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Instructional Approaches That Increase Reading Achievement for Boys, Grades 3-6

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Tiffany Rudek

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Instructional Approaches That Increase Reading Achievement

for Boys, Grades 3-6

by

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MA, University of La Verne, 2002

BA, Franklin and Marshall College, 1985

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2015

Abstract

An achievement gap persists in many educational settings with girls outperforming boys in reading. In a Southern California school district, reading scores for boys average 10 percentile points below those of girls. A qualitative case study was conducted to explore which instructional approaches can help close this gender gap. The conceptual framework for this study was based on engagement theory, which proposes that students who are engaged in learning tasks achieve at higher levels. The guiding question asked how reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6 could be improved in the district under study. Semistructured individual interviews were conducted with 4 teachers from different schools and grade levels whose boys, according to district officials, had demonstrated a strong increase in reading achievement. Content analysis of interview transcripts used a 2-cycle coding method to find emerging themes. Participants indicated 5 instructional approaches that contributed to an increase in reading achievement for boys: differentiated reading instruction, collaborative learning, motivation, goal setting and monitoring, and positive teacher-student relationships. Understanding how teachers can improve reading achievement for boys may contribute knowledge about how to improve achievement for all students in other grades in this district, help close achievement gaps, and improve the chance of getting into college for all students.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family and friends, who labored beside me and supported me throughout this entire process. Thank you for not disowning me and for your unwavering love and understanding. I also dedicate this to all of the colleagues and administrators who inspired and encouraged me to advance my career and to attain my doctorate degree. Thank you, and God bless all of you.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill needed to succeed in the modern world (Faust & Kandelshine-Waldman, 2011; White, 2007). According to Cheung et al. (2009), learning to read is one of the most important and fundamental skills school-aged children must acquire to be successful in the global arena. As the world becomes more interconnected and collaborative, and effective communication skills requiring reading and writing are required to succeed in the global workforce, ensuring that all students can read and write efficiently will be even more important than it is today (Belanca & Brant, 2012; Jacobs, 2010).

In the local district under study there had been a persistent gender gap in reading since 2002. The problem of underperforming boys demonstrated at the local level in Southern California is also evident in other educational settings. Data show that there is a 4- and 12-point gap between the reading scaled scores of fourth-grade boys versus girls across every state (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Data also show that 15-year-old U.S. girls outperformed boys in reading scores on the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) by an average of 38 points (OECD, 2009b). These data indicate that there has been a national achievement gap in reading between girls and boys.

Other nations, such as Canada, England, and Thailand, are also concerned about the gender achievement gap in reading (Klein, 2008; Ma, 2008; Sadowski, 2010). One correlational study, for instance, using National Assessment of Educational Progress

(NAEP) data indicated that, between 1992 and 2003, girls outperformed boys in reading across all NAEP participating nations and grades (Klecker, 2006). According to some researchers, this gap is now considered a global gender crisis (Geske & Ozola, 2009; Ma, 2008; Watson et al., 2010).

Data from international reading assessments indicated that in 31 countries, girls scored higher than boys in reading (Farris et al., 2009). The data also suggested that internationally, girls are able to apply higher-level reading skills more than boys are (Shiel & Eivers, 2009). It appears as though the gender gap in reading is a worldwide concern.

Girls in the US have been outperforming boys on the NAEP for over 30 years (Cohen et al., 2012; Costello, 2008; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009b). According to Marks (2008), this gender gap in reading has increased over the last few decades. More boys than girls have reading difficulties and are placed in special education or remedial programs (Hawke et al., 2009; Limbrick et al., 2011; Rutter et al., 2004). Snyder and Dillow (2012) suggested that the gender gap in reading might be one reason why boys are not enrolling in colleges at as high a rate as girls. In order to ensure the educational success of both genders and all citizens, it is imperative that educators discover approaches that will help improve reading achievement for boys.

Definition of the Local Problem

In a small suburban school district in Southern California there was an achievement gap in reading between male and female students. The majority of the

district's boys in Grades 3–6 were underperforming its girls by 10% on state reading achievement tests (California Department of Education, 2012a).

Although overall reading assessment data for the district indicated that boys were not performing as well as girls in reading, disaggregated data from both districts indicated that in certain Grades 3-6 classrooms, boys performed as well as, and sometimes better in reading than the girls (California Department of Education, 2012a). Further study was needed to investigate which instructional approaches teachers implemented in the classrooms where boys demonstrated strong reading achievement, and how teachers accounted for their success.

