the information needed to navigate the rest of my study.

In her review, the reviewer stated that I established a good range of participants and that my process was sound. The explanation of the recruitment process was clear. The participant comments were organized and easy to read. She expressed that teachers have such simplistic needs, but that the needs are so hard to implement in many settings due to so many different factors. From the findings, she gathered that teachers simply want time, reflection, and each other.

Overall, the peer reviewer expressed that my research was grounded in solid and sustainable evidence formulated from current research, as well as from my own research. She felt I took every measure to ensure an ethically sound study. She stated that I made sure that the participants' voices were heard and that I focused themes around multiple

data sources. I maintained the participants' and school's confidentiality throughout the research process. I clearly and concisely outlined the methodology used in my study. The study was supported throughout by current and valid research, and my review of literature had depth and purpose. It was a pleasure to work with my peer reviewer throughout this process.

Summary of Outcomes

The findings that were revealed after a careful and thorough analyses of the ELA meeting minutes and the interviews with ELA teachers helped me learn a great deal about teachers' experiences using independent reading in fifth grade through eighth grade ELA classrooms at Falcon Middle School. In the interviews, teachers from all four grade levels shared detailed information about independent reading and their experiences using independent reading in their classrooms and curricula. When coding and analyzing the meeting minutes, it became clear what topics were more frequently discussed than others, and how this may or may not have an impact on teachers' classroom instruction and curricular choices. The outcomes of the findings are addressed related to the problem and research questions, the larger body of literature on the topic of independent reading, and according to Vygotsky's (1978) conceptual framework.

Outcomes related to the problem and research questions. In the interviews, the participating teachers were asked variations of the three research questions:

RQ1: How do ELA teachers implement instructional activities that lead students to develop reading independence?

RQ2: How are ELA teachers scaffolding student reading levels of growth during independent reading in the ELA curriculum?

RQ3: How does assessment data inform ELA teachers' instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development?

RQ1: Instructional activities. I asked teachers what instructional activities they embedded into their ELA curriculum that support students' independent reading growth and to explain how those activities are structured. In the findings section, I reported in detail the instructional activities that teachers described during the interview sessions. The activities are summarized into two categories and four subcategories.

When asked explicitly about instructional activities during the interviews, the teachers responded with a variety of activities, which I described in detail in the findings. A review of the meeting minutes findings revealed that there was no recorded discussion in the 11 different meeting minutes explicitly related to instructional strategies. The majority of the meetings focused on ELA teachers' support of reading through schoolwide reading and literacy events and activities, supplies teachers needed for reading and literacy instruction, and books and book access for students. The meeting time was spent discussing schoolwide focused activities that teachers collaborate on in order to bring to fruition for students. As a group, based on the meeting minutes, the ELA department was focused on reading growth and development for the entire student body.

RQ2: Scaffolding student reading levels of growth. During the interviews, teachers were not explicitly asked how they scaffold student reading levels of growth during independent reading in the ELA curriculum. At different points in the interview

conversations, teachers did describe ways they gradually release support, with a focus on developing student independence. Falcon Middle School ELA teachers' gradual release of support was described thoroughly in the findings in the form of varying levels of skills instruction and through the support teachers provide during independent reading time.

In reviewing the meeting minutes data set, ELA teachers were recorded discussing ways to scaffold student reading levels of support as a department for the entire student body. As presented in the meeting minute findings, at seven out of 11 ELA meetings in the data set, the i-Ready reading program was discussed. The i-Ready reading program provides students with reading lessons that are meant to help students develop reading independence. Throughout the 2018-2019 school year, teachers were recorded discussing and planning for an afterschool reading room. The reading room was established to support students' independent reading growth and i-Ready completion with a different ELA teacher each evening. The One Book One School program for the fall of 2019 was frequently planned and discussed at meetings. Recorded in the meeting minutes were ways in which ELA teachers would use the book with their classes. ELA teachers discussed ways to support students while reading the book and completing activities associated with the book. Some teachers planned to help students incorporate the book as part of their independent reading choice. Reported in the findings was a recorded ELA meeting discussion in developing reading goals per grade level for the 2019-2020 school year. Falcon Middle School teachers spent time in their ELA meetings developing ways to gradually release support for students during independent reading in the ELA curriculum.

RQ3: Assessment data as an informant. During each of the interviews, teachers were asked to describe in what ways they assess students' individual reading development. When asked directly about assessment, the interviewed teachers described a variety of formative assessments, as is reported in the findings. Teachers did not mention state assessments once as a way to assess students' individual reading development. This is consistent with conversations at ELA meetings about state assessments. State assessments were on one meeting agenda when the school principal delivered state assessment data to the ELA teachers during their ELA meeting. Two teachers did specifically refer to using i-Ready data as a tool for making instructional choices, but one of the teachers did not prefer the i-Ready data and opted to use the data of a different reading assessment.

In an interesting contrast to the teachers' interview responses, when asked about assessing students' individual reading development, in the reviewed meeting minutes, the most frequently occurring agenda item was i-Ready. Student use of i-Ready, teacher concerns regarding the program, and administrative requirements were common conversations about assessment recorded in the meeting minutes. Twice, it was recorded in the meeting minutes about a discussion related to i-Ready data review. Based on the two data sets, it was clear that i-Ready was a big focus of the school district and school administrators, but not necessarily of the ELA teachers. According to the interviews with Falcon Middle School ELA teachers, they find other means of assessment more valuable when determining their students' individual reading development.

Outcomes related to Vygotsky and the larger body of literature. The conceptual framework for this study was Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social and cognitive development theory. Cognitive growth and learning require social interaction, a knowledgeable teacher, and a student's ZPD. According to the theory, students play an active role in their own learning. In this active role, students co-construct knowledge with a teacher. As active participants in their own learning, with the support of their teachers as adult guides (Vygotsky, 1978), students gradually gain independence. Teachers must prepare active agents to assist students in developing their learning and independent responsibility. Based on the research findings, teachers at Falcon Middle School do employ active agents, or activities, in their ELA curriculum to support and scaffold their students' learning.

ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School have developed independent reading practices that differ from what was previously known as sustained silent reading. Teachers at Falcon Middle School embed additional components in the form of instructional activities associated with independent reading practices in order to develop student reading independence. Sanden (2014) and Trudel (2007) described additional components associated with independent reading as students collaborating around independent reading, students and teachers communicating about what students are reading, teachers providing mini lessons for purposeful independent reading practice, and students having accountability. In a 2018 report, the ILA (2018b) supported adult guides in the form of teachers providing explicit instruction directly connected to student reading choices, teachers providing students time to self-select books with their guidance,

teachers monitoring and supporting students' reading, and adults and students participating in meaningful conversations about the books students are reading. Hudson and Williams (2015), Noortyani (2018), and Serravallo (2017) support instructional activities, such as students self-selecting books with teachers as coaches assisting and guiding students' book choices, teachers modeling comprehension practices for students to apply when independently reading, conferences and conversations about books between teachers and students, and book talks given by teachers and students.

All of these components are described in the findings based on interviews with teachers at Falcon Middle School. ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School conference with students about what they are reading, focus on student social interaction around reading and books, encourage and believe in the student's free choice of books to read, model best practices, and teach mini lessons of reading skills and strategies for students to apply and practice when given in-school independent reading time. In the interviews, teachers at Falcon Middle School described conversations they have with their students about the books they are reading and the conversations they observe students having with each other about books. One teacher shares book talks on Fridays with her students, and two other teachers described their students partaking in a book commercial activity, where they develop short commercials about their books to share with their classmates.

Researchers have found that there are ways to assess students' independent reading development. Conferences with students about reading, having students write in journals, and collecting and reviewing the data from standardized reading assessments help teachers determine students' independent reading growth and development (Brannan

& Giles, 2018; Hudson & Williams, 2015; Kern & Bean, 2018; Pruzinsky, 2014; Serravallo, 2017). At Falcon Middle School, the ELA teachers interviewed described a range of formative assessments and some summative assessments they use to gather data on students' reading development. As reported in the findings, the teachers interviewed assess students through conferences and discussions about books and reading, have students write in journals and book logs, review i-Ready and Fountas and Pinnell assessment data, and have used the Accelerated Reader book test program in past years.

A common theme found in the literature was student motivation, specifically at the middle school level. Vygotsky (1978) found that motivated students play an active role in their learning. Two of the teachers interviewed wanted professional development that shared ways to motivate students to read. When asked in the interview to define independent reading, many of the teachers stated students' choice of books to read as one definitive component of independent reading. Researchers have found that one way to support students' reading pleasures is by providing choice. Teacher and classroom practices, such as teacher excitement, interest, and book recommendations, play a role in students' motivation to read (Merga, 2015; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016a). A de-emphasis on testing, coupled with teacher support through guidance and feedback, has also been found to motivate students to read (De Naeghel et al., 2014; Merga, 2015; Merga & Moon, 2016). Two teachers at Falcon Middle School mentioned in their interviews that they noticed an increase in student reading interest since students are not required to take a book test in Accelerated Reader after reading a book. Based on the ELA meeting minutes data, as a department, the ELA teachers spend a significant amount of time discussing,

planning, and preparing schoolwide activities related to reading and books. Teachers in the ELA department at Falcon Middle School are dedicated to building a culture of reading throughout the school in order to motivate students to read and develop habits of lifelong readers.

Consistent with research findings, there are barriers to implementing independent reading programs successfully and consistently in ELA classrooms and curricula. Curriculum demands and mandates are felt to be barriers for teachers across the nation, according to a survey conducted by Scholastic (2016b). When asked about barriers to implementing independent reading, teachers at Falcon Middle School most frequently referred to curriculum demands and time. Integration of new standards, curriculum demands, and new mandates are pressures felt by teachers. Scholastic (2016a) conducted another survey for teachers that found that teachers have a need for relevant, ongoing, effective professional development. When asked about professional development needs, teachers at Falcon Middle School wanted tips to implement independent reading, ways to motivate middle school students to read, and more presenters like Donalyn Miller to support their independent reading efforts in the ELA classroom and curriculum. Teachers are willing to implement independent reading in their ELA curricula, but they want support to do so.

Stakeholders, other than teachers, can also have an impact on students' reading development and growth. Principals and administrators have been found to play a role in the reading lives of their students (Francois, 2015). Teachers may not even implement independent reading in the ELA curriculum without clear directives from administrators

(Woulfin, 2015). One of the teachers interviewed felt there was not a push for independent reading to be a part of the ELA curriculum at Falcon Middle School. None of the teachers interviewed mentioned the principal or other members of the administration playing a supportive role in the teachers' independent reading efforts. Teachers also were not asked directly about principals' and administrators' roles regarding independent reading. It was reported in the findings that an administrator from the school district only attended one of the 11 ELA meetings, and that was to deliver state assessment results. It has also been found that libraries and librarians can have an impact on students' independent reading habits (Flowers, 2017; Grigsby, 2014; Webster, 2017). Unfortunately, the Falcon Middle School librarian was only recorded attending one of the 11 meetings used as part of the data analyses. Teachers at Falcon Middle School are supportive of independent reading in order to improve students' independent reading growth and to develop lifelong readers. They are giving time for independent reading, supported by other meaningful instructional activities. Additional professional development would be beneficial to ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School to further develop and strengthen their efforts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum after ELA teachers from Peregrine School District attended a presentation by Donalyn Miller. The school district's assistant superintendent hired Miller for a 1-day professional development workshop in an attempt to educate teachers on the importance of providing

independent reading in the ELA classroom and providing instructional activities that support independent reading to increase student reading growth and achievement while fostering a love for reading. Peregrine School District middle school students' reading scores had not been advancing (see Table 1). Students' reading scores for 3 years of data were flat and not improving. An ongoing goal of the school district, as described by the assistant superintendent, has been to get all students reading on grade level. The assistant superintendent was in support of research that claimed the more students read, the better at reading they get, and in order to get students to read more, you need to instill a love of reading. The focus of Miller's presentation was free choice reading for students, providing designated independent reading time in school as part of the ELA curriculum, and helping teachers foster a love of reading in their students.

Researchers have recommended that teachers use independent reading in the classroom to encourage students to develop and practice learned skills (Bates et al., 2017; Brannan & Giles, 2018; Flowers, 2017). The analyses of the provided ELA meeting minutes and interviews conducted in this study helped generate valuable information about teachers' experiences using independent reading in Grade 5 through Grade 8 ELA classrooms. From the data, I have been able to determine how independent reading is used by ELA teachers at the local setting as an approach to support student learning through a time devoted to practice. As a department, ELA teachers are focused on developing and fostering a love of reading throughout their school.

As determined from the interview and meeting minute data, ELA teachers at Falcon Middle School felt encouragement from the presentation by Donalyn Miller for

the implementation of independent reading and supportive instructional practices in the ELA curriculum. It was obvious to the ELA teachers that the school district supported independent reading in the ELA curriculum. Following the professional development workshop with Miller, after a review of the department meeting minutes, there was not follow through by the school district to further support teachers' independent reading implementation in the curriculum. A conclusion based on the teachers' interviews is that they have been trying to implement the practices shared by Miller, but they are searching for more support in a number of different ways. In the interviews, all the teachers described specific professional development they need in order to continue to successfully and effectively implement independent reading practices in their ELA classes.

