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## Exploring Reading Teachers' Collaborative Experiences in Improving Reading Instruction to Below Grade-Level Elementary Students

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Carol L. Manciel

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

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Instruction to Below Grade-Level Elementary Students

by

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Ed.S, Wayne State University, 1998

MA, Wayne State University, 1996

BS, University of Detroit Mercy, 1981

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

Walden University

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## Abstract

In 2016, a Midwestern state legislature passed the Read by Grade Three law that mandates students who are not proficient readers at the end of third grade to repeat the third grade. The problem is that teachers struggle with implementing effective instructional interventions, and they acknowledge their lack of experience with effective interventions and instructional approaches. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore elementary reading teachers' pedagogy to understand the barriers to improving students' reading comprehension skills for students reading below grade level. The conceptual framework guiding this basic qualitative study included Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and Knowles's theory of adult learning andragogy. This study was guided by two research questions that address the instructional practices reading teachers use for elementary students struggling to improve their reading skills, and how reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for students reading below grade level. Data from semi structured interviews with 10 first- and second grade reading teachers were collected and analyzed using Level 1 and Level 2 coding of field data to identify codes, patterns, and categories. The results of this study indicated professional development is paramount in helping struggling readers by empowering teachers with knowledge and skills, fostering collaboration, and improving student academic outcomes to promote positive societal progress by motivating educational leaders to offer tailored professional development programs that support elementary school reading teachers. However, further exploration is recommended on the effectiveness of differentiated instruction approaches within professional development programs.

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## Dedication

My heart is warm with gratitude to my three daughters, who have helped carry the baggage that I toted for many years that weighed me down as I traveled to complete my educational journey. I express endless love for your support. Also, I wish to express special gratitude to the LOVE of my life Anthony, who I appreciate for his encouragement, patience, and understanding as I pursued my educational goals. Now that the dust has settled, my love, we can begin the next chapter in the game we call Life.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

The problem at a charter school district in a Midwestern state was that teachers acknowledge they do not have the skillset to effectively integrate reading strategies to instruct students reading below grade level in first and second grade to become proficient readers by third grade. Researchers have found that students in classrooms with teachers who use evidence-based strategies show more significant achievement gain than students in classrooms where teachers use fewer effective approaches and few evidence-based instructional approaches (Kraft et al., 2018; Lekwa et al., 2019). Tomaszewski et al. (2022) suggested that beyond effective teaching strategies are effective learning strategies that exhibit improved outcomes. Their study found three necessary components for learning: effective teaching practices, learners' engagement with the instruction, and the reinforcement of student achievement (Tomaszewski et al., 2022).

Teachers at the study site acknowledged that their traditional reading instruction was ineffective for improving reading outcomes. Many researchers concluded that reading instruction in elementary school was not effective in helping struggling readers develop more vital reading skills to read at grade level (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). Thus, different intervention strategies are needed to replace the traditional classroom instruction for struggling students (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2018; Suarez et al., 2020). Additionally, Cassidy et al. (2016) researched reading interventions in elementary schools and asserted that struggling readers' classroom reading instruction and interventions have been ineffective. The researchers recommended additional research to

determine why these methods fail to meet the intended goals. Ortlieb and McDowell (2016) posited that despite multiple interventions catering to literacy explicitly designed for elementary students, struggling students are still demonstrating a lack of school reading achievement. Table 1 presents assessments for first- and second grade reading performance outcomes as evidence of a growing problem at the study site. Due to COVID-19 pandemic modifications, the study site had limited student assessment data for response-to-intervention necessary for students to read on grade level by the third grade.

**Table 1**

*Research Site Reading Levels*

Year	Overall Performance	
	First Grade Below Performance	Second Grade Below Performance
2018–2019	25%	28%
2019–2020	29%	34%
2020–2021	24%	29%

Source: Northwest Evaluation Assessment, 2021

The 2021 Northwest Evaluation Assessment [NWEA] data indicated that in the district's elementary school, 25% of first-grade students and 28% of second-grade students in 2018–2019, 29% of first-grade students and 34% of second-grade students in 2019–2020, and 24% of first-grade students and 29% of second-grade students in 2020–2021 were reading below grade level. First- and second-grade teachers had not demonstrated a strong understanding of the teaching skills needed to help struggling first- and second-grade readers at grade level. First- and second-grade teachers have limited exposure to strategies for reading intervention to assist struggling students with reading development skills. The local school district superintendent noted students' lack of

literacy achievement and the teachers' concerns regarding limited exposure to effective reading intervention strategies. The local district superintendent suggested developing workshops for reading intervention strategies to address both issues but did not stay in his position to see the suggestions through. Researchers suggested that gaps in practice exist, and different strategies were needed to replace the traditional classroom interventions to assist struggling first- and second-grade readers to become proficient readers by third grade (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2018; Suarez et al., 2020). Further, a gap in practice exists between what researchers recommend as research-based strategies and evidence-based approaches, and with teachers' current practices that fail to bring about effective interventions and instruction at the study site.

In his andragogy theory, Knowles (1984) explained that to the adult learner, education is the process of improving knowledge and the ability to cope with problems and challenges. When teachers control their learning process, they gain knowledge, skillset, and expertise. In this study, I explored reading strategies and approaches teachers use, as well as how they try to learn more effective instructional methods, using Knowles's theory as a lens to understand the teachers' efforts.

### **Evidence of the Problem on the National Level**

Allington (2005b), a literacy researcher and author, suggested a severe problem with reading instruction in general in the United States. In 2005, the United States ranked last among 15 English-speaking nations in reading skills (Allington, 2005b). The 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed improvements in reading scores over the 1992 assessment in children in Grade 4 through Grade 8 (Lee et al.,

2007). NAEP measures reading comprehension explicitly, and data from the most recent NAEP showed little progress in reading skills since 1992 (Havard et al., 2018). The Education Trust-Midwest (2019) report is more relevant to this study than the NAEP scores. The study site did not make meaningful improvement for third grade reading since 2003. The Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA), part of the NAEP assessment, revealed that the study site school district was the lowest-performing urban school district among the 27 TUDA districts.

The Education Trust-Midwest's (2019) executive director called out the lack of progress in early literacy. Many issues have been identified that contribute to reading deficits for students in elementary school, including shortfalls in the skills of decoding, fluency, acquiring vocabulary, and building background knowledge. Ortlieb and McDowell (2016) concluded that reading instruction in elementary school had not helped struggling readers develop more vital reading skills to read at grade level. Different intervention strategies may be needed to replace the traditional classroom interventions for struggling readers (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2018).

Previous studies reported that traditional reading interventions for elementary students have been largely ineffective (Allington, 2005a; Cassidy et al., 2016; Ortlieb & McDowell, 2016; Scammaca et al., 2015). However, interventions that focus on vocabulary building have shown success in helping students make measurable gains in word reading and comprehension (Vaughn et al., 2009). Also, reading interventions that increase motivation were recently found to be effective for struggling students and improve reading through practice (Lovett et al., 2021). Researchers found that the Orton-



Gillingham method of phonics instruction has had similar improvements for early readers who need to strengthen sound-symbol relationships (Stevens et al., 2021).

First- and second-grade students reading below grade level in this study setting are not performing up to expectations in reading, as measured in 2018 with formative and summative assessments based on Fountas (2016). Interventions that focus on vocabulary building have shown success in helping students make measurable gains in word reading and comprehension (Vaughn et al., 2009). Two research-supported features of effective reading instruction are multicomponent approaches and proper teacher implementation training (Fountas & Pinnell 2009; Vaughn et al., 2009). In this study, I documented teachers' personal experiences with students who cannot read at grade level and the teachers' intervention strategies.

### **Rationale**

The rationale for this basic qualitative study with interviews aimed to investigate reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. I examined problems, experiences, preparation, perceptions of practice, and various teaching strategies and interventions. I also examined how teachers work individually and collaboratively to share successes and expand their knowledge needed to successfully educate first- and second-grade students who are struggling readers to become proficient readers by third grade to comply with the new reading law mandates. The Midwestern state legislature mandated new measures for students' reading growth and proficiency; the Read by Grade Three Law indicates that students who are not proficient readers at the end of third grade must repeat the third grade (Finegan, 2019).

I investigated and responded to the gap in practice by providing recommendations for teachers to strengthen their skills to assist struggling students in being proficient readers by third grade. Different intervention strategies are needed to replace the traditional classroom interventions for struggling students (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2018; Suarez et al., 2020). Traditional reading interventions for elementary students have been largely ineffective (Allington, 2005b; Cassidy et al., 2016; Ortlieb & McDowell, 2016; Scammaca et al., 2015). Exploring teachers' experiences regarding their ability to implement interventions effectively may identify factors that influence teachers' use of different instructional strategies to help improve students' reading skills. The study results may also help the school's administrator provide support and professional development for educators to experience success in educating struggling readers and explore why first- and second-grade teachers may be using ineffective methods to initiate interventions for students reading below grade level.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Andragogy*: The science of understanding and supporting lifelong education of adults (Knowles, 1984).

*Early service teachers*: Those teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2016).

*In-service teachers*: Those teachers who have completed their educational training and have been teaching in a classroom (Liebfreund & Amendum, 2017).

*Orton-Gillingham*: Samuel Orton's research on *stephymbolia* utilized his knowledge of adult brain damage to connect struggling students with reading and language difficulties (Auletto & Sableski, 2018).

*Pedagogy*: Refers to the teaching of children (Knowles, 1989).

*Reading Recovery*: Intensive reading program for first-grade students to prevent future difficulties with reading and writing tasks (Auletto & Sableski, 2018).

*Research-based programs*: Programs that have been developed, implemented, and investigated by researchers over a course of time, with published results (Cassidy et al., 2016).

*Scaffolding*: The role of teachers and others in supporting the learner's development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level (Vygotsky, 1978).

*Self-efficacy*: A belief held by a teacher, fostered by a feeling of mastery, which can lead to better academic response from their students (Bandura, 2006).

*Sociocultural theory*: Comprises a concept such as culture-specific tools, private speech, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978).

*Struggling reader*: A child who is not performing up to expectations based on the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS; Allington, 2005b, 2013).

*Zone of proximal development (ZPD)*: The distance between the actual developmental level determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development, as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Significance of the Study**

In this basic qualitative study, I investigated reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. The investigation helped illuminate the problems, experiences, preparation, perceptions of practice, and various teaching strategies and interventions. I examined how teachers work individually and collaboratively to share successes and expand their professional knowledge. In semi structured interviews, I examined intervention strategies reading teachers need to utilize for success in educating first- and second-grade students who are struggling readers to comply with the 2019 Read by Grade Three Law.

The gap in training at the study site, an urban charter elementary school in the Midwest, involved improving teachers' skills to assist elementary students who read below grade level and to better implement the intervention strategies to help struggling readers. When teachers explore instructional and personal development ideas and perceptions, there is the potential to comprehend what reading instruction supports and intervention strategies educators need to experience success in educating struggling readers. The results led to interventions to help shape classroom instructional practices to increase students' academic achievement.

### **Research Questions**

The Midwestern Read by Grade Three Law indicates that students who are not proficient readers at the end of third grade must repeat the third grade. However, elementary school teachers at the research site faced several challenges in providing practical strategies for low-reading first- and second-grade students to be proficient

readers by Grade 3. I conducted a basic qualitative study with interviews to answer the following two research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling to improve their reading skills?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level?

### **Review of the Literature**

This basic qualitative study investigated reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. The investigation helped illuminate the problems, experiences, preparation, perceptions of practice, and various teaching strategies and interventions. I examined how teachers work individually and collaboratively to share successes and expand their professional knowledge. In semi structured interviews, I examined intervention strategies reading teachers need to utilize for success in educating first- and second-grade students who are struggling readers to comply with the 2019 Read by Grade Three Law. In the interview questions, I explored teachers' attempts to improve students' reading outcomes by third grade to advance to fourth grade.

I searched peer-reviewed education journals, accessed through Walden University's library. I used the following databases and search engines, targeting sources published within the past 5 years in peer-reviewed journals: Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), Education Full Text (EBSCO), Education Source (EBSCO), and Eric. I also

employed Sage, Thoreau, and Google Scholar in subsequent searches. Initial key search terms included *reading instruction, reading interventions, reading interventions for elementary students, reading programs, struggling readers, self-efficacy, teacher support, zone of proximal development, early childhood reading programs, and first grade and second grade reading intervention programs*. As the literature review progressed, I added further search terms based on my findings and my developing sense of the conceptual framework. I performed a Boolean search using words, including *curriculum, literacy, reading interventions, professional development, Vygotsky, and Knowles*.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual frameworks guiding this basic qualitative study drew from Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and Knowles's (1989) theory of adult learning andragogy. Vygotsky's ZPD theories, combined with Knowles's theory of andragogy, provided both a model and a framework for investigating adult learning. The framework of this study was used to examine how classroom teachers evolved their pedagogy practices when implementing instructional strategies to struggling readers.

### ***Five Assumptions of Andragogy***

Knowles's (1984) five assumptions about adult learning place the learner at the forefront of the theory of andragogy.

- Adults need to understand the purpose of learning and what they will learn from an activity.

- Adults must tie their experiences to the material known to enhance their knowledge base.
- Adults must be responsible and learn autonomously with self-direction to develop social role developmental tasks.
- Adults learn best when the learned material is immediately applied to real-life situations as a problem-solving method.
- Adults learn best when intrinsic motivators give them more opportunities for professional growth. Knowles assumed that adult learners are self-directed students learning to support new social roles by applying what they are learning to the situation.

### ***Vygotsky's Social Cultural Theory and ZPD***

Vygotsky (1978) introduced the ZPD, explained by Eun (2019) as, “The actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as defined through problem-solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (pp. 19–20). Based on Vygotsky’s ZPD, teachers or peers considered more knowledgeable or experienced in the classroom should build upon students’ developmental levels by scaffolding students’ learning to engage their cognitive capacity. In this approach, the more significant person supports the novice into the most proximal level of development, while providing the accustomed assistance (Eun, 2019).

Vygotsky (1986) also suggested that the surrounding social nature of learning encompasses the student’s interactions with other peers and the instructor. Vygotsky’s

(1986) socio-cognitive theory broadened into the sociocultural nature of learning. Further, young children influence one another and affect the adults who attempt to socialize with them (Nielsen, 2016). Even though ZPD is frequently referred to in studies that focus on children, researchers suggested that students and adults both experience a ZPD for learning (Knowles, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD with teachers, as learners, aids in their knowledge about language learning, and teaching can be more effective than information that is only self-discovered (Vygotsky, 1986).

Students and teachers need to receive scaffolding, modeling, explicit instruction, and the opportunity to develop and master the skills taught. Newman (2018) suggested extending Vygotsky's concept of ZPD from the school settings to adults and described how best the teachers could pass through the ZPD stages of professional development and gain professionalism. Scaffolding teacher learning is essential to understanding and fostering pedagogical content knowledge (Newman, 2018). In this study, I expected to illuminate the problems, experiences, preparation, perceptions of practice, and various teaching strategies and interventions to examine how teachers work individually and collaboratively to share successes and expand their professional knowledge. Vygotsky's (1978) work provides a way for students to learn through the interaction and communication with classroom teachers as adult learners.

This social process is why Vygotsky's (1989) theories are essential to adult education, as adult learners benefit enormously from working with others. Vygotsky's ZPD theory was best suited to examine the data collected through online teacher



interviews to investigate barriers teachers may face in providing instruction to struggling first- and second-grade readers.

The Midwestern charter school district, where I conducted the study, used various reading interventions. Most first- and second-grade students are reading below grade level and required personalized interventions for instruction and progress monitoring. Teachers fall within a range of experience, from new to the teaching profession to in service for more than a decade. Teachers' use of varying instructional practices, collaboration, and sharing among colleagues in similar situations has not been addressed. The Read by Grade Three Law must also be considered when developing strategies for primary reading teachers' teaching reading to below grade-level elementary students. The analytical approaches of the study considered a variety of variables. Teacher preparation was an important focus that contributed to what teachers have learned, both as students and teachers in the classroom. The problems and barriers they face are perhaps the most valuable component of the study's data. A teacher's description of their educational background had an observable bearing on mastery in the classroom. Yet, teachers who have learned from various instructional strategies informed what we know about instructional practices.