Identifying and studying which instructional approaches improve reading achievement for boys could suggest techniques educators should implement to improve male reading achievement. For this study, I investigated the instructional approaches implemented by teachers in Grades 3-6 whose boys demonstrated strong reading achievement in their classrooms. I analyzed reading achievement data taken from the 2011 and 2012 California Standards Test in Reading to identify which grade levels exhibited strong male reading achievement. Working with district officials, I was able to obtain a list of teachers whose classrooms demonstrated strong male reading achievement, and who would qualify to participate in the study. I used a qualitative case study to identify which instructional approaches the qualifying teachers implemented during reading instruction. A goal was to identify instructional approaches that local teachers could implement to improve reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6, and thus help close the district's gender gap in reading.

Rationale for Selecting Problem

The school district under study is a small suburban district on the border of two counties in Southern California. The district has five elementary schools and one junior high school. The district enrolls about 3,100 students. According to the California Department of Education (2012b), two-thirds of the students are Hispanic in origin, and the other third are White.

Local California State Testing (CST) reading scores from 2005 to 2011 indicated that girls in Grades 3–6 outperformed boys by an average of 12 percentage points. In 2011, girls in Grade 3 scored 67% proficient, while boys scored 54% proficient. Grade 4 girls scored 81% proficient compared to boys at 73% proficient. Girls in Grade 5 scored 79% proficient compared to boys who scored 73% proficient. Finally, Grade 6 girls scored 76% proficient and boys scored 62% proficient in reading as depicted in Table 1. In addition, longitudinal data indicated that this local achievement gap has persisted since 2002 (California Department of Education, 2012a).

Table 1

Local 2011 Proficiency Rate in CST Reading Scores

Grade Level	Proficiency rate boys	Proficiency rate girls	Difference (points)
Grade 3	54%	67%	13
Grade 4	81%	73%	8
Grade 5	79%	73%	6
Grade 6	76%	62%	14

Note: From District Student Data System, 2011.

In 2011, the district was labeled a program improvement district under the 2001 Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act because certain student subgroups did not meet annual yearly progress (AYP) goals in the area of reading language arts (California Department of Education, 2011a). This came as a shock to district staff (Administrative Meeting Minutes, September 2, 2011). In previous years the district had been considered a high performing district, and all elementary schools had received California distinguished school status (California Department of Education, 2010).

In September 2011, the administrative team began disaggregating CST reading achievement data to determine which subgroups did not meet AYP. The administrative team consisted of all principals, vice principals, and district office administration, including myself. NCLB subgroups included socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, English language learner, and special education program participation. First, the

administrative team analyzed the CST data. Second, our District Advisory Team, a group consisting of one teacher from each grade level, several principals, and myself as a district administrator, analyzed the data. My role was to facilitate both groups and to help them identify achievement gaps.

As the groups analyzed the data, they realized that boys throughout the district were not performing as well as girls in reading (Administrative Meeting Minutes, October 11, 2011; District Student Data System, 2011). While boys are not considered a NCLB subgroup, within each NCLB subgroup boys did not perform as well as the girls in reading. In some of the NCLB subgroups, the discrepancy between boys' and girls' proficiency in reading was over 10 percentage points as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

District 2011 CST Scaled Reading Scores by Subgroup and Gender

Subgroup	Scaled score, boys ^a	Scaled score, girls ^a	Difference (points)
English language learners	311	328	17
Hispanic	368	382	14
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	354	371	17
White	392	406	14

^a A scaled score of 350 or higher is proficient.

Note: From District Student Data System, 2011.

Teachers and administrators discussed the local gender reading achievement gap and analyzed other district formative and summative reading assessment data during their

weekly collaboration meetings (Professional Learning Community Feedback Forms, November, 2011). They observed that boys were not as engaged as girls during reading (District Advisory Council Minutes, November 23, 2011). The group also discussed the Accelerated Reading (AR) reading program, which is designed to increase reading motivation. According to district AR data, 23% more girls than boys took AR quizzes. The data indicated that boys were not reading as many books as girls (District Accelerated Reader Data, 2011).

In addition, staff identified that more boys than girls had been referred to special education due to low reading scores (District Special Educational Information System, November, 2011). District data revealed that 50% more boys than girls were receiving special education reading services, and 68% more boys than girls were referred to reading intervention classes (District Student Data System, November, 2011).