Deliverable Project Based on the Outcomes

In Section 3, I deliver a project that stems from the study findings. The project is a product of the research and the outcomes discussed in Section 2. With this case study, I was able to identify fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. The information derived from the analyses of ELA meeting minutes and teachers' interviews provided valuable details about teachers' experiences that will help inform stakeholders about independent reading practices. These data are valuable because they have helped me develop a professional development training with curriculum and materials that ELA teachers in middle school can use. The professional development training is built from a foundation of research-based best practices centered around independent reading and the needs expressed by the

teachers at Falcon Middle School. The goal of the professional development is to provide middle school ELA teachers with training that will help organize, guide, and enhance their independent reading efforts in their classrooms and curricula.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 provides a discussion of the study project. Based on research findings, I provide a professional development training with curriculum and materials as the study project. This section includes the rationale for selecting this project genre. A review of the literature is provided related to professional development as a means of change. I also describe the project and an evaluation plan of the project. Section 3 will end with a discussion of project implications, summarizing possible positive social change with local stakeholders and in a larger context.

The purpose of the professional development is to disseminate the research findings to create a training that could enhance teachers' implementation of independent reading in the ELA curriculum and middle school classroom. The goal of the professional development is to provide middle school ELA teachers with training that will help with planning and implementation of instructional activities and assessments for supporting and guiding students' independent reading in the ELA curriculum. The professional development training will be informative and provide research-based best practices in independent reading to increase student reading achievement. A professional development of this magnitude could ultimately improve middle school ELA curriculum and classroom practices centered around independent reading and lead to student growth in reading independence while fostering a love for reading.

Rationale

Four genres were provided for project selections: an evaluation report, a curriculum plan, professional development training, and a policy recommendation. By conducting the qualitative case study, I identified professional development training as a key factor that impacts teachers' experiences with independent reading implementation. Most often changes occur in teachers' practices with support from administration through professional development trainings. Changes in the local district independent reading practices, which are already supported by the local district's administration, would require more training and support through professional development for teachers. Based on the findings in this study, professional development training would be the best genre to help elicit change to address teachers' implementation of independent reading best practices in the ELA curriculum.

An evaluation report is an appropriate project for an evaluation study. The report includes an explanation of the purpose, criteria, and major outcomes of the evaluation. An evaluation report addresses the local needs and meets the standards for a project evaluation. The goal of this study was not to evaluate a program, so for this study an evaluation report is not an appropriate project choice.

A curriculum plan project would include the development of a curriculum. A curriculum plan would include the purpose for the plan, the level and learners the curriculum was intended for, and the scope and sequence of the plan. Materials, units, and lessons, including lesson objectives, activities, assessments, teacher notes, and an evaluation plan, would also be included. The goal of this study is to help teachers

enhance a portion of an already established ELA curriculum; therefore, a curriculum plan is not an appropriate project for my study.

A policy recommendation with detail would include a plan to change an existing policy. A policy change recommendation would include a summary of findings that represent the need for change, with the support of major evidence from both literature and the research conducted. Policy change recommendations would be outlined in connection to the evidence in relation to the specific audience of the study. The local setting in my study supports the implementation of independent reading in the ELA curriculum. A policy change recommendation would not be an appropriate project for this study.

A professional development training is the most appropriate genre of the project for this case study. The purpose of this study was to explore, after Miller's 1-day workshop, fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. The local school district recognized a need to enlist a national presenter to support teachers' efforts in independent reading implementation, with a goal of improving consistently flat reading scores. Based on the findings, teachers' implementation of instruction activities that lead students to develop reading independence was present in many classrooms, but inconsistent in practice and implementation. Some of the teachers at the local middle school were scaffolding student reading levels of growth during independent reading in the ELA curriculum, but efforts were again inconsistent and in need of support. Some teachers at the local level were using assessment data to inform instructional choices for supporting student growth and

independence in reading development. Teachers interviewed expressed the need and desire for professional development training to assist with their implementation of independent reading in the middle school ELA curriculum.

Unfortunately for the teachers at the local setting, one-shot professional development is not known to be highly effective (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Lane & Hayes, 2015; Neuman & Gambrell, 2013; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). The 1-day presentation by Miller, no matter how exceptional it may have been, would not be enough for local teachers in attendance to sustain independent reading practices long-term in their middle school ELA classrooms. The local district would benefit from considering additional, ongoing, high-quality professional development focused on independent reading implementation for their ELA teachers. High-quality professional development is known to effectively improve classroom instruction through teachers' learned practices and knowledge, which positively supports student growth and learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Neuman & Gambrell, 2013).

The findings and outcomes of this case study effectively exposed teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum. A review of the findings revealed the efforts of teachers in implementing independent reading practices in the ELA curriculum. A need for increased teacher support and guidance of independent reading best practices was also revealed. In order to elicit improved student reading development through independent reading, professional development training is the best genre for this project.

Review of the Literature

Based on the findings, the goal was to create a professional development that could improve teachers' understanding of independent reading and how to successfully embed independent reading practices into the ELA curriculum to increase reader growth and independence. Despite already participating in a 1-day professional development workshop with a nationally recognized, published presenter of independent reading practices, teachers at the local setting needed an effective, sustainable professional development to support their efforts to embed independent reading practices into their ELA curricula. The school district, having brought in the presenter, was in support of independent reading practices for increasing students' reading achievements. Each of the nine teachers interviewed were in support of independent reading practices, and during the interviews, all expressed a need for more professional development related to independent reading.

In a recent study that reviewed a wide body of literature, Bates and Morgan (2018) found seven consistent elements of professional development that positively impact teacher learning and practice that lead to student learning. The seven elements of effective professional development are a focus on content, active learning, support for collaboration, models of effective practice, coaching or expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Unfortunately, the 1-day presentation at the local school district did not encompass most of these elements of effective professional development. ELA teachers at the local setting would benefit from

a professional development model that expands on the foundation of Miller's 1-day presentation.

Focus on Content

One effective element of teacher professional development is a focus on content, while reflecting on the latest research and practices (Bates & Morgan, 2018; De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, Haerens, & Aelterman, 2016; Doubet & Southall, 2018; Lampi, Dimino, & Taylor, 2015; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018; Steeg & Lambson, 2015; Terrazas-Arellanes, Strycker, & Walden, 2019). When professional development focuses on content, teachers are able to connect theory to practice (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Teachers can take the new knowledge and apply specific strategies for specific students to better meet their needs (Bates & Morgan, 2018). The teacher participants in this case study expressed an interest in embedding independent reading practices with the standards and the curriculum.

Professional development models that reflect the latest research and practices begin with a strong foundation. Through a shared growth professional development model, Dimino and Taylor partnered to build a teaching plan based on theory before providing the professional development for others (Lampi et al., 2015). To promote elementary school students' autonomous reading motivation, De Naeghel et al. (2016) developed an experimental teacher professional development workshop that began with a discussion of the underlying theoretical background. Similarly, Doubet and Southall's (2018) professional development began with the rationale for using taught, research-based instructional strategies in order to shape teachers' perceptions and practices. The

design elements of Steeg and Lambson's (2015) professional development were guided by a concept connected to theory, which was shared with teachers during demonstration sessions. When developing a web-based professional development for teachers, Terrazas-Arellanes et al. (2019) noted content-focused as one of five critical points. Scarparolo and Hammond (2018) recognized the need for others looking to replicate their professional development model to include the theoretical underpinnings in order to have effective implementation and practice. Educators, when looking to strengthen their practice and shift their teaching philosophies, need content-focused professional development grounded in research and practice.

Active Learning

When professional development sessions include interactive learning opportunities, teachers have a chance to reflect and question their practices (Bates & Morgan, 2018). McElhone (2015) focused on designing a professional development that was more engaging for teachers to maximize teacher ownership in the process. In De Naeghel et al.'s (2016) study, teachers were presented strategies and then given time to discuss the implementation of those strategies, apply the strategies to real cases, and prepare and demonstrate reading activities. Engaging experiences that are directly related to content and curricula are most valued by teachers (Martin, Polly, Mraz, & Algozzine, 2019). At the local setting, teachers wanted to see different ways to successfully implement independent reading practices in their classrooms. Seeing and then having time to engage in the independent reading activities meant for the students in the

classroom would likely give teachers confidence in the implementation of new or refined independent reading practices.

Professional development for teachers can be designed in a way that is a model for what teachers are learning for classroom implementation. All four educators in the Dean, Heaton, Orme, and Woodward (2015) study participated in the National Writing Project, which involved teachers engaging in the writing processes they wanted their students to learn. The educators' eyes were opened to what an impact their process has on their students' processes in writing. Steeg and Lambson (2015) modeled their professional development around the same workshop model that teachers were learning for their classrooms. This professional development design decision reinforced what teachers were learning. Teachers were engaged in the learning process prior to their students. Rasmussen and Eastman (2018) developed a similar professional development learning model for teachers. Teachers participated in the professional development sessions in the morning and taught students in the afternoon, giving the teachers an opportunity to immediately apply what they had just learned. Doubet and Southall (2017) developed a training where participants engaged in the activities and best practices that were to be used in their classrooms with their students. In a survey completed after the professional development, teachers most frequently cited implementing the strategies most often that they were actively engaged in during the session (Doubet & Southall, 2017). Teachers involved in a web-based professional development program focused on teaching strategies for online academic research to students felt that engaging in a process similar to what they would teach effectively prepared them to implement the instruction

(Terrazas-Arellanes et al., 2019). Teachers found value in the web-based program, which led to the successful implementation of the new practices.

Support for Collaboration

When working with educators, it is beneficial to build trusting relationships to help welcome changes in practice (Riley, 2015). Teachers' previous life experiences are an important part of the professional development learning processes. During professional development, time must be spent developing trust in order for educators to take risks (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Teachers often thrive in communities of collaboration that are developed to share with each other and learn from each other (Dean et al., 2015). Collective collaboration worked into professional development sessions produces more positive results for teacher learners and student outcomes (De Naeghel et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2017). When teachers have a collaborative voice, they are more likely to continue implementing positive changes in their classrooms (Pratt & Martin, 2017). Teaching can be very isolating and planning for collaboration within professional development models can benefit teachers.

During interviews, teachers in this case study expressed many times the desire to collaborate with other teachers. Teachers at the local setting wanted to know how independent reading works in other middle school ELA classrooms. A desire to listen to other teachers and share ideas with other teachers was made clear during the interviews.

Modeling of Practices

Teachers, like their students, benefit from seeing what is expected of them in practice (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Examples include lesson demonstrations, instructor

observations, or working directly with the instruction material and participating in the practice. In effective professional development sessions, a facilitator models the practices to be implemented (De Naeghel et al., 2016; Doubet & Southall, 2018; Mundy, Howe, & Kupczynski, 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2017). In one professional development study, schools planned ahead to allow the presenters to work with the students to demonstrate the teaching formats for their teachers (Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Teachers in that study found the professional development model to be beneficial.

Teachers also benefit from participating in the practice prior to implementing changes within the classroom. To increase teachers' feelings of competence, De Naeghel et al. (2016) had teachers apply the strategies in real classroom scenarios. Wilkinson et al. (2017) and Doubet and Southall (2018) had teachers engage in the tasks expected of students. Teachers' practices after the professional development improved.

Coaching or Expert Support

Having access to coaches or instructional leaders can provide teachers with support when implementing new teaching practices learned in professional development sessions (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Effective professional development models include coaching support for teachers, which is more likely to lead to sustainable implementation of practices in the classroom (Lemons, Al Otaiba, Conway, & De La Cruz, 2016; McElhone, 2015; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018; Troyer, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2017). Unfortunately, it is not always feasible or practical for a school district to provide one-on-one individualized coaching support for teachers due to lack of funding or other obstacles.

In even more unique situations, school districts and universities work together to provide professional development collaborations that include coaching support from university staff (Moore et al., 2019). In one situation, university faculty trained teachers to be mentors and then the teachers trained as mentors introduced and reinforced the implementation of new strategies with colleagues in their schools (Gabriel, 2018). The benefit of this situation was that the teacher mentors were always available for their colleagues to get support with implementation. Students' SAT scores also improved that school year (Gabriel, 2018).

School administrators are frequently viewed as the instructional leaders in schools. Through engagement within their schools, principals can help determine what professional development their teachers are most in need of (Koonce, Pijanowski, Bengtson, & Lasater, 2019). Despite their role in the school, according to a study conducted by Koonce et al. (2019), 30% of principals lacked confidence regarding professional development planning and implementation. Lane and Hayes (2015) recognized the need for school administrators and coaches to attend professional development sessions to support them as they strive to help teachers implement new practices. Administrators have a strong influence on teacher motivation, which is why administrators need to feel competent in leading (Daniels, 2017). Despite time and monetary barriers, principals need to be involved in the professional development process in order to build trusting, supportive relationships with, and among, the educators in their school buildings. When analyzing the meeting minutes in this case study, it became apparent that the school principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent were

rarely present at ELA department meetings. The middle school ELA teachers in this study would benefit from increased support and administrative involvement in meetings, professional development, and independent reading implementation.

Feedback and Reflection

Constructive, not critical, feedback gives teachers a means for reflection and room to make change (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Professional development sessions that are only held once often do not include opportunities for feedback and reflection due to time constraints in the agenda. Teachers who are given the opportunity to get feedback and also make reflections on their practice and the learned practices of professional development are able to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their own professional development process (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Yoo, 2016). Feedback occurs best in an environment where trusting relationships have already been established.

The practice of having coaches available and working with teachers one-on-one allows for the perfect opportunity for a learning cycle of feedback and reflection. If possible, an effective model of professional development includes one-one-one coaching sessions with teachers over a length of time (Stegg & Lambson, 2015; Wilkinson et al. 2017). Once a trusting relationship has been established between teacher and coach, teachers find the feedback coaches provide and the reflective process they share positive and beneficial to their teaching practice (Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Coaches may use tools to enhance the feedback and reflective learning cycle, including video. Video reflection can help teachers understand the complexities of their teaching and address a challenge or problem (Mosley Wetzels, Maloch, & Hoffman, 2017). Not all effective

professional development sessions allow for coaches, yet still provide time for teachers to get feedback from facilitators or colleagues in order to reflect on their practice.