### ***Self-Efficacy and Motivation***

Intrinsic motivation is a crucial component of Knowles's (1989) theory of andragogy. Studies exist on an entire spectrum of reading interventions, from context-free scripted curricula to highly individualized, culturally relevant classroom practice. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of ZPD, it is crucial to maximize the sense of

personal mastery in the classroom for both teachers and students. As the literature review indicated, there are many types of reading intervention; as a result, some schools, districts, and individual teachers have tried many approaches over the years. Knowles's theory suggested that if a specific intervention is not working, it may not be a problem with the intervention itself, but the way it was selected, as in some cases, by a principal, administrator, school board, statute, or other entity outside the classroom and the teachers' feelings about using it (Compton et al., 2014; Filderman et al., 2018; Infurna et al., 2018; Ortlieb & McDowell, 2016; Ryder et al., 2016; Scammaca et al., 2015). Another factor was the teacher's professional development level, actual or self-perceived (Bandura, 2006). Interventions, in some cases, were considered barriers to effective instruction (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Birdyshaw et al., 2017). The dismal statistics of reading performance in student populations demonstrate that a new approach was necessary.

This research study project focused on components of Knowles's (1989) theory of andragogy and Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD. Knowles assumed that adult learners are self-directed students and that repeated successful performance leads to significantly higher subsequent performance levels. Researchers suggested a correlation between treatment results and instructional practices for developing early childhood readers (Birdyshaw et al., 2017). Teachers of children struggling with reading must often help their students confront ongoing fear, failure, and disappointment. According to Bandura (1977), "Successes raise mastery expectations; repeated failures lower them, particularly if the mishaps occur early in events" (p. 195).

Knowles et al.'s (2014) core principles of adult learning—the learner's needs to know, the self-concept of the learner, prior experience, readiness to learn, orientation to education, and motivation to learn—are a relevant theoretical framework for the project. Adult learning as a framework for teacher development informed the research questions. Knowles et al. indicated that the andragogical model understands the reasons for professional development before committing to that development, underscoring personal motivation as a factor.

Toste et al. (2019) looked at motivational beliefs training in the reading classroom and found that high motivation levels are associated with better reading skills. Toste et al. did not conclusively find that motivational beliefs training would improve instructional practice' however, a student would improve reading with increasing self-efficacy, only to abandon reading outside the classroom if the motivation was entirely process-based. Also, Baker and Wigfield (1999) suggested that motivation and reading skills are inextricably linked, but motivational profiles are multifaceted. The role of play in reading is potentially an instructional challenge and opportunity; possibly, connections made between self-efficacy, play, and reading skills (Nielson, 2016). Bandura's (2006) positive experiences related to specific skills might be considered ideal in the reading classroom, especially with teachers with lower-achieving students who have associated education with burden and failure.

A series of studies indicated motivational intervention in a remedial elementary summer reading program in Massachusetts. Orkin et al. (2018) showed that autonomy and mastery emphasis in reading instruction dramatically improved outcomes, as

compared with a control group of students who received material rewards for performance. Ryder et al. (2016) studied direct instruction and found differences in responses to direct instruction and non-direct instruction approaches between suburban and urban students in Grade 1 through Grade 3. Among the teacher characteristics that positively correlated with success, the authors noted teacher demeanor, individual attention to students, and encouraging student independence. The Ryder et al. findings were based on a self-reported questionnaire data.

### **Teacher and Classroom Instruction**

Clara (2017) asserted that Vygotsky's (1978) conceptual development theory of instruction pushes a child's development when the relationship is promoted through nonspontaneous meaning to a spontaneous purpose that permits self-development. The ZPD no longer comes between the relationships of people, rather a structural relationship between definitions. Tucker et al. (2005) linked ZPD to student achievement when researchers found that students' academic engagement improved when teacher efficacy became a central pedagogical stance. In light of ZPD, it is conceivable that teachers' self-efficacy has positively affected student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Some older studies have documented teacher success with high self-efficacy, attributing this to enthusiasm, openness to ideas, and willingness to test various teaching methods (Allinder, 1994; Ross & Gray, 2006). Teacher self-efficacy is thought to be a function of moving the teacher to the learner's side and placing the student at the center of instruction (Allington, 2013).

Filderman et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of peer-reviewed studies from 1975 to 2017 that relied on quantified performance data. With the role of data-based decision-making (DBDM) established in many circles as a best practice, the study is impressive in its comprehensive effort to provide empirical evidence for DBDM. Ortlieb and McDowell (2016) performed a statistical analysis of 15 peer-reviewed studies on reading interventions that employ DBDM, typically decisions based on criterion mastery to repeat lessons, adjust instructional material to student needs, and utilize strategy-use rubrics. Overall, the authors found modest effects in the few studies they discovered that engaged in (and measured) DBDM. The Filderman meta-analysis is valuable for its attempt to quantify the results of DBDM but is limited by the fact that very few studies met inclusion criteria. In a more comprehensive literature review, Stentiford et al. (2018) included 64 published and unpublished studies from 1970 to 2017 and examined reading interventions across various delivery strategies and tiers. Stentiford et al. focused on intervention delivery, concluding, in part, that future studies should retain more information about methods, locations, and persons delivering programmatic instruction. Stentiford et al. asserted a lack of transparency in reading interventions described in the literature. Many studies lack information about the location of the research and the credentialing of persons delivering interventions.

A synthesis of studies focused specifically on inferences made or not made by struggling readers. Hall (2016) identified several studies with exciting findings, including that struggling readers might benefit more from specific inference instruction than skilled readers (McGee & Johnson, 2003, in Hall, 2016). Definitive inference taxonomy does not

exist, and Hall admits the synthesis raises more questions than answers. Culturally aware reading instruction is likely to prove fundamental, as success in making inferences is significantly affected by whether a student shares the cultural background assumed by a text (Kispaal, 2008). Debnam et al. (2015) looked at culturally responsive instruction and found an absence of data, with teachers' self-reported culturally responsive teaching strategies not validated. Significantly, teachers who bridge cultural divides in the classroom also reported higher self-efficacy levels. This finding has ramifications for conceptual development theory in instruction and instructional design for struggling readers.

### ***Best Practices***

Instructional practices are an important area of inquiry for anyone looking at the role of conceptual development in reading skills. Malloy et al. (2019) identified 10 evidence-based best practices, including ongoing monitoring and adjustment, small group differentiated instruction, instruction in, and technology practice. Best practices are active, engaging, relevant, multifaceted, inquiry-based, and technologically rich. Students learn not just by speaking and listening, reading, and writing; they learn to understand digital representations and graphic communication.

**Monitoring.** In a large, controlled study, Droop et al. (2016) studied the effects of an intervention on reading comprehension with positive results. The subjects were 1,469 third- and fourth graders in the Netherlands. The teacher read a book selection followed by independent student reading (books of their choosing), assisted by a checklist of reading strategies. Participants were not necessarily struggling readers, but a random

sample from 40 schools in the study. Interventions were designed for struggling readers, “During independent reading, the teacher had the opportunity to read with poorer readers and assist them as they applied the strategies” (Droop et al., 2016, p. 83). The control group’s teacher manuals provided no specific instruction on modeling a strategy in this study. However, the Strategic Reading Initiative (SRI) study program “provided detailed scripts for the teacher to model a strategy, what to say exactly, and which questions to ask during reading aloud” (Droop et al., p. 85). Teachers later reported learning from these scripts—a key point—and became more confident in applying the modeling idea to other texts. The information was not in the original program, and they could use the new knowledge in different subjects.

Several studies have indicated that elementary students’ traditional reading interventions have been ineffective (Cassidy et al., 2016; Ortlieb & McDowell, 2016). A qualitative assessment of teachers’ experiences adapting interventions and pedagogy to new approaches may point toward reading intervention methods that capitalize on teachers’ strengths. New strategies are necessary for adult learners before committing entirely to a new practice or model (Knowles et al., 2014). Teacher self-concept is essential to selecting interventions and addressing reading failures in early grades, as well as an understanding of barriers perceived by teachers in helping struggling students.

The andragogical concept, as expressed by Knowles et al. (2014), is relevant to the research questions because, while the study seeks to examine and elucidate barriers that teachers must deal with as they work with struggling readers, some of the obstacles may be with limited preparation for working with struggling readers. Knowles et al.

found that adult learners will sometimes “resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them” (p. 65). Teachers feel they have little input into curriculum and intervention decisions when administration offices mandate those strategies. Also, an environment that fosters a learning culture would require the teacher’s participation in planning their further professional development (Knowles et al., 1984). An analysis of teachers’ perceived barriers to the successful reading intervention might shed light on potential directions for future training in reading instruction, particularly regarding the implementation in 2019 of the Midwestern Read by Grade Three Law.

Oslund et al. (2012) studied progress-monitoring measures in kindergarten classrooms for predictive validity; the steps were phonemic awareness and alphabetic/decoding measures and DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). The authors found that curriculum-embedded mastery checks were reliable predictors of outcomes, while DIBELS had predictive utility. Oslund et al. stated that “more attention may be warranted for specific skills depending on the time of year, especially given the sequential and often rapid development of reading skills during the first year of reading instruction” (p.100).

The results of so many reading intervention strategies are encouraging, especially when student interest, personal learning style, and intensive instruction are considered. Compton et al. (2014) decried the quick fix and called for a return to reading theory. Reading theory has produced several valid interventions over the years. Compton et al. suggested that computational modeling techniques can help determine information and delivery necessary for struggling readers. They argued that strategy instruction, the most



current reading intervention, does not allow students to construct a situation model, which they consider vital to reading improvement.

One wonders if the classroom teachers at the research site would have time to remain professionally current on developments in reading theory. A National Council on Teacher Quality (2016) report indicated that pre-service teachers do not have the necessary reading skills. An evaluation of more than 800 undergraduate programs for elementary teacher education showed fewer than half of these programs offered instruction in all five essential reading components. Nearly 20% of the programs addressed either one or none of the reading components. Bratsch-Hines et al. (2017) suggested that high levels of expertise are needed for teaching reading, especially to struggling readers.

Compton et al. (2014) insisted upon building background knowledge in the struggling reader via latent semantic analysis desirable but time-consuming and requiring high expertise level studies focused on intervention methods, which have yielded results and have raised questions about the feasibility of implementation. Chase et al. (2018) examined the effects of the Neurological Impress Method and Read Two Impress on “reading comprehension, fluency, and students’ attitude toward reading” (p. 492) and demonstrated measurable results on fluency, but no change in attitude toward reading. Taylor (2018) found promising results using Lexia for first- through third-grade students in Connecticut. Fast Track to Fluency, a method used in Texas to manage the time and effectiveness of volunteers in the reading classroom, was studied by Atwater (2014). Atwater asserted that repeated readings, either with teachers or volunteers, correlated

with increased fluency in struggling readers. Paige (2018) forcefully attacks Reading Recovery, an intensive Tier 3 intervention, as “expensive” (p. 492).

Savage et al. (2015) addressed the Simple View of Reading (SVR) model of reading comprehension in the context of one classroom in England. SVR, as a model, has become a component of educational policy in England and, as such, comes into policy questions. The results of this study are not of considerable significance to my research. The further breakdown of a model with policy implications is enlightening and required new thought and investigation. Malouf et al. (2014) assessed the effectiveness of Helping Early Literacy with Practice Strategies (HELPS) on reading fluency in a small sample and found positive results.

Oostdam et al. (2015) studied guided oral reading as an intervention for struggling readers in Grade 2 to Grade 4 and found improvements in reading fluency and attitude, but not reading comprehension. From a classroom self-efficacy standpoint, the change in mindset is the most significant aspect of the study. It is hoped that with a shift in attitude toward reading, students will benefit from a further intervention that improves comprehension. When designing future interventions to address understanding, it will be necessary to remove barriers to teachers’ ability to spark a love of reading in their students.

### **Early Literacy Intervention Programs**

Intervention literacy-designed programs have student success in mind, utilizing reading and writing skills is the passport to achievement, according to Auletto and Sableski (2018). Reading is essential in the early stages of a child’s reading development.

The student will read below grade level if there is no connection to reading comprehension skills in the student's reading abilities (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). The lack of literacy development programs for low socioeconomic students can signal a language gap for peers by the age of 3, if teachers do not emphasize reading comprehension, oral language, and vocabulary as essential in literacy instruction, which can impact future reading abilities for a student up to third grade.

### ***Reading Recovery***

Reading Recovery is an intensive reading program for first-grade students identified as at risk to prevent future difficulties with reading and writing tasks for effective reading instruction by third grade. Reading Recovery lessons typically involve one-to-one, 30-minute daily tutoring, a 12- 20-week program with a trained Reading Recovery teacher, and general classroom literacy introduction for at-risk first-grade students (Sirinides et al., 2018). The program was developed in New Zealand by Dr. Marie Clay in 1978 to continue her research into effective reading instruction for struggling readers (Clay, 1987). According to Holliman & Hurry's (2013) reading intervention study, any student who received Reading Recovery services, regardless of their completion rate, was noted as being less likely to require special education services. It was a predictor that students in the Reading Recovery intervention programs scored higher on standardized tests than those who continued with further intervention services (Holliman & Hurry, 2013).

### ***Orton-Gillingham***

The Orton-Gillingham reading intervention instruction is based on the research and methodology of Samuel Orton and Ann Gillingham (Waldvogel, 2010). Samuel Orton's research on *stephymbolia* utilized his knowledge of adult brain damage to connect struggling students with reading and language difficulties (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). Orton concluded that students could not use the left hemisphere of their brain when attempting to read, similar to adults with left brain damage. His research introduced the concept of multisensory education that engaged both brain hemispheres in reading tasks. Literacy instruction included phonemes, morphemes, and standard spelling rules, incorporating phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). Gillingham's research utilized remedial training for children with specific disabilities in reading, spelling, and penmanship.

In comparison, Reading Recovery had overlapping and similar background with several existing intervention programs, making literacy intervention teachers favor Reading Recovery. The overlapping skills found in Reading Recovery are critical to improving literacy instruction for low socioeconomic students to instill knowledge and skills that will implement high-quality instruction to assist struggling first-grade students to be proficient in readings by third grade. The 4-year study concluded, "Reading Recovery is an effective intervention that can help reverse struggling readers' trajectories" (Sirinides et al., 2018, p. 331).

### ***Small Group***

Support for small groups and an individual reader is essential for fostering complex literacy skills. As researchers have found for early grades, more research is needed to unpack what takes place between teachers and students in various instructional contexts (Griffith et al., 2015). Griffith et al. (2015) focused on teacher decisions made at the moment, which depend primarily upon “pedagogical knowledge” as against “pedagogical content knowledge,” depending more on knowledge of teaching than on the inside of a subject (p. 447). The authors found that the small group setting facilitated variation in teacher decisions.

Students working in pairs may or may not constitute peer tutoring, depending on the situation. In a peer-tutoring case study, Grünke and Leidig (2017) looked at reading comprehension in fourth graders following a week of tutor-tutee sessions. Participants showed improvement in their ability to answer comprehension questions about stories. The authors looked at peer tutoring as an intervention; readers had adequate decoding skills but did not achieve reading comprehension or understand a text’s meaning. The authors acknowledged that much research-based interventions exist in practice, including lack of time, resources, large classes with diverse reading levels and learning abilities, teacher training, or other factors. Grünke and Leidig (2017) noted, “The accumulated knowledge on the benefits of various reading comprehension interventions is worth little if students at risk for failure do not have access to them” (p. 43).

Grünke and Leidig (2017) implemented a program of story mapping with reward tokens. They intended to develop a strategy adopted “easily and quickly” by teachers

using current resources (Grünke & Leidig, 2017, p. 46). While acknowledging that the results could not be generalized and their sample was relatively small, Grünke and Leidig achieved “remarkable results” (p. 55). One problematic aspect is that their system matches struggling readers with a peer tutor. There are often good reasons for not matching skills. The reasons range from privacy to child labor laws to harming the struggling reader if the peer tutor is not a good match or for other purposes. The Grünke and Leidig study also paired children of immigrants to Germany with native-born children who spoke German at home as tutors. However, the task is worth noting for reading comprehension to reach struggling readers. The intervention begins early; Chiu and Cain (2018) demonstrated that kindergarten skill deficits predict Grade 3 reading comprehension issues.

In a study conducted in an urban elementary school in Massachusetts, Schechter et al. (2015) looked at blended learning outcomes for low socioeconomic status students. Lovett et al. (2017) provided an evidence-based case for intervention at the earliest stage for children whose reading skills were not improving. The earlier timing and longer duration of interventions beginning at Grade 1 were emphasized. Schechter et al. included a diverse group of children, including minority children and children of low socioeconomic status.

### **Technology: Digital and Online Interventions**

Part of the interview and questionnaire data in this study focused on teachers’ and students’ use of technology. Innovations based on technology have online Learning to Integrate Internet Knowledge Strategically (LINKS) program based on Internet text

integration (Hagerman, 2017). The program is a digital game called GraphoLearn (Ronimus et al., 2019), video self-modeling (Edwards & Lambros, 2018), and digital pens to increase English reading fluency in Chinese students (Tan et al., 2013). Even Twitter has been studied as one method for getting elementary students to engage with reading (Morgan, 2014).