As staff began further analysis of the 2011 CST reading data, they noticed that in 11 of the Grades 3-6 teachers' classrooms, in different schools throughout the district, the boys performed as well, and sometimes better, than the girls. In one Grade 4 classroom, for instance, the boys scored 65% proficient in reading compared to the girls who scored 46% proficient (California Department of Education, 2011a). District data indicated that most boys in that class demonstrated improved CST scaled reading scores from 2011 to 2012. Similarly, in four Grade 6 classrooms, at two different schools, the boys performed higher than the girls in reading by about 4%. Boys in two Grade 5 classrooms outperformed girls in reading by an average of 2%. Further analysis of data over a three-year period indicated that the boys in these teachers' classrooms had been performing as

well as or better than the girls, and had shown improved scaled scores on the CST Reading Test each year (California Department of Education, 2011a).

The purpose of this study was to determine which instructional approaches teachers think most improved the reading achievement of boys. The information gained from this study may provide insight into creating effective professional development workshops to close the gender gap in reading and increase reading achievement for all Grades 3-6 students in this district.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The reading gap between boys and girls is prevalent across the globe (Geske & Ozola, 2009; Ma, 2008). Data from the 2009 PISA indicated that in 40 out of 41 countries, girls outperformed boys in reading comprehension (Ma, 2008; OECD, 2009a; Sadowski, 2010). This gap was larger when racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors were taken into consideration (Matthews et al., 2010; Sadowski, 2010). One correlational study comparing international PISA data to economic and racial factors indicated that the gender gap in reading existed despite race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES). The gap increased when low SES students' reading scores were compared to higher SES students' scores, and when White students' scores were compared to Hispanic and African American students' scores (Matthews et al., 2010).

National data follows similar trends. According to NAEP 2009 reading results, girls outperformed boys in reading across all states and grade levels (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011a; Sadowski, 2010). On average, NAEP results indicated that

a 10-point gap existed between the reading scores of girls and boys. This gap increased when ethnicity, race, and SES factors were considered (Sadowaki, 2010).

Numerous studies on the gender gap in reading indicated that boys demonstrated increased reading achievement when motivated and interested in the reading content or assignments (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Farris et al., 2009; Griva et al., 2012; Limbrick et al., 2011; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Meece et al., 2006). According to some researchers, motivation and interest are related; and they speculate that a student will read more, and show stronger gains in reading achievement, if he is interested and motivated to read (Boltz, 2007; Limbrick et al., 2011; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Senn, 2012).

Several studies investigated particular instructional approaches to determine if they improved reading achievement for all students (Berne & Clark, 2008; Blum et al., 2010; Connor et al., 2011; Ernest et al., 2011; Fahim et al., 2011; Faust & Kandelshire-Waldman, 2011; Garcia-Madruga et al., 2013; Guthrie et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Prado & Plourde, 2011; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Reis et al., 2011; Shelton-Strong, 2012). The results indicated that several different instructional approaches increased reading achievement. Some research suggested that the implementation of differentiated instruction increased reading performance (Connor et al., 2011; Ernest, et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2012; Reis et al., 2011). Results from those studies showed that student performance in reading improved when teachers implemented differentiated reading instruction rather than whole-group, basal instruction.

Researchers recommended that the implementation of explicit direct instruction increased reading achievement (Fahim et al., 2011; Faust & Kandelshire-Walsman, 2011; Garcia-Madruga et al., 2013; Jeynes, 2008; Prado & Plourde, 2011). In these studies, students receiving explicit direct instruction in comprehension and phonics skills showed an increase in reading scores.

According to some research, embedding collaboration and discourse into reading instruction increased students' reading achievement (Berne & Clark, 2008; Blum et al., 2010; Gritter, 2011; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Shelton-Strong, 2012). Results from these studies suggested that students' reading achievement increased when teachers provided opportunities for students to discuss, debate, and elaborate on texts they read. Collaborative discourse, in other studies, provided opportunities for students to synthesize and evaluate text, which led to increased comprehension (Berne & Clark, 2008; Blum et al., 2010; Guthrie et al., 2012; Peterson & Taylor, 2012; Mills & Jennings, 2011).

Research also suggested that a combination of explicit direct instruction, collaboration, differentiation, and motivational strategies led to increased student achievement (Block et al., 2009; Cheung et al., 2009; Parsons & Ward, 2011; Peterson & Taylor, 2012; Pitcher et al., 2010; Stricklin, 2011; Trogger, 2011). The authors from these studies argued that reading instruction should integrate collaborative discourse, high-interest texts, authentic tasks, explicit direct instruction, and student-directed learning.

Most of the reading research focused on identifying specific strategies that increase reading achievement for all students (Berne & Clark, 2008; Blum et al., 2010; Connor et al., 2011; Ernest et al., 2011; Fahim et al., 2011; Faust & Kandelshire-Waldman, 2011; Garcia-Madruga et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2012; Prado & Plourde, 2011; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Reis et al., 2011; Shelton-Strong, 2012). There was limited research identifying approaches that lead to improved reading achievement for boys. In the district under study, reading achievement for boys was a concern. It was important to determine which instructional approaches improved the reading achievement of boys from Grades 3-6 in this school district.