Professional development facilitators can develop models that allow teachers to get feedback on practices and for reflection. Pratt and Martin (2017) researched a professional development model that took place over 5 months in three sessions lasting 2 hours each. After the first session, teachers practiced the learned strategies with students, then at the second and third sessions participated in collaborative discussions to reflect on their practices moving forward (Pratt & Martin, 2017). The researchers found that teachers in this professional development model had a desire to continue implementing positive change in their classrooms. Doubet and Southall (2018) studied a professional development model that only consisted of a 1-day, 3-hour session, yet the facilitator did manage to engage participants in the learning process, model practices to be implemented in teachers' classrooms, and provide time for reflection.

Sustained Duration

The most effective professional development does not occur just one time. Sustained professional development occurs over time and allows for support over weeks, months, and even years, developing into reflective cycles of learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Time between sessions allows for reflection, collaboration between colleagues, and development of sustainable change in practices (Pratt & Martin, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2017). When collaborating with a university, professional development support often remains for years and includes the most current instructional strategies (Moore et al., 2019; Mundy et al., 2015). The 1-day professional development workshop with Donalyn

Miller at the local setting made it difficult for teachers to successfully sustain independent reading practices in their classrooms. Some discussions about independent reading practices did take place during ELA department meetings after the 1-day presentation; although, interview findings helped to identify the need for more opportunities for discussion, collaboration, and feedback related to teachers' independent reading experiences and practices.

Schoolwide implementation of professional development can lead to more supportive and sustainable changes in practice (Gabriel, 2018; Moore et al., 2019; Steeg & Lambson, 2015). A shared vision throughout the professional development sessions leads to greater sustainability in schools (Moore et al., 2019). Department-based teacher leaders can be trained as mentors on strategies and then act as support for colleagues throughout their school, working to implement learned practices (Gabriel, 2018). Researchers and professional development facilitators recognize the need for support to be present over time in order for constructive changes in practice that lead to positive student learning to occur (De Naeghel et al., 2016; Doubet & Southall, 2018; Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018).

An online forum, group, or organization can be formed or joined as a tool for sustaining support and development of practice when in-person professional development over a length of time is not possible. Reimagining professional development by participating in a professional learning network, such as an online book club, can lead to sustainable professional learning and collaborative reflection (Porath, 2018). Teachers can find professional learning networks through various social media platforms. Social

media is one component of teacher professional development where teachers have an opportunity to share resources and ideas with educators from all over the world (Rickels & Brewer, 2017). An online forum can even serve as a way to offer ongoing support over time, even after the in-person professional development sessions are finished (Liu, Miller, & Jahng, 2016). Teachers in rural areas may encounter barriers when using digital tools, including access to reliable technology and internet (Hunt-Barron, Tracy, Howell, & Kaminski, 2015). Regardless of the communication platform, teachers must feel comfortable and trust in the process in order to participate and have a voice. In the interviews, many teachers at the local setting expressed a strong interest in communicating with other teachers from other school districts who were also implementing independent reading practices in their schools and curricula.

The project literature review was conducted using search phrases related to professional development, professional development in education, professional development and teachers or educators, and professional development and reading. Extensive searches of current literature using peer-reviewed journals was assessed through Walden University's Library. I targeted sources published within the last 5 years using Education Research Complete, EBSCO, ERIC, SAGE, ProQuest, Thoreau, and Google Scholar.

Project Description

The project is a professional development meant to provide middle school ELA teachers training that will help improve and enhance their planning and implementation of instructional activities and assessments for supporting and guiding students'

independent reading in the ELA curriculum. The project includes the background of the existing problem of flat student reading achievement at the local setting and the previous 1-day professional development presentation on independent reading. The professional development training is supported by evidence from the literature and research on effective independent reading practices that will increase student growth and independence in reading development. The project recommendations are connected to evidence.

There are resources that will be needed for this project. A request for building use will be needed for the days of the professional development training. Technology will be needed with presentation capabilities for during the training sessions (i.e., projector, computer, and speakers). Copies of the presentation and resources will be provided for teachers participating in the training sessions. On the days school is in session, teachers in attendance will need substitutes. One teacher will be requested to volunteer his or her class and students for modeling and demonstration of practices. An online forum will be utilized as a resource that teachers and facilitator will have access to throughout the school year for collaboration and support. One of the training sessions will include a piece about the books middle school students love, and some of those books will be available for teachers to take back to their own classrooms and add to their classroom libraries. The final group session will include a raffle of gift cards for teachers to purchase books to read for their own enjoyment. Funding for the middle level books for teachers to add to their classroom libraries and gift cards will be needed. Existing supports for the project include 3 years of flat reading assessment scores in the local

district, a school district that already has invested in some independent reading training for teachers, literature findings that support successful independent reading practices at a range of grade levels, study findings that explore fifth grade through eighth grade teachers' experiences using independent reading in the ELA curriculum, and research to support effective professional development training.

Potential barriers to the project may include resistance to change in current independent reading practices; conflict with current district literacy initiatives already in place; financial concerns regarding professional development implementation, including the need to possibly pay substitutes for teachers on some training days; and concerns regarding the time commitment to the multiple days of professional development. There are possible solutions to some of the barriers. Teachers in the local district who participated in the interviews may be more open than the other ELA teachers in the middle school to participate in the professional development training. Many of the study participants' independent reading concerns are addressed in the professional development training days. The study participants may encourage the other middle school ELA teachers to participate in the professional development trainings. Current district literacy initiatives are not completely meeting students' reading growth and independence needs, which may entice the school district to endorse the research-based independent reading practices. In order to avoid the need for substitute teachers, the trainings could take place during the summer, on scheduled professional development days, or during times when teachers are not instructing. In order to deliver an effective professional development, the seven elements outlined by Bates and Morgan (2018) must be as closely adhered to as

possible, which may require the implementation of some innovative ideas by the school district.

The timetable for implementation would be three full training days over the course of a school year. The first training day would be prior to the start of the school year in August. The second training day would be a few months into the school year, preferably at the end of October. The last full training day would be at the end of January. A final meeting of approximately an hour in April that would allow for reflection, evaluation, and celebration would also be included in the professional development timeline. In between the training days, participants would be asked to participate in some additional activities related to the training sessions. A proposal for implementation would be presented to the school district prior to the start of the school year. Most likely, this meeting would be with the assistant superintendent who leads the school district's professional learning committee and who also recruited and hired Donalyn Miller for the 1-day independent reading workshop.

Middle school ELA teachers and the middle school principal from the local school district will be potential participants in the professional development training sessions. The middle school principal and middle school secretary may be needed for coordination of the professional development trainings, room usage, and supplying substitute teachers for some of the training days. The district technology coordinator will be needed to ensure proper function of technology devices prior to each training day. One teacher will be asked to volunteer his or her classroom for model lessons to take place on one of the training days. Students will be participants in these demonstrations. Students

will be participating in an independent reading practice with the teacher as if it were any other lesson during the school day.

Project Evaluation Plan

The project evaluation for this study is goal-based. The goal of the project is to deliver a professional development that will improve teachers' understanding of independent reading and how to successfully embed independent reading practices into the ELA curriculum to increase students' growth and independence in reading development (see Appendix A). An evaluation will be conducted at the final meeting in April, once teachers have participated in all of the professional development trainings and have had time in their classrooms to embed learned independent reading practices. A goal-based evaluation is best for the project because the goals were developed based on the teachers' own classroom experiences using independent reading in the local setting. The goals would be shared at the first session and reviewed with participants throughout the school year. Teachers who participate in the professional development trainings would be asked to complete an evaluation form at the final meeting (see Appendix A). Teachers' responses would help determine if the professional development was effective or if revisions needed to be made to best support ELA teachers in the successful implementation of independent reading practices. The school principal and school district assistant superintendent should also review the evaluation to determine if teachers are moving forward with implementation of independent reading practices or if teachers need additional support.

Project Implications

The professional development is important to local stakeholders because the teachers who participate would gain a better understanding of independent reading and how to successfully embed independent reading practices into the ELA curriculum to increase students' growth and independence in reading development. The professional development is a needed extension of a 1-day professional development workshop the school district previously held for teachers. That 1-day professional development workshop was informative and motivating for teachers, but it was not enough to provide sustainable implementation of independent reading practices in the middle school ELA curriculum. Student growth and independence in reading development is an important factor in students' literacy success. As a result of teachers participating in the professional development sessions, students at the local setting would be taught strategies to improve reading independence and also be a part of a school culture of developing a lifelong love of reading.

In the larger context, the implications for social change are far reaching. Educators throughout the world are ever striving to help their students develop valuable, sustainable reading skills. Teachers recognize the benefits of reading, reading practice, and developing a lifelong love for reading. Reading independence is a skill that ensures college and career preparedness. Educators, both locally and throughout the world, who learn independent reading best practices help students grow and develop independence in reading while also fostering a lifelong love of reading.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this project is that the professional development training spans over multiple days and directly addresses the needs of teachers. The local school district was already invested in improving student reading outcomes by hiring a national presenter for a 1-day workshop on independent reading. Based on the findings from my research, I created the professional development training to help the local school district and other districts with similar needs. Effective professional development focuses on specific content related to current research and practices, has an active learning element for participants, supports collaboration, provides models of effective practice, offers participants expert level support, ensures there is time for feedback and reflection, and has a sustained focus over time (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Change in teacher practices that lead to positive student learning outcomes can be developed over time with implementation of the effective professional development elements (Bates & Morgan, 2018). The literature I reviewed to develop the project was based on the seven elements of effective professional development.

When working to deliver all seven elements of effective professional development, some elements may be easier to implement than others. School districts looking to implement or enhance independent reading practices will find value in the focused content of the professional development. The active learning element embedded into the training sessions will help teachers develop confidence in independent reading practices. Collaboration support in the training sessions is beneficial to teacher training

outcomes by helping teachers develop trusting relationships (Riley, 2015). Time for feedback and reflection can be strategically worked into any training schedule (Yoo, 2016).

School districts attempting to implement the professional development training may encounter some limitations. It is possible that some participants could be resistant to developing trusting relationships during the training. Resistance could also hinder training participants' engagement in active learning throughout the sessions or to participate in the practices being modeled for classroom implementation. In the literature, support was established for coaching and university collaboration (Gabriel, 2018; Moore et al., 2019). Not all school districts have monetary funds to support education coach staffing. School districts may not be in a location that is within reasonable distance of a college or university for collaboration. A sustained duration approach is outlined in the professional development training; yet, this would require participants to attend all the trainings and participate in online opportunities over time (Rickels & Brewer, 2017). Participants may not attend all sessions or be willing to participate in online opportunities over time. I developed the professional development training to encourage changes in teacher practices that support positive student learning outcomes, but actual outcomes are not possible to predict.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem addressed in this study was that little is known about teachers' experiences using independent reading in fifth grade through eighth grade ELA classrooms. Another way to address the problem would be to ask teachers from multiple

school districts about their experiences using independent reading in middle school ELA classrooms. A questionnaire can be an efficient way to collect data from teachers from multiple school districts, allowing for significant amounts of data to be collected in a short period of time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Administering a questionnaire could reduce the study of the deep conversation that likely results from interviews conducted for qualitative studies. Another option would be to conduct observations of teachers' classroom practices to see teachers and students engaged in independent reading practices. Classroom lesson observations would allow the researcher to see the teachers' and students' practices in their natural settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While observations and fieldnotes are a respectable and widely used form of qualitative research data collection, teacher and student observations could lead to reactivity, where the actions in the classroom while the researcher is present are not an accurate reflection of when the researcher is not present (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Focus group interviews could be conducted instead of individual interviews with participants. Group dynamics and interactions would provide different data than individual interviews, possibly changing the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Focus group interviews would not allow for individual focus on each participant's experiences using independent reading.

An alternative way to address the problem that little is known about teachers' experiences using independent reading in fifth grade through eighth grade ELA classrooms may be to shift the focus to students' experiences in school engaging in independent reading related practices. Students at the local setting could provide eye-opening results for local teachers and administrators to consider when implementing

independent reading practices throughout the school. With a shift to students' experiences, the researcher could focus the study on the school culture related to reading. Key stakeholders within a school setting, including teachers, the principal and assistant principal, and additional support staff, have a role in developing students' reading identities (Francois, 2015). A school culture determines students' motivation to read and can have a significant impact on fostering a lifelong love of reading (Francois, 2015). Gathering information through a questionnaire would reach many students within the local school and provide a range of students' experiences from Grade 5 to Grade 8. The data could be used to develop professional training for all school staff, not just the ELA teachers, that would focus on enhancing the school reading culture.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

The doctoral process, including the research and development of a project that can be implemented, has been an opportunity for me to reflect on my goals and values in the field of education. Doctoral work is learning at the highest level, a level of scholarship that is central to the achievement of the student based on the processes learned throughout the long journey. What began 5 years ago as a goal of getting my doctorate has turned into an extensive process of learning and growth. I have learned the intricacies of what it takes to develop into a true scholar, one who is studying past and current research and conducting my own research at a level that is meant to be impactful to others beyond my own scope of pedagogy at the local setting.

To begin this process, I spent many hours in my coursework learning how to conduct comprehensive quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research. I studied

educational theory and conceptual frameworks in order to root my own educational beliefs in theory. I worked diligently with my chairperson to uncover a problem at my local setting and to develop research questions in relation to the problem and purpose of the study. My review of the literature helped to build a foundation of study out of current literature that was derived from a proven conceptual framework. Prior to beginning the research related to the local problem, I needed to gain approval from the IRB. The IRB review process taught me about my own biases and how best to establish a trusting researcher-participant working relationship. Through the IRB process, I learned how significant the role of the researcher is to the research process. As the researcher, I needed to acknowledge my professional roles at the research setting, my relationships with the participants, how those roles and relationships could affect the data collection process, and my experiences and biases related to the topic.

