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Authentic Instruction and Achievement of Fifth Grade Charter School Students

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Walden University
2014

Abstract

Authentic Instruction and Achievement of Fifth Grade Charter School Students

by

Novea McIntosh

MA, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2007

BS, University of the West Indies, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

October, 2014

Abstract

Students' performance on standardized tests continues to dominate the discourse in the educational arena as it reflects student growth and teacher performance. The low performance index scores of 5th grade students at 2 elementary charter schools in urban southwestern Ohio has been a major concern of the school district. Guided by social constructivism, the purpose of this research study was to identify curricular practices that influence student academic achievement. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 4 reading teachers and 2 administrators; curriculum maps, tests scores, and lesson plan documents were also reviewed. Interview, test score, and lesson plan documents were analyzed through an open-coding process and constant comparison of data to ensure trustworthiness. The findings revealed that 5th grade reading teachers and principals used teacher-centered instructional practices that did not connect with students' backgrounds. Based on the findings, a capstone project was developed that provided a content-specific professional development training for reading teachers that would expose them to student-centered instructional practices related to students' backgrounds. The implications for positive social change include engaged classrooms with student-centered instructional practices that could increase student achievement in urban schools.

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Dedication

This dedication is two-fold, to my foundation and to my present. This doctoral study is dedicated to my parents Donald and Eunice Jackson, my foundation, and my husband and son, Mario and Zade McIntosh, my present. They have given me so much confidence throughout the years to aspire to my goals and to persevere no matter what obstacles I have to overcome. My father, though deceased, gave me the invaluable character trait of self-belief from which I have depended on with every milestone that I have accomplished in my life. My mother has been such a constant presence in my life, the prayer warrior, the matriarch of my family, and the tower of strength to guide me. I have also been blessed with a brilliant and incredible husband who is my constant source of support and motivator. He has been a true partner for the past 14 years and continues to inspire me to explore new heights and achieve my goals. You are my rock and I adore you. My 7-year old son, Zade, has been so resilient and patient as he watched me being a student and often part time Mom. I love you my angel. I thank you all, for the solid foundation that you have given me in the Lord. I know that through Christ all things are possible. I thank God for you and the gift of love that you have given me.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed by the federal government in December 2001 requires each state to establish standards for all students in math and reading. To measure the extent to which students are making adequate yearly progress toward meeting the standards, states are required to conduct academic assessments (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2007). Based on standardized academic assessments for fifth grade, students at two local elementary charter schools in southwestern Ohio have failed to meet adequate yearly progress on their standardized state tests over the past 3 years. The Ohio Local Report Card (2010) has identified both schools as high poverty, and both are urban charter schools.

The students in both schools are failing math, reading, and science. The Ohio Local Report Card (2010) revealed that fifth grade students met zero of three indicators on the Ohio Achievement Assessments and pulled down the performance index of the overall school scores. The nature of this problem is severe as fifth grade students need to be functional in order to transition to the middle school setting and be successful. The continuous decline in the students' performance on standardized tests is ample reason to critically examine this problem in the hopes of identifying solutions.

Although there are weaknesses in reading, math, and science, this study concentrated on the weaknesses in reading because this skill can affect success in other subjects as well. I studied the instructional strategies used in the reading classrooms to

understand how students can increase their performance on state exams. This investigation examined curricular practices that influence student academic achievement at the fifth grade level in the urban setting, such as how teachers draw connections between their instructional practices and students' backgrounds to improve the academic achievement of fifth grade students. This information will help teachers develop more effective instructional skills and hopefully promote positive social changes.

Definition of the Problem

Fifth grade students have failed their standardized tests for the past 3 years at two urban elementary charter schools in southwestern Ohio. Table 1 below illustrates the proficiency results according to the Ohio State Report Card (2010).

Table 1

Fifth Grade Ohio Achievement Tests Scores – 2010

	School A	School B	Statewide
Reading	56.5%	44.7%	74.1%
Math	34.8%	22.1%	66.6%
Science	56.5%	51.2%	71.1%

Note. Adapted from "Ohio State Report Card" by the Ohio Department of Education, 2010, retrieved from http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2010-2011/BUILD/143578.pdf

The students at Elementary School A have failed to meet the state performance index (an overall value of how students perform on the Ohio Achievement Tests) score of 75%. School A has been adversely affected as it continues to be one of the lowest-

performing schools in the county, with students failing reading at 56.5%, math at 34%, and science at 56.5%. This trend of low performance is an ongoing problem in the school.

The Ohio Department of Education Report Card (2010) also revealed a lack of proficiency among fifth grade students in the school over a 3-year period, with their average scores being 61.1% in reading, 33.3% in math, and 61.1% in science. This is clearly cause for concern as documentation reveals that there is little or no academic growth among students who have been enrolled over at least 2 years prior to the fifth grade year.

The situation is even worse in Elementary School B. Students are failing with scores of only 44.7% in reading, 22.1% in math, and 51.2% in science. The Ohio Department of Education Report Card (2010) shows a 3-year trend that fifth grade students are failing standardized tests scores by 12.8% in reading, 32.2% in math, and 11.8% in science. The report also revealed that this urban charter school is rated in the top 10 in its county. The fifth grade students' scores, however, do not line up with their overall success, as the students are failing.

This problem is not limited to the local level, but seems to be an issue at the state level. The Ohio Department of Education Report Card (2010) found that fifth grade students across the state did not meet the 75% mark in test scores, as students averaged only 74.1% in reading, 66.6% in math, and 71.1% in science. The National Assessment of Educational Progress Report Card (2011) revealed that incoming fifth graders did not improve over the years on their fourth grade reading assessment, and the percentages of

students performing "at or above Basic," "at or above Proficient," or "at Advanced" did not change significantly from 2009 to 2011. It is evident that there is a curricular issue to be addressed if students are not making academic gains at the required level.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Uzzell et al. (2010) reported that students are failing standardized reading tests in high poverty urban cities of the United States. The problem of low achievement is further compounded by the constraints of state legislatures demanding that these urban schools meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), which is a measurement of growth. According to Birdwell (2012), students and teachers in high poverty and low-performing schools continue to fail reading with the added pressure of meeting AYP as too much of the focus is on standardized tests. This research focused on fifth grade students in two high poverty urban schools that are failing and not meeting their schools' AYP.

According to Dutro and Selland (2012), one of the impacts of students' failure on standardized tests in high poverty schools across the United States is that schools are being closed when students fail to pass their reading and math tests. They further pointed out that the emphasis on standardized tests constrained teachers' abilities to provide students in poverty with rich teaching experiences, leading inevitably to failure. Gagnon and Mattingly (2012) stated that students' failure was also attributed to a high number of beginning teachers, approximately 11% of them in high poverty schools where students are already performing below grade level. This would often prove disastrous as the teachers are trying to learn their curriculum, environment, and students, with the added

pressure of preparing them to meet the demands of standardized tests. Bancroft (2010) emphasized that with beginning and inexperienced teachers, teaching to the tests may not work as it will not engage students who they do not know, especially minority students.

Rationale

The low performance of fifth grade students at two elementary charter schools in southwestern Ohio is a serious academic issue that has affected not only the students, but also the school's academic performance at the county level. The Ohio Department of Education Report Card (2010) reported that fifth grade students did not meet any of the five passing indicators as mandated by the state. This is a serious issue because fifth grade students, unlike all other grade levels within the schools, have to be evaluated in the academic content areas of math, reading, and science.

The overall academic performance of fifth grade students is also comparatively very low at the state and national levels. It is crucial for this issue to be addressed because fifth grade academic success directly affects not only the students themselves, but also their school's overall academic rating. Bancroft (2010) noted that low-income students and students of color often have less experienced teachers with lower salaries, and schools with inadequate facilities and resources. The school district's Annual Report (2010) detailed investment in ongoing professional development programs to prepare teachers in best practices for the classroom. However, the results reflected annual failure to meet the standards.

This problem has been discussed by teachers and administrators at the schools in staff meetings as they tried to understand how to deal with the continuous failure of fifth grade students. Some of the fifth grade teachers believed that their students struggled with reading at grade level because they lacked so many fundamental skills in reading (personal communication, fifth grade reading teacher, September 4, 2012). While the teachers tried to address the problem in their classrooms, administrators were faced with the added pressure of providing quality teachers to help fifth grade students.

In a data meeting, it was pointed out that students' academic experience changed significantly in fifth grade because they encountered less experienced teachers who had no knowledge of testing standards (personal communication, administrator, March 6, 2012). The schools struggled with students performing below grade level in the fifth grade reading classroom, and also inexperienced teachers, hence resulting in a serious dilemma regarding student achievement.

This must be frustrating for parents who see their children failing at such a critical stage of their school life. It must also be cause for concern for sixth grade teachers receiving below grade level students because this will impact their instructional practices and eventually test scores in their classrooms. Finally, administrators must be frustrated with the continuous failing grades, which cannot bode well for the school and its reputation in the community. These stakeholders must all be conscious of the need to change their practices in order to pass these tests. They must also be curious as to why so many students are failing in their schools, while many others succeed.

The purpose of this study was to identify curricular practices that influence student academic achievement at the fifth grade level in an urban setting. These curricular practices include how teachers draw connections between their instructional practices and students' backgrounds to help improve the academic achievement of fifth grade students.

Definition of Terms

Additive curriculum: "The additive approach is when cultural content, concepts, and themes are merely added into the curriculum without disrupting the Eurocentric or mainstream canon. Adding a book to the curriculum without changing its framework is an example of this approach. In addition, the experiences of these cultural groups are still interpreted and viewed from the dominant perspective" (Halagao, 2004, p. 2).

Assessment: The act of determining the extent to which the desired results, such as curriculum, are being achieved. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) believed that "it is an umbrella term used to mean the deliberate use of many methods to gather evidence to indicate that students are meeting standards" (p. 6). In this study, assessment was defined as a more learning focused term than an evaluation. It is the giving and using of feedback to enable improvement and meeting of goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Authentic assessment: "Authentic assessments, often called performance-based assessments, engage students in real-world tasks and scenario-based problem solving more than traditional measures such as multiple-choice pencil-and-paper tests" (Moon, Brighton, Callahan, & Robinson, 2005, p.120).

Authentic instruction: "Authentic instruction is the combination of instruction and assessment that is designed to bolster student achievement through lessons which are taught at a higher intellectual level and that contain information and skills that are of value beyond school" (Dennis & O'Hair, 2010, p. 4). This is diametrically opposed to traditional instruction, which typically involves teachers lecturing and students taking notes. Authentic instruction is a departure from the traditional teacher-imparted instruction. Instead, students and teachers are collaborators involved in the co-construction of learning using their real life experiences to relate to and understand knowledge. Examples of authentic instruction in reading include reading instructions to a game, problem-solving everyday problems, or using pop music to identify common themes and compare them to poetry.

Charter school: "A charter school, officially designated a public school academy (PSA), is a state-supported public school that operates independently under a charter granted by an authorizing body" (Arsen & Yongmei, 2012, p. 5).

Culturally relevant instruction: Ladson-Billings (1992) conceptualized culturally-relevant pedagogy which is an approach that empowers students to the point where they will be able to critically examine educational content and processes and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society. It uses the students' culture to help them create meaning and understand the world. Thus, not only academic success, but also social and cultural success are emphasized (Milner, 2011).

Curriculum: "Refers to the blueprint for learning that is derived from desired results that is, content and performance standards" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p.6). In this study, curriculum will be limited to the fifth grade core course of reading.

Transformational instruction practices: "The transformation approach restructures the curriculum so that concepts, issues, or events are viewed from different perspectives including the Eurocentric or mainstream perspective. In this approach, students read and hear the voices of the victors and vanquished. They learn that knowledge is socially constructed and depends on one's positionality" (Halagao, 2004, p. 2). For example, students may come into the classroom believing the Earth is flat. This may be challenged by the instructor and peers, and through collaboration, exploration, and critical reflection, they will be able to transform their ideas into the understanding that the Earth is round.

Significance of the Study

According to Nelson et al. (2007), "No Child Left Behind is designed to change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works" (p. 126). This mandate was put in place in 2005 but has not worked to close the achievement gap. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) has failed to improve parent involvement, and students are still unsuccessful on standardized tests. Instead of improving, the test scores of fifth grade students at the elementary schools in this study have steadily declined over the past 3 years.

For this study, I identified the curricular practices that influenced student academic achievement at the fifth grade level in an urban setting, such as how teachers draw connections between their instructional practices and students' backgrounds to improve the academic achievement of fifth grade students. It was crucial to examine the practices in two schools in the same district to see which ones were successful. This will help inform teachers about effective methods and tools to facilitate successful instruction for their students.

It was important to investigate the connections between instructional practices and students' experiential backgrounds. Casas (2006) found that students' attitudes toward learning were adversely affected if they believed their culture was not integrated into their learning by their teachers and administrators. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) believed that instructional practices could help students master knowledge and gain skills to propel their performance not only on standardized tests, but also beyond the classroom. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) stated:

> An assessment approach grounded in authentic work calls for students and teachers to come to two important understandings: first learning how adults in the larger world beyond the school really use or do not use the knowledge and skills that are taught in school and second how discrete lessons are meaningful leading to higher quality performance or mastery of more important tasks. (p. 155)

However, it was important for me to determine if these effective instructional practices existed and were aligned to the state standards, or if they were merely fun

activities that were disconnected from the state's expectations. For this school district, answers to this question could mean success for the school community with higher performance scores and more successful students.

The outcome of this study will be beneficial to educators at the school and state levels because it gives them insight into the value of transformational instructional practices. They can assess how teachers may bridge the gap in practice through making connections with students' experiences, thereby making learning more relevant and not abstract. Seidl (2007) proposed the following:

> Teachers must learn what it means to become students of a particular context. They must learn about the range of cultural experiences and norms within a specific community and begin to situate education within an understanding of the goals and expectations the community has for children and for education. (p. 170)

It is crucial for teachers to understand who their students are because students' lives are impacted by their teachers in the short- and long-term. Gay and Howard (as cited in Groulx & Silva, 2010) also claimed that when teachers were unaware of their own lack of cultural understanding, it lead to lower expectations and miscommunication. They believed that minority children were less able to achieve than other students. Because teachers' instructional practices are automatically based on their perceptions of their students, teachers must make connections with their students' cultural backgrounds in order to reach and teach them. If this connection is cemented, students will learn more.

The outcome of this study will be even more significant for students and parents whose lives will be changed as they embrace academic success in their urban environment. Lemberger and Clemens (2012) noted that a curriculum that is designed to support students' backgrounds can impact student achievement significantly as they will feel a sense of belonging, safety, and support in their learning environment.

The students' success will impact their home lives significantly, and their parents and families will enjoy some sense of satisfaction. Thus, this investigation was important because it revealed information about effective instructional practices and their abilities to promote positive social change in the classroom and beyond.

Research Questions

The classroom has become a diverse environment where teachers meet students from many backgrounds and are faced with the daunting task of facilitating instruction to meet their needs. Milner (2011) pointed out that many researchers have advocated a culturally relevant curriculum to meet the needs of all students in schools. It has become paramount for teachers to understand the students' culture and their backgrounds in order to connect with them. Ukpokodu (2011) shared urban students bring a rich cultural background and knowledge to the classroom but it is not considered nor utilized in the instructional practices, hence students do not succeed. Further research has suggested that one of the problems contributing to urban students' academic underachievement is the lack of access and opportunity to learn (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Lee, 2006; Oakes & Lipton, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to identify curricular practices that influence student academic achievement at the fifth grade level in an urban setting. These practices include how teachers draw connections between their instructional practices and students' backgrounds to improve the academic achievement of fifth grade students. It was imperative to examine the curriculum at each school to determine if it was aligned with state standards. At the heart of this research were the instructional practices and whether they cater to the needs of urban students based on their cultural backgrounds. It was crucial to understand why there is a gap between theory and classroom practice to effectively prepare students for standardized tests and learning beyond the classroom.

The study investigated which instructional practices were used in fifth grade classrooms, how they aligned with the school's curriculum, and how they connected with students' backgrounds. The following questions were asked to help better understand the problem:

- How does the school's curriculum align with state standards?

- What are teachers' perceptions on the best instructional practices in delivering curriculum?

- How do teachers decide on strategies that they would use to teach students?

- In what ways do teachers plan their lessons using students' backgrounds to inform their practices in the classroom?

Section 1: Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to provide a foundation for this qualitative case study. The study utilized the theoretical framework of constructivism by describing pertinent literature on authentic instruction and achievement of students in the classroom. The literature review explored the theoretical framework of social constructivism and its value to educators and their pedagogy, and consists of four sections. First, instructional practices were examined to understand the relevance of constructivist teaching and authentic practices in the classroom. Second, it details the social context in education and the impact of students' backgrounds on their academic learning achievement. Third, the curriculum used in the classroom is discussed to give insight into classroom practices used to propel student achievement. Finally, I peruse assessment practices used in the classroom environment that can either hamper or enrich students' learning.

An extensive review of the literature was conducted using the Walden University Library and internet databases. The databases were searched for primary peer-reviewed scholarly articles and studies relevant to the research study. The key search terms used included: *social constructivism, authentic instruction, reading instructional practices, curriculum, culturally relevant curriculum, standardized tests,* and *authentic assessment.*

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I explored teachers' instructional practices and drew connections between needed content and students' backgrounds. The conceptual framework that informed this study was social constructivism developed by Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1978) was a firm believer that social interaction and cultural influences have a huge effect on students and how learning occurs. Social constructivism in education defines learning as "constructing, creating, inventing and developing one's own knowledge and meaning" (Liu & Chen, 2010, p. 65).

For this study, the social constructivist framework was connected with authentic instructional practices which advocate that learning has value beyond the classroom. Social constructivists advocated for the creation of learning, with students playing a pivotal role in the process. Duncan and Bushirk-Cohen (2011) shared that constructivist theorists do not necessarily anticipate students' mastery of a subject, but students will have the opportunity to explore, handle, and relate their learning to their own experience. The students' cultural and experiential backgrounds would be interwoven into an authentic learning environment. Because students enter the classroom environment with different learning styles based on their different backgrounds, teachers should recognize the diversity of the class and embrace their differences. A one-size-fits-all mentality driven by standardized tests does not adequately meet the diverse learning needs of diverse students.

Social constructivism is inclusive of all students, irrespective of their ability level, as students will be engaged in experiential learning and will discover new knowledge on their own. This is a shift from the traditional classroom, which is often controlled by state standards. This framework applies to the study and its focus on effective instructional practices. Duncan and Bushirk-Cohen (2011) noted that "In contrast to a passive, teacher-centered approach, a constructivist approach, influenced by the theories of Vygotsky (1986) and Piaget (1977), relies on active exploration by students with professors providing guidance as needed" (p. 246). Essentially, the role of the teacher would evolve into a partnership with students rather than a dictatorship. This would mean that students and teachers would be engaged in every aspect of the classroom, including setting goals, developing activities, and creating authentic learning experiences.

Review of Literature Related to the Problem

Instructional Practices

In this study, the instructional practices of the teachers were examined to see how students are positioned in order to plan and facilitate learning. According to Artiles et al. (2011), instructional practices include students and teachers' use of social cues about what is relevant to learn, and how their instruction and learning can be impacted by their own social lives. This study explored the reconstruction of learning by students as they seek to connect classroom knowledge with their own backgrounds. The instructional practices used in the classroom would have to draw on prior knowledge to make sense to the learner.

A study by Kenkamn (2011) summed up the learning process as using prior knowledge as well as the real-world application to create an authentic learning experience for students. This authentic learning can only occur if teachers develop constructivist teaching practices that are concrete to the learners. A study conducted by Duarte (2013) revealed that teachers who facilitate good instructional practices typically embrace constructivist principles as they intend to impact students' lifelong learning. The main ingredient is getting the learner involved in this process.

Social constructivist teaching practices are relevant to this study because they emphasize students being at the center of the learning process. Constructivist teaching practices can then be used synonymously with authentic instructional practices. The execution of this authentic practice in the classroom is reflected in the activities, assignments, and assessments given to students.

According to Diamond (2012), pedagogy in a low-income school tends to be very traditional, where teachers lecture in a teacher-centered instructional classroom while students memorize and recite content. He studied 105 classrooms where instruction was more fragmented and didactic as the focus was on test preparation and being accountable to school policy. This instructional framework did not work as these methods have not resulted in success on tests as the students are failing. Interestingly, the students in this research were from low-income families and were failing. Therefore, it is imperative to scrutinize how teachers instruct the students.

Traditional instruction nullifies the role of the students in the classroom, thereby creating an inauthentic, subjective classroom climate. In Camburn and Han's (2011) meta-analysis of 142 studies that used data national data sets, the findings indicated that students from a lower socioeconomic background were less likely to be exposed to authentic instruction. This is unacceptable for those students who have already seen failure in their lives. The classroom should give them an opportunity to excel, but this can only happen with the best instructional practices to facilitate learning.

Similarly, Conklin, Hawley, Powell, and Ritter (2010) found that teachers of minority students often do not challenge these students with rigorous and high quality schoolwork as they would students from other backgrounds. Teachers tended to have lower expectations of minority students when engaging them in intellectual learning. This validates why many of our low-income students fail, as they need to be held to the same expectations and given the same opportunities to excel as other students. If economically disadvantaged students are not exposed to quality instruction, failure is the only option for them on standardized tests. Because this study's setting and participants are economically disadvantaged, it will be relevant to examine teachers' perceptions of instructional practices for these students.

Students' failure to pass standardized tests is not only a local issue, as evidenced with the fifth grade students in Ohio, but has become a national problem in the United States. If students are to improve their scores on standardized tests, the instructional practices need to be rigorous in teaching students to analyze and synthesize acquired

knowledge. While testing may be at the forefront of teachers' minds, value beyond the classroom should be the focus. The relationship that is formed between teachers and students will inform instructional practices in the classroom. If authentic instructional practices are facilitated, this relationship will be fostered with results of success for all involved.

The debate on standardized testing itself and whether or not it should be used continues to dominate national conversations on the education system. According to Nelson et al. (2007), testing has become a national obsession in places where students may have a poor quality of education. However, Nelson et al. (2007) implied that authentic instructional practices can be an antidote to standardized testing. They suggested that students' sociocultural backgrounds, including their parents, communities, and cultures, must become a vital part of the curriculum. If the goal is to propel student achievement, then it is crucial to include critical stakeholders in the learning environment to inform instruction and assessment. Teachers will then be able to draw connections to students' lives and make learning a social event not limited to the walls of the classroom. This would mean that our schools invest in the best instructional practices, especially authentic instruction.

Authentic Instruction

As was defined previously, authentic instruction is designed to enhance academic achievement using lessons that combine intellectual knowledge and skills that are useful outside the classroom (Dennis & O'Hair, 2010). It is imperative that instruction is

connected with students' lives in order for them to relate to it and gain meaning from what is presented to them. It cannot be abstract and must be authentic.

Kemker, Barron, and Harmes (2007) believed that authentic instruction relates to the real world that students experience outside of school. In authentic instruction, teachers must "move students beyond memorization of facts" by facilitating and developing classroom instruction that can connect to real world experiences of the students (p. 307). The study examined a Title I elementary school where at-risk students were engaged in authentic learning through technology. The findings revealed that even at-risk students could excel in an authentic learning environment where their needs were met. Teachers' instructional practices must draw connections with students' daily lives. This means that students and teachers have to work in concert to facilitate and understand content in the classroom.

Collaborative Learning

Collaboration is at the heart of authentic instruction, with students moving towards a student-centered setting where they take ownership of their learning. Ford (2010) believed that a collaborative student-centered classroom can exist if students' lives and culture are essential ingredients in that classroom. The collaborative process includes interaction where ideas are exchanged, and teachers and students must learn and understand one another.

Adams (2006) looked at social constructivist classrooms as environments where teachers and students work together to co-create learning, because authentic instructional

practices will only survive in a climate of trust where teachers and students can relate to each other in every activity that they complete. This will encourage students to participate more their own learning. Student engagement in the learning process is high when the classroom activities are geared towards their needs. Dennis and O'Hair (2010) proposed other authentic collaborative teaching strategies which involve three criteria: (a) construction of knowledge, (b) disciplined inquiry, and (c) learning that is of value beyond school. These strategies are a paradigm shift from traditional approaches of rote learning and memorization where students receive knowledge, but are not given an equal opportunity to share knowledge. Students must engage in learning experiences that move them from the classroom to their real-life experiences so that they can become citizens of the world. This can only happen if their instructional practices are relevant or authentic within their own social contexts and they are able to collaborate with their teachers.

Research by Scott (2011) demonstrated that students were more engaged when they had roles as "questioners" and "problem solvers" in the constructivist classroom. One example was the work of a classroom teacher who used a student-centered framework to facilitate classroom instruction where students used questions and prior knowledge to participate in the classroom. Interestingly, the teacher found that students were more engaged and could relate their backgrounds to their learning. This is also essential to this study because the role of students in the instructional practices in the fifth grade reading classroom will be brought to the forefront. Students must have significant roles in the classroom instruction to achieve. These roles as described by Scott (2011)

solidify the integration of students in the classroom as active participants. Students will not only be able to stretch their brains to think at the literal level of comprehension, but higher order thinking will also be explored.

In a study that examined authentic instruction through cooperative learning Ferguson-Patrick (2012) discussed the effectiveness of student involvement in the academic environment, even at the elementary level. Teachers and students must be in constant dialogue about instruction and assessment in order for success to be achieved in the classroom. Interestingly, the study's findings illustrated that in an inclusive classroom, instructional strategies such as cooperative learning can be successful. This is relevant to this current study, which will review instructional practices in fifth grade reading classrooms.

Social Context in Education

The social context of each individual in the classroom plays a pivotal role in learning outcomes. Bruner (as cited in Sert, 2008) defined learning as a process in which the students are actively involved in building on their prior knowledge or social experiences to connect new knowledge with their social life. This would mean that learning is not abstract, but is integrated into the lives of the students.

In a study on personalizing culturally relevant pedagogy, Seidl (2007) concluded that teachers must understand students' social contexts in order to meet their learning needs. Seidl (2007) examined how teachers can become integrated into the cultural context of their students, and found that teachers could not succeed if their pedagogy was

culturally irrelevant. Teachers must learn their students in order to teach them effectively. This would mean that teachers delve into the cultural experiences of students to facilitate teaching and learning in a collaborative classroom.

Senior (2010) advocated constructivist teaching where students and teachers collaborate within a mutual social context. In addition, Parsons (2012) stated "Teachers must educate an increasingly diverse student population to world-class levels. In 2009, for example, 21% of children ages 5-17 spoke a language other than English at home (up from 10% in 1980) and 19% lived in poverty" (p. 149). Thus, teachers and students need to develop a partnership where the learning environment is a reciprocal entity serving their academic and social needs.

Stears (2009) noted that learning in school is strongly connected to the interaction between the student's community and school. Many researchers believe that there must be a connection between the home and school in order for learning to be less difficult and more meaningful. For example, Ladson-Billings (1995) postulated that teaching has to be culturally relevant giving teachers' autonomy to explore student-teacher relationships, the curriculum, the school, and the community. If teachers planned instruction within the social context of their students' lives, they could see the development of relationships beyond the school. Not only would students be in tune with the learning process, but by extension, parents and community members could contribute to the school culture as well.

Schools have changed, and classrooms are now pluralistic and diverse. Students'

socioeconomic backgrounds and culture are central to their school's academic culture.

Casas (2006) noted the need for cultural diversity within the school where students can

see and value the inclusion of their social life in their learning. Students will have a

positive attitude towards learning and will feel welcomed in the classroom if they can see

themselves represented in the instructional practices. Students' cultures cannot be

celebrated only on the required days of the year when national recognition compels

educators to discuss their differences. It also cannot be used as an additive curriculum,

but must be an embedded part of the academic culture of the classroom that incorporates

various perspectives (Casas, 2006).

Oberg (2009) further elaborated by describing the diverse pluralistic and inclusive

composition of classrooms in our society where teachers are obligated to know their

students to teach them. No longer can teachers operate effectively in the confines of their

textbooks and achieve success; now it is necessary to explore the students first and apply

their books or learning to their lives. Students' communities would have to be explored to

make their learning authentic. In a study on cultural relevant pedagogy and experiential

learning, Colvin and Tobler (2013) asserted that students can only deepen their

understanding of themselves if their learning is connected to their communities.

In contrast, Irvine (2012) pointed out that one result of teachers' unawareness or

lack of students' culture in teaching and learning was that students who were placed in

special education classrooms were labeled as failures. In addition, students who were low

achievers were often labeled as special education students because teachers did not

connect with them socially. This is often the case when students did not get a chance to

connect with their learning. These students eventually failed their standardized tests

because they did not get the chance to explore learning based on their own experiential

backgrounds.

Mary Lou Kober, McMurrer, and Silva (2011) revealed success from Title I

programs in schools that had the school, community, parents, teachers, and students

working together, particularly in low-performing schools. They showed that students can

achieve if there are partnerships that garner parental involvement in their learning. It is

important to create high expectations, parental engagement, and a culture of connection

with the community. All stakeholders should take ownership of the learner and the

learning environment, thereby empowering students. Furthermore, as Wang and

Holcombe (2010) confirmed, students who took ownership of their learning in school had

better school outcomes and were more likely to attain higher grades.

Students' lives need to be at the center of instruction. In a study discussing

effective tools for a constructivist classroom, Powell and Kalina (2009) noted the value of

students "cognitive part of self" in which students are emotionally in tune with their

learning. This can ultimately lead to success for students as they connect on a

psychological level with their classrooms. The social context is essential to the learning

environment. As Potter (2013) concluded, an authentic context is the best place to

facilitate learning. This research study explored how teachers use students' backgrounds or their social contexts to inform their practices in the classroom.