Definitions

Collaborative learning: Collaborative learning is a constructivist instructional approach based on cooperative learning (Pattanpichet, 2011). Collaborative learning occurs when small groups of students work collaboratively toward a common goal as they discuss texts, solve problems, share ideas, or practice skills (Pattanpichet, 2011; Pham, 2011; Slavin, 1995). Collaborative learning encompasses a variety of approaches including literature circles and project-based learning (Pattanpichet, 2011).

Differentiated instruction: Differentiated instruction (DI) is a constructivist instructional approach where the teacher changes the instruction based on a student's learning need. Teachers can differentiate the content (what a student learns), the process (how the student learns the content), or the product (how the student demonstrates learning, according to a student's interests, readiness level, and/or learning style (Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers implementing differentiated instruction tend to have

students work in flexible groups according to students' needs (Tomlinson, 2003; Tomlinson et al., 2008).

Explicit direct instruction: Explicit direct instruction is a behaviorism-based instructional approach where the teacher directly explains, models, and scaffolds, or breaks down, the skills and concepts students need to learn using a lesson format where cognitive skills are presented sequentially, deliberately, and systematically (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Carnine, et al., 2009).

Literature circles: A literature circle is a collaborative learning instructional approach where students lead regularly scheduled small group discussions around the same text, and share insights and interpretations (Shelton-Strong, 2012). Students are generally assigned specific roles or jobs during literature circles, and are held accountable for contributing to discussions (Tracy & Morrow, 2012).

Inquiry-based learning: Inquiry-based learning is a collaborative learning approach where students actively engage in problem solving tasks, collaboration, communication, and authentic assessments (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Guccione, 2011). Project-based learning and problem-based learning are examples of approaches that fall under inquiry-based learning (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Instructional approach: An instructional approach is a particular method a teacher uses when s/he interacts with students and instructional materials that can be explained and copied (Corcoran & Silander, 2009). Instructional approaches include collaborative learning, explicit direct instruction, and differentiation.

Reading achievement: Reading achievement refers to a student's ability to understand what they read and correctly answer questions about the vocabulary and content of what they read (Guthrie et al., 2012). In this study, a measure of reading achievement was obtained by using the reading comprehension sub-scores from the California Standards Tests (CST) in Reading. The CST is a pre-established criterion-referenced test aligned to the California Content Standards. The state of California uses CST Reading/Language Arts scores to measure students' overall reading proficiency.

Significance

Local data indicated that a gap in reading performance between boys and girls was evident in the district being studied (District Student Data System, 2012). District reading scores reflected national and international data that suggest that there is a global gender gap in reading between boys and girls (Cohen et al., 2012; Watson et al., 2010). The reading gender gap in the district under study averaged between 10–12 points each year. These data appeared to match the national gender reading achievement gap, and indicated serious disparities in reading achievement scores between boys and girls that warranted study and understanding (US department of Education, 2011).

The local district had been labeled a program improvement district for two years due to lack of adequate progress in reading. Data indicated that district boys, in all NCLB significant subgroups, were not making AYP in reading (California Department of Education, 2012b). Although NCLB does not consider gender a significant subgroup for accountability purposes, district data analysis of performance between boys and girls in reading indicated that the reading levels of boys was below that of girls in all subgroups,

especially in the Hispanic and English language learner subgroup (California Department of Education, 2012b; District Student Data System, 2012). It appeared as though the district's largest underperforming subgroup was the boys.

The goal for this case study was to provide insight to educators about which instructional approaches will most likely close the gender achievement gap in reading. This study helped provide information that could help bring the local district out of program improvement status, and support policies on improving reading achievement for boys. There is a possibility that other districts may have similar gender achievement gaps in reading across subgroups. If so, the results of this study may provide helpful information to other districts with a gender achievement gap in reading.

Guiding Research Questions

This study investigated which instructional approaches were likely to improve reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6, and how teachers accounted for boys' reading achievement. A qualitative case study was used to examine and describe the instructional approaches teachers in Grades 3-6 implemented from 2010 to 2012 in classrooms where students, including boys, showed a strong increase in reading achievement. The following questions were addressed in the study;

1. What are the instructional approaches that teachers use to improve reading achievement in their classes, Grades 3-6?
2. What are the instructional approaches that teachers specifically use to improve the reading achievement of boys in their classes, Grades 3-6?