Learning about the processes of conducting qualitative research and data analysis and then carrying those processes out were significant experiences to truly grasp the level of scholarship doctoral research entails. Each step of the research process was best met with a clear set of expectations and timeframe. The data collection was broken into a set timeframe of completion, followed by a set timeframe of completion for the data analysis processes. Recruiting participants, conducting interviews, transcribing the interviews, and transcript review were only the beginning of the research process. Compiling the data for analysis, then conducting multiple rounds of various coding processes to determine themes to summarize the outcomes logically and systematically in relation to the problem

and the research questions and the larger body of literature on the topic were vital to determining the project deliverable as an outcome of the results.

Based on the findings of the study, a professional development training was most appropriate. When making the determination to develop a professional development training to support teachers' implementation of independent reading practices, it was necessary to understand how the problem was going to be addressed. Teachers interviewed for the study expressed specific professional development needs to help them improve their classroom implementation of independent reading practices. A thorough review of current literature about effective professional development helped me determine the appropriate professional development training curriculum and materials needed. The findings from the study and current literature, explicitly related to professional development for teachers in education, were used to generate the goals, purpose, learning outcomes, timeline, activities, and overall implementation and evaluation plan of the training.

Over this several year journey, I have experienced personal growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Throughout this extensive doctoral process, I have developed into an academic scholar. My learning has increased to a level of expertise. I feel confident to work among other scholars in my field. At the onset of my journey, I had a goal to earn my doctorate degree, with a hope to work among other scholars in the future. At this point in my scholarly journey nearing dissertation completion, I feel as though my true academic journey into the realm of scholarly level work is just beginning. Through my own research process of conducting interviews and analyzing data, I learned

that the research process is not just a method of obtaining information, but also a means of obtaining to be able to give back. Based on the data collected, I was able to develop a professional training for my colleagues and other educators that can help them grow in their practice. Personal growth that has bloomed from this process is the desire to help others through my own research. My purpose is to use my knowledge to seek findings to a problem and to generate research to help others see a probable outcome to make a difference in practice. Coursework and conversations with other scholars fueled the scholarly process. The conclusion of the entire qualitative project study has been satisfying and exhilarating. Conducting research that can have a possible impact on teaching practices and the field of education is lifechanging. To reach a personal point of confidence and growth as a scholar encourages my desire to conduct additional research. Future research may include a qualitative case study approach with administrators to study their experiences in developing school reading cultures and the role they play.

As a practitioner, conducting the research for the case study and developing the professional training have been a significant experience for me. The task of performing a literature review of current research about the topic of independent reading has provided me with thorough insight into various best practices related to reading. The insight gained from reviewing research-based independent reading strategies has helped me link theory to practice. The extensive literature review validated the need to develop a professional training for the teachers at the local setting in order to further develop and enhance their experiences with independent reading in the ELA classroom. My goal as a practitioner is to share my extensive knowledge of independent reading practices and the importance of

developing a reading culture with colleagues and administrators within my school district and other school districts. This research study and project can have far reaching outcomes beyond the local school district.

As a project developer, this was my opportunity to make an impact. The teachers I interviewed openly expressed their professional development needs. The findings from the interviews and meeting minutes helped me develop professional training for teachers that was relevant to the local setting and also applicable to other settings striving to implement effective independent reading practices in support of student growth in reading independence. The goal of the project was to support teacher implementation of independent reading practices by building from the foundation already laid by the one-day workshop teachers participated in at the beginning of the previous school year. Additional impact from the project would be advancement in student reading outcomes and development of a school reading culture that fosters a lifelong love of reading. The professional development training could have an influence on an individual level, in a classroom, on an ELA curriculum, and in a school or school district. Results could be far reaching and impact positive social change for years.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Reading is a lifelong activity. Based on my findings, teachers want what is best for their students and are searching for support to improve their practice. Teachers are passionate about their craft. Administrative directives matter to teachers and are often what drive classroom instruction and curriculum content. Teachers will implement independent reading best practices when they know they are supported by their

administrators and are given a directive from administrators to implement the supported practices (Woulfin, 2015).

Through my extensive study of current research on independent reading, I can support, with confidence, that when implemented with fidelity, amidst a school culture where stakeholders support and work to develop students' lifelong love of reading, independent reading can make a difference in students' academic and personal lives. The findings from analyzing teachers' interview responses and ELA meeting minutes at the local setting helped me cultivate a foundation for an ideal professional development training focused on one middle school's independent reading professional development needs. I constructed the focus of the professional development training with a foundation rooted in teachers' voiced needs, based on authentic classroom experiences, combined with an extensive literature review of current effective professional development elements and independent reading best practices. The work I have done is consequential and impactful.

I have learned that the value that I saw in independent reading many years ago is valid. Through research, I have found a way to support my work and develop a project that school districts, schools, and teachers can use to improve their independent reading implementation for students' growth and development as independent readers. Doctoral level work is not to be taken lightly. The scholarly level of commitment necessary to produce a work that can bring about social change is beyond substantial.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Positive social change through the implementation of research-based independent reading best practices can have a potential impact on individual students, teachers, and administrators. Families who are enrolled in a school or school district devoted to developing and nourishing a culture of reading and working continuously to foster a love of reading will benefit. Positive social change that begins with a teacher and is supported by administration can mature into positive social change throughout a school and school district. Positive social change that begins with a student can grow into positive social change in a family and a community. This study focused on a relatively small group of teachers in a rural school district. Positive social change is possible within the scope of this school district with the application of the learned practices from the professional development training. I took into consideration sustainable elements of professional development when creating the project. With the support of the administration and a goal of schoolwide implementation, changes in practice can be sustainable over time (Gabriel, 2018; Moore et al., 2019; Steeg & Lambson, 2015). Social change beyond the school district would depend on the investment of other schools and districts within the region and possibly the state in the professional development training plan developed for this study.

Future research can address changes in educational practice. Tracking teachers' experiences using independent reading in fifth grade through eighth grade ELA classrooms after teacher participation in the professional development training could help professional development facilitators make necessary adaptations to meet educators' and

students' needs. Current schools and districts that implement independent reading practices in their classrooms and curricula could continue to be analyzed to determine the impact of research-based independent reading practices. Issues, such as demographics, socioeconomic status, parenting, community and education resources, and stakeholder involvement, can also impact reading practices and achievement. These issues could be analyzed in coordination with independent reading practices to determine the most successful outcomes for students. Elementary teachers' experiences at the local setting using independent reading in the classroom could also be studied in order to further expand upon the local school district's support and investment in independent reading practices and students' independent reading growth. With a focus of the study on Grade 5 through Grade 8 teachers, the school district could expand their focus to elementary and high school teachers' experiences using independent reading in ELA classrooms. Building a culture of reading can be a districtwide goal. Fostering a love of reading is sustainable with widespread support and investment by a range of stakeholders throughout school and family communities.

Educators who invest time in independent reading practices will be able to provide students the support necessary to develop reading growth and achievement. Including independent reading practices in classrooms as part of the curriculum gives teachers the opportunity to provide students support while students practice learned skills (Bates et al., 2017; Brannan & Giles, 2018; Flowers, 2017). When educators adopt a strong independent reading culture, students have the opportunity to develop into independent learners, college and career ready (ESSA, 2015).

Conclusion

Reading is a fundamental life skill. When school communities and families are committed to fostering a love of reading, the life skill of reading is sustainable. School districts across the nation are faced with similar situations as the local school district in this study. Student reading outcomes are not advancing and reading data are flat. Teachers support reading; their actions in the classroom are controlled by administrative, state, and federal demands; and a focus on students' needs gets lost in the shuffle. Teachers do the best they can with the resources and support they are provided from the school district, community, state, and federal government. Most importantly, teachers want support because they want their students to succeed. Teachers want their students to grow. School culture can make a difference in students' reading lives. Teachers, principals, additional support staff, and administrators have control over school culture, which determines students' reading identities and reading motivation and fosters a lifelong love of reading (Francois, 2015). Investment in independent reading practices in schools has led to increased reading achievement and reading motivation, which eventually leads to higher skill jobs that may offset poverty (Fisher & Frey, 2018; Krashen, 2016).

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Appendix A: The Project

USING INDEPENDENT READING IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

FALCON MIDDLE SCHOOL

3 Full Day Sessions | 1 Final Celebration
August | October | January | April

FACILITATOR:
TARA ANNE BAKER
Tara.baker3@waldenu.edu

Develop a clear understanding of independent reading and how to best use the model in your middle school language arts classroom. Leave each session more confident in your ability to embed, support, and assess independent reading with a focus on student reading growth. The sessions will provide you with the tools to develop a strong culture of reading in your classes and provide you with resources to use with your students.

Session 1 *bring something of choice to read*

- Set group norms and establish PD goals
- Independent reading overview
- Independent reading session with model observation
- How to be a model of wide reading
- Join Google Class

Session 2 *bring something of choice to read*

- Explore strategies to support student reading growth
- Independent reading session with model conferencing
- Ways to assess to inform instructional choices
- The importance of student motivation
- What's hot in the YA reading world?
- Join new reading blogs



Session 3 *bring a YA book to share*

- Model read aloud
- Book commercial presentations
- Collaboration session with another district
- Virtual classroom visit
- Plan a week of independent reading

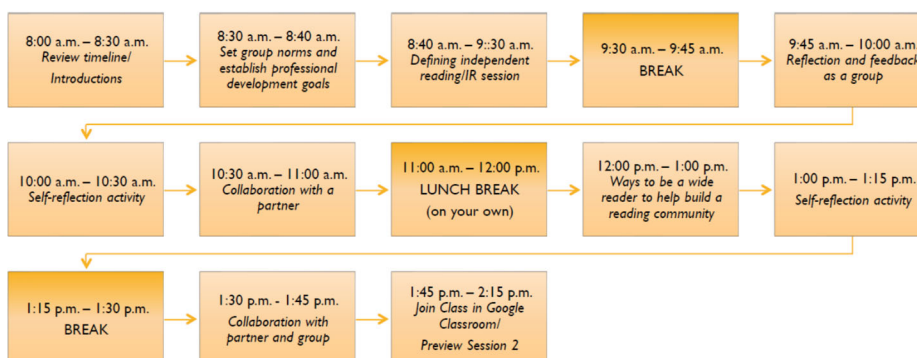
Final Meeting

- Celebrate!
- Set independent reading goals
- Complete PD evaluation

USING INDEPENDENT READING IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

A MULTI-SESSION
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WELCOME TO SESSION 1: TIMELINE



NORMS AND GOALS

- Group Norms
 - Respect the thoughts and ideas of others
 - Participate and listen actively
 - Collaborate with colleagues
 - Celebrate accomplishments
- PD Goals
 - Develop a clear understanding of independent reading and independent reading practices for the ELA classroom.
 - Develop confidence in embedding, supporting, and assessing independent reading practices in the ELA curriculum focused on student reading growth.
 - Explore new ways to build a reading community in your classroom that helps foster a lifelong love of reading.

INDEPENDENT READING (IR)

- Independent reading occurs when *students are provided time during the school day* to engage in authentic reading experiences that are manageable by the students independent of any supports.
- *Students choose their own books* and are encouraged to practice learned skills while reading.
- *Teachers support independent reading time* by focusing on student-centered learning and *providing scaffolding* through conferences with students about their reading.

(Brannan & Giles, 2018; Routman, 2016)

Lifelong Practices of Readers and Writers	
Lifelong Practices of Readers	Lifelong Practices of Writers
Readers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> think, write, speak, and listen to understand read often and widely from a range of global and diverse texts read for multiple purposes, including for learning and for pleasure self-select texts based on interest persevere through challenging, complex texts enrich personal language, background knowledge, and vocabulary through reading and communicating with others monitor comprehension and apply reading strategies flexibly make connections (to self, other texts, ideas, cultures, eras, etc.) 	Writers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> think, read, speak, and listen to support writing write often and widely in a variety of formats, using print and digital resources and tools write for multiple purposes, including for learning and for pleasure persevere through challenging writing tasks enrich personal language, background knowledge, and vocabulary through writing and communicating with others experiment and play with language analyze mentor texts to enhance writing strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION	Children's Rights to Read
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Children have the basic human right to read. Children have the right to access texts in print and digital formats. Children have the right to choose what they read. Children have the right to read texts that mirror their experiences and languages, provide windows into the lives of others, and open doors into our diverse world. Children have the right to read for pleasure. Children have the right to supportive reading environments with knowledgeable literacy partners. Children have the right to extended time set aside for reading. Children have the right to share what they learn through reading by collaborating with others locally and globally. Children have the right to read in a variety of other forms of communication, such as writing, speaking, and visually representing. Children have the right to benefit from the financial and material resources of governments, agencies, and organizations that support reading and reading instruction.
	Pledge your support for these #RightsToRead: www.rightstoread.org

SUPPORT FOR IN-SCHOOL IR PRACTICES

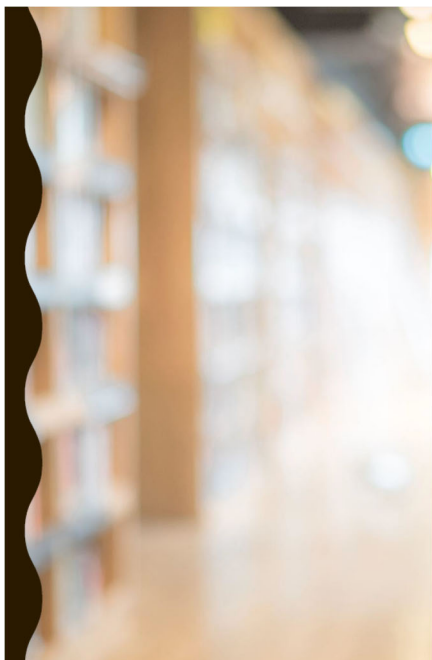
(International Literacy Association, 2020; New York State Education Department, 2017)

IN-SCHOOL IR LOOKS LIKE:

- Teachers/adults providing explicit instruction directly connected to students' book choices.
- Students self-selecting books with the guidance of teachers/adults.
- Teachers/adults monitoring students and supporting students' reading.
- Teachers and students participating in authentic and meaningful conversations about the books that students are reading.

(Hudson & Williams, 2015; International Literacy Association, 2018b; Noortyani, 2018; Serravallo, 2017)

- Teachers scaffolding instruction to fill in the gap between what students can do independently and what students can do with adult guidance (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018).
- Teachers providing structure and accountability (Sanden, 2014; Trudel, 2007; Walker, 2013).



PRACTICE

- Time to practice an independent reading session.
 - **Your job:** Take out the personal reading material you brought with you. Relax and enjoy. For our first session, we will be reading for 10 minutes. In later sessions we will work up to longer reading sessions as we build our reading stamina.
 - **Facilitator's job:** The facilitator will be conducting reading observations while you read. These observations will be used in the future when conferencing.

IR OBSERVATION/ CONFERENCE FORMS

Name: _____ Week of: _____

Independent Reading: Teacher Check List

Key: R= Rarely S= Sometimes U= Usually NO= Not Observed

Date	Observed	Additional Comments
	Silent Reading/Enjoyment	
	*Quickly settles down to read	
	*Focuses on reading task	
	*Reads silently, without sub-vocalizing or whispering words	
	*Chooses books that are "just right" for them	
	*Reads the whole time	
	*Stays in one spot	
	*Respects all readers so we can do our "best thinking"	

Teacher/Student Conference: _____ Independent _____ small group Date: _____

Comments:

BREAK

PLEASE RETURN
IN 15 MINUTES.

REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK
GROUP DISCUSSION

What did you notice
during the IR session?
What didn't you notice
during the IR session?



REFLECTION: WAKE UP YOUR INNER READER

What were your reading experiences as a child? Were they positive or negative for you?

Do you see yourself as a reader now? Why or why not?

How do you share your reading experiences with your students? (both current and past)

Who have been your role models for reading?

What are the last three books you read? How long did they take to read?

Which books were read for school-related purposes? Which were read for pleasure?

What do you enjoy reading?

(Miller, D. (2010). *The book whisperer: Awakening the inner reader in every child*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)

COLLABORATE

TURN TO A PARTNER AND SHARE
WHAT YOU LOVE TO READ.



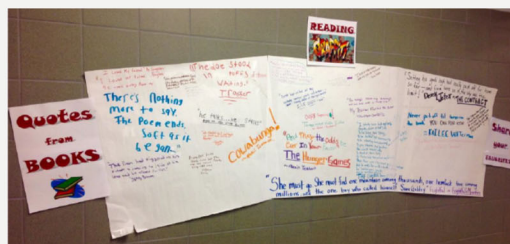
LUNCH

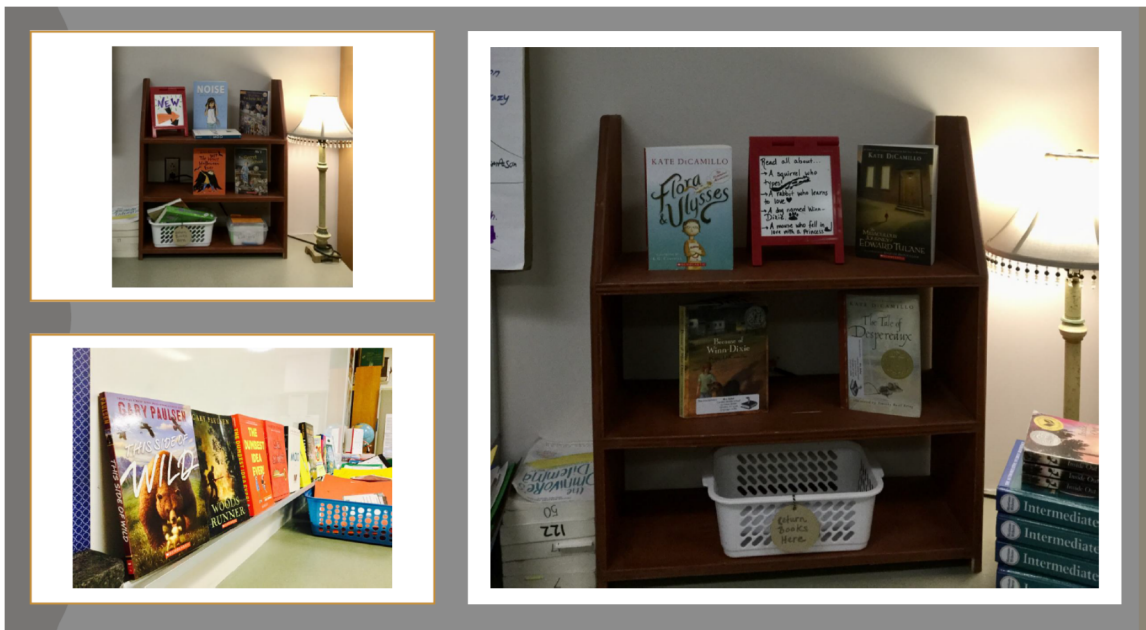
PLEASE RETURN
IN ONE HOUR.

BEING A MODEL TO HELP BUILD A READING COMMUNITY

- Give book talks
- Read aloud to students
- Share favorite book/author quotes
- Post a sign on your classroom door of what you are currently reading
- Prop the book you are reading on your desk
- Display new books, featured books
- Talk about authors
- Visit the school library
- Carry the book you are reading with you

(Beers & Probst, 2017; Gambrell, 2015; Layne, 2009; Merga, 2015; Merga & Moon, 2016; Miller, 2013; Miller, 2010; Miller & Sharp, 2018; Neugebauer & Fujimoto, 2018; Noortyani, 2018; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016a)





SELF-REFLECTION

HOW CAN YOU BE A WIDER READER?

WRITE ON A POST-IT ONE WAY THAT YOU CAN IMPROVE ON YOUR WIDE READING.
STICK THE POST-IT ON THE BOARD AT THE FRONT OF THE ROOM.



PLEASE RETURN
IN 15 MINUTES.



COLLABORATE

TURN TO A PARTNER AND SHARE
WHAT SHAPES YOUR CLASSROOM
INDEPENDENT READING.



WRAPPING UP SESSION 1



Join Google Class

(Move to computer lab/location with devices for all)
Enter the code to join our Google Class
Help others if needed



A preview of Session 2

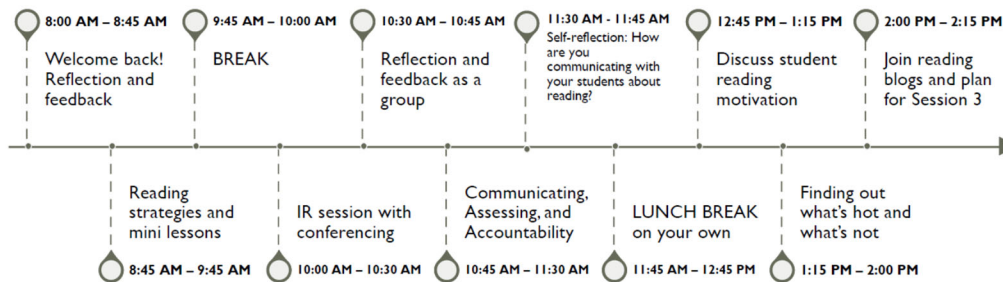
Learn reading strategies for students
Observe conferencing
Learn ways to assess reading growth
Find out what's hot and what's not



Challenges to try

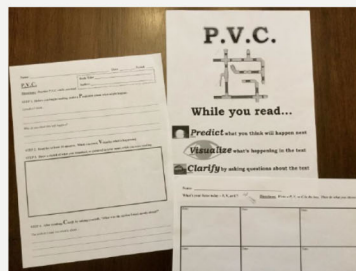
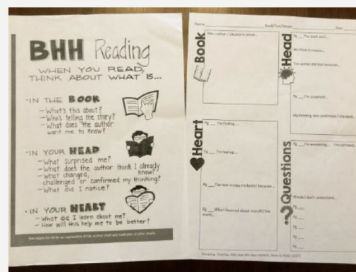
Conduct at least one independent reading session and observe two or three students
Be a wide reader using one of the session suggestions
Post in Google Class about both before next session
Bring something of choice to read for Session 2

WELCOME TO SESSION 2: TIMELINE



STRATEGIES AND MINI LESSONS TO SUPPORT READING GROWTH

- Book, Head, Heart – BHH
(Beers & Probst, 2017)
- Predict, Visualize, Clarify – PVC
(Beers & Probst, 2017)
- Somebody, Wanted, But, So – SWBS
(Beers & Probst, 2017)



BREAK

**PLEASE RETURN
IN 15 MINUTES.**



PRACTICE

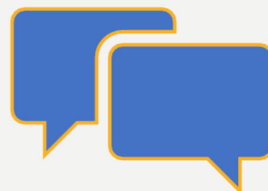
- Time to practice an independent reading session.
 - **Your job:** Take out the personal reading material you brought with you. Relax and enjoy. For this session, we will be reading for 20 minutes. Previously we read for 10 minutes, but now that we have built up our reading stamina we can read for longer. While reading, use your new BHH bookmark to respond to the BHH questions.
 - **Facilitator's job:** The facilitator will be conducting reading conferences while you read. If you are called over, please take your book with you.

REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

GROUP DISCUSSION

What did you notice during the IR session?

What didn't you notice during the IR session?



COMMUNICATING, ASSESSING, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

THE GOAL IS TO USE ASSESSMENT TO INFORM INSTRUCTIONAL CHOICES FOR SUPPORTING STUDENT GROWTH AND INDEPENDENCE IN READING DEVELOPMENT.

- Conference with students:
 - When conferencing with students, *have a plan or a goal*.
 - Are you getting to know the students as readers?
 - Are you following up on a mini lesson?
 - Are you coaching a student on something you observed or know he/she needs to work on?
 - Are you helping a student choose a book to read?
 - Use previous observations of students during independent reading time as an assessment for scaffolding future instruction.
- Set students up with reading journals:
 - Journals can include a variety of tools that can be used during conferences to hold students accountable for their reading and to assess their reading growth. Include:
 - a space to write books that are read throughout the school year
 - a space to write books that students want to read
 - a section for students to respond about the books that they are reading and for teachers to communicate back to students
 - a section to write reading goals
- Standardized reading assessments

(Brannan & Giles, 2018; Hudson & Williams, 2015; Kern & Bean, 2018; Layne, 2009; Miller, 2013; Miller 2010; Pruzinsky, 2014; Serravallo, 2017; van Rijk et al., 2017)

SELF-REFLECTION

HOW ARE YOU
COMMUNICATING WITH
YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT
READING?



WRITE ON A POST-IT ONE WAY THAT YOU CAN
COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT READING.
STICK THE POST-IT ON THE BOARD AT THE FRONT OF
THE ROOM.



LUNCH

**PLEASE RETURN
IN ONE HOUR.**

Reading Motivation and Why it Matters

- Teachers' knowledge of what motivates students to read, based on students' values, goals, and beliefs, can unlock students' reading potential (Groenke, 2017; Merga & Moon, 2016).
- Ways to find out what students' interest are:
 - Interest surveys (Layne, 2009; Miller, 2010)
 - Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP)
 - Student book wish lists
- Motivated students play an active role in their learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

(Aerila & Merisuo-Storm, 2017; Hudson & Williams, 2015; Ivey, 2015; Loh & Sun, 2018; Miller, 2015; Mitchell, 2016; Wilhelm, 2016)

MOTIVATORS

Social opportunities with reading as the central point:

Teachers and students sharing about books –

Book commercials

Read alouds

5 Word Friday

Choice:

Relevant book choices connected to students' interests and pleasures

Access to e-reader technology:

Audio books

e-book apps

INTEREST-A-LYZER
Based on the Interest-A-Lyzer by Joseph S. Renzulli

Name _____ Date _____

ELA Teacher _____

What makes you happy?

What is your favorite activity or subject at school? Why?

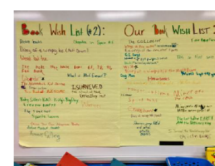
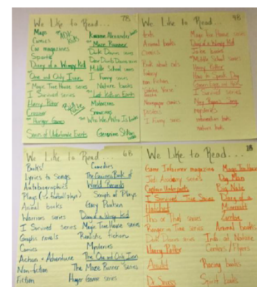
What is your first choice about what to do when you have free time at home?

Put a check next to all the types of books you like to read:

<input type="checkbox"/> Novel/Chapter books	<input type="checkbox"/> Books about other cultures
<input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers	<input type="checkbox"/> Science books
<input type="checkbox"/> Poetry books	<input type="checkbox"/> Scary books
<input type="checkbox"/> Graphic novels	<input type="checkbox"/> Picture books
<input type="checkbox"/> Funny books	<input type="checkbox"/> Mystery books
<input type="checkbox"/> Apgames	<input type="checkbox"/> Biographies/autobiographies
<input type="checkbox"/> History books	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-fiction/informational books
<input type="checkbox"/> Sports books	<input type="checkbox"/> Books in a series
<input type="checkbox"/> Fantasy books	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Do you have a favorite author or book series? Yes No
If yes, who or what? _____

Do you have a public library card? Yes No



WHAT'S HOT?