Curriculum

In this study, the curriculum was examined to see how much it is aligned to state standards. The study also examined whether or not teaching and assessment of students are actually controlled by the state standards, or if this the just the teachers' perceptions. The types of teaching practices reflected the use of the curriculum. This gave insight into the impact of the state reading curriculum on the instructional and assessment practices within the fifth grade reading classrooms. The curriculum is the roadmap to the instructional practices facilitated within the classroom. The goal of instruction and assessment should not be limited to passing tests, but should focus on adding value to students' learning so that they can be prepared for the future. The literature reviewed also suggested that the curriculum offered to students of poverty often limited them in achieving academic success.

Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2011) revealed that the curriculum in low-income schools is often narrow with ineffective assessments of students, and only give students basic skills to take standardized tests and not to function effectively in society. If the instructional practices are determined by a goal of simply passing standardized tests, then the limitations will be significant. While the curriculum must comply with state laws, it should not limit the instructional practices of teachers.

Classroom instruction must address the needs of students and their backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (as cited in Utley, Obviator, & Bakken, 2011) advocated for "culturally responsive teaching" in order to understand the students' needs and teach them to survive in the society. The curriculum offered to students has to be integrated within the cultural environment of the students. This may result in educators interpreting the state standards to suit the needs of the students, thus creating a shift in their practices where standards do not drive the instructional and assessment practices, but rather the students' needs.

Camp and Oesterreich (2010) also asserted the need for a "re-centering" of education focusing on the students versus the curriculum, which only restricted students and did not give them the power to change their world. This is a significant part of the dialogue that can create change within urban classrooms where traditional teaching often dominates student-centered pedagogy. Teachers should no longer be tied to the scripted curriculum and standards because the dynamics of the classroom have changed so much (Camp & Oesterreich, 2010). Teachers must instead invest time in learning about their students and teaching to their needs with them being the catalyst in the planning and execution of a curriculum in an authentic learning environment.

The standardized curriculum must be reformed to meet the educational needs of our modern society. In a study on reforming the curriculum, Leggett and Ford (2013) focused on the value of intentional teaching in a curriculum designed to meet students' learning needs, thereby making their learning intentional. This refutes the use of the standardized curriculum and forces teachers to play a pivotal role in the construction of

the curriculum and the co-construction of knowledge in the classroom. Ultimately, the students will be active participants in the teaching learning process and will set their own goals for achievement.

Boyd (2011) noted that the focus should be on making students central to the curriculum design process, and not on the teachers' delivery of the content or standards. As he examined his own design of a curriculum, Boyd (2011) found that a student-centered approach was necessary in order to get the best results. The emphasis of any curriculum administered in the classroom would therefore target the students' learning outcomes versus the teachers' objectives. Teachers' use of the curriculum can change the lives of students positively. For example, Choi's study (2009) about the Freedom Writers described how the teacher sought to rewrite the curriculum by allowing the students to be a part of the process and creating a community of trust and respect. The success of that project is an illustration of how students can drive their own learning.

Minority students continue to be victims of a standardized curriculum that does not fulfill their academic or social needs. Often new ideas and curriculum implementation are hampered by infrastructural problems and a lack of resources to make them work. Gibson, Cartledge, and Keyes (2011) found that low-income students and urban schools were more likely to have lower expectations, less instruction, fewer personnel, and fewer resources. It is evident that students in urban schools are plagued with many issues that impact their tests scores. This is catastrophic for students who hunger to be successful in their schools. Not only are students affected adversely, but teachers have to face these

problems too, and this may result in failure for them as they try to implement curriculum changes in the classroom.

Sahin (2013) found that teachers struggled with implementation and facilitation of a new curriculum in elementary schools, as they could not create the instructional materials to meet the expectations. Sahin concluded that even though teachers were exposed to a more diverse curriculum for students, teachers tended to use the traditional methods because they found it easier to plan their instruction. Curriculum changes in any school setting have to be examined to take a deeper look at how all the resources and materials align with the curriculum for students. This is absolutely necessary if teachers and students are to benefit from a reconstructed curriculum. The current research study will look at professional development offerings for teachers and their implementation.

Another related problem is a lack of curriculum alignment to textbooks and standards in the schools. Many schools and teachers face a serious dilemma where textbooks do not match the standards that are typically in the written curriculum. This will inevitably lead to failure for teachers and students who have to prepare and take the tested curriculum, in other words, standardized tests. In an urban setting where there is already a lack of resources, a curriculum that is not aligned will only compound the issues faced in the schools.

Squires (2012) studied curriculum alignment and student achievement and found that textbooks and curriculum must be aligned to propel student achievement. He asserted the need for school districts to identify major gaps and provide the necessary materials to

address students' learning needs where textbooks fall short. Ultimately, teachers and students will have to become co-constructors of the curriculum within their own school setting. The social context of students and teachers will be a vital tool in responding to the curricular needs of students.

As Bester and Sholtz (2012) pointed out, increased teacher participation and collaboration are needed in aligning a curriculum to textbooks benefit students. The traditional approach of giving teachers all the resources and assignments to teach would be nullified. Similarly, Skerrett, and Bomer (2011) illustrated how teachers can utilize students' backgrounds as an integral part of the formal curriculum boosting students' literacy in schools. This can be achieved if teachers are willing to connect and accept the students' lives as an essential part of classroom curriculum and learning.

Assessments

Inherent in an authentic instructional learning environment are the products used to evaluate instruction. Wang, Beckett, and Young (2006) researched standardized assessment and the pros and cons of this in the classroom and concluded that traditional assessments have failed to meet the needs of students and also the expectations of the curriculum. While there is a place for standardized assessments, other types of assessments are necessary to reform schools. Teachers are now more inclined to teach to the tests. Wang et al. further contended that based on teachers' reliance and focus on standardized tests, their instructional practices are also standardized, thereby eliminating differentiated instruction for diverse students. Consequently, students fail their tests as

they grapple with trying to relate to an abstract curriculum. The instructional practices in the reading classrooms have to be examined to determine whether they are standardized or not.

Okoye-Johnson (2011), in a study on closing the achievement gap, pointed out the changing demographic diversity in schools and the value of creating a curriculum that encompasses students' cultural and academic needs. This will foster the use of authentic instructional practices in the classroom. The value of authentic instruction and assessment lies in its ability to work with a diverse group of students and foster differentiated instruction in the classroom. Authentic assessment practices give each student an opportunity to be tested fairly and give schools an opportunity to make learning decisions for individualized instruction rather than a generalized curriculum.

Gay (2010) suggested that minority students bring with them cultural and academic skills that they have mastered, so teachers should build on these skills through their curriculum and assessment practices. Culturally relevant pedagogy should be incorporated through programs and projects that are implemented in the classroom in order to meet and build on students' lives. Of course, every classroom presents challenges, with a wide variety of individual students and needs to meet during and after instruction. However, the value lies in making attempts to connect with students in the learning environment through the classroom activities, tests, and projects assigned. This relates to the study, as using students' backgrounds to plan instruction will be examined.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) suggested the use of multiple methods of assessments to gather evidence of students' learning rather than a single test. This will give a true picture of students' progress, not only to the teacher but most importantly the student. Banks (1996) implored educators to respect and value the diverse knowledge students bring to the classroom and to use this foundation to connect to student lives. Students should be allowed a menu of choices in the learning environment for instruction and assessments that can truly showcase who they are and how they understand learning.

As with the reconstruction of the curriculum, assessments must also be changed to suit the many reforms in the classrooms. The debate in society now focuses on how much children are learning in the classroom, because too often they fail to function in the real world. If the intent is to move away from a completely standardized curriculum, it would follow that some assessments will also be nonstandardized. Hui (2012) postulated that assessments should no longer be predicated on high stakes standardized tests, but should focus on real-life experiences.

The social context of most students is often removed from the context of the assessments. Bagnato and Macy (2010) argued that assessment should measure tangible knowledge and skills that students can use to function in society. If students are to be adequately prepared for society, then a connection has to be made between both home and school, as well as instruction and assessment. Similarly, Bunch, Shaw, and Geaney (2010) noted that authentic assessments, such as performance assessments versus

standardized tests, would have students engaged in real world tasks that will definitely prepare them for the 21st century.

Authentic assessments have been considered as tools to engage students in real-world experiences in the classroom environment. Shaukat (2010) postulated that authentic assessments change the curriculum, instruction, teachers, and students to an orientation in which rote learning and curriculum coverage are discouraged, and the classroom evolves into an engaging environment of learning. The impetus is on educators to discover the best tools to get students to learn. Because students continue to fail standardized tests and cannot seem to apply them to their everyday life, it would be prudent to use other assessments, such as authentic assessments, to help them adapt to society.

In this research study, I was not opposed to standardized tests, but believed that other types of assessments were necessary to help students to learn and achieve. Fenwick (2012) contended that performance assessments would give students a variety of assessments to demonstrate mastery of standards in the curriculum. All students, irrespective of their backgrounds, would be supported in the learning environment. Student outcomes must be credible and reliable, must reflect the students' abilities, and must not be limited to a mundane paper-and-pencil test, but be applicable to their real-life experiences.

The home also plays a crucial role in the assessment process, as not only students and teachers, but also parents must be invested in the process of evaluation. Lopez (2011)

found that teachers' incorporation of resources from the homes and communities of students are invaluable in helping students perform at the highest level. The study examined teachers' behaviors in an urban school district with a high Hispanic population. It detailed the success of non-Hispanic students, whose achievement was predicated on teachers understanding the students, and incorporating students' ideas and cultures into the classroom. Students' backgrounds are relevant to classroom practices, which ultimately leads to achievement on standardized tests. While schools will likely continue to use standardized tests as a measuring stick, the focus is on how students can be prepared to pass these tests and still add value to learning beyond the classroom.

Deslandes and Rivard (2013) discussed the value of having parents understand students' assessment to support learning at home. The study described how both well-educated parents and low-income parents were interested in their children's education and found that parents wanted to be more involved in monitoring their children's progress. This is relevant to this research study because understanding students' backgrounds is central to the authentic instructional practices used in a classroom. It would therefore mean that knowledge of parents and their input is necessary.

Because students' backgrounds have an impact in the classroom, it makes sense to have parents involved in the learning process. This will further maximize learning opportunities and outcomes for students propelling student achievement. Wixson and Valencia (2011) believed that students' assessment should reflect their home environment, especially in terms of their language, literacy, and diversity. Students come

into the school environment from various experiential backgrounds, so it is critical that learning and assessment take into account the differences among students. This will make learning and assessment valid for students.

Assessments themselves should also enhance the quality of learning for the learner. Students must play an integral role on the dialogue about what works and what does not through the assessment process in the classroom. This can only happen if students receive feedback that is analyzed and applied to further learning. Gavriel (2013) pointed out that assessment for learning requires feedback where learners are able to share their understanding of their learning outcomes. The study found that diverse assessments for learning would create self-directed learners. In a student-centered classroom, students must have the autonomy to discuss their own learning, particularly their progress, as they examine the assessments used. Not only would feedback benefit learners but also teachers who not only check students' progress but also their own effectiveness. Young and Kim (2010) also postulated a strategy to connect with students through conversations and dialogue with them to probe and redirect their ideas toward the learning goal and assessments. They suggested that students need to create their own assessment goals to improve learning and instruction with formative assessments. For this study, it was necessary to examine the assessment tools used in the reading classroom and how students were involved in the process.

Razek and Awad (2011) found that feedback was essential to address curriculum components and instructional methods used by teachers. Instructional practices in the

classroom can only change when a variety of assessments are used to evaluate teaching. The results from standardized tests alone send a message that teachers, students, and the instructional methods are failing. However, given other methods of assessments, students and teachers may be more successful. Research by Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Lee (2011) found that students valued feedback as a form of guidance, and student-tutor dialogue made the learning experience better for all involved. This offered the opportunity for self-reflection and critical thinking, rather than simply being told they got an answer wrong on a test.

Students also experience highly intellectual and engaging learning outcomes in a rigorous classroom environment with a variety of assessments. This is not possible in a standardized classroom driven by summative standardized tests and quizzes. As Frey and Schmitt (2007) noted, the traditional assessments of paper-and-pencil tests do not impact students in domains that require higher-order thinking and learning. Kirikkaya and Vurkaya (2011) stated that alternative assessments are valuable for promoting higher thinking skills as students learn to explore, problem solve, make decisions, and connect with real world interaction. They found that students performed at a higher level when multiple forms of assessments were used to measure their learning. This relates to the research where authentic instruction and assessment would be explored. Too often, though, teachers are more inclined to create tasks and assessments that are easy to evaluate, and these are likely standardized. While these may provide quick results, they do not help students, but instead harm them as learning continues to be in the literal

domains. McNeill, Gosper, and Xu (2012) shared the value of assessment choices in targeting higher order thinking tasks for students because students need to be challenged in the classroom. This inclusion of more rigorous tasks for students must be intentional in getting students to think at a critical level.

Thomas (2012) stressed the need for teachers to be skillful and educated about assessment strategies to expose students to a variety of tasks in the classroom. While teachers believed that alternative assessments were needed, they often felt pressured by standardized tests, and were more inclined to teach to the tests rather than invest in student-centered authentic assessments. This research focuses on authentic assessments and achievement in fifth grade reading so it makes sense to look at teachers' assessment practices. If teachers are willing to connect with students and their academic needs, then they will also have to connect with diverse ways to assess their different needs. Then, students will get a chance to exhibit authentic learning and success.

Lawson and Lawson (2013) described students with high levels of cognitive engagement as products of an authentic learning environment. If this is the case, students would be empowered because learning would be about them and would result in true success. Student achievement should be at the core of the educational environment whether students are disadvantaged or not. Even though research has shown so many failing urban schools, there are those urban schools that succeed. It is crucial that students' cultural needs are met to propel academic achievement.

This review of the literature provided insight into authentic instructional practices, assessment methods, and the theoretical framework of social constructivism that this study will employ. It has also pointed out strategies that can be used within the authentic learning environment. During the investigation of teacher's instructional practices, several factors were examined including the social context, curriculum, and its alignment with the real-life experiences of students, authentic assignments, and assessments.

Implications

The current study helped to strengthen student achievement, influence teacher instruction, and evaluate the overall program. The study explored several components of the classroom, such as assessment, curriculum, and instruction. This exploration gave deeper insight into classroom practices, and revealed which areas need to be addressed in order to improve fifth grade education within the district.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' instructional practices and how they influence students' learning. The data collected led to a project study to be facilitated in a professional development workshop (see Appendix A), focusing on the development of a more culturally-responsive, standards-based reading curriculum for fifth graders, and techniques that would enhance teachers' abilities to deliver more authentic instructional practices in their classrooms. The potential project would promote positive social change because it would be used to improve student achievement significantly at the fifth grade level, thereby propelling the performance index score of the school.

Summary

Fifth grade students' low performance on standardized reading tests in two urban elementary charter schools was discussed in Section 1. The focus of this study was to examine the instructional practices in both schools in order to identify what works and what does not to help improve the practices in these low-performing schools. Research at the local and national levels revealed a lack of achievement among fifth grade students, particularly in high-poverty urban schools. The literature review gave insight into instructional practices and their relevance to students from high poverty environments. It also pointed out the success of students within the same demography where effective instructional practices were implemented. The guiding research question sought to examine the instructional practices and the alignment to school and state standards.

Section 2 of this research study focuses on the methodology, including the research design, the setting and participants of the study, data collection, data analysis, and findings. In addition, this section explains the role of the research and the limitations of the study. Finally, this section explores the implications for the project study based on the findings.

Section 2: Methodology

Introduction

The problem at two local urban charter schools is that fifth grade students are not progressing. The purpose of this study was to identify curricular practices that influence student academic achievement at the fifth grade level in an urban setting, such as how teachers draw connections between their instructional practices and students' backgrounds to improve their academic achievement.

It was necessary to identify whether or not there is poor instruction that can be improved, and if there is good instruction, why it is not resulting in progress. To accomplish this, the following research question guided this study: What instructional practices are used in the fifth grade classrooms, and how do these practices align with the school's curriculum and connect with students' backgrounds? In essence, the objective of this study was to learn about the existing instructional practices within the schools. To assess this, the following subquestions were asked:

- How does the school's curriculum align with state standards?

- What are teachers' perceptions on the best instructional practices in delivering curriculum?

- How do teachers decide on strategies that they would use to teach students?

- In what ways do teachers plan their lessons using students' backgrounds to inform their practices in the classroom?

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

This research was a qualitative case study investigating the instructional practices used to prepare fifth grade students for the Ohio Achievement tests. The methodology was a qualitative research design. Merriam (2009) defined qualitative research as studying people's interpretation of their experiences, construction of their worlds and what this means to their lives. Merriam (2009) further stated qualitative researchers must be purposeful in understanding and making meaning of people's lives in order to describe how people interpret what they experience. The qualitative research design enabled me to investigate how teachers executed instructional practices and understand their reasoning behind the selected practices in the fifth grade classroom.

A case study was selected because it is a common method used to study a small group of people, in this case, fifth grade reading teachers. Because case studies give credence to exploring a small group, this was the best approach for this research study (Merriam, 2009). In addition, case studies may focus on a group of people sharing their experiences and activities within the group (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the unit to be studied was a group of fifth grade reading teachers who described the instructional strategies used in their classrooms.

Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) noted that when conducting a case study, "no one qualitative method is used. Instead, multiple techniques including interviews, observations, and the examination of documents and artifacts are employed" (p. 269). For this research, a multiple form of data collection through interviews and documents was

used. The interviews were important because they provided information for the study that was not observed, and they corroborated the other documents I reviewed. It also gave the participants an opportunity to express their own views on the topic researched, giving an in-depth and authentic perspective of the study.

In addition to conducting interviews, I also collected and analyzed additional documents. Qualitative researchers can use documents relevant to the research study such as public and personal documents and other artifacts to understand the findings, (Merriam, 2009). I analyzed the documents for more information in addition to what was garnered from the interviews. These included lesson plans, curriculum maps, sample work, and tests scores. These documents helped to inform data that were collected during the interviews.

Some might argue that a qualitative research method is too limited in its scope. Because this research looked at fifth grade teachers' instructional practices in their classrooms and how they affected student achievement, a qualitative case study was the best approach for understanding teaching practices. Qualitative research gave me an opportunity to learn more about the fifth grade teachers' instructional practices through exploration (Creswell, 2009).

Participants

Settings

The setting of the study was two urban elementary charter schools located in counties in southwestern Ohio. The Ohio Poverty Report (2011) showed that 12.7% of people were living below poverty in one county, and 15.5% in the other county. However, in both of the schools studied, 100% of the students qualified for the federal free and reduced lunch program according to the school district's report of the local socioeconomic status.

At the time of the study, there were 220 students enrolled in Elementary School A with a diverse population of 65.3% African Americans, 25% Hispanics, and 9.8% White students. The target population was the fifth grade students, which consisted of 40 students. The fifth grade students at School A had the worst scores in standardized tests among all grades at the schools studied. The school has had a performance index score of 85% on the state's standardized tests since 2009 with a continuous improvement status, which is good.

Elementary School B had 100 fifth graders, and was also in an urban setting in another county in southwestern Ohio. School B was much less diverse, with a student population that is 99% African American, and 1% White. This school has had an 87% performance index score on the state's annual exams since 2009 and has maintained a status of continuous improvement overall. However, the fifth grade students have failed

every year and have never met the state average of 75%. Like their counterparts in School A, the fifth grade students have failed all three subject areas on standardized tests.

There were six participants interviewed in this study: two reading teachers from School A, two reading teachers from School B, and one principal from each school. Purposeful sampling was employed to select the participants. Merriam (2009) noted that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 77). Therefore, two core reading teachers, two Title I reading teachers, and two principals comprised the sample participants. The sample size remained small to garner in-depth information from each participant. I submitted a request for permission to gain access to the participants from the superintendent's office and the building principals. All participants involved in the study signed consent forms.

Protection of Participants

Several measures were taken to protect the rights of participants in this study. These included consent forms for principals and teachers, which ensured confidentiality and protection from harm (see Appendices B and C), approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University (approval #06-11-13-0194598, expired June 10, 2014), and a letter of cooperation from the district's governance body through the superintendent's office (see Appendix D).

Upon approval from Walden IRB, I sent letters of invitation to the district superintendent (see Appendix E) and school principals (see Appendix F). After receiving an affirmative response from the principals, I asked them to create a list of potential

participants in their schools. After receiving this list, I sent an email inviting potential participants to a meeting (see Appendix G). They were informed that this was not a recruitment meeting, but an opportunity to introduce the study to them. All participants were also informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, and they could revoke their participation at any time with no consequence. They all agreed to this and volunteered for the study.

All interviews were conducted at a time, date, and comfortable location such as boardrooms, offices, and classrooms determined by the participants. The Walden IRB reviewed and approved all interview questions to ensure that they were appropriate and relevant to the research study. Because ensuring the physical and emotional safety of each participant was a priority, the IRB also confirmed that the questions presented no emotional stress or could cause adverse reactions for the participants. Participants were informed that their participation in this study and all responses would be kept strictly confidential, and no demographic information was collected that could identify participants

Role of the Researcher

I identified the sites of the study as schools where fifth grade students were failing standardized reading tests. I also identified the study participants in the schools as teachers who have worked with fifth grade students, and thus are familiar with standards and instructional strategies for teaching fifth grade reading. After IRB approval, I conducted interviews with the participants,

reviewed documents, and collected data. I transcribed the recorded interviews and analyzed these data for themes that were triangulated with the documents reviewed such as lesson plans, short cycle test data, Ohio Achievement test data, and curriculum maps. After completing the study, I presented the results to the fifth grade teachers, curriculum specialists, and principals.

Although I work for the school district where the research was conducted, I was a participant-observer when working with the teachers to collect the document data in their classrooms. During the one-on-one interviews, I had a different role as an inquirer who was not responsible for the training, implementation, or evaluation of the classroom teachers' instructional practices. My current position requires that I work with all schools in developing programs for students and collaborating with teachers on best practices in compliance with the Race to the Top Initiative and the Ohio Resident Educator Program.

Data Collection

The qualitative case study research employed two sources of data: interviews and documents. Data were collected over a 6-week period. Data collection included interviews with the four fifth grade reading teachers, interviews with the two principals, and documentation in the form of fifth grade curriculum maps, lesson plans, short cycle test data, and Ohio Achievement test scores.

Interviews were conducted in accordance with predetermined interview protocol (see Appendix H), and semistructured questions were used based on the research questions postulated (see Appendix I). The semistructured interview format was selected

because it enabled me to delve deeper into the teachers' perspectives of their instructional practices used in the classroom. Semistructured interview questions give latitude to probes so that questions can be clarified and deeper descriptions can emerge (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

These one-on-one interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and were scheduled and conducted over a 6-week period. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. These audiotapes and transcriptions were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office, and electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer. I will be responsible for destroying all data 5 years after the completion of the study.

Document data were also collected for analysis. Documents such as the curriculum maps, lesson plans, short cycle test data, and Ohio Achievement test scores were examined to increase the trustworthiness of the research. These documents were studied to determine to what extent participants intentionally plan to use authentic instructional practices when teaching, and to validate or disprove data collected from the interviews. Information was needed on how the schools' curriculum helped to encourage or discourage authentic instructional practices. Lesson plans were analyzed to determine how teachers planned their lessons based on students' backgrounds.

Ethical Concerns

Creswell (2012) cited the value of "identifying gatekeepers who can provide access to the site and participants for the study" (p. 477). Taking this into consideration, I first contacted the superintendent for a list of failing schools and gained permission to

access participants for my research. Then, I contacted the principals at the suggested schools for a list of fifth grade teachers who I contacted to attend a general meeting to share my research with them. After informing participants of protections from harm and ensuring them of confidentiality, the principals and teachers were interviewed about their instructional practices, and school documents were examined.

The major ethical issue that may have come to the fore was that of researcher bias based on my relationship with the participants in the study. I have served as a building principal in the school district for the past 7 years. I have also facilitated training for teachers in the district. However, I have had no relationship with the teachers involved in the study, because they are assigned to a different grade level and school. In my current professional role, I work as a district director of student services and have minimal contact with the participants. It must be noted that I have not observed the participants in the past in the fifth grade reading classroom.

To address the issues of personal assumptions and bias, it was necessary to include reflections and member checks. The goal was to ensure credibility of the findings. I spent time with each participant after data collection and interpretation clarifying research data to check for accuracy. Participants were able to review interview transcripts and make changes if needed. There were no changes requested or made.

It was imperative that I carried out the research ethically through naturalistic observation and with no embellishment for it to be considered reliable. It was important

to respect the people involved in the research and cause no harm to them by ensuring their privacy and dignity.

Instrumentation

Individual interviews were determined to be the best way to answer the research questions, with additional documents supplementing the information and perceptions in the interviews. There were six participants in this research case study. Four reading teachers and two principals answered semistructured interview questions in response to the following research question: What instructional practices are used in the fifth grade classrooms, and how do these practices align with the school's curriculum and standards?

I created the interview questions based on the research questions and relevant literature. The interviews for the four reading teachers consisted of 19 questions, and the principals' interviews consisted of 10 questions. The interviews were used to gain insight from fifth grade reading teachers and principals about instructional practices used in fifth grade classrooms and how they aligned with the school's curriculum and standards.

The National Center for Post-Secondary Improvement (2003) has established interview protocols which were used as a guide in developing interview protocols for this study. The protocol allowed for consistency in garnering information from the participants. I created a matrix showing the relationships between the subquestions in the study and the questions asked of the participants. This enabled the triangulation process as I was able to compare the interview transcripts matrix with documents such as lesson plans and tests scores to establish credibility of the findings.

Qualitative studies usually include quotes from participants in the research findings because it is important to accurately represent the people and situations that are part of the study (Lodico et al., 2010). To protect anonymity and ensure confidentiality, interview participants were identified as Principal at School A (PA), Principal at School B (PB), Teacher 1 at School A (A1), Teacher 2 at School A (A2), Teacher 1 at School B (B1), and Teacher 2 at School B (B2).

The participants were encouraged to select the best date and time for the interview and a location where they felt most comfortable and would be assured of their privacy. Locations for interviews included places such as school offices, boardrooms, and classrooms. Table 2 below displays the information on the date, time, and location of each participant's interview.

Table 2

Table Showing Participant's Interview Schedule

Participant	Date	Time	Duration	Location
PA	8/6/2013	10:45am	33 minutes	Office
PB	7/18/2013	9:15am	35 minutes	Office
A1	8/6/2013	9:14am	37 minutes	Classroom
A2	8/5/2013	11:00am	32 minutes	Boardroom
B1	7/22/2013	10:15am	40 minutes	Boardroom
B2	8/5/2013	9:51am	34 minutes	Boardroom

Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) stated "the much preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p. 171). Thus, data analysis for this

study began during the data collection process. The data set for analysis included: (a)

interviews with four fifth grade reading teachers; (b) interviews with two principals; and

(c) documents such as curriculum maps, lesson plans, short cycle test data, and Ohio

Achievement test scores from the two elementary schools.

Because of data collected from two groups of teachers from two different schools

at the same grade level, the constant comparison of data strategy was selected to analyze

the data. This strategy is defined as "generating and connecting categories by comparing

incidents in the data and categories" (Creswell, 2009, P. 434). Merriam (2009) found that

the constant comparison strategy allows the researcher to compare data to determine

similarities and differences, and encourages the researcher to look for similarities and

differences in the perceptions of the research participants.

After completing the interviews, I uploaded them to the Cogi Transcription

program which transcribed all interviews within a 48-hour period. I then completed a

verbatim transcription of all audio-recorded interviews. Next, I conducted a line-by-line

analysis of the transcripts to identify and refine codes, using a constant comparative

strategy to form categories, which was then grouped into themes in a manual color-coded

open coding format.

I used axial coding to examine the patterns in which variables are grouped by

properties, using field notes and documentation to compare diverse or similar evidence.

Then, I made direct interpretations to see interrelationships between groups from both

schools identifying commonalities and differences and cross referenced the findings from

different interviews. Finally, I used code mapping or naturalistic generalizations made

from data collected from both schools to identify and link themes. This gave insight into

factors that caused the changes, or depending on data, factors that are needed for change

to occur. I ensured that the themes were supported in verbatim responses from the

interviews that used participants' direct quotes to support each theme.

I examined additional documents to triangulate the findings from interviews.

Documents such as curriculum maps and lesson plans from the two elementary schools

were analyzed as documentary artifacts used to facilitate instructional strategies used in

the fifth grade reading classroom. I also examined short cycle test data and Ohio

Achievement test scores that were used to measure students' progress based on the

instructional practices employed. All documents were coded and linked to themes that

emerged from the interviews. I ensured that documents were matched to relevant themes

to triangulate the data collected.

Lodico et al. (2010) believed that qualitative research should be written as a

narrative. Thus, the research findings in this paper are written in a detailed, narrative,

thematic design, and include interpretations of the data. The results from this study were

shared with the superintendent and principals of the two schools, and were used to create

a professional development workshop.

Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify curricular practices that

influenced student academic achievement at the fifth grade level in an urban setting, such

as how teachers draw connections between their instructional practices and students' backgrounds to improve the academic achievement of fifth grade students. Data were analyzed from interviews with four fifth grade reading teachers, interviews with two principals, and documentation from curriculum maps, lesson plans, short cycle test data, and Ohio Achievement test scores using open coding and a constant comparison of data strategy.

The main research question was: What instructional practices are used in the fifth grade classrooms, and how do these practices align with the school's curriculum and connect students' backgrounds? Seven themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) teachers' knowledge of curriculum (b) instructional practices, (c) professional development offering for reading teachers, (d) collaborative decision-making, (e) managing resources, (f) ongoing teacher evaluations, and (g) planning instruction not based on students' backgrounds. These themes will be discussed as they emerged from each sub-question. Hence, the research findings will be presented below based on responses to the sub-questions:

- How does the school's the curriculum align with state standards?
- What are teachers' perceptions on the best instructional practices in delivering curriculum?
- How do teachers decide on strategies that they would use to teach students?
- In what ways do teachers plan their lessons using students' backgrounds to inform their practices in the classroom?