3. What explanations do teachers offer to account for the improvement in reading achievement of boys in their classes, Grades 3-6?

Previous research focusing on the gender reading achievement gap, as well as international and national assessment data, identified a gender gap in reading favoring girls (NAEP, 2009; OECD, 2009a). Some of the researchers analyzed national and international data, looking for gaps in boys' reading achievement, and found that in most countries there is a gender-based achievement gap in reading (Diprete & Buchmann, 2013; Klecker, 2006; Ma, 2008).

Other research addressing the gender gap in reading sought to identify why boys are not performing as well as girls in the area of reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Farris et al., 2009; Griva et al., 2012; Limbrick et al., 2011; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Ma, 2008; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Meece et al., 2006; Senn, 2012). Several of these studies used student surveys and questionnaires to assess student motivation and interest toward reading (Boltz, 2007; Limbrick et al., 2011; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010). Most of these researchers indicated that reading achievement for boys improved when student choice, high-interest, and authentic reading tasks were implemented in classrooms (Boltz, 2007; Limbrick, et al., 2011; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Senn, 2012).

Additional research analyzed specific reading intervention programs and/or approaches to determine their effect on boys' reading achievement. Findings from these studies suggested that boys responded positively to constructivist teaching methods, which included differentiated instruction, explicit direct instruction, and collaborative

learning (Berne & Clark, 2008; Blum, et al., 2010; Connor et al., 2011; Ernest et al., 2011; Fahim et al., 2011; Faust & Kandelshire-Waldman, 2011; Garcia-Madruga et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2012; Prado & Plourde, 2011; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Reis et al., 2011; Shelton-Strong, 2012).

There is a lack of research directly addressing the identification of instructional approaches that teachers implemented to improve boys' reading achievement, and how teachers explained their success using these approaches to improve reading achievement for boys. Some researchers used an experimental design to evaluate the impact a particular instructional approach had on reading achievement for boys and girls, or to compare how effective two instructional approaches were on reading achievement (Block et al., 2009; Connor et al., 2011; Faust & Kandelshire-Waldman, 2011; Fahim et al., 2011; Ferris et al., 2009; Garcia-Madruga, 2013; Prado & Plourde, 2011; Ng et al., 2013; Troegger, 2011). Other researchers implemented a case study design to explore the impact a particular instructional approach had on student reading motivation and achievement, or to gain insight into how students felt about certain reading approaches (Berne & Clark, 2008; Brinda, 2011; Jenkins, 2009; Ferguson & Kern, 2012; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Peterson & Taylor, 2012; Pitcher et al., 2012; Sax, 2007; Taylor, 2005). Several researchers implemented a mixed-method approach to gain insight about and evaluate particular instructional approaches and their impact on reading achievement (Avci & Yuksel, 2011; Griva et al., 2012).

Review of the Literature

The literature for this study was selected based on database searches for current peer-reviewed journal articles on the gender gap in reading achievement and on instructional approaches and strategies used to improve reading achievement for students, particularly boys. Qualitative research articles on teachers' perceptions of various reading strategies, and qualitative and quantitative research studies on reading instruction and achievement were also read for this study.

The following electronic databases were used to ensure saturation: Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, Education from SAGE, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), and Google Scholar. Dissertations related to reading achievement, and qualitative research focusing on reading achievement were found using the ProQuest Dissertations database.

The search terms used for the literature review included the following, given in Boolean pairs: *instructional approaches and reading achievement, instructional strategies and reading achievement, gender gap in reading, literacy instruction, literacy instruction and males (boys), reading gap and gender, reading gap and males (boys), reading achievement and strategies, reading achievement and males (boys), reading strategies and males (boys), reading approaches and males (boys), reading and males (boys), teaching and reading achievement, teaching approaches and reading achievement, teaching strategies and reading achievement, teaching and male reading achievement, qualitative research, and qualitative study and reading.*

Theoretical Framework Related to Reading Achievement

Engagement theory (Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Tracey & Morrow, 2012) falls under constructivist theories and includes aspects of motivational theories such as expectancy-value and self-efficacy theories (Bandura, 1986; Eccles, 1983; Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Engagement theory focuses on the idea that students who are intrinsically motivated to read tend to read more, and are more mentally engaged in reading tasks (Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie et al., 2012; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Tracey & Morrow, 2011). This theory proposes that students engaged in reading tasks tend to have higher comprehension scores in reading (Tracey & Morrow, 2011).