- Relevant books
- Up-to-date titles
- Diversity
- Books in a series
- Graphic novels
- Realistic fiction
- E-reader options
- Choice

Go-to Hot Spots:

- The ILA Choices Reading Lists – updated annually
<https://literacyworldwide.org/get-resources/reading-lists>
- We Need Diverse Books – lists of where to find diverse books of all ages and ranges
<https://diversebooks.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-books/>
- Scholastic – popular books from Scholastic publishing company
<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/teaching-tools/book-lists.html>
- The Young Adult Library Service Association – award-winning teen books
<http://booklists.yalsa.net/>
- <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/best>
- Read & Shine – new website with book lists developed by librarians
<http://www.readandshine.com/>

WHAT'S NOT!

- Out-of-date books
- Books with torn covers and pages
- Books that look old
- Not having a choice

BLOGS ABOUT READING

- <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog>
- <http://mrschureads.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.mrcolbysharp.com/>
- <https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/>

WRAPPING UP SESSION 2

Move to computer lab/location with devices for all

- Join one of the four reading related blogs.

A preview of Session 3

- Book commercials
- Collaboration session with another school
- Classroom visit
- Make an IR plan

A Challenge to complete prior to Session 3

- Read one new book from one of the “what’s hot” reading lists
- Bring the book you read to Session 3

8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. Welcome back! Model a read aloud with PVC	8:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. Book Commercials	9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. BREAK
9:15 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. Book Commercials	9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. Collaboration with local school district	10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Reflection as a group
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. LUNCH BREAK on your own	12:00 p.m. – 12:45 p.m. Prepare for and observe a colleague's ELA class IR session	12:45 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. BREAK
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Plan a week of independent reading sessions	2:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m. Schedule classroom visits	

WELCOME TO SESSION 3: TIMELINE

READ ALOUD

While I am reading aloud,
practice VISUALIZING.

Be prepared to share what
you VISUALIZED while I was
reading aloud.





SELLING BOOKS TO READERS

- Hook your audience
 - Read a quote
 - Ask a question
 - Set the scene
 - Show the book
- Summarize the plot
 - Introduce main characters
 - Identify the problem
 - Don't give away the ending!
- Give your opinion
- Close with a cliffhanger

BREAK

PLEASE RETURN
IN 15 MINUTES.

Date of Book Talk: _____ Publication Date: _____ Genre: _____

Book Title: _____

Book Author/Illustrator: _____

Hook: _____

Plot Summary (Exposition [main characters, setting, main conflict], Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action):

Impression/Opinion/Rating: _____

COLLABORATION SESSION

VIRTUAL COLLABORATION SESSION

REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

GROUP DISCUSSION

What did you notice?
What do you find
useful from the virtual
collaboration session?



LUNCH

**PLEASE RETURN
IN ONE HOUR.**





MAKE A PLAN

- Remember:
 - Provide time to read daily
 - Instructional practices to support students' independence in reading development (Slides 6, 4, 21, 34)
 - Ways to assess students' independent reading development (Slides 6, 8, 25)
 - How to motivate students (Slides 6, 28, 29, 35)

WRAPPING UP SESSION 3

Move to computer lab/location with devices for all

Sign up to observe another colleague's ELA class during an independent reading session



Between Session 3 and the final meeting visit a colleague's classroom during independent reading and record at least one strength related to independent reading that you observed.

CELEBRATE!



Reflection and feedback:
What are your colleagues'
independent reading strengths?



Establish goals for future
independent reading
implementation



Complete the professional
development evaluation survey

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**“Using Independent Reading in the Language Arts Classroom”
Final Evaluation Questions**

1. Was this professional development beneficial?
 - a. Why or why not?
2. How will these training sessions help you implement independent reading in your language arts classroom?
3. What is something new you learned from the training?
4. Would you recommend this professional development to a colleague?
 - a. Why or why not?
5. Please describe anything that you would you recommend be added to the training.

Facilitator Notes for All Sessions

Distribute note-taking format of printed slides to each participant prior to the first session.

Session 1

- **Slide 2**
 - Go over timeline of Session 1/introductions of facilitator and participants
 - Share name, grade level, years in building, what you brought to read
- **Slide 3**
 - Say, “I have outlined four group norms to ensure the success of our training sessions.”
 - Go through norms
 - Say, “I have also set two goals for our professional development based on the needs observed and expressed by middle school ELA teachers.”
- **Slide 4**
 - Share definition of independent reading and focus on key points (i.e. providing reading time during the school day, student choice, students working on practicing learned skills, teachers supporting students through scaffolded instruction).
 - Be sure to explain that there has been a shift from SSR to IR. Time spent reading in school is important because teachers are present to provide support and scaffold instruction.
- **Slide 5**
 - Highlight one national organization (ILA) and one state organization (NYSED) that support independent reading practices.
- **Slide 6**
 - Highlight the essential aspects of independent reading.
 - Students provided time daily/consistently/frequently to read in school.
 - Say, “Independent reading is so much more than just reading. Teachers should act as adult guides coaching students on book choices, providing time to read in school while providing scaffolded support and structure with accountability. Independent reading also includes consistent conferencing with students about books, reading goals, and strategy application.”
- **Slide 7**
 - Explain that participants in the training session will independently read for 10 minutes while the facilitator records observations of the participants reading.
 - Set timer; observe two or three participants reading; take notes of observations.

- **Slide 19**
 - Help participants sign up for a Google Class (provide code) that has been set up to collaborate when not in the sessions.
 - Make sure you have already established and set up the Google Class.
 - Share about the next session.
 - Encourage participants to 1) try one independent reading session while observing a few students and 2) do at least one activity to promote yourself as a wide reader.
 - Show teachers how to post in the Google Class how the IR session with observations went and the wide reading modeling.

Session 2

- **Slide 20**
 - Go over timeline of Session 2
 - Reflect and discuss independent reading sessions and observing and also what activities were tried as wider readers.
- **Slide 21**
 - Share with participants strategies that can be taught to students that support reading growth.
 - Say, “Some of you may already be familiar with these three strategies or have other strategies that you use with your students. These are just three ideas for helping develop your students’ reading independence and build growth as readers.”
 - Also encourage participants to teach reading related curriculum standards to students, broken into mini lessons that can then be practiced by students during in-school independent reading time.
 - Remind participants that when students are independently reading in school, adults are present to monitor students’ use of the strategies and to support students as they work toward independence.
 - Suggest that students can be asked to write in their reading journals after independent reading sessions responses related to the different strategies.
 - Explain that the strategies can also be a part of read aloud sessions. Students can practice applying the taught strategies with classmates during pauses from read alouds with the adult present to assist with application.
 - As a way to engage participants, have each participant make a BHH bookmark to take. Supply each participant with a piece of unlined white paper, pre-cut to an appropriate bookmark size, and markers.
 - Explain that each bookmark should have a B (book) question, an H (head) question, and an H (heart) question as a reference for the reader.

- Walk around to help participants and ask how they might incorporate the strategy into their class lessons.
 - Say, “If students have their own bookmarks with the strategies on them or if charts of the taught strategies are up in the classroom, teachers can refer to them during read alouds or prior to independent reading sessions.”
- **Slide 22 BREAK**
- **Slide 23**
 - Explain that participants in the training session will independently read for 20 minutes while the facilitator conferences one-on-one with some of the participants.
 - Set timer; call over participants one by one for a conference. When conferencing, use the observation sheet from the previous session.
 - When conferencing, have a plan. Plan to spend approximately 5 to 7 minutes with each participant.
 - Say, “Please tell me about the book you’re reading and why you chose it.”
 - Say to the participant, “As a reader we use strategies to help us think about and understand what we are reading. As a reader, how did you use BHH while you were reading today?”
 - If this was one of the participants you observed in the first session during independent reading, you could also discuss some of what you observed.
 - End the session by setting a reading goal together.
- **Slide 24**
 - After time is up, explain to participants that this is what an independent reading session could look like in their classrooms. Sometimes the teacher will be calling students over for one-on-one conferences. Explain that what is discussed in the conferences will vary, but it is always important to have a plan.
 - As a group, discuss participants’ observations during that independent reading session. Ask the participants that had conferences to please share with the group about their conference experiences.
- **Slide 25**
 - Share with participants the importance of communicating with students about reading.
 - Say, “You don’t need to do all of these and some of these things you probably already do because you are such great teachers.”
 - Remind participants that the goal is to use assessment to inform instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development.
 - Explain that one way to communicate about reading is with one-on-one conferences and that conferences are also a way to assess students’ reading growth and reading independence.

- When focusing on conferencing, encourage the participants to view conferencing as an assessment tool. Explain that when planning for a conference, participants should consider literacy skills that are critical to a specific grade level or what a particular student might be struggling with. Participants can also have students read aloud to assess a student’s fluency and to determine if the student’s book choice is appropriate. Encourage participants to ask students, “Does this book feel right for you? Tell me how or why.”
 - Encourage participants to make one-on-one conferencing a positive experience for their students.
 - Refer back to the observation/conference form from Session 1. This form can be used to take notes about the conference once the conference is over.
 - Share other forms of assessment that are also ways to hold students accountable for their own reading.
 - Student reading journals, standardized reading assessments, student observations.
- **Slide 26**
 - Have participants write down one way that they can improve communication about reading with their students on a post-it and stick it up on a chart at the front of the room.
- **Slide 27 LUNCH on your own**
- **Slide 28**
 - Focus on student reading motivation and motivators for students. Say, “Research supports the need to focus on motivation in order to help students grow in their reading independence.”
 - Read through and explain the different motivators.
 - Book commercials – brief (30 second) “commercials” to advertise a book so that others will want to read it. Teachers should model book commercials prior to asking students to present them.
 - Read alouds – reading books aloud to students of all ages motivates students to read and increases student interest in reading the book that is being read aloud.
 - 5 Word Friday – on Friday students come up with a five-word statement about the book they are currently reading. All students share their five-word Friday statements with each other. This activity advertises different books and generates excitement and social connection around reading and books.
- **Slide 29**
 - Share the example of a reading interest survey that can be given to students.

- Discuss the student wish lists of books and reading interests that teachers and students can make together.
 - Say, “One way to get students involved in the process of choosing books for your classroom library is to directly ask their opinion. Having students write wish lists or developing wish lists together as a class can be an empowering process for students.”
- **Slide 30**
 - Share with participants ideas for how to choose books that students are interested in and motivated to read.
 - Say, “We can’t assume by looking at students how they self-identify. It’s important to have diverse books to expose children to other people and other cultures, but it’s also important so children can find themselves in books.”
 - Click on the links provided to show the websites with book lists. Explain that the lists are up-to-date and include relevant reading material for today’s middle school readers.
- **Slide 31**
 - Share with participants the following blogs about reading.
 - Encourage participants to choose at least one of the blogs to sign up for. Explain that by joining one or more of the blogs they are gaining exciting insight from other professionals that are excited about reading, building reading communities, and fostering the love of reading in children.
- **Slide 32**
 - Help participants join one of the blogs.
 - Share about the next session.
 - Encourage participants to choose a book from one of the popular book lists that was shared in slide 30 and sign up to visit a colleague’s class during independent reading for an observation.
 - Say, “Books from the websites in slide 30 can be found in the school library, in colleagues’ classroom libraries, at a public library, or purchased. You do not need to purchase the book, but please plan to have it at Session 3.”

Session 3

- **Slide 33**
 - Go over timeline of Session 3
- **Slide 34**
 - After going over the timeline for Session 3, model a read aloud session.
 - Be prepared with something to read aloud.
 - Encourage participants to practice visualizing from the PVC strategy that was reviewed in Session 1. Read for approximately 15 to 20 minutes. At a preplanned stopping point, ask participants to share with the people

around them one they visualized and then have a few participants share their visualization with the entire group.

- Remind participants about visualizing while reading by saying, “Visualizing while reading is like making a movie in your head.”

- **Slide 35**

- Encourage participants to give book commercials or book talks to their classes to motivate and entice students to read.
 - Explain the different elements of a good book commercial.
 - Share that Scholastic and other websites do offer online book commercials.
 - Explain that after some modeling and coaching, students can also begin giving book commercials for their classmates.
 - Say, “Book commercials should be brief. Think TV commercial. The idea is to get you to buy the product. The idea of a book commercial is to get your listeners to read the book. Be brief. About thirty seconds should cover just enough to keep the listeners interested and build excitement around the book.”

- **Slide 36 BREAK**

- **Slide 37**

- Guide participants in developing their own book commercials using the book that they read between Sessions 2 and 3.
- Once all participants have had time to make a book commercial and practice sharing with some colleagues, encourage participants to take turns presenting their book commercials.
 - Keep a list of the book commercials and later post the list in the Google Class for participants to have as a reference.

- **Slide 38**

- Prior to Session 3, make plans with a local school district to have a virtual collaboration session via Google Meet. The local school district representatives will share about their independent reading experiences and how they incorporate IR into their ELA classes and school culture. Allow time at the end of the session for questions.

- **Slide 39**

- After the virtual collaboration session, spend time as a group discussing what was learned about the other district’s independent reading practices.

- **Slide 40 LUNCH on your own**

- **Slide 41**

- Explain to the participants that as a group we will observe one of the participating ELA teacher’s classes virtually during an independent reading session.
 - Prior to Session 3 plan this virtual observation with one of the teachers.
- After the virtual observation, spend some time reflecting as a group on what was observed.

- **Slide 42 BREAK**
- **Slide 43**
 - Provide participants with time to develop a plan for independent reading in their class(es). Encourage participants to work together with the same grade levels and/or their co-teachers and/or team. Be available to support participants in the planning process.
- **Slide 44**
 - Wrap up Session 3 by signing up on the spreadsheet that is in Google Class for a time to observe another colleague's ELA class during an independent reading session.
 - Make sure spreadsheet of teachers' ELA classes is available as a working document in the Google Class.