First- and second-grade urban students in the Midwest examined a computer-based repeated reading intervention (Council et al., 2016). Council et al. (2016) stated, “Within urban settings, overburdened with too many needs and too few resources, intervention delivery must be of minimum effort and maximum effect” (p. 242). The study, published in *Behavioral Disorders*, focused heavily on the correlation between difficulty reading and behavioral problems. Still, the conclusions included reading fluency and behavioral improvement and found improvement in both measures. The sample was relatively small, and the intervention was amenable to being tailored to each student. For example, one girl interested in video games could play 3 minutes of Ninja Turtle as reinforcement when she finished her reading prompts successfully (Council et al., 2016). Although Council et al. concentrated on *stereotype threat* (Carr & Steele, 2010) as the source of the three female student participants’ initial lack of confidence in their ability to read, the results could easily be interpreted as a self-efficacy problem. After several successful computer-assisted reading sessions, all three girls changed their self-talk about reading, improving their behavior.

Messer and Nash (2018) evaluated a visual mnemonics system with 78 British school children struggling readers. Their literature review suggested that most computer-

based interventions have measurable but small positive effects and are not of substantial or long-lasting help. Messer and Nash compared a 6-month and a 10-month intervention and found the 10-month response had results that included helping students overcome the Matthew effect. The effect enabled them to catch up with their age peers in reading comprehension. Messer and Nash postulated that this particular computer-assisted intervention's success was visual images using Trainer-text. The length of the response is likely significant, as well. The Trainer-text tutorials were developed over a dozen years with many feedback rounds. They were high quality and more effective than recently developed material or material produced for one study. The main takeaway of the Messer and Nash study was the importance of the duration of intervention.

Huang and Yang (2015) designed and tested a 10-week online remedial English program for Taiwanese students to compare direct instruction with a model called ET-RT, explicit teaching before reciprocal teaching, from Palinscar and Brown (1984). The study participants were from a university population. Still, the cohort was chosen because they were struggling with the language, and the results may inform the study of the ET-RT model for grade school classroom practice. Huang and Yang found that their ET-RT approach outperformed direct instruction; although, students in both groups enjoyed and benefited from the instruction. ET-RT is a student-centered approach and includes students working in pairs or groups to practice skills. The emphasis is on strategies for reading. Teachers' professional development can potentially consist of ET-RT instruction elements; although, more study is necessary.



Wu et al. (2018) examined video self-modeling (VSM) as an intervention for reading fluency in elementary school students. While the study did not find a difference between group reading interventions with and without VSM, it is essential to consider VSM as a potential professional development component for teachers and its effects on students. The real value of VSM in reading instruction is for teachers' video modeling, watching other teachers perform a reading intervention and VSM teachers watching themselves provide reading responses to students successfully. However, more research into the effectiveness of VSM is indicated, as work in other disciplines has indicated its value. Vygotsky's (1986) conceptual approach used modeling as an intervention, demonstrating that children learn best when contingent interaction and scaffolding occur in classroom instruction. Observation of one's success, according to Vygotsky, is a vital component of learning.

### **Teacher Pedagogical Stances**

A highly personalized approach to the struggling reader may have notable results (Stover et al., 2017). Stover et al. (2017) found that individualized literacy activities led to a marked improvement in the child's performance, leading to his titular remark, "It ain't hard anymore" (p. 26). It is convincing and ideal where every teacher has the time and capacity for highly individualized assignments. With the individualized lesson plan already a part of practice; it may not be too significant to incorporate students' interests into their reading interventions, given the research-based potential for beneficial results.

The relationship of parenting styles to academic self-efficacy has ramifications for reading skills, peer relationships, and peer influence dramatically affected by parenting.

Kiuru et al. (2014) suggested that authoritative teacher stances might make up for non-authoritative parental positive impact on spelling skills. However, this Finnish study has not been replicated in North America.

It is not unusual for comprehension to lag other gains in reading. Raffaele Mendez et al. (2016) conducted a small pilot study using a Tier 2 intervention with struggling readers in Grade 1 through Grade 5, but the minor gains were incomprehension. Changes may be needed in the way we measure understanding. As culturally responsive teaching methods encourage more student-centered participation, there may be more than enough measures to demonstrate success. It is crucial to query every aspect of the student's reading experience and determine what best nourished their progress. However, measurement as it currently exists is key to placing students in intervention programs as early as possible, when they do their best. January et al. (2016) queried curriculum-based measurement in reading (CBM-R) in schools as a universal screening method, with or without word lists, with implications for screening at-risk readers in first and second grade. More study is necessary to determine what sets of measurements best served to introduce robust culturally responsive reading intervention.

### ***Teacher Training***

Bratsch-Hines et al. (2017) found that teacher education was not related to their instructional outcomes when the reading curriculum was scripted with limited time for interventions to support struggling readers. Still, teacher experience and reading knowledge were positively correlated with the instructional outcomes, including reading skills. A study of 5- and 6-year-olds in Greece found that the arts positively impacted

literacy (Theodotou, 2017). The finding is likely a cultural bias, however helpful and accurate it may be in that setting.

Ciampa and Gallegher (2018) explored the self-efficacy beliefs for literacy instruction of Canadian and American pre-service elementary teachers. University coursework in literacy instruction correlated positively with high self-efficacy scores (Ciampa & Gallegher, 2018). Isoaho et al. (2016) studied Specific Language Impairment (SLI) in students in Finland, children 6 to 10 years of age. Students with SLI are found to be at high risk of developing reading difficulty in many studies. Isoaho et al. found that the SLI group struggled particularly in the third and fourth years of schooling, when (in Finland) many new subjects are introduced, and comprehension and performance become significantly more dependent on reading ability, with implied effects on self-esteem and motivation. Briefly, the deficit model of reading postulates that the reading skills are lacking, while reading development parallels that of more skilled readers, though at a slower pace. The developmental lag model assumes that lower early reading ability levels, connected with overcoming cognitive delays, lead to a lack of exposure to reading and subsequent lack of performance. Isoaho et al. attempted to view their results through the lenses of both the deficit model of reading ability and the developmental lag model, pointing out that studies have indicated the deficit model is supported in most studies.

Abernathy et al. (2013) studied teacher beliefs, values, and their impact on wholehearted adoption of effectiveness and newly introduced reading interventions. The authors included an excellent analysis of the characteristics of teacher self-efficacy. Abernathy et al. found those teachers' high self-efficacy scores on questionnaires

correlated with teachers who took more responsibility for outcomes. The schools that were low performance in reading were Reading First schools. The questionnaires' open-ended responses revealed that many teachers did not find the district training helpful, with the comment "what I already do" occurring (Abernathy et al., 2013, p. 8).

In a large study of preschool reading teachers in an urban district, Infurna et al. (2018) found that job satisfaction was predictive of higher levels of self-efficacy. The researchers found that teachers who were pleased with their work reported less burnout, acknowledged their self-efficacy, and responded as satisfied with their job (Infurna et al., 2018). The authors used the 24-item Tschannen-Moran/Woolfolk Hoy teacher self-efficacy instrument. There was also some indication that teachers with more experience teaching Grade 3 and up find it difficult to transition that experience into a Pre-K to 2nd Grade setting. Expertise negatively correlated high self-efficacy (Infurna et al., 2018).

Liebfreund and Amendum (2017) studied participation in a reading intervention as a means of professional development for teachers. Significantly, they found that providing effective, one-on-one Tier 2 instructions in kindergarten through second grade was a positive and confidence-building experience for teachers and effective intervention for students. Bates and Morgan (2018) contended that teachers could develop self-efficacy through various positive educational experiences, including observing other teachers, professional development, professional learning communities, and collaboration with colleagues that focuses on instructional practices reflections.

**Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities.** In a randomized controlled study of fourth- and fifth grade struggling readers, Vaughn et al. (2019) found a statistically

significant positive correlation between intervention, word, and fluency in reading, but mixed statistically substantial results for reading comprehension. The study was the most recent of several related, but non-overlapping, efficacy studies. The authors stated reading comprehension is “difficult to affect” in all of them (Vaughn et al., 2019, p. 32). Late elementary readers at every level are confronting texts of increasing complexity, and sometimes, early elementary students who had few difficulties begin to struggle at this stage with comprehension. The Vaughn et al. study included 18 hours of professional development for tutors of small group sessions. The study draws upon conclusions from previous studies led by Vaughn and frameworks of reading theory, including Chall (1996) and Gough and Tunmer (1986). Vaughn et al. suggested that reading interventions have to be intensive and must be carried out over several years, as reading complexity increases, “provided by highly qualified clinicians” (p. 42).

Nielsen (2016) assessed teaching spelling patterns to increase orthographic fluency in Danish third graders. Nielsen follows the self-teaching hypothesis (Share, 1995, in Nielsen, 2016) of phonological decoding in support of orthographic learning—connecting spoken phonemes with written graphemes. Students who received the training showed improvement in orthographic knowledge (Nielsen, 2016). The study did not focus on struggling readers, so students with low scores on vocabulary and spelling were excluded.

Ronberg and Petersen (2016) looked at poor reading comprehension in 9-year-olds in a cohort with age-appropriate word reading skills. The study’s literature review helpfully reveals the wide variation in reported reading comprehension difficulty in fluent

word readers, frequently reported as 10% to 15%. Ronberg and Petersen found a vast difference in that number, from 1% to 22%. The results of their study demonstrated a 3% to 6% incidence of poor comprehension in average readers. The author's interpreted weaker orthographic skills relate to a lower reading frequency, as reported by students.

Studies of reading interventions in low socioeconomic or high-poverty areas are of particular interest, given that the focus of my research is the potential of new interventions and professional development. Kim et al. (2016) found a statistically significant impact on reading comprehension in a large, randomized, controlled study in North Carolina using summer reading programs combined with comprehension lessons at the end of the school year. The plan was a cost-effective intervention in a high-poverty area that achieved results (Kim et al., 2016). Summer reading programs are likely to form a significant component of the response. Christodoulou et al. (2017) found direct evidence that summer reading programs make a measurable difference for student's age's six to nine with reading disabilities. The paraphrasing strategy TRAP (Think before you read, read a paragraph, ask yourself, and put it into my own words; Hagaman et al., 2016) increased reading comprehension at 46% of economically disadvantaged schools in the Midwest. The study was a small study with seven participants of Tier 2 students. The authors suggested that pre-service teachers, or others without specialized training, could successfully implement TRAP intervention (Hagaman et al., 2016).

Davidson et al. (2018) asserted that in struggling readers with an autism spectrum disorder, oral vocabulary was the strongest predictor of reading comprehension. The authors focused on gauging working memory as a component of reading comprehension,

a research gap, and found that poor perception “does not use effective retrieval strategies” (Davidson et al., 2018, p. 325). Müller et al. (2015) found that the only struggling readers in their study of second-grade students who benefited from an intervention were those that already had strong word recognition. Coltheart (2015) interpreted patterns of reading deficits, distinguishing between proximal and distal causes of developmental disorders affecting reading and discussed several models of impairment that might be addressed.

The foundational skills that underlie reading comprehension include “alphabet knowledge, print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, decoding, and text-reading fluency” (Solari et al., 2017, p. 150). The authors studied an instructional framework (Reading RULES!) that allows instructors to tailor lessons to Tier 2 small groups. This tailoring is not interest-based, as in the case study example above, but skills-based. The authors acknowledge this approach requires instructor “finesse” and that there is no “one-size-fits-all” model (Solari et al., 2017, p. 158). The fact that this finesse is required may point to removing one of the most concerning barriers to teaching effectiveness: the lockstep curricula that demand following a script (Solari et al., 2017, p. 158). Teachers can develop a sense of self-efficacy and nourish their struggling reading students.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching.** Instruction for culturally diverse students is included in teacher preparation for reading instruction in most United States (Birdyshaw et al., 2017). Ryder et al. (2016) noted that successful teachers were unsatisfied with the direct instruction materials and frequently supplemented them with more culturally aware readings. With the de-emphasis on phonics in non-direct instruction approaches, direct instruction material provided better results for urban students. An extensive and

comprehensive Institute of Education Science study of instructional practices from kindergarten to third grade did not find that focusing on world knowledge positively correlated with readers' outcomes. Still, it is not clear that "world knowledge," in this instance, had any cultural implications (Chiang et al., 2017, p. 34).

Little recent research exists on the home literacy practices of low-income, African American families. However, Kelley et al. (2016) examined the bedtime routines of 20 middle- and low-income families with a preschooler and found bedtime routines to be major literacy events for preschoolers. From a cultural responsiveness standpoint, these routines that supported literacy were focused on reading and found that prayer is significant. Likely, public school-based attempts to reach into the African American early literacy experience in a culturally responsive way met a problematic interface between religion and publicly funded programming. Also, it is likely necessary to acknowledge the importance of the Bible and prayer in home literacy development in lower income African American homes and keep it in mind as early childhood reading interventions are developed. Interestingly, Kelly et al. found that nighttime television viewing, a standard part of a routine in the households they studied, was also considered a positive experience. While the authors were also considering the impact of television on sleep patterns, they cited several studies that indicated a potential positive effect of television on early literacy (Kelly et al., 2016). Linebarger and Pitrowski (2009) argued that television could contribute to language development without much at-home reading. Television, as an element of early childhood literacy environments, is ripe for future study, as is the impact of smartphones and video games.



Shealy and Blanchett (2016) described persistent cultural bias and insensitivity problems at all grade levels. Introducing a relevant themed issue on culturally responsive pedagogy, the authors offered a succinct definition of the challenges of language and reading comprehension interventions in a unique educational setting, asserting, “Access is where the convergence of special education and multicultural education begins and ends” (Shealy & Blanchett, 2016, p. 2). Naturally, any successful reading intervention that enhances cultural responsiveness will have to consider the needs of the many exceptional learners at the kindergarten to Grade 3 level. Robinson (2016) studies culturally responsive practices in a response-to-intervention setting in eight schools, with 200 teachers participating. Teachers overwhelmingly agreed to employ culturally sensitive methods and decided that their school already did implement them, while open-ended responses in some cases refuted the self-reported first responses (Robinson, 2016).

A general lack of guidance on culturally responsive pedagogy—what it consists of and how to do it—has plagued instructors. According to Toppel (2015), “One of the most challenging and frustrating things about culturally responsive instruction is that there is no guidebook or a comprehensive training that prepares teachers to be culturally responsive” (p. 559). The gap is a concern, but also an inspiration. A need is there, but many share Toppel’s concerns.

Sharma and Christ’s (2017) approach were geared toward teachers in Grade 3 classrooms. The authors provided constructs for text selection and the creation of question and response opportunities and a valuable list of resources, but this was a

professional guideline, not a study. Teachers must be contributing to the conversation about cultural texts and classroom practices, but more research also is needed.

Wyatt (2014) described how culturally responsive pedagogy took off in the wake of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The boom in scripted curricula following NCLB did not create a friendly environment for individually selected readings, with teachers needing to follow a literal script and, in any case, a standardized curriculum. According to Wyatt, the concept, if not the terminology, of culturally relevant/responsive education had been around far longer, at least since the 1970s, though later marginalized in favor of neoliberal education reforms that strove for context-blindness. Wyatt (2014) stated that the scripted curricula “effectively stripped teachers of their professional expertise” (p. 464). Wyatt points toward a sort of détente between culturally responsive teaching and scripted curricula that incorporates both elements and posits that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive.

Siwatu et al. (2017) tested an instrument called the Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Self-Efficacy Scale with 380 pre-service and in-service teachers. The scale followed Bandura’s (2006) guidelines for developing devices to measure self-efficacy. The article contains a valuable literature review of the older literature on Bandura, self-efficacy theory, and classroom management (Bandura, 1956).

Bennett et al. (2017) examined a multicomponent intervention aimed at African American second-grade students at risk for reading deficits in an urban setting. Computer-assisted reading strategies were shown to be more effective than the control. The study combined culturally relevant material in repeated reading, which led to gains in

a novel reading of non-culturally relevant material. The repeated reading facilitated by a computer-reading program enabled the students to track their progress. Bennett et al. believed that maximum independence on the part of the student is desirable, and it is the case that an active, computer-assisted intervention that reduces teacher time may, in some ways, be an essential component of larger-scale interventions. Bennett et al. noted included extrinsic rewards (a temporary tattoo) for students who successfully met their goals could be beneficial. It is possible that a path to an evidence-based effective reading intervention program for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in urban schools in the Midwest would likely combine culturally sensitive material and teaching practices.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to investigate reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. In the study, I examined intervention strategies reading teachers need to utilize to successfully educate first- and second grade struggling readers in Midwest to comply with the Read by Grade Three Law. As the literature review documents, teachers need to change their pedagogy and apply teaching strategies to increase student outcomes, resulting in improved reading instruction. I anticipated that all staff members at the study site work more collaboratively on successfully implementing instructional reading strategies to cultivate their pedagogy.

Evidence in the charter school district in the Midwest shows that teachers have struggled to provide the instructional support necessary for all students to read at grade level by the third grade. The 2021 NWEA results indicate that in the district's elementary

school, 25% of first-grade students and 28% of second-grade students in 2018–2019, 29% of first-grade students and 34% of second-grade students in 2019–2020, and 24% of first-grade students and 29% of second-grade students in 2020–2021 were reading below grade level. This evidence indicated that gaps in practice exist between research-supported instructional strategies that assist struggling first- and second-grade readers to be proficient readers by third grade.

I have deliberately delimited the study by focusing entirely on teachers' perceptions without regard to reading interventions' relative effectiveness. While I am familiar with several interventions and their success rates, for this study, it is more important to gather information from teachers so that what is learned may be applied to the problems they are encountering. An online audio-recorded interview even the least formal, tend to force or suggested specific response categories. Also, the teacher participants in this study have a full workload and donate time to me as a researcher.

### **Summary**

This study's results provided insight into how to develop training in classroom instruction so that teachers can promote students' reading development in compliance with the Midwest Read by Grade Three Law implemented in 2019. Given that the district must comply with new state-mandated reading laws to measure reading growth and proficiency, teachers must determine what barriers they encounter when providing reading instruction for struggling readers. This study's potential findings lead to a positive social change in providing needed resources and instructional support to assist and support struggling first- and second-grade readers reading below grade level.

Several researchers have found that teachers' classroom experience directly impacts students' knowledge (Lovett et al., 2017; Siwatu et al., 2017). Teachers' use of intervention, their choice of intervention, and the ability to choose are all factors in assisting the struggling reader to become a successful reader (Bandura, 2006; Stover et al., 2017; Wyatt, 2014). In-practice recommendations from this study were crucial to successfully develop an evidence-based program for early reading intervention that is culturally responsive and contributes to teachers' and students' ZPD.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Qualitative Approach and Design**

Qualitative research allowed me to examine how elementary classroom teachers' instruction evolved through investigating and analyzing event characteristics associated with teachers' words and teaching descriptions (Yin, 2014). Creswell's (2012) criterion for inquiry-based qualitative research is the natural setting. As a data collection instrument, I proceeded without bias and with as few assumptions as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I chose a qualitative research method because it is best understood using this flexible, exploratory approach, focusing on teachers' experiences. I employed Level 1 and Level 2 coding of field data to view patterns without losing a holistic perspective of the data (Yin, 2014). Level 1 coding was used to align data with research questions. Level 2 coding refined data for distinctions between themes and subthemes. I endeavored to uncover themes and patterns to interpret what was learned from participants through virtual audio-recorded interviews (Creswell, 2012). I expected to learn more from teachers themselves about the barriers they face as they apply reading interventions for struggling readers. I attempted to understand the challenges that elementary classroom teachers encounter when providing reading instructions to struggling elementary students. Hence, the basic qualitative approach was appropriate (Creswell, 2007).

I intended to uncover detailed descriptions of first- and second-grade teachers' experiences with struggling readers; therefore, the phenomenological design was inappropriate. A basic qualitative research design was suited to studying a natural world

setting and discovering how people react to it (Yin, 2014), which may allow me to understand the challenges that elementary teachers encounter during instruction.

### **Justification for the Qualitative Research Study Design**

In this basic qualitative study with virtual audio-recorded interviews, I explored elementary school reading teachers' experiences teaching students who read below grade level to comply with Read by Grade Three Law. I followed a basic qualitative study with an interview approach to answering my research questions:

RQ1: What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling in reading to improve their skills?

RQ2: How do reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level?

Finegan (2019) asserted that teaching reading to elementary students who are struggling readers involves an in-depth analysis with vivid descriptions using a humanistic approach of the participating teachers' teaching experiences with struggling readers to identify struggling readers early. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research builds on participants' behaviors and attitudes to understand a research problem within a sample population. I chose a basic qualitative research design to conduct my research because it provides an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon suitable for studying participants' meaning of a problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research design allowed me to investigate the challenges elementary classroom teachers encounter in providing reading instruction to struggling elementary students. When selecting a research design for my study, I found that a basic

qualitative method was most useful for human life inquiries. Other qualitative design variations only partially answer the research questions with fidelity (Yin, 2014). The qualitative traditions of investigation include, but are not limited to, phenomenology, case study, narrative, and ethnography (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

After viewing each approach, the basic qualitative research approach process fit the purpose of the study by exploring how teachers develop a pedagogy approach to teaching reading to struggling first- and second-grade readers. In qualitative research, a phenomenology approach is unsuitable because it focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group to understand and interpret the meaning of human life. The process's fundamental goal is to describe the nature of the specific phenomenon to help others understand the importance of people's lived experiences and experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The phenomenon research approach is appropriate when little is known about the phenomenon; however, it was not suitable for this study.

I did not select a case study research approach because assessment instrumentation will be virtual audio-recorded interviews. A case study requires data from many sources in which the researcher explores a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Case studies are in-depth research to describe the case thoroughly and are bounded by time and activities of data collection procedures through observations and documents, which would not be suitable for the study (Creswell & Creswell 2018).



A narrative research approach was unsuitable for the study because it explores participants' lives by describing and discussing the meaning of personal experiences with individual lives through recall and memory. A narrative design approach would make it more challenging to analyze findings indirectly to answer the research questions, making it an inappropriate option for this study.

I did not select the ethnography research approach because it explores characteristics of culture, myths, and rituals, which is unsuitable for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although the ethnography approach allows reading teachers to discuss their experiences, the overall objective was to examine intervention strategies reading teachers need to utilize to educate first- and second grade struggling readers successfully.

A grounded theory approach focuses on the general idea of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the participants' views to compare the similarities and differences of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Grounded theory design was not appropriate because it involved constant stages of data collection with categories of different groups to maximize information.

In selecting the basic qualitative approach with virtual audio-recorded interviews, I was able to gather information for the study to help bridge the literature gap to explore instructional practices for reading teachers. The instructional practices will assist elementary students struggling with reading to improve their skills and promote reading collaboration among reading teachers.

I did not choose quantitative research, which yields numerical data to form a statistical analysis that relies on probability and inference to address the uncertainty that drives the research (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

The philosophical framework for quantitative research is based on the empiricist tradition, where reality is objective and independent of the researcher. The research is formal, value-free, and unbiased, and the process itself is deductive, with a cause-effect approach to the research. The researcher generalized, leading to predictions, explanations, and understandings of studies considered accurate, valid, and reliable. Quantitative research focuses on patterns that generate data that lend to predetermined closed-ended questions that offer no further insight into the phenomenon. Consequently, various assessment methods in a quantitative study would not provide the results necessary to assist reading teachers in examining intervention strategies needed to educate first- and second grade struggling readers to read at grade level by third grade. Therefore, a quantitative research approach would not be appropriate for this study.

### **Participants**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with virtual audio-recorded interviews was to investigate reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. I examined intervention strategies reading teachers need to utilize for success in educating first- and second-grade students who are struggling readers in the Midwest to comply with 2019 Read by Grade Three Law. According to Yin (2014), selecting specific participants depends upon the most significant data of the topic being

investigated. The justification for choosing first- and second-grade teachers is because these are the primary educators of the struggling students.

### **Criteria for Selecting Participants**

I established participant selection upon receiving approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district. The human resources director provided permission to recruit educators to participate in the study (see Appendix B). All first- and second-grade teachers were open to participating in the study, regardless of their gender, ethnic or cultural background, and years of teaching. Each volunteer teacher received a consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the timeframe of the study, and the timeframe for completing the interview. I used sampling strategies to ensure that the participants vary in years of teaching and grade levels (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The small number of teachers interviewed enabled valuable data for interpretation (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). I provided virtual audio-recorded responses to discover an in-depth understanding of each participant's perspective for 10 elementary reading classroom teachers (Yin, 2014). An online platform helped overcome time limitations, geographical dispersion, and social distancing due to COVID-19 guidelines.

I sought to research the barriers first- and second-grade teachers face when providing reading instruction to struggling elementary students; smaller sample size is more appropriate (Eun, 2019). I designed authentic interview questions to collect meaningful and rich data to answer my research questions based on Knowles's adult learning theory and Vygotsky's ZPD (Creswell, 2012). I conducted semi structured virtual audio-recordings specific criteria for selecting the participants: participants must

have provided instruction to struggling first- or second-grade students in reading and must have agreed to participate in the qualitative case study with, a written consent form (Creswell, 2012).

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

Once I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I initiated the study procedures. The procedure for gaining access to participants for the research study was as follows. The recruitment plan indicated that the researcher would provide a study recruitment flyer (see Appendix C) to the site's contact person. The site contact person then distributed a flyer in each teacher's school mailbox to acknowledge the study and invite potential participants. I posted a flyer on the school's website as an additional recruitment method.

I placed my email address and phone number on the bottom of the recruitment flyer as a contact source if teachers wanted additional information or to volunteer for the study. After the participant emailed me, the participant received instructions to provide her email address to receive a copy of the consent form (see Appendix D), which detailed the study procedures and protocol that allowed the teacher to review the study information and determine if she wished to participate.

If the teacher decided to volunteer for the study, they emailed me a copy of the consent form using "I Consent" as the subject line. If participants had questions, they could contact me directly via email before beginning the audio-recorded interview. When I received the consent form, I notified the volunteer via email to ask them to select the best day and time to conduct a 60-minute audio-recorded interview.

The audio-recorded interview began once I received the consent form and scheduled the interview. I administered the interview questions verbally using an audio-recorder to record the participant's answers. Within a day after the volunteer completed her interview, I emailed the volunteer a copy of her transcript to verify the accuracy of her answers and to allow the volunteer to make changes if necessary.

As an invasive contact method for scheduling interviews and distributing the transcript review, I asked for the participant's contact email information after the participant volunteered for the study and I received the consent form. I asked background questions (see Appendix E) at the beginning of the interview session and the remainder of the questions directly after, so that the questions flowed as one interview session with multiple queries. During the verbal interview, I used a virtual audio-recorder to document participants' answers. The participants did not need to write any answers to their questions. Finally, the volunteer received a \$20 electronic gift card to thank them for participating in the study. Once the results were available from the study, all volunteers received a copy via email for member checking to ensure volunteers' interpretations aligned with participants' viewpoints, improving the overall validity of the research (Elliott, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

With the study's intention to explore how teachers perceive the obstacles they face in addressing struggling readers' needs, personal interview questions afford the best scope for participants to share experiences inside their natural setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I tracked and analyzed data using a labeling system for data to be presented in table form for the reader. Interview questions, which are unique and highly specific, were

interpreted first. Later remarks included data analysis to inform, support, and extend the development of follow-up interview questions, which were recorded and categorized to make collected data manageable to uncover patterns (Yin, 2014).

After each interview, I prepared a transcript and sent it to each participant for review as an iterative and reflective process during the research and data analysis. I used Vygotsky's (1978) SCT and ZPD and Knowles's (1989) theory of andragogy as lenses through which to examine the data collected through interview questions. This study did not establish causality between teachers' knowledge and their perceived success in implementing a new strategy; instead, the methodology aims to collect and analyze information that may inform future projects.

### **Researcher-Participant Relationship**

According to Wa-Mbaleka et al. (2022), "The relationship between researcher and participant is crucial in qualitative research" (p. 396). A researcher should explain the study's purpose, goals, and procedures and understandably address participants' questions or concerns to develop trust. Before conducting the interviews, I ensured each participant received and completed a Consent Form and understood the study's details, their rights, and the potential risks and benefits. As I began asking interview questions, I showed a genuine interest in participants' perspectives and experiences. The participants were able to generate answers to the research questions rapidly. I actively listened to their thoughts, concerns, and feedback and validated their feelings, and, on occasions, would ask questions to further their understanding of the question being asked.

It was essential to be honest, reliable, and consistent in my interactions while following through on commitments and promises to build trust over time. I had to respect participants' autonomy by allowing them to choose whether to participate or withdraw without repercussions. I continually assured participants their information would be kept confidential throughout the study as they participated in a virtual audio-recorded session to respond to the research questions.

I appreciated the participants' time, effort, and contribution to the research and continually acknowledged the participants' importance to the study. Once the interviews were completed, I shared the results with participants, showcasing how their involvement contributed to the research's advancements. I maintained professionalism and adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the research process, which was crucial to the researcher participants' positive relationship (Wa-Mbaleka et al., 2022).

### ***Ethical Protection of Participants' Rights***

I enforced Walden University's IRB protocols to protect participants' rights, safety, and confidentiality to minimize the risks. I used pseudonyms to safeguard the confidentiality of all participants in the study. The consent form will state that participants know the purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, risks, and benefits. Participants, the site, and any other identifying factors will be kept confidential. Once the participants have agreed to participate in the research study, I scheduled virtual audio recordings of interview questions responses that will not interfere with the participants' daily instructional routines. I informed participants that they might discontinue participation in the study at any given time. I complied with whatever IRB or ethics

committee requirements apply in this situation and obtain written permission from all administrative authorities necessary at the schools and the district before the beginning of the study.

### **Data Collection Methods**

I systematically collected and analyzed teachers' responses to the interview questions and experiences to discover themes and patterns to obtain and analyze data using comparative analysis to understand patterns through detailed descriptions. The data will uncover groups' social relationships and behaviors, which are idealistic for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In the basic qualitative approach with interviews, I conducted virtual audio recordings over several weeks to collect information for the data collection process and analysis. The study allowed me to use data from approximately 10 participants. I examined how elementary teachers describe their years of experience, motivation, readiness, and orientation to learn as a vehicle to assist struggling elementary readers to become proficient readers by third grade. Therefore, I discovered emerging patterns in reading teachers' experiences. This study's objective generated new information on helping struggling readers for further research. This section includes information regarding study's participants and how they were selected, the data collection methods and analysis, the participants' ethical protection measures, and the researcher's role.

In this basic qualitative study, I examined teachers' experiences to assist struggling first- and second-grade students in becoming proficient readers by third grade. I selected a basic qualitative study (Yin, 2014) as the structure of this study to collect and



analyze data to understand teacher participants' perceptions of their success in implementing reading instruction for struggling readers. This approach may also help to understand the factors influencing teachers' strategy selection during reading instruction. The model of andragogy established by Knowles and the ZPD suggested by Vygotsky informs this study. Knowles's (1989) self-stated strength was "helping individuals become more proficient practitioners" (p. 96). In-service teachers in the study may have the five characteristics of adult learners in Knowles's (1984) theory: self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, practical reasons to learn/immediacy of application of learning, and internal motivation. However, Vygotsky's theoretical views are the relationship between individuals within their ZPD and social content. Therefore, interview questions may point to potential barriers teachers have assisting first- and second-grade students in becoming proficient readers.

### **Justification Based on Qualitative Data Collection Methods**

I conducted the study at a small charter school district in the Midwest, which consists of one elementary school in an urban municipality. The district population is 98% African American and 2% other. Most of the district's students receive free or reduced lunch. A low percentage of first- and second-grade students were reading at or above grade level in the charter school district. The standardized state and assessment results were taken from end-of-the-year testing using the Fountas and Pinnell BAS and the NWEA results. I selected five first-grade and five second-grade teachers to participate. Selection criteria included first- and second grade reading teachers, education, number of years in service, and interest in participating. The selection was

made for maximum participant characteristics, including education and years in service. Only teachers who completed the interview were included in the results. Eight teachers had more than 10 years of classroom experience with struggling readers, and the remaining two teachers had fewer than 10 years. Subject selection was based on availability and access to this charter school district and the teacher's level of experience teaching at the grade level. Study participants were five first-grade and five second-grade teachers who received reading interventions. All participants were identified as having students reading at least two grade levels below grade level at the end of last school year.

I performed evaluations of this study in the school year 2018–2019 using the Fountas & Pinnell BAS, which indicated a high percentage of students in K-5 not meeting expectations in reading. Before 12 weeks of scheduled intervention, the pre-intervention assessment returned the following results: of 46 Kindergarten students, 40 did not meet expectations; of 39 first-grade students, 32 did not meet expectations; and of 44 second-grade students, 19 did not meet expectations.

### **Instruments and Source for Data Collection Instrument**

I utilized semi structured open-end questionnaires (see Appendix E) to determine the purpose of the qualitative study and what information I needed to collect. I developed a questionnaire that provided an in-depth insight into first and second-grade teachers' strategies to assist struggling readers. I created 20 open-ended semi structured questionnaires, which included eight questions about the participants' educational backgrounds, and five questions related to RQ1: What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling in reading to improve their skills? And

seven questions associated with RQ2: How do reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level?

I conducted two pilot tTests on friends before implementing the interviews with volunteer participants to ensure the program could record the interview questions and respond appropriately. I used creative ways to report results to see the data visually to avoid over-coding and data not aligned with the purpose of the research questions. I reviewed virtual audio-recording websites Otter, Nvivo, and Trello, before selecting Otter use as a tool for recording the interview process. Otter was comprehensive and provided components (recording's time, date, length, and keywords) necessary for documenting each participant's answers to the questionnaires for reliability. The virtual audio-recorder program was also able to transcribe the interview within hours, which was highly preferred due to time restraints and participant availability. After transcribing interviews, each participant received a copy of their transcript interview for members-checking the information recorded for accuracy.

### **Procedure for Collecting and Recording Data**

The benchmark assessment that elucidates the problem is the Fountas & Pinnell BAS. I gathered data for the study through virtual audio-recorded interview questions communicated in an open-ended nature. I administered a teacher interview to participants to generate information about the study to determine teachers' interests and reading skills. The information included background education and preparation for teaching reading, the professional experiences that further inform teachers' approaches to reading

instruction, and the strategies and activities teachers rely on as they plan lessons and interventional design instruction.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participation Data**

I used virtual audio-recorded questions to gather information about each participant. The questions allowed me to see what instructional tools and intervention strategies teachers used in assisting students who would struggle with reading. I designed the semi structured questions around Knowles's adult learning conceptual theory. The first research question investigated reading teachers' instructional practices for elementary students struggling with reading to improve their instructional skills. The second research question centered on how reading teachers collaborate and share strategies to improve reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level.

Although the study site school has a reading interventionist, students spend most of their instructional day in the classroom, receiving grade-level instruction from the primary teacher. I sought approval from Walden University, the charter school district, and participants to follow a timeline for data collection.

I strictly adhered to IRB requirements and explained guidelines thoroughly to participants. The data collection for this qualitative case study followed a detailed timeline, which included virtual audio-recorded responses to interview questions to document teachers' interventions and strategies to assist first- second-grade students struggling to read at grade level by third grade. Table 2 provides the timeline for data collection.

**Table 2***Data Collection Timeline*

Week	Steps for Data Collection
1	Sent recruitment flyer to study site and recruited participants for the study.
2	Collected consent forms and sent chair Pilot Interview 1 and 2 for approval.
3	Consent granted to move forward with interviews.
4	Continued recruitment and began online audio interviews.
5	Continued recruitment and online audio interviews.
6	Continued online audio interviews.
7	Continued online audio interviews.
8	Continued online audio interviews.
9-10	Data analysis to inform, support, transcribe transcript and email transcript to volunteers to check for accuracy.

**Role of the Researcher****Past and Present Role of the Researcher at the Study Site**

In the past, my role was as a reading interventionist, and I often had a more hands-on and observational role at study sites. I would spend significant time in the classrooms, collecting manual data, making observations, and recording information using paper and pen. This approach was time-consuming and required meticulous attention to detail and a strong focus on accuracy.

My present role at the study site as a reading interventionist has evolved significantly. I now have access to various sophisticated tools and equipment for data collection to gather data more efficiently and accurately. This has enabled me to collect larger volumes of data in shorter time frames. Additionally, updated technology has allowed me to spend significant less time processing, interpreting, and modeling the collected data. Advanced computational tools and techniques have uncovered reading data that might have been difficult to identify in the past.

### **Past and Present Relationship of Researcher with Subjects**

In the past, my relationship as a researcher with subjects was often characterized as authority figure or expert with excellent knowledge and control in the reading arena. My colleagues viewed me as part of the administrative team. They were mindful of conversations they had in my presence regarding decisions made by other managerial personnel, thinking I would disclose their discussion. They needed clarification on my role as a reading interventionist to keep our relationship professional. In my role as a researcher, teachers were frequently viewed as passive participants whose role was to provide data or information, with limited involvement in the research process.

Currently, the relationship between myself and my colleagues shifted towards a more collaborative and ethical approach. We recognize the importance of informed consent, transparency, and respecting rights and autonomy. My viewed role as an authoritarian transformed into an active partner with insight into new tools and technology, which I was able to provide to colleagues to improve academic student success. This shift has led to more diverse and inclusive collaboration and a greater emphasis on the potential impact of teachers sharing information willingly to produce positive outcomes.

### **Researcher's Experience and Bias**

Bias may be unavoidable; however, I paid attention to the participants' responses to the research questions to understand and identify factors participants used based on social acceptance rather than their true feelings that may impede the study. My criteria for participant selection include teachers with many years of classroom experience in the

same lower socioeconomic bracket, urban, mainly African American school district in which data are collected. In performing a study, I understood the classroom experience from the participants' standpoint (Creswell, 2012; Kumar & Antonenko, 2014). I fostered a trusting, open relationship with the teacher participants to encourage open honesty and authenticity in their responses to the interview questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). Teachers participated in a virtual audio-recorded session to provide answers to the interview questions. In the consent form, I explained the study's goal and review the ethical expectations of the study, such as confidentiality, honesty, and integrity. Participant responses were confidential; most communication is expected through non-district (personal) email exchanges. Participants received and returned a consent form describing the study (see Appendix). Each participant acknowledged potential risks, explanation of the study's voluntary nature, and a confidentiality statement.

I reviewed the responses from Midwest first- and second-grade teachers' strategies in successfully helping students who struggle with reading to make measurable, consistent improvements. The teachers have been working to assist students reading below grade level for over a decade; many interventions have been tried, some of which have been tested, but the precise barriers these teachers faced will be uncovered. It was hoped, this basic qualitative study would shed light on these barriers through the following research questions.

RQ1: What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling in reading to improve their skills? RQ2: How do reading teachers collaborate

and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level?

During virtual audio-recorded interviews, I asked first- and second grade reading teachers to describe their perceptions of barriers in reading instruction for students reading below grade level. The research questions addressed obstacles each teacher experienced during classroom instruction so that it was understood the strategies and methods teachers used to support struggling readers. Research questions were reviewed to identify instructional strategies and resources used to manage readers' needs. The qualitative research approach enabled a complete description of teachers' classroom competencies, which formed a data field for the qualitative evaluation when combined with data gathered using a complete efficacy assessment.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Data Analysis Approach and Methods**

Vygotsky's (1978) SCT and ZPD provided the theoretical base, and Knowles's (1989) theory of andragogy offered a conceptual framework to examine the data to understand better how elementary classroom teachers' pedagogy evolved when they provide reading strategies to elementary students reading below grade level. Vygotsky's sociocultural, cognitive language development included constructing scaffolds during an early reading intervention and provided a lens for connecting students learning with the teachers' own pedagogical growth and understanding. Vygotsky's theory also supported the formal strategies teachers plan in their lessons to develop scaffold support for reading development (Eun, 2019). The rationale for choosing a basic qualitative approach was



related to the nature of the problem, which was to investigate the barriers teachers experience when teaching below-grade-level elementary school students to read.

I utilized a virtual audio recorder, modified for my study, to record information obtained (Creswell, 2012) from 10 teacher participants. I developed a timeline for the interview questions and asked each participant to describe their natural setting. I assessed themes and issues that emerged from interviews when the study's data collection portion was complete. The interview questions offered me data to guide teachers' analyses into rich explanations utilizing the research questions as a guide.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

I collected data from an online audio recorder during interviews with five first- and five second-grade reading teachers. I followed a protocol interview template with interview questions (see Appendix E) to help structure the interview and ensure that each participant was asked the same question accurately (Creswell, 2012). Throughout the data collection process, the recording website recorded the interviews, which lasted approximately 13 to 22 minutes, and provided keywords from each teacher, which were coded into categories to generate themes to support the research questions.

With the study's intention to explore how teachers perceive the obstacles they face in addressing struggling readers' needs, personal interview questions afforded the best scope for participants to share experiences inside their natural setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I tracked and analyzed data using a labeling system for data to be presented in table form for the reader. I interpreted interview first, which are unique and highly specific. Later remarks included data analysis to inform, support, and extend the

development of follow-up interview questions, which I recorded and categorized to make collected data manageable to uncover patterns (Yin, 2014).

After each interview, I prepared a transcript and sent it to each participant for review as an iterative and reflective process during the research and data analysis process. I used Vygotsky's (1978) SCT and ZPD and Knowles's (1989) theory of andragogy as lenses through which to examine the data collected through interview questions. This study did not establish causality between teachers' knowledge and their perceived success in implementing a new strategy; instead, the methodology aimed to collect and analyze information that may inform future projects. I used the following steps for data collection.

- Organized the data according to each research question and assigned reference codes to the data according to keywords and phrases.
- Gathered relevant data from online audio-recorded interviews to transcribe.
- Transcribed the interview transcript to ensure accuracy and consistency through member checking.
- Coded data from the document analysis component.
- Evaluated notes to identify patterns, themes, and categories, matching reference descriptive codes related to strategies for struggling readers reading below grade level and teacher collaboration through professional development, and workshops.
- Analyzed the results and interpreted the findings in the context of the research questions and conceptual framework.

- Withdrew discrepant keywords from data.
- Drew conclusions based on the data analysis and provided recommendations for future research.
- Summarized data analysis process, findings, and conclusion.

### **Procedures to Assure Accuracy and Credibility of the Findings**

The extraction of accurate conclusions from data establishes validity (Creswell, 2012). I used several strategies, including implementing triangulation, peer debriefing, and recordings, to ensure validity throughout the study. I offered study participants an opportunity to read an initial draft of the data obtained from their interview questions for any changes or to clarify any misconceptions to corroborate the trustworthiness and credibility of my basic qualitative study. To ensure credibility, I limited outside-of-study contact with the participants before and during the study.

### **Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases**

Once reaching data saturation, using semi structured interviews enhanced dependability and increased the study's credibility and validity. Participants received an email copy of their interview transcription to review for accuracy and misconceptions of data interpretations as a process of member checking. No participants requested transcript reviews. Through an iterative process, I sorted and eliminated discrepancies that did not support themes resulting from the data collection. However, data aligned with the purpose of the study, and research questions were open-coded into categories that generated meaningful theme descriptors.

### **Limitations**

Limitations included sample size, potential bias in answers, and patterns or trends that are difficult to pinpoint in this basic qualitative study. I understood that several components comprise the ultimate classroom practices, such as school curriculum, culture, climate, experience, and training. However, I limited my exploration and focus on the responses from interview questions, rather than components of the classroom, of how first- and second grade reading teachers evolve their pedagogy while implementing strategies in their classroom instruction to assist readers reading below grade level.

### **Conclusion**

My purpose for this basic qualitative study with interview questions was to investigate reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. I examined intervention strategies reading teachers needed to utilize to educate first- and second-grade students struggling readers in the Midwest to comply with the 2019 Read by Grade Three Law. I interviewed 10 teachers from a Midwest charter school district to better understand the interventions necessary for students reading 2 or more years behind grade level. I created a narrative based on teachers' responses to shed light on their experiences. The study aims to uncover information utilizing the conceptual framework of Vygotsky's (1978) SCT and ZPD and Knowles's (1989) theory of andragogy and learn more about perceived barriers teachers face that prevent effective reading instruction. The data collection methods aligned with the research questions and provided data to answer the research questions.

The qualitative study enabled me to collect a rich array of individual responses to help determine how teachers meet classroom challenges to meet the needs of struggling first- and second-grade readers. Results from interview questions may lead to a full description that may inform future studies and be relevant to how Midwest reading teachers find a path toward effective implementation of new statutory requirements.

### **Data Analysis Results**

#### **Data Collection Analysis**

In this section, I describe the evidence of the themes supported by volunteer participants' responses to the interview questions. Two research questions guided the study's data analysis for coding, categories, and themes.

RQ1: What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling in reading to improve their skills?

RQ2: How do reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level?

The online audio-recorded interviews data analysis took approximately 10 weeks to administer interviews and transcribe the transcript. I collected and translated the online audio-recorded interviews on an online app for accuracy. I organized the results from the semi structured interviews into categories, and during thematic analysis, I analyzed qualitative data from volunteers' responses relating to and informing the study's research questions (Elliott, 2018 & Saldana, 2021).

Saldaña (2021) described a code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns summative, salient, essence capturing, and evocative attribute for a portion of

language-based or visual data” (p. 5). Saldaña described coding as an analytical lens that categorizes emerging data patterns into themes and develops theories. Saldaña emphasized that qualitative inquiry is the “metacognition of inductive inquiry combined with the socially conscious ethos,” and the nature of this approach results in compounded layers of developmental knowledge supported by interpretations (p. 52). The transcribing program generated keywords for grouping and coding into similar categories and themes that supported the research questions. In contrast, Elliot (2018) argued that “The conceptualization of coding as a decision-making process is made by individual researchers in line with their methodological background, their research design and research questions, and the practicalities of their study” (p. 2850).

**Table 3**

*Teacher Participants’ Educational Background*

Participant	Years of Teaching	Major/Minor	Degree Level
Teacher A1	7	ELA	PhD
Teacher A2	7	ELA	Bachelor’s
Teacher A3	15	English	Bachelor’s
Teacher A4	14	English	Master’s
Teacher A5	20+	Reading	Master’s + 30
Teacher B1	20+	Speech	Master’s + 30
Teacher B2	20+	ELA	PhD
Teacher B3	20+	ECH	Educational Specialist
Teacher B4	14	English	Bachelor’s
Teacher B5	20+	Learning Disability	Master’s

**Summary Results According to Research Questions Themes**

I this qualitative case study, I investigated reading teachers’ experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. The investigation helped illuminate the problems, experiences, preparation, perceptions of practice, and various teaching

strategies and interventions. I examined how teachers work individually and collaboratively to share successes and expand their professional knowledge aligned with the research questions. The research questions with Knowles's (1978) adult learning theory. It focused on instructional tools, interventions, and strategies to help evaluate teachers' pedagogy. The following theme differentiates instruction, reading support, and reading resources that emerged from the data focusing on RQ1: What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling in reading to improve their skills? Table 4 displays the themes that emerged from the data on RQ1.

**Table 4***Summary of Categories According to Research Questions*

Research Questions	Interrelated Ideas	Descriptive Coding	Categories
RQ1: What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling in reading to improve their skills?	“Highlights phonics as a successful teaching method.”	Building students' confidence and setting clear expectations.	Early Intervention
	“Acknowledges that struggling readers respond better to apps and resources supporting their learning experience.”	The teacher recognizes the importance of individualized support and staying updated with different resources.	Reading Resource Support
	“Engaging students both visually and physically, creating a positive impact on their reading skills.”	The teacher uses various instructional practices and technique.	Differentiate Instruction
RQ2: How do reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level?	“Suggests a dedicated, empathetic, and collaborative approach to assisting struggling readers.”	Professional development practices showcase a well-rounded and effective teaching approach.	Professional Development
	“Ensures continuity in learning for struggling readers by collaborating with teachers in other grades.”	Proactive effort to align teaching methods across grade levels.	Continuity
	“Reinforces the importance of continuous improvement and adaptability.”	Teachers sharing successful and unsuccessful approaches promoting a Collaborative learning environment.	Collaboration & Commitment



## Results Discussed According to the Themes in Relation to Theoretical Framework

Table 5 displays the codes, categories, and themes from the teacher interviews.

**Table 5**

*Codes, Categories, and Themes from Teacher Interviews*

Codes	Categories	Themes
Phonetic/phonicallly Guided reading Independent reading Grouping Isolation reading	Early intervention	Promote effective language learning and reading skills development
Parents School service assistance Peers Another teacher School support services	Reading resource support	Collaborative and supportive educational environment
Home involvement Classroom materials Technology and games School curriculum	Differentiated instruction	Support education and learning and student achievement
Confidence Consistency Encouragement Expectations Patience	Teacher's challenges	Personal and emotional development
Time restraints No schedule No coverage Monthly Weekly	Collaboration and commitment	Challenges in coordinating and managing collaboration endeavors

## Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework and Local Problem

Organizing data into categories would makes meaningful connections in identifying the different approaches teachers employed to support struggling readers reading below grade level. Teacher A5 suggested,

A dedicated, empathetic, and collaborative approach to assisting struggling readers. Their openness to learning from others, and emphasis on effective instructional practices showcase a well-rounded and effective teaching approach with continuous improvement and adaptability in the ever-evolving field of education.

Teacher A4 has 5 years of experience in education and provided interrelated ideas by “using various instructional practices to engage students visually and physically, positively impacting their reading skills and reducing stress for teachers and students.”

Teacher A3, who has been teaching for 15 years, revealed,

The other thing that I like to do is to help them develop their self-esteem while they're reading by constantly giving them encouragement and providing them with positive feedback. Because they find that students who feel like they're doing the job and are being told that they're doing a good job tend to do better.

Teachers felt providing students with positive reading experiences would help struggling readers become willing to try other methods for learning to read. Teacher A2 expressed, “Each student is individualized, so I’ll take the time to figure out what they are dealing with, their exact needs.” When I reviewed the interview transcripts, I noted that teachers with the least amount of years teaching were more in tune to the students’ emotional, mental, and physical state of mind and were willing to adapt their lessons to accommodate the needs of the students to assist them with their reading struggles.

Teacher A2 added,

I use a lot of games because they're so young, and a lot of things can be overwhelming for them, so if they feel like learning is fun, and they won't even stress about it, they don't even know that they're really learning or that they're being evaluated to some extent.

However, the teacher with the most teaching experience verbalized, “We had different strategies that were kind of obsolete and then as time went on, we were using computer software and making sure that the students have the resources they need.”

Teacher B5, a seasoned teacher, noted, “there was very little tools available.” Teacher B4 has taught for 14 years and noted when she has a student struggling with reading,

They first communicate with their students to find out how they feel about reading, if they do a reading inventory, so I tried to narrow it down to what type of reading does the child enjoy? How does the child enjoy the reading? Or it is someone reading to the child or listening to an audio tape? Or better yet, the child trying to read themselves and so I get to know the child first. And then I can figure out where the difficulties may lie and then assess that and then move on with a strategic plan for the child.

Teacher B3 expressed interrelated ideas, as many other teachers did, that are necessary to support struggling readers. She noted,

The first method that I would use would be to pull in all information of the child's prior progress, as well as administer any foundational assessments that cover the five components of reading so that I can see a breakdown of where the child is and where the difficulties may start in the reading process.

Using different methods to help struggling readers, Teacher B2 explained, “It would depend on ... the reason why the student was struggling, I would have to kind of investigate to see why the student was struggling before I could just say how to try to help them.” Teacher B2 continued explaining, “If he was underperforming because of something that was going on, say maybe at home, or with his health or with his intellectual capacity, that would help me determine how I will proceed.” Teacher B2 provided additional information by adding,

So, I may work more closely with a parent or I may decide that he needed extra time extra tutoring or may just kind of diversify the level of instruction, the delivery of instruction, to for example, I may rather than lecture I may rely more on videos or I may have student teachers student teaching is a good tool because they really respond to one another.

Teacher B1 suggested,

First thing that you look at with a child who is struggling is that you make sure that they're healthy. Can I hear, Can I see, Am I hungry. Once those things are addressed is there learning disability there? Once you evaluate whether that child can see, can, hear that he is not hungry? Next you evaluate is there a special reason that he is having a hard to reading. Is he ADHD? Is he artistic? Is he dyslexic? You evaluate for any disability that may interfere with him learning to read.

Teachers suggested several methods to use in first and second grade to help struggling readers read at grade-level by third grade to comply with the Midwest Read by Third-Grade Law.

According to Piasta et al. (2020), teachers' content knowledge is crucial to classroom practices and student learning. The findings from the data indicated that all teacher participants still struggle in retrospect with the quality and quantity of the time dedicated to providing emergent literacy practice. Teachers require adequate professional development on current research-based methods to improve students' academic achievement (Didion et al., 2020). Didion et al. (2020) suggested that when high-quality Professional development is provided, teachers' knowledge and skills change the teacher's attitudes and beliefs. Quality teacher training influences student achievement during instruction, which aligns with the research findings.

- Teachers need to identify individual needs, for each struggling reader may have unique challenges, making it essential for teachers to identify specific areas of difficulty and tailor strategies accordingly.
- Teachers often need more time and resources to address the needs of struggling readers while also managing the needs of the entire class due to limited time and resources.
- Implementing effective strategies requires creating personalized learning plans for struggling readers, which can be challenging in a classroom with a wide range of abilities to promote differentiated instruction.

- Finding a balance between helping struggling readers and covering the mandated curriculum can be difficult for teachers trying to balance curriculum demands.
- Struggling readers may disengage from reading activities, making it necessary to find creative ways to spark their interest and motivation for reluctant readers.
- Some struggling readers may experience frustration or lack confidence, so addressing emotional barriers to learning are necessary.
- Encouraging parental support at home is crucial for struggling readers' success and can be challenging to foster that involvement.
- Monitoring the progress of struggling readers and adjusting strategies accordingly requires regular assessment and data analysis, which can be challenging.
- Collaboration among educators, professional development, and access to appropriate teaching resources are essential to support struggling first- and second-grade readers to overcome reading challenges for academic achievement.

### **Teacher Collaboration to Improve Reading Outcomes**

I reviewed additional results from the semi structured interview responses relating to and informing RQ2: How do reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level? Teacher A5, a seasoned teacher, indicated teacher collaborations were “weekly with discussions

of how we work with the children and use other people's ideas ... children are so different." Teacher A4 noted, she "personally, I would say I do not however, we have professional development throughout the school year those are opportunities where workshops occur, that touch base on different subjects and then reading for our learners often comes up." Teacher A3 indicated collaboration occurs,

Every day in some form, we talk about what's happening or what's going on. I am constantly in contact with different instructors checking in just to see how things are going. I also enjoy like meeting monthly to know, just discuss, like deeper issues that everyone might be experiencing.

Teacher A2 collaborates,

When I'm getting my roadblock, or if I have students, maybe behavioral issues or anything that might work, it might be me or if I feel like hitting the roadblock, like everything that I'm doing is not working. Then I'm going to my colleague and bounce ideas off them and take that what they give me."

Teacher A1 expressed,

I'm in a situation where we meet monthly, and we discuss any problems we're having we discuss. Okay, this is why I had this problem, and this is how I resolve them. So, we cross reference our ideas and we come to were helpful with each other as far as resources and ways that we have been able to solve some of our concerns.

Teacher B5 highlighted,

We collaborated daily. You know, that's just something that we talked about as teachers, you know, to collaborate. We had teams, you know, grade level teams, and we would just, you know, work together to collaborate as you know, the best methods to use with the children and sometimes we would switch our kids out, you know, because we had three grade levels.

Teacher B4 noted, "Collaboration ideally should take place every week, but sometimes it does not. So, it may take place every two weeks, but those conversations need to always have a purpose and an outcome... so ideally, it should happen every week." Teacher B3 noted, "Collaborations are a plus to making sure that all children, even if they're not right away in that intervention pool, that we do all we can to avoid getting more children in that intervention pool." Teacher B2 noted, "So, the beginning of the year and the end of the year for sure I did that (collaborate). Then throughout the year, it will depend on the need." Teacher B1 elaborated, "Every day I can remember asking teachers how do you do that? How can you do that? Can I come in and watch you do that? Can you share resources for me being able to do that every day." All interview participants indicated that collaboration is essential to the teaching profession. Many teachers stated that collaboration is essential for learning skills; yet, time restraints, no schedule, no coverage, and limited opportunities contribute to the lack of collaboration necessary for teachers to help students struggling to read at grade level. Data are unique and should be treated as such. Saldaña (2021) stated, "It is not the questions that are



interesting, it is the answers that are interesting” (p. 4), and that supports the transformational journey that qualitative data is part of your overall outcome.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

In this basic qualitative study, I investigated reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. Specifically, I examined and helped illuminate the problems, experiences, preparation, perceptions of practice, and various teaching strategies and interventions. I investigated how teachers work individually and collaboratively to share successes and expand their professional knowledge to utilize intervention strategies needed to educate the Midwest's first- and second grade struggling readers to comply with the Read by Grade Three Law.

Various students' reading assessments indicated that teachers must change their pedagogy and apply teaching strategies to increase student outcomes, resulting in improved reading instruction. Researchers noted that different intervention strategies are required to replace traditional classroom interventions for struggling students (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2018; Suarez et al., 2020). I anticipated that staff members at the study site would work more collaboratively on successfully implementing instructional reading strategies to cultivate their pedagogy. The study results provide school administrators with ideas to support educators with experiences and opportunities in educating struggling readers and exploring why first- and second-grade teachers use ineffective methods to initiate interventions for students reading below grade level. The findings of the study informed the following two research questions:

RQ1: What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling to improve their reading skills?

RQ2: How do reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level?

The findings from the research also indicated that experienced teachers lack innovative skills that could create a positive learning environment and classroom atmosphere that would engage students in learning applications integrated as new coursework into games, which provide opportunities for students to learn skills creatively for promoting literacy success (Sheldon, 2020). Teachers were willing to adapt to new innovative skills; however, some teachers find it challenging to collaborate to develop a different perspective on instructing students to achieve academic success in reading at grade level. The findings from the research study aligned with previous studies and indicated that different intervention strategies might be needed to replace traditional classroom interventions to assist struggling readers (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2018).

### **Project Genre**

I selected a 3-day professional development program based on several considerations, which include the target audience's needs, the program's desired outcomes, and the available time and resources. The workshop also aligns with the desired outcomes of the professional development initiative. The workshop provided an opportunity to cover a comprehensive range of topics, delve into depth, and foster meaningful learning experiences, which included theoretical knowledge, practical exercises, interactive discussions, and collaborative activities, enabling participants to acquire new knowledge, develop skills, and apply them in real-world contexts (Loesch, 2023). In contrast, an evaluation report assesses the effectiveness of a program; a

curriculum plan outlines the content and structure of an educational program; a policy recommendation suggests actions to address issues; and professional development training enhances professional skills and knowledge. After various considerations, the 3-day professional development workshop was adequate and met the needs of the teachers and their desired outcome to provide innovative strategies to help elementary students who are reading below grade level (Loesch, 2023).

### **Rationale**

The rationale for implementing a 3-day professional development workshop was to address first- and second-grade teachers' problems with students reading below grade level. The workshop was structured to cover relevant theoretical concepts and practical strategies to help teachers learn techniques helpful for struggling readers. The content was research-based, up-to-date, and aligned with best practices (Phala, 2023).

The program incorporated interactive and participatory learning methods by engaging participants actively to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to their specific contexts, effectively addressing the problem targeted by the professional development initiative. Overall, selecting a 3-day professional development program, considering data analysis, provided a learning experience that met the target audience's needs, aligned with desired outcomes, and optimized available time and resources. See Appendix A for all components of the 3-day professional development workshop.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Literature Related to Themes**

The literature review examines the effectiveness of professional development workshops to empower educators with the knowledge to address the specific needs of struggling readers in first and second grade to improve students' achievement in emergent literacy (Loesch, 2023). Professional development workshops are significant for teachers' continuous learning and educational skill enhancement. Thus, the workshops highlight the ever-evolving nature of education and the need for educators to adapt and grow alongside their students. The benefits of ongoing professional development, the role of technology in enhancing teaching practices, and the importance of fostering a learning culture within educational institutions provide teachers with skills that can assist in helping students reading below grade level to comply with the Midwest reading law.

I referred to academic journals, peer-reviewed journals, educational journals, and databases available through Walden University's online library to collect appropriate articles for the literature review. The databases included ERIC, Educational Research, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and EBSCO. The phrases entered during this research were *struggling readers, emergent literacy, literacy strategies, guided reading, professional development, reading problems, literacy instruction, classroom literacy practices, online professional development, and teacher collaboration*. The literature in this discussion was based on a publication date within the last 3 years, which ensured the literature was relevant and credible to my problem and research questions.

According to Didion et al. (2020), the education landscape constantly evolves as new research provides teacher professional development to train in-service teachers on current research-based methods. However, there is a “lack of consensus in the literature on what teacher components are necessary for students’ achievement” (Didion et al., 2020, p. 29). In comparison, Loesch (2023) noted there is a “lack of quality research,” which represents a significant gap in the impact of professional development knowledge and student achievement (p. 16). Didion et al. (2020) explained that teachers’ professional development sessions must stay updated to provide relevant and practical instruction supporting collaboration to enhance student success. According to American Educational Research Association (2005), four guidelines must be followed for effective professional development.

- Focus professional development on the subject teachers are teaching.
- Use authentic assessments and curricula during professional development, so teachers can transfer newly acquired information for classroom practices.
- Provide time for teachers to attend professional development.
- Evaluate tools that reflect the impact the professional development has on teacher instruction and student learning.

Ongoing professional development enhances instructional practices, allowing teachers to acquire new instructional strategies, teaching methodologies, and pedagogical techniques to engage students and optimize learning outcomes (Loesch, 2023). Attending workshops on research-based learning can enable teachers to implement student-centered approaches, deepen their subject understanding, and stay updated with current research

and best practices. Through professional development, in-service teachers gain insights into the latest educational trends, research findings, and technological advancements to enhance teachers' knowledge and skill levels to improve student learning achievement to match the needs of 21st-century learners (Loesch, 2023).

Teacher professional development goals are to enhance the knowledge and skill levels of teachers and change their thought process of teaching to promote improvements in students' achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Loesch, (2023). The framework intended for the professional development must be met, and the transformation of the instructions of the professional development to improve student outcomes must be met. To have adequate professional development, the attitudes of the session can be analyzed by exploring the attributes set forth for evaluating professional development success.

Loesch (2023) noted that various attributes of an effective professional development allow for active learning, collaboration duration of the sessions, actual subject matter, and coherence with teacher, school, and district goals. Loesch noted several variations of professional development that need to be adhered to in developing the professional development. One form of professional development is an embedded model. An embedded model means the professional development is located inside the teacher's classroom with the students present as the professional development is delivered to the teacher. Embedded professional development allows the teachers to reflect on their learning process, as it takes place in the actual instructional setting. The traditional professional development is external to the teacher's school and school district and occurs at a neutral site where teachers from multiple schools or districts collaborate

and support each other. According to Traga Philippakos and Voggt (2021), there are several widely shared features incorporated in effective professional development:

- Focus on appropriate content,
- Incorporate active learning,
- Coherence and collaboration, typically in job-embedded content,
- Ongoing learning using models and modeling effective practices; and
- Offer opportunities for feedback and reflection.

Loesch (2023) researched whether teachers believed that embedded or traditional professional development transformed their literacy practices to improve student achievement. Loesch “explored teachers’ beliefs in the transformative power of embedded PD [professional development] using the lenses of satisfaction levels and attributes of effective PD” (p. 16), noting that embedded professional development improved student literacy outcomes. Administrators might need to consider more embedded professional development when planning various professional developments for teachers.

### **Professional Development: Elements of Effectiveness**

The quality of a professional development initiative implementation has implications for its effectiveness in enhancing teacher practice and improving student learning. Researchers have found that willing teachers sometimes need help implementing professional development practices due to obstacles beyond their control. Even the best-designed professional development may fail if poorly implemented (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).



### **Professional Development Barriers to Effective Implementation**

Barriers to effective implementation of professional development modules include inadequate resources, lack of a shared vision that demonstrates quality instructions, and lack of time for implementing new approaches to teacher instruction and failure to align policies for new instructional approaches (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). A dysfunctional school culture and the inability to assess the quality of professional development were also noted. Implementing professional development requires responsiveness to the specific needs of the teachers, students, and school district where learning occurs. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), these obstacles should be anticipated and planned for during the implementation of various stages within designing a professional development session for teachers.

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### **Professional Development Tools**

Technology offers innovative and diverse instructional materials to engage students and promote active learning. Teachers can use interactive whiteboards, educational apps, and online platforms to create dynamic and interactive lessons. These tools cater to different learning styles and enable personalized student learning experiences (Phala, 2023). Professional development opportunities provide teachers with

strategies to establish positive and inclusive classroom environments with tools to differentiate instruction based on students' diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles to tailor teaching methods to optimize student engagement and learning outcomes to improve literacy outcomes (Phala, 2023).

Continuous learning enables teachers to develop effective assessment practices beyond traditional tests. Teachers can use formative assessments, project-based assessments, and peer feedback to provide meaningful and timely feedback to students. Collaboration in professional learning communities allows teachers to collaborate with peers, share best practices, and engage in meaningful discussions to enhance their teaching practices (Hargreaves, 2019). A collaborative environment fosters continuous learning opportunities for teachers to help first and second-grade students struggling to master the skills necessary to read at grade level by third grade (Hargreaves, 2019).