Engagement theory also supports expectancy-value theory, which claims that a person's motivation to accomplish a task is directly linked to how strongly they believe that they will succeed at the task and how much they value, or are interested, in the task (Eccles & Wigfield, 2000). According to research, the value a person places on an academic task directly related to academic task achievement (Eccles et al., 1983). In other words, if a person finds value in reading a certain text, then he will put forth effort, and successfully read the text. Teaching approaches that support engagement theory include differentiation, implementation of student choice of texts based on interest, and creating learning activities, such as project-based learning, that are authentic and meaningful to students (Logan & Johnston, 2010; Senn, 2012; Tracey & Morrow, 2011; Watson et al., 2010).

Research suggested that student achievement increased when teachers implemented instructional approaches that motivated and inspired students to achieve

(Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Buddy, 2011; Costello, 2008; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Meece et al., 2006; Senn, 2012). Similarly, research indicated that boys achieved higher reading scores when they were motivated to read (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Buddy, 2011; Costello, 2008; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Meece et al., 2006; Senn, 2012). According to some research, students demonstrated stronger reading motivation and achievement when teachers differentiated reading instruction, incorporated choice and autonomy into instructional activities, and based instruction on the learning styles of their students (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Harvey & Daniels, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Logan & Medford, 2011; Reis et al., 2007; Reis et al., 2011; Tobada et al., 2009).

There are many factors that may impact reading achievement. The research tended to indicate that instructional approaches, reading motivation and interest, and physiology and brain development are several factors that influenced reading achievement (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Buddy, 2011; Costello, 2008; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Meece et al., 2006; Senn, 2012; Sousa, 2006; Watson et al., 2010; Young & Brozo, 2001). A preponderance of the reading research focused on instructional approaches that led to an increase in reading achievement for all students. There were few studies that focused specifically on which instructional approaches increased reading achievement for boys (Limbrick et al., 2011; Senn, 2012; Taylor, 2005; Topping et al., 2008).

The Gender Gap in Reading

National and international reading assessment data indicate that boys do not perform as well as girls (NAEP, 2009; OECD, 2009a). Correlational studies have suggested that this gender gap in reading has existed since the early 1990s (Diprete & Buchmann, 2013; Klecker, 2006; Ma, 2008). Researchers are searching for the underlying reasons as to why this gap is occurring, and are exploring ways to solve the problem. Some researchers have referred to the problem as an international crisis (Ma, 2008; Senn, 2012).

According to international PISA (2009) data, boys in 40 countries at all assessed grade levels underperformed females in reading by an average of 10 percentage points (OECD, 2009; Sadowski, 2010). This gap widened depending upon student race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Sadowski, 2010). Similarly, International Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) data indicated that girls outperformed boys in reading in most assessed countries at statistically significant levels in 2006 and 2011 (Cheung et al., 2009; National Center for Educational Statistics; 2011c). According to Sadowski (2010) gender gaps in reading are found in almost every nation.

National assessment data showed similar results. According to recent NAEP and American College Testing Program (ACT) data, boys at all grade levels underperformed girls in reading achievement (Conrad-Curry, 2011; Eliot, 2010; Matthews et al., 2010; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011a; Sadowski, 2012). When race, ethnicity, and SES were considered, this gap increased. Hispanic and African American boys scored over 20 percentage points below white boys (Matthews, 2010).

Other data suggested that the gender gap in reading might be influencing program placement and educational opportunities for students. Reportedly, there are more boys than girls enrolled in remedial reading classes (Conrad-Curry, 2011; Hawke et al., 2009; Senn, 2010; Zambo & Hansen, 2011). Employers are finding it very difficult to find qualified male graduates that are not in need of reading remediation. They are finding that recent male graduates are unable to think critically, solve problems, or communicate effectively (Gallagher, 2010). In addition, there are more females than males enrolled in institutions of higher learning (Cohen et al., 2012; Diprete & Buchmann, 2013; Sadowski, 2010).

Reading is an important life skill, required to succeed in the workplace (Jubani et al., 2012). Through reading, people learn and acquire skills. The gender gap in reading is an international concern researchers are striving to address and solve (Topping et al., 2008; Watson et al., 2010).

Behaviorist Approaches and Reading Achievement

Behaviorist-based instructional approaches have been prevalent in American schools since the 1950s (Tracey & Morro, 2012). Behaviorist approaches are teacher-led, focus on positive and negative reinforcement, and have observable objectives (Pham, 2011; Tracey & Morrow, 2012). One strategy based on behaviorism is explicit direct instruction (EDI).

Explicit direct reading instruction. Explicit direct instruction is an instructional approach where teachers explicitly teach skills and concepts to students in a systematic way, providing feedback and additional instruction according to students' performance

(Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Providing explicit direct instruction of reading skills according to students' appropriate reading level is one instructional approach researchers suggest increases reading achievement, especially for boys (Fahim et al., 2011; Griva et al., 2012; Jeynes, 2008; Young & Brozo, 2001). According to several studies, boys tended to not implement effective comprehension approaches during reading activities (Griva et al., 2012; Kolic-Vehovec & Baksanski, 2006). This research suggested that boys required explicit direct reading instruction to help them use effective comprehension skills and to increase their reading achievement.

A meta-analysis of 22 studies on elementary students conducted by Jeynes (2008) suggested that a direct correlation existed between explicit direct instruction of phonics and reading approaches and reading achievement. Jeynes also proposed that reading achievement for all students increased when students were provided with explicit direct instruction, especially for minority students.

In addition, several quantitative studies using elementary students implied that the use of explicit direct instruction increased students' reading achievement. In one experimental study, 70% of the reading scores for participating boys improved when they were provided with explicit direct instruction (Prado & Plourde, 2011). In this study, researchers determined that reading scores for participating boys and girls increased as a result of receiving explicit direct reading instruction.

Another study using participants in Grades 5 and 6 indicated that boys did not implement effective reading comprehension skills during reading activities (Griva et al., 2012). Authors suggested that in order to increase reading achievement, boys required

explicit direct instruction in applying comprehension skills. Furthermore, according to Pitcher et al. (2010), some struggling readers were not receiving explicit direct instruction in reading comprehension skills, which may have been the cause of their reading deficiencies.

Results from another experimental design study conducted with 31 Grade 3 students showed that the explicit direct instruction of comprehension skills increased reading achievement, and improved students' working memory (Garcia-Madruga et al., 2013). The treatment group in this study received 50 minutes of explicit direct instruction daily for four weeks. Post-test results indicated reliable, strong gains in reading comprehension for the treatment group.

According to Harvey & Daniels (2009), proficient readers monitor their own comprehension of text, react to the text, ask questions, and connect the text to prior experiences during reading activities. Their review of research proposed that students' reading achievement improved when teachers explicitly taught comprehension skills. Furthermore, a study conducted by Garcia-Madruga et al. (2013), indicated that students' reading comprehension improved when they were provided with explicit instruction in reading comprehension skills, including approaches to improve working memory, which included focusing, inferencing, connecting with prior knowledge, and updating mental representations.

Constructivist Instructional Approaches and Reading Achievement

Constructivist instructional approaches support the notion that students learn through active knowledge building (Tracey & Morrow, 2102). Strategies that support

constructivism require students to actively engage in learning, solve problems, collaborate, and reflect on learning (Pham, 2011; Tracey & Morrow, 2102). Reading approaches that are based on constructivism include collaborative learning and differentiated reading instruction, which supports teaching to a student's readiness level, interest, and learning styles (Tomlinson, 1999).

One meta-analysis of factors for reading achievement indicated that the top ranking indicators of student achievement were the instructional approaches teachers implemented in the classroom (Hattie, 2009). This study suggested that constructivist instructional approaches, such as meta-cognition, peer collaboration, differentiated learning, and inquiry-based learning led to higher reading achievement.

Collaborative learning. Collaborative learning has been shown to increase student achievement (Avci & Yuksel, 2011; Berne & Clark, 2008; Brinda, 2011; Ferguson & Kern, 2012; Nystrand, 2006; Reis et al., 2007; Senn, 2012; Shelton-Strong, 2011). Research suggested that reading achievement increased for students when teachers implemented instructional approaches that provided opportunities for students to engage in meaningful conversations around complex text (Nystrand, 2006; Reis et al., 2007; Senn, 2012). Brinda (2011), for instance, conducted a qualitative study with struggling sixth-grade students to explore which approaches would motivate students to read and increase reading achievement. He concluded that student achievement and motivation increased when students were placed in small groups, and held collaborative discussions around interesting texts.

One case study indicated that students' reading comprehension skills and interest in reading increased when the teacher implemented literature circles (Ferguson & Kern, 2012). A literature circle is defined as an instructional strategy where students self-select texts and meet regularly in collaborative discussion groups to ask questions and share insights and interpretations about the text they read (Shelton-Strong, 2011).

Several other studies also indicated that the implementation of literature circles increased students' reading achievement (Berne & Clark, 2008; Ferguson & Kern, 2012; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Shelton-Strong, 2011). Results from one mixed-methods study, for example, proposed that reading comprehension achievement and attitude toward reading increased for students who were involved in literature circles (Avci & Yuksel, 2011). In addition, two case studies, conducted with elementary students, suggested that reading achievement increased when teachers implemented literature circles focused on promoting critical and reflective thinking (Mille & Jennings, 2011; Berne & Clark, 2008).

Research has also suggested that embedding collaboration and critical thinking skills, such as inquiry and problem-solving into reading tasks, improved student achievement (Prado & Plourde, 2010; Peterson & Taylor, 2012; Reis et al., 2007). According to Peterson & Taylor (2012) students engaged in reading tasks that required critical thinking skills using high-order questioning demonstrated increased reading achievement. Several researchers suggested that providing time for students to collaborate and discuss interesting texts using complex reasoning and critical thinking

increases reading achievement (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Cheung et al., 2009; Ferguson & Kern, 2012; Nystrand, 2006; Prado & Plourde, 2010; Reis et al., 2007).

In one study, students in the experimental group were placed in an intervention class where they received critical thinking skills instruction. Results showed that the experimental group enrolled in the critical thinking skills intervention program demonstrated stronger gains in reading comprehension than the control group, which received traditional reading instruction (Fahim et al., 2012).

Differentiated instruction. Another instructional approach that may be linked to positive student achievement is differentiated instruction (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Jenkins, 2009; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011; Tobin, 2008). Differentiated instruction can be defined as an instructional approach that is responsive to students' learning needs, where teachers proactively plan instruction according to students' learning readiness level, interests, and learning styles (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2003). Teachers who effectively differentiate reading instruction align teaching approaches to the learning style of a student, as well as to how cognitively ready a student is for the content or skill, and to how interesting the content is for the student (Tomlinson, 2003; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). They create a safe, respectful learning environment, use assessments to drive their instructional planning, and challenge each student according to their instructional level (Tomlinson, 2003; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011).

Research indicated that students of teachers who implemented differentiated instruction exhibited increased achievement in all curricular areas, including reading (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Jenkins, 2009; Tobin, 2008). Differentiated reading

approaches include using leveled texts, implementing literacy stations based on students' learning styles and interests, providing students with a choice of texts, and using flexible grouping strategies (Tobin, 2008). Research suggested that providing differentiated reading tasks improved reading achievement (Jenkins, 2009).

Results from one study conducted with Grade 3 students also indicated that reading achievement increased when students received differentiated reading instruction (Connor et al., 2011). Researchers in this study conducted a quantitative study where students in the control group received differentiated reading instruction in a small group setting for one year. Results suggested that students receiving differentiated reading instruction had stronger gains in reading achievement than students receiving traditional instruction.

In another study conducted with elementary students, results indicated that students' reading achievement increased when students were placed in an enriched, differentiated reading program (Reis et al., 2011). In this study, researchers compared reading scores from students receiving traditional basal instruction to the reading scores from students receiving a differentiated reading program that included critical thinking. Results showed that students receiving the differentiated reading program had a stronger increase in reading fluency and comprehension scores than students who received the traditional basal reading program.

Combining Instructional Approaches and Reading Achievement

Allington & Gabriel (2012) recommended that teachers implement a combination of approaches that include critical thinking skills, explicit direct instruction, and peer

collaboration in order to improve reading achievement for all students. The authors believed that a strong reading program should consist of student-selected texts, appropriately challenging texts, teacher-directed lessons, student autonomy, authentic reading tasks, close reading techniques, and peer collaboration. Similarly, Hollerbeck & Saternus (2013) argued that teachers implementing the Common Core State Standards must take into consideration the need to teach comprehension skills using explicit direct instruction along with collaboration and critical thinking.

Other researchers believed that reading achievement increased when teachers implemented a variety of reading approaches (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; McKeown et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2013). One experimental study focusing on comparing four different reading approaches indicated that an increase in student reading achievement occurred when students were placed in the Conceptual Learning Reading Program, which consisted of critical thinking, problem solving, and elaboration strategies (Block et al., 2009). Results from this study suggested that the strongest gain in student reading achievement was realized when students received a transactional learning intervention where students were engaged in critical thinking strategies paired with collaboration, student directed learning, and thematic learning.

An additional study conducted with 76 Grade 5 students revealed that implementation of a Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) teaching strategy significantly improved reading achievement (Ng et al., 2013). CORI combined explicit direct instruction, student autonomy, critical thinking, and motivational support. Authors

noted that CORI combined with discussion, increased students' reading instruction more than CORI alone.

Another teaching strategy, called the Consider Organize Reflect (COR) framework, incorporates explicit direct instruction, opportunities for students to discuss and visually process text, cooperative group work, and reflection (Troegger, 2011). According to Troegger's research results, student achievement results indicated that the COR framework for teaching reading comprehension helped increase student achievement and engagement.

Girls and Reading Achievement

Neuroscientists and researchