

2023

## Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Strategies for Reading

Erin Sponaugle  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Erin Lloyd Sponaugle

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Strategies for Reading

by

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MA, West Virginia University, 2009

BA, Shepherd University, 2003

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

Walden University

December 2022

## Abstract

The problem investigated in this study was decreasing annual reading proficiency among students in intermediate elementary grades (Grades 3-5). Deficiencies in reading proficiency can negatively impact overall student achievement. The purpose of this study was to investigate intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students' reading proficiency and potentially increase Generalized Summative Assessment scores. The conceptual framework was Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory. The key research questions were about elementary reading teachers' perceptions of effective instructional practices used to increase students' reading proficiency and elementary reading teachers' perceptions about teachers' instructional strengths and challenges associated with student reading proficiency. A basic qualitative design was used, using semistructured interviews to acquire data from 10 participants. Data analysis from the interviews consisted of *a priori*, lean, and in vivo coding. The findings revealed six themes: motivation through engagement, intrinsic engagement vs. accountability for motivation, the impact of technology, parental engagement, data-driven small group instruction, and phonemic awareness. The outcome of this project study is a three-day professional development addressing the needs of teachers based on the data. School and district leaders could benefit from this study by providing professional development to improve instructional strategies for reading. Parents may benefit by learning of the use of instructional strategies for reading and how those strategies could be applied to supporting student reading proficiency during the school year and at home. Students may benefit with enhanced overall student achievement.

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## Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my aunt, Dawn Mose, who taught first grade for 35 years and was my inspiration for going into teaching. This project study is also dedicated to my seventh grade reading teacher, Mary Jo Pingley. Both helped me and countless others grow and realize their purpose in this world.

## Acknowledgments

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

The problem investigated in this study was the decreasing annual reading proficiency among students in intermediate elementary (Grades 3-5). The study focuses on three Grades 3-5 schools in a district in the Mid-Atlantic region, 90 minutes from a metropolitan area. Data from the yearly online student performance test known as the state General Summative Assessment (GSA) showed a decrease in student reading proficiency since the 2015-16 school year for certain schools in the district (see Table 1). There was an achievement gap between these schools and the higher performing schools in the district. The schools included in the study are Title I and all three participate in county and state initiatives to improve reading proficiency, such as Multi-tier System of Supports (MtSS), implementation of a district wide reading and writing curriculum program, and participation in academic coaching for reading (school administrator, personal communication, January 21, 2021). These schools continue to show a decline in reading proficiency while other schools improve (school administrator, personal communication, January 21, 2021).

**Table 1***Reading Proficiency of Grade 3-5 Students by School Year*

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
School A	40%	39%	37%	31%
School B	51%	50%	40%	41%
School C	53%	49%	46%	43%
State	49%	48%	45%	46%

*Note.* From “ZoomWV Dashboard” by West Virginia Department of Education (2021).

Researchers acknowledge deficiencies in reading proficiency can negatively impact overall student achievement. Being able to read proficiently affects student achievement in other content areas and standardized assessments in other subjects (Miller, 2020). Additionally, administrators and teachers in the schools studied have expressed concern that the interruptions to learning during the COVID-19 pandemic will cause a further decline in student reading proficiency (school administrator, personal communication, February 18, 2021). Additional support and pilot programs for reading intervention have been launched in these schools to support the growing number of students that are not proficient in reading (school administrator, personal communication, February 18, 2021).

### **Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to investigate intermediate elementary (Grades 3-5) teachers’ perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students’ reading proficiency and potentially increase GSA scores. Based on the schools’ low GSA reading test scores, more in-depth information was needed from teachers about how they prepare

and encourage students to read proficiently. Low reading proficiency not only impacts future academic success across subjects but also has a negative impact on self-esteem and mental health (Boyes et al., 2018; Kavanaugh, 2019). Identifying student needs in reading to improve proficiency is critical in the elementary grades, even though the tests that measure reading proficiency may not provide all the needed information (Lonigan & Burrell, 2017; Miñoza & Montero, 2019). It becomes increasingly necessary to nurture students as readers in the elementary grades, as their interest in and attitude towards reading declines as they get closer to middle school (Bright & Loman, 2020; Kavanaugh, 2019). Teachers' perceptions about reading and how they project those perceptions on their students are noted to have an influence on reading development and future reading habits (Unrau et al., 2015). Understanding teachers' perceptions about reading instructional strategies helped me to identify the next steps to take to help mitigate the problem of declining scores.

### **Definition of Terms**

*At-risk:* The term *at-risk* refers to students who are at an academic disadvantage due to their background and environment, requiring additional academic support (Bulger & Watson, 2006).

*Achievement gap:* Achievement gap is the difference in academic performance between groups of advantaged and disadvantaged students based on race, background, and socioeconomic status (Carpenter et al., 2006).

*General Summative Assessment (GSA):* The GSA is a standardized assessment given annually to students in Grades 3-8. It tests proficiency in mathematics, reading, and writing (Wayne County Schools, 2020).

*Instructional strategies:* Instructional strategies are methods or plans of action taken by the teacher to guide students to understanding based on students' needs before or during a lesson (Sottilaire et al., 2014).

*Multi-tier system of supports (MtSS):* Also referred to as a state tiered system of supports, MTSS is a framework to support students with their mental health, behavior, and academics. Students are tiered as universal, targeted, or intensive based on their needs in these areas (West Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

*Reading motivation:* Reading motivation is a students' desire to read for intrinsic and extrinsic incentives, often influenced by self-concept, interest, and the value assigned to reading (Neugebauer & Fujimoto, 2020).

*Reading proficiency:* Reading proficiency is a solid competency in language, communication, reading mechanics, and comprehension (Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, 2014).

*Title I school:* A Title I school receives federal financial assistance distributed through their local education agency (LEA) due to having a high percentage of students with low socioeconomic status. This support is designated through the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965 (United States Department of Education, 2015).



### **Significance of the Study**

The ability to apply fundamental reading skills to problem-solving and innovation in math and science has been shown to influence preparedness to careers in STEM, with the National Assessment of Educational Progress showing nearly two-thirds of high school graduates reading below grade level (Caccamise & Kintsch., 2017). Effective reading instruction in the elementary grades is essential to a child's ability to succeed in school, graduate, and attain employment with more profitable earnings (Bratsch et al., 2017). The results of this study could benefit school and district leaders because the identified areas for professional development may improve teachers' instructional strategies for reading and ultimately student reading proficiency. Parents may benefit from the results of the study by learning of the use of instructional strategies for reading and how those strategies could be applied to supporting student reading proficiency outside of the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

The problem to be investigated in this study was the decreasing annual reading proficiency among students in Grades 3-5. The purpose of this study was to investigate intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students' reading proficiency and potentially increase GSA scores. The research questions guiding this study were derived from the problem statement and are supported by the project study's purpose. To investigate intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students' reading proficiency and potentially increase GSA scores, I elicited teachers' perceptions of effective instructional

strategies and the teachers' instructional strengths and challenges associated with student reading proficiency. The two research questions were:

Research Question 1: What are elementary reading teachers' perceptions of effective instructional practices they use to increase students' reading proficiency?

Research Question 2: What are elementary reading teachers' perceptions about teachers' instructional strengths and challenges associated with student reading proficiency?

### **Review of the Literature**

The focus of this project study was elementary teachers' perceptions of instructional practices for reading. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) theory was the conceptual framework guiding the research. In this study, the following topics were researched: *instructional strategies, independent reading, reading motivation, technology integration, parent involvement, and professional development.*

The review of literature helped attain a better understanding of the factors influencing reading proficiency and recognize potential gaps that exist in the schools that are a part of this project study. Researched sources related to the problem included instructional strategies, independent reading, reading incentives, parental involvement, technology integrated programs, and reading professional development.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD. Learning leads to development in the child due to their interactions with people and peers (Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Rentauli, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD shows the

relationship between actual development and the potential development in the child.

Through adult guidance in the form of scaffolding and the creation of experiences where children can collaborate with their peers, children can reach their learning potential (Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Rentauli, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). Integrating ZPD into reading practices such as cloze procedures and small group instruction is shown to be effective in reaching the instructional needs of students (Ajideh et al., 2020; Martinez & Plevyak, 2020) Learning begins before children enter school, and children also learn from adults they interact with outside of school once they start attending school, making interactions with others essential for development (Rentauli, 2019; Shebani, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, play allows children to imitate and master skills because it places them within their ZPD through their interactions and interpretations (Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978).

Some of the factors that influence the scaffolding process are appropriate assistance, mediation through language, cooperation, imitation of skills, growth targets, and life crises that spur development (Rentauli, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). It is important that the scaffolding relationship between the teacher and student allows for interaction and avoids direct instruction (Shabani, 2010). This is because making language and communicating needs to people leads to organized thought (Vygotsky, 1978). ZPD helps to inform the project study on teachers' perceptions of instructional strategies for reading because the use of ZPD is the basis for many of the programs and practices implemented in classrooms for reading proficiency (Ajideh et al., 2020; Bakhoda & Shebani, 2019; Lewis, 2018; Martinez & Plevyak, 2020).

## **Review of the Broader Problem**

The topics encompassing the broader problem of reading proficiency include instructional strategies, independent reading, reading incentives and motivation, technology integration, parent involvement, and professional development. Research has focused on studies pertaining to improving reading proficiency through these topics. Each is an area of concern to be addressed through the project study through investigating intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions. Keywords used to search for literature included *reading skills elementary*, *independent reading practices elementary*, *parent involvement reading*, *reading program fidelity*, and *elementary reading professional development*. Sources were acquired from ERIC, EBSCO, and the Walden University Thoreau database.

## **Instructional Strategies**

Instructional strategies where students speak and interact with each other in person or online are shown to have a positive effect on reading proficiency. Students learn to improve their reading proficiency through small group and differentiated instruction within their ZPD (Kuhn, 2020; Martinez & Plevyak, 2020). Oral reading strategies help students make connections to the text and build word recognition. Quality conversational experiences in reading, such as classroom talk during reading instruction, readers theatre, and literature circles increase standardized tests scores and understanding of the text (Goodwin et al., 2021; Holahan 2018; Ming 2018; Venegas, 2018; West, 2018). Students see reading as a community activity by engaging in instruction with these skills. For example, teachers who utilize peer influence by pairing students for reading

activities where stronger reading can be modeled for struggling readers see an improvement in reading achievement (Cooc & Kim, 2017; Yilmaz & Kadan, 2019). These experiences also lead to improved reading fluency (Hudson, 2020; Kuhn, 2020).

Students also benefit from being taught strategies where they need to internalize the text and build comprehension independently. Strategies where students create questions and predictions about the text, such as the directed thinking reading activity (DTRA), are most effective at developing readers with strong comprehension skills and interest in reading (Ardhian et al., 2020; Frijters, 2018). By working within students' ZPD, the teacher can employ strategies that build skills such as sequencing and making predictions without a direct focus on the words themselves. Interactive book reading activities where students are shown pictures relating to the text or are supplemented with picture books help students develop higher levels of fluency and comprehension (Çetinkaya et al., 2019; Lubis, 2018; Roslina, 2017). Emphasis on vocabulary development is also important in building reading proficiency. A focus on word identification and comprehension in the elementary grades is important in closing the achievement gap in reading (Holahan, 2018; Sparapani, 2018). Another necessary strategy and element to developing reading proficiency is independent reading.

### **Independent Reading**

Independent reading is a strategy and activity that builds reading proficiency through student choice. When choice is promoted in student independent reading in an ELA classroom, removing the traditional expectations of accountability and text rigor from the learning environment, student inclination to read increases with the freedom

given to students in their independent reading (Allen-Lyall & Davis, 2020; Hale, 2020; Raney, 2017). Within the student selected reading, practical application of what has been taught during reading instruction occurs. Independent reading allows students to apply the skills on their own that they learned during reading instruction (Deacon et al., 2019; Miñoza & Montero, 2019; Pierce & Gilles, 2017). Skill reinforcement during independent reading is not limited to comprehension. Students are also able to teach themselves the spellings and meanings of new words in context through independent reading (Deacon et al, 2019; Mimeau et al., 2019).

Reading independently is more effective when it encompasses reflection and communication of what has been read. An independent reading program based on students' written reflections on the text and application of literacy skills allows developed readers to expand on their interests and writing abilities, while reluctant readers receive more personalized attention in reading from the teacher, promoting growth (LeWren, 2017; Peterson, 2019; Pierce & Gilles, 2017). Although students are choosing texts to read on their own, teacher interaction and monitoring are necessary to gauge student progress. Activities such as student-teacher journaling about current independent reading and student-led conferences lead to higher quality relationships and interactions in the learning environment (LeWren, 2017; Raney, 2017).

Allotting time in the classroom for students to practice independent reading is needed in order for it to have a substantial impact on reading proficiency. While independent reading increases reading proficiency, structuring time in classroom instruction for students to read independently without scaffolding remains a concern

(Barone & Barone, 2018; Hiebert & Daniel, 2019). While it is ideal to have students read outside of the classroom as well, that time outside of the classroom is in competition with student attitudes, home environment, and after school commitments (Barone & Barone, 2018; Ha Thi Thu Nguyen & Henderson, 2020; Surkami, 2019) To encourage students to read independently for improvement in reading proficiency, many teachers use incentives and motivation to encourage students to read on their own.

### **Reading Incentives and Motivation**

Motivating students to read on their own and providing an incentive for attaining their goals is a common practice in the elementary school to increase reading proficiency. Connections between reading motivation and reading proficiency among elementary students are evident (Kloos et al., 2019; Nevo et al., 2020; Smith, 2017; Toste et al., 2020). One way of providing motivation is through extrinsic incentives as rewards. Although such a token economy can be successful in keeping students on task and productive in the short term, struggling readers receiving tangible items show less long-term motivation and skill acquisition (Kanonire et al., 2020; Orkin et al., 2018; Troyer et al., 2019). Attempts to motivate through extrinsic incentives can lead to students reading for reasons that do not increase growth. Students may honor reading programs because they fear the consequences if they do not reach their goals, often finding greater personal interest in reading outside of the pressure of challenges and in reading non-traditional materials on e-readers and tablets (Smith, 2017; Troyer et al., 2019). Students with less reading proficiency are more inclined to be motivated by extrinsic factors as a means to compete with their more proficient peers, although the extrinsic motivation has limited

impact on their reading growth (Hebbeker et al., 2019; Kanonire et al., 2020, Yang et al., 2018).

Intrinsic motivators such as student choice, school culture, and developing self-concept appear to be more impactful in motivating students to read more and increasing reading proficiency. Identifying student motivational preferences and needs plays a role in meeting the needs of non-proficient readers, such as those under intensive MtSS intervention (Neugebauer & Fujimoto, 2020; Smith & Miller, 2018; Troyer et al., 2019). Student choice in reading also serves as motivation to read for students, as they are able to select texts of interest to them and that they feel confident in comprehending (Allen-Lyall & Davis, 2020; Barone & Barone, 2018; McClung et al., 2019). Providing students with high interest reading selections such as graphic novels and allowing for students to self-select reading materials is shown to be a greater motivator than tangible rewards (Luetkemeyer, 2021; McClung et al., 2019). Students' self-concept regarding how they view themselves as readers also contributes to motivation to read and can be scaffolded through reading instruction (Nevo et al., 2020; McClung et al., 2019).

The effort to motivate students to prioritize the development of their reading proficiency needs to extend beyond the classroom. A school culture that emphasizes the importance of reading and provides resources to meet students' needs and interests also serves as an intrinsic motivator for increased reading (Bright & Loman, 2020; Toste et al. 2020). Students are increasingly influenced regarding their self-concept and how they use their time by the availability of technology, such as cell phones and portable devices. This availability of technology has made its way into the curriculum. The use of



technology in reading instruction as a strategy to improve reading proficiency by reinforcing skills and as a means of motivation has become increasingly prevalent with the availability of devices, programs, and out of necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lagarde, 2021; Turunen, 2019; Yaghi et al., 2019). Technology integration will continue to have an impact in the classroom as a means of improving reading proficiency even when it is not necessitated by a pandemic to deliver instruction.

### **Technology Integration**

Teachers use online reading programs and technology integrated components of teaching resources for the purpose of improving reading proficiency. Using technology to engage students in online components of reading programs based on their level of reading proficiency is shown to improve reading proficiency and interest in reading (Bakhoda & Shebani, 2019; McDermott & Gormley, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2018, Yang et al., 2018). While the use of technology in reading instruction can provide more efficient monitoring and access to resources, both the teacher and student must know how to use it effectively. With the integration of technology, teachers also have to teach students how to use the technology correctly in order to be able to use it to improve their reading proficiency (Mitchell et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2018). The increased accessibility of technology in students' lives makes its use in reading practices familiar and engaging to students. Many of the features in reading technology, such as read aloud text and interactive elements, along with the access it provides outside of the classroom, motivate students to engage in the text and work on their reading proficiency (Yang et al., 2018; Yuqing Shi & Yuelong Zhu, 2020).

The schools included within this project study have used Accelerated Reader (AR) as a scaffold for student reading proficiency. This technology-based program allows teachers to scaffold reading instruction based on student reading proficiency, while providing students with assessments on the comprehension of reading texts. Greater implementation of AR in classrooms can lead to higher achievement on the STAR reading test, as it targets student reading levels based on their ZPD (Bloomer, 2020; Topping, 2018). Programs such as AR and other computerized reading assessment programs have proven to help students practice and improve their reading proficiency through targeting their ZPD (Bakhoda & Shebani, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2018). Technology integrated reading programs that allow teachers to monitor and adjust instruction based on student performance are effective in determining proficiency as students engage in the program throughout the year (Mitchell et al., 2018; Soto et al., 2019). Technology based programs alone cannot improve the quality or success of reading instruction. Teachers find value in technology integrated literacy programs such as AR for structure, student accountability, and motivation for reading, but program limitations necessitate deeper comprehension of the texts and for developing appreciation for reading (Kloos et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2017). AR and other technology integrated programs are more advantageous to students with fewer obstacles impeding their reading proficiency.

Certain groups, such as girls, those with higher reading ability, and those with higher socioeconomic status showed much greater progress with AR and similar programs, as parent involvement and access to reading material still play a role in success

(Bloomer, 2020; Topping, 2018). Students still need to be taught skills, even when technology programs for reading are in use. Teachers still need to provide the scaffolding and the classroom modeling of skills during reading instruction to supplement the technology tools (Hashim & Vongkulluksn, 2018; Lange, 2019). Scaffolding from the teacher and the parent figures in students' lives remains essential to improving reading proficiency, regardless of the added technology.

### **Parent Involvement**

The involvement of parent figures in students' lives impacts their success in improving their reading proficiency. Parent involvement in addition to time spent in reading instruction impacts student reading proficiency, as students first learn the value of reading in their home setting (Dong et al., 2020; Gay et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2018). Not all students have the opportunity for their parents to be involved in their reading development in the same amount as their peers. Factors such as low socioeconomic status (SES), less time to engage in reading at home due to work or family issues, and lack of books in the home or transportation to school affect the ability for parents to be involved in the development of their child's reading proficiency (Andersen et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2020; Gay et al., 2020; Ni et al., 2021). Parental education level also plays a role in the willingness to be involved (Gay et al., 2020; Smith, 2020; Zambrana et al., 2019). Not all parental involvement has a positive impact on reading proficiency. Instances where parents coerce students to practice, overcorrect mistakes, and focus heavily on performance show that parents need to be shown how to support their students' reading proficiency that is being scaffolded at school (Andersen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2018).

Considering the needs of both the students and parents is important for the success of any effort to improve reading proficiency (Smith, 2020; Yang et al, 2018; Zambrana et al., 2019).

Creating experiences for parents and students to engage in reading practices together is an effective method of improving reading proficiency, as long as the needs and demographics of families are considered in the creation of the activities. By implementing programs such as parent-child book clubs, family reading nights, and programs to teach parents how to develop student reading at home, parents and family members have an increased interest in reading with their children, as well as improved school and family relationships (Dennis & Margarella, 2017; Deuschle, 2017; Mesa & Restrepo, 2019; Zambrana et al., 2019). Parental involvement in these programs gives students time to engage in reading with their parents in ways they may not have time or the ability to do outside of school. Involvement in such programs or engagement during instruction where parents and children are reading together appears to have them most impact on student reading proficiency (Jones, 2018; Mesa & Restrepo, 2019; Ni et al., 2021).

Activities to promote parental involvement have the potential to help at-risk students. Students from low-income families show an increase in reading proficiency when engaged in intervention programs outside of the traditional school day and school year, especially when their parents are involved in the programs (Beach & Traga Philippakos, 2021; Ni et al., 2021). It is important that the programs created for parental involvement take into consideration the needs of the parents, such as work times and

language barriers, in order for the program to have the intended benefit of including the families of students most in need of developing their reading proficiency (Dennis & Margarella, 2017; Zambrana et al, 2019).

Implementing instructional strategies, independent reading, motivation, technology integration, and parental involvement all require the teacher to receive training and guidance for effective use in developing student reading proficiency. Professional development is necessary to bring these elements together for effective reading proficiency in the elementary school.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development that gives teachers the opportunity to put into practice the strategies and resources obtained is necessary in order for it to impact instruction and student reading proficiency. When elementary teachers are provided with professional development for reading instruction, the strategies teachers adopt for instructional strategies, motivation, and parental involvement have a positive influence on student interest and growth in reading (Beach et al., 2020; Didion et al., 2019; De Naeghel et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2018; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2019). Taking the teacher out of the classroom for professional development keeps the teacher from being present to provide reading instruction to students. Professional development centered on co-teaching, mentoring, and coaching improves teachers' ability to provide more effective reading instruction, although it does not guarantee the students will be given time to put the strategies that could improve reading proficiency into practice (Didion et al., 2020; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2019). With these professional development

practices, the teacher can learn how to best adapt the knowledge learned with the coach providing the professional development. These strategies keep the teacher in the classroom to practice the strategies and resources obtained during the professional development, which teachers have found to be important in maintaining continuity of instruction (Clark et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2018).

Structuring professional development experiences for teachers who provide language instruction such as reading skills needs to consider the teachers' own ZPD. Professional development that focuses on the needs of individual teachers through personalized training through a one-one-one approach allow for better feedback for the teacher in improving their reading instruction (Clark et al., 2018; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2019). Other factors beside the delivery of the professional development impact its effect on reading instruction. The amount of time teachers spent in the professional development, relevance to the teachers' reading instruction, and willingness to implement the professional development into their practice influence the effectiveness professional development has on student reading proficiency (Basma & Savage, 2018; Beach et al., 2020; Didion et al., 2019). Creating a community where teachers can continue to develop what has been learned in the professional development and continue to apply it to reading instruction is needed for continued improvement. Considering how to create opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their peers and ensuring the professional development content will challenge teachers without creating confusion is essential to its effectiveness (Basma & Savage, 2018; Bright & Loman, 2020; Shabani, 2010).

### **Implications**

Teacher judgment is an accurate predictor of student reading proficiency in comparison to standardized tests (Missall et al., 2019). Using a qualitative research approach to this study allowed for insight from the perspectives of teachers regarding instructional reading strategies that cannot be collected from standardized test data. The results of the study may be used to create professional development that would help teachers implement instructional strategies to improve student reading proficiency. Insight into teacher perspectives on the instructional strengths and challenges associated with student reading performance may improve understanding about what students need academically and personally to improve reading proficiency. More information about the needs of students and teachers will provide greater understanding regarding what is needed to increase student achievement, potentially leading to increased reading proficiency.

### **Summary**

Student reading proficiency scores in Grades 3-5 have shown a decline in three schools in the study school district. Scores have continued to decline despite the schools' and the district's efforts to improve reading proficiency through various initiatives and support (school administrator, personal communication, January 21, 2021). Being able to read is an essential skill that students need for success in school, work, and life (Iruvuri, 2020). The effective use of instructional strategies and the identification of student needs leads to greater student achievement and lifelong interest in reading. Section 2 explains the research methodology, the participants of the study, and a rationale for how data was

to be collected and analyzed. Section 3 provides a description and analysis of the project study once data has been collected. Section 4 shows the reflections and conclusion of this project study.



## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Research Design and Approach**

Within this study, I used a basic qualitative design using semistructured interviews to acquire data from participants. I developed interview questions to collect data, with data analysis from the interviews conducted using *a priori*, lean, and in vivo coding. Ten interviews with teachers in Grades 3-5 were conducted to investigate intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students' reading proficiency and potentially increase GSA test scores. This chapter details the qualitative research design and approach, how participants were selected and contacted, and the steps taken for data collection.

#### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

The basic qualitative design permits the researcher to learn about the perceptions of a local problem through semistructured interviews with those affected by the problem (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through rich descriptions and observations, the researcher learns how others make meaning through their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic qualitative design allowed for the natural, descriptive collection of data based on teachers' unique experiences with reading instruction in the classroom and data that could not have been as effectively obtained through a statistical, quantitative approach (see Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). Selecting participants is based on whether those selected meet criteria that will permit them to be able to contribute information based on the basic qualitative design topic (Lodico et al., 2010).

This research design derived logically from the local problem because the declining annual reading proficiency in Grades 3-5 suggested more information on elementary teachers' perceptions of instructional practices for reading would aid in understanding the decline. In order to gauge teachers' perceptions on reading instructional practices, conversational and anecdotal data needed to be collected from teachers. The narrative, interpretive nature of basic qualitative design allowed me to create a dialogue with the participants to collect this form of data (see Lodico et al., 2010). The multiple perspectives obtained from the interviews led to the recurring themes among participants that formed the results of this study.

Other research methods were considered. The purpose of this study was to investigate intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students' reading proficiency and potentially increase GSA scores. In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative design involves developing a hypothesis based on trends in data and developing or using an instrument to obtain data from participants, using predetermined questions and response selections (Creswell, 2015; Lodico et al., 2010). While the statistical data yielded from a quantitative study could have provided insight into teachers' perceptions, it would have limited the depth of understanding regarding why teachers feel the way they do about reading instructional practices. A qualitative approach allowed for greater connection with the participants that led to discovering unexpected themes that presented in the interviews (Creswell, 2015). As a teacher for 20 years, I have also found that teachers and administrators, those who would be affected by the study's results, are more receptive to the conclusions in research that

involve personal narratives they can relate to as a fellow professional. A basic qualitative design was not only more appropriate for the study but also served to attract more stakeholders to the conducted research and possibly have them act on the study's results.

### **Participants**

Criterion-based selection was used to choose participants for this study on teacher perceptions on instructional reading practices. Using criterion-based selection allowed for the participants to reflect the purpose of the research to be conducted and to state why these attributes are necessary for the study's intent (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To participate in the study, teachers must have taught for the past 3 or more years and needed to have taught reading in Grades 3-5 for at least 5 years. These criteria were in place to ensure the teachers interviewed had experience teaching reading and had witnessed how instructional practices have affected students over a period of time. Having taught for 5 years overall was included in the criterion for assurance that participants had experience necessary to base their responses on classroom experience with reading instruction and not on being new to the teaching profession.

Excluded from participating in the study were teachers who had not taught reading in Grades 3-5 over the past 5 years and who had not taught reading in Grades 3-5 for the last 3 years. Teachers with less than 5 years of experience may have based their responses more on being new to the profession more so than on their established instructional practices in reading. Teachers who have not taught reading for an extended period of time would not have seen how instructional practices have been impacted by changes in instruction or needs of the student population. These measures are in place to

protect the validity of the data collection and the usefulness of the conclusions in making positive change to reading practices.

To acquire participants, voluntary participation was requested after obtaining approval from district and school principals. Requests were made in writing via email for principals to distribute to the teachers in their building. The principal at each school served as the gatekeeper for initial communication with potential participants, to establish relationships, and to facilitate access to the school (see Lodico et al., 2010). It was stated in the request that interviews could take place in person or via video conferencing such as Microsoft Teams based on the participants' preferences. After participants had volunteered and it had been determined they met the criteria for the study, contact was made via email to move forward with data collection. The purpose and benefits of the study were shared in writing with participants when the interviews were requested to establish trust. A promise of confidentiality was shared and signed by all participants and me to further establish trust among the participants and to show that I would protect the privacy of the participants (see Bilken & Bogdan, 2007).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Upon obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, this project was assigned #02-14-22-0539117. Interview questions were developed to collect data (see Appendix A). Document recording sheets were created to analyze data from interviews. Each research question was answered through the collection of data during the 45-60 minute, in-person or via video conference, semistructured interviews. The semistructured interview questions were open-ended to allow the participants to answer in their own

words and to allow for the collection of data that could take the study in an unexpected direction (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To ensure the data collected from the interviews was correctly reported, notes were taken during the interviews and the interviews were recorded for a speech-to-text transcript. This was stated in the signed confidentiality agreement and stated again prior to beginning the interview. To assure validity and credibility of the collected data, triangulation in the form of member checks was utilized by sharing the findings of the data to avoid misinterpretation (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews were held one-on-one with each participant. This was to ensure confidentiality and provide the most comfortable environment for the participants to articulate their thoughts (see Creswell, 2013).

Once an interview had been completed, the transcripts were analyzed with coding. Coding allows for similarities in the data collected from participants during the semistructured interviews to be placed into categories that would reveal teachers' perceptions about reading practices. *A priori* codes were used initially to analyze data followed by additional coding of emergent themes uncovered during analysis (see Creswell, 2013). Categories and subcategories for codes were derived from the answers of the participants so as to categorize in a way that was exhaustive and responsive to the purpose of investigating teachers' perceptions of instructional practices for reading (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lean coding, the process of assigning a few codes when analyzing an interview transcript for the first time, was followed by in vivo coding, expanding on the analysis of each teacher's perception of reading instructional practices

with codes from their own words (Creswell, 2013). The use of lean coding allows the researcher to start with a broader scope of the themes in the data, while the in vivo coding permits for a more in-depth investigation of each response (Creswell, 2013).

As the researcher, I had not held a professional role at any of the schools where participants in this study were employed, nor did I have a relationship with any of the participants. I taught multi-subjects, including reading and English Language Arts, in Grades 3-5 for 17 years before changing programmatic levels. Being removed from the 3-5 intermediate classroom assisted in staying objective and preventing bias while conducting research.

### **Limitations**

Teachers in other schools across the state or country may have different views than the ones featured in this study. Those in similar or same teaching situations across Grades 3-5 may have different viewpoints than the ones featured in this study, even with the established criteria for participants. Conducting this research post-pandemic may also have impacted how teachers responded regarding their perceptions of instructional practices in reading. Any conclusions reached are limited to the context of the participants featured in this study.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students' reading proficiency and potentially increase GSA scores. Ten questions focused on intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions about effective instructional practices and instructional strengths

and challenges associated with increasing student reading proficiency were the basis for the semistructured interviews (see Appendix B). The 10 teacher participants were asked the same initial semistructured interview questions during their 45–60-minute interview. All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed using Microsoft Teams for the convenience and privacy of the participants. Notes were also taken during the interviews for reference. Participants were assigned a number to further protect their identity. As the researcher, I reviewed the recordings and transcriptions after each interview to ensure the transcription displayed the correct wording and syntax for understanding. Member checking was utilized via email with each participant to confirm the accuracy of the transcription after my initial review of the transcript. No participants requested any clarification of their responses. Discrepant cases are addressed in each theme as needed.

The research questions developed to guide this study and to address the problem in this project study were:

1. What are elementary reading teachers' perceptions of effective instructional practices they use to increase students' reading proficiency?
2. What are elementary reading teachers' perceptions about teachers' instructional strengths and challenges associated with student reading proficiency?

Codes were developed based on these questions as interview transcripts were analyzed. The codes were then categorized as themes in the data emerged for each research question. Data collected from the interviews aligned with the research questions. Six themes developed from analyzing the data: motivation through engagement, intrinsic

engagement vs. accountability for motivation, the impact of technology, parental engagement, data-driven small group instruction, and phonemic awareness.

### **Theme 1: Motivation Through Engagement**

Teachers expressed that keeping students engaged and interested in reading instruction was essential in increasing student reading proficiency in Grades 3-5. This theme presented itself through semistructured questions regarding teacher's daily reading instruction, most effective instructional strategies, independent reading, and motivation. It became apparent that the most perceived strength to increasing reading proficiency was to use strategies to engage students in the act of reading. Student engagement was tied closely to questions regarding independent reading and motivation. Several sub themes emerged as strategies that promoted student engagement: read alouds, conversations, student book choice, and good fit books.

#### ***Read Alouds***

Read alouds were among the most mentioned strategies for engaging students to increase reading proficiency. Teachers attributed reading books aloud to their students as a way to interest students in reading and to model additional strategies that could improve reading proficiency. As stated by Participant 10:

The most effective [strategy] has been reading out loud to my kids. I know it sounds simple, but it's reading aloud and taking time to stop and discuss it.

Teaching them how to visualize - so many of them have no clue they should be making a movie in their head when they read. That also fosters a love for reading.

They come to love the story that you're reading, and they're interested and want to



know what happens next. I'm convincing them there are other great stories out there waiting for them to just open the book and get started. Fostering the love for reading is the most important thing you can do. Kids who enjoy reading, read more. They're getting further and further ahead while the other ones are getting further and further behind.

Teachers noted that read alouds were effective at motivating their students to increase their reading proficiency because they were modeling for students that reading is an enjoyable activity with relevance to their lives. This was achieved through choosing high interest books that students could relate to and connect to their own lives. Participant 1 stated they always begin the year reading *Shiloh* to their class because "The kids love that book. They love that it has a dog in it and everything...And then once we're done, I have kids who want to read more in the series" (Participant 1). Read alouds also were perceived by teachers as a means to motivate students to read by modeling their own interest and enthusiasm for reading. Participant 2 mentioned:

I think my read alouds and my excitement about what I'm reading during read aloud is probably 90% of their motivation to read. Because I've showed an interest in it and they always want to read the read aloud that you just read. I make sure that I have several copies of that. And it's funny to me, because they wouldn't normally reread a book, kids when they get to this age. But they will reread a read aloud.

Read alouds were noted as an opportunity to discuss topics, strategies, and build dialogue about books as a classroom community. The use of dialogue, or conversations for student engagement was another recurrence in the data.

### *Conversations*

Creating opportunities for classroom dialogue about books was another strategy used to engage students for increased reading proficiency. It was noted by many participants that students in Grades 3-5 needed time to socialize with one another and share their learning through conversation. Such experiences where conversations about books and text take place during read alouds, as well as student-led discussions about books they are independently reading. Conversations also included dialogue with the teacher to build relationships to foster further interest in reading. Participant 3 stated:

I will have conversations with students about a book they might have picked out in the library and let them use their conversation skills...to let them talk about what's happened or a word they didn't know. It helps motivate them and increase reading in general...I let them recommend a book to me. I'll read it, and then we'll have lunch together in my room one day and we'll talk about it...

Teachers mentioned literature circles, where a group of students read the same book and then meet to discuss what they have read with their peers, as effective in building reading proficiency through student engagement, especially regarding encouraging independent reading. Participant 8 noted that "The big push for me is literature circles, having students read together and being able to collaborate and have

those conversations within their independent reading level. Fostering that love of reading helps them get other perspectives on things” (Participant 8).

The desire and need for students in Grades 3-5 to socialize was perceived as a strength for building reading proficiency through conversation. The books selected for students were to read, either collaboratively or independently, impacted the level of engagement students had with the reading instruction.

### ***Book Selection***

Teachers noted the importance of having students read books that reflected their interests and were appropriate for their reading level. Taking both into account was perceived to ensure students would stay engaged in the instruction provided and continue to read independently. The most important factors identified for effective book selection were student book choice and selecting good fit books for students.

**Student Book Choice.** Teachers perceived giving students the opportunity to self-select books they found of interest as another means of engagement in reading. As stated by Participant 4, “I feel like they need to have access to books that are interesting and things that they’re interested in” (Participant 4). Giving students the autonomy to choose their own reading material based on their interest is perceived as a means of motivating students to be engaged in the reading instruction and read independently outside of instructional time. Participant 8 also noted the impact of allowing students to have a voice in what they read, stating “Choice is huge for kids...when we don’t allow choice, when we don’t take into account their interests, reading isn’t as motivating” (Participant 8).

Allowing students to choose books that interest them was seen as key, as well as teaching students how to select books for themselves to read based on their interests. Participant 1 assists her students in creating book boxes based on a reading inventory to “... get a gauge on what they kids are interested in reading, because...I don’t even think some of the kids by the time they come into fifth grade, even know what they are interested in reading about” (Participant 1). Participant 5 echoed this sentiment that students need to be shown how to find books they enjoy stating:

I’ve found that if I show them, sit with them, and find books they enjoy and can read on their own independently without struggling, they’re more apt to read than if somebody just hands them a book and says, “Here you go.” Some kids I have been able to reach by just finding books that they enjoy reading.

**Good Fit Books.** Along with giving students autonomy in choosing what they wanted to read was the perception that books needed to fit students’ reading instructional levels so they could comprehend the text. This was called a good fit book by teachers, meaning that the book suits not only the student’s interest, but also their reading level so as to avoid the student becoming frustrated and disengaged in the text. This means of scaffolding is in line with selecting instructional material in accordance with a child’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). Selecting a good fit book is used by teachers in tandem with student interest. Participant 7 explained how she combines selecting a good fit book along with acknowledging students’ interests:

At the beginning of the year, we talk about what is a good fit book for you, how to determine that. They will get to pick their book that is their level. Sometimes I’ll

even be like, 'This seems like something you would like.' Something that kind of fits. Things you're interested in, like, 'You like cars, so read this one.'

Providing students with the opportunity to choose their own books and to read books that are a good fit for their reading level are perceived as necessary for student engagement. Teachers noted that students needed to be shown how to select books to fit their interests and needs. Modeling this practice as well as others was also noted as necessary for effective student engagement.

### ***Modeling***

All aspects of creating student engagement for increased reading proficiency included an element of modeling the desired skill or behavior for students in order to be effective. This included the teacher demonstrating how to think and put into practice different reading skills, as well as teachers showing excitement and interest in reading themselves. "I really think that modeling it, modeling the excitement, modeling, stopping to chat and showing them those think alouds and the modeling what I'm thinking" (Participant 2). The practice of modeling extended through the other sub themes of read alouds, conversations, and book selection. "If we are sharing our love for reading with students and we're showing that we really are interested in the things that they are reading, then they're going to be more motivated to read" (Participant 6). Teachers perceived their actions and attitudes toward reading played a role in the effectiveness of the student engagement.

### **Summary of Theme 1**

Read alouds, conversations, book selection, and modeling encompassed the theme of motivation through engagement. These instructional strategies were viewed among the most effective in increasing student reading proficiency. Getting students interested and motivated to read is perceived to be necessary to develop students as readers. An overlapping theme that then emerged was engagement vs. accountability for motivation. While the strategies of Theme 1 encompassed intrinsic motivation, Theme 2 presented a competing perception of holding students accountable through extrinsic means to improve their reading proficiency.

### **Theme 2: Intrinsic Engagement vs. Accountability for Motivation**

Participants expressed through their responses that motivating students to read is essential for reading proficiency growth. The strategies for student engagement overlapped with the need to motivate students intrinsically to read to increase reading proficiency. Holding students accountable for their reading proficiency through extrinsic methods of motivation presented itself as a theme through the data analysis.

#### ***The Value of Intrinsic Strategies***

Teachers recognized the value of having students develop a love for reading as essential for long-term growth in reading proficiency. Engaging students through intrinsic means described in Theme 1 was the most desired. Having students see the value in reading for their own growth and find enjoyment in it was paramount in teachers' responses to the interview questions. Regardless, many of the teachers referred to using extrinsic means of motivation even though they viewed intrinsic methods as most

effective in the long term. While intrinsic methods for student engagement were used throughout reading instruction as described by teachers, extrinsic methods were specifically tied to motivating students to read independently.

### *Accountability as Extrinsic Motivation*

Although engaging students through intrinsic strategies was perceived as most effective for reading proficiency growth, teachers used extrinsic methods to encourage students to read independently. Most of these methods had a focus on holding the student accountable for their reading growth regarding the amount of time the student spent on reading or progress toward a goal. A reward was offered for students who could show they have reached their accountability measure.

The most common method of accountability mentioned was having students keep a reading log to document the books and minutes spent reading each week, with a reward for those students who fulfilled the requirements. Other accountability measures encompassed having students work toward a reading goal based on their reading instructional level. Teachers justified the use of these methods as effective for students at this age level. Participant 5 stated, “We have some students where the most effective way to get them to read is to bribe them. They enjoy the extrinsic motivation. They want those awards” (Participant 5). Participant 10 agreed, saying:

I do a nine-week incentive [for reading]. They like working towards something. I think a lot of them have never had that in their life where they have a goal and they're working towards something. When they accomplish it, I always tell them that feeling is proud. You feel proud right now.

Teachers who used accountability measures for motivation perceived the students' participation in the extrinsic motivation as proof that these methods were effective at increasing reading proficiency. Participant 7 noted:

Every month they have to read...They have some things to look forward to at the end of the month, and I notice kids who typically wouldn't read, were turning those forms in because they wanted that reward, especially once they knew what it was. They still like working towards something and having a goal. I would say that helps increase their reading proficiency because any time they take up a book, that's helpful.

Teachers noted there were limitations to extrinsic methods of motivation that made them less effective. None went as far to say it was the most effective strategy, as it was often stated getting students to read for the love of reading itself was most desired. The lack of instilling a love for reading when extrinsically incentivizing was perceived to have an adverse effect on students' interest in reading when no reward was offered. Participant 3 stated, "I don't think we should give incentives for reading, because just in the past 10 years they don't have that passion and love because they were forced to read" (Participant 3). Participant 8 saw the potential for extrinsic methods to be effective, while also stating the need for students' desire to read to come from within:

When it comes to rewards, I've seen it both ways. I've seen kids that like the rewards, and I've seen kids not motivated by rewards. It really depends on the student. I lean more for the intrinsic motivation, the self-motivation. I want them to read because they love reading, not read to get a prize. I do know that rewards



can be a motivating factor for some kids and can be the hook that gets them into the intrinsic motivation.

### ***Conflicting Views on Accelerated Reader***

A program used for increasing reading proficiency in Grades 3-5 that many of the teachers had used or were using was Accelerated Reader (AR). Students take a test that gives them their reading level within their ZPD. They are encouraged to read books within that reading level range and take online tests through the AR program to earn points toward their goal set by the teacher. The teachers who used AR used along with providing extrinsic motivation in the means of a reward for reaching their goal.

Teachers were divided on its effectiveness to increase reading proficiency. The teachers who did not feel it was effective stated they found engaging students intrinsically was preferred. Participant 3 said of using AR "...although there are some good aspects to the program, I feel that it hinders children from choosing books that they might normally have liked, because they're limited to a level" (Participant 3). Participant 6 agreed there were other ways to effectively encourage students to read:

I don't think Accelerated Reader is effective. There are other ways to motivate students. They get frustrated with it. You have students who do not like to read, or maybe it takes them longer to read, and having an amount of points that they have to reach by a certain date is frustrating for some of them. I'm not a big fan of that. The best thing to do is to show kids you're excited and introduce them to different genres that they may not have thought about before. Pair them with things that

they're interested in. Get them to try something new. AR is the least effective. I don't think that is a good way to motivate students to read.

Other teachers perceived AR and the extrinsic rewards tied to students reaching their goals as effective, as evidenced by growth in their students' reading levels. They did use intrinsic methods of engaging students in additions to those used with AR. Participant 5 stated the following with regards to how they utilize AR:

We have a certain time they read every day, and then they do the test on the book. I do tell them if there's a book that they want to read that doesn't have a test to just read it. I'm just happy if they're reading something. At the end of each semester, I offer a party for students that have met their goal, which is based on their reading level. Each student goal is different so it's attainable for everybody.

Participant 10 agreed, taking an approach with AR that combined student engagement strategies mentioned in Theme 1 with extrinsic incentives:

Taking an AR quiz that's five or 10 questions is an easy way to prove they've read the book. It teaches them comprehension strategies. I think that an AR goal is motivating for them. They love watching their progress each week they come in... My AR incentives have been really motivating. For example, we had a camp out in January where there was a tent. We did ghost stories; it was a whole 90-minute incentive. We did smores and they played games. It's just a fun time. Usually, kids that missed one of the AR incentives, they didn't miss another one.

## **Summary of Theme 2**

Teachers perceived motivating intrinsically through creating student engagement as most desired and effective in increasing reading proficiency for students in Grades 3-5, but many also resorted to extrinsic methods of motivation tied to accountability with regards to getting students to read independently. Getting students to read independently to increase their reading proficiency was a commonly referred to challenge among teachers. That challenge appeared to stem in part from the impact of technology.

## **Theme 3: The Impact of Technology on Reading Proficiency**

A challenge noted by participants was that the availability and use of technology has influenced student reading proficiency. With students having access to digital devices, often in a 1:1 classroom environment, the constant accessibility of technology was perceived by the majority of the participants as a detriment to increasing reading proficiency. If not properly used, the growing availability of technology and its use in instruction poses a challenge to increasing reading proficiency. The sub themes that emerged were the impact of instant gratification, “a book in their hands,” and student interaction.

### ***Impact of Instant Gratification***

Teachers perceived the near constant access to technology in the classroom as a challenge to increasing student reading proficiency. With the Internet available to provide information, teachers felt interest in reading had diminished among students “because of the instant gratification with cell phones and [the] internet” (Participant 7). Being able to quickly access information was viewed as a hinderance to students engaging in the

practice of reading for pleasure and to learn. Participant 1 stated, “I think that kids are not reading for pleasure anymore. They would rather look something up on their device. I think that is kind of a downfall for kids” (Participant 1). This was echoed by Participant 2:

We used to have to read to learn, and now we don't, because we have Google. In the older grades they don't have to do that [read to learn] anymore. We've given them devices in their hands...Access to technology most of the time can be a tool, but it can also be a hindrance as well.

Student technology use outside of the classroom was also viewed as a challenge to increasing reading proficiency. Time that could be spent reading independently had been replaced by using digital devices for entertainment. Participant 9 noted, “They've got the distractions at home, the technology, the social media...I think reading is becoming more of a challenge each year because of that” (Participant 9). The distractions were perceived to cause students to “get distracted by other things...[or] want to move around to other things online” (Participant 5). This was viewed as impacting the stamina students had to stay focused during reading instruction. Participant 10 noted that “They don't know how to visualize, because they never have to. The screen is showing them what to see. They cannot pay attention very long [during reading]. Screens are a challenge because they go home, and that's all they do” (Participant 10).

To combat the aspects of technology viewed as disruptive to increasing reading proficiency, teachers showed a preference for not using technology during reading

instruction. An actual book for students to read and practice reading skills was overwhelmingly preferred, even if students had access to being able to read on a device.

***A Book in Their Hands***

A common phrase repeated in regard to student technology use and its impact on reading proficiency was that teachers prefer students to have “a book in their hands” rather than reading on a device. Having students interact with a book rather than read the book or text on a screen was perceived as more effective because of the large amount of time students already spend online. Table 2 shows the comments teachers made about the preference for students having physical books over reading on a device.

**Table 2***Teachers' Preference for Students Reading Physical Books Over Devices*

Participant responses	
Participant 1	“[I] like them to have the hard copy books in their hands that they can manipulate and do things with. Sometimes they cut corners when they’re on the technology.”
Participant 2	“I think that they have to have books in their hands. They have to be reading and trying to figure it out on their own. During our reading instruction, all our technology is put away.”
Participant 5	“I found it is sometimes difficult to get students to read online. I don’t like to read books online, like if I have a choice between having a book in their hand or a book online, I would rather them have a book in their hand.”
Participant 6	“I did not like [new online reading program] ... The students had no book in front of them. It was either on their iPad or the teacher had the text to read, and the students didn’t. I didn’t like that at all because I felt if we’re teaching reading, they need to be able to see the words in front of them.”
Participant 8	“...there is something to be said about having a book in your hand... I’m not particularly for complete immersion of e-readers. I prefer a book in the hand. Some students do, too.”
Participant 9	“I don’t think I use technology so much that the kids are over it. I use it as a fair balance because I use books. I like a handheld book. I’d rather have them read by a book, have a book in their hands.”
Participant 10	“Part of my challenge is too much screen time, so I shy away from that, reading on screens. In reading class we’re using books and paper to read.”

Some teachers noted another reason they did not use technology to increase reading proficiency was because they lacked the knowledge and time to effectively use it during reading instruction. Participant 6 felt part of the challenge of implementing technology was "...having time to do it, because I feel like we're focused so much on either reading the novel or doing something with the novel that I forget about using technology...I guess I'm just not tech savvy" (Participant 6). Other participants agreed that "learning all the different components that are available and how they can be used has been a little bit challenging" (Participant 9) and "the professional development part, just knowing what tools to use" (Participant 4). While teachers perceived using an actual book was more effective for increasing reading proficiency, they expressed an interest in learning ways to use technology effectively as an instructional tool.

Teachers' interest in using technology more effectively stemmed from how they had observed their students interacting with technology programs as part of their reading instruction. When students showed an interest in interacting with the program or activity using technology, it was perceived as having a greater impact on their reading proficiency.

### ***Student Interaction***

Teachers perceived the content and type of interactions students had with the applications and programs on their devices impacted the effectiveness of the technology on reading proficiency. Programs where the students were read to and could follow the text, such as the online reading platform Epic, were viewed as having a positive effect on student reading proficiency:

I have students who read on Epic... I'll add books if we're reading about a certain subject in social studies that are either read aloud, or they can read on their own to accommodate all the different levels. I use several different websites that have articles they can read. I use digital escape rooms. (Participant 5)

Other uses of technology where students created something using a device to demonstrate their reading proficiency were viewed as effective. Other uses of technology had students use aspects of student engagement from Theme 1:

The main thing I like to use for tech integration with their reading is FlipGrid. You can create grids for your students, and it's basically assignments or groups that kind of thing. And we have one that's labeled book discussions. So once a student has read a book, they will video themselves with the book... And then other students in the class can also respond to them through video discussion or through text about that book. So, it ends up being almost like an online book review or even a book club where it gives other people ideas. (Participant 3)

Teachers perceived many of the technology programs that accompanied the district adopted reading program as being effective but not the most ideal source for increasing reading proficiency. Participant 1 mentioned the Razz Plus reading program they were expected to use "some of the material the kids aren't super excited about... It doesn't do a lot of the scaffolding or the leveling stuff I think is hard for the kids" (Participant 1). Other programs mentioned, such as Scholastic Literacy Pro and WORD, allowed for scaffolding and "being able to see where students are presently... not just relying on benchmark data" (Participant 8), but "Some of the students seemed to like it,



but others didn't...some of them would groan if they had to be on it" (Participant 9).

Gauging how students interacted with the program appeared to be an indicator regarding whether teachers found the technology use favorable and an effective strategy for instruction.

### **Summary of Theme 3**

Most teachers perceive the availability of technology to students as a challenge to increasing reading proficiency in Grades 3-5. They see students using devices as their source of enjoyment rather than reading books, which negatively impacts their reading proficiency growth. It is preferred by teachers for students to use actual books for reading instruction rather than read on devices, as teachers feel students are less distracted and interact more authentically with the text when they have an actual book. Using technology in an engaging manner with students has shown to be more effective when students are demonstrating what they learned. Some of those aspects from the impact of technology overlapped with the need for parental engagement in Theme 4.

### **Theme 4: The Need for Parental Engagement**

The challenge of engaging parents in their child's reading proficiency growth recurred throughout the participant interviews. Teachers expressed parents were not interested or communicative in regard to their child's reading proficiency growth. Effective strategies for getting parents involved in increasing their child's reading proficiency included getting the parents to interact in the learning environment. The sub themes that emerged were barriers to parental involvement and creating effective interaction.

### ***Barriers to Parent Involvement***

While teachers acknowledged the importance of having parents involved in their child's reading development, many challenges were noted in obtaining that support. Teachers spoke with dismay of the obstacles to using parental involvement effectively as a means to increase reading proficiency. The sub themes were time constraints faced by parents and the recurring perception from teachers that "they [parents] don't care" about their child's progress.

**Time.** A challenge perceived by teachers was parents do not have the time to be able to support their child's reading. Participant 4 noted when it came to challenges with parent involvement, "Time is a big one. A lot of parents work, so some kids don't even get their homework done, let alone have anybody at home to read with them" (Participant 4). Student after school activities also attributed to the amount of time parents could devote to reading. "It's always an excuse... 'Oh, we had practice, Oh, we had to be somewhere'... parents are busy and everybody's busy, and I don't know reading is a priority" (Participant 9). The amount of time parents had or were willing to spare to work on reading proficiency was viewed as a challenge to utilizing parental involvement as a strategy for reading instruction.

**"They Don't Care."** Teachers also perceived a lack of interest from parents in being involved in their child's reading proficiency. One of the reasons for this was parents feeling students in Grades 3-5 were capable of learning independently and not needing as much support from home. Participant 5 observed, "It's hard in fifth grade. Parents think at this point that the student is reading on their own and they don't really

need help, so the parent involvement becomes less and less as they get older” (Participant 5).

5). Other teachers also noted the lack of interest from parents:

... a lot of the parents aren't as involved with their child. They don't come to school for things, and when we try to reach out, communication is few and far between. Just getting a hold of them can be difficult. They think they're old enough they really don't have to be involved (Participant 7).

A lack of parent interest was perceived as impacting the success of instructional strategies in the classroom. Much of this perception came from making attempts to communicate with parents about their child's progress. “The challenge I have is convincing the parents that it's important for them to practice reading at home and that it's important to get their child the help that they need early... I feel like a lot of my parents don't care” (Participant 10). Teachers expressed that, in spite of the barriers to parent involvement, they strived to create effective interaction for parents to engage with their child to increase reading proficiency.

### ***Creating Effective Interaction***

Even those teachers who noted the obstacles faced getting parents to engage with their child to increase reading proficiency expressed a desire to create experiences where parents could engage in reading with their child. Some of these sub themes overlapped with the subthemes of extrinsic motivation as accountability in Theme 2 and student interaction in Theme 3. The sub themes emerging for creating effective interaction were parent nights, technology, and reading logs.

**Parent Nights.** Teachers acknowledged parents could improve students' reading proficiency by modeling good reading habits and supporting students at home to increase their reading proficiency. It was noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many in-person events were not able to take place. They also observed that parents may want to help or be involved but not know how to do so effectively. Conducting parent nights, where parents and their children were invited to learn together how to increase reading proficiency, were noted as being effective for those who participated:

One of the challenges is sometimes parents just don't know how to help. One way that you can help with that is parent nights. Information gets sent home, but I think there's a lot to be said about modeling for a parent and having them come in and do with their child while you're there. (Participant 8)

Participant 7 also noted that a parent night, Camp Read-a-Lot, "got a lot of parents in the building... we give them a little brochure of different things that they can do with their kids to work on reading... Things that are easy to do at home" (Participant 7). The afterschool opportunities mentioned by the teachers were things done school wide, not as something in their individual classrooms. Those activities that were exclusive to their classrooms involved technology and reading logs.

**Technology.** Teachers who used technology to interact with parents for their child's reading proficiency viewed them as effective. These interactions served to educate parents on what their child was learning during reading instruction so the parents could help the students at home, similar to the in-person experiences of a parent night.

Participant 6 explained how their interactive newsletter helped parents:

I have done an interactive newsletter through MyVRspot... a place where you can upload videos and documents. You can also create documents that can be shared out with others. I created a newsletter on there that went through all the skills that we were going to be learning for that week or unit with hyperlinks... They watch a short video, and then they have a better understanding. Parents enjoy the interactive newsletter because then they're better able to help their child.

Participant 3 found using FlipGrid, an app where videos can be uploaded to a classroom board online, as an effective way to have parents interact with their child. "They can do interviews, a reading assignment... video themselves studying for the big test... Parents really liked that" (Participant 3). In order to be able to use these programs to create experiences for students using technology, a teacher would need to have knowledge of how to effectively implement it. This connects to Theme 3 and how students' interactions with technology impacted its perceived effectiveness.

**Reading Logs.** A commonly mentioned strategy for parental involvement overlapping with Theme 2 and holding students accountable was reading logs. Teachers mentioned reading logs as a method of parental involvement, as the parents were to sign indicating students had read the required amount of time, either independently or with an adult at home, tying return of the reading log to students receiving a reward at school. While often mentioned regarding parent involvement, teachers never referred to this as effective, with some noting the issues with using reading logs:

One way [to involve parents] is to require the parents to sign a log each week that their students read at home. I don't really think that's effective because people just

sign it just to get their kid out of their hair... it's a piece of paper that usually goes in the trash. The parents need to feel involved in the learning process. (Participant 3)

Other teachers also felt the traditional reading log did little to increase student reading proficiency. "From the parent perspective and watching my kids, a reading log is trash. That's the worst thing you can do. I feel it stresses kids out if they didn't get it filled out that night. It encourages people to fudge or lie" (Participant 10). The strategies for parent involvement that were perceived as most effective involved no extrinsic motivation or accountability.

#### **Summary of Theme 4**

Teachers acknowledge the positive impact parents can have on increasing student reading proficiency but perceive challenges for engaging parents in the learning process. Lack of time and interest on the part of parents is felt by teachers to be the greatest challenges. Afterschool activities such as parent nights were viewed as effective for showing interested parents how they could assist their child. Efforts to engage with parents using technology, were also seen as effective and well received. While the reading log was named as a method of parent involvement, its effectiveness was in question. With barriers regarding parent time and interest, the responsibility of increasing reading proficiency is the responsibility of the teacher during the school day. Teachers addressed that responsibility in Theme 5, data-driven small group instruction.

**Theme 5: Data-Driven Small Group Instruction**

All participants noted the effectiveness of implementing small group instruction and using data to create groups that focus on students ZPD for reading skill needs. Every teacher utilized some form of small group instruction informed by data reflecting student reading level. Small group instruction was used to meet students at their level and focus on skills for increasing reading proficiency. Although not viewed as an effective strategy for meeting student at their instructional level, teachers used some form of whole group instruction to introduce skills.

***Scaffolding through Leveled Groups***

Teachers used assessment programs provided through their school district to analyze student performance to create the small groups where they would work with students on increasing their reading proficiency. Small group instruction was also referred to as guided reading groups. These programs included students completing an online assessment to benchmark their progress and show their current reading level. Based on these results, teachers created their small groups for guided reading instruction to meet students within their ZPD. Teachers perceived using data to inform small group instruction as essential to making small group instruction effective:

With the guided reading groups and all our benchmarking that we do, it really helps us to see that instructional reading level. To just have kids with the material in front of them while they're working with you, with a text that is suitable. You can push them enough so that they will encounter those difficulties in front of you so that you can help them strategize and work through that. (Participant 8)

Using data to inform small group instruction was viewed as an ongoing strategy throughout the year to monitor student reading proficiency. Teachers mentioned the benefit of doing so was to insure they were teaching to the students' instructional levels:

I like to assess them... see where they are, what level they are, what skills they have, what skills they're missing. And then I build on from there...I try to group students that have similar reading levels or are missing similar skills, so I can meet them where they are and build from there. Assessing and progress monitoring is a really big thing and making sure to meet them where they are so that they're being taught at their instructional level and not their frustration level.

(Participant 4)

The detailed responses teachers provided including how they structured their daily reading instruction to include data-driven small group instruction showed a strong correlation to understanding the need to differentiate instruction within students' ZPD. Within those groups, teachers targeted skills identified as needing support or enrichment.

### ***Targeting Needs***

Small group instruction focused on meeting students where they were and reinforcing skills students needed to master to increase reading proficiency. Teachers used this time to focus on the groups of students with similar needs in order to provide focused instruction. Participant 1 stated, "...when they're with me on their instructional level, I feel like I see improvement the more I do those small group sessions with those kids during the course of the year" (Participant 1). This also included formatively



assessing students regarding if they were learning more about the skill that would improve their reading proficiency:

We take whatever instructional strategy we're working on that week, like if it's inferencing or main idea, and I'll use that in a small group lesson. We have small books that go along with the series, or I will pull a chapter book or an article that relates to the reading of that week. We will read that in small groups to go over in more detail, so I can see who's got the strategy and who doesn't. (Participant 5)

Teachers also noted that small groups were used for improving reading proficiency for all students, including those who read on grade level and needed to be challenged. "Your higher levels [students] still need to be seen. They still need time with you, too... I still meet with them and challenge them, too" (Participant 9). That included integrating literature circles or challenging students through higher-level thinking activities. Participant 6 explained what that looked like during their reading instruction:

Within the guided reading groups and the literature circles that I use, we differentiate the skills and what it is that they're reading, whether it's a short passage or a novel. That way we can focus on the skills that are needed for them to be successful... I try to get the students to answer higher order thinking questions along with the story rather than just "Who did this? What happened?" That makes them dig a little bit deeper.

Teachers perceived a high value of implementing small group instruction and its impact on student reading proficiency. They demonstrated a thorough understanding of using small group instruction during their reading instruction. Use of whole group

instruction was also used as a means to set the stage for the instruction that took place in small groups.

### ***The Use of Whole Group Instruction***

While small group instruction was perceived to be effective and necessary for increased reading proficiency, teachers also acknowledge using some whole group instruction to begin the class or to introduce new concepts. “To get them ready for that reading time, if we’re starting a new skill, I will do a lot of practice, “I do, we do, you do” kind of things with a whole group” (Participant 1). It was also used to get students acclimated to reading instruction at the beginning of the school year to teach skills and procedures for small group instruction. Participant 2 stated they “...start out whole group reviewing basics...just to feel success at the beginning of the year” (Participant 2). While many of the student engagement strategies noted in Theme 1 took place during whole group instruction, teachers felt the best place to reach students on their instructional level was through small groups:

I think that going to their level of reading and then teaching the skill or strategy is the best way to do it. I don’t think teaching whole group with their reading book reading series is the most effective for every kid. (Participant 5)

### **Summary of Theme 5**

All teachers had a solid understanding of how to implement data from the assessment programs provided by their school district to form small group instruction to best meet the needs of their students on their instructional level. They expressed that small group instruction was effective at meeting students on their instructional levels to

increase their reading proficiency. Whole group instruction was still used to introduce lessons and skills, but small group instruction was viewed as where teachers could best meet individual student needs. This appeared to be increasingly necessary with the growing need to support students in their phonemic and foundational knowledge of reading.

### **Theme 6: Phonemic and Foundational Knowledge**

A growing concern and challenge expressed by participants to increasing student reading proficiency in Grades 3-5 is the lack of phonemic awareness among students. The most requested professional development from those interviewed involved wanting training on teaching phonics and foundational skills, similar to that provided for those who teach at the K-2 level. Teachers perceived the growing achievement gap among students in Grades 3-5 as cause for alarm. They observe students having phonics deficiencies they have not had in the past. Having the opportunity to receive foundational knowledge of learning how to teach reading was seen as urgently needed professional development.

#### ***Closing the Gap***

Teachers recognized a growing achievement gap in Grade 3-5 student reading proficiency. These gaps in learning are perceived to be more pronounced in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, when students had their learning interrupted by quarantines and remote learning. “Kids have a lot of those splinter skills per se where they miss some things and then they just kept missing them because we weren’t in school [during the pandemic]” (Participant 1). With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic occurring when

many 3-5 grade students were in the primary K-2 grades, teachers felt basic foundational reading skills had been missed by students. This missing instruction was seen as a challenge to teaching students to read because, "...those kids that fall behind are missing foundational skills that they're not going to get in the upper grades because by the time they get to the later grades, they're reading to learn rather than learning to read" (Participant 4). This was viewed as a near impossible obstacle to getting students reading on grade level:

Once they get to 5th grade, for some of them the gaps have gotten so large that it's so hard to bring them up to grade level. They've given up, and you have to try to reach them where they're at. I've had kids that were on kindergarten, first grade level and tried to reach them to at least bring them up. I have brought them up a grade level, but they're still not where they need to be. They really struggle after they leave elementary school, because they're not going to get that extra assistance. (Participant 5)

The most crucial loss of instruction noted by the teachers interviewed was phonemic awareness. Interrupted instruction on basic word study and sounds has made it difficult to teach 3-5 reading skills when students have not mastered the basics.

### ***Phonemic Awareness***

Teachers perceived a growing lack of phonemic awareness in Grades 3-5 as a challenge to increasing reading proficiency. Students who had reading instruction interrupted during Grades K-2 were perceived as lacking important basic skills expected to have already been mastered once they reach Grades 3-5. Teachers noted that adding

phonics to their reading instruction made a difference to their struggling students.

“Towards the beginning of the year, especially with third grade, we hit [phonics] hard. My first couple of years, I didn’t hit that as hard, and I did see a difference when I did add that in” (Participant 7). While teachers identified the need to address phonemic awareness to increase reading proficiency, they noted teachers in Grades 3-5 usually do not receive professional development regarding strategies to effectively reach students regarding phonics skills:

...especially with COVID we see a lot of phonics gaps... They’re still struggling so much over decoding... I think we would benefit greatly from in-depth phonics and word study training, so we can best meet student needs within their guided reading groups...I would really like to have that intense PD from the K-2 level on phonics... (Participant 8)

Participant 4 also noted phonemic awareness is not traditionally addressed in Grades 3-5 and needs to be taught effectively, although many currently provided programs to classrooms lack the content and structure to do so effectively:

...So many reading programs that I’ve seen don't have phonics skills in there that they teach, or they might not be in an order that makes sense. They might be working on short vowels, and then, all of a sudden, they’re throwing in something that’s not. I feel it needs to be kind of like a spiral instruction, so they build on a foundation and have the basics down before they can learn more difficult skills...and again, phonics isn’t usually taught as much in the upper [3-5] grades. (Participant 4)

Teachers overwhelmingly expressed a desire to learn strategies for teaching phonics in Grades 3-5. The opportunity to learn the foundational knowledge behind learning to read was seen as something that would assist teachers greatly in increasing student reading proficiency in a post-pandemic classroom.

### ***The Why Behind the How***

Teachers expressed, along with the desire to learn how to teach phonics to students in Grades 3-5 to close the achievement gap, wanting to learn foundational knowledge regarding reading instruction. They perceived kindergarten through second grade teachers as receiving more professional development in teaching students how to read, whereas Grades 3-5 teachers received more training in teaching students how to read to learn. With the growing gaps in student achievement and students' lack of phonemic understanding, teachers felt they need to be learning the foundational structures of reading. Participant 2 stated:

I would love to know more about the science of reading, even though I'm not teaching the learning to read piece, that K-2 piece. I'm very interested in it and how it's going to play out in grades three to five. So maybe a little bit of that for just to show how that is going to impact our intermediate kids later on.

Teachers mentioned The Science of Reading, research conducted on the foundational basis of reading and phonological awareness, as well as Orton-Gillingham, a multi-sensory approach to teaching reading, as professional development they felt would be helpful in providing them with the background knowledge to implement effective strategies for teaching phonemic awareness to students in Grades 3-5. Along with the

opportunity to learn foundational skills for teaching reading, teachers were interested in learning more methods to promote student engagement, especially with Orton-Gillingham. Teachers who had received professional development in Orton-Gillingham felt it had helped them be more effective. Participant 4 noted:

I learned how to refresh them on phonics rules, syllable patterns, spelling rules, and things like that. That was helpful, just knowing how to teach the why behind it and how... We just learned a lot of great, interactive, engaging strategies for teaching reading that I was able to directly use with my students immediately. I just learned more hands-on ways of teaching.

### **Summary of Theme 6**

Teachers expressed it was becoming increasingly difficult to close the gaps in reading instruction among students in Grades 3-5. This was attributed to a growing lack of phonemic awareness in students because they missed learning those skills at the K-2 level. While teachers identified the need, they recognized Grades 3-5 teachers have not traditionally received training regarding how to teach phonics to these grade levels. Professional development for phonemic awareness and understanding the foundations of learning to read was expressed as an urgent need.

### **Summary of Themes in Relation to Research Questions**

The problem investigated in this study was the decreasing annual reading proficiency among students in intermediate elementary Grades 3-5. The purpose of this study was to investigate intermediate elementary Grades 3-5 teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students' reading proficiency and potentially

increase GSA scores. The research questions developed to guide this study and examine the problem in this project study were:

1. What are elementary reading teachers' perceptions of effective instructional practices they use to increase students' reading proficiency?
2. What are elementary reading teachers' perceptions about teachers' instructional strengths and challenges associated with student reading proficiency?

The following summarizes how the themes identified in the data analysis relate to the research questions.

**Research Question 1: What are elementary reading teachers' perceptions of effective instructional practices they use to increase students' reading proficiency?**

Teachers perceived student engagement as an effective practice to increase reading proficiency. Teachers reported that offering read alouds which provide students opportunities to engage in conversation about the text and choosing books that reflected students' interests and reading levels contributed to effective engagement. "Those [read aloud] books have just become springboard for so many lessons...but also just real talk. Those books become community" (Participant 2). Many student engagement practices were integrated into independent reading and intrinsic motivation. While intrinsic motivation was most desired for its long-term effects on increasing student reading proficiency, teachers also perceived extrinsic motivational practices tied to accountability as effective, necessary, and appropriate for students in Grades 3-5. "... Independent reading is important, but I feel like if they don't have accountability for what they're



reading, it's very hard for them to read on their own" (Participant 9). No instructional practice was thought to supersede the importance of creating a learning environment where the students were excited about reading. "If students aren't engaged with whatever they are reading, then they're bored. We need to pick higher interest texts that engage them..." (Participant 6).

Teachers perceived students having an actual book in their hands to read and to interact with the text as more effective than reading done using technology. "If they always have access to technology, the motivation to read for learning goes away" (Participant 2). Teachers found technology to be effective when they had their students use it to demonstrate reading proficiency and share what they were reading with others. Using technology to interact and engage parents in their child's reading instruction was also perceived to be effective.

Data-driven small group instruction was viewed as effective and necessary for reaching students within their ZPD. Teachers used assessment and benchmarking programs provided by their school district to target instruction based on student needs. Providing instruction that met students on their instructional level was perceived as a cornerstone to meeting students' needs and increasing their reading proficiency.

**Research Question 2: What are elementary reading teachers' perceptions about teachers' instructional strengths and challenges associated with student reading proficiency?**

Teachers' answers during the semistructured interviews revealed their perceived strengths and challenges in developing student reading proficiency. Among the

instructional strengths were attentions to student needs and structuring the learning environment to incorporate small group instruction, as well as meeting students' needs within their ZPD. Challenges expressed by teachers centered on technology, engaging parents in their child's reading growth, and addressing the growing gaps in phonemic awareness among students.

### ***Strengths***

Teachers recognized the needs of students in Grades 3-5 to interact with one another, socialize, and feel confident within their responses concerning student engagement. They acknowledged students needed to love reading for prolonged reading proficiency and their role as a teacher in selling reading as an entertaining activity that they as teachers enjoyed outside of the classroom. "If we are sharing our love for reading with students and we're showing that we really are interested in the things they are reading, then they're going to be more motivated to read" (Participant 6).

Teachers showed a thorough understanding of how to structure small group instruction to teach students based on their ZPD and similar reading skill needs of their peers. The need to assess student progress and growth to monitor student reading proficiency through the small group instruction was present in teacher responses. "If you don't know where to start, then you're not going to be as effective. You need to be right where they are ready to learn" (Participant 3). Teachers also understood the place whole group instruction had as part of their reading instruction, without using it as the sole method to provide reading instruction. "I [start with] an introductory mini lesson, whether that be a read aloud or strategy lesson that moves into guided reading... It's [not enough]

to do whole group instruction with no focus on filling gaps that students have”

(Participant 8).

### ***Challenges***

Teachers perceive they are competing with the accessibility and instant gratification of technology in their efforts to increase reading proficiency. The presence of technology in the classroom and in students’ homes is felt to be impacting students’ willingness to read to find information and to read for enjoyment. “If they always have access to technology, their motivation to read goes away... I don’t think it has much of a place in the instruction I’m doing” (Participant 2). Many have resorted to not using technology during reading instruction, preferring students to use actual books. Expressed was a desire for professional development on the resources available for students to interact with technology effectively, as “the challenge is being consistent with using [the technology] the right way” (Participant 3). Teachers with an understanding of ways to use technology in this manner viewed it as more effective “for practicing and motivating...[and] reinforcing what skills that we worked on” (Participant 4).

Parent apathy and availability to be involved in their child’s reading proficiency growth was also expressed as a challenge. “The [students] that I really want help from the parents are not as involved in academics as they should be” (Participant 5). Effective methods of engaging parents in the learning process were often schoolwide programs, not exclusive to individual classrooms. Teachers noted these activities were effective in getting parents involved with their child and demonstrating ways to assist with building reading proficiency at home, but that the COVID-19 pandemic had prevented a great deal

of that interaction recently. “Students just don’t have the support at home” (Participant 4). Many teachers resorted to a reading log tied to student independent reading accountability to “get that connection with parents to read with their child” (Participant 1).

The most urgent challenge perceived by teachers was that students in Grades 3-5 are showing an increased lack of phonemic awareness. “This past year it was more like there was a small group [of students] who didn’t need phonics, and everybody else did” (Participant 10). With large gaps in achievement, many of which are attributed to missed instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers expressed concern of being able to catch students up to grade level on basic reading skills normally practiced at the K-2 level. “Phonics isn’t usually taught as much in the upper grades... the gap widening is a big issue, because you just have students getting left behind” (Participant 4). Teachers desired professional development on teaching phonics skills and foundational knowledge on teaching students to read that is usually reserved for K-2 teachers “so we can best meet student needs within their guided reading groups” (Participant 8).

### **Project Deliverable**

The next section of this project study details the professional development project based on the answers to the research questions based on the data analysis and the literature review that followed from that analysis. Included is the literature review, a description of the professional development to be provided, methods of project evaluation, and implications the professional development project for teachers and increasing student reading proficiency.

### Section 3: The Project

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate intermediate elementary teachers' perceptions of their instructional strategies to improve students' reading proficiency and potentially increase GSA scores. This research design allowed for teachers to share their perceptions on effective instructional practices and instructional strengths and challenges associated with increasing student reading proficiency. The 10 teacher participants had taught reading in Grades 3-5 for the past 5 or more years and were asked the same initial semistructured interview questions during their 45-60 minute interview. The goal based on the research questions was to determine the perceived effective practices for teaching reading and the strengths and challenges teachers associated with increasing student reading proficiency.

#### **Project Genre**

The project deliverable is a 3-day professional development based on the needs perceived by teachers and the areas of importance identified through a literature review that stemmed from the data analysis of the semistructured interviews. The desired goals from this professional development are for teachers of students in Grades 3-5 to become more effective at increasing reading proficiency among their students from learning the best practices for teaching reading and ultimately increase student reading GSA scores.

#### **Rationale**

A professional development program best met the goals of this project. The data analysis from the semistructured interviews showed that teachers perceived a need for more knowledge regarding using technology, engaging parents, and phonemic awareness.

The best way to train teachers in these areas that could then be implemented into the classroom was through a professional development program.

Other project genres were considered. An evaluation report would not be appropriate for this project, as the data collection focused on teachers' perceptions of instructional strategies for reading and not on a previously existing program or professional development. While a curriculum plan could address some of the teachers' expressed concerns with student reading proficiency, it would not be appropriate for this study as the perceived challenges apply to teaching reading throughout the year and extend beyond a 9-week plan. A policy recommendation with detail could direct those responsible for providing instructional needs for teachers, but ultimately was not appropriate for this project because it would not directly assist teachers with providing students with effective practices to increase reading proficiency.

A professional development project was the most appropriate project genre because it could provide teachers with current best practices to address their immediate needs as expressed in the data analysis. It would also give teachers the opportunity to collaborate with one another for the purpose of sharing ideas with other Grade 3-5 teachers for how to best implement instructional practices presented to increase reading proficiency based on the needs of their students. A professional development project would also be the most efficient means of presenting teachers with strategies that they could take back to their classrooms to begin using immediately to address challenges and increase reading proficiency.

## **Review of the Literature**

The data analysis from the basic qualitative study identified perceptions teachers of students in Grades 3-5 had regarding effective instructional practices and strengths and challenges associated with reading instruction. The answers to the research questions were derived from the identified themes. Student engagement through practices such as read alouds, conversations, book selection, and modeling was noted to be effective and widely used to increase reading proficiency. Keeping students motivated to read was perceived as a pivotal factor for reading growth, with many teachers integrating some form of accountability with extrinsic incentives to encourage students to read independently. The impact of technology was noted to have the potential to engage students and parents in the quest for increasing reading proficiency, but teachers widely felt the use of devices during reading instruction was unnecessary and detracted from the learning process. Parental involvement was greatly desired by teachers, but many challenges regarding parent availability and attitudes towards their child's needs impacted effective practice. Teachers expressed a strong understanding of how to implement small group instruction to scaffold reading instruction to meet student needs. Greatly desired was more training in understanding the foundation of teaching reading and phonemic awareness, as students in Grades 3-5 were noted to have increasing gaps regarding basic reading skills, especially phonics.

### **Method of Literature Research**

Themes researched in the literature review were student engagement, accountability, technology for student engagement, parent engagement, small group

instruction, and phonemic awareness. The themes derived from the data analysis were the basis of the literature review and reflect the perceptions expressed by the teachers during the semistructured interviews. Keywords searched for included *reading engagement*, *read aloud elementary*, *reading incentives*, *educational technology reading*, *reading apps*, *parent child reading*, *family literacy*, *small group instruction*, *multi-sensory reading instruction*, *phonemic awareness*, *science of reading*, and *elementary reading professional development*. Peer reviewed sources were acquired from ERIC, EBSCO, and the Walden University Thoreau database.

### **Student Engagement Practices in Reading**

Research correlates with the teachers' perceptions that read alouds are an effective practice for increasing reading proficiency. Read alouds engage students in reading by increasing word and concept recognition, forming relationships, and associating reading with positive experiences (Kolski & Zhang, 2017; Stoetzel & Shedrow, 2021). The teachers interviewed used read alouds to build student interest in reading and to engage in conversations about themes and issues in the books they read with the class. Cultivating the joy of reading, such as interesting students in a book series or the teacher's expression of their own enjoyment of reading, have far reaching impacts on students' desire to read (Merga, 2020; Johnson, 2022). Noted also for read alouds to be optimally effective is asking students questions reflective of their ZPD. Reflective questioning as opposed to basic who-what-when questions is more supportive of increasing reading proficiency (Deshmukh et al., 2019). While these aspects of read alouds were reflective of teacher perceptions, further research shows other practices that



read alouds can assist with improving reading proficiency that were not addressed by the interviewed teachers.

Using read alouds for vocabulary building and for incorporating expository texts were not mentioned by the teachers in the study as aspects of their read aloud practices. Building background knowledge and using conceptually coherent texts improve the effectiveness of read alouds to improve student comprehension and vocabulary (Churchill & Danielson, 2021; Kaefer, 2020; Wright et al., 2022). Reading aloud to students was perceived as beneficial by the teachers interviewed primarily for the purposes of getting students excited about reading and modeling reading as an enjoyable activity. However, read alouds can also bridge word recognition gaps through intentional conversations with the reader and child (Churchill & Danielson, 2021; Roessingh, 2020). Mentioned in the research is the need to incorporate expository texts into classroom read alouds in addition to fiction texts for the purposes of vocabulary development (Cremin et al., 2020; Roessingh, 2020). Teachers interviewed alluded mostly to reading aloud chapter fiction books to their students. These would be areas to further explore as part of the 3-day professional development.

Teachers noted during the interviews how student choice and good fit books reflecting students' interests and reading levels impacted student engagement. Research ties these ideas to building a student reading identity and allowing for student agency in reading instruction. Having conversations with students about how they view themselves as a reader, learning about how reading is viewed at home, and observing their peer interactions are all components that teachers need to consider as they help students form

their identity as a reader (McKay, 2019; Ng, 2018; Parker et al., 2017; Wagner, 2020). While teachers referred to student choice with regards to allowing students to choose books of interest to them, choice in reading can be expanded to other aspects of the reading environment. Choice that leads to effective instruction also extends into giving students voice in how to structure their classroom reading environment, with agency regarding where they sit within the classroom, who students read with throughout the day, and how they choose to engage in conversation about what they have read (Ng, 2018, Vaughn et al., 2020; Wilson 2021). Expanding on this view of student choice would be something to note within the professional development provided.

Teachers emphasized giving students time to share and collaborate as an effective practice for increasing reading proficiency. Conversation-centered reading instruction is viewed as a valuable means of student choice and student-centered learning (Policastro et al., 2020). Literature circles were frequently referred to in this review of literature as a means of engaging students for the purposes of increasing reading proficiency through meaningful conversation. Teachers mirrored this perception in their interviews. Conversing with peers through a designated role on a shared book of choice in literature circle develops student reading comprehension and reader-centered responses rather than responding to basic questions about the text (Herrera & Kidwell, 2018; Tosun & Doğan, 2020). The spoken language aspect of literature circles also serves to enhance students' social skills, such as being able to understand other's viewpoints (Dogan & Kaya-Tosun, 2020; Jank, 2021).

### **Questioning the Importance of Student Accountability for Reading Motivation**

While teachers interviewed perceived intrinsically motivating students to read of higher importance, they still admitted and defended the use of extrinsic motivation to increase reading proficiency. Making students accountable through reading logs and documentation was commonly referred to as part of the extrinsic practices. The literature supports emphasizing intrinsic practices over extrinsic ones, with no mention of the need to tie accountability measures to ensure students are reading. Students need to have the skill as well as the will to read in order to grow as readers (Merga, 2020). Developing a desire to read for the pleasure of reading through independent reading, read alouds, literature circles, and book talks cultivates motivation in students that extrinsic incentivization cannot replicate (Cremin et al., 2020; Mäkinen, 2018). Teachers referred to extrinsic incentives as rewards, not mentioned was the use of feedback or affirmation. While intangible extrinsic incentives such as praise work well in tandem with intrinsic motivation to instill value in reading, the use of tangible extrinsic incentives such as rewards and prizes have short term effects (Li & Doyle, 2020). This would be an aspect of extrinsic motivation to explore in a professional development and how to use it effectively.

Regardless of perception, the research points to intrinsic methods as ones that are essential and most effective at increasing reading proficiency. Reading proficiency growth is positively impacted through instructional practices reflecting intrinsic motivation, while extrinsic motivation practices such as competition and rewards do not have a lasting impact on achievement (Schiefele & Loweke, 2018; Xiaocheng et al.,

2020). Strengthening teachers' understanding of how to apply these practices over ones centered on extrinsic means could improve their ability to increase student reading proficiency. Teachers felt students needed to have accountability measures for motivation in order to try to involve parents in their child's reading development. Practices that involve strengthening home-to-school involvement are more effective than those that involve giving students an assignment for accountability in the form of homework (Braunschweig et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2018). This would also be a practice to expand on as part of the professional development and will be explored further later in the literature review.

### **Using Technology to Enhance, Not Replace, Reading Engagement**

Teachers expressed they preferred using technology to enhance reading instruction over having it replace printed texts. Research supports the use of technology for enhancing reading instruction and providing supports that otherwise would not exist for students' reading growth. While read alouds, conversations, and student choice serve to engage students in reading, engagement also stems from the practice of multi-modal literacy, considering not only the words but also the visuals, such as pictures, graphics, video, and animations that make up the featured text (Lenters, 2018; Son et al., 2020). Technology provides many of these multi-modal features for reading instruction. Cloud-based reading technologies such as Epic and other audiobook programs utilize these multi-modal features to motivate students and provide scaffolds for reading development (Kucirkova, 2022; Meyers et al., 2017; Mikidenko & Storozheva, 2021). Technology can be tied into student engagement strategies, such as conversations, to motivate students to

reflect on what they read and to read books suggested by their peers (Batchelor & Cassidy, 2019; Johns et al., 2017; Ostiz-Blanco et al., 2021; Schulz-Heidorf et al., 2021; Xiaocheng et al., 2020). Teachers referred to programs where students could share what they read and reflect as effective during the interviews, stating the high interest and involvement of the students. Programs such as Flipgrid and Screencast-O-Matic allow both teachers and students to create content that can be shared for the purposes of reflection and skill reinforcement (Cahyo & Ayu, 2018; Kiles et al., 2020; Mango, 2021). The growing amount of options available has led to teachers needing more professional development with regards to how to implement technology into their instruction, reading included, to use it to its full potential (Martin, 2021). With teachers stating they would like more training on the available technology to promote student reading growth, the professional development would be a means of introducing teachers to some of the available resources to have students collaborate, read, and exercise choice.

The literature agrees with teachers' perceptions that reading from books is a more effective practice than reading from a device. Using printed texts over digital texts leads to less mind wandering and higher comprehension levels (Dahan Golan et al., 2018; Delgado & Salmerón, 2021; Halamish & Elbaz, 2020). Teachers noted that students were distracted by the other options on their devices and often preferred to read from a physical book. Students initially may be motivated by the novelty of reading on a device but were more confident and accurate regarding what they read when using printed books, ultimately gravitating towards printed materials (Dahan Golan et al., 2018; Lenhard et al., 2017; Li & Doyle, 2020; Ocal et al., 2022). Research from literature also

confirms teachers' perceptions that students have become accustomed to the instant gratification from using devices, leading to a disinterest in taking the time to read. The misuse and overstimulation from technology, leads to the skill gap widening for students as they reach higher grades (Ahn, 2022). Making more teachers aware of the impact of technology on students' reading development and how to integrate printed books into an increasingly digital education environment would be a necessary component of the professional development.

### **Engaging Reluctant Parents in Reading Instruction**

Teachers expressed they felt parents did not care about being involved in increasing their child's reading proficiency in Grades 3-5. Literature offers several reasons for why parents eschew involvement in helping their child read. Often, parents' reluctance to be more involved in their child's reading is because they lack knowledge regarding how to help their child at home (Segal & Martin, 2019; Steiner et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2021). Parents want to be involved and know how their child is taught (Braunschweig et al., 2019; Swain & Cara, 2019). This supports statements teachers made in support of practices that would teach parents how to help their child read at home. Teachers also mentioned issues at home influenced how much time parents could contribute to helping their child. Factors outside the child's control, such as parental incarceration, also impact the extent of the involvement at home (Flint et al., 2020; Nutbrown et al., 2021; Wiseman et al., 2021). Reiterating this to teachers who may assume parents have no interest in their child's reading growth would be important to include in a professional development encompassing best practices. Understanding

family values and backgrounds of students is essential in choosing effective practices for engaging parents in reading instruction (Simone et al., 2019).

The literature shows a shift in thinking from parental involvement to parental engagement. This could also be traced to the nature of the teachers' responses when speaking of the obstacles to making parents a part of their child's reading growth. It is just as important for parents to form a connection to reading and having conversations about books with their child at home as it is for teachers to develop with students in the classroom (Bano et al., 2018; Castelli & Denessen, 2019; Kamisli, 2020; Patel & Martin-Chang, 2021). That engagement with the text and child would need to be modeled for parents who may not have previous experience with supporting their child with reading at home. While more common in the early grades, teachers in Grades 3-5 mentioned during their interviews that older students are often viewed as not needing as much from home to improve their reading practice. There is still time in middle childhood to nurture the connection students and families have with books (McKay, 2019). Providing professional development for this aspect of effective reading practices could help alleviate the misconception of a reduced need for parental engagement at the intermediate level of elementary school.

The same idea of embracing multi-modal instruction in the classroom can be applied to engaging parents in developing their child's reading proficiency. Cloud-based reading technology programs can provide parents with a means to monitor their child's progress and review the books they have read (Meyers et al., 2017), as do initiatives that integrate technology, such as mobile messaging via Text to Talk (Buchholz & Riley,

2020; Ziden et al., 2020). Providing an opportunity for parents and children to interact with one another, as teachers discussed with regards to family reading nights, allows for practice with text engagement to take place. Parent engagement programs for reading that incorporated a shared reading experience with their child and taught parents reading strategies are shown to improve student reading proficiency (Brown et al., 2018; Carignan et al., 2021; Steiner et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2021). Teachers also noted there are parents that cannot be present after school with their child for multiple reasons. When the students' parent is not available to participate in such programs, interaction with an adult role model in the same capacity or connecting the parent via technology to participate helps the child increase reading proficiency (Carignan et al., 2021; Flint et al., 2020; Nutbrown et al., 2021; Stickel et al., 2021). Exploring the aspects of parental engagement and how to create that engagement in person and with technology through professional development could allow for similar nurturing to occur as with the small group instruction provided in the classroom.

### **Guided Reading Through Small Group Instruction**

Teachers described how they implemented small group instruction as part of their reading instruction in each interview. Consistent use of small group instruction has been shown to improve reading fluency and comprehension in at-risk students (Begeny et al., 2018; Martinez & Plevyak, 2020). The act of having small groups is not as important as the practice that occurs during the time students are meeting with the teacher. The type and quality of instruction occurring within the small group, referred to increasingly as guided reading, determines the effectiveness of this practice in improving reading



proficiency (Donnelly, 2019; Hudson & Walker, 2017). Part of effective guided reading is providing the necessary scaffolds for students to be successful. Setting goals for the guided instruction within students' ZPD is important for guided small group with the teacher to be intensive, focused, and intentional (Hudson & Walker, 2017; Nicholas et al., 2021). Another aspect of guided reading is engaging students in reflective thinking and teaching them how to make meaning on their own. Scaffolding student comprehension and decoding through the use of prompts and dialogue helps students develop skills within their guiding reading instruction (Donnelly, 2019; Mikita et al., 2019; Nicholas et al., 2021). While teachers perceive a deep understanding of utilizing small groups for this purpose, providing professional development on this aspect of reading practices would give teachers an opportunity to share with one another how to best use this time to increase reading proficiency.

Teachers were clear about preferring actual books over technology to teach reading. However, opportunities exist within a small group to use devices effectively for learning reading skills. Utilizing technology during small group instruction can allow for teachers to show students how to use their devices to demonstrate their reading proficiency and to accommodate struggling readers (Husband & Schendel, 2017; Van Allen & Zygouris-Coe, 2019). The technology portion of the professional development could serve to provide teachers with resources to use devices to supplement learning within guided reading. Teachers described their small groups as being created based on student instructional level. Determining groups was based largely on progress monitoring and benchmarking. Research shows that guided reading, when done effectively, does not

have to be homogenous in order for student to learn from one another. The use of appropriate text and explicit instruction allows for non-leveled guided reading instruction to have a positive impact on student reading proficiency (Young, 2022). This is an aspect that could be discussed as part of the professional development provided to give teachers an opportunity to collaborate on the possibility of having students in a non-leveled small group to collaborate with their peers and build skills.

### **A Focus on Phonemic Awareness**

Teachers were emphatic regarding the gaps students had in reading, especially with phonics. These were skills that would be assumed to be addressed in the early grades of elementary school. Although phonics instruction is heavily associated with the early years of elementary school, older elementary students with significant gaps in their achievement benefit from phonics instruction (Chan et al., 2020; Georgiou et al., 2021; Henry, 2020). The needs of students and the structure of how education can be delivered to students has changed with the COVID-19 pandemic (Kamisli, 2020). Teachers' perceptions mirrored this thought, as they, too, attributed the growing gap in phonemic awareness from missing instruction during the pandemic. These gaps in learning become even more concerning for students who are at-risk or are predisposed to reading disorders such as dyslexia (Ring et al., 2017; Schaars et al., 2017). Addressing phonics awareness in Grades 3-5 appears to be the most urgent need from the teacher interviews, with backing from literature.

Teachers referred to Orton-Gillingham as a training they felt would help them meet their students' phonics needs. This program focuses on multi-sensory methods of

teaching foundational reading skills. The act of reading requires multiple areas of the brain to be stimulated in order for meaning making to occur (Marzena, 2019). Multi-sensory methods for phonemic instruction in Orton-Gillingham are widely regarded as effective in stimulating the areas of the brain for making sense of words, especially in students with dyslexia (Bernadowski, 2017; Sayeski et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2021). While not all students who need phonics intervention have dyslexia, providing teachers with professional development making them aware of how they can meet students' needs. The direct, systemic approach with multi-sensory instruction paired along with practices incorporating sight, sound and movement help students with basic phonemic deficiencies close the gap (Evanovich & Scott, 2022; Sayeski et al., 2019; Schlesinger et al., 2017). Explicit instruction in phonics is beneficial for students after their primary elementary years as they acquire exposure to Greek and Latin roots, affixes, and multisyllabic words within their reading instruction and in other core content (Dilgard & Hodges, 2022). Other forms of multi-sensory instruction to target older students include word walls, puzzles, and games (Dilgard & Hodges, 2022; Evanovich & Scott, 2022).

With the rising need for students to gain reading skills missed from consistent instruction, it becomes ever more critical that teachers receive special training on the science of reading, the foundational knowledge that goes into teaching reading and helping students form meaning from decoding words (Cervetti et al., 2020; Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hudson et al., 2021; Shanahan, 2020). As with small group guided reading, phonics instruction needs to be scaffolded to the student's level of instruction (Fletcher et al., 2021).

### **Project Description**

The project will entail a 3-day professional development for teachers who teach reading in Grades 3-5 at the three schools in this project study that are showing a lack of reading proficiency based on their test scores. Each day will consist of two modules. Day 1 will focus on student engagement and reading accountability vs. reading motivation. Day 2 will focus on enhancing instruction with technology and engaging parents in the instruction process. Day 3 will focus on using small groups for effective guided reading and phonemic awareness. Each day of the professional development will allow for teachers to interact and reflect on what they learned with their peers, with an online component for continued sharing of ideas and resources after the professional development. Training will be provided in person at an available facility and will also be offered virtually to accommodate the needs of participants. The trainings for the professional development modules will be made available on the district's professional development website so they can be accessed by attending teachers for reference and so the training can be used for additional teachers in the future.

### **Needed Resources**

The resources needed for the project involve physical space and technology. To conduct the in-person professional development, a conference room or the equivalent that can hold a capacity of approximately 85 teachers will need to be located. Such a facility exists in the school district that can be reserved for the purpose of provided professional development. The facility comes equipped with a Smart board, projector, and Internet access, all which will be needed to conduct the training. If securing this facility is not

available, local schools could be used on a designated professional development day to conduct the professional development; each grade level could be assigned to a different school for capacity concerns. All schools in the district have the aforementioned technology needs to conduct the training.

All teachers in the school district have a MacBook Air and an iPad as part of the district's 1:1 technology initiative. Teachers attending the professional development will need to bring both devices with them to the in-person training to access the resources provided, especially on Day 2 of the training, and to get acquainted with the online community that will be set up for teachers to continue to communicate and share after the training. While teachers do not need to have any prior experience using the technology resources provided, they will need to have installed Microsoft Teams if they are attending the training virtually and to access the resources and group for future use.

### **Existing Supports**

Existing supports for this project include professional personnel and available resources. Each school has an academic coach and a reading interventionist that can assist with any training concerning reading professional development. A district reading instructional specialist that coordinates professional development opportunities for the district is also available to assist with the coordination of such a project. As previously stated, the building facilities and technology to support the delivery of the professional development are already in place. Along with a district technology integration specialist (TIS), each school has a TIS that can assist with any technology needs or troubleshooting that may be needed.

## **Barriers and Solutions**

Several barriers exist to the completion of this project, but none that cannot be reasonably addressed. One barrier that exists is finding the time to conduct the three-day professional development so that teachers may attend. A solution to this barrier is to use the days already set aside for professional development within the school district when no students will be in attendance. These designated professional development days are marked for schools to conduct their own professional development or professional development suggested by the school district. During both the first and second semester of the school year, three such days exist where the training could take place. The training could also occur during the three professional days set aside at the end of the school year as an encore for teachers who could not participate. Another solution is to offer the professional development virtually, so that teachers who cannot attend in person can do so through Microsoft Teams, a videoconferencing platform used by the school district, or watch the recorded training asynchronously at their convenience.

Space is another barrier to conducting the professional development. While a facility exists in the school district for professional development activities of this size, it is noted that it may be used for other trainings during the time desired. Since the schools where this training is needed all have the needed technology to conduct the professional development, a solution would be to have teachers go to an assigned school by grade level for their training or to do the training as Grade 3-5 teachers within their home school. This would require more professional personnel such as interventionists and academic coaches to be involved in the presenting of the professional development, but

enough support personnel are available within the study district to provide this extra support if necessary.

Another barrier is providing those needed to present the professional development with the background and resources to conduct the professional development. Academic coaches and interventionist have complex schedules meeting with teachers and students during the week where their availability may be limited. A solution to this is to hold a meeting via Microsoft Teams on an early dismissal day in the school district to present the findings supporting this project and the necessary resources to conduct the professional development. As several of these early dismissal days, where students leave early, are built into the school calendar, this time could be used to meet virtually with academic coaches and reading interventionists to prepare them for conducting this professional development. It would also allow for any time needed to adjust the training based on what the academic coaches and interventionists have observed most recently from working with teachers and students.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The roles and responsibilities vary based on how one is involved in the project. Grades 3-5 teachers of reading have the role of learning from the professional development and putting the acquired training into effective use in the classroom. Their responsibility is to take the knowledge and resources gained back to their classroom and use it to increase student reading proficiency. They are also responsible for providing feedback and reflection on the provided training so that it can be adapted to meet their needs and the needs of their students.

The role of the academic coaches and reading interventionists is to present and share their knowledge of how to increase student reading proficiency based on the research supporting this project. They will present the professional development training and facilitate the discussions that occur during the training. Along with the teachers, they also have the responsibility to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the professional development so adjustments can be made and supports can be provided to teachers. The academic coaches will also work with the teachers to implement the professional development into their classrooms once it concludes. They will be available within the school to observe teachers and provide supports as needed.

My role as the researcher in this project is to train those who will be providing the professional development within the schools and to provide the training to other teachers if needed. I will arrange for the days and times the professional development will take place and will coordinate with the academic coaches and reading interventionists to provide them with the necessary training and resources to prepare for training the teachers. I create the resources to be used and shared for the trainings, as well as the evaluation tools. I along with the academic coaches will set up the files and links within the Microsoft Teams group to be used by those attending the training and will work with the technology specialists to get the recorded trainings online and available for future use.

### **Implementation Proposal and Timeline**

A time and place to conduct the three-day professional development will be scheduled with input from the district regarding availability. This would be confirmed within the first month of school. Teachers in Grades 3-5 who teach reading would be



informed of the upcoming professional development, its goals, and content once the days and times are confirmed. They would be informed via email with an attached form for them to electronically complete regarding their availability. Those teachers who are not able to attend in person on any of the days of training will be sent a link to join via Microsoft Teams so they can participate virtually. School administrators will also be informed of the dates and location of the training. While their attendance is not required, they are welcome to attend if desired so they can be aware of the instructional practices that teachers are bringing back to their schools.

Several virtual meetings will then be then held with me to train the trainers, in this case academic coaches and reading interventionist, for this professional development using Microsoft Teams. During these meetings, the research leading to this project would be shared, along with the resources for the professional development and the planned delivery of the material. During this time there will be an online group set up for teachers to access content after the training and to provide updates on their successes and concerns following the training.

The project will follow a predetermined timeline (see Appendix A). Day 1 will focus on student engagement and reading accountability vs. reading motivation. The information and resources on engaging students through effective use of read alouds, conversations, and student book choice will be shared, as well as how to cultivate motivation in the learning environment that does not rely on extrinsic means. Time will be allotted for teachers to collaborate with their peers by grade level to discuss implementation ideas and concerns. The online group accessible on Microsoft Teams will

be introduced so teachers can begin accessing resources and so they can collaborate with teachers who are doing the training virtually. Teachers will complete a Day 1 reflection form to share with the researcher and trainer how they plan to use the information in their classroom and any feedback they have about the training.

Day 2 will focus on enhancing instruction with technology and engaging parents in the instruction process. Teachers will be using their Macbooks and iPads to engage in the apps and resources they can use with their students, with time again allotted for teachers to discuss and share their ideas for how to use technology to enhance but not replace instruction. The second half of the Day 2 training will focus on parental engagement strategies. After learning how to effectively create opportunities for parents to be better partners in their child's reading development, teachers will work in groups to create a potential parent event for their school to demonstrate their understanding. Online participants will complete the same activity in a Microsoft Teams breakout room. An evaluation form for Day 2 will be completed by participants for reflection and feedback.

Day 3 will focus on using small groups for effective guided reading and phonemic awareness. Teachers will learn about how to use small group time for effective, guided lessons that allow students to improve their thought process and decoding skills. Emphasis on this day of training will be heavily focused on phonemic awareness for Grades 3-5. Teachers will be given time once again to share with other teachers in their grade level their concerns and plans for implementation. An evaluation on Day 3 will be completed, along with an overall evaluation on how teachers perceive the training will impact their reading instruction.

Following the conclusion of the professional development, the researcher will meet with those who delivered the training to reflect on the feedback provided by teachers. Concerns for assisting teachers with the implementation of the practices and resources provided will be addressed. Teachers will be sent a follow-up evaluation one month after the last day of the professional development to gauge how the professional development is being applied to reading instruction. Another follow-up evaluation will be sent towards the end of the school year to see how the professional development impacted instruction throughout the year. This will also allow for any changes to be made if an encore training for teachers who have yet to participate is to take place.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The overarching goal of this project is to increase student reading proficiency in Grades 3-5. In order for this to occur, teachers need to be trained on best practices for effective reading instruction. The short-term goal of the project is to provide Grades 3-5 teachers with effective training in best practices for reading instruction. The key stakeholders in this project are teachers who teach reading in Grades 3-5. They are the ones responsible to increasing student reading proficiency in the midst of growing achievement gaps and changing needs of students. In the long-term, the goal of this project is to bring all students up to grade level in reading, which will require teachers to have the knowledge and support to meet their students' needs. A goal-based evaluation is therefore appropriate for this project, as its success will be determined if the desired goals are reached.

One goal of the developed evaluation tools (see Appendix B) is to gauge how much teachers' knowledge of implementing best practices in reading instruction improves as a result of the provided professional development. Another goal of the evaluation tools is to see where teachers still feel they need support in order to implement these practices effectively. The evaluation tool created will be completed by teachers at the end of each day of the professional development. Teachers measure how much their understanding of the topics covered increases, as well as their comfort level in implementing them after the provided training. A section of the evaluation is also provided for teachers to give feedback on how the training could be improved and questions they still have. The researcher or trainers will contact the teachers to assist them based on this feedback if desired by the teacher.

As the overarching goal of this project is increased student reading proficiency, progress and implementation needs to be measured once teachers have had an extended time to use the professional development in their classrooms. Teachers will be sent a follow-up evaluation one month after the last day of the professional development to gauge how the professional development is being applied to reading instruction. Another follow-up evaluation will be sent towards the end of the school year to see how the professional development impacted instruction throughout the year.

Other stakeholders in this project are the trainers and the school administrators. The researcher will also be in contact with the academic coaches as they work with teachers in their school by observing and assisting as needed with implementing practices learned in the professional development. An evaluation tool will be provided to academic

coaches so they can provide feedback on how they perceive teachers to be implementing the training in their classrooms (see Appendix B). School administrators will receive access to the recorded trainings and resources provided to teachers for their reference. The goals of the project will be shared with school administrators, and they will be provided with an evaluation tool as the year progresses to gauge their observations on how they feel teachers are implementing effective reading instructional practices. Any feedback received from teachers, academic coaches, and school administrators will be used to provide additional assistance to teachers and to amend the professional development as needed for future trainings.

### **Project Implications**

The professional development provided to teachers who teach reading in Grades 3-5 has the potential to improve teachers' understanding of how to meet the needs of students to increase reading proficiency. Parents will also be provided with better strategies and opportunities to be involved with their child's reading development, which will allow more students to have continued literacy support at home. By improving the reading proficiency of their current students and those in future years, those students will be better prepared for future years of schooling and will have the literacy skills necessary to excel in the work force or continue their education after graduation. They will then be able to pass that knowledge of literacy on to their own families and children.

Local stakeholders outside of teachers, parents, and students that stand to benefit from this project are school administrators, businesses, law enforcement, local government, and mental health services. School administrators at the school and district

level will benefit from having teachers who are better equipped to increase the reading proficiency of their students and meet the needs of their students and their families. This will manifest in potential increased test scores and reading proficiency of the students in their schools. Local businesses who go on to employ the students in the future will benefit from having employees with higher literacy levels. With an increased ability to read and comprehend, those students who go on to make decisions as elected officials in local government will be able to make informed, thoughtful decisions that improve the lives of their constituents. Increased literacy levels within the local population could potentially lead to decreased levels of crime and delinquent behavior, as more students upon graduation seek employment, higher education, and become better informed citizens that seek to positively contribute to the community. With increased confidence and self-esteem from being able to read, current at-risk students will possibly rely less on mental health services as they progress through school and adulthood.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

A strength of the project is that it covers a range of topics that apply to increasing student reading proficiency. Student engagement and motivation over accountability focuses on the qualitative aspects of reading that teachers note are often overlooked as a result of high-stakes assessments. Technology and parental engagement sessions are high interest to the teachers, as they are current and timely to the needs and struggles teachers face in the classroom on a daily basis. Small group guided reading sessions and phonemic awareness training are also highly regarded by teachers and give clarification to teachers who are unsure if they are addressing these needs appropriately in the classroom. By providing training on a range of practices, teachers have a toolbox of valuable strategies for improving multiple areas of their reading instruction and overall learning environment.

Another strength of the project is its format. Teachers are able to connect to others who also teach reading in Grades 3-5 and communicate their individual ideas and needs of their students their classrooms. Creating the atmosphere in a professional development training for teachers to develop professional relationships with colleague results in teachers sharing resources and ideas with one another once the trainings conclude. Some teachers have more exposure and insight regarding specific areas addressed in the training and are able to provide additional resources to those attending the trainings, which are then to be shared via the Microsoft Teams groups to be accessed in the future. Using Microsoft Teams to extend the opportunity to teachers to attend and participate

increases participation and allows for teachers to continue to ask questions and share resources related to the topic. For teachers who have not been able to attend professional development as they did prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, these trainings serve as an opportunity to get reacquainted with professional learning communities, learning from one another and reflecting on how practices can be best implemented in the classroom.

While the breadth of the project provides a strong overview of the areas teachers should be fluent in to increase student reading proficiency, it also serves as a limitation. Many of the topics covered within the 3-day training could stand alone as their own 3-day professional development that goes further in depth as to how to implement best practices to increase reading proficiency. This is especially true of small group guided reading and phonemic awareness. While teachers may leave with a deeper understanding of using best practices in these areas, many may be eager for more information and guidance as to how to implement these ideas with students in Grades 3-5. Even though resources and practices with multi-sensory phonemic instruction are to be provided, this professional development cannot provide the same intense training that could be given in an actual Orton-Gillingham training. Other topics, such as technology, also could be better explored if they have a training devoted to that topic alone and provide more time and guidance for implementation.

Another limitation is that this project may not meet the exact needs of every teacher who attends or address the unique needs of each classroom represented. While the content of the professional development is based on research derived from interviewing teachers in Grades 3-5, no one professional development can meet every varied aspect of



increasing reading proficiency in every classroom. The breadth of topics covered within this professional development allows for it to apply to more classrooms, but the needs of each teacher vary based on school and experience teaching reading in Grades 3-5.

While this project can provide teachers with ideas, resources, and opportunities for collaboration on best practices for increasing reading proficiency in Grades 3-5, there is no guarantee the training provided will be put into practice by the teachers who attend. Although the intent of this professional development is for it to be taken back to the classroom and put into practice, it cannot alter teacher attitudes or preferences for how to teach reading. The project also cannot ensure school administrators will be receptive to the content and resources provided through this training and that they will promote its implementation in their buildings.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

One of the limitations is ensuring that the practices gained from the professional development are implemented in the classroom. An alternate approach to this project would be to create a coaching program implemented within the schools, where the academic coaches observe and facilitate the use of the practices and resources throughout the school year. This would allow for professional guidance, long term support for teachers, and would give academic coaches within the schools the opportunity to engage in dialogue with teachers about how to implement the practices learned within reading instruction. School administrators could also be a part of the school wide coaching, going into classrooms and observing the instructional practices gained from the professional

development so as to dialogue with teachers about their teaching of reading and students' needs.

Another alternate approach would be to create a parental engagement initiative that encompasses the other aspects of the trainings, with the intent of educating parents on how student engagement, motivation, technology use, phonics, and small group instruction not only impact instruction but can be integrated into the home literacy environment. This initiative could include face-to-face events with parents within the schools, as well as online resources for parents to access about assisting their child at home. Using digital communication such as texts and virtual newsletters to share a skill or strategy of the week with families and a schoolwide or district wide forum to families to share how they are implementing it at home would allow for parents to use technology engagement to increase student reading proficiency.

Some facets of the professional development in this project may be more or less applicable to teachers based on their experience or needs in the classroom. Another approach rather than a predetermined, structured 3-day professional development would be to have a virtual learning library and online professional learning community for teachers to access trainings that are the most relevant to their classrooms. Teachers could also share their perceptions of topics they would like to know more about so that those at the school or district level could create future trainings for teachers to meet the needs of classrooms. This could also allow for teachers in other grade levels, such as those at the K-2 level, to share resources on phonemic awareness that may be of help to those at the 3-5 level.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

Conducting qualitative research through semistructure interviews allowed me to learn how the participants' collective thoughts, ideas, and experiences lead to the themes constructed from the data analysis. As someone with a background in journalism, I felt comfortable being unbiased in conducting the interviews and reporting the data collected. Grouping the perceptions of the teachers first through coding and progressing into discerning themes from the coded data required careful consideration and review of the data. While objective reporting consists of relaying the facts, objective coding and synthesizing of the data proved to be an intense and challenging process. However, I saw within that challenge an opportunity to share what teachers often express is lacking in education research, teacher voices. Often decisions are made regarding instructional practices that focus on statistical data alone and not the varied experiences and perspectives from those responsible from providing instruction firsthand. I have now experienced how much more time consuming it is to go deep into the thoughts and perspectives of those affected by the decisions made in education. However, I see the worth of doing so as invaluable to providing for the needs of students and teachers, especially when conditions abound that make retaining teachers a vital aspect of sustaining public education.

There is an abundance of literature on reading research; however, I found the majority of the literature focused on the elementary grades and targeted early literacy and Grades K-2. This was especially true when seeking literature on phonemic awareness. While this research from the early grades was useful, it illuminates a need for literacy

development research to encompass the intermediate grades of 3-5. With the narratives provided from the teachers in the semistructured interviews, it is imperative that more research regarding reading proficiency is conducted targeting Grades 3-5. Not only is it necessary for more literacy research to be directed at this grade range, but it is also important for that research to feature teacher voices through the process of qualitative research. I found there to be more quantitative research available as opposed to qualitative. Providing more opportunity through research to share teachers' perspectives through qualitative analysis rather than relying on statistical data alone would allow more teachers to be involved in the data that leads to decisions made based on research for reading instruction as well as other content areas.

Developing the project resulting from the data analysis was a daunting process, as I am not a teacher in this grade range or subject area. I was concerned that this would impact my ability to create a quality professional development. I found instead that it allowed me to be objective and base the structure of my project on the research collected rather than subjective measures. A key finding regarding the implementation of the project was providing a training format that cultivated teacher engagement. Much like the student engagement desired from teachers when creating the conditions for students during reading instruction, the same type of conditions, motivation, desire to learn, and choice, to name a few, appear to be just as pertinent to an effective professional development. Leadership begins with giving others voice to have autonomy and self-efficacy within their profession. Involving teachers in qualitative research provides that gateway for change in education.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

As the researcher, I learned the practices for effectively increasing reading instruction as perceived by those who teach reading in Grades 3-5. I learned that teachers place a great value on getting students to love reading in regard to whether or not students will gain reading proficiency throughout the year. Without an authentic desire to read, any practice or strategy for improving a student's reading appears futile. From this research, I learned how multifaceted the practice of increasing reading proficiency is and how imperative it is to have the support of parents as partners for improving literacy. Teachers greatly desire the involvement of parents but feel dismayed at their perceived lack of interest. Perhaps most importantly, I learned through the constructs of this project how much teachers gain from professional conversations and interactions with one another. Much as students need engagement and collaboration for their reading proficiency growth, teachers also need engagement and opportunities to interact with their peers in order to grow as professionals and be able to provide students with best practices.

The work of this project is important because it reveals the perceived needs of Grades 3-5 teachers from the teachers themselves. Their words provided the data that led to the conclusions of this research, rather than statistics that are not able to reveal the thoughts and human emotion that permeates the classroom environment. The variety of themes that surfaced as a result of the semistructured interviews shows that improving student reading proficiency is not solved from targeting and reinforcing skills alone. It requires getting students engaged and excited in the act of reading, and viewing reading

as an enjoyable activity, not simply a chore or a requirement to avoid consequences.

While technology cannot replace or replicate the importance of actual books, its integration and appropriate use can serve as a means to enhance instruction and to connect families to instructional practices. The importance of the family literacy environment is illuminated in this project and the efforts that need to be made to engage and educate parents to be partners in the quest to increase reading proficiency.

Most notably perhaps, in light of the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, is the importance this research has going forward as educators seek to close the achievement gap that has further presented itself due to disruptions incurred in the learning environment. Small group instruction, as noted by teachers, presents a vital opportunity to provide students with individual instruction on missed skills and strategies. The alarm shared by teachers regarding students' lack of phonemic awareness in the upper elementary grades is of great importance, as the lacking phonics skills are those usually reinforced at the K-2 level. The research and resulting project provide if anything a framework for other schools and districts to address similar needs of students as evidence through their own reading proficiency growth.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

Teachers that possess the knowledge and training to implement best practices in reading for students in Grades 3-5 will be better equipped to close the achievement gap and increase student reading proficiency. Enhancing reading instruction with technology has the potential to further connect teachers to others in their field and to prepare them to use future technologies to enhance instruction. The opportunities to connect with and

share with other teachers through the professional development and the provided online group afterward has the potential to allow for teachers to continue to professionally communicate with each other on best practices and to share resources that are effective in increasing student reading proficiency.

Instructional practices that effectively engage parents in the process of increasing reading proficiency stand to cultivate households that place a higher value on reading. With a better understanding of how to scaffold the reading process for their child, parents will be able to support the reading growth of that student as well as other children in the home. Improving the home to school connection through practices such as reading nights help to change the perceptions of parents who may have previously lacked knowledge on how to increase student reading proficiency.

By increasing student reading proficiency, students will possess the literacy skills to succeed in school subjects beyond reading, as well as have the aptitude necessary to seek higher education after graduation or preparedness for the work force. The instructional practices of collaborating with peers, choosing books of value and interest to them, and using technology to demonstrate knowledge prepare them to apply their reading proficiency to life outside of the classroom. As more literate individuals, students will be better prepared to make informed decisions and to pass on the value of literacy to their future families.

Future research based on this project may focus on any of the six themes formed from the data analysis that led to the creation of the professional development. A separate study exploring the impact of technology on reading proficiency may provide further data

as to how teachers have adapted to its permanence in reading instruction. A study into parent perceptions of cultivating a literate home environment may provide further insight as to how schools can meet the needs of families to support reading proficiency. Additional quantitative analysis into phonemic awareness skills teachers observe students to be lacking may provide data to schools as to how to best target achievement gaps incurred from the pandemic.

### **Conclusion**

Reading not only makes us more knowledgeable but happier, fulfilled individuals (Marzena, 2019). Taking the initiative to impact not only the academic but the emotional well-being of students in light of the aftermath of the pandemic through increasing reading proficiency improves students' lives in the present and in the future. Attention to the needs of teachers in Grades 3-5 to implement effective instructional practices in reading serves to prepare students for their future lives and to enrich their world as they currently know it. The opportunity exists as evidenced through this research and resulting project to pursue the many facets that exist in increasing reading proficiency in Grades 3-5 through engagement, effective use of resources, and strategic instruction. The potential end results are prepared teachers and students who are able to self-regulate, discern, and have the autonomy to improve their lives and the communities in which they live.



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## Appendix A: The Project

Best Practices in Reading Instruction Grades 3-5 is a three-day professional development (PD) created to increase student reading proficiency in grades 3-5. The purpose of this PD is to provide teachers in grades 3-5 who teach reading with the best practices in instruction to meet the literacy needs of their students. While this PD is predominately geared for classroom teachers in grades 3-5, administrators and interventionists at the 3-5 grade level are welcome and encouraged to attend to expand their understanding of how to best teach reading.

### **PD Content**

The following topics will be addressed each day of the PD. Each day will consist of two sessions, one held in the morning, and one in the afternoon:

- Day 1: Student Engagement and Reading Accountability vs. Reading Motivation
  - Read alouds, conversations, and student book choice
  - Motivating students to read for intrinsic purposes
- Day 2: Enhancing Instruction with Technology and Engaging Parents
  - Sharing progress and collaborating through technology
    - How to implement resources such as Flip-Grip, SeeSaw, and Screencast-o-matic
  - Cloud-based technology programs (ie. Epic)
  - Using technology to engage parents in reading
  - Developing family reading activities/events
- Day 3: Effective Guided Reading and Phonemic Awareness

- Scaffolding, reflective thinking, prompts for decoding
- Unique phonics needs of grades 3-5 students
- Multi-sensory approach
- Importance of explicit phonics instruction

Content from the PD will be made accessible to teachers via a group on Microsoft Teams. Teachers will be able to access this group after the PD has concluded as they implement what they learn in their classrooms. They will also be able to share with those attending the PD and seek support through this online forum throughout the year.

Although content is for grade 3-5 teachers, PD participants will be seated with teachers that teach the same grade level so they can work together during collaborative activities to share and create implementation plans that would best work with the grade level of students they teach. This will also allow teachers to form relationships with those that teach the same grade level, so they are more comfortable sharing and conferring with one another at the conclusion of the PD. It is hoped this helps to strengthen professional relationships among teachers for future PD experiences.

### **Presenters**

This PD will be presented to teachers by the academic coaches in the district. All academic coaches of the schools where teachers will be partaking in this PD will receive prior training and resources regarding the best practices to be covered through this PD. Academic coaches will collaborate with the researcher to prepare for the PD and to designate who will be responsible for presenting each session. Since the academic coaches who will be presenting also work in the schools of the attending teachers, they

will be able to support and provide guidance as needed to teachers after the conclusion of the PD when teachers return to their classroom to implement the practices into their reading instruction.

### **PD Goals**

The overarching goal of this PD is to provide teachers with effective practices for increasing reading proficiency that can be taken back to the classroom and implemented with students. This goal is to be achieved through three PD days, with each day focused on two aspects of reading instruction. Resources, literature, and strategies will be provided on each day to assist teachers in implementing the practices when they return to the classroom. Teachers will also be provided with an online forum via Microsoft Teams where they can access resources from the PD and communicate with one another during and after the PD to continue their support as they implement what they have learned.

The goals of this PD are:

- Teachers will learn how to integrate student engagement strategies into their reading instruction.
- Teachers will understand the difference between reading accountability and reading motivation strategies.
- Teachers will learn how to enhance reading instruction through available technology resources.
- Teachers will learn of and create ways to engage parents through opportunities that increase student reading proficiency.

- Teachers will understand how to implement guided reading and phonemic awareness into their reading instruction.

### **Anticipated Outcomes**

As a result of this PD, the following outcomes are expected:

- Teachers will be confident in implementing reading instructional practices that increase the reading proficiency of their students.
- Teachers will be aware of the resources and strategies that currently best meet the needs of students in grades 3-5
- Teachers will interact with other teachers and academic coaches that can assist and support them as they

### **Methods of Evaluation**

This PD will be evaluated by attending teachers each day as they partake in the training. An evaluation form will be provided to all teachers for them to rate how beneficial the content, resources, presentation delivery, activities, and peer conversations are for each day they are in attendance. They will also be invited to share what they find to be the most and least beneficial from each day's PD and if they feel others would benefit from the training. Teachers will evaluate the entire PD at its conclusion on the last day, with the opportunity to share if they would like additional support. The information from the evaluation will be shared with those providing the PD to assist the teachers throughout the year and make necessary changes to the PD to best serve teachers' perceived needs. Academic coaches, who will be responsible to interacting and supporting teachers in their implementation of the PD, will distribute a follow-up

evaluation one month after and one semester after the PD to gauge how teachers implemented the practices in their classrooms and what support they still need. All information gained from the evaluations will be used to improve the PD for future trainings on best reading practices.

### **Technology**

The district where this PD is being provided is 1:1 with devices for teachers and students. Teachers will need to bring their school MacBooks and iPads to this training to engage in some of the session content, complete evaluations, and interact with teachers who are participating in the training virtually. Teachers attending in person will need to use a device to view the group set up in Microsoft Teams for teachers to access resources and interact with participants once the PD has concluded.

### **Daily Schedule**

A daily schedule will be adhered to throughout the PD. Each day will cover two sessions:

- Day 1: Student Engagement (morning), Reading Accountability vs. Reading Motivation (afternoon)
- Day 2: Enhancing Instruction with Technology (morning), Engaging Parents (afternoon)
- Day 3: Effective Guided Reading (morning), Phonemic Awareness (afternoon)

While the content each day will be different, the same schedule and timing will be followed all three days. Table A-1 shows the daily schedule to be followed.



**Table A1***Daily Schedule for Best Practices in Reading PD*

Time	PD Activity
8:30 – 9:00	Teachers arrive, find seat based on grade level, set up technology/devices Presenters distribute any resources and materials for day's activities Teachers complete ice breaker activity on Padlet app using iPad to share perspectives on this morning's session topic
9:00 – 9:30	Presenter introductions Share responses to ice breaker at group tables Introduce PD topics for the day, relevance to reading instruction
9:30 – 10:00	Presentation on morning PD topic: Literature on best practices, examples of how to implement in classroom, resources and materials for reference and classroom use
10:00 – 10:10	Bathroom/Snack Break
10:10 – 11:30	Group discussions on how to implement practices in classroom, share responses on Microsoft Teams group Collaborative activity in grade level groups for creating a plan to use practices in the classroom, reflecting on current classroom practice Meet back together to review morning PD topic, share ideas and concerns for implementation
11:30 – 12:30	Lunch on Own
12:30 – 12:45	Afternoon Padlet app icebreaker topic for afternoon PD topic Share in grade level groups
12:45 – 1:15	Presentation on afternoon PD topic: Literature on best practices, examples of how to implement in classroom, resources and materials for reference and classroom use
1:15 – 1:25	Bathroom/Snack Break
1:25 – 2:45	Group discussions on how to implement practices in classroom, share responses on Microsoft Teams group

Collaborative activity in grade level groups for creating a plan to use practices in the classroom, reflecting on current classroom practice

Meet back together to review afternoon PD topic, share ideas and concerns for implementation

2:45 – 3:00

Review morning and afternoon session topics

Introduce next day's PD sessions, share anything teachers may want to bring or begin to think about for following day

3:00 – 3:30

Evaluations distributed for completion and collected

Presenters available to speak to teachers about PD topics or other areas of reading practice

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## Appendix B: Project Evaluation Documents

**Best Practices in Reading Instruction Grades 3-5 PD – Daily Evaluation**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) Taught \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

This evaluation is for (check one):

\_\_\_\_ Day 1: Student Engagement/ Reading Accountability/Motivation

\_\_\_\_ Day 2: Enhancing with Technology/ Engaging Parents

\_\_\_\_ Day 3: Effective Guided Reading/ Phonemic Awareness

**Please rate today's PD using the scale below regarding how it will benefit your reading instruction.**

1 = Not beneficial      2 = Somewhat Beneficial

3 = Beneficial      4 = Exceedingly Beneficial

1. Content Presented	1	2	3	4
2. Resources Provided	1	2	3	4
3. Delivery of Presentations	1	2	3	4
4. Practice Activities	1	2	3	4
5. Peer Conversations	1	2	3	4

Will you incorporate today's training into your reading instruction? **(Select one) Yes No**

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think other teachers would benefit from today's PD? **(Select one) Yes No**

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

What are you **most likely** to implement from today's PD? \_\_\_\_\_What are you **least likely** to implement from today's PD? \_\_\_\_\_

**Best Practices in Reading Instruction Grades 3-5 PD – Overall Evaluation**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) Taught \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate the sessions based on how beneficial they will be to your reading instruction.

1 = Not Beneficial 2 = Somewhat Beneficial 3 = Beneficial 4 = Exceedingly Beneficial

Day 1: Student Engagement 1 2 3 4

Day 1: Reading Accountability/Motivation 1 2 3 4

Day 2: Enhancing with Technology 1 2 3 4

Day 2: Engaging Parents 1 2 3 4

Day 3: Effective Guided Reading 1 2 3 4

Day 3: Phonemic Awareness 1 2 3 4

Which session(s) did you find the **most helpful** and why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Which session(s) did you find the **least helpful** and why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did this PD improve your understanding of best practices in reading instruction (**Select one**) Yes No

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

What aspects of reading instruction would you like more support with this year?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please share any suggestions for how this PD can be improved. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Best Practices in Reading Instruction Grades 3-5 PD – 1 Month Follow-up

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) Taught \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

Please share using the scale below how you have implemented the practices from the PD you attended on best practices in reading.

1 = Have not used

2 = Planning to use

3 = Have used

Student Engagement	1	2	3
Reading Accountability/Motivation	1	2	3
Enhancing with Technology	1	2	3
Engaging Parents	1	2	3
Effective Guided Reading	1	2	3
Phonemic Awareness	1	2	3

Which practices above have had the **most impact** on improving student reading proficiency in your classroom? \_\_\_\_\_

Which practices above have had the **least impact** on improving student reading proficiency in your classroom? \_\_\_\_\_

What (if any) practices would you like more support or resources for implementing in your classroom? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you used the online forum on Microsoft Teams to share or ask questions regarding this PD? **(Select one) Yes No**

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

### Best Practices in Reading Instruction Grades 3-5 PD – Semester Follow-up

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) Taught \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

Please share using the scale below how you have implemented the practices from the PD you attended on best practices in reading.

	1 = Did not use	2 = Used, but did not continue	3 = Consistently used
Student Engagement	1	2	3
Reading Accountability/Motivation	1	2	3
Enhancing with Technology	1	2	3
Engaging Parents	1	2	3
Effective Guided Reading	1	2	3
Phonemic Awareness	1	2	3

If you used but did not continue certain practices, please share why.

\_\_\_\_\_

Which practices above had the **most impact** on improving student reading proficiency in your classroom this year? \_\_\_\_\_

Which practices above had the **least impact** on improving student reading proficiency in your classroom this year? \_\_\_\_\_

Did find the online forum on Microsoft Teams beneficial for implementing the instructional practices from the PD? **(Select one) Yes No**

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

What practices would you like more support or additional PD on for the next school year? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching reading in grades 3-5?
2. Take me through what your students do on a daily basis as part of their reading instruction (how you start out a lesson, the activities and programs students do, small group instruction, etc.).
3. What have you found to be the most effective instructional strategy for increasing reading proficiency and why? What has been least effective?
4. What do you see as the greatest challenge in increasing reading proficiency and why?
5. What are some ways your reading practice supports students through their zone of proximal development (where a child is developmentally and their potential for development)?
6. How do you use independent reading to scaffold students' growth in their reading proficiency?
7. What are some ways that you motivate students to read and to increase their reading proficiency? What have you found to be the most and least effective?
8. How do you use technology integration to scaffold students' growth in their reading proficiency? What have been some of the challenges of making technology integration a part of your reading instruction?
9. How do you involve parents in developing their child's reading proficiency? What are some of the challenges in grades 3-5 of getting parents to help scaffold their child's reading growth?

10. What professional development has been most helpful to you in improving your instructional practices in reading?
11. What professional development do you feel would benefit you the most in continuing to improve instructional practices in reading?