### **Early Intervention**

Research consistently demonstrates that early intervention improves reading outcomes in struggling readers (Lovett et al., 2017). First and second grade serves as foundational years for developing reading skills, and timely, targeted support during this period can significantly impact a student's long-term literacy development. The professional development workshop aims to equip teachers with effective intervention strategies. Teachers aim to intervene early and help struggling readers overcome obstacles before they become more pronounced in later grades (Piasta et al., 2020).

### **Teacher Empowerment**

Teachers play a vital role in fostering literacy skills among their students. However, supporting struggling readers can be a complex and multifaceted task. By providing teachers with professional development training on literacy and intervention reading programs, the professional development workshop would empower teachers with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to address the diverse needs of struggling readers effectively. According to Loesch (2023), professional development training will enhance teachers' instructional practices, equipping teachers to make informed decisions, implement evidence-based interventions, and adapt their teaching approaches to meet individual student requirements.

### **Equity and Inclusion**

Every child deserves an equal opportunity to succeed in their education, regardless of their initial reading abilities. By focusing on first- and second-grade students reading below grade level, teachers aim to address disparities in literacy achievement and promote inclusivity in the classroom (Phala, 2023). Through the professional development workshop, teachers strive to create an equitable learning environment that supports the unique needs of every student, fostering a sense of belonging and setting the stage for future academic success.

### **Evidence-Based Practices**

The literacy instruction and intervention field are constantly evolving, with new research and evidence-based practices emerging. School districts providing professional development training based on the latest research and best practices ensure that teachers

can access the most effective and up-to-date strategies for supporting struggling readers. This project study will bridge the gap between research and classroom implementation, equipping teachers with evidence approaches for positive outcomes (Loesch, 2023).

### **Project Description**

The 3-day professional development workshop analyzed three research-based programs—Direct Instruction, Fountas and Pinnell, and A-Z Components—for teachers to support first- and second-grade students reading below grade level. The professional development workshop aimed to equip teachers with in-depth knowledge and practical strategies (Loesch, 2023) related to research-based programs such as Direct Instruction, Fountas and Pinnell, and A-Z Components, enabling them to support struggling first- and second-grade readers effectively.

By the end of the professional development workshop, participants will understand components of Direct Instruction, Fountas and Pinnell, and A-Z Components, along with practical strategies to implement these approaches effectively. Teachers are equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to support struggling first- and second-grade readers, fostering their literacy development, and enhancing their overall academic success.

#### **Day 1**

- Introduction to the importance of collaboration and group discussions among reading teachers for effective instruction.
- Community building on collaborative strategies and techniques to enhance reading instruction for struggling readers.

- Presentation: Direct Instruction and best practices in teaching reading to below-grade-level students.
- Direct Instruction program with objectives and demonstration
- Exit ticket: Reflections, takeaways and questions, postings on parking lot wall.

## **Day 2**

- Reading instruction and collaboration.
- Small group activities to analyze real-world case studies and develop collaborative solutions.
- Sharing success stories and effective practices from participants' classrooms.
- Presentation: Fountas and Pinnell Literacy continuum, tools for assessment planning demonstration
- Exit ticket: Reflections, takeaways and questions, postings on parking lot wall.

## **Day 3**

- Community building with experienced teachers who have successfully implemented collaborative approaches to improve reading instruction.
- Presentation: Reading A-Z Components with differentiated student reading, reading skills with discussion cards for comprehension, and demonstration of student quizzes.
- Action planning sessions to develop personalized strategies for participants to implement in their schools.

- Reflections on takeaways and commitments to continued collaboration and improvement.

Throughout the 3-day professional development, participants will engage in hands-on activities, gain insight from experts and peers, and develop actionable plans to enhance reading instruction for below-grade-level students through effective teacher collaboration (Degener et al., 2023).

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The following components included a comprehensive project evaluation plan for assessing the effectiveness and impact of the 3-day professional development workshop on supporting teachers in assisting struggling first- and second-grade students reading below-grade level (Loesch, 2023).

Participants received evaluation forms at the end of each workshop session to gather immediate feedback on the content, facilitation, and activities' quality, relevance, and effectiveness. I observed and documented participants' engagement, interaction, and participation during hands-on exercises, discussions, and collaborative activities, which contributed to the 3-day workshop evaluation.

A post-workshop questionnaire assessed participants' knowledge gain, confidence levels, and perceived readiness of teachers to implement Direct Instruction, Fountas and Pinnell, or A-Z Components in their classrooms. The effectiveness of the 3-day professional development workshop will be evident by teachers and school administrators observing the changes in instructional practices, classroom environment, or student performance after the workshop. Based on workshop participants' feedback and

evaluation findings, recommendations for future iterations and additional professional development support are needed to value the training in supporting struggling first- and second-grade readers.

### **Project Implications**

The implications of the professional development workshop provided instructional practices by equipping teachers with evidence-based strategies, enabling them to implement effective interventions and instructional approaches tailored to struggling readers' needs. Teachers became empowered with the knowledge and skills to support struggling readers to enhance student outcomes to comply with the new Read by Third Grade Law. The project anticipates improved reading proficiency and academic success among first and second-grade students.

Through professional development, teachers gain confidence in addressing the challenges of supporting struggling readers, leading to increased engagement and job satisfaction (Degener et al., 2023). The implications of this project extend beyond the immediate workshop, as participating teachers can share their knowledge and strategies with their colleagues, fostering a schoolwide culture of effective literacy instruction and support for struggling readers. These elements collectively contribute to the overall effectiveness of the project in addressing the needs of struggling first- and second-grade readers, empowering teachers, and ultimately impacting student achievement and literacy development.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The 3-day professional development workshop focused on supporting students reading below grade level was an insightful and enriching experience. Throughout the workshop, teachers had an opportunity to explore various strategies and techniques to enhance reading instruction and meet the needs of struggling readers. The workshop fostered a collaborative environment, allowing teachers to exchange ideas, share their experiences, and learn from one another. The well-structured sessions also included practical examples, demonstrations, and hands-on activities, which helped teachers grasp the concepts effectively.

One of the critical strengths of the workshop was the emphasis on collaboration, which brought together teachers from different schools and backgrounds. The workshop created a supportive community where educators could exchange ideas and learn from each other's experiences. This collaborative environment promoted a sense of shared responsibility and enabled teachers to gain valuable insights and practical strategies. The workshop also provided practical tools and techniques that teachers could readily implement in their classrooms. The knowledge gained was immediately applicable by incorporating hands-on activities, demonstrations, and real-world examples. This emphasis on practical application enhanced the workshop's effectiveness in supporting teachers to address the specific needs of their struggling readers.

The workshop served as a valuable professional development opportunity for teachers. It allowed them to deepen their understanding of reading instruction, explore



evidence-based practices, and refine their teaching skills. The knowledge and insights gained during the workshop will benefit the struggling readers and empower the teachers to become more effective educators in the long run.

The 3-day duration of the professional development workshop limited the depth of coverage on specific topics. Teachers may have benefited from additional time for in-depth exploration of specific instructional strategies or the opportunity to delve into individual case studies. Extending the workshop or providing follow-up sessions could address this limitation (Degener et al., 2023). With a focus on a diverse group of struggling readers, it may have been challenging to address the individual needs of each student. Teachers might have desired more personalized guidance or opportunities for tailored instruction. Future workshop iterations could consider incorporating differentiated approaches to address individual student's unique challenges.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

While a professional development workshop is a common approach, there are alternative methods to help teachers understand and implement strategies to support struggling readers (Loesch, 2023). For one, a school district can offer teachers the option to participate in online courses or webinars specifically designed to address the needs of struggling readers. These digital platforms can provide flexibility in timing and accessibility, allowing teachers to learn at their own pace. The courses could include instructional videos, interactive modules, and assessments to ensure understanding and application of strategies.

According to Bachkirova et al. (2020), coaching or mentoring programs are excellent alternatives, where experienced educators work closely with teachers to provide personalized guidance and support. Through regular meetings or classroom observations, coaches can offer targeted feedback, model effective instructional strategies, and assist teachers in adapting techniques to meet the needs of their students. Communities of practice are another option for teachers, either in person or through online platforms, where they can collaborate, share ideas, and learn from one another. These communities can be organized around specific topics or grade levels, allowing teachers to discuss, ask questions, and exchange resources to support struggling readers. Facilitators or experts can moderate these communities to ensure quality information and facilitate meaningful interactions (Patton & Parker, 2017).

An alternative approach to gaining knowledge to help struggling readers is to develop comprehensive resource libraries or toolkits that provide teachers with research-based strategies, lesson plans, assessments, and instructional materials for struggling readers. These resources should be easily accessible, organized, and user-friendly, enabling teachers to explore and adopt strategies based on their students' needs. Educators can better understand effective strategies to support struggling readers by considering these alternative approaches. Combining multiple methods and tailoring the approach to the specific needs of the teachers and students will contribute to more successful outcomes.

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

According to Loesch (2023), professional development focused on addressing teachers with students reading below grade level can lead to various scholarship, program development, evaluation, leadership, and change initiatives. Further, professional development workshops can inspire and inform scholarly research in literacy instruction. Educators participating in such workshops may be motivated to explore specific aspects of reading instruction, such as the effectiveness of different strategies, the impact of targeted interventions, or the influence of teacher-student interactions. Scholarly research can also contribute to the existing body of knowledge, provide evidence-based practices, and further refine instructional approaches.

The insights gained from professional development workshops can guide the development of targeted programs or interventions for students reading below grade level (Phala, 2023). Based on the practical strategies learned during the workshops, educators and instructional leaders can collaborate to design comprehensive literacy programs that address the specific needs of struggling readers. These programs may include curriculum modifications, differentiated instruction, small group interventions, or technology integration to enhance reading skills (Degener et al., 2023).

Professional development initiatives can also prompt review and assessment of existing reading instruction practices. By reflecting on their teaching methods and integrating newly acquired knowledge, educators can evaluate the effectiveness of their instructional approaches and make informed adjustments. This evaluation process can involve collecting and analyzing student data, tracking progress, and identifying areas for

improvement. Additionally, evaluating the impact of the professional development program itself can help refine future iterations and measure its effectiveness in supporting teachers and improving student outcomes (Degener et al., 2023).

Professional development can empower educators to become school or district leaders. Teachers with expertise in supporting struggling readers can take on leadership roles, such as literacy coaches, instructional leaders, or department heads. Teachers' knowledge and experience can be leveraged to guide and mentor other teachers, advocate for effective literacy practices, and facilitate schoolwide or districtwide changes in reading instruction. These leaders can drive systemic improvements in literacy education and help create a culture of continuous learning and growth.

Professional development addressing teachers with students reading below grade level can contribute to scholarship, program development, evaluation, leadership, and change initiatives within the education field. By building a collective knowledge base, refining instructional practices, and fostering leadership capacity, such initiatives could improve literacy outcomes and support struggling readers' success (Loesch, 2023; Patton & Parker, 2017; Phala, 2023; Saric & Steh, 2017).

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

The importance of professional development to help teachers with struggling readers who are reading below grade level cannot be overstated. Such initiatives play a vital role in equipping educators with the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to address the specific needs of these students. Reflecting on this work highlights its significance and the positive impact it can have on both teachers and struggling readers.

First, professional development acknowledges the complex nature of reading difficulties and teachers' critical role in supporting struggling readers. By providing targeted training and resources, it recognizes the unique challenges these students face and the need for specialized instructional approaches. This recognition fosters a sense of empowerment among teachers, enabling them to approach their work with confidence, purpose, and a deeper understanding of effective strategies (Saric & Steh, 2017).

Additionally, professional development acknowledges the ever-evolving nature of education and the importance of staying abreast of current research and best practices. Reading instruction is a dynamic field, with new insights and approaches emerging regularly. Professional development ensures that teachers are equipped with the latest knowledge and evidence-based practices, enabling them to deliver high-quality instruction that aligns with current research and meets the evolving needs of struggling readers.

According to Saric and Steh (2017), professional development provides educators with a collaborative and knowledge-sharing platform. Bringing teachers together in workshops, courses, or communities of practice creates a supportive network where they can learn from one another, exchange ideas, and share experiences. This collaborative environment promotes a sense of shared responsibility and collective problem-solving, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

The impact of professional development goes beyond individual teachers. Enhancing teachers' capacity to support struggling readers directly contributes to improving student outcomes. When teachers are equipped with evidence-based strategies,

differentiated instruction techniques, and a deep understanding of literacy development, they can create engaging learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of their students to help struggling readers overcome challenges, develop their reading skills, and achieve academic success (Loesch, 2023; Patton, & Parker, 2017; Phala, 2023; Saric, & Steh, 2017).

In conclusion, professional development focused on helping teachers with struggling readers reading below grade level is paramount. It recognizes the unique needs of these students, empowers teachers with specialized knowledge and skills, fosters collaboration among educators, and ultimately contributes to improved student outcomes. By investing in professional development, we invest in the future of struggling readers, providing them with the support and opportunities they need to thrive academically and beyond (Loesch, 2023; Patton & Parker, 2017; Phala, 2023; Saric & Steh, 2017).

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

Implications, applications, and directions for future research related to professional development for teachers working with struggling readers who are reading below grade level include future research focusing on assessing the long-term impact of professional development initiatives on teacher practices and student outcomes. Researchers can examine the effectiveness of specific professional development strategies, identify the key components that lead to positive changes in instructional practices, and measure the impact on student achievement (Phala, 2023). Further exploration is needed on the effectiveness of differentiated instructional approaches within professional development programs. Research may examine how teachers can

effectively tailor instruction to meet the diverse needs of struggling readers, considering factors such as learning styles, linguistic backgrounds, and specific reading difficulties. This research can inform the development of evidence-based strategies and resources for differentiated instruction (Loesch, 2023; Patton & Parker, 2017; Phala, 2023; Saric & Steh, 2017).

Investigating technology integration into professional development programs can also be valuable. Research can explore how digital tools and resources can enhance teacher learning and support the implementation of effective reading instruction practices. Research can involve examining the impact of technology on student engagement, personalized learning, and the accessibility of reading materials for struggling readers. Further research can explore the impact of collaborative learning environments in professional development programs, such as communities of practice. This research can explore the factors for effective collaboration, the impact on teacher knowledge and training, and the sustainability of collaborative networks in supporting struggling readers.

Investigating the integration of culturally responsive practices within professional development initiatives is essential (Loesch, 2023; Patton & Parker, 2017; Phala, 2023; Saric & Steh, 2017). Research may explore how educators can incorporate diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds into reading instruction, ensuring that struggling readers from various communities receive culturally relevant and inclusive support. Future research can focus on strategies for sustaining and scaling professional development efforts. Factors such as funding models, leadership support, and systemic

implementation can provide insights into how professional development programs can be effectively embedded within educational systems and replicated on a larger scale.

Exploring the role of parent and community involvement in supporting struggling readers can be a fruitful area for research. Investigating effective strategies to engage parents, caregivers, and community organizations in the learning process can provide a comprehensive support network for struggling readers, extending the impact of professional development beyond the classroom. Teachers can continue to enhance the effectiveness of professional development programs and better support teachers in addressing the needs of struggling readers reading below grade level by exploring implications, applications, and directions for future research. Ultimately, this research can improve instructional practices, enhance student outcomes, and create more inclusive educational environments.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the 3-day professional development workshop for teachers dealing with students reading below grade level was a valuable learning experience. The collaborative environment, emphasis on practical application, and professional development opportunities made it an enriching event. While the time constraint and the need for individualization posed some limitations, overall, the workshop provided teachers with valuable tools, strategies, and a supportive network to effectively address the needs of struggling readers in their classrooms. By implementing the knowledge gained, teachers have the potential to make a significant positive impact on their students' reading abilities and overall academic success (Degener et al., 2023).



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## Appendix A: The Project



### Three Day Professional Development Workshop

#### Exploring Reading Teachers' Collaborative Experiences in Improving Reading Instruction to Below Grade-Level Elementary Students

Research-Based Reading Programs  
for  
First-and Second-Grade Reading Teachers  
to Assist Struggling Students in Reading

#### Professional Development Three Day Workshop Overview Activities

Day 1 Schedule of Activities	Day 2 Schedule of Activities	Day 3 Schedule of Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Community Building</li> <li>• Reading Mastery Program objectives, components and demonstration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Community Building</li> <li>• Fountas and Pinnell Literacy Continuum, Tools for Assessment, Planning, and teaching PreK-8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Community Building</li> <li>• Reading A-Z with differentiate student reading, reading skills with discussion cards, and comprehension quizzes</li> </ul>

### Professional Development Workshop

#### Purpose of Workshop:

- Equip first-and second-grade teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to assist struggling readers in first-and second-grade to read on grade level.