Final Meeting

- **Slide 45**
 - Have participants reflect and share positive feedback with each other based on the classroom independent reading observations.
 - As a group set future independent reading implementation goals.
 - Have participants complete the professional development evaluation survey.
 - Throughout the final session give books away to participants for sharing and have a drawing for Barnes and Noble gift cards.

References

Appendix B: In Vivo Codes

RQ1

“Implementing instructional activities that lead students to develop reading independence.”

I1

“...teacher guided or like I read a page, or you read a page...” (referencing IR)
 “So as like a choice, you can either read your independent reading book...” (IR)
 “I’ll set a clock and we’re all going to read for 10 minutes...” (IR)
 “...your students are given time to read during your classes...” “Yes.” (IR)
 “...we’ll read, talk about our books...”
 “...we draw pictures of what we read...”
 “...they really enjoy sharing with each other what they’ve read...”
 “...a class novel we will do audio books...”
 “...if a kid is reading something, I know is above their reading level...I’ll show them how...to get it read aloud to them...” (IR)
 “So, if a kid...was reading something that was a little bit higher of a level, I would probably read with them...” (IR)
 “...we read, we have a little breakfast, and then we talk about our books.”
 “...they draw what they’ve read...I walk around and look...sometimes...I draw...they even want to show it...and they want to talk about their books.”
 “...once they’re guided to a book that they really like, they’re in it and it’s awesome.” (IR)
 “...they’re enjoying what they’re reading...they’re enjoying talking to each other about it...drawing a picture about it...they’re proud of themselves.”
 “...we try to predict, we try to visualize, and we try to clarify.”
 “...I typically try to have them do it in color because we visualize in color.”
 “...we clarify, which is super important, and we do it in science class often as well...”
 “...we just go around and talk about the books...”
 “...they like to talk about their books, and that’s time for me to say, “What do you think is going to happen next? Do you have a prediction?””
 “...you’d still get time to talk to kids about their independent reading books.” (IR)

I2

“...my students have 20 minutes of independent reading each day.” (IR)
 “...have their independent reading books with their logs where they document how much they are reading...” (IR)
 “I have a couple students that will either be partnered with myself or another T.A....”
 “I also allow them once in a while to read to a buddy...”
 “Some kids ask to go to the library and once in a while we all go down as a class...”
 “I do audio books for a couple students...” (IR)
 “...I print them out ReadWorks.org passages...”

“I have done independent reading logs that they take home and they’re supposed to read 10 minutes a night...”

“They do a log and will print out questions for it...”

“...the kids definitely love to read to each other.”

“They definitely love to pick out their own books.”

“They like to talk about their own books.”

“They will willingly go in the corner and just read.”

“...reading in silence and visualizing and...talking about different strategies...”

“...Meeting Monday...” Who did you meet today?” ...Texting Tuesday...” Could you make a text to self-connection?”

“...I give them a range/selection to choose out of two to three book bins...”

I3

“...right now, there is a full day dedicated to independent reading.” (IR)

“...keep up with them through conferencing.”

“...more than half of my students are getting...well over an hour and a half of independent reading a week.” (IR)

“...modeling it for them...write a summary...make connections...ask questions...connect to it...”

“...an “other” column on the side. ...bullet ideas or just thoughts or words or concepts.”

“...try to look at my students. ...even if I only get to two or three kids in a 40-minute period...”

“...I have tried to share statistics about the difference between the number of words they can pick up if they read...”

“...every creative organizer out there I have shown them.”

“...game of picking up words.”

“...I’ve tried...competitions, I’ve tried to track...you name it.”

“...the more we just model...”

“...complete projects every five weeks...”

“...literary elements...”

“Theme development...”

“...theme...where you can talk about it...identify it...make connections...”

“...a reading log...”

“...keep a list of books they read throughout the year...”

“...tell me why you didn’t read...what go in the way...identifying time...”

“...at five weeks and 10 weeks...embed a project...”

“...reading log...”

“...modeling reading and...having open conversations about it...”

I4

“...choose any book they want and then doing Status of the Class with them.”

“...meet and record how long it takes them to read a book, if they finish a book...”

“...the 40 Book Challenge is part of where they have to read different genres...”

“...I rotate through and call the kids back to check in with them with what they’re reading.”

“...it’s just total silent reading on their own.” (IR)

“I ask them for advice on what I should order...”

“That...helped me...do more independent reading.” (IR)

“...they really do enjoy sitting and reading...”

“...part of their homework grade is independent reading.” (IR)

“...with Status of the Class I will touch base with every student...”

“...if we didn’t offer this time and encourage them to read, they wouldn’t...”

“...do a Flipgrid...where they talk about and try to encourage other students to read...”

“...it’s like a little book taste...it touches on your main ideas and character traits...”

I5

“I use the homework in my classroom. I assign book one is due, book two is due, we try to do four a marking period.”

“I also give independent reading time in the classroom.” (IR)

“...I tell them they have to give me some kind of proof that they have read...scheduling a conference...there’s a Book Talk form they could fill out...I was utilizing Whooo’s Reading...”

“...ten minutes per 40-minute class a week.” (IR)

“I try to do it at the beginning or the end.” (IR)

“...it’s also a great time to pull a kid aside...see that they all have a book...a book that fits them.”

“...I remind them that there’s a lot of different types of reading.”

“...it’s more getting the knowledge, getting that reading.”

“I allow listening and read alouds...as an independent reading.” (IR)

“I give them...two to three weeks depending through the marking period...”

“If they’re a student who is a faster reading...they’ve got book four complete, try a different genre...”

“I do brief conferences...sitting with them, talking to them, referring back to the basics of the story.”

“The Somebody, And, What, But, So.”

“One on one conversation with a child. And some students choose to do a write-up...I’ll...make a little note on it...”

“...this is what I tell my students...the more you try it, the better you’re going to get at it.”

“...we’re going to sample different genres in our short-reads. ...I hope...they’ll then go back for independently...”

“The short-reads that we do...kind of sample different genres...”

“And we also talk about how we would read those...”

“...we tie everything back to the writer...and consider how does this piece help you read this type of novel or text...in our instruction time that I hope then spills over to their independent reading.”

“...taking a closer look at the text...it might not be something that they can do independently...”

“...Bless the Book. ...sit with the kid with a basket of books...and talk briefly about them...and hope that it hooks them...”

I6

“In our classroom we call it Status of the Class and we check in with our students to see what they’re reading.”

“...five to 10 minutes at the end of a period, but not very often.” (IR)

“I often select a skill/strategy, model it with a reading passage and then ask students to do the same with their independent reading books.”

“We are trying to introduce the kids to an app called Libby where they can use their actual library card.”

“Students...complete...one reading lesson a week...to help them further develop their reading skills.”

“We’re trying to strive to have them read at least 20 books this school year...”

“...when we...do the Status of the Class...we meet with a student...”

“...dig into what they’re reading...find out what they like about it, help them find new books...”

“...two-minute book talks...they talk about plot, genre...”

“...with the leniency...they can pick any book and read it...”

I7

“I do read to some students...looking to check comprehension, listening skills...”

“...to get to sight word recognition, letter sound correspondence...to be, at some point, independent.”

“...anywhere between 30 and 45 minutes a week...” (IR)

“...students that need to be read to...sit at the back of the room... other kids come up to the front of the room...”

“Some of them use the CDs, the books on CD...”

“...they may be listening, but they’re not always comprehending what they read...”

“Everybody needs to be read to...”

“It’s pretty much reading short fictional or non-fictional passages. Checking for comprehension, word, site word identification, or larger word identification...”

I8

“...every Friday, 40 minutes of class time to read the book they selected.” (IR)

“...when the bell rings...they begin reading...I have a sheet that they fill out...to...monitor how much progress they made...reflecting on what they read.”

“...I do a whole lesson. We talk about when we read outside of school, when we see other people reading...”

“...trying to find texts that they’ll read.”

“...every couple of weeks I’ll call students back to my desk...I talk about what book they’re reading...”

“...book title, author, genre, and the page started on, page ended on, and...write a brief summary of what they read that day.”

“...interesting word. ...they need to write down one word that they thought was...funny...to get them engaged more in the words.”

“...I collect all of those...make comments...to try and engage them...”

“...I always put the genre on there because I try to have kids explore different genres.”

“...I just try to model that and let kids see that...this is something that’s going to help you.” (reading)

I9

“...I do give them time every week to read something of their choice...” (IR)

“I provide a full 20 minutes per week.” (IR)

“...based on the amount of time I had left over...the largest amount of time I could spare...”

“...I allow students to not only choose what they’d like, I let them sit where they’d like.” (IR)

“I have a huge classroom library. ... I want to encourage that love of reading.”

“...the only way...I can...make these kids love reading and be lifelong readers is to provide them with the time, the materials, and the praise and encouragement to keep reading...”

“...there’s a lot of very reluctant readers that we’ve been able to bring around with the right text.”

“I found kids that have really found their niche...”

“...kids recommending books to other kids, engaging in discussions with me and the other students about what they’re reading.”

“We should be engaging in...conversations as a group...about what we’re reading...”

“...First Chapter Friday...I read to them the first chapter of a book or I’ll show some really well-done book trailers...or I’ll do a book talk myself...”

“I challenge all of my kids to read and log as much as they can, and I promise them in return that I will read...”

“...I encourage them to find their reading buddies. ...I try to make it as...active as possible.”

“...First Chapter Fridays...book trailers...book talks...three different things...to get them engaged in picking up books...”

“...I do a lot of mini lessons on different things...to help them with those skills...”

RQ2

“ELA teachers scaffolding student reading levels of growth during independent reading.”

I1

“...it could be teacher guided or like I read a page, or you read a page...”

“...I start off the year smaller with...10-minute time limits because I know that’s a realistic goal for them.” (IR)

“...if a kid is reading something that I know is above their reading level...I’ll show them how...to get it read out loud to them...”

“I read some of those books with them...”

“...sometimes I’ll just have an adult read to them...”

“...one kid is reading graphic novels.... Does he understand what’s going on...? I don’t think so, but he thinks he does and he’s proud of himself so even though that’s not...where I want him to be, it’s better than being reluctant and grumpy about reading.”

“...the biggest thing for me in my classroom, is that they can actually talk to each other about their books.”

“That’s the biggest reading growth, because they really have a hard time reading.”

“Whether they’ve gained a level or a letter or a Lexile or a number isn’t as important or noticeable as the fact that they’re enjoying what they’re reading...”

“...predict, because if you’re predicting you at least know enough as to what’s going on now to make a guess about the future.”

I2

“If the student is able to read on their own, then they’re on their own.”

“...a couple students that will either be partnered with myself or another T.A. and that will range from either they read but we have to assist them on a lot of words or I will read and they kind of fill in the blanks at specific words.”

“...once in a while to read to a buddy...”

“...audio books for a couple students that can’t read...”

“...print them out ReadWorks.org passages that they’ll complete based on their Lexile level and they’ll complete comprehension questions with that...”

“...just 20 minutes a day is doing strides for them.”

“...once they complete their book test, they have a free day and then they pick out a new book and they rate the book they’ve read.”

“...if we have two students that can’t read that requires by T.A. and myself to be with them one on one which means I can’t go around the room and listen to the rest of them read...”

“...I’ll grade all of those and see where their Lexiles are. ...then I give them...a range to look for a book.”

“So, if you’re this Lexile level, you can look in bins two and three for example.”

“Even though I give them a range/selection to choose out of two or three book bins I do like giving them that...”

I3

“...I often will check struggling readers who show me interest in anything or my readers who excel.”

“...recently I’ve hit kind of a snag with some pretty resistant readers...whatever they want right now.”

“...I try to listen and value where they’re at...”

“Even my struggling readers still walk in with books on Friday...”
 “...even kids who I know aren’t successfully completing a book are still...at least attempting...”
 “...this is something greater than a number that is going to show up on a progress report and a report card.”
 “...they’ll remember that books shaped them somehow.”
 “There’s still excitement in telling me a story for a few seconds when they get into a book...they will tell me about a character.”
 “By eighth grade I’m lucky that it’s pretty much a review, but I find it’s great to use that language...being consistent...”
 “...most of them are just discovering literature where theme really does exist in a way that you can talk about it and they can start to identify it and make connections...”
 “This year more than ever I’ve tried to be open...it’s allowed them to identify with habits as readers.”
 “...tell me when you think you can find minutes.”

I4

“I don’t think it has to be on their level.” (IR)
 “...we do Whole Group reading...where they’re not reading...they’re following along as we listen...”
 “...for the first marking period it was four books a marking period. ...Next marking period, second...five books...”
 “...each time I meet with them...we count them together.”
 “...when I talk to them, I do ask them, but there is no way for me to verify that they have read the entire book.”
 “...a pro is just being excited about reading. ...the students who they just don’t read...how to motivate them or encourage them.”
 “...it’s helpful in life in many different areas to develop the fluency and the comprehension. ...I just hope to see them grow in all areas.” (IR)

I5

“...there’s not a score given based on how well they do on it. ...they would just get full credit for reading that book.”
 “See that they all have a book and it’s a book that fits them.”
 “The level to me isn’t as important as the student reading. The level isn’t as important as the student liking what they read.”
 “...you want them to enjoy it and you’ve seen them at different levels and different kids like different things and where they’re at and different genres and trying to find that special book and give them information...”
 “Everybody’s reading is different. What their reading looks like in their life is not all going to be the same. So, I try to allow the kids to have that freedom in the classroom as well.”

“...I do also allow for independent reading because there’s so many different levels and some kids are very reluctant readers and some kids even still are not solid readers, confident readers.”

“I allow listening and read alouds.... I do all that...every kid is different.”

“...just have to be flexible and know the kid.”

“You have to be flexible.... You want to push and challenge, but you don’t want to make those reluctant readers uncomfortable...”

“That’s as a whole class and they’re usually on grade level or slightly above grade level. ...a little more challenging, they’re more structured. We do it as a read aloud, they’ll do a partner read within it.”

“...independent reading is, the big piece is to find what kind of reader that child is and where they’re going to fit, what reading’s going to look like in their life...”

I6

“I often select a skill/strategy, model it with a reading passage and then ask the students to do the same with their independent reading books. My hopes are for my students to utilize these skills/strategies independently.”

“...from pre-readers to advanced.” (classroom library)

“...I’m a Special Education teacher.... So, I can touch base with them...and dig into what they’re reading...find out what they like about it...help them find new books...keep their reading going.”

“We do not make students read only on their level...anymore. They can pick up any book and read it. I think this fosters a love for reading.”

“...we always talk about practice makes perfect...if students continue reading on their own...they’ll show growth...”

I7

“I use it...to expose kids to different types of literature.” (IR)

“I’ve got from picture books all the way to grade level six books that kids can choose from. A library...that’s that vast.”

“Their reading level, their ability...how much time they can handle being an independent reader or being read to.”

“The IEP, there are certain goals and objectives that I have to hit on...”

“For some...they show increases in their comprehension, they do show an increase in their reading level. For others, it’s just a way to expose them to different types of literature.”

“If they’re at a, what I choose for them to do independently or as a group, I’ll look at, or how the groupings are done, I’ll look at what their levels are, if they’ve increased, if they’ve stayed the same.” (F&P)

I8

“If students want to read audio books many of them have their own personal accounts and I let them do that...”

“...it’s very clear the students in my classroom who read a lot and have diverse genre selection compared to students who don’t.”

“...the Burke Inventory...I’ve kind of modified it over the course of my teaching...I always say to my students, “Who do you know that’s a good reader?”...they list a whole bunch of names...then they always say, “Because they read a lot. They read all the time.” So, they understand...the next step is trying to find texts that they’ll read.”

“...we do a book project. ...just to keep it simple, ...was a book talk and I modeled how a book talk looks...”

“If a kid’s stagnant or if a kid’s continuing to pick up...Mary Pope Osborne...I’ll say, “Okay, somethings, you know, it’s not working for this kid.”

I9

“...I still find it difficult to ascertain whether or not some of my kids are really getting what they should out of their reading. ...and the interventions I’ve been trying with them haven’t seen as much progress as I would like.”

“...I believe in my heart that any reading is good reading, and the more words I can expose them to, the more time reading they do, that has to make them better readers. It has to make them more fluent. They have to be garnering more vocabulary.”

“I try to...encourage them to find their reading buddies...a lot of times they will read the same book at the same time so they can discuss it.”

“Those help me by giving me a jumping off point to know what to engage with the student in my conversation with him or her. So, if I can see that they’re having a really hard time with inferencing skills...that tells me to work on inferencing. If they have a hard time telling me who the main characters are when asked, conflict...that tells me we need to spend more time in this area and discuss this either one on one or in a whole group.”

RQ3

“Assessment data as an informant for ELA teachers’ instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development.”

I1

“...reading...above their reading level...I’ll show them how to find it on YouTube to get it read aloud...”

“...reading something that was a little bit higher of a level, I would...read with them...or have one of the other adults in my room read with them...”

“...as a special education teacher, my kids have really low reading levels...so...sometimes it’s difficult to find texts that they...enjoy...”

“...if that’s at their reading level and they’re happy to read them...I’m happy...”

“...they’re reading levels are so low that I don’t expect them to do it outside of my classroom.” (read)

“...our reading levels are pretty challenging. ...I have some kids who barely read on their own...”

“...a challenge is...their individual reading levels...”

“...I ask them what’s going on in their book and they can tell me, that’s what makes me happy.”

“They don’t get a grade for it, it’s for the pure enjoyment of doing it.”

“...it’s hard to assess something...with a number like independent reading. But I personally don’t feel it needs a number.”

I2

...I print them out ReadWorks.org passages that they’ll complete based on their Lexile levels and they’ll complete comprehension questions with that for their IEP goals.”

“...we did it and just seeing how much their Lexiles grow and at the end of the year when you have their parent meetings, just seeing how far they’ve come...”

“We did the Renaissance book tests. ...there were questions...based on that book. ...you could really tell if the child was comprehending...”

“...once they complete book test they have a free day and then they pick out a new book and they rate the book that they’ve read. So, they really liked it and I really liked it just to hold them accountable to actually reading.”

“...their Lexile levels go up dramatically. When it comes to their IEPs, last year I had a student who had a goal to read at a 500 Lexile level...and they were almost past 600 at the end. So just that 20 minutes of reading in silence and visualizing and just talking about different strategies to use was huge for them.”

“I do print out their ReadWorks.org passages and that’s based on Lexile level. ...I’ll grade all of those and see where their Lexiles are. Once I figure that out, then I give them kind of a range to look for a book.”

I3

“...I feel a lot of pressure every five weeks for progress reports and 10 weeks to produce a grade on a 100-point scale and it really undermines my hopes for independent reading to have to place a number on it.”

“...I try to make it seem as open-ended...and as free as possible, but I do have to hold them accountable somehow.”

“...they are receiving a grade, a numerical grade from me, on the project, but there’s a rubric provided for that at both five and 10 weeks...”

“...their reading log. ...It’s more anecdotal. I write back to them...”

“In past years our school has used a reading test system, reducing the reading to multiple choice questions using specifically Accelerated Reader...”

I4

“...I just meet and record how long it takes them to read a book, if they finish a book, and I have different incentives for them to read more books.”

“Each book they read they get a star...”

“...when I talk to them, I do ask them, but there is no way for me to verify that they have read the entire book. I take it on their word.”

“I wish I could offer something else too, ...because they know they’re only going to read one book and they’re going to get a bad grade.” (reluctant readers)

“...it’s like a book taste, but still...making sure that the student has read the book and they can tell you everything about it. And it touches on your main ideas and character traits...” (Flipgrid videos)

I5

“...I tell them they have to give me some kind of proof that they have read...by having them...scheduling a conference with me, ...there’s a Book Talk form they could fill out, or they could do a write up of their choice...and also I was utilizing Whooo’s Reading...as a means of proof for credit, book credit.”

“...everything I do is an assessment.”

“With observations and listening to the students read...all of that stuff I take into my...consideration.”

“The assessment would be if they’ve proven that they’ve read the book, they would just get full credit for reading that book. There’s no partial credit. We would just find a different book or move on to something else.”

“I try to...allow for independent reading because there’s so many different levels and some kids are very reluctant readers and some kids even still are not solid readers, confident readers.”

“I do brief conferences, sitting with them, talking with them, referring back to the basics of the story.”

“...some students choose to do a write-up...I’ll collect them, I’ll read the write-up, I’ll talk to them about what the book is, make a little note...it helps to see what they’re getting out of the book...”

“...it will help overall with...your standards and assessments...but at the end of the day, we’re preparing these kids for life and where that reading fits in in their life is what I want them to be successful with.”

“Did they do it? Didn’t they do it? ...we all know the more they do, the better they’ll be.”

I6

“i-Ready to assess student growth with reading. They take a diagnostic in the fall, middle of the school year, and in the springtime to show their progress. Students complete at least one reading lesson a week (or more) to help them further develop their reading skills. The lessons are on their reading level and hone in on the skills the students need to improve. Areas in need of improvement are identified after the students complete their diagnostic. We monitor their growth based on the fall/winter/spring diagnostic tests.”

“...Status of the Class and we meet with a student, if they can tell us a little bit about the book, then it kind of shows that they are reading it...”

“I think in previous years when we forced the kids to read only on their level or higher and forced them to take book tests, it kind of turned them away from reading.”

“We do not make students read only on their level either, anymore. They can pick up any book and read it. I think this fosters a love for reading.”

“...tried to pilot Whooo’s Reading.... It’s sort of like a book test site, but it gets more personable. ...it makes more sense for the students than the Renaissance book tests when they would ask some random detail.”

I7

“The students that need to be read to or read with, they usually sit at the back of the room...the other kids can come up to the front of the room.”

“...their reading ability. Their reading level, their ability...how much they can handle being an independent reader or being read to.”

“The pros are...it’s developing their reading levels. It’s developing their comprehension, their listening...”

Now that we don’t have the AR tests.... So, there’s not really any way to check for their comprehension, their understanding of what they’ve read.”

“...one of the other reading teachers will go back and do the Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment for me. It gives us, we do use the i-Ready, but I find the i-Ready program does not give an accurate picture of where my kids are, what they can do, so I rely more on the F and P.”

“It shows me whether or not they’re increasing their reading level. If they’re at a, what I choose for them to do independently or as a group, I’ll look at, or how the groupings are done, I’ll look at what their levels are, if they’ve increased, if they’ve stayed the same. ...what I pull for them to work on. The skills we’re working on.”

I8

“...I have a sheet that they fill out just to kind of monitor that they are in fact truly reading and how much progress they made and just kind of reflecting on what they read.”

“...I do...the Burke Inventory...”

“...it...has book title, author, genre, and then page started on, page ended on, and they just write a brief summary of what they read that day.”

“...I go through them all and make comments and always try to ask them a question...to try and engage them...”

“...at the end of each five weeks we do a book project.”

“...each five weeks I try to have some cumulative activity about what they read, and it’s not meant to trick them or to give them a bad grade, it’s just, again, thinking about their text...”

I9

“...i-Ready is an instructional online tool that our school district has purchased in order to give targeted instruction to our students. It analyzes based on an exam three times a year what areas a student may be struggling in and assigns them lessons to meet those targeted goals.”

“...using a reading log, group discussions about their books, and one on one discussions about what they’re reading.”

“They fill it out once a week. They tell me where they are in their book, questions that they have moving forward. So, things they might wonder about happening in the text, and/or making predictions.”

“Those help me by giving me a jumping off point to know what to engage with the student in my conversation with him or her. So, if I can see that they’re having a really hard time with inferencing skills...that tells me to work on inferencing. If they have a hard time telling me who the main characters are when asked, conflict, things like that, those are going to be evident from what we’re filling out in there, so tells me we need to spend more time in this area and discuss this either one on one or in a whole group.”

Appendix C: Descriptive Codes Derived From In Vivo Codes

RQ1

“Implementing instructional activities that lead students to develop reading independence.”

I1

INDEPENDENT READING (AS A CLASS)
TALK ABOUT THEIR BOOKS
DRAW PICTURES OF WHAT THEY READ/VISUALIZED

I2

INDEPENDENT READING TIME (WITH SUPPORT)
READING IS SOCIAL
READING CHOICE

I3

INDEPENDENT READING TIME
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT READING
MODELING

I4

INDEPENDENT READING TIME
STATUS OF THE CLASS (CONFERENCE ABOUT BOOKS)
FLIPGRID (STUDENT BOOK COMMERCIALS)

I5

INDEPENDENT READING TIME
CONFERENCING
CHOICE
SHORT-READS AS A CLASS (DIFFERENT GENRES)

I6

STATUS OF THE CLASS
CONFERENCE
MODEL A SKILL
BOOK TALKS
CHOICE

I7

INDEPENDENT READING TIME
SHORT READING PASSAGES (AS A CLASS)

I8
INDEPENDENT READING TIME
CONFERENCING
MODELING

I9
INDEPENDENT READING TIME
CONVERSATIONS AROUND READING (BETWEEN STUDENTS AND
TEACHERS)
BOOK TALKS
CHOICE
MINI SKILLS LESSONS

RQ2

“ELA teachers scaffolding student reading levels of growth during independent reading.”

I1
TEACHER READS WITH/TO STUDENT
AUDIO BOOKS

I2
TEACHERS/T.A. READS WITH/TO STUDENT
BUDDY READING
AUDIO BOOKS

I4
WHOLE GROUP READING

I5
WHOLE CLASS READING
AUDIO BOOKS

I6
MODEL SKILLS/STRATEGIES

I7
READ WITH STUDENTS/TO STUDENTS
AUDIO BOOKS

I8
AUDIO BOOKS

I9
READING BUDDIES

RQ3

“Assessment data as an informant for ELA teachers’ instructional choices for supporting student growth and independence in reading development.”

I1
STUDENT READING LEVELS
STUDENT COMPREHENSION
CONFERENCING

I2
STUDENT READING LEVELS
STUDENT COMPREHENSION

I3
ACCOUNTABILITY
READING LOG
BOOK TESTS
BOOK PROJECTS

I4
STUDENT COMPREHENSION
STATUS OF THE CLASS

I5
STUDENT READING LEVELS
STUDENT COMPREHENSION
PROOF OF BOOKS READ (CONFERENCE/FORM)

I6
STUDENT COMPREHENSION
I-READY

I7
STUDENT READING LEVELS
STUDENT COMPREHENSION
I-READY
FOUNTAS & PINNELL

I8
READING FORM
BOOK PROJECT

I9
STUDENT COMPREHENSION
READING LOG

Appendix D: Dominant Codes

RQ1

(Note: Theme #2 derived from RQ1 dominant codes.)

INDEPENDENT READING
SOCIAL ACTIVITY
CONFERENCING
SPECIFIC SKILL INSTRUCTION
MODELING
BOOK CHOICE

RQ2

(Note: Theme #3 derived from RQ2 dominant codes.)

READ WITH STUDENTS
AUDIO BOOKS
BUDDY READING
WHOLE GROUP READING
MODEL SKILLS/STRATEGIES

RQ3

(Note: Theme #4 derived from RQ3 dominant codes.)

STUDENT COMPREHENSION
STUDENT READING LEVELS
ACCOUNTABILITY
I-READY