The findings from the data collected will be reviewed by presenting the research sub-question and then the themes that emerged from the responses to those questions.

Subquestion 1: How Does the School's Curriculum Align With State Standards?

Teachers' knowledge of curriculum. One major theme that emerged from the data analysis was how curriculum aligns with state standards. A common response from the teachers was that the fifth grade reading curriculum was aligned to the Ohio Academic Content Standards. All four reading teachers identified the curriculum map as the guide used to teach the state standards in the fifth grade reading classroom. Teachers A1 and B1 shared that their schools have a curriculum map that is aligned to the state standards. Teacher B1 stated "We have a district-wide curriculum map that is aligned with the state standards." Teacher A2 stated the following:

> Our curriculum map is aligned to the state standards and whatever indicator or whatever content statement that I'm working on, I just make sure that the stories or the, the lessons or the activities that go along with the standards match up to that curriculum map.

Likewise, the principals both said that the curriculum map provided by the district is used by fifth grade reading teachers in delivering state standards. Principal PB stated,

> Our map is based on about a 4- to 6-week month where standards are already mapped out for teachers, and what they are able to do is break down their reading program to help those standards that are already within that curriculum. And I think it's also a great way that we can do some cross-curriculum, because our

reading map is also tied into our social studies maps, so we're able to cross-

curricular their reading and social studies.

Principal PA also shared that while it is not a requirement of the state, but rather a

district-driven initiative, "They do have a curriculum map and there are things on the

ODE website that the state does provide that we expect for teachers to be able to use in

order to supplement the map." PA also shared that she was not directly involved in the

process, but from her school "A third grade reading teacher and the lead teacher for third

through sixth grade participated in the curriculum alignment process." On the other hand,

principal PB shared,

> I used to work on the curriculum team to help put the maps together a couple of
>
> years ago and we, as a group of teachers, just met and looked at those programs or
>
> different grade levels, and just came up with, based on the state assessment what
>
> standards we needed to have our students meet.

A review of the curriculum map (see Appendix J) detailed the state standards in

units with specific months assigned as a pacing guide to cover the standards.

Of note, only two participants in this research study were directly involved in the

curriculum alignment process. Both PA and PB shared that only two teachers from each

school participated in the curriculum alignment process. While all of the participants

were aware of and used the curriculum map, they had differing views on the alignment of

their reading programs to the state standards and the curriculum map. A review of the

fifth grade reading textbooks found a phonics-based program which integrated comprehension, fluency, and writing. Teacher B2 shared,

> As the teacher or the support, we're not really familiar with the actual correlation between the state standards and the reading program. We just entrust in our administration of making sure that we have the necessary materials that we need to teach.

PA shared that she "allowed my teachers leverage to use novels" to supplement the reading program. Teacher A2 explained how limiting the textbooks were in the fifth grade reading classroom,

> The textbook they were using in the fifth grade I thought was very low for fifth grade. It wasn't a challenge at all, the stories were basically boring. They weren't relating to the kids, and I don't think the textbook was relating to the fifth grade, so I would try to bring in a lot of novels, because the textbook, I didn't think was very appropriate.

Even though the textbooks did not align to the standards outlined in the curriculum, the teachers shared strategies that they used to teach to the standards. Teacher B1 shared "We will ensure that students know and understand what the standard is by breaking down the standard into student-friendly language." Teacher A2 said "I did a lot of hands-on, which brought out writing." Teacher A1 and teacher B2 explained using phonics to get students to learn. They used formative assessments to evaluate students' mastery of the state standards. For example, teacher A1 used "formative-type

assessments, more paper pencil type things," and teacher A1 used "formative assessments all throughout, the class day, week observation, whether it's exit slips, or a warm-up from the previous day's lesson."

In summary, all six participants indicated that the curriculum map was aligned to the state standards. My review of the curriculum map document revealed that although the curriculum map gave details of state standards, there was no evidence of alignment of the fifth grade reading program materials to the state standards. Most of the teachers suggested that they did not believe that their reading program was aligned to the map because they were not integrally involved in the process. While the principals allowed the use of other materials to meet the standards, some teachers felt disengaged from the curriculum alignment process. However, the teachers found strategies to teach and measure students' mastery of the standards outlined in the curriculum map. The onus was then on teachers to align their textbook materials to standards.

Subquestion 2: What Are Teacher's Perceptions on the Best Instructional Practices in Delivering Curriculum?

Two themes that emerged from the data analysis were related to instructional practices and professional development offering for reading teachers. The participants described some of the best instructional practices they believed they use to deliver the reading curriculum and their impact on standardized tests. These included discussion, direct instruction, small group instruction, choral reading, and cross-curricular instruction.

Instructional practices. Teacher B1 explained the classroom practice of having

direct instruction, and "then allowing some small group time for students to work

together, teach one another, learn from one another" has been very effective in the fifth

grade reading classroom. While teacher B1 believed these practices were effective in the

classroom, the students "struggled on standardized tests because of a lack of stamina" to

complete their tests. Another teacher B2 used choral reading with the students, which is

the practice of "where they read together, like a choir, like a class." Teacher B2 used this

because "the lack of fluency is pretty much what I have found the problem with fifth

graders, at this level. They're just not fluent enough in their reading to really comprehend

the questions." This was how teacher B2 attributed fifth grade students failing their

reading tests,

> The test scores are telling us exactly what, in my opinion; I feel that they're low.
>
> They're very low, because we assume, because they're in the fifth grade they're
>
> able to successfully take the test and pass it, but the results are showing that this is
>
> not the case. Our students are not reading fluently. They are basically, some of the
>
> fifth graders that I had tested individually as far as their fluency and things like
>
> that, they're reading on the first, second grade level so they're not passing the test
>
> and the fluency in my opinion, and it was just what we have seen through the data
>
> is the problem.
>
> Teacher A1 used a cross-curricular approach to teach the students. "I like to use

stories that are introducing them to new peoples and new cultures in different subjects."

Teacher A1 shared that these practices are effective in the classroom, but not on the standardized tests. Teacher A1 also noted that the fifth grade students "lack confidence" and said,

> I feel like in 5th grade, our scores are always just one of the lowest. I see the students coming from 4th grade where they passed that reading in OAA. They've done well, they are doing well in class, and they fail that test, and they get to 6th grade and they are on it again.

Teacher A2 shared that the biggest challenge was getting students to be interested in the test since they do several standardized tests for the year. Teacher A2 said "I think they want to blow it off, it's another test. You know, you test and test and test and test."

Principal PA also shared that "Direct instruction is the most common practice used in that classroom" at the school. Both Schools A and B had a Title I program which allowed for some co-teaching. Principal PB stated that "Differentiated instruction also included the Title 1 reading teacher during those different reading times." Both principals believed that they saw growth on benchmark standardized tests throughout the year, but not enough to succeed on the Ohio Achievement reading test. Principal PA stated "I think we saw some growth, especially on the Terra Nova tests on fifth grade reading," even though these students did not pass the Ohio Achievement Tests. Principal PB also explained,

I think our test results do reflect the work what we try to do here. You know you

have students that do meet those standards and it is shown on the state

standardized test. And you have those that do not meet them.

Short cycle tests are benchmark tests administered by the schools internally (see

Appendix K), and the Ohio Achievement tests are state standardized tests (see Appendix

L). Scores on both of these tests revealed that fifth grade students did not meet the

benchmarks for reading on standardized tests.

Documentation of the benchmark short cycle tests for fifth grade reading revealed

that the fifth grade students only met four out of 15 standards at School A. Only 48% of

these fifth grade students passed the Ohio Achievement Reading Test. Similarly in

School B, documentation of the benchmark short cycle tests for fifth grade reading

revealed that the fifth grade students met only three out of 15 standards on the school's

short cycle tests. Likewise, only 50% of students passed the Ohio Achievement Reading

Test.

In summary, teachers and principals considered some of their best instructional

practices to be direct instruction, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction through small

groups and cross-curricular planning. Even though principals and teachers indicated

students' growth on standardized tests validated the effectiveness of instructional

practices, it is evident that this was very minimal and the students had little practice.

Some teachers expressed that students lacked stamina and confidence, and took too many

standardized tests throughout the year. The formative assessments described by participants were also standardized.

The archival data, short cycle tests, and Ohio Achievement test results revealed that most of the fifth grade students in both schools were failing fifth grade reading irrespective of the instructional practices and formative assessments used in the classrooms. There was no evidence that teachers intentionally planned to use authentic instructional practices when teaching because the focus was strictly on standardized tests and direct instruction.

Professional development offering for reading teachers. A common theme that emerged when teachers discussed their perceptions of the best instructional practices used in delivering the reading curriculum was professional development. A common response from all teachers was that there were a lot of professional development offerings within the schools. However, they all echoed the sentiment that the professional development focused on general instruction and not specifically on fifth grade reading. As teacher A1 stated,

> Basically, I mean we do some, you know, overall district-wide, best practice type thing, just as a general instruction and we have the opportunity to choose and go to professional development of our choosing. But other than that, there isn't a whole lot that's just geared towards, you know, fifth grade reading teaching.

Teacher B2 said "I have not been to any professional developments for the fifth grade reading at all, so at this time, I must say there's been none." While the teachers

shared professional development focused on differentiated instruction, phonics, and testing strategies, it was a general consensus that there was a need for professional development that focused on fifth grade reading. Teacher A1 said,

> I feel like we need to be masters of our subject area that we're teaching. And I think that if I'm the reading teacher then I need to be a master of reading. And that needs to be where I'm at, so any strategies or anything that you can learn, I can only imagine it would help.

On the other hand, the principals believed that they offered professional development to help the fifth grade reading teachers. Principal PA said "We spend a lot of time with phonics. Our students, historically, have been low readers. We also use Dibels to monitor the fluency of their reading." Principal PB also noted "I think our school provides various professional development opportunities, for example, Accelerated Reader."

Both principals believed that the success of the professional development depended solely on the individual teacher. Principal PA said that "some teachers are more willing to learn than others," and Principal PB said, "I think it's based on the individual." Principal PA shared that there was not a system in place to generate feedback, but administrators monitored professional development through observations and data. Principal PB reported that the school generated feedback through Survey Monkey, and it was typically a "50/50 turnaround." Both principals said that they had encountered

resistance from teachers who did not want to execute practices from professional development.

In summary, both teachers and principals explained that there were many professional development opportunities offered within the schools. However, it is clear that while the fifth grade reading teachers believed that there should be offerings focused specifically on fifth grade reading, the principals did not necessarily share this view. The opinions on professional development offerings discussed by the principals were similar to those of the teachers. There was no professional development geared solely to fifth grade reading teachers. In addition, the need to generate feedback and monitor practices to evaluate their effectiveness came to the fore as both principals had encountered resistance from teachers.

Subquestion 3: How Do Teachers Decide on Strategies They Would Use to Teach Students?

Three themes that emerged from the data analysis were: (a) collaborative decision-making, (b) managing resources, and (c) ongoing teacher evaluations. Collaboration was the main strategy used in making decisions on strategies that teachers used in their classrooms.

Collaborative decision-making. All four teachers interviewed shared that they worked together in teams to plan instruction for students. Teacher B1 shared:

We certainly collaborate with each other. We had vertical teaming to begin off the school year where we met with each other. As the reading teacher, I would meet

with the 4th grade and 6th grade reading teacher and we would just discuss

amongst one another the foundations that we really needed the students to have

before they exit to the next grade. It was great.

Not only were teachers collaborating vertically but also cross-curricular planning

was a part of team planning. As teacher A2 shared:

We definitely collaborate with our peers. When I was just the only one, you

know it was just, we had one math; one reading, one social studies and science in

our school but you still collaborate. You know, I can ask the science teacher, well,

how would you maybe teach this reading? They could do reading in the science

and social studies when they're teaching reading and vice versa.

All teachers believed that collaboration worked for them. Teacher TB2 stated

"Yes, I believe it is working because at this point, it's necessary for everyone to work

together to get our students, you know, where they need to be. There's no Superman." Of

collaboration, teacher A1 also noted that it was "absolutely great."

Both principals discussed the value of collaboration within their respective

schools. Principal PB said "They do collaboration when they meet during their cluster

meetings," and Principal PA noted that "Teachers have common planning time for

collaboration with their grade level team." The teachers created unit plans and common

assessments through their collaborative meetings.

The lesson plan documents I reviewed (see Appendix M) revealed that

collaboration is a strategy used by the teachers within the schools. The lesson plans

showed co-teaching with Title I reading teachers and also cross-curricular teaching practices. The lesson plans used terminology such as "co-teaching" and "cross curricular." The documents also confirmed instructional practices and implementation of professional development in the schools described by the teachers and principals.

In summary, teachers and principals indicated that collaboration was the main strategy used to choose teaching strategies. While the principals provided common planning time for teachers to collaborate, the teachers had to provide lesson plans and meeting agendas to document their collaborative efforts. Collaboration seems to be one of the most effective strategies that had worked for both schools thus far.

Managing resources. The four teachers in the study expressed varying viewpoints on the resources available to improve instruction in their classrooms. According to teacher B1, there were many "technology resources and websites that the students used this year to help prepare them for standardized testing" and free "online modules" for teachers to use to help with their practices. Likewise, teacher B2 agreed and said "We have quite a few resources. I think the problem is that they're just not used effectively or consistently." Teacher B2 further expressed that even with Dibels and Title I, the school is beleaguered with many teacher absences. Teacher B2 said, "Many teachers call off and so we end up in classrooms as substitute teachers." As a consequence, B2 believed that "Unfortunately with our Title 1 here, it hasn't been as successful."

On the other hand, teacher A1 shared that while they lack material resources such as books and supplies at the school, they do have people resources. Teacher A1 said, "We have our curriculum coordinator, we have student service people, our principal, I believe other teachers are valuable resources, our Title I, and special education." In the same way, teacher A2 expressed that teachers relied on the human resources such as the "principal who has books in her office," but noted, "I buy a lot myself, you know, I buy a lot, my things, books, or whatever, I get online a lot."

Similarly, principals expressed differing perspectives on the resources available to improve teachers' instruction. Principal PA expressed a reliance on human resources and thought the school should be "using stronger teachers or teachers who are able to target weak areas, such as Title 1, special education, and also offering professional development in outside resources." Principal PB discussed the use of technology resources at their school such as websites, achievement series, short cycle assessments, and the Title I teachers to support the classroom. It must be noted that School A did not have a computer lab, while School B had two computer labs.

In summary, both School A and School B had resources such as achievement series, online modules and short cycle assessments that they had used to improve instruction within fifth grade classrooms. The teachers seemed to struggle with a lack of resources, either in terms of people, or materials such as textbooks, at both schools. These resources are essential in enabling teachers to be effective in their instructional practices.

Ongoing teacher evaluations. All teachers and principals expressed that

evaluation was an embedded part of practice within their schools. All teacher participants

shared that they had at least three to four formal evaluations each school year. Teacher

B1 reported:

> There are walkthroughs throughout the year announced and unannounced visits
>
> and we do get feedback from them, which are great that we can improve upon our
>
> practices. Um, I think I've had at least, at least 3 this year, and we've also been
>
> able to have peer walk-throughs.

> Likewise, teacher A1 said "My principal is in our room, probably every four

weeks, which is doing quick little walk-throughs and giving suggestions." Teacher A1

also noted that they had four formal evaluations for the school year. Additionally, teacher

A2 expressed that "I get good feedback that improves my practice such as being hands-

on." However, teacher B2 stated "There was not a lot of follow-up as far as, you know,

what they saw. What should I change? It was just sign off on it and [you are expected to]

kind of fix things on your own."

> The principals were the core evaluators within both schools. Principal PA said

that "learning strategies are evaluated. We do, I try to do, four evaluations in addition to

walk-throughs per year." Principal PA expressed that not only were classroom

observations completed, but she is also continually "looking at unit plans and giving

feedback on unit plans." Principal PA believed that one goal of the evaluations was to

help improve weak standards with "some different ways of re-teaching it or pulling in

some help for those that need it." This was also shared by Principal PB who stated that "When doing our observations, we use different observation tools. The goal here at our school is try to increase the rigor in the classrooms." Principal PB shared that they used "a rubric three times per year to evaluate teachers."

In summary, teachers were evaluated through formal and informal methods within the schools. While three of the four teachers appreciated the value of feedback from the evaluations, one teacher reported that she did not receive feedback and found it unhelpful. The principals were clearly compliant in fulfilling the mandated number of yearly evaluations, and seemed to share suggestions and feedback with most teachers they observed.

Subquestion 4: In What Ways Do Teachers Plan Their Lessons Using Students' Backgrounds to Inform Their Practices in the Classroom?

The biggest theme that emerged from the data analysis was that, according to teachers and principals, students' backgrounds were not taken into consideration during lesson planning.

Planning instruction without students' backgrounds. The most common response among teachers was that students' backgrounds were not being used, but their ability levels are considered paramount. For example, teacher B2 stated:

I don't think it's being done at all, which is something that is very important to do.

But I have not seen that being done at all, in any way, shape, or form. With the

curriculum that we use, I say no because the stories that are being used are things that the kids have no idea, or have no interest in, for the most part.

Teacher B2 shared that to teach the standards and make connections, one would have to "find a story, maybe about a musician or athlete" to relate to students' interest. Teacher B1 focused on students' academic backgrounds rather than their social backgrounds. She stated "So, uh, we absolutely use how they've done in the past to help plan what we're going to do in the future." While students may come from different homes, she contended that "when a student walks into my classroom, that's their home. They're going to be treated and have the same expectations that I have for them wherever they come from."

Some of the teachers believed that they already knew the students and their backgrounds based on the number of years they had been working at the schools. Teacher A1 referred to her long experience in the school by saying "I really feel like I know my students. I know who their parents are. I know who their brothers and sisters are so that helps me to plan for them."

Teacher A2 also discussed how the curriculum did not relate to students' backgrounds. Teacher A2 said "I have to bring books that relate to students' backgrounds since we do not have the resources." Similarly, the principals shared that the curriculum used in the schools did not relate to the students' backgrounds. Hence, they needed to find other resources to make the connections to the students' lives. Principal PB stated:

For us to be 99% African American, I don't see our school's curriculum being catered to our students. I think we just pick research-based curriculum and our teachers just teach to all of our students being high-medium or low-level in terms of the academics.

This viewpoint was also shared by Principal PA who stated "I don't believe that the curriculum truly addresses the background of our students." Because of this, Principal PA noted that her teachers were "bringing in novels" and "civil rights materials in order to interest the students" in the fifth grade reading classroom. Both principals agreed that teachers use their lesson plans to meet the academic needs of their students. Principal PB stated that "Based on their lesson plans, they do try to meet the needs of their students using that differentiated instruction piece" Principal A also noted that "to target, they're supposed to use accommodations" which are not limited to special needs, but also include students' backgrounds.

The lesson plans used are based on the *Understanding by Design* framework from Wiggins and McTighe (2005). Both principals understood that teachers struggled with lesson planning. Principal PA stated "I'm not sure that the teachers all truly understand how to use the lesson plans to gear it towards state standards or students' backgrounds." Lesson plans examined by this researcher disclosed that teachers focused on students' ability levels through small group instruction. The lesson plans used terminology such as "accommodation for special education students" and "ability grouping based on co-teaching instruction."

One lesson plan in particular demonstrated the use of civil rights materials during Black History month, but it was understood that this was not the norm. The lesson plan also revealed that there was no connection to students' backgrounds or home life as the focus was primarily on responding to data from short cycle tests. The assessments were primarily paper and pencil with no evidence of projects used to involve students in the learning process. The performance tasks noted on the lesson plans were not truly project-based and did not meet the criteria for performance based assessments.

While teachers alluded to best practices in their classrooms, which met the needs of various academic groups, that is high, medium, or low, as documented in the lesson plans, students' input was not at the focal point of these practices. The lesson plans had sections for teacher guiding students and student independent work which demonstrated participation in the classroom instruction. While the teachers collaborated to plan instruction, there was no evidence in the findings of students being a part of the collaborative process to drive their own learning.

Principal PB pointed out the use of standardized tests data results to inform their collaborative practice. Principal PB stated "we use a full day to deconstruct data and plan lessons for remediation of the students based on the standards while the students are absent." She further noted this was based on "high, medium, or low students" and not connected to students' social backgrounds. Remediation and enrichment of state standards did not include authentic instruction through projects and lessons to connect with students' lives. Teacher B1 noted that "students track their data from tests but were

not involved in plans to respond to the data." Teacher A2 further noted "teachers have little time to prepare for standardized tests so it limited their practices such as projects but they do include a few."

In addition, the curriculum map documents which I examined were found to be teacher-centered and focused specifically on standards for the teachers, with no mention of students getting an opportunity to review the map and take ownership. As Principal PA shared "only a few teachers with the district leadership created the map." While the teachers and principals shared a few opportunities where they intentionally planned to use authentic instructional practices when teaching to celebrate special events, it was not a regular part of their practice as they all noted students' backgrounds were not integrated into their practice.

In summary, teachers had to find ways to connect their lessons with students' backgrounds on their own because the resources provided by the school did not connect with the students. The principals also agreed that the curriculum did not cater to students' backgrounds. In both schools, students' academic backgrounds came to the fore as the primary source to inform classroom practices. Teachers' lesson plans focused specifically on ability levels within the reading classroom, with a little injection of materials to connect to their everyday lives. The schools' curriculum did not help to foster authentic instructional practices as the focus was on meeting state standards through standardized practices.

Summary of Research Findings

The research findings revealed that fifth grade reading teachers and principals employed several instructional practices to teach state standards. However, they were hampered by a reading program that was not aligned to these standards or to students' backgrounds. The findings also indicated that while the teachers and principals felt that instructional practices were effective, there was still a lack of achievement on the fifth grade standardized reading tests, and students were not meeting state requirements.

These findings showed that while the fifth great teachers and principals have an understanding of meeting the academic needs of students, they struggle with a lack of resources such as professional development and textbooks that are relevant and aligned to fifth grade reading students' needs. Some teachers also provided books for instruction as the school lacked the resources for fifth grade classroom. The findings further revealed that teachers' practices such as curriculum maps, lesson plans, formative assessments, and short cycle tests are controlled by state standards and benchmark tests. Hence, there is limited or no teacher or student input. In the two schools in this study, student involvement in instructional practices that allows them to be co-constructors of their learning was absent.

The findings also revealed that to a great extent, authentic instructional practices were not intentionally planned to connect with students' backgrounds. In addition, teachers were not offered professional development that catered solely to reading instruction. Furthermore, the findings suggested that fifth grade teachers and principals

may need to be more intentional in connecting classroom practices to their students'

backgrounds and gaining students' input into their instructional framework. There is a

tremendous need for further professional development on an instructional framework that

caters specifically to the needs of the fifth grade reading teachers and students.

Trustworthiness

The findings in this study were examined for trustworthiness through

triangulation of the data. Creswell (2012) defined triangulation as "the process of

corroborating evidence from different methods of data collection" (p. 259). I provided

each participant with a transcript of the interview to verify the information was correct

and accurately represented them. No discrepant information was reported or noted. I

checked with participants for clarification of data to ensure that the interpretation reached

is representative of the participants' thoughts. The different data sources for the present

research study included fifth grade reading teachers interviews, principal interviews, and

an examination of curriculum maps, lesson plans, short cycle test data, and Ohio

Achievement test score documents. The data from all the source interviews and

documents were triangulated to ensure credibility and trustworthiness.

Limitations and Delimitations of Study

This study was conducted within the parameters of limitations. Based on the

nature of this qualitative research study, the perspectives of four teachers and two

principals from two urban charter schools were shared about fifth grade reading

instructional practices. The results may not be the same with a wider cross-section of

teachers within the school and in other fifth grade classrooms in the state. The study

focused primarily on reading as the core subject, and the findings may be different in

other content areas. In addition, because interviews were conducted with fifth grade

reading teachers and administrators, any generalizations only reflect the group being

studied and not the school's instructional climate.

Implications for the Project Study

The results of this study have implications for a paradigm shift in the facilitation

of instructional practices in fifth grade reading classrooms. The findings revealed that the

instructional practices used aligned with the standards, but textbooks did not align with

the curriculum or students' backgrounds. In addition, the findings revealed that the

prevalent use of traditional teacher-centered instructional approaches and standardized

assessments were not effective. The study clearly showed students' lack of achievement

on standardized tests to be a serious problem within the schools.

In spite of the problems faced within their schools, students deserve the chance to

succeed. Admittedly, teachers and principals did not use students' backgrounds to inform

instructional practices in their classrooms. Implicit in the results is the need for students

to be at the fore of any decision-making in the instructional environment, whether it is

curriculum alignment or instructional practices. The perceptions of fifth grade reading

teachers and principals were reflective of the need to ensure that teachers are provided

appropriate professional development and training resources in order to be effective

educators and meet the needs of students in a student-centered classroom. The

participants also noted the lack of using students' backgrounds was a valuable piece missing from curriculum and instruction.

A professional development workshop which focuses specifically on instruction in reading may help to alleviate the challenges associated with the implementation and facilitation of reading instruction. Based on the research findings, this project evolved into such a professional development workshop for reading teachers and principals on using students' backgrounds through a project-based instructional learning framework. This framework integrates a more culturally responsive and standards-based reading curriculum to meet the needs of students in the reading classroom. This professional development workshop will allow teachers and principals an opportunity to explore a plethora of strategies for the reading curriculum for fifth graders that will enhance teachers' abilities to deliver more authentic instructional practices in their classrooms.

Conclusion

I conducted a qualitative case study to: identify curricular practices that influence student academic achievement at the fifth grade level in the urban setting, such as how teachers draw connections between their instructional practices and students' backgrounds to improve the academic achievement of fifth grade students. Upon the approval of the Walden IRB, I reviewed all ethical protocols to ensure the protection of all participants and enhance the trustworthiness of data collected. A qualitative research design was selected to collect data from a purposefully-selected sample, consisting of

four fifth grade reading teachers and two principals to assess instructional practices in the classroom.

Data collection included interviews with four reading teachers', interviews with two principals', and an analysis of documentation from curriculum maps, lesson plans, short cycle test data, and Ohio Achievement test scores at two urban elementary schools.

The findings revealed that to a great extent, fifth grade reading teachers and principals did not intentionally use authentic instructional practices while teaching, and they were not connecting with students' backgrounds in their practices. These findings were shared in a collaborative, hands-on professional development workshop for reading teachers and principals. It is hoped that the findings may help teachers bridge the gap between the curriculum and students' backgrounds. The goal was to effectively prepare students to meet the standards and achieve on standardized tests. Consequently, teachers will become more effective educators, and students will take ownership of their learning, become active citizens, critical thinkers, lifelong learners, and catalysts for positive social change within the schools and their communities.

Section 3 of this study will describe the professional development workshop and the rationale for such a project. In addition, the section will review the literature relevant to the project study. Finally, Section 3 will discuss the implementation and evaluation of the project, as well as implications for social change within the local and larger educational context.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 of this research study presents the project, its goals, and the rationale as it relates to the findings. There is a comprehensive literature review explaining the project genre. In addition, this section discusses the planned implementation and evaluation of the project and concludes with implications for positive change.

The project design is a professional development training workshop (PDTW) on reading instruction that involves teachers and administrators partnering with parents and students. A PDTW can be defined as a formal learning community in which teachers experience knowledge and skills through activities and interactions that can increase their instructional practice, growth, and development to better meet the needs of students (Desimone, 2011). A PDTW was selected because it gives teachers and administrators an opportunity to foster ongoing teacher learning, explore and exchange ideas on a particular subject, and collaborate with students and parents on their individual needs.

The research findings of this study indicated that fifth grade reading teachers and principals did not intentionally use authentic instructional practices while teaching, and they were not connecting with students' backgrounds in their practices. While teachers were engaged in teacher-centered instructional classrooms focusing primarily on standardized tests, students continued to fail reading. A PDTW for reading teachers and principals, which incorporates students' backgrounds through a project-based instructional learning framework, will help teachers prepare students to connect with learning and succeed beyond the tests.

Description and Goals

According to the findings of this study, the professional development of reading teachers on subject-based instructional strategies is a core component to teaching and meeting the needs of their students. The participants shared that they used more traditional teacher-centered practices and standardized assessments to prepare students to pass the tests. The participants also expressed a failure to understand and use students' backgrounds as a valuable part of their instructional framework, which they attributed to students' lack of achievement in reading. The participants in this study acknowledged the need to master practices and strategies for the reading classroom in a more student-centered learning environment. The participants also stated that it may help to have a PDTW offered focusing specifically on reading because there were none offered to them.

Based on the findings, a formal PDTW that consists of knowledge-based reading strategies modules and problem-based interactive activities may be useful in helping reading teachers and administrators facilitate reading in a student-centered climate. The training program would equip reading teachers and administrators with essential skills and knowledge to facilitate reading instruction in an authentic learning environment. This would, in turn, give students the competencies to perform within the classroom, on standardized tests, and beyond the classroom.

The goals of the training program will be to provide teachers and administrators with a variety of reading strategies to facilitate instruction in an authentic student-centered classroom, assist with creating effective project-based lesson plans and assessments reflective of students' backgrounds to use in the classroom, and promote a

collaborative community partnership among teachers, students, and their parents to inform instruction.

Rationale

The findings of this study indicated that fifth grade teachers and administrators were concerned with the lack of resources such as teaching staff, materials, and professional development, and textbooks that were not aligned to state standards. The study participants shared that they had to provide their own resources that related to students' backgrounds, and they were mandated to use curriculum maps and other standardized resources to meet the needs of students. The participants were concerned that they had little input in the decision-making about resources and instructional practices. They expressed the need for a PDTW that focuses on reading.

The findings gave further insight into the depth of the problem, as it was revealed that teachers need to explore authentic learning strategies such as planning and assessment tools to meet the needs of their students in a student-centered setting. Therefore, providing a relevant PDTW for reading teachers in their subject area on nontraditional approaches to teaching the content may propel student achievement in the reading, not only on standardized tests, but also in life.

Review of Related Literature

A study conducted by Podhajski, Mather, Nathan, and Sammons (2009) that examined the effects of workshops offered to reading teachers revealed that teachers' knowledge base can increase and will affect student growth positively. The research findings further revealed that it is imperative to discover exactly what teachers need to

know about reading instruction to select the relevant professional development for them. The focus on professional development on scientifically-based reading instruction resulted in student growth, particularly among students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

In the present study, the participants indicated the need for a reading PDTW to help them function more effectively in the classroom. Another study by Fisher, Frey, and Nelson (2012) revealed the impact of professional development in reading instruction on student achievement in a high-poverty urban school district. Findings showed that student achievement increased significantly from a 42.3% in 2005 to 72.3% in 2011 proficiency in reading. The components of the study's professional development included an instructional framework, small group professional development, collaboration on lesson planning, instructional strategies such as productive group work and guided instruction, and assessments. The teachers were trained over a 4-day period as coaches for their schools in the first year and ongoing training occurred every year. Administrators were also trained as they were the key to monitoring the practices within the schools. It showed that when teachers and administrators received professional development, students were more successful on standardized tests.

Professional development training was chosen as the project design in response to the findings of this study. The PDTW may be useful to address the needs of students in the two high-poverty schools in this study who encountered difficulties with reading achievement. The PDTW will demonstrate a project-based instructional framework for the reading classroom at work with authentic reading strategies, lesson plans, and

assessments. The project will give teachers, students, parents, and administrators an opportunity to collaborate, thereby making connections with students' backgrounds and bridging the sociocultural gap to facilitate intentional instruction. Based on my research and a review of the scholarly literature, this should provide a positive impact on student achievement in reading.

Professional Development Programs

In this current academic climate, there are many professional development offerings for reading teachers as schools grapple with the need to have students pass standardized tests, particularly in high-poverty urban schools. Williams (2013) examined the effectiveness of professional learning communities in a large urban district in Texas with over 200 schools. The professional development focused on reading, whereby reading teachers collaborated weekly in creating lesson plans and making decisions about instruction in the reading classroom. The study revealed that teachers saw a 35% increase in fifth grade students' reading achievement scores. The teachers also felt that the professional learning communities impacted their classroom practices. Williams showed again how vitally important it is to allow teachers to collaborate on instructional practices to inform their practice.

A second study by Kennedy (2010), who is a teacher-educator, reported her collaboration with a high-poverty school to address the problem of literacy through professional development. The goal of the professional development was to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and strategies to meet the needs of their underachieving students. The training offered was customized and collaborative

involving teachers, students, parents, and special education teachers. It focused specifically on student achievement using inquiry-based, problem-based approaches to demonstrate lessons and assessments for students.

Teachers created a customized curriculum using students' interests and involvement, and collaborated with intervention specialists to facilitate instructional strategies such as differentiation and creative skills. Kennedy (2010) found that not only were students more successful, but teachers' practices improved and parental involvement increased. The value of student achievement accomplished through teacher development and student, and parent involvement and collaboration cannot be minimized.

A third professional development study by Friend, Most, and McCrary (2009) looked at teachers of English Language Learners (ELL) in an urban high-poverty school district in Kansas described the impact of the training on significant academic student achievement in reading. The professional development program was designed specifically to meet the needs of the ELL students. Teachers were offered classes on methods and best practices, assessment, and working in an environment with diverse backgrounds over a 2-year period, with teachers taking classes on early release days and practices monitored in the classrooms. Other classes would focus on linguistics and teachers creating a product through action research. Friend et al. found that the professional development gave teachers an opportunity to learn and understand the cultural needs of their students. Results from this study revealed that the impact of

teacher learning on student achievement can be significant despite the high-poverty climate of the school.

A fourth study of professional development offerings focused on literacy coaching offered to teachers in a failing urban school in the northeastern United States. According to Pomerantz and Pierce (2013), the professional development coaching of reading teachers on comprehension strategies was successful. The professional development was designed to serve teachers for 2 years. It included literacy coaching where coaches modeled lessons and collaborated with teachers on lesson planning and observation feedback. The coaches also engaged in co-teaching as a part of guided practice with the teachers who eventually had to demonstrate independent practice in the classroom. The teachers faced the challenges of a lack of resources and support but were able to tap into the coaching of comprehension strategies to meet the needs of their students. The result of the coaching was a school meeting the state's AYP because students were now mastering content and achieving on standardized tests.

The Effectiveness of a PDTW

The professional development trainings described above all aimed to provide teachers with the necessary tools to increase student achievement in the reading classroom. The results of numerous studies have revealed that even in urban high-poverty settings, students can make gains in their academic achievement. Because of these findings, I suggest that professional development training offerings provide a great avenue to engage teachers, administrators, students, and parents in order to increase student achievement in reading.

Additionally, I suggest that a 3-day PDTW is a better option for this study because it incorporates elements of collaboration with multiple stakeholders and is not limited exclusively to teachers. A module is carved out specifically to encourage dialogue between the teachers, students, and parents about their backgrounds in an interactive setting. This format will facilitate an exchange of ideas in a collaborative community setting of educators, parents, students, and community stakeholders.

Because the 3-day workshop will encapsulate project-based, hands-on activities, and all participants will get an opportunity to interact with each other, share their ideas, understand cultural differences, and reflect on practices to propel student achievement in tangible ways in the classroom. Furthermore, the PDTW format gives school leaders the opportunity to meet the needs of all stakeholders in a common educational setting.

As schools face pressure to meet the demands of standardized tests and reading proficiency, the PDTW provides an opportunity to advocate the schools' vision to meet the academic needs of students. Through this training, the school and community can bridge the cultural gap by amalgamating students' backgrounds, their communities, and the schools instructional practices resulting in authentic teaching and learning.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that informs this study is social constructivism as outlined in Section 1, whereby the coconstruction of knowledge within the context of one's experiences is vital to the learning process. Vygostky's (1978) social constructivism advocated that teachers support each other's learning with expert input so learning could be scaffolded through interaction. For the PDTW part of this study, I will

utilize this social constructivist framework because teachers, administrators, students, and parents will be engaged in an active, collaborative, project-based setting, creating authentic products to support their learning.

Pella (2011) found that social constructivism is useful for adult learning, and in the case of this study, the teachers would be engaged in training relevant to their context which is their classroom. Therefore, it is vital to understand how adults learn when creating professional development offerings for them. Vygostky (1978) advocated three central premises of social constructivism for adult learners: situated cognition, social context, and scaffolded instruction, which informed this PDTW.

The problem that the PDTW addresses based on the findings of this study is the lack of intentional authentic instructional practices used in the reading classroom. The learning activities within the modules seek to address the problem by engaging teachers and administrators in problem-solving and by constructing strategies to use in their classrooms. They will be engaged in these activities in an authentic environment which will make learning meaningful to them. Pella (2011) advocated teacher development in an engaged setting where they interact with each other and share experiences, knowledge bases, and resources. The fifth grade teachers in this study will get an opportunity to share their experiences teaching reading, what they know and do, and what they can change as they delve into the resources offered in the PDTW.

Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) noted that constructivists believe that adult learners can make personal meaning of their learning within a context. The findings in this research indicated that reading teachers did not utilize students' backgrounds to

inform their instructional practices and lacked the resources to connect with students'

own contexts. Hence, instruction was inauthentic and not contextualized. The PDTW

offered will give teachers an opportunity to interact with students and parents through a

collaborative conference setting. This will give the students an opportunity to construct

their own learning because teachers will gain insight into students' backgrounds along

with what and how they love to learn.

Constructivists advocate creating and designing authentic tasks to give the learner

ownership and an opportunity to experience the environment in which they will work

even after the learning (Savery & Duffy, 1996). This will definitely contextualize the

learning environment for the teachers. Hence, project-based activities such as student

conferences, role play, creating lessons and assessments, group discussions, and

reflection journals will help the learner to connect prior knowledge and students'

backgrounds to their learning environment. Adult learners must learn in and with various

contexts (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). They pointed out the value of adult learners in this

study the teachers and administrators, learning in a sociocultural context where they can

understand diverse perspectives of their students, hence being able to apply theory to

practice in the classroom.

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development advocated the merits of

scaffolded instruction. Through scaffolding, the teachers will be engaged in a project-

based instructional framework where instructional strategies will be implemented to

develop an authentic classroom. This includes small group activities where they will be

able to help each other understand state standards and align content and activity that

generates success in the classroom. The professional development module will have

sequential modules that build on and influence each module as the adult learners'

transition from concept to mastery. Techniques such as modeling, cuing, collaborating,

and fading as purported by Jeffries and Maeder (2009) will engage the adult learners.

Teachers will also get an opportunity to reflect on their learning because social

constructivists advocate the need to reflect on content learned and the learning process

(Savery & Duffy, 1996).

Review of Literature

The purpose of the literature review in Section 2 was to research and discover

current existing studies and articles which focused on the professional development of

teachers. Based on the research findings, reading teachers and administrators lacked the

necessary resources and professional development to meet the needs of their failing fifth

grade students. A literature review was conducted through the Walden University Library

generating scholarly source results from various databases. The keyword search terms

included: *professional development, reading instruction, reading programs, reading*

instruction low income schools, low-income schools, urban schools teacher training

programs, adult learning theory, and *professional learning.*

The literature review generated many research studies, articles, and reports

addressing professional development for teachers, particularly to meet the needs of low-

performing students. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), in order for

students to succeed, teachers need to be prepared and have on-going support and

collaboration opportunities through professional development. Like the blueprint reform

created by the U.S. Department of Education (2010), which proposed teachers get

meaningful information about their practice through professional development training,

several recent studies (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter,

Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001) and organizations, such as Learning Forward,

formerly the National Staff Development Council (Darling-Hammond & Richardson,

2009), and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Blank & de las Alas, 2009) have

focused on effective professional development of teachers to meet the needs of their

students. The literature review below examines the characteristics of effective

professional development and practices for teachers to inform the design of this project.

Characteristics of Highly Effective Professional Development

As schools today continue to face mounting challenges with student success on

standardized tests, many innovative approaches to professional development have

evolved. The current study findings revealed that teachers were engaged in ongoing

professional development. However, the training and content offered did not meet the

specific needs of the reading teachers. Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe (2011)

purported that effective teacher professional development has five important

characteristics. These include: (a) alignment with school goals, (b) focus on core content

and modeling of teaching strategies for the content, (c) inclusion of opportunities for

active learning of new teaching strategies, (d) provision of opportunities for collaboration

among teachers, and (e) inclusion of embedded follow-up and continuous feedback. The

professional development must focus directly on teachers' practice and the impact must

be student learning.

Alignment With School's Goals

     Professional development can be useful to teachers, students, and administrators if it is aligned with the goals of the school. Quick, Holtzman, and Chaney (2009) studied professional development of teachers and effectiveness of instructional practice. Their study pointed out the need for teachers to be engaged in training that will meet the needs of the school, the classroom, the grade level, and overall development. A PDTW designed specifically for reading teachers and administrators aligning specifically with the goals of the school of meeting state standards, students relating to their learning, and teachers engaging in new instructional practices will prove invaluable to all stakeholders.

     The PDTW should have clearly defined objectives aligned with school goals which should be reviewed with participants. Terosky (2014) looked at urban principals and focused on their leadership which was focused on instructional practices within the schools and not solely on the managerial issues faced. The study found that school leaders determined what professional learning was needed based on the learning goals of the students as they were actively involved in the classroom instruction.

     For a professional development to be effective then, it is crucial for administrators to be also involved in the professional learning. Birman et al. (2009) reported that most teachers were participating in training that is aligned to state standards with the influence of the No Child Left Behind Act. The teaching standards and the goals of the school have to inform the professional development training of teachers. Teachers' prior knowledge must also be considered to make the learning more meaningful in an adult learning environment.

Core Content and Modeling of Teaching Strategies for the Content

Desimone (2009) contended that a professional development that is content-focused is beneficial to teachers as it increases their knowledge and skills in that area and impact students as it propelled student achievement. The author further stated that the content focus feature of professional development may be the most influential feature in planning for teacher support. This would result in a positive change in instruction and student learning. Carney (2010) pointed out that content-specific professional development would foster more opportunities for students to learn as the teachers would share a common language and align their content in a consistent and coherent way to enhance learning.

Slavit, Nelson, and Kennedy (2010) studied the value of content-specific professional development where teachers were engaged in a learning community that empowered them in teacher-defined inquiry focus, involving positive gains from a single-disciplined learning community, and an opportunity to enhance research skills and content specific dialogue about student data. The study findings revealed the need for ongoing support of teacher teams as they practice what they have learned in content specific professional development. Koballa and Bradbury (2009) noted that when planning professional development for teachers, and particularly mentoring, it is wise to start with a continuum of content-specific needs first. It pointed out that beginning teachers especially need support in areas such as instruction and using resources in the classroom to meet content needs. Therefore, a professional development that addresses the direct needs of teachers in their content area would prove beneficial.

Grossman and Davis (2012) pointed out that teachers' success is determined by a focus on developing their pedagogical knowledge and skills of their core content. Hence, the focus of professional development should be less on the emotional support and more focused on the instructional support. The research illustrated the need to support teachers as they learn and master their craft on the job. It is important for schools to find ways through professional development and mentoring to support teachers. Carney (2010) further pointed out that the key focus of developing teachers in their content area should be keeping them current with research and best practices in their areas to address the needs of a diverse student population.

Elfers and Stritikus (2014) illustrated how school leaders and classroom teachers can impact student achievement through a content-focused professional development model. The content-focused development of teachers addressed the needs of English Learners students in four school districts, resulting in reading success for students in the schools.

Active Learning of New Teaching Strategies

In a study on the impact of professional development on instructional strategies, Richards and Skolits (2009) revealed that teachers need to be actively involved in the learning of these new teaching strategies to effectively implement and facilitate them. The study illustrated how six teachers were able to implement a new instructional strategy based on professional development that gave them a theoretical framework for the practice, modeled the strategy, connected it to their prior knowledge, and helped them to implement it within their own contexts. The professional development gave the

teachers an opportunity to practice what they would teach in their classrooms, thus

making them students of the strategy before they could teach it.

Kinnucan-Welch, Rosemary, and Grogan (2006) suggested that effective

professional development which introduces new strategies must be hands on, with

experiential learning offered to adults in an authentic context. Social constructivists also

share this belief as they support experiential learning through project based framework

for learning which will be integrated into this professional development of reading

teachers.

Carter (2011) also revealed that teachers who are actively engaged in professional

development of new teaching strategies, for example, Reciprocal Teaching, can impact

student academic achievement significantly. As a result of the professional development

training, teachers were able to increase student achievement in reading by 28% at an

urban charter school. This new teaching strategy, Reciprocal Teaching, changed the

dynamics of the classroom from the traditional teacher-centered to a student-centered

classroom maximizing on cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and authentic

learning. In this strategy, students and teachers reflect on their practices through journals

and collaborative dialogue. Vygostky's (1978) social constructivism substantiates the

value of dialogue between teacher and students, and students and students, to construct

meaning to learning based on their backgrounds.

Teacher preparation and ownership of the content and strategies are essential to

the success of new teaching strategies. Ultimately, the goal is to propel student

achievement in the classroom. Choo, Eng, and Ahmad (2011) illustrated the success of

Reciprocal Teaching in another urban school which resulted in academic achievement in reading on standardized tests for low-proficiency students. The value of students' success is rooted in teacher preparation as they introduce new strategies to get students to learn effectively.

Stricklin (2011) expressed the need for teachers to utilize drama, props, and hands-on tools such as sticky notes, paper plate dials, bookmarks, sentence starters, discussion, and documentation through journals to model instruction in a student-centered climate for students as they enjoy learning. This interaction will be dependent on students' backgrounds as their interests will be tapped into to create activities for learning. Furthermore, the research indicated that teachers who are professionally developed in a student-centered approach to the classroom most typically are interested in formative assessment techniques to nurture this climate of learning.

According to Clark (2014), assessment changes in which teachers interact with students in an assessment for learning climate were inclusive of reflective learning, written descriptive feedback, higher order questioning, sharing assessment rubrics, and oral feedback. Clark (2014) further noted that teachers need to be trained in these assessment methods with their students' ideas at the forefront of their learning because implementation is dependent on students' interest. This would also mean connecting with parents as an essential part of the classroom through partnerships.

Childre, Sand, and Pope (2009) advocated the use of standards, assessments, and project-based activities to transform the classroom to a student-centered environment. The research provided examples of lesson plans that illustrated the use of inquiry-based

teaching techniques and formative assessments that are focused on the real-life experiences of the students. They argued that it is essential to equip teachers with these tools through professional development training in order to facilitate a student-centered classroom that will benefit students for lifelong learning.

If teachers are actively engaged in creating these tools in professional development training, they will be prepared to efficiently model and implement them in their classrooms. Similarly, Blank and de las Alas (2009) substantiated the value of active learning and collective participation in professional development to add value to teachers' practice and implementation skills.

Opportunities for Collaboration Among Teachers

Many researchers have contended that teacher collaboration and support that is an embedded part of the school or district can have a positive effect on student learning (Eaker, Dufour, & Dufour, 2002; Hill, Stumbo, Paliokas, Hansen & McWalters, 2010). It is critical then that collaboration be modeled and facilitated within any learning environment for adults, in this case, teachers. Collaboration is a highly effective part of professional development as teachers are engaged in sharing their expertise with each other, with common goals to impact student learning.

Collaboration is postulated by constructivists who believe in co-construction of learning as an active team effort versus an individual task. For example, Clary, Styslinger, and Oglon (2012) suggested that the collaborative efforts of reading teachers in professional development must be geared toward creating common goals and sharing resources to meet the needs of their students. The teachers in Clary et al.'s (2012) study

collaborated within the framework of a constructivist setting whereby they created projects such as literacy memoirs, lesson plans, and portfolios documenting their experiences and artifacts acquired. This approach to professional development proved successful as the teachers saw the impact on their students' learning.

Another significant study by Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, and Goldenberg (2009) revealed that teacher teams teaching the same content, in this case reading, which were professionally developed and supported by a coach who facilitated collaboration among them, were able to improve students' achievement and learning. The study proved that students in high poverty schools, in this case nine Title I schools, could address student learning in a collaborative content focused approach. The key to their success was a focus over a 5-year period on instruction through problem solving as teacher grade level teams.

Dever and Lash (2013) also pointed out the effectiveness of opportunities for collaboration in a middle school setting where teachers shared resources, created lessons and discussed students' data in a job-embedded Professional Learning Community that influenced their professional needs. The research cautioned that collaboration had to be structured since not all groups were effective. The need to have administrators as an active part of the collaborative process was vital to the success of content area and interdisciplinary teams.

Additionally, collaboration should be facilitated outside of the school through partnerships with parents and community organizations. This gives teachers an opportunity to connect with students' lives, hence giving them an authentic premise to

plan learning for students. Darling-Hammond and MacLaughlin (2011) believed that teachers could be a part of communities outside of the schools, such as partnerships with clubs, libraries, literacy projects, sports groups, and parent leader groups to better understand their students' interests and plan lessons that are more authentic and relevant to their lives. This gives credence to professional development which includes other stakeholders such as parents, students, and community groups to dialogue with teachers about students' learning needs.

Goldkind and Farmer (2010) noted that students' academic performance can be significantly affected by direct parental involvement in the schools. The study revealed that the school size and climate can adversely affect parent support if there are no efforts to connect with parents. While large schools may struggle with parental support, the study further shared that parents can be actively engaged in schools if the teachers and administrators create opportunities to collaborate. Parents respond to teachers who communicate with them, particularly in urban, low socioeconomic communities in which parents seek to be respected. Therefore, inviting parents to be involved in a professional development will be a great opportunity to collaborate and connect with them and their children through their eyes.

Embedded Follow-up and Continuous Feedback

A final consideration is that professional development cannot survive on its own without follow-up and feedback from the participants. In looking at teacher evaluation, Daley and Kim (2010) noted the need for embedded follow-up and continuous feedback to teachers who have participated in and created a professional learning community.

Their research revealed the need for teachers to be evaluated by their peers, independent certified observers, mentors, and principals over time to give comprehensive feedback. This will affect teacher practices significantly as constant dialogue about active learning strategies and skills learned will be evaluated to inform teacher facilitation in their classrooms.

Donaghue and Dolci (2013) suggested using a professional teaching portfolio as a tool to evaluate teachers' practices in the classroom. Teachers could include videos of classroom practice, student work, lesson plans, student reflections, and other artifacts to share with their colleagues who could then give them feedback about their practices in a collaborative setting. Modern technology can be a great tool to create portfolios, such as online blogs in which students can interact with students around the world and get feedback and share new ideas (Donaghue & Dolci (2013).

Biancarosa, Bryk, and Dexter (2010) conducted a longitudinal study on effective professional development strategies. They found that strategies can only be successful in classrooms where they are evaluated and supported by other teachers and administrators. The study revealed a 32% gain in student achievement when teachers were supported through instructional coaching and frequent feedback. This may prove expensive for some schools, but the impact on student learning far outweighs the cost if implemented properly.

All stakeholders should be a part of the process of feedback. Hirsch (2013) stated that teachers can use continuous feedback to refine their practices over time in the classroom when many stakeholders such as students, peers, experts, and supervisors

evaluate and support them. Teachers could benefit significantly from student reflections, peer feedback in Critical Friends Groups or Professional Learning Communities, and from coaches and instructional leaders.

Hschi and Ming-Chao (2010) studied how teachers were evaluated at a vocational high school. After professional development training, teachers were evaluated with the use of a formal tool on a Likert scale to help them grow professionally, inform their practices, and improve student learning outcomes. The evaluation tool was implemented within the school to identify teacher's growth and effectiveness after professional development training. The evaluation tool was able to show that professional development was effective as it was reflected in teacher practice. The value of ongoing feedback can engage teachers in objective reflection of their practices, thus increasing their knowledge and skill base.

Professional development training can provide opportunities for teachers to share their knowledge and learn from their peers, students, and community about best practices for their classroom instruction. However, these professional development offerings must be aligned with the school's curriculum, assessments, standards, and teacher learning to prove invaluable to students and their achievement in the classroom (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Overall, there should be clearly defined goals established for professional development training for teachers to enhance their practices beyond the training.

School Practices Supporting Low-Income Students

Many researchers have documented the benefits of teachers' instructional practices supporting low-income students which facilitate collaboration with multiple stakeholders about student instruction. For example, Ladson-Billings (2006) pointed out the need for teachers to connect with minority students' culture through community organizations, clubs and teams where students experience some success. This would give teachers an opportunity to relate to the students better in the classroom environment.

The professional development offering for this research will give teachers an opportunity to collaborate with parents and community groups to connect with students' backgrounds. Noguera (2011) revealed research findings which illustrated the success of collaboration between the school and the community in schools serving low-income urban students. The study revealed students success and growth on standardized tests where they improved by 32.5% in English Language Arts, from 36.6% in 2010 to 69.1% in 2011. He further pointed out the value of teacher knowledge of the students' lives as the catalyst in student achievement, where teachers engaged in partnerships with community groups and connected with students' culture. It is crucial then for all stakeholders to take ownership of the students' learning and support its sustainability and success. Ladson-Billings (2011) further noted that teachers are not exposed to diverse cultures in their college courses hence it is crucial to connect with students through other avenues such as in the field and partnerships with the community. She pointed out the success of schools in New York where administrators intentionally forge partnerships with groups to counsel and tutor low-income minority students to success.

Research revealed that low-income students can be successful on standardized tests given a school culture that connects learning with students' culture. For example, Delpit (2006) cited examples of successful low-income minority schools such as Sankofa Shule, a charter school in Michigan, the Marcus Garvey School in Los Angeles, California and the Chick School in Kansas City, Missouri, where low in-come students outperform the affluent schools on standardized tests. This was attributed to students learning within their own contexts and community problem solving. It is necessary then to use materials from students' culture in the classroom to help students think critically and apply learning to the world at large.

Lee, Morrow-Howell, Johnson-Reid, and McCrary (2012) illustrated the effectiveness of school and community partnerships and student achievement among low-income minority students. The study described the work of community volunteers who used students' interests to facilitate one-on-one tutoring that ultimately resulted in students' success. The elementary students experienced success two fold academically and socially as they were engaged in an educational environment with older members of the community connecting with values and leadership. Stigler and Hiebert (2009) described the importance of changing schools to support students and teachers' learning. This is essential if the low-income minority students are to achieve success in education. The school culture then must solicit support from other stakeholders such as parents, community groups and organizations to make this happen. The professional development offering for this research study is designed to facilitate this positive social change in the schools.

The Professional Development Training Workshop

Purpose

The purpose of the PDTW in this project is to collaborate with reading teachers in planning instruction for their students. The training will serve as an avenue for teachers to explore new teaching strategies and collaborate with multiple stakeholders such as students, parents, and the community before making decisions about their instructional practices. The training is in response to research findings which revealed that teachers did not use students' backgrounds or input to inform their practices in the classroom, utilized a teacher-centered approach, and have not been trained in their content-specific professional development.

The objective of the PDTW is to expose reading teachers and administrators to resources that can expand their knowledge and skill bases, to meet the needs of students in an authentic, student-centered classroom to increase student achievement. The training modules which are based on the constructivist adult learning will give teachers a collaborative, project-based training and opportunity to create tools to use in the classroom and to help them reflect on their practices. The results from the present study informed the content of the modules designed. In addition, the findings of many research studies in education were used to design the content of the modules.

According to Luneta (2012), continuous professional development programs which include teachers' knowledge bases and content areas affect their performance significantly in schools. The strategies for the PDTW will include a three-day workshop covering 12 modules which consist of project-based interactive activities, collaborative

discussions on topics shared, role playing, conferencing, and creation of artifacts such as journal portfolios as a reflection tool. A PowerPoint slideshow will present the topics such as student-centered classroom, instructional strategies, lesson plans, technology, assessment, and reflection shared over the three days.

Additionally, students, parents, and community stakeholders will be invited on the second day to interact with teachers and administrators as a tool to inform the creation of their artifacts for instruction. At the end of each day, participants will engage in an evaluation session, a professional learning community called reading reflection rounds, to reflect on the impacts, strengths, and weaknesses of the modules covered. Participants will also get an opportunity to share feedback online on a blog to continue to support their professional development training.

Implementation

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The schools in which this research will be conducted have never experienced success on standardized reading tests at the fifth grade level. The professional development of their teachers and administrators is crucial to effect change in these schools. The administrators and teachers support any tools that might enhance their classrooms, especially in reading achievement as the schools are faced with the mammoth task of meeting state standards. The school administrators are willing to support professional development that could positively affect their teachers and students' learning. Moreover, the teachers are ready to embrace training that was content-specific, as they believe it would be more useful to them in the classroom.

The superintendent of the schools and board of directors are invested in teacher development because they host a scheduled mandatory two-week training every summer as an embedded part of their district's practice. Also, the district solicits teacher professional development offerings through a request for proposals from teacher leaders and educators for their October training. The superintendent is an active participant in training and has access to important resource persons who would readily support professional development that could affect positive change.

Keiser (2009) pointed out that school leaders need to be more intentional in including collaboration with families and community resources to facilitate students' success. The study advocated the use of community resources to engage students and teachers in active learning that would respond to the needs of the community. Potential resources such as the library, youth clubs and societies, students, and parents will prove invaluable to this project. The objectives were shared as a common goal and vision aligned with the school, district, and state standards, which was to propel student achievement in reading. The stakeholders were provided with the results of the program as an ongoing part of support and feedback to facilitate teacher professional development.

Potential Barriers

A potential barrier to the project may be funding. Even though the costs would be minimal, there is a need for basic materials and supplies to implement it effectively. The superintendent's office provides funds for professional development through state initiatives, and this may be an option to tap into for financial support. Because I am the program planner, I plan to present my findings and proposal to the superintendent's office

and the director of academic affairs to solicit their financial support. At that time I will

discuss the estimated costs for the project and explore options with them on how to

support the implementation of the professional development within the classrooms after

the initial training.

Another viable resource to defray the cost could be the community resources that

will be integrated into the training program. The school could establish partnerships with

some of these groups that could help to provide some of the materials needed to sustain

the project over time. Also, other schools that face the same dilemma could be invited to

the PDTW at a cost to offset some of the funds needed for the sustainability and growth

of the embedded project. I will request the use of school facilities such as projectors and

other such technology tools to support the training.

Another potential barrier may be parental involvement. Because the research

findings indicated that teachers did not use students' backgrounds to inform their

practices, it is crucial to have collaborative dialogue with their parents in this training.

However, the implication from the research is that this may be new to parents, and thus

may require some support to gain parent participation.

Giles (2005) suggested that schools need to use a variety of strategies to develop

the relational narrative with parents as more than likely, many urban, low socio-economic

parents do not know how to start a dialogue when they feel marginalized. A potential

solution to overcome this problem is to use multiple approaches to communicate with

parents about the training event and their participation.

Because organizations such as the library, youth clubs, groups such as The Hospital Family Resource Services, community outreach groups, and colleges will be invited, I will request that the leaders of these groups share the information with parents along with the school communicating with them. Additionally, I will discuss incentives that could be offered to parents who participate in the training as the school district receives funding for parental activities through Title I funds.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The PDTW is designed for reading teachers, administrators and parents to prepare them for addressing the instructional needs of their students in the classroom. The training will be implemented for three days and participants will create and receive tools to embed in their classrooms and schools over a sustained period of time. The training sessions will be facilitated as part of the summer training professional development offered by the district for approximately five hours daily. The sessions will be facilitated by the program planner who is an administrator of programs in the district. Participants will be engaged in collaborating on a diverse range of topics and teaching strategies presented in four daily learning modules over the three days.

The first four modules offered on day one will build a foundation for all participants to understand the big idea and essential concepts of the student-centered classroom and teaching strategies, such as reciprocal learning, small group discussions, and how they can be aligned to reading standards and the students they teach. The second four modules offered on day two will be an intentional collaborative setting including parents, students, and community groups connecting with teachers and administrators.

Based on the knowledge acquired on Day One, the first module offered on day two will facilitate conferences and discussions with stakeholders as they familiarize themselves with their students' interests and backgrounds. The teachers will also do a gallery walk with students and parents to explore resources that interest them such as books, music, technology, food, and extracurricular activities. In the final four modules offered on day three, teachers will respond to students' needs by creating lessons, assessments, and strategies. Each day, the participants will get an opportunity to reflect on their learning in a professional learning community setting with peer feedback.

The program planner will create a blog for the PDTW that will share documents and activities which will be included in the three day sessions. I will share the link to the blog with all participants as an embedded tool of a professional collaborative community of learning. I will also send out emails to all participants one month prior to the training and a reminder one week before the training to remind them to participate. I will collaborate with community stakeholders to get involved in their activities and have them hand out brochures and posters to parents. I will also solicit the help of administrators to make calls to parents and students to participate in the training.

Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others

The PDTW will need the support of all stakeholders to make it a successful event. The program planner will collaborate with the director of academic affairs and administrators to collate the needed materials and printed copies of the training itinerary for the three days. The program planner will need help from the technology team to allow all participants to access to the blog. The teachers and administrators will be given a

script to call parents with a personalized invitation to invite them to the second day collaboration meeting. Community stakeholders will also be invited to the training location three days before the sessions to identify areas to set up and facilitate their groups. The superintendent and director of academic affairs will ensure refreshments and lunch are available for participants. Ultimately, all stakeholders will have to support the training with their input.

Project Evaluation

The PDTW will be assessed through a formative evaluation system in which participants will engage in continuous, ongoing feedback throughout the three-day workshop. Reeves (2010) noted that formative evaluation for teachers in professional development training should be purposeful, constructive, and designed to help them grow and learn. Therefore, I designed the goals of the evaluation to answer the following questions:

- Did the content equip teachers and administrators with the essential skills and knowledge to teach reading in an authentic student centered classroom? If so, how?

- Were teachers and administrators provided with a variety of modeled and guided teaching strategies to implement in their classrooms?

- Can teachers and administrators engage in and implement structured collaborative learning communities to elicit feedback to sustain and support each other in their classrooms?

- How effective were program facilitators in presenting and modeling the content-specific teaching and learning strategies to support teacher learning and student achievement?

The final module offered each day focuses on reflective reading rounds which will take the format of a Professional Learning Community or a Critical Friends Group. In this setting, participants will get an opportunity to share feedback on the content taught in the models and critique its effectiveness for their classrooms. The objectives for each session will guide the discussion and each participant will have a role in this collegial group. For this session, teachers will provide rich descriptive feedback that will be documented in their portfolios. Each group will provide feedback on the blog to continue the dialogue outside of their small groups.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) suggested the use of a wide range of evidence to assess practices in the classroom. These include things like performance tasks, student self-assessment, peer assessments and descriptive feedback. I intentionally wanted to model for teachers the use of several evaluation tools as alternative methods to give constructive feedback to their students.

A formative evaluation tool that will also be useful is a 5-point Likert scale evaluation which will have participants rating the effectiveness of each component of the program at the end of each day. Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that this tool could provide quantitative feedback that will give a clear picture of participants' understandings and opinions of the training offered. This would also be a good tool to give facilitators

immediate feedback of the strengths and weaknesses of the daily training, so corrections and directions can be changed instantly to benefit everyone.

The data collected from both evaluation tools will be collated and presented to the school's administrators, teachers, parents, and students at least six weeks after training and implementation of the practices. The goal is to give the teachers a chance to implement and collaborate over the practices with constant dialogue as they plan their lesson units on a six-week period. The evaluation will be ongoing and will help teachers maintain job-embedded professional learning communities to enhance students' learning.

Implications for Social Change

Local Community

The PDTW for reading teachers in this urban school district is an opportunity to explore their content area and actively engage in strategies that can address their students' needs. This will prove to be a great resource for the teachers who can maintain the collegial dialogue through technology, portfolios, and job-embedded support such as collaborative team meetings to reflect on their practice. The needs of the students in these urban schools were integral to the content of the professional development training.

Klein and Riordan (2009) also discussed the integration of community-based, authentic learning activities as realized in this project. They noted teachers must be engaged in ongoing experiential professional development to impact their students' learning. Since the main goal of the PDTW in this study is to provide teachers and administrators with essential skills and knowledge to address students' learning needs and backgrounds, the students would be rewarded positively.

Students can feel more connected to the school as learning now is co-constructed by them and teachers who understand their backgrounds. Based on the literature reviewed above, this will mean success for the students on standardized tests and also lifelong learning in their society. This will affect not only the students, but also parents and community partners who are actively engaged in the training as resources to bridge the social-cultural gap that has hindered the schools.

Ultimately, school administrators will realize their vision, which is students mastering state standards and increasing student achievement. The implication for positive social change then is an understanding that urban students can increase their performance on standardized tests through collaboration with critical stakeholders. While urban schools continue to struggle with poor ratings, the project will illustrate there are still educators who are willing to make a difference in urban youth education.

Far-Reaching

Students' lack of achievement on standardized tests is not limited to this local context but is a serious problem faced by our country as a whole. Urban schools in particular are faced with serious academic issues such as poor teachers, few resources, and diverse students. The findings of this research and the professional development project can serve as a resource to other urban schools intent on driving student success.

According to Williams (2013), professional development through small learning communities affected teachers' instructional practices and also the school culture. Teachers collaborated on students' learning through data collection which informed their weak or strong instructional practices. The professional learning communities saw a

focus on student learning. As a result, the focus for success in our schools will change from how teachers teach to how students learn. Consequently, professional development will come to be based on students' backgrounds and their learning. Teachers who work in urban settings will also get an assurance that they are not isolated and that they can succeed with continuous on-going support to inform their practices. With a school climate entrenched in collaborative professional support from administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community groups, the construction of learning will impact all in the school and beyond.

Conclusion

The PDTW and its goals were presented in Section 3. Reading teachers and administrators would have an opportunity for the first to collaborate and plan learning with parents, students, and community groups. The training would also empower participants to shift their approach to instruction from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered one in which learning is authentic. The modeling and practice of a professional learning community at work within the training can be transplanted into the schools with ongoing feedback and support to sustain them. The rationale for this project, its implementation, and its evaluation were described in this section. Additionally, the project's implications for positive change within the local community and beyond were discussed.

Section 4 of the research study discusses the strengths and limitations of the project. I will also share a scholarly reflection on my experience and learning as a researcher in the areas of scholarship, leadership, practitioner, and the project developer.

The section will also focus on the project's potential for social change, its application in the field of education, and implications for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In Section 4, the project's strengths and weaknesses will be discussed. Then, the focus will turn to the researcher in a scholarly reflective discussion. I will analyze myself throughout this journey in the areas of scholarship, leadership, practitioner, and the project developer. Finally, Section 4 concludes with a discussion about the project's potential for social change, its application in the field of education, and implications for future research.

Project Strengths

The PDTW is designed to provide essential knowledge and skills to educators in a constructivist framework giving them an opportunity to be actively involved in the learning process. The teachers and administrators will be given the chance to experiment with learning and construct new knowledge. Hunzicker (2010) noted that effective professional development engages teachers in the learning process, builds on what they already know, and adds new knowledge and skills to their repertoire. The professional development modules are geared towards participants using their prior knowledge to connect with and build on each session, thereby creating a common understanding of learning.

The collaborative instructional strategies used in the project add credence to address students' learning from multiple perspectives rather than the confines of a classroom. The modules facilitated a professional learning community at work, which makes the training authentic for the participants to apply to their classroom practices.

Given that the collaborative efforts embedded in the project include various stakeholders, the result could mean change beyond the local context to a larger one.

The reflection and evaluation experienced by educators within the training and via the internet could prove most useful as teachers have an opportunity to dialogue about their instructional practices and student learning. Teachers could replicate these practices within their schools, thereby creating ongoing support and feedback to encourage each other. The fact that administrators will be a part of this training will be useful as they will see how much their teachers benefit from an embedded professional learning community.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

The project modules are designed to impart essential knowledge and skills to teachers and administrators to equip them for the reading classroom. However, one limitation is that there is no solid plan to manage and observe the instructional practices after the 3-day workshop. While the project may present some authentic practices that can be easily replicated in schools, it is necessary to have mechanisms in place to ensure that these practices are embedded in the schools for them to be effective. Varela (2012) pointed out that one of the major problems with professional development training is a lack of follow-up, as it needs to be embedded in the classroom practice and monitor for effectiveness. The school administrators will have to provide support for the teachers in executing the content taught through maintenance of the online portfolio and blog, regular professional learning community meetings, and additional in-service.

I propose that school administrators be proactive in addressing the implementation of the strategies learned from the PDTW through ongoing mentorship of

teachers, and opportunities for collective assessment and reflection based on student data and lesson study. Mentoring educators to refine their skills and explore best practices provides teachers with a reciprocal relationship where they can share with someone more experienced in the field (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011). Research has suggested that mentoring would serve as ongoing support for teachers and an opportunity to gain feedback. This could be provided in a coteaching or a cohort model that would be more advantageous for teachers and less costly for administrators.

Another strategy that is often used by school administrators is using student data to drive decision-making in the classroom. It is necessary to measure student achievement on an ongoing basis, not only because the instructional practices from the project are designed to enhance student achievement, but also because this will help to inform the viability and sustainability of the strategies. According to Pella (2011), teachers should be engaged in a variety of formative assessments that can provide data to tailor instruction to students' needs. Teachers can therefore use a diverse data set to analyze their strengths and weaknesses and inform future practices in a cyclical format, which would foster an embedded culture of data-driven instruction. These data can serve to inform ongoing professional development for teachers.

Another strategy that could be used to address the problem is lesson study in which teachers collaborate in planning, designing, observing, and debriefing over their reading lessons as a part of their school culture. According to Hunter and Back (2011), lesson study can be used to create a network among teachers through classroom observations where teachers share ideas about teaching practices and evidence of student

learning on an ongoing basis. Lesson study is used as a strategy to sustain professional development among teachers as they continue to build their repertoire of knowledge while they are practicing in the classrooms. Through mentorship and using collective assessment and data to drive decisions and lesson study, the professional development offered could be maximized to benefit the educators, students, and parents to benefit student achievement.

<div align="center">**Scholarship**</div>

Adcroft and Lockwood (2010) identified three common characteristics that are inherent in the scholarship of teaching and learning for educators: (a) educators as learners reflecting on their classroom practices, (b) teaching and learning as a behavioral and cultural practice where educators operate within their context, and (c) the nurturing of communities of practice where educators can thrive. As I developed the PDTW modules, I realized the value of informing the content through scholarly journals and educational literature to enrich the teaching and learning for the participants. Not only will the educators be able to explore best practices to inform their instruction, but they will also engage in a reflective, contextual, and collaborative community of learning that practices true scholarship.

As the program planner, I realized the value of advancing the participants in their own disciplines through the scholarship of teaching and learning so that they would truly be empowered to teach their students. The opportunity to demonstrate what they learned and to reflect on their practices with students and parents being at the core of the dialogue was essential to adding to their knowledge and skill bases. Scholarship, I realized, is not

limited to the classroom, but extends to the community where the needs of stakeholders must be considered to make it meaningful to them. Scholarship embraces and advocates lifelong learning.

Project Development and Evaluation

The project development process was very challenging as there are so many components such as objectives, modules, learning activities, and evaluations to consider in addressing the problem. Based on the research findings, one of the major goals of the project was to create authentic learning tasks for students. As the program planner, I attempted to incorporate authentic learning tasks for the participants that they could replicate within their schools. Neo and Neo (2010) advocated constructivist learning environments in which there is active participation in learning, problem solving, skill building, collaborative feedback, and inquiry. Hence, the project was developed to demonstrate the authentic constructivist climate giving educators an opportunity to learn from each other and create artifacts that would benefit them.

The project evaluation was very important as it was designed within the project to facilitate the process of feedback in a collaborative community of learning and also as individuals. I believe that this was a strength of the project, as it truly gave participants an opportunity to communicate on a collegial level on teaching and learning. Butler, Godbole, and Marsh (2013) found that feedback is essential to the learning process as it immediately clarifies what knowledge is desired. Because this was a 3-day workshop, it was imperative to cover the content and to give feedback and evaluate the learning for the participants and the program planner. I realized the value of creating a comprehensive

program through this process that affects individuals beyond the training, hence leading

to social change.

Leadership and Change

Leadership and change are important to the research process. It was essential to

have the background knowledge from Walden University to help me conduct and

facilitate the research as an effective leader. The research process gave me an opportunity

to dialogue with educators on the administrative and teacher level. This required initiative

and confidence in facilitating these interviews and conversations. I learned the value of

being a leader in the field of education research, a critical thinker, and an agent of

change.

Brinson and Steiner (2012) emphasized the roles of the administrators, teachers,

schools, and community stakeholders in changing failing schools. The study emphasized

the need to have a shared vision, develop a strategy, measure the strategy, and build a

relationship with stakeholders. My project study immediately responded to the findings in

this research, thus giving me an opportunity to create a product that could change the

lives of so many teachers, students, parents, administrators, and the community

stakeholders of the schools. The project study was also created to empower teachers,

thereby identifying teacher leaders as they emerge from professional learning

communities and can be more effective within their schools.

I realized the value of shared leadership, where students are given a voice,

parents' views are considered, administrators are kept abreast of instructional practices,

and teachers can function with support. Brinson and Steiner (2012) further postulated the

need for stakeholders to collaborate and build trust so that schools can build a strong support system. The school climate will then change to be a place where every stakeholder contributes to its success, and change will be celebrated in student achievement that affects all.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

My Walden journey has been a very significant part of my academic life as a scholar. I have always desired to learn a lot about my crafts of teaching and learning so I can be more proficient in sharing my skills with others in the education field. Throughout this doctoral journey, I realized there was so much to learn in education, and I have grown to respect my peers as we attempt to change the lives of our students. I loved being a teacher first as I became very intimate with the craft of teaching. When I embarked on being a principal, I understood how invaluable my teaching career was in making me an instructional leader. However, leadership change and knowledge cannot be static, so the Walden journey was inevitable for me.

Twelve years ago, I was given the opportunity to work with urban children living in poverty. This has been the most rewarding part of my career thus far. According to Bourgeois (2010), a scholar-practitioner works as a change agent through reflection, working within and outside of the organization to effect change. I aspire to be a scholar-practitioner in the field of education. This doctoral program has given me a solid foundation to explore research and employ it within the field, particularly in urban schools.

As a scholar in the field of education, I am convinced that I can impact urban schools in a positive way to enhance instruction. Too often, urban schools are left with the lowest-performing teachers and administrators in our nation. Throughout my journey at Walden, I was intent on changing this by being an agent of change in the lives of administrators, teachers, students, and parents. My project study will serve as a tool to advocate and employ change in urban schools. My goal is to use my scholarly knowledge to motivate and mobilize all stakeholders to increase student achievement from inside and outside of urban schools.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Over the years, I have been given many opportunities to be a practitioner in the field of education. Not only have I explored the art of teaching in the classroom for over 21 years, but I have been a practitioner in teacher training for over 14 years. As I reflect on myself as a practitioner, I realized how limited I was in the field. The doctoral journey has given me a solid foundation to plan and execute training in a more succinct and teacher-focused manner. I have explored so much content that it made me realize how educational practices have evolved and how teaching methodologies have changed to meet the needs of contemporary society.

As a practitioner, I now understand that I need to tap into the tools that are researched-based to inform teacher training in the future. The project study research gave me an opportunity to look into the window of practitioner researcher where I am compelled to utilize my knowledge to change the world. According to Simon, Campano, and Broderick (2012), researchers must become advocates for educational reforms in the

field as practitioners if they intend to affect social change in the world. I believe that Walden has armed me with the tools to be a practitioner who sticks to neither the traditional educational tools, nor the status quo approach to teaching and learning.

The one-shot workshop approach with the expectations to transform teachers overnight is absolutely impossible. I realize now that my practice lends itself to ongoing, embedded support of teachers to influence positive outcomes. As a practitioner, my impact cannot be limited to the schools, but has to be far-reaching in meeting the needs of parents and the community. I can truly say that I have grown during the course of this journey and am ready to practice in the educational field.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

I have learned a lot as I developed the project for my research study. As a project developer, I realized that I had to align my thoughts and content with the vision and mission of the schools. I understand that a needs assessment is key to informing any project development as it would prove useful if it met the needs of the participants. The research study gave me a lot of data to support the construction of the project. This was a laborious and challenging process, but was so fulfilling.

One of the approaches that I used in carving out the project study was employing the reverse engineering framework where I looked at the objectives and assessments before the module creation. I found this approach more useful to address project development. As a project developer, I realized the value of evaluation throughout the process to learn more about the project's effectiveness. I understand now that each

component of the project is significant to its success. I wanted to create a project that

would touch the lives of many in the field of education, especially students.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

Because the problem of students' failure in reading affects so many people

beyond the school, I realized that the success of the project was dependent on input from

multiple stakeholders. The project was designed for a community to take ownership of

the problem and resolve it. With students' backgrounds as the catalyst to plan and

integrate into the training, it was crucial to include authentic aspects of their lives. The

project itself, if executed effectively, will be the first indication of social change within

the community, as finally everyone would have contributed to planning for student

instruction.

The professional development training will impact the lives of many students,

teachers, parents, administrators, and the community. Williems and Gonzales-DeHass

(2012) advocated for cooperation among multiple stakeholders to foster student learning

in their social and educational contexts. This research project will change the lives of

urban students who have been failing reading tests. It will generate school and

community partnerships where teachers dialogue with organizations and plan with them

to meet the diverse needs of the students. This would mean success for a whole

community as students master and succeed and give back to their society.

 Parental engagement will increase significantly because teachers and parents will

now communicate on a regular basis about the students' learning and assessment. The

educators, that is, teachers and administrators, will develop a collegial community of

learning for themselves and a successful environment of achievement for their customer-families. Social change will then be inevitable for these urban schools where failure will be minimized and eventually obliterated.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Based on the literature reviewed about the professional development of teachers, it is clear that there is a need for schools to offer content-specific training that fosters collaboration among multiple stakeholders to get effective results from teaching and student learning. The literature also confirmed that it is crucial to present authentic instructional practices that can be employed within the constructs of the classroom to connect with students' backgrounds. It is necessary for us to create professional learning opportunities for teachers so that students will have effective practitioners teaching them (U. S. Department of Education, 2010).

The continuous decline in student performance on standardized tests, particularly in urban schools, is not only troubling, but signals failure for an entire generation in our country. A lack of proficient teachers who continue to work with disadvantaged students in these urban educational settings with no knowledge of students' backgrounds signals the need for professional development training. Based on the research findings, teachers need to build their repertoire of instructional strategies to meet the needs of students in their own contexts.

The data also indicated that teachers and administrators need to integrate students' background in their instruction, through collaboration with the parents and the community. While the project study's intent is to address all of these areas, further

research must be done to assess the implementation and sustainability of this training to see whether teacher practices change overtime. It is also necessary to follow up with support for teachers, students, and parents as they adjust to a student-centered classroom. Furthermore, I suggest that additional research be conducted to explore community and school partnerships and the impact on student achievement as this would support an authentic learning environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results from the research provided an opportunity for educators to examine professional development training opportunities with different strategies and methodologies to address students' lack of achievement on standardized reading tests. The study revealed that collaborative professional learning that focuses on student learning in a constructive project-based training can be useful for reading teachers to replicate in the classroom. The project is designed to provide a collaborative training for teachers and administrators with students, parents, and community stakeholders, giving them valuable information about students' backgrounds to inform their instructional practices. The collaborative efforts of the participants will impact social change within the communities as students' success would spillover into community and societal achievement.

Section 4 described the project's development, strengths, and limitations in relation to the research. It also delved into my personal reflection on scholarship, leadership, and change during my educational journey. In addition, I gave a self-analysis of myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Finally, Section 4 concluded

with a discussion of the project's potential impact on social change, and the implications

for further research in the field of education.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development Training Workshop

The overall goal of the professional development training workshop is to equip reading teachers and administrators with essential skills and knowledge to facilitate reading instruction in an authentic learning environment. This would give students the competencies to perform within the classroom, on standardized tests, and beyond the classroom. The PDTW is designed to:

- Educationally prepare reading teachers to function in a student-centered classroom environment.

- Explore a variety of strategies for the reading curriculum that will facilitate authentic instructional practices.

- Provide educational support and resources that will maximize learning outcomes.

- Help create a collaborative community partnership between the teachers, students and parents to inform instructional strategies.

At the end of the PDTW, the participants will be able to:

- Discuss the characteristics of a student-centered classroom.

- Describe instructional strategies that can be facilitated in an authentic classroom environment.

- Discuss application of effective authentic teaching strategies and students' backgrounds in the classroom.

- Align reading standards with authentic teaching strategies and assessments.

- Analyze how the standards, students and strategies function in an authentic classroom

- Collaborate with their peers in planning and facilitating instruction.

- Use a variety of strategies to plan lessons for instruction.

- Identify strategies to encourage student participation in the classroom.

- Create assessments to evaluate students' work and teacher reflection.

- Collaborate with students before and after the construction of instruction.

- Explore performance measures used to assess teaching-learning practices in the classroom

- Explain technology resources used in the teaching-learning environment

Day 1 Schedule
9:00am-3:30pm

	Objectives/Strategies	Equipment Needed	Timeframe
Module 1 The Teacher-Centered versus Student-Centered Classroom	Discuss the characteristics of a student-centered classroom. **Strategy:** Think Pair Share to define student centered classroom, compare and contrast classrooms and identify characteristics.	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handouts: Student-Centered Classroom	9:00-9:45am (45 minutes)
Module 2 Instructional Strategies	Describe instructional strategies that can be facilitated in an authentic classroom environment. **Strategy**: Model Reciprocal Teaching, Think Alouds, Literacy Circles, Vocabulary Development Lessons.	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handouts: Instructional Strategies	10:00-12:00pm (120 minutes) **~Break for Lunch~** 12:00-1:00pm
Module 3 Who are My Students and What are My Standards? : Exploring Students' Backgrounds in the Classroom	Discuss and align standards with effective authentic teaching strategies and students' backgrounds in the classroom **Strategy**: Align Common Core Standards with the strategies modeled.	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handouts: Standards, Strategies & Students	1:00-2:00pm (60 minutes)
Module 4 **Reading Reflection Rounds**	Analyze how the standards, students, and strategies function in an authentic classroom **Strategy**: Video Analysis and Scenarios	Tables Video Example Handouts: Reflection Sheets/Prompts	2:15-3:30pm (75 minutes)

Day 2 Schedule
9:00am-3:30pm

	Objectives/Strategies	Equipment Needed	Timeframe
Module 1 Understanding and Collaborating with Students and the Community	Collaborate with students before and after the construction of instruction **Strategy:** Conferences, and Surveys with students, parents and community.	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handouts: Flashcards & Survey	9:00-11:00am (120 minutes)
Module 2 Facilitating Student Learning	Identify strategies to encourage student participation in the classroom. **Strategy**: Survey Analysis with student, parents and community.	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handouts: Flashcards	11:15-12:30pm (75 minutes) **~Break for Lunch~** 12:30-1:30pm
Module 3 Technology Use in an Authentic Learning Environment	Explain technology resources used in the teaching-learning environment. **Strategy**: Blogs, Portfolios/Calendar/Directory	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handouts: Flashcards	1:30-2:30pm (60 minutes)
Module 4 **Reading Reflection Rounds**	Describe strategies to conduct productive pre and post student conferences in the classroom **Strategy**: Conference Data to Intelligence Map.	Tables Handouts: Reflection Sheets/Prompts	2:45-3:30pm (45 minutes)

Day 3 Schedule
9:00am-3:30pm

	Objectives/Strategies	Equipment Needed	Timeframe
Module 1 Planning Lessons	Use a variety of strategies to plan lessons for instruction. **Strategy:** Instructional Cycle, Application of Intelligence Map and Teaching Strategies	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handouts: Instructional Design Cycle , Intelligence Map, Teaching Strategies	9:00-11:00am (120 minutes)
Module 2 Creating Assessments	Create assessments to evaluate students' work **Strategy:** Instructional Cycle, Application of Intelligence Map and Teaching Strategies Assessments, Rubric	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handouts: Instructional Design Cycle, Intelligence Map, Rubric	11:15-12:30pm (75 minutes) **~Break for Lunch~** 12:30-1:30pm
Module 3 Follow-up and Support of Instructional Practice	Explore performance measures used to assess teaching-learning practices in the classroom **Strategy**: Instructional Design Cycle, Rubric	Portable Microphone Projector PowerPoint slides Handout: Instructional Design Cycle, Rubric	1:30-2:15pm (45 minutes)
Module 4 **Reading Reflection Rounds**	Describe appropriate use of the teacher evaluation process/self reflections **Strategy:** Reflection Prompts	Tables Video Example Handouts: Reflection Sheets/Prompts	2:30-3:30pm (60 minutes)

Program Learning Activities
Day 1

Activity	Trainer Notes and Materials	Format
Compare and Contrast The Teacher-Centered versus Student-Centered Classroom	Participants will be engaged in groups to Think Pair and Share as they create a definition for Student-Centered Classroom, compare and contrast two classrooms. They will use the handouts provided. Handouts, pens, tables, chairs	10 minutes small group work
Model Instructional Strategies/ Lessons	Model lessons: Participants will be engaged as students in the lessons modeling the instructional strategies reciprocal teaching, think aloud, cooperative learning/literacy circle and vocabulary development. Participants will discuss strategy facilitation in a student-centered classroom. Participants will use the instructional strategies handout to take notes. Handouts, pens, index cards, tables, chairs	20 minutes for each mock lesson and discussion. Whole group lesson, small group discussion. Total 80 minutes.
Video Analysis/ Strategies, Standards and Students	Participants will watch a video clip from the movie Freedom Writers. Participants will use the handout Strategies, Standards and Students as a guide to align standards to students' backgrounds. Standards Manual, pens, video clip, handout, pens, index cards	40 minutes ~ 10 minute video clip, 10 minute discussion and 20 minutes to align standards/notes in small groups.
Demonstration of Authentic Student-Centered Learning	Participants will be given two scenarios and within their groups they would plan and dramatize the scenario to each other. Each participant would have a rubric of the characteristics of a student-centered classroom. Participants would use the rubric to check for these traits. Handout with Scenarios, Multiple Intelligence Flashcards for Students/Parents/Community/ Student-Centered Classroom Rubric	20 minutes role playing with Critical Friends Group feedback

Program Learning Activities
Day 2

Activity	Trainer Notes and Materials	Format
Demonstration of Real Collaboration Students and Parents	Participants will conference with students and parents. They will be given pre-conference forms, conference and post conference forms to start the dialogue. Conference forms, Room set up in a collaborative conference setting Handouts, pens, tables, chairs	10-15 minutes conferences with flashcards/surveys 30 minutes of debriefing based on notes taken in open discussion, then collaborative PLC's dialogue
Analysis of Technology Use in the Reading Classroom	Teachers will spend time on the computer blogging and creating portfolios, Community resource directory, calendars, intelligence maps Computers, Technology personnel	30 minutes of collaboration in navigating blogs and portfolios, then debriefing.
Data to Create My Classroom Intelligence Map	Participants will use the intelligence flashcards completed by students/ parents and community members to create an intelligence map for the classroom. Computers, Technology personnel pens, handout, pens, index cards	20 minutes in small groups creating a map using conference data.

Program Learning Activities
Day 3

Activity	Trainer Notes and Materials	Format
Planning Lessons for a Student-Centered Classroom	Participants will engage writing lesson plans which include new teaching strategies. This will be done in a Professional Learning Community Handouts: Instructional Design Cycle, Instructional Strategies, Standards Manual, Class Intelligence Map Tables and chairs, paper and pen	30-minute discussion as teachers share openly lesson plans developed with the group.
Creating Assessments for the Reading Classroom	Participants will engage creating assessments and rubrics which include new teaching strategies. They will use the assessments designed in the model lessons as a guide. This will be done in a PLC Handouts: Instructional Design Cycle, Instructional Strategies, Standards Manual, Class Intelligence Map, Tall Tale Rubric Tables and chairs, paper and pen	30-minute discussion as teachers share openly assessments developed with the group.
Critical Analysis of Teacher and Student Evaluation/ Reflection Process	Participants will be given sample teacher evaluation rubrics and students' self assessment forms. They will use these in two groups, teachers and students, to demonstrate how to use them in the classroom.	20 minutes of role-playing with critical analysis of presentations.

Professional Development Training Evaluation Tool

Please circle the appropriate response for each learning objective.
Scale key: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

At the conclusion of the learning module, I believe I am able to:

1. Discuss the characteristics of a student-centered classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Describe instructional strategies that can be facilitated in an authentic classroom environment.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Discuss and align standards with effective authentic teaching strategies and students' backgrounds in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
4. Analyze how the standards, students and strategies function in an authentic classroom	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate response for each session of the learning module.

At the conclusion of the learning module, I believe I understand:

1. The Teacher-Centered versus Student-Centered Classroom	1	2	3	4	5
2. Instructional Strategies	1	2	3	4	5
3. Who are My Students and What are My Standards : Exploring Students' Backgrounds in the Classroom	1	2	3	4	5
4. Reading Reflection Rounds	1	2	3	4	5

Please score the following areas for the professional development training workshop:

At the conclusion of Day 1, I believe I understand the following areas:

1. Module instructor (knowledgeable, clearly communicates, models instructional practices, professional)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Module content (clear, relevant to classroom, quality information, organized, engaging)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Learning activities (aligned to/reinforced content, engaging authentic, collaborative)	1	2	3	4	5
4. Learning materials (aligned, handouts, research materials, instructional materials)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Facilities (comfortable temperature, conducive to learning, available resources to support learning)	1	2	3	4	5

Please provide any other comments or suggestions for the professional development facilitator.
Please circle the appropriate response for each learning objective
Scale key: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

At the conclusion of the learning module, I believe I am able to:

1. Collaborate with students before and after the construction of instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Identify strategies to encourage student participation in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Explain technology resources used in the teaching-learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
4. Describe strategies to conduct productive pre and post student conferences in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate response for each session of the learning module.

At the conclusion of the learning module, I believe I understand the concepts of:

1. Understanding and collaborating with students/community	1	2	3	4	5
2. Facilitating student learning	1	2	3	4	5
3. Technology use in an authentic learning environment	1	2	3	4	5
4. Reading Reflection Rounds	1	2	3	4	5

Please score the following areas for the clinical faculty training session.

At the conclusion of the day, I believe I understand the following areas:

1. Module instructor (knowledgeable, clearly communicates information, models instructional practices professional)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Module content (clear, relevant to classroom, quality information, organized, engaging)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Learning activities (aligned to/reinforced content, engaging authentic, collaborative)	1	2	3	4	5
4. Learning materials (aligned, handouts, research materials, instructional materials)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Facilities (comfortable temperature, conducive to learning, available resources to support learning)	1	2	3	4	5

A Professional Development Training Workshop

Novea McIntosh

Learning Targets: At the end of the sessions participants will be able to:

•Discuss the characteristics of a student-centered classroom

•Describe instructional strategies that can be facilitated in an authentic classroom environment.

•Discuss and align standards with effective authentic teaching strategies and students' backgrounds.

•Analyze how the standards, students and strategies function in authentic classroom

The Teacher Centered vs. the Student Centered Classroom

Teacher Centered Classroom

- Teacher directs the classroom.
- Doesn't meet diverse needs of students.
- Teaching styles conflict with students' learning styles.
- Quiet classroom.
- Memorization of information.
- Limited learning.
- Teacher generates ideas (Henriksen, 2010).
- Students are passively involved in the learning process.
- Technology is not integrated.

Student Centered Classroom

- Teacher is a facilitator.
- Meets diverse needs of students
- Students work individually, in pairs or in small groups.
- Learning is meaningful.
- Involves extensive planning and task-specific classroom management.
- Students experience success.
- Students generate ideas (Henriksen, 2010).
- Students are actively involved in the learning process.
- Technology is integrated into the classroom.

To facilitate student centered learning teachers need to be responsive to their students…..

- Learning needs and goals
- Other Goals
- Abilities and Learning Styles
- Interests
- Life experience
- Life issues
- (family, social, economic, employment, political …)

Tools used to connect with students

- Surveys or Questionnaires
- Class voting and prioritizing
- Focus groups (parents, community organizations)
- Individual student conferences
- Students' writing, especially journals
- Informal discussions before, during, or after class
- Other teachers or program staff

Research from Hattie

TEACHING EFFECTS

Influences and effect sizes related to student achievement

Source: Hattie (2009) Visible Learning
Diagram: www.visible-learning.org

Influence	Effect size
Providing formative evaluation	0,9
Comprehensive interventions for learning disabled students	0,77
Reciprocal teaching	0,74
Feedback	0,73
Spaced vs. mass practice	0,71
Meta-cognitive strategies	0,69
Self-verbalization/self-questioning	0,64
Problem-solving teaching	0,61
Teaching strategies	0,6
Cooperative vs. individualistic learning	0,59

6
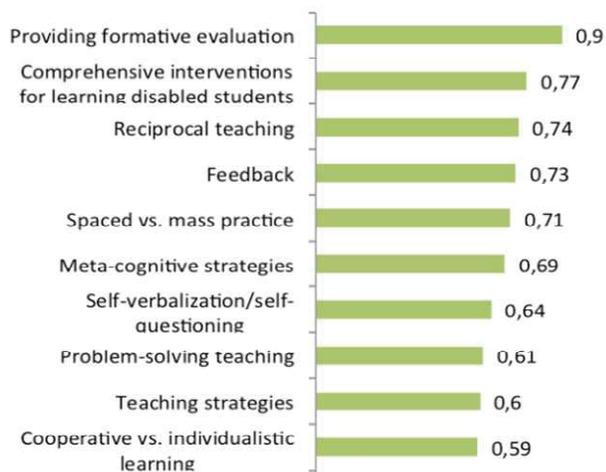
Research from Hattie

TEACHER EFFECTS

Influences and effect sizes related to student achievement

Source: Hattie (2009) Visible Learning
Diagram: www.visible-learning.org

Influence	Effect size
Micro teaching	0,88
Teacher clarity	0,75
Teacher-student relationships	0,72
Professional development	0,62
Not Labeling students	0,61
Quality of Teaching	0,44
Expectations	0,43
Teacher effects	0,32

7
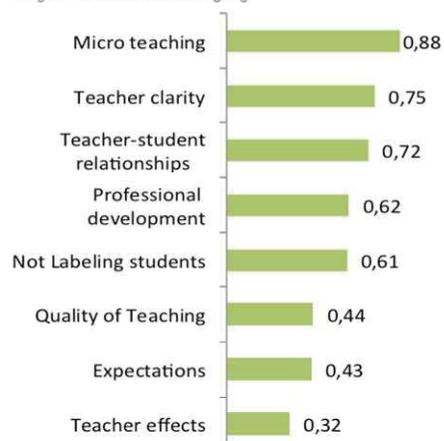
Instructional Strategies

- Reciprocal Teaching
- Think Alouds
- Cooperative Learning (small groups)
- Literacy Circles
- Vocabulary Development

Reciprocal Teaching At Work

This technique uses the four strategies of predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing to increase comprehension.

An example of reciprocal teaching for reading students is:

- Introduce a story or book such as "Freedom Crossing" by Margaret Goff Clark. Based on Ohio Standards fifth grade students are taught about the underground railroad and visit the museum in Cincinnati. Teacher can introduce the lesson dressed as Harriet Tubman and dramatize her experience. Students can have a discussion about what they know about Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad. Teacher could use pictures from the book cover and other pictures collected to have students make predictions. Students would make predictions about the setting of the story, themes, and plot. In small groups students would students would have a chart, bookmarks or sticky notes with the four strategies and they would predict, clarify, question and summarize the story as they work in together. Also sentence starters are great with four strategies:

■ Predicting—"I wonder..." or "I think that..."

■ Clarifying—"I was confused about..." or "I don't

understand..."

■ Questioning—"How...?" or "Why...?"

■ Summarizing—"The author wants us to know..."or "The big idea is..."

Students would also use pictures to illustrate their understanding of the story. Teacher could also invite grandparents, community members of presenters at the Underground railroad to share their experiences with the class. Students could listen to freedom hymns sung in churches to connect to mood and setting of the novel. The students could reenact the underground railroad as a performance task.

Think Alouds

Student think alouds are an effective assessment tool that provide a window into students' thinking. They provide opportunities for teachers to notice what students know and can do by making their reading strategies audible and visible.Spainger et al. (2011)

Why use think-alouds?
•It helps students learn to monitor their thinking as they read and improves their comprehension.
•It teaches students to re-read a sentence, read ahead to clarify, and/or look for context clues to make sense of what they read.
•It slows down the reading process and allows students to monitor their understanding of a text.

Think Aloud Example

How to use think-alouds

- Begin by modeling this strategy. Model your thinking as you read. Do this at points in the text or passage that may be confusing for students (new vocabulary, unusual sentence construction).
- Introduce the assigned text and discuss the purpose of the Think-Aloud strategy. Develop the set of questions to support thinking aloud (see examples below). For the fifth grade classroom use passages such as raps or hip-hop music, articles about sports athletes in football, basketball.
    - What do I know about this topic?
    - What do I think I will learn about this topic?
    - Do I understand what I just read?
    - Do I have a clear picture in my head about this information?
    - What more can I do to understand this?
    - What were the most important points in this reading?
    - What new information did I learn?
    - How does it fit in with what I already know?
- Give students opportunities to practice the technique, and offer structured feedback to students. Students may be able to complete these think alouds with partners or small groups.
- Read the selected passage aloud as the students read the same text silently. At certain points stop and "think aloud" the answers to some of the pre-selected questions.
- Demonstrate how good readers monitor their understanding by rereading a sentence, reading ahead to clarify, and/or looking for context clues. Students then learn to offer answers to the questions as the teacher leads the Think Aloud.

Cooperative Learning

The authors of *Classroom Instruction that Works* cite research showing that organizing students in cooperative learning groups can lead to a gain as high as 28 percentiles in measured student achievement (Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock 2001).Some examples of these are literature circles, think pair share, jigsaw, round robin, tea party, writearound and others.

Literature circle is an example of a cooperative learning group in the reading classroom. Students will select their own reading materials based on their interests and are assigned roles within the group (voting could be used). The roles could also delve into students' multiples intelligences. Once the group norms are established the teacher will act as a facilitator guiding students practice within the groups. Students could report to the whole class at the end of their task through various formats, poetry, drama, rap, music, forum, writing letters, reports and books. The teacher must always provide a rubric to assess literature circles.

Literature Circles

*Harvey Daniels (2002), an expert in literacy,
defines literature circles as "small, peer-led discussion
groups whose members have chosen to
read the same story . . . or book" (p. 2).*

1 **Connectors** find and bring in connections between the text and themselves or the world.
2. **Questioners** write down questions they think of while reading a section of text; these questions can be about anything from characters to events to vocabulary to predictions.
3. **Literary luminaries** pick quotes or sections that stood out for one reason or another (such as humor or importance) and that they want to share with the group for this reason.
4. **Illustrators** prepare a picture from a specific scene in the text that led them to visualize that part of the story.
5. **Summarizers** prepare a brief summary of the reading, recounting the important points or events from that section of the text.
• **Researchers** look for background information to share on a topic related to the text such as culture of the characters or history of the setting.
• **Word Wizards** pick out several words from the text that are puzzling or unfamiliar, noting the page number and looking up definitions to share.
• **Scene Setters** keep track of where the events in the book are taking place and note when the action switches locations. (Daniels, 2002)

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary Instructional Strategies: Marzano's 6-Step Process

The 6 steps:
1. The teacher provides a description, explanation, or example of the term.
2. Linguistic definition – students restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.
3. Nonlinguistic definition – students construct a picture, pictograph, symbolic representation, or act out the term.
4. The teacher extends and refines understanding of the word by engaging students in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in vocabulary notebooks.
5. Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.
6. Involve students in games that enable them to play with the terms and reinforce word knowledge.

An example: Teaching figurative language would mean introducing students to figurative terms such as metaphor and simile. The teacher could introduce poems to the students and the student in turn could share their raps, hip hop songs to illustrate their understanding of metaphors and similes used in their everyday life. Students could sing, perform, recite their music and draw pictures or make symbols to represent the vocabulary terms learned in class. The students can play games such as jeopardy, bingo, around the world to reinforce the vocabulary terms. They could also create books/dictionaries as a performance task. A word wall would also be great in the classroom.

Standards, Teaching Strategies and Students' Backgrounds

Standards	Teaching Strategies	Students' Backgrounds
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.	Cooperative Learning: Think Pair Share, Dramatizations, Analogies, Vocabulary Development	Music such as rap, hip hop, spoken word integrated into lesson as poetry representative of students' culture.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.	Reciprocal Teaching, Think Alouds, Literature Circles, Writearounds, Small groups	Parent, community leader, museum representative, negro anthem, negro spirituals, hymns, I had a dream speech reflective of students' culture.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.	Think Alouds, Dramatization, Think Pair Share, Small groups	Historical Icons such as Martin Luther King Jr. Harriet Tubman, Pop Artists such as Tupac, Chris Brown, Rihanna

Professional Learning Communities

- Professional Learning Communities allow staff to work in collaborative teams to continually analyze and improve classroom practice to ultimately impact student learning. Teachers meet weekly to dialogue about "best practices" and their implications for student learning.
- Professional Learning Communities empower teachers to work together to develop curricular outcomes, assess student achievement, select instructional materials, plan special projects, participate in peer observation and coaching, and pursue professional growth opportunities.
- **Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community:**
- Shared mission, vision, values, goals
- Collaborative teams focused on learning
- Collective inquiry into "best practice" and "current reality"
- Action orientation
- Commitment to continuous improvement
- Results orientated

Reading Reflection Rounds

- Focus: Analyze how the standards, students and strategies function in an authentic classroom

- NB. Participants will be given PLC forms to use for the training.

PLCs At Work

- Participants will be engaged in a tuning protocol for Reading Reflection Rounds. The goal is to facilitate dialogue in a formal yet meaningful manner. The presenter or facilitator will talk, participants will remain silent after which participants will engage in a discussion over the topic discussed. Each segment of the this PLC will be timed to allow for efficiency and productive collegial dialogue. The steps below illustrate the components:
  - Introduction/Facilitator (5minutes)
  - Presentation(10-15 minutes)
  - Clarifying Questions (5 minutes)
  - Pause note on warm (complimentary) or cool (challenging) feedback (5 minutes)
  - Feedback (Presenter takes notes based on participants responses, silent) (10 minutes
  - Reflection/Response (Presenter share feedback based on what the participants shared) (5 minutes)
  - Debrief (Presenter starts a group discussion with participants about the topic shared and plan for next steps) (5 Minutes)

Team Agenda Template

While there is no one way to create an agenda for a team meeting, the most successful agendas include topics to be discussed, decisions to be made, actions to be taken, and reasons for celebration. Some agendas also include short reflection surveys designed to collect information about team meeting processes. The following is a sample agenda that your learning team might find valuable.

Date of Meeting: _____ **Start Time:** _____ **End Time:** _____

Members Present: _____

Topics to Be Discussed: Effective teams limit the focus of their meetings, resisting the temptation to tackle too many topics at once. As a result, we will focus our next meeting on the following three topics.		
Topic 1: _____	**Topic 2:** _____	**Topic 3:** _____
How does this topic connect to our school's mission and vision?	How does this topic connect to our school's mission and vision?	How does this topic connect to our school's mission and vision?
Where do we currently stand?	Where do we currently stand?	Where do we currently stand?
What do we need to do to move forward?	What do we need to do to move forward?	What do we need to do to move forward?

1 of 3

Professional Learning Community Agenda – Communication Form

Grade Level/Content Area: _____   Date: _____

Team Members Signatures:

Guiding Questions of a PLC:
- *What do we want students to learn and be able to do?*
- *How will we know if students have mastered essential learning?*
- *What will we do for students who have not mastered essential learning?*
- *What will we do for students who have already mastered the content?*

1. Agenda topic(s) for PLC meeting:

2. What will be done as a result of this PLC meeting?

3. Who is responsible to carry out what was agreed upon?

4. What is the timeline?

5. How will we assess the effectiveness of what we did? What will be the evidence or artifact?

6. What are the agenda topics for the next PLC meeting?

Problem-solving Model: IDEAL

Identify Issue/Concern – **D**efine Problem – **E**xplore Solutions – **A**ct on Plan – **L**ook at Results

Learning Targets: At the end of the sessions participants will be able to:

•Collaborate with students before and after the construction of instruction.

•Identify strategies to encourage student participation in the classroom.

•Explain technology resources used in the teaching-learning environment

•Describe strategies to conduct productive pre and post conferences in the classroom.

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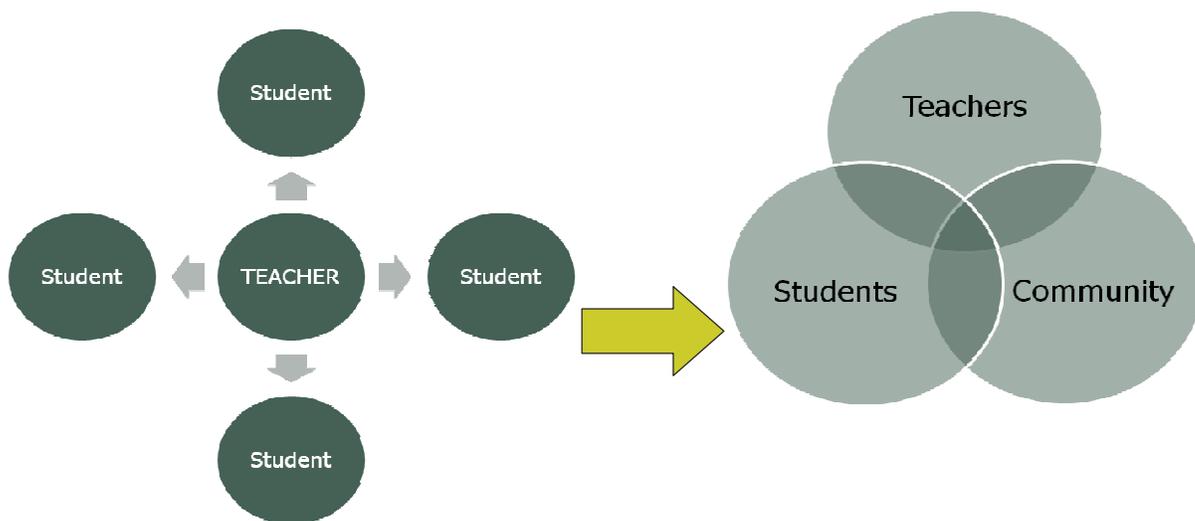
Research from Hattie

CURRICULA EFFECTS

Influences and effect sizes related to student achievement

Source: Hattie (2009) Visible Learning
Diagram: www.visible-learning.org

Program	Effect size
Vocabulary programs	0,67
Repeated reading programs	0,67
Creativity programs	0,65
Phonics instruction	0,6
Tactile stimulation programs	0,58
Comprehension programs	0,58
Visual-perception programs	0,55
Outdoor/adventure programs	0,52

26
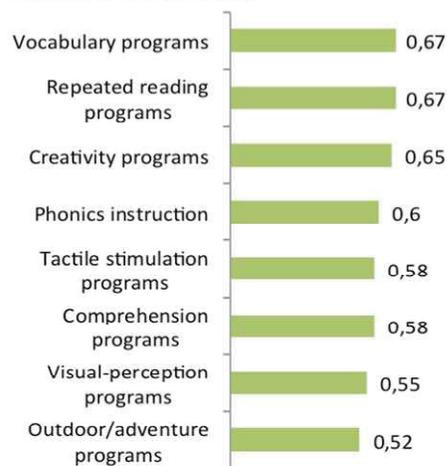
Research from Hattie

HOME EFFECTS

Influences and effect sizes related
to student achievement

Source: Hattie (2009) Visible Learning
Diagram: www.visible-learning.org

Influence	Effect size
Home environment	0,57
Socioeconomic status	0,57
Parental involvement	0,51
Home visiting	0,29
Family structure	0,17
Welfare policies	-0,12
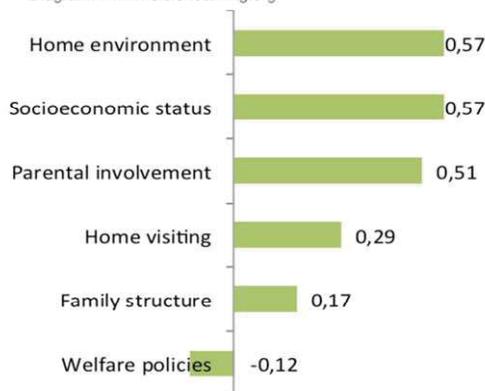
27

Student Led Conferences

Student Led Conference Agenda
<u>Self-Assessment</u>:
Show your parent(s) the self assessment worksheet and explain to them which areas you feel are your strengths and which areas you want to improve this year.
<u>Work Samples:</u>
Show your parent(s) the work samples you are proud of and what you did for the assignment.
<u>Questions:</u>
Ask your parents(s) if they have any questions for you.
<u>Teachers:</u>
The 5th grade teachers will talk to you and your parents for a few minutes.

Statement	Strength	Area for Improvement
I like to read short stories.		
I enjoy music, art and drama in the reading classroom.		
My favorite time in reading is working with my partners in small groups.		
I understand my work better when teacher demonstrates it for the class.		
I like to have presenters come to my class to share their knowledge about my community.		
I take responsibility for my actions and behavior.		
My classroom is my professional workspace, and I know what my behavior must look like.		
I follow the technology guidelines.		
I am able to work in a collaborative and supportive manner.		
I ask questions when I do not understand. I listen.		
My parents/guardians have access to my Weekly Progress Reports.		
I ask for, and make plans to attend, any tutoring I might need. (morning, during PE, for example).		
If I have to turn in late work, I take responsibility for locating what I need, completing the assignment, and handing it in before the deadline.		

Multiple Intelligences Test - based on Howard Gardner's MI Model

(young people's version - see businessballs.com for adults and self-calculating versions)

Score the statements: 1 = Mostly Disagree, 2 = Slightly Disagree, 3 = Slightly Agree, 4 = Mostly Agree.

Alternatively for speed or ease - tick the box if the statement is more true for you than not. This is page 1 of 2.

Longer manual and self-calculating versions for people over 16 years of age are available free from businessballs.com.

Score or tick the statements in the white-out boxes only	Score	
I can play a musical instrument		1
I often have a song or piece of music in my head		2
I find it easy to make up stories		3
I have always been physically well co-ordinated (run, jump, balance, etc)		4
Music is very important to me		5
I am a good liar (if I want to be)		6
I play a sport or dance		7
I am a very social person and like being with other people		8
I find graphs, charts and diagrams easy to understand		9
I find it easy to remember quotes or phrases or poems or song lyrics		10
I can always recognise places that I have been before, even when I was very young		11
When I am concentrating I tend to doodle		12
I find mental arithmetic easy (sums in my head)		13
At school one of my favourite subjects is / was English		14
I like to think through a problem carefully, considering all the consequences		15
I love adrenaline sports and scary rides		16
I enjoy individual sports best		17
I find it easy to remember telephone numbers		18
I set myself goals and plans for the future		19
I can tell easily whether someone likes me or dislikes me		20
To learn something new, I need to just get on and try it		21
I often see clear images when I close my eyes		22
I don't use my fingers when I count		23
At school I love / loved music lessons		24
I find ball games easy and enjoyable		25

Statement	No.
My favourite subject at school is / was maths	26
I always know how I am feeling	27
I keep a diary	28
My favourite subject at school is / was art	29
I really enjoy reading	30
It upsets me to see someone cry and not be able to help	31
I prefer team sports	32
Singing makes me feel happy	33
I am happy spending time alone	34
My friends always come to me for emotional support and advice	35

Add the scores or ticks in each column and write the total for each column in the boxes on the right.

The highest scores indicate your natural strengths and potential – your natural intelligences.

There are no right or wrong answers.

My strongest intelligences are (write them here):

Intelligence type	your totals
Linguistic	
Logical-Mathematical	
Musical	
Bodily-Kinesthetic	
Spatial-Visual	
Interpersonal	
Intrapersonal	

You are **happiest and most successful** when you **learn, develop,** and **work** in ways that make **best use of** your **natural intelligences** (our strengths and style and brain-type in other words).

This indicator can help you to focus on the sorts of learning and work that will be most fulfilling and rewarding for you.

The multiple intelligences definitions are available in sheet 2 of the MSExcel file containing this test. The file and more information about multiple intelligences are available from the website www.businessballs.com.

If you are using this test tool for teaching and development purposes you might find it helpful also to refer to the 'Fantasticat' ideas on the businessballs website, which are designed to help young people identify and express their own unique personal potential.

Strategies to encourage student participation

- Hands On Activities-Create reading projects that connect with students interests (music, dance, sports, food, language).
- Use the Multiple Intelligences to group students. Have students demonstrate learning through their intelligences.
- Visual Aids are great for the classroom.
- Create parent and community partnerships
- Use diverse teaching strategies.
- Teach with Technology

Technology Resources

Create Blogs for your classroom to:

- Facilitate fantastic discussions
- Replace your paper newsletter
- Get your students blogging
- Post videos, podcasts and documents
- Create a class publication

How to create a blog

- Blogger is an easy-to-use, no-cost blogging platform that does not require programming skills to use.

- Blogger is tied to your Google account, so you'll first need to first log in to it.

- From there, go to Blogger.com, and you'll immediately see a "New Blog" button to click.

- From there, you'll go to a screen where you can enter the title of your blog and give it a name, which will be the phrase of your choice in front of .blogspot.com (unless you purchase and add a custom URL).

- Once you've done that, you're ready to go

Snapshots of classrooms without student ownership vs. classrooms with student ownership of learning
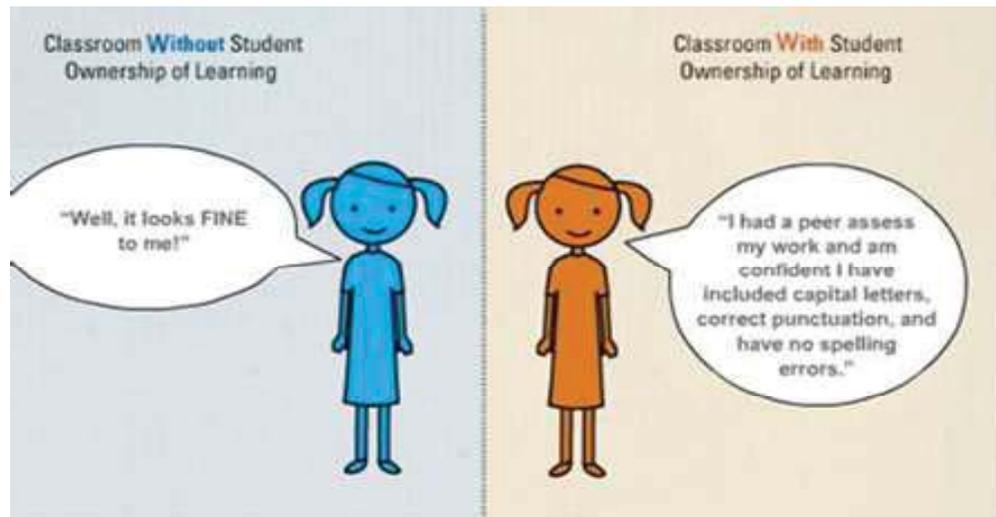

Reading Reflection Rounds

- Focus: Describe strategies to conduct productive pre and post conferences in the classroom.
- NB. Participants will be given PLC forms to use for the training.

Learning Targets: At the end of the sessions participants will be able to:

•Use a variety of strategies to plan lessons for instruction.

•Create assessments to evaluate students' work.

•Explore performance measures used to assess teaching-learning practices in the classroom.

•Describe about appropriate use of the teacher evaluation process/self reflections
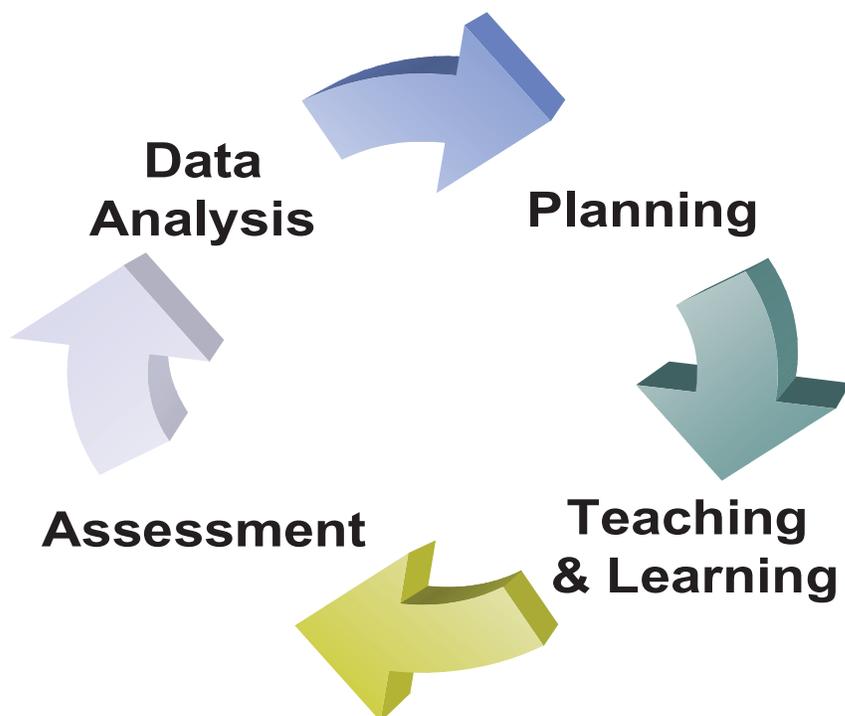
Lesson Planning

- Teaching for understanding should involve activities that support identified desired results and integrate planned assessments (Stage Three). Wiggins and McTighe identify seven core design principles for teaching in an understanding-based classroom in a template they call WHERETO. Each of the letters in this acronym corresponds to key instructional design questions educators should always consider when planning learning activities:
    - W = How will you help your students to know *where* they are headed, *why* they are going there, and *what ways* they will be evaluated along the way?
    - H = How will you *hook* and engage students' interest and enthusiasm through thought-provoking experiences at the beginning of each instructional episode?
    - E = What *experiences* will you provide to help students make their understandings real and to *equip* all learners for success throughout your unit or course?
    - R = How will you cause students to *reflect, revisit, revise*, and *rethink*?
    - E = How will students *express* their understandings and engage in meaningful self-*evaluation*?
    - T = How will you *tailor* (differentiate) your instruction to address the unique strengths and needs of every learner?
    - O = How will you *organize* learning experiences so that students move from teacher-guided and concrete activities to independent applications that emphasize growing conceptual understandings?

SIX FACETS OF UNDERSTANDING

Six Facets	Description	Example
Explanation	To ensure students understand why an answer or approach is the right one. Students explain or justify their responses or justify their course of action.	Students develop an illustrated brochure to explain the principles and practices of a particular type of technology (i.e., transportation, construction, medical, information).
Interpretation	To ensure students avoid the pitfall of looking for the "right answer" and demand answers that are principled...students are able to encompass as many salient facts and points of view as possible.	Students develop a 'biography' of the development of a particular type of technology.
Application	To ensure students' key performances are conscious and explicit reflection, self-assessment, and self-adjustment, with reasoning made evident. Authentic assessment requires a real or simulated audience, purpose, setting, and options for personalizing the work, realistic constraints, and "background noise."	Students analyze a design of a product, taking it apart in order to determine how it works. Students design, develop, test, and revise a solution to a local issue, such as a new roadway system, a water treatment system, or long-term storage of various materials.
Perspective	To ensure students know the importance or significance of an idea and to grasp its importance or unimportance. Encourage students to step back and ask, "What of it?" "Of what value is this knowledge?" "How important is this idea?" "What does this idea enable us to do that is important?"	Students investigate about a technological artifact from the perspective of different regions and countries.
Empathy	To ensure students develop the ability to see the world from different viewpoints in order to understand the diversity of thought and feeling in the world.	Students imagine they are politicians debating the value of nuclear power. They write their thoughts and feelings explaining why they agree or disagree with the use of nuclear power.
Self-Knowledge	To ensure students are deeply aware of the boundaries of their own and others' understanding; able to recognize their own prejudices and projections; has integrity – able and willing to act on what one understands	Students reflect on their own progress of understanding about one of the standards in _Standards for Technological Literacy: Content for the Study of Technology_. They evaluate the extent to which they have improved, what task or assignment was the most challenging and why, and which project or product of work they are most proud of and why.

Source: Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). _Understanding by Design_. p. 85-97. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Handout #9

A TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING
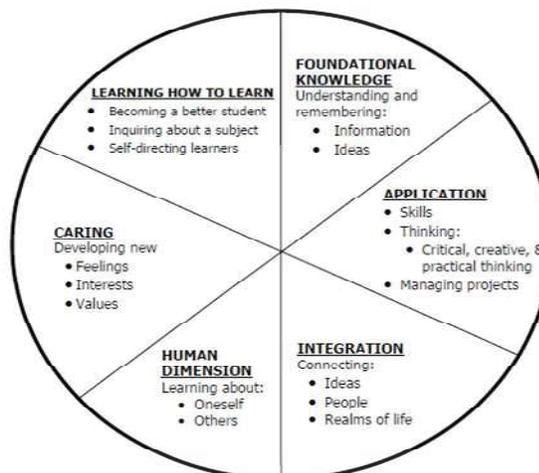
Creating Assessments and performance tasks

- A primary goal of teaching for understanding should be the assurance that students can use their acquired understandings and knowledge independently in real-world situations and scenarios. Culminating performance-based projects (what Wiggins and McTighe refer to as GRASPS), therefore, should include the following core elements:
  - G = *Goals* from the real world.
  - R = *Roles* that are authentic and based in reality.
  - A = *Audiences* to whom students will present final products and performances.
  - S = *Situations* involving a real-world conflict to be resolved, decision to be made, investigation to be completed, or invention to be created.
  - P = *Products* and *performances* culminating from the study.
  - S = *Standards* for evaluating project-based products and performances.

Research from Hattie

STUDENT EFFECTS

Influences and effect sizes related to student achievement

Source: Hattie (2009) Visible Learning
Diagram: www.visible-learning.org

Influence	Effect size
Self-report grades	1,44
Piagetian programs	1,28
Prior achievement	0,67
Pre-term birth weight	0,54
Concentration/persistence/engagement	0,48
Motivation	0,48
Early intervention	0,47

42
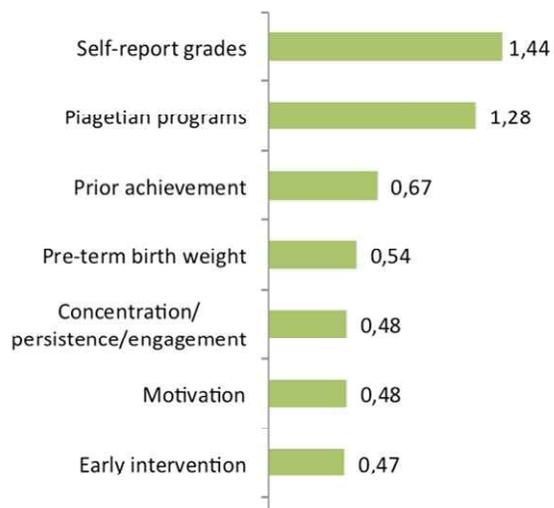
Reading Reflection Rounds

- Focus: Describe about appropriate use of the teacher evaluation process/self reflections.

- NB. Participants will be given PLC forms to use for the training.

References

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Stigler, J. W., & Hiebert, J. (2009). *The teaching gap: Best ideas from the world's teachers for improving education in the classroom*. Simon and Schuster.

PDTW Handouts

Student-Centered Classroom:

Use this space to construct a definition of a student-centered classroom:

Teacher Centered Classroom vs. Student Centered Classroom

Teacher Centered Classroom	Student Centered Classroom

Characteristics of a Student-Centered Classroom
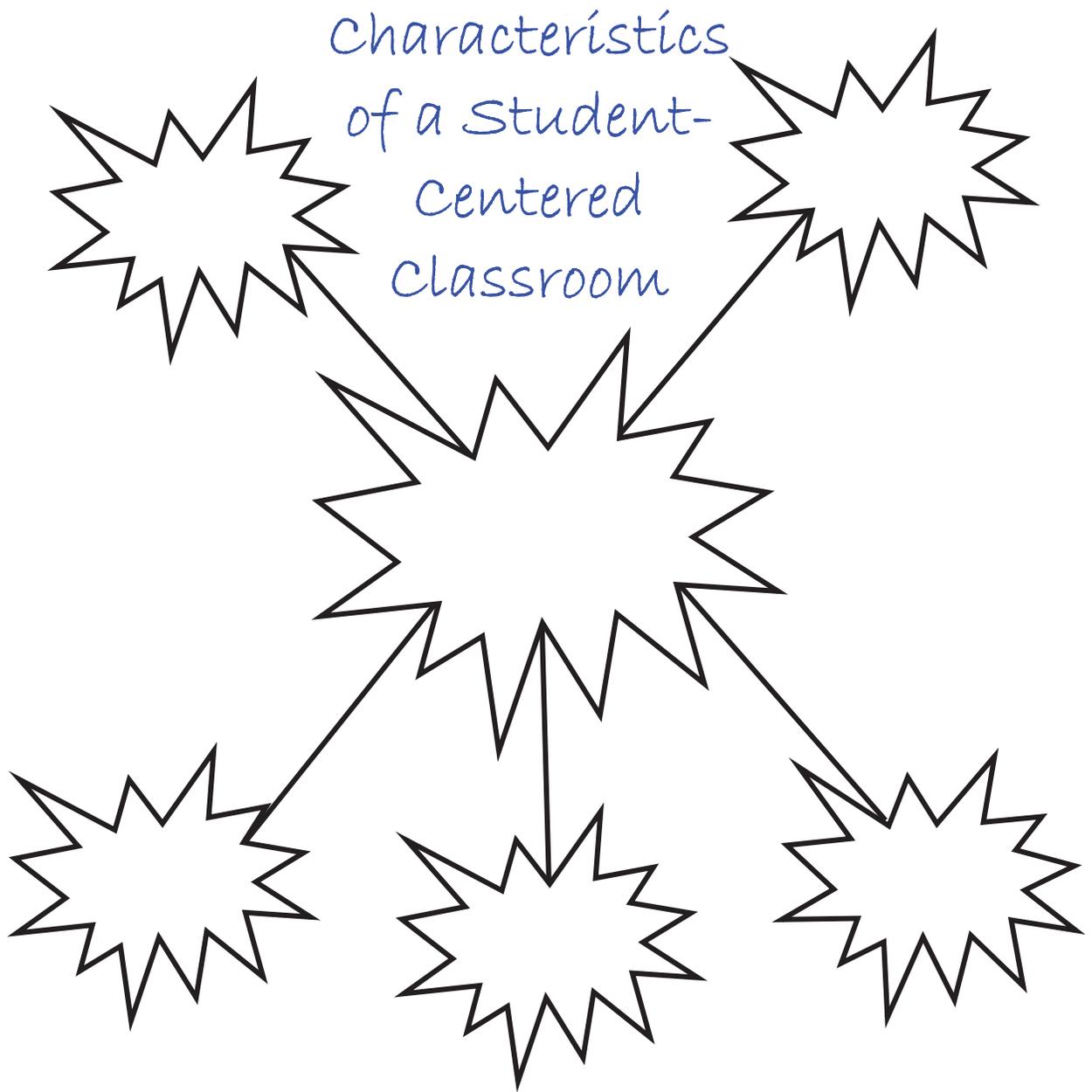
Instructional Strategies

Strategies	Examples	Materials
Reciprocal Teaching	Teacher introduces the lesson with the video "Happy" by Pharell Williams, a popular hip-hop song. The students could sing and dance to the song. Students are divided into small groups of 4-5 students. Each group must go through the reciprocal strategies of Predicting, Clarifying, Questioning and Summarizing the song. The goal is to identify themes, mood, setting and the author's purpose. In each group students are assigned questions and the student leader guides the discussion. I wonder, what is this text about? What message does Pharrell Williams want to convey with this song? Students can engage in a discussion making predictions about the themes in the song. Each group will record their ideas and post their responses on a Graffiti Wall in classroom. Clarifying: I was confused about the section about bad news why would that be included in a happy song? The student leader would redirect students to read the section and discuss it again. The teacher would be walking around the room to guide the discussion. In the groups. The group clarifies misunderstandings as they question each other. What is the Pharell's purpose? How does he want the reader to feel? What does the author want us to know? Where do you think is the setting of the piece? What evidence can you use to validate your answers? Students would also use words and pictures on their graffiti wall to illustrate their understanding of the song. All students would do a gallery walk of the graffiti wall and have a whole group discussion. Teacher invited a local rapper/ musician to share with students about writing songs with a theme, setting mood and purpose. The students could create their own raps with their own theme, setting, mood and purpose as a performance task. They would share these with their classmates. **Sample of the Bookmark /Chart Given to each group of students.** ■ Predicting—"I wonder..." or "I think that..." ■ Clarifying—"I was confused about..." or "I don't understand..." ■ Questioning—"How...?" or "Why...?" ■ Summarizing—"The author wants us to know..."or "The big idea is..."	(from "Despicable Me 2") [Verse 1:] It might seem crazy what I'm about to say Sunshine she's here, you can take a break I'm a hot air balloon that could go to space With the air, like I don't care baby by the way [Hook:] Because I'm happy Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof Because I'm happy Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth Because I'm happy Clap along if you know what happiness is to you Because I'm happy Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do [Verse 2:] Here come bad news talking this and that, yeah, well, give me all you got, and don't hold back, yeah, well, I should probably warn you I'll be just fine, yeah, no offense to you, don't waste your time Here's why [Hook] Hey, come on [Bridge:] (happy) bring me down can't nothing bring me down my level's too high bring me down can't nothing bring me down i said (let me tell you now) bring me down can't nothing bring me down my level's too high bring me down can't nothing bring me down i said [Hook 2x] Hey, come on (happy) Bring me down… can't nothing… Bring me down… my level's too high Bring me down… can't nothing… Bring me down, I said (let me tell you now)

		[Hook 2x] come on
Think Alouds	**Topic: Compare and Contrast** The teacher introduced the assigned text and discussed the purpose of the Think-Aloud strategy. Today we will be learning to compare and contrast two basketball players. The teacher assigned students a role, some students are Michael Jordan and some are Lebron James. **Think aloud**: What do you know about these two basketball players? Teacher activates learning by asking students to Think Pair and Share with a partner so a Lebron would share with about the topic. Using a Venn Diagram on the board and the projecting the passage from online the teacher read with students the passage. After the first paragraph **Think Aloud**: It seems both characters have had similar impact on the sport what do you think? Share your thoughts. Then Think Pair Share. After a few minutes the teacher asked students What do they have in common? What was different about them? Let's record this on our Venn Diagram. Let's continue reading as a class. **Think Aloud:** I wonder what we will discover in the next paragraph? The teacher and class read the passage and pause for each paragraph to discuss the two characters and record similar and different traits in the Venn Diagram and what they both had in common. Students highlighted areas in each passage as they Think Pair Share. The teacher had students complete their Venn Diagrams in pairs. Then she allowed the class to go into two groups Lebron and Michael and had an open debate as they assumed the characters of the basketball players. She culminated the lesson with video clips of each player, playing basketball.	http://www.boxscoregeeks.com/articles/lebron-james-vs-michael-jordan-the-debate-is-over

| Cooperative Learning (small groups)/ Literacy Circles | Topic: Hyperbole
Teacher will start the lesson by discussing the meaning of hyperbole with the students. Students will share their understanding of hyperbole by making connections with their daily lives. Teacher will model the use of hyperbole in sentences such as: **I am so hungry I could eat a horse. .**

The teacher will review this sentence and other examples with students as a group, identifying the words or phrases that are exaggerated. Then in small cooperative learning groups students will look at raps, hip hop songs to brainstorm ad identify hyperbole. Students will collaborate and act these out for the whole group.

Topic: Informational Text –Hyperbole. For this lesson the teacher will use tall tales to engage students in literacy circles, to read informational text and identify hyperbole within the text. Each group will have several students with specific roles:
The Connectors will find and bring in connections between the text and themselves or the world. The **Questioners** write down questions they think of while reading a section of text; these questions can be about anything from characters to events to vocabulary to predictions.
The **Literary luminaries** pick quotes or sentences that stood out as examples of hyperbole. The **Illustrators** prepare a picture from a specific scene in the text that led them to visualize the concept of hyperbole in the story. The **Summarizers** prepare a brief summary of the reading, recounting the important points or events of hyperbole from the text. The **Word Wizards** pick out several words from the text that are puzzling or unfamiliar, noting the page number and looking up definitions to share with the group to understand hyperbole.
Assess: The students will present their group work examples of hyperbole from John Henry to the whole group.
Homework: Students will create their own tall tale based on their own life experiences. Illustrations can be included. For students performing below grade level they can create a picture story of a tall tale. Students will tell their tall tale to the class. | **Hip Hop Songs by Justin Bieber, Bruno Mars, Cassidy and Pink Floyd.**
Examples of lyrics to use:

"If you cats wore my chain for a month you'd be hunchback." - Cassidy

If you need me, I'll come running from a thousand miles away. – Justin Bieber

Now there's a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky. – Pink Floyd

I'd catch a grenade for ya. Throw my hand on the blade for ya. I'd jump in front of a train for ya.- Bruno Mars.

Tall Tale: John Henry Foklore:
John Henry Races the Steam Drill
Music: We Shall Overcome |

Authentic Instruction in Action

Students bring their life experiences, cultures, ideas to the classroom.

Teacher brings standards, texts, strategies and tools to the class.

Parents and community groups contribute ideas to standards.

Administrators evaluate ideas and monitor facilitation.

Summary

All stakeholders contribute to a student-centered instructional environment to propel student success.

Standards, Teaching Strategies and Students' Backgrounds

Standards	Teaching Strategies	Students' Backgrounds
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.	Cooperative Learning: Think Pair Share, Dramatizations, Analogies, Vocabulary Development	Music such as rap, hip hop, spoken word integrated into lesson as poetry representative of students' culture.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.	Reciprocal Teaching, Think Alouds, Literature Circles, Writearounds, Small groups	Parent, community leader, museum representative, negro anthem, negro spirituals, hymns, I had a dream speech reflective of students' culture.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.	Think Alouds, Dramatization, Think Pair Share, Small groups	Historical Icons such as Martin Luther King Jr. Harriet Tubman, Pop Artists such as Tupac, Chris Brown, Rihanna

Reading Reflection Rounds: Teachers will watch a video clip from the movie Freedom Writers illustrating how the standards, students and strategies function in an authentic classroom.

Reading Reflection Round Prompt:

1. What do I need to learn and know about my students in order to provide authentic instructional practices and experiences that relate and affirm their language and cultural identities?

2. How might I go about acquiring the information from my students or about my students?

Sample Activities: These will be used in the sessions with students, parents and

community stakeholders the next day. At the end of day one participants will reflect on

their learning through these scenarios. Participants will be given scenarios and within

their groups they would plan and dramatize the scenario to the group. Each participant

would have a rubric of the characteristics of a student-centered classroom. Participants

would use the rubric to check for these traits.

Scenario One: Use the multiple intelligence flash cards to find out more about your

students. Pretend that you are in conference with a group of students. Share with your

students your reading preferences. Find out what books they love to read, the authors they

love or do not love. Use this dialogue to discover what culturally relevant books, poems,

songs, raps, parks, sites and sports they engage in their community. Invite students to

being in some of these materials. Have students identify their intelligence. Based on

students choices create a multiple intelligence map for your classroom. Use the teacher

flashcards activity sheet.

Scenario Two: Use the multiple intelligence flash cards to find out more about your

parents and community. Pretend that you are in conference with a group of parents and

community stakeholders. Share with them home and school connection. Discuss with

them how much you need their input to help their children succeed. Share with them you

need contact with individuals from diverse communities. Use the home and school

connection document to guide your discussion. Give parents the opportunity to look at

the flashcards and identify their children's intelligences. While community stakeholders

can share resources they have or know to benefit the classroom.

<u>Day Two</u>

Activity: During the conferences with parents and students, teachers will use the multiple

intelligence flashcards. Parents will identify their child intelligences based on their

knowledge of them at home and the activities they participate in the community. Students

will select which intelligence suits them best based on their own self assessment.

Teachers will use their flashcards to dialogue with students and parents what activities

they would love best in the reading classroom.

Home and School Connection

Dear Parents,

We are so excited to have this time to collaborate with you about your child's education.

We want you to be a great resource in our classroom. We know you have a lot to

contribute. Please answer the questions below to help us accomplish our goal of

excellence for our students.

1. Please list any skills or ideas that you can contribute to our reading program.

   These may include writing, computer science, cooking, singing, camping, dancing

   and the like. *My skills or ideas for the classroom are:*

2. Please list any artifacts you can share with students. These may include music,

   historical photographs, old journals, coins, stamps, scrapbooks. *I would like to*

   share these artifacts with the students:

3. Please list any part of your career or job that connects with our class. This may

   include artists, hairdresser, nurse, general motors employee, care giver, doctors,

social worker, electrician, plumbers and others. *I can share the following parts about my job:*

4. Do you have any community connections with places such museums, libraries, historical sites, art galleries that could be included in our classroom learning? : *Yes, I can arrange a visit to:*

5. Please list any community resource people that you know that can support our class with their skills, talents and ideas. *I am connected to the following resource people:*

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Email: _____

Activity: Teachers will use the above home and school connection document as part of their conferences. The goal is to collect data to use for their class directory of resources.

Multiple Intelligence Flashcards(Students)

I love reading books, writing poems and raps, and telling stories. I play word games, love debate and drama. I am word smart.	I love numbers. I love the computer and video games. I love to calculate numbers, figure out puzzles and organize things in a logical order. I am math smart.	I love art. I love designing, drawing, and doodling. I love patterns, pictures, and colors. I am art smart.	I love music. I love singing, rapping, humming and whistling. I learn when ideas are put to rhythm or beats. I am music smart.
I love sports and action. I learn through the use of body movements. I am body smart.	I love dreaming and planning. I am quiet and shy but love reflecting and thinking and writing in my journal. I am self smart.	I love sharing my ideas with other people. I love to problem-solve and organize and learns by bouncing ideas off others in a group. I am people smart.	I love the outdoors and learn from the nature and the environment. I am a nature smart.

Multiple Intelligence Flashcards(Parents)

My child loves reading books, writing poems and raps, and telling stories; plays word games; learns with language. My child is verbal.	My child loves numbers. He/she loves to calculate, organize, and use technology. He/she loves computer and video games. My child is mathematical or logical.	My child loves art, loves designing, drawing, and doodling. He/she learns through patterns, pictures, and colors. My child is visual.	My child loves music. He/she loves singing, rapping, humming, whistling; learns when ideas are put to rhythm or beats. My child is musical.
My child loves sports and action. He/she learns through the use of body movements. My child is kinesthetic.	My child loves dreaming and planning. He/she is often quiet and shy but loves reflecting and thinking. My child is intrapersonal.	My child loves sharing with other people. He/she loves to problem-solve and organize and learns by bouncing ideas off others in a group. My child is interpersonal.	My child loves the outdoors and learns from the nature and the environment. My child is a naturalist.

Multiple Intelligence Flashcards (Teachers)
Standard: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors, similes, hyperbole.

Word smart students: Students dramatize the hyperbole phrases for the class. Students read aloud the story, or retell folktale with voice intonations. Students write in their journals about John Henry.	Math smart students: Given a series of events, students organize in logical order events from the story. Students predict outcomes in the folktale about John Henry. Students complete puzzle of hyperboles used in the story with meanings and definitions.	Art smart students: Students make visual analogies of hyperbole use in the folktale. Students map the folktale. Students illustrate exaggeration as told by John Henry in their own picture story.	Music smart students: Use background music of John Henry working on the steel railroad while students read the folklore. Students create raps about the tall tales or hyperbole use to share John Henry's story.
Body smart students: Students create a skit using movements to illustrate John Henry's work, hammer movements depicting hyperbole use in the folklore. They can use dance moves.	Self smart students: Students can create a journal log of hyperboles as they are presented in the story. Students will write their own interpretation.	People smart students: Students can think pair share in a group their examples of hyperboles and determine the meanings. Students can edit each other work and share ideas.	Nature smart students: Students can use a microscope to look at rocks and materials such as wood used to build railroads. Students can also read outside.

Reading Reflection Rounds: Teachers will spend time on the computer blogging and creating portfolios. Based on the sessions with parents, students and community stakeholders, teachers will input information garnered into their classroom portfolios. Teachers will use the reflection prompts below to create a calendar of community events to attend, a classroom directory of resources, resource people and places to utilize in the classroom.

Reading Reflection Round Prompt:

1. Now that I have met community stakeholders what are some community events that might be beneficial for me to attend to learn more about my school

community. What are some resources that I can use in my classroom that they offered?

2. How can I use the information from the Home and School Connection documents to provide opportunities for parents to share their experiences, traditions, and expertise with my students throughout the year?

Day Three

Activity: During the teachers will use the examples of authentic instructional strategies and data gathered from the students, parents and community to create authentic lessons and assessments for their class. Teachers will be given the instructional design cycle shared in the training to guide their thinking as they complete the exercises. They will create lesson plans and assessments for their classrooms.
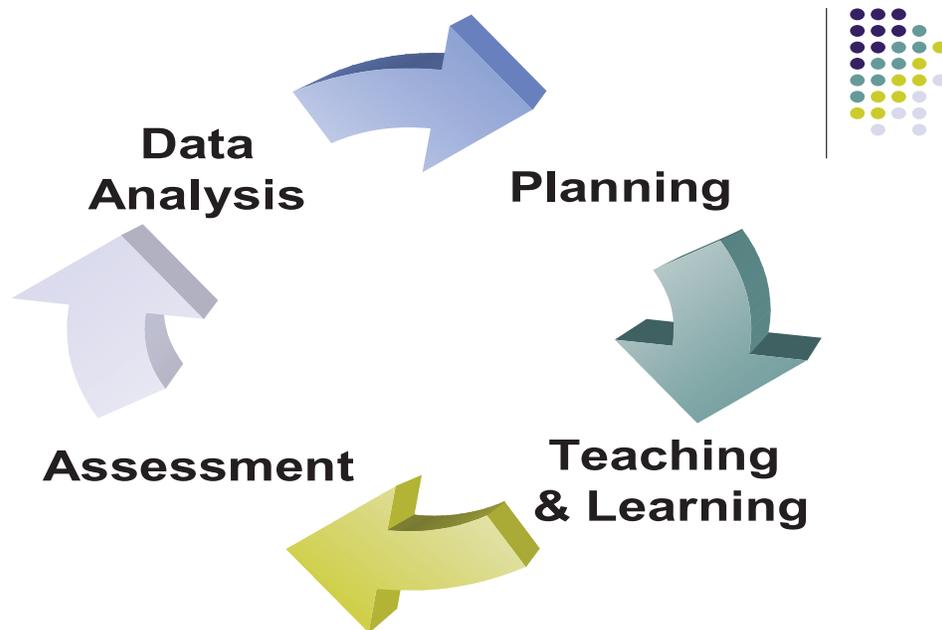
Sample Multiple Intelligence Map created on Day 2

Mrs. Jones Class- Multiple Intelligence Map				
Word Smart	Self Smart	Art Smart	Music Smart	
Body Smart	Math Smart		Nature Smart	People Smart
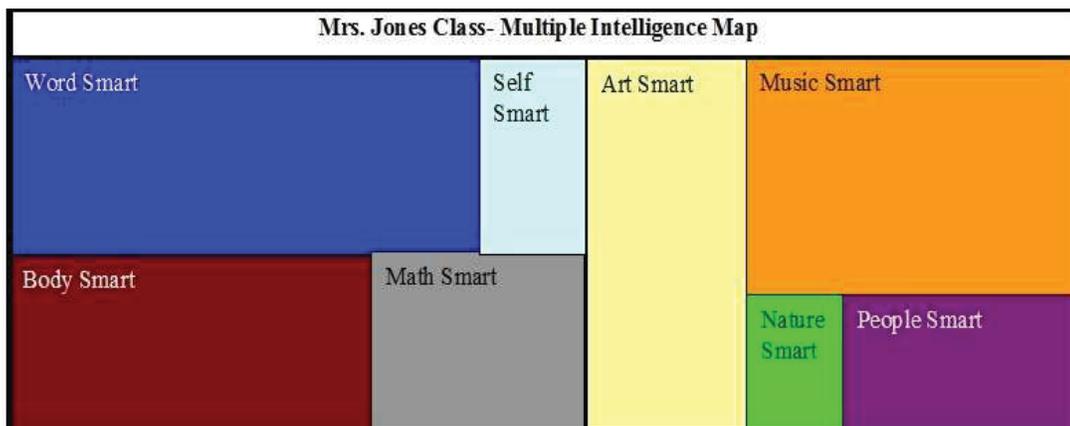
Sample Scoring Rubric for Tall Tale Activity	
4	The rap has 5 examples of figurative language such as hyperbole, metaphor and simile. The rap is complete and well developed
3	The rap has 4 examples of figurative language such as hyperbole, metaphor and simile. The rap is partially complete and adequately developed.
2	The rap has 3 examples of figurative language such as hyperbole, metaphor and simile. The rap is incomplete but has some development.
1	The rap has 1 example of figurative language such as hyperbole, metaphor and simile. The rap is incomplete and is not developed.

Reading Reflection Rounds: Participants will spend time on looking at the assessments for each modeled lessons. They will also look at the lessons, strategies and parents and community resources collected and created. They will use the Instructional Design Cycle to assess themselves.

<u>Reading Reflection Round Prompt:</u>

1. Now that I completed training on authentic learning how can implement it in my classroom? What are some resources that I can use in my classroom that they offered?

2. How can I use the information and resources to effectively meet the needs of my students?

Appendix B: Principal Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of the instructional practices in fifth grade reading and their influence on students' achievement. The study will gather data on teachers' instructional practices and perceptions on planning and implementing the fifth grade reading curriculum. The researcher is inviting administrators and curriculum specialists involved in the implementation and facilitation of fifth grade curriculum and instruction. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Novea A. McIntosh, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a Director of Student Services from ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The researcher will study the instructional strategies used in the reading classrooms to understand how students can increase their performance on state exams. This investigation is focused on teachers' instructional practices and student achievement in reading. It also looks at curriculum implementation in the fifth grade reading classroom.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in one-on-one interview. Interviews will last for approximately 30- 45 minutes after the school duty day. Interviews will be recorded. There will be a two week window to schedule an interview.
- Share documents – Documents such as curriculum maps and assessment tools. Documents and student work should have no name or identifiers on them.
- Member checking – Follow-up meetings with participants to review interview transcripts and perform member check (confirming validity of researcher's interpretations. Member checking will last from 45 minutes to an hour.

Here are some sample questions:
1. How do you align the school's reading program with state standards? Is it a

   requirement?

2. Does the state provide programs/ resources to help the school align its curriculum

   to the standards? How do these work?

3. What types of faculty development opportunities do you offer in your school that

    focuses on teaching and learning strategies for the fifth grade reading classroom?

Other Comments

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at school district will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may choose to end the study at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue. There may also be some risk of discomfort due to the interview by the researcher who is also an administrator in the district. This research will give your school an opportunity to understand the instructional practices used in the fifth grade reading classroom. A project that will be developed by the researcher will offer suggestions on instructional practices that can help teachers to be successful.

Payment:
There is no payment or stipend for participating in the doctoral study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. 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. Data will be kept secure by being stored electronically on the hard drive of the researcher. No one else has the passwords to the hard drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via (###) ###-#### or name@walden.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-###-####.
Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-11-13-0194598 and it expires on June 10th, 2014.

The researcher suggests that you print out and keep a copy of this form for your own personal records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Signature

_____

Researcher's Signature

_____

Appendix C: Teacher Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of the instructional practices in fifth grade reading and their influence on students' achievement. The study will gather data on teachers' instructional practices and perceptions on planning and implementing the fifth grade reading curriculum. The researcher is inviting fifth grade teachers involved in the implementation and facilitation of fifth grade curriculum and instruction. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Novea A. McIntosh, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a Director of Student Services from ███████████████, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The researcher will study the instructional strategies used in the reading classrooms to understand how students can increase their performance on state exams. This investigation is focused on teacher instructional practice and student achievement in reading. It also looks at curriculum implementation in the fifth grade reading classroom.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in one-on-one interviews. Interviews will last for approximately 30-45 minutes after the school duty day. Interviews will be recorded. There will be a two week window to schedule an interview.
- Share documents – Documents such as lesson plans, student work, curriculum maps and assessment tools. Student work should have no name or identifiers on them.
- Member checking – Follow-up meetings with participants to review interview transcripts and perform member check confirming validity of researcher's interpretations. Member checking will last from 45 minutes to an hour.

Here are some sample questions:
1. What type of curriculum/reading program do you use in your classroom?

2. How do you ensure that your curriculum/reading program meets state

    requirements?

3. How involved are state standards in your daily instructional practices?

4. Describe specific strategies you use to teach state standards to ensure students'
    learning?

5. How do you measure students' mastery of state standards in the reading
    classroom?

Other Comments

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at school district will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may choose to end the study at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue. There may also be some risk of discomfort due to the interview by the researcher who is also an administrator in the district. This research will give your school an opportunity to understand the instructional practices used in the fifth grade reading classroom. A project that will be developed by the researcher will offer suggestions on instructional practices that can help teachers to be successful.

Payment:
There is no payment or stipend for participating in the doctoral study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. All student work or documents used must have no identifiers/names before they are shared with the researcher. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by being stored electronically on the hard drive of the researcher. No one else has the passwords to the hard drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via (###) ###-#### or name@walden.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-###-####. Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-11-13-0194598 and it expires on June 10th, 2014.

The researcher suggests that you print out and keep a copy of this form for your own personal records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent" , I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Novea McIntosh,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Authentic Instruction and Achievement of Fifth Grade Charter School Students* within the_____ which includes _____ in Montgomery County and _____ in Butler County. As part of this study, I authorize you to invite the fifth grade reading teachers and the principal or curriculum specialists to be participants in this study, observe the instructional settings, conduct interviews and review artifacts such as curriculum maps, short cycle data, lesson plans and student sample work to collect data. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: sharing invitation letters with fifth grade teachers, principal or curriculum specialist and giving access to fifth grade classrooms for observations, data collection and interviews. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,
Administrator

Appendix E: Letter of Invitation to Superintendent

April 26, 2013
Novea McIntosh
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Superintendent,

Student achievement on standardized tests continues to be a significant topic in our educational settings. Presently, there is research revealing how 5th grade students are failing standardized tests at the state and national levels. This is serious cause for concern as these students will be affected for the rest of their academic lives. I am a student at Walden University in the Doctoral Program. I am conducting a research project on the instructional practices used to facilitate fifth grade reading instruction in the urban charter school system and how fifth grade teachers are coping in meeting the demands of the standardized test. The project is entitled *Authentic Instruction and Achievement of Fifth Grade Charter School Students.*

After researching the schools in southwestern Ohio, I realized that _____ has charter schools where fifth grade students are not successful on their reading tests annually. This research will give your district an opportunity to understand the instructional practices and why fifth grade students are failing. Therefore, I would like your permission to invite the fifth grade reading teachers and the principal or curriculum specialists to be participants in this study. All names will be anonymous and no students would be interviewed. Participants would be given semi-structured interview questions. The interviews would last a maximum of 45 minutes. Data would be published in academic journals. Your district's participation in this project would not only be greatly appreciated, but would add to the literature in this area and would help other practitioners in the field.

If you consent to your district participating in this research, please have the attached letter giving your permission for the fifth grade teachers and principal or curriculum specialist to volunteer as participants in this study written on your school's letterhead addressed to me at the given address. If you have any questions or need further explanation about the study, do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (###) ###-#### or by email at name@walden.edu.

Sincerely,
Novea McIntosh

Appendix F: Letter of Invitation to Principals

May, 2013

Novea McIntosh
Dayton, Oh, 45449.

Dear Principal _____,

Student achievement on standardized tests continues to be a significant topic in our educational settings. Presently, there is research revealing how 5th grade students are failing standardized tests at the state and national levels. This is serious cause for concern as these students will be affected for the rest of their academic lives. I am a Doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a research project on the instructional practices used to facilitate fifth grade reading instruction in the urban charter school system in meeting the demands of the standardized test. The project is entitled *Authentic Instruction and Achievement of Fifth Grade Charter School Students.*

_____ is one of the charter schools where fifth grade students fail their reading tests annually. Therefore, I would like your permission to invite the fifth grade reading teachers and curriculum specialists or yourself to be participants in this study. All names will be anonymous and no students would be interviewed. Participants would be given semi-structured interview questions. The interviews would last a maximum of 45 minutes. Data would be published in academic journals. Your district's participation in this project would not only be greatly appreciated, but would add to the literature in this area and would help other practitioners in the field.

If you consent to your school participating in this research, please have the attached letter giving your permission for the fifth grade teachers and principal or curriculum specialist to volunteer as participants in this study written on your school's letterhead addressed to me at the given address. If you have any questions or need further explanation about the study, do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (###) ###-#### or by email at name@walden.edu. Sincerely,

Novea McIntosh

Appendix G: Invitation to Meeting

Novea McIntosh
Dayton, Oh, 45449.

Dear Educators,

I am conducting a research project on the instructional practices used to facilitate fifth grade reading instruction in the urban charter school system in meeting the demands of the standardized test. The project is entitled *Authentic Instruction and Achievement of Fifth Grade Charter School Students.* You may already know me as the Director of Student Services at _____ but this study is separate from that role. I am also a Doctoral student at Walden University.

I am hereby inviting fifth grade teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists who are involved in the implementation and facilitation of fifth grade reading curriculum and instruction to a brief informational meeting on Monday, June 24, 2013 at _____ campus at 2:30 p.m.

Please note that your participation will be voluntary and at your own discretion. I will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to attend. This is not a recruitment meeting but an opportunity to introduce the study to you. If you have any questions or need further explanation about the study, do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (###) ###-#### or by email at name@walden.edu. Sincerely,

Novea McIntosh

Appendix H: Interview Protocol

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate our note-taking, we would like to audio tape our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 minutes. During this time, we have several questions that we would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have volunteered as someone who has a great deal to share about teaching, learning, and assessment in the fifth grade classroom. My research project as a whole focuses on instructional practices, with particular interest in understanding how fifth grade teachers are engaged in this activity, how they facilitate student learning, and whether they are working or not to foster student achievement in fifth grade. My study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about teaching and learning in the fifth grade classroom, and hopefully learn about instructional practices that help improve student learning to prepare them for standardized tests and beyond.

Interviewee Background

How long have you been …

_____ in your present position?

_____ at this institution?

Interesting background information on interviewee:

What is your highest degree? _____

What is your field of study? _____

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Appendix I: Interview Questions

Principal's Interview Questions

Research Question 1: How does the school's curriculum align with state standards?

1. How do you align the school's reading program with state standards? Is it a requirement?

2. Does the state provide programs/ resources to help the school align its curriculum to the standards? How do these work?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions on the best instructional practices in delivering curriculum?

1. What types of faculty development opportunities do you offer in your school that focuses on teaching and learning strategies for the fifth grade classroom?

2. How do teachers transfer instructional strategies taught to the classroom environment?

Probe: Do you encounter resistance from teachers?

Research Question 3: How do teachers decide on strategies that they would use to teach students?

1. Describe some of the instructional practices used on a regular basis in the classroom?

2. Are teachers involved in the decision-making on strategies that would benefit their students in their classrooms? How do you generate this information?

3. How are learning strategies evaluated to determine what works and what does not work?

4. What resources are available to teachers to improve their instruction in your classroom?

Research Question 4: In what ways do teachers plan their lessons using students' backgrounds to inform their practices in the classroom?

1. How does the school's curriculum cater to the backgrounds of students?

2. How are teachers prepared to meet the needs of students' backgrounds in their lesson planning? Probe: How is this evaluated?

Teacher's Interview Questions

Research Question 1: How does the school's curriculum align with state standards?

1. What type of curriculum/reading program do you use in your classroom?

2. How do you ensure that your curriculum/reading program meets state requirements?

3. How involved are state standards in your daily instructional practices?

4. Describe specific strategies that you use to teach state standards to ensure students' learning?

5. How do you measure students' mastery of state standards in the reading classroom?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions on the best instructional practices in delivering curriculum?

1. What are some of the best instructional practices you use to deliver the reading curriculum?

2. Share your thoughts on the effectiveness of these practices in your reading classroom?

3. How do these practices directly impact students' achievement on standardized reading tests? Probe: How do you know? (criteria, evidence)

4. What types of faculty development opportunities do you see emerging in your school that focuses on teaching and learning strategies for the fifth grade reading classroom?

5. Probes: Do you believe these instructional development programs help you to prepare your students for standardized tests? Explain

Research Question 3: How do teachers decide on strategies that they would use to teach students?

1. What is the strategy you use for deciding on teaching, and learning practices in your reading classroom? Do you collaborate with your peers?

2. Probes: Is it working – why or why not?

3. What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching techniques in the classroom?

4. What are some of the major challenges you face in attempting to prepare fifth grade students for standardized tests?

5. To what extent are teaching strategies evaluated at your institutions? Probe: If you receive feedback, how does that help you with your future practices?

Research Question 4: In what ways do teachers plan their lessons using students'

backgrounds to inform their practices in the classroom?

1. How do your students' backgrounds help you determine strategies to teach

    reading?

2. Can students relate content taught in the classroom to their daily lives? How do

    you know this?

3. Give examples of strategies you use to make connections with students.

4. How can these strategies help to increase students' performance on standardized

    tests?

Appendix J: Curriculum Map

**Note: Indicator skills listed with asterisks and in italics are not necessarily taught expressly throughout the year, but are skills embedded in the other focus indicators.

5th Grade	CURRICULUM MAP: Reading
Unit 1 *September-October* **Focus for assessment:** AV, RP, RA: L	**AV** **1. Define the meaning of unknown words by using context clues and the author's use of definition, restatement and example.** 3. Identify the connotation and denotation of new words. 5. Use word origins to determine the meaning of unknown words and phrases. 8. Determine the meanings and pronunciations of unknown words by using dictionaries, glossaries, technology and textual features, such as definitional footnotes or sidebars. **RP** 1. Establish and adjust purposes for reading, including to find out, to understand, to interpret, to enjoy and to solve problems. 2. Predict and support predictions with specific references to textual examples that may be in widely separated sections of text. **7. Answer literal, inferential and evaluative questions to demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate print texts and electronic and visual media.** 8. Monitor own comprehension by adjusting speed to fit the purpose, or by skimming, scanning, reading on, looking back or summarizing what has been read so far in text. **RA: I** 8. Distinguish relevant from irrelevant information in a text and identify possible points of confusion for the reader. 9. Identify and understand an author's purpose for writing, including to explain, to entertain or to inform. **RA: L** *Refer to Reading Process* **1. Explain how a character's thoughts, words and actions reveal his or her motivations.** 2. Explain the influence of setting on the selection. 5. Summarize stated and implied themes. 6. Describe the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres, including poetry, drama, chapter books, biographies, fiction and non-fiction.
Unit 2 *October-November* **Focus for assessment:** AV, RP, RA: L	**AV** **1. Define the meaning of unknown words by using context clues and the author's use of definition, restatement and example.** **2. Use context clues to determine the meaning of synonyms, antonyms, homophones, homonyms and homographs.** 3. Identify the connotation and denotation of new words. 5. Use word origins to determine the meaning of unknown words and phrases. **RP** 2. Predict and support predictions with specific references to textual examples that may be in widely separated sections of text. 4. Summarize the information in texts, recognizing that there may be several important ideas rather than just one main idea and identifying details that support each. **5. Make inferences based on implicit information in texts, and provide justifications for those inferences.** **7. Answer literal, inferential and evaluative questions to demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate print texts and electronic and visual media.**

Appendix K: Short Cycle Tests Data

School Test Reports - Item Analysis

~~████████████~~

SCA-3_5R 2013: Item Analysis

School B

Past Year Test: 12-13
Report Scope: Standards
Broken Down By: Standards
Test Reliability : 0.85
Standard Deviation : 18.31
N-Value : 84
Standards Document: Academic Content Standards 2003

Time Frame: All Dates
Student Filtering: OFF

Standard ▲	Items	Correct	Incorrect	Partially Correct (MR/MC/ER)	Omitted	Score
R.2.A.1 Define the meaning of unknown words by using context clues and the author's use of definition, restatement and example.	1	58	24	0	1	69.87%
R.2.A.2 Use context clues to determine the meaning of synonyms, antonyms, homophones, homonyms and homographs.	4	219	113	0	0	65.96%
R.2.B.4 Identify and understand new uses of words and phrases in text, such as similes and metaphors.	1	73	10	0	0	87.95%
R.2.E.6 Apply the knowledge of prefixes, suffixes and roots and their various inflections to analyze the meanings of words.	2	112	54	0	0	67.46%
R.2.F.8 Determine the meanings and pronunciations of unknown words by using dictionaries, thesauruses, glossaries, technology and textual features, such as definitional footnotes or sidebars.	2	127	39	0	0	76.50%
R.3.B.4 Summarize the information in texts, recognizing that there may be several important ideas rather than just one main idea and identifying details that support each.	3	143	82	17	7	61.74%
R.3.B.5 Make inferences based on implicit information in texts, and provide justifications for those inferences.	2	77	65	16	8	47.79%
R.3.C.7 Answer literal, inferential and evaluative questions to demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate print texts and electronic and visual media.	7	332	247	0	2	57.14%

Standard ▲	Items	Correct	Incorrect	Partially Correct (MR/MC/ER)	Omitted	Score
R.4.A.1 Use text features, such as chapter titles, headings and subheadings; parts of books, including the index and table of contents and online tools (search engines) to locate information.	4	139	164	22	7	43.37%
R.4.A.5 Analyze information found in maps, charts, tables, graphs and diagrams.	1	54	29	0	0	65.06%
R.4.B.2 Identify, distinguish between and explain examples of cause and effect in informational text.	5	167	224	16	8	41.96%
R.4.D.9 Identify and understand an author's purpose for writing, including to explain, to entertain or to inform.	1	58	25	0	0	69.87%
R.4.F.4 Summarize the main ideas and supporting details.	6	168	270	52	8	38.55%
R.5.A.1 Explain how a character's thoughts, words and actions reveal his or her motivations.	1	64	19	0	0	77.10%
R.5.D.4 Identify the speaker and explain how point of view affects the text.	1	62	21	0	0	74.69%

Time Frame

Time Frame: All Dates

Student Filtering: Demographics

Demographic Filtering: All Included

Student Filtering: Groups

Group Filtering: All Included

Student Filtering: Score Range

Score Range: All Included

Appendix L: Ohio Achievement Test Scores

SCHOOL SCORE REPORT · Ohio | Department of Education

Reading Achievement Results

SCHOOL AVERAGE SCORE

Your school's average score is 398. The performance of your school's fifth graders is similar to fifth-grade students in your district and lower than fifth-grade students statewide.

Your School's Average Score: 398

Limited	Basic	Proficient	Accelerated	Advanced

State Average Score: 415

District Average Score: 398
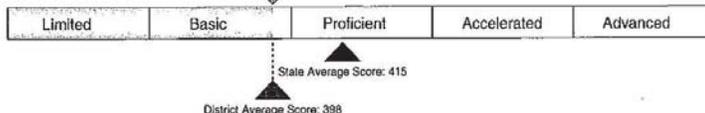
The scale scores in this report are used to keep the performance standards (e.g., the proficient level) comparable from year to year even though a new version of the test is used during each testing cycle. Scores in different subjects cannot be compared.

Are Students Meeting State Standards?

% Proficient or Above

| 50% | 50% | 74% | 51% |

Teacher Data

7%
10%
2% | 2% | | 2%

46% | 46% | 57% | 47%

17% | 17% | 12% | 17%
14%

33% | 33% | | 33%

School · District · State · Richardson
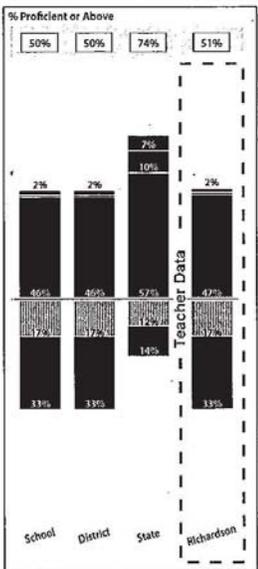
WHAT THE PERFORMANCE LEVELS MEAN

Advanced (459-534)
Students go beyond simply understanding what they read and can make good judgments about the author's use of fact versus opinion.

Accelerated (441-458)
Students understand what they read (e.g., plays, biographies, newspapers) and can summarize stated and unstated themes.

Proficient (400-440)
Students understand what they read. They try to explain how an author's choice of words creates the story's mood and describes the story's setting.

Basic (384-399)
Students understand some of what they read. They use strategies (e.g., authors' definitions and examples) to learn the meaning of new words.

Limited (247-383)
Students may struggle with simple reading tasks (e.g., plays, biographies, newspapers).

Note: This report contains information from all students tested, so the numbers may not match your Local Report Card.

Spring 2013 143560.3

Appendix M: Lesson Plan

Teacher: ▬▬▬▬
Topic/Theme: Figurative Language

Dept. 5th Grade

Course: Reading/Lang Arts
Timeframe: 1/7/13 – 1/18/13

Essential Question(s):

- Why do writers use figurative language?
- What are some ways authors write to make their details more vivid?
- How can we write things to show comparisons?

Learning Targets:

- Students will explore the use of figurative language in texts
- Students will identify the literal representations of idioms through class discussions, drawings, and writing
- Students will be able to interpret and write similes and metaphors.
- Students will be able to tell what personification is and look at given sentences and describe the object being personified
- Students will be able to write similes and metaphors.
- Students can identify hyperboles in writing.

Essential Content Vocabulary:

5A & 5B: simile, metaphor, idiom, hyperbole, personification

5C & 5D: simile, metaphor, idiom, hyperbole, personification

Story Vocabulary: dialect, dumpling, mallet, singsong, ginger

Differentiation (Product, Process, Content, Learning Profile)

- Students will be ability grouped for the co-teaching model, so that intensive students will receive more concentrated instruction.
- Intensive students' HW assignments will be modified.
- Intensive students will take their quiz with ▬▬▬▬

Opening Activity Strategies

Wk 1-Wk 2: Each day students will complete a written 5 minute warm up review of the previous day's activities (Fill-in the blank, quickwrites, t-charts)

Fig. Lang. Activator: In small groups, students will work together to complete a T-Chart Sort, placing sentences in either the "Literal" column or the "Figurative Column."

Similes & Metaphors Activator: In small groups students will work together to complete a sentence sort, matching the example sentence with the correct type of figurative language.

Specialized Instruction

- On Monday ▬▬▬▬ comes in, and we will practice the co-teaching model (If she isn't DIBELing).
- On Thursdays when ▬▬▬▬ comes in, she will assist in progress monitoring intensive students.

Assessment of Learning Goals

- Exit Slip
- 3-2-1
- CROWN Activity
- Quiz

Teacher: **Dept.:**   **Course:**

Topic/Theme: Timeframe:

Standards of Focus:

- Identify and explain the use of figurative language in literary works, including idioms, similes, hyperboles, metaphors and personification.

Work Session Activities: **WEEK 1:** We will create a T-chart clarifying the difference between figurative language and literal language. We will do a read aloud and will discuss the text with students, asking about the figurative language presented and what they mean in comparison to what the main character translates them to mean. Brainstorm other idioms that students have heard. To get the discussion started, ask students what they know about the phrases "it's raining cats and dogs" and "saved by the bell." Ask them to draw upon their personal experiences and background knowledge to discuss these idioms and any others that they can think of. For each personal experience, ask the student to describe how the idiom was used and how he or she was able to decipher the figurative meaning. On the board or chart paper, list all of the idioms mentioned during the class discussion and refer to the list as needed during the remainder of the lesson. Discuss how some idioms are passed down through generations. This discussion gives students a preliminary introduction to the historical meaning of idioms. Develop a class definition of idioms. Write the definition on chart paper and hang the sheet on the wall for reference purposes. I will display the introductory poem. The students will identify the similes and metaphors and what is being compared. The students will change the similes to metaphors and the metaphors to similes. They will then use the list of sample similes and metaphors and identify each. As a class, choose a person from TV or an era in history and write several similes and metaphors to describe the person. The students must base their comparisons on facts. Each student choose a different person write similes and metaphors to describe that person. Tell the students to base their comparisons on facts.

WEEK 2: I will read *The Three Little Pigs* to the students. After reading the story, ask the students to think about the pigs and the wolf and discuss what they do that normal pigs and wolves don't do. Tell them these are examples of personification. I will write the definition of personification on the board. (*Personification is giving human characteristics to everyday ideas, objects, and animals.* I will re-examine some of the ideas given during the beginning and ask why they are examples of personification. Students will complete the handout of sentences containing examples of personification and have students work in cooperative groups. They underline the object, animal, or idea being personified. They will circle what they're doing that makes it an example of personification. We will go over the answers in class, explaining each answer. I will write nouns on the chalkboard such as monkey, tree, wind, snow, sky, leaf. Students will help me expand this list until I have about 20 nouns on the board. In another column on the board, I'll write some verbs such as whispered, smiled, laughed; and ask students to also help me expand this list until I have about 20 verbs. Students will then write ten of their own sentences using personification. I will write a couple of examples on the board, and let students share their work if they wish to. Students will write ten sentences as described. I will introduce hyperboles by reading a tall tale to the students and asking them to pick out the "ridiculous" statements that are not literal. We will then review the definition: Hyperbole simply means exaggeration. I will provide some examples. I will then give blanket statements in class that the students will complete with their original hyperbole. Students will work in pairs to author a short story creating a character or characters that use(s) hyperboles constantly. Students will write a ten-line poem using hyperboles, or write ten examples of hyperboles.

Appendix N: Sample Interview Transcript

Interview of B2

August 5, 2013

Transcribed by Researcher on August 8, 2013

Researcher: What type of curriculum or reading program do you use in your classroom?

Reading Teacher B2: Okay at the fifth grade level, we currently use open court reading.

R: Could you go into some more details to describe what that program is?

RTB2: Open court reading basically, has all the components of reading which are phonics, reading fluency, comprehension and the language and vocabulary piece.

R: How do you ensure that your curriculum or reading program meets state requirements?

RTB2: Um, as the teacher or the support we're not really familiar with the actual correlation between the state standards. We just entrust in our administration of making sure that we have the necessary materials that we need.

R: Describe any specific strategies that you use to teach state standards to ensure that the students are learning?

RTB2: Um, for the different components for the Phonics piece, we do a lot of dictation, sounds and position. Basically at the fifth grade level, we can't assume that those students are fluent in reading, and able to phonetically segment words, so, we dictate different words to them that we believe they should know, and see how well they are able to just write them. Even with sentence structure, giving, isolating different sounds uh, that we may utilize with our wall cards, and having them reflect upon words that they

may know that have those letter sound combinations. With the comprehension piece the strategies we use are making connections. I like having the students, to be able to make a connection between their literature that they're reading and maybe some experiences that they have, in real life. Um, also, asking questions. Teaching the students as they read if they come across different words, or anything they may not understand just different questioning techniques in order to allow them to come up with the correct understanding or the answers they may be looking for.

R: How do you measure the students' mastery of state standards in the reading classroom?

RTB2: We develop rubrics depending on the particular lesson, or the particular story whatever standard we are focusing on. So if our focus is the reading comprehension. We will develop a rubric to go along with the, uh, how well they should have answered or been able to understand the questions that were asked in that particular story.

R: Have they been successful?

RTB2: For the most part they are.

R: What are some the best instructional practices you use to teach the reading curriculum?

RTB2: I believe the best instructional practices um for teaching the reading, especially when it's dealing with the reading fluency. We do a lot of choral reading because our students are not as fluent as they should be in order to successfully comprehend the passages that they're reading so in choral reading, we read together, like a choir, as a class, with my voice louder. They're able to follow along. So I can ensure that their

fluency is being built. And then we stop and monitor and ask questions during that process to ensure that the students are comprehending what they're reading as well as focusing on their fluency.

R: Share your thoughts on the effectiveness of these practices.

RTB2: I feel, at this point, it's been effective because the lack of fluency is pretty much what I have found the problem, uh, with fifth graders at this level. They're just not fluent enough in their reading to really comprehend the questions or the story because they're so focused on sounding out words. So I believe that, uh, once the fluency skills are built, the comprehension comes a little more natural. So, I really think uh, that is the core problem at the fifth grade level and I feel confident in knowing that if the fluency skills are built their comprehension skills will also increase.

R: How do these practices directly impact students' achievement on their standardized tests?

RTB2: Well the standardized tests is consisted of nothing but reading and they're timed, and because they are timed they have to be able to get through the passages in a certain amount of time to allow them enough time to go back and answer the questions. So I feel with working with these strategies, once they get to the test they're able to fluently read through the passages, um, so they can meet that time frame and also just developing other, uh, strategic skills with the testing, with going and reading the questions first and going back into the passage and finding the answers. Because if they're reading fluently then they'll know exactly where to go back in the passages especially when they have the headings and the subheadings and things like that. Because if they're not comprehending

what they're reading and they're just focusing on the words then they have no idea where to go back to in the in the passage. So that, that fluency piece is, in my opinion, the biggest, the biggest piece of it because the students are able to go back and find exactly where they need to go because they are understanding what they're reading as they read.

R: So, tell me, how do you know? When you look at their test scores after they've have taken their fifth grade test. You tell me, do you, do you believe? What do you think? How do you know that they're really getting it?

RTB2: Well, the test scores are telling us exactly what, in my opinion; I feel that they're low. They're very low because we assume, because they're in the fifth grade they're able to successfully take the test and pass it, but the results are showing that this is not the case. Our students are not reading fluently. They are basically, uh, most them of the fifth graders that I had tested individually as far as their fluency and things like that, they're reading on the first, second grade level, so they're not passing the test and the fluency in my opinion, and it was just what we have seen through the data is, is, is the problem.

R: What types of professional development opportunities are being offered in your school which focuses on teaching and learning strategies for the fifth grade reading classroom?

RTB2: I have not been to any professional developments for the fifth grade reading at all so at this time, um. I must say, there's been none.

R: Okay and since there's none, of course, my follow up question would be, do you believe these professional development programs help anyone to prepare students for standardized tests?

RTB2: We have none for fifth grade reading.

R: What is the strategy you use for deciding on teaching and learning practices in your reading classroom?

RTB2: I'm, it really depends on the students. I believe that each, groups of students, the group, the students are. The strategies that I use will depend on the groups of students that I am working with.

R: Do you collaborate with your peers?

RTB2: Yes, uh, we have a lot of collaboration. At this time, we have shared planning periods. So, um, it gives me the opportunity to go in and see where, uh, the teachers are. And what they're actually working on and then I'm able to come up with a, a strategy to assist the students in, in their, that particular skill. And it really depends on the group of students that I am servicing at that time because there's no one way. There's no one size fits all for the teaching of the students. So that it really depends on the students that I'm servicing.

R: Okay. Do you believe that this strategy, the collaborating, is it working?

RTB2: Yes, I believe it is working. Because at this point it's necessary for everyone to work together to get our students, you know, where they need to be. There's no Superman just to come in and save the fifth grade class, we have to work together in order for the students to be successful.

R: What resources are available to faculty for improving teaching techniques in the classroom?

RTB2: We have quite a few resources. I think the problem is that they're just not used effectively or consistently. Um, I think that's the biggest thing. You know, we have

Dibels we have our Title 1 staff that have different strategies and things that unfortunately with our Title 1 here, it hasn't been as successful because of subbing. Our Title 1 teachers have had to sub a lot, so that pullout in even the inclusion that is necessary to assist the students. It hasn't worked effectively throughout the year because we have so many teacher call-offs and we end up in classrooms, subbing.

R: What are some of the major challenges you face in attempting to prepare 5th grade students for standardized tests?

RTB2: The major challenge is basically, the time, like I said, having to do other things within the school and not having the time to actually see and service the students that need to be serviced. Also really, student attendance has been a factor because we just find that those students who need the most assistance are the ones that have some of the socioeconomic issues, which goes along with attendance, which goes along with tardiness, so, they are sometimes just not here.

R: To what extent are teaching strategies evaluated in your classroom?

RTB2: Uh, well, for teachers, uh, they have evaluations three times a year.

R: How does that help you with your future practices?

RTB2: The principal and/or their lead teachers, they will come in and just kind of sit and go through, um, a rubric that has been developed by our district, but I have found, when I was in the classroom, that there was not a lot of follow-up as far as, you know, what they saw. What should I change? It was just sign off on it, and kind of fix things on your own.

R: Okay? So, in a title one capacity, do you find that you get any type of evaluation?

RTB2: I feel like I kind of just left out. There was a time when I was evaluated. Someone kind of came in but there was nothing, you know to the point where the teachers are evaluated.

R: How do you use your students' backgrounds to plan instruction in your reading classroom?

RTB2: I don't think it's being done, at all which is something that is very important to do but I have not seen that being done at, in any way, shape, or form.

R: Can students make connections with the content taught to their own lives?

RTB2: With the curriculum that we use, I say no because the stories that are being used are things that the kids have no idea, or have no interest in for the most part, so they're not able to make a connection. But with what I do, I try to find something in that story to make a connection to something that they may be familiar with, whether it's sports, whether it's the weather, something, you know. But unfortunately some teachers don't do that, you know. Also, with the curriculum that we have my answer would be no.

R: Could you give examples of strategies that you've used to make connections with students.

RTB2: Well basically I would kind of just, because the point of the curriculum map or the resource that we use is to teach the standards. So basically I would just take the standards as my umbrella and then I would just find another source for them to develop that same standard so I would not use the reading passage per say, that's in the book, but I'm still touching base on some of the, on all of the standards that the curriculum would be focusing on. So I would just find a story maybe about a musician, maybe about an

athlete, maybe about a doctor, or just whatever's in the news that I know the students have some type of idea about and I would use the same strategies with that particular piece, because you could teach cause and effect with anything. You know, you can teach the different standards with any source. It's just basically having that ability to make the connection.

R: And the last question, how can these strategies help to increase students' performance on standardized tests?

RTB2: What I wholeheartedly believe is the students develop an interest in what they're reading. They want to work harder, they're going to focus more and they're going to do their best to complete the test and do it effectively. The students lose focus because they're not interested so I think if the resources that are being used for the testing have some type of connection with the students they will be willing or more focused in completing the task, or doing their best on the test.

Curriculum Vitae

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Education

Walden University, Minneapolis, MN   Expected 2014

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Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Indiana   December 2007

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