#### Goals:

- By the end of the workshop, participants should be able to understand the characteristics of three research-based reading program components and strategies to assist struggling first-and second-grade readers to comply with the Midwest Read by Third Grade Law.

#### Learning Outcomes:

- Identify the factors that contributed to reading difficulties
- Apply research-based strategies to support struggling readers

#### Target Audience:

- First-and-Second-grade reading teachers

### Professional Development Workshop Materials

1. Workshop Agenda
2. Lunch Menu
3. Handouts
4. Pens, markers, notebook, and small sticky note pads
5. Relevant books & workbooks for the research-base research literacy programs Direct Instruction, Fountas & Pinnell, and A-Z.
6. Technology and audiovisual equipment
7. Flipchart & whiteboard
8. Name tags
9. Evaluation Form

**Professional Development Workshop**  
**Schedule - Day One**

Registration Sessions	8:00-8:30 Time	Overview of Schedule
Introduction	8:30 - 9:30	Community Building
Break	9:30 - 9:45	Coffee/Restroom
Session 1	9:45 - 10:45	Reading Mastery Objectives
Session 2	10:45 - 11:45	Reading Mastery Components
Lunch	11:45 - 12:30	Lunch Provided
Session 3	12:30 - 1:30	Reading Mastery Demonstration
Break	1:30 - 1:45	Coffee/Restroom
Closing	1:45 - 2:30	Exit ticket: Write Takeaways from today session in parking lot.

**Community Building Teachers Collaboration**  
**Day One**

**Objective:** Participants will be able to listen to the prompt and if they agree with the prompt stand and reply “Me too.” Do not forget to look around the room to see who agrees with you.

**Goal:** Collaboration with other teacher to find who has the same interests, characteristics and mindset as you to get to know your fellow teachers.



## Community Building Teachers Collaboration Day One

\* Community building activity to get to know your colleagues.

### \* Just Like Me!

\* Please stand and say “Just Like Me” for each experiences, interest, or characteristic that is true for you. Be sure to look around the room to see who has the same thing in common as you.

1. Birthday month is December
2. Teaches first-grade reading,
3. favorite color is blue,
4. brings a lunch to work,
5. favorite food is pizza,
6. reads for a hobby,
7. enjoys cooking large meals,
8. drives a jeep,
9. favorite vacation spot is Florida,
10. has grandchildren,
11. has home phone
12. likes playing sports,
13. has a gym in their home,
14. prefer driving to work with the radio off,
15. do not like drive on the freeway.

## Components of Exploring Direct Instruction (DI)

- o Definition, principles, and critical components of Direct Instruction
- o Research evidence supporting the effectiveness of DI in improving reading outcomes.
- o Analyzing and understanding the specific DI techniques and strategies applicable to first and second-grade students reading below grade level.
- o Best practices for implementing DI in the classroom.

<https://www.nifdi.org/>



Demonstration of Direct Instruction  
Literacy Program  
Day One

Exit Ticket

Parking Lot Take-Away

Reflections



Professional Development Day One  
Direct Instruction

**Professional Development Workshop Schedule:  
Day Two**

Registration Sessions	8:00-8:30 Times	Overview of Schedule
Introduction	8:30-9:30	Community Building
Break	9:30-9:45	Coffee/restroom
Session 1	9:45-10:45	Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum
Session 2	10:45-11:45	Fountas & Pinnell Tools for Assessment
Lunch	11:45-12:30	Lunch Provided
Session 3	12:30-1:30	Fountas & Pinnell Planning and Demonstration
Break	1:30-1:45	Coffee/Restroom
Closing	1:45-2:30	Exit ticket-write takeaways from today's session in Parking lot

**Community Building Teachers Collaboration  
Round Two**

- \* 1. Meet with someone in the room (one person) whom you made a connection with through our first activity. This will be someone whom you do not know.
- \* 2. With your partner, spend time sharing the following information:
- \* 3. What was one thing that connected you to each other? Tell one thing about yourself that you feel is important for the other person to know about you. What does reading intervention strategies mean to you? How can reading intervention strategies help struggling students in first-and second-grade reading below grade level? Take notes to share with the whole group.

### Components of Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) System

- Overview of the F&P system and its components
- Understanding the role of guided reading in supporting struggling readers
- Analyzing the F&P instructional framework and its application for first and second-grade students
- Practical implementation strategies and techniques for using F&P with struggling readers.

[www.fountasandpinnell.com](http://www.fountasandpinnell.com)



**Demonstration of Fountas & Pinnell  
Literacy Program  
Day Two**

**Exit Ticket**

\*Parking Lot Take-Aways                      \*Reflections



## Professional Development Workshop Day Two

Professional Development Workshop  
Schedule - Day Three

Registration Sessions	8:00-8:30 Time	Overview of Schedule
Introduction	8:30 - 9:30	Community Building
Break	9:30 - 9:45	Coffee/Restroom
Session 1	9:45 - 10:45	A-Z Objectives
Session 2	10:45 - 11:45	A-Z Components
Lunch	11:45-12:30	Lunch Provided
Session 3	12:30 - 1:30	A-Z Demonstration
Break	1:30 - 1:45	Coffee/Restroom
Closing	1:45 - 2:30	Exit ticket: Write Takeaways from today session in parking lot.

**Professional Development Workshop  
Schedule - Day Three**

Registration Sessions	8:00-8:30 Time	Overview of Schedule
Introduction	8:30 - 9:30	Community Building
Break	9:30 - 9:45	Coffee/Restroom
Session 1	9:45 - 10:45	A-Z Objectives
Session 2	10:45 -11:45	A-Z Components
Lunch	11:45- 12:30	Lunch Provided
Session 3	12:30 - 1:30	A-Z Demonstration
Break	1:30 - 1:45	Coffee/Restroom
Closing	1:45 - 2:30	Exit ticket: Write Takeaways from today session in parking lot.

**Community Building Teachers  
Collaboration  
Round Three**

**Phonics Scavenger Hunt**

**Directions**

1. Divide the teachers into small groups of 3-4 members.
2. Provide each group with phonics skills relevant to first and second-grade reading levels (e.g., short vowels, consonant blends, digraphs, long vowels).
3. Explain that the goal of the activity is to search for real-world examples of words that demonstrate the specified phonics skill.
4. Instruct each group to take turns exploring the classroom or school environment, searching for items or objects that contain words with the assigned phonics skill.
5. Encourage the groups to work together, discussing and sharing ideas on identifying and collecting the words.

**Community Building Teachers Collaboration  
Round Three  
Phonics Scavenger Hunt ...continues**

**Directions**

6. Once the groups have gathered sufficient words, reconvene as a whole group.
7. Ask each group to share their findings, taking turns presenting the words they discovered and explaining how they demonstrate the assigned phonics skill.
8. As the words are shared, encourage the other groups to provide feedback, suggestions, or additional examples of the specific phonics skill.
9. Facilitate a discussion among all participants to explore common patterns or challenges identified during the scavenger hunt.
10. Encourage the teachers to brainstorm and share instructional strategies or activities that could be implemented in their classrooms to reinforce the phonics skill based on the real-world examples they found.
11. Wrap up the activity by summarizing the key takeaways and discussing the importance of incorporating real-life connections to phonics instruction.

**Unpacking A-Z Components**

- Introduction to the A-Z program and its components
- Analyzing the leveled reading system and its benefits for struggling readers
- Strategies for selecting appropriate A-Z texts and implementing them in the classroom.
- Differentiated instruction using A-Z resources to meet individual student needs.

[\\*www.raz-kids.com/](http://www.raz-kids.com/)



**Demonstration A-Z Literacy Program  
Day Three**

**Exit Ticket**

\*Parking Lot Take-Aways

Reflections



**Professional Development Workshop  
Day Three  
A-Z**



## Evaluation Form



### Reading, Literacy and Assessment

Thank you for your Participation  
in the  
Professional Development Workshop  
on  
Three Research-Based Literacy Program  
Three Day

Contact Information:  
Carol Manciel, Doctoral Student  
Walden University  
[Carol.manciel@waldenu.edu](mailto:Carol.manciel@waldenu.edu)



**Thank you for your support!**  
**Happy Learning**

Professional development for first- and second-grade teachers focused on using research-based reading programs, such as Direct Instruction, Fountas and Pinnell, and A-Z, can offer several key benefits. Research-based programs are designed using proven instructional strategies backed by educational research. By providing teachers with training on these programs, they gain access to strategies shown to support struggling readers effectively (Saric & Steh, 2017).

First- and second-grade teachers can benefit from understanding how to tailor their teaching methods to address the needs of students reading below grade level. These programs often provide structured approaches to differentiating instruction, allowing teachers to target the areas where students need the most support. Professional development can emphasize using assessment data to track student progress and identify areas of improvement. This data-driven approach helps teachers make informed instructional decisions and adjust their teaching strategies based on student performance.

The training can emphasize the importance of implementing the chosen reading programs with fidelity. Consistent implementation ensures that students receive the intended instructional benefits, leading to more reliable outcomes. Professional development can introduce teachers to effective pedagogical techniques in these programs, which can include explicit instruction, guided practice, and strategies to engage struggling readers effectively (Saric and Steh, 2017).

Creating a learning community among teachers allows for sharing insights, challenges, and successes. Collaborative learning can lead to the exchange of best practices and strategies for addressing specific student needs. Intensive professional

development can result in lasting improvements in teachers' instructional practices. As teachers become more skilled in research-based programs, the positive impact on students' reading abilities can extend beyond the current grade levels.

These programs often incorporate engaging activities and materials to help struggling readers feel more confident and motivated to improve their reading skills. Integrating a financing panel can provide insights into the financial aspects of implementing these programs. This includes budget considerations for acquiring instructional materials, technology, and ongoing professional development. The review of various programs, including A through Z, allows teachers to assess the strengths and limitations of each approach and choose the one that best aligns with their teaching context and student needs. Providing professional development for first- and second-grade teachers with research-based reading programs can enhance their instructional effectiveness, student outcomes, and overall teaching practices. It equips them with evidence-based strategies to support struggling readers and fosters a collaborative environment where educators can continuously improve their teaching methods (Loesch, 2023; Patton & Parker, 2017; Phala, 2023; Saric & Steh, 2017).

## Appendix B: Letter Requesting Permission to Conduct Study

Dear Mr. Mckithen, Human Resources  
Solid Rock Management Company

I am a Doctoral Candidate at Walden University requesting permission to conduct a Reading literacy study at both of your campuses. The title of my research is Exploring Reading Teachers' Collaborative Experiences in Improving Reading Instruction to Below Grade-Level Elementary Students. My basic qualitative study will investigate reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students. It examines intervention strategies reading teachers need to utilize for success in educating first- and second graders who are struggling readers in the Midwest to comply with the 2019 Read by Grade Three Law. I am seeking ten teachers from first- and second grade to participate in the study. Teachers' participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time. I will send a letter via email to all participating teachers with a copy of the study's protocol. Teachers will complete an Audio online questionnaire indicating the strategies they use in the classroom to help struggling readers. All responses will be kept confidential throughout the study. If additional information is necessary, please feel free to contact me at [c\\_manciel@yahoo.com](mailto:c_manciel@yahoo.com) or 313 220-2241.

Educationally,

Carol Manciel, Doctoral Candidate

Walden University

## Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer for Research Study



## Interview study seeks First and Second Grade Reading Teachers

A new study investigates first- and second-grade reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students by examining teachers' strategies, collaborations, and interventions to comply with the latest reading law mandates.

### About the study:

- One 60-minute interview that will be virtual audio-recorded.
- The deadline for volunteering for the study is 2 weeks after the flyer distribution.
- You will receive a copy of your interview transcript to verify accuracy via email, which should take 20 minutes to review.
- You would receive an electronic \$20 Visa gift card as a thank you a few days after completing the study.
- The study may inform future studies toward implementing new statutory reading requirements effectively.

### Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Certified Elementary Teacher
- Teach first or second grade reading to students struggling to read at grade level.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Carol Manciel, an Ed.D student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during June 2023.

To confidentially volunteer, contact the researcher:

## Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study about first- and-second grade reading teachers' strategies, experiences, and innovations teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students.

This form is part of the "informed consent" process to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study seeks 5-first grade reading teachers and 5-second grade reading teachers from a charter school in the Midwest.

### **To volunteer in the study, you must:**

- Be a Certified Elementary Teacher
- Teach first or second grade reading to students struggling to read at grade level.
- Teach at the study site.

The researcher's named is Carol Manciel who is a doctoral student at Walden University is conducting this study.

### **Study Purpose:**

The purpose of the study is to investigate reading teachers' experiences teaching reading to below-grade-level elementary students struggling with reading. It examines problems, experiences, preparation, perceptions of practice, various teaching strategies, and interventions needed to comply with the Midwest Read by Grade Three Reading Law.

### **Procedures:**

This study will involve volunteers completing the following steps:

- One 60-minute phone interview that will be audio recorded.
- You will receive a copy of your interview transcript to verify accuracy via email, which should take 20 minutes to review.

### **Here are some sample interview questions:**

1. When you have a student struggling with reading, what methods do you use to help that student?
2. Many instructional tools, interventions, and strategies exist to help struggling readers in K-2. How would you describe your experiences with these tools, interventions, and techniques?
3. What is your biggest obstacle in teaching reading, especially concerning readers, not at grade level?
4. What would help you the most to serve this population better?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. So, everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. No one in your charter school district will treat you differently based on whether you volunteer or not.

If you decide to join the study, you can change your mind later, and you may stop anytime. Please note that 5 first graders and 5 second grade teachers are needed for the study; therefore, not all volunteers will be selected to participate. The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether they were chosen for the study.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this study could involve some risk of minor discomforts encountered in daily life, such as sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your well-being. This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The study may have implications for positive social change locally and nationally to help teachers employ effective reading strategies to strengthen student-reading outcomes to comply with the Midwestern Read by Grade Three Law. Once the analysis is complete, the researcher will share the study's overall results by providing a link to participants through their email to review the results from the study.

**Payment:**

You will receive an electronic \$20 Visa Gift card to thank you for volunteering in the study. You can anticipate receiving your thank-you gift a few days after completing your interview questions for the study.

**Privacy:**

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. The researcher is only allowed to share your identity or contact information as needed with Walden University supervisors, who are also required to protect your privacy. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would contain no identifiers so this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by using a number code in place of participants names to security measures. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You can ask questions of the researcher by email at [c\\_manciel@yahoo.com](mailto:c_manciel@yahoo.com). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210.

Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here**. It expires on **IRB will enter expiration date**.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact information above.

### **Obtaining Your Consent**

If you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with "I Consent" in the subject line.

Educationally,  
Carol Manciel, Doctoral Candidate, Walden University



## Appendix E: Interview Questions

Dear Educator:

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my research. I appreciate your time and effort and will gladly share the results with you when my study is complete. Your responses are tabulated in confidence utilizing an online audio recorder.

These interview questions are recorded confidently and should take approximately 5 minutes to answer.

1. By the end of this school year, how many years will you have been teaching?  
Please round to the nearest whole number.
2. Gender?
3. How old are you? Under 25, 30-40, 41–50, 51–59, 60 or older (circle)
4. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed? \_\_\_\_\_
5. A. What was your major or minor area(s) of study during your educational studies?

Major \_\_\_\_\_ Minor \_\_\_\_\_

- a) What were your educational studies? Primary/Elementary b) Education—  
Secondary c) Other \_\_\_\_\_

As part of your formal education and training, to what extent (years) did you study the following areas?

These interview questions are recorded confidently and should take approximately 55 minutes to answer.

1. When you have a student struggling with reading, what methods do you use to help that student?
2. Many instructional tools, interventions, and strategies exist to help struggling readers in K-2. How would you describe your experiences with these tools, interventions, and techniques?

3. What is your biggest obstacle in teaching reading, especially concerning readers, not at grade level?
4. What would help you the most to serve students reading below grade level better?
5. How often do you collaborate with colleagues to expand your knowledge on teaching reading skills to struggling students?
6. How often do you share what you have learned in reading literacy with other reading teachers to assist them with students in your classroom who are struggling readers with lesson strategies?
7. How often do you observe another classroom to learn more about teaching reading strategies to struggling readers?
8. Do you work with other colleagues to improve how you teach the skill to struggling readers?
9. Do you work with teachers from other schools on a reading curriculum?
10. Do you work with teachers from other grades to ensure continuity in learning?
11. What instructional practices do reading teachers use for elementary students struggling with reading to improve their skills.
12. How do reading teachers collaborate and share strategies for improving reading outcomes for elementary students reading below grade level.
13. What advice would you provide future teachers who may have students not reading at grade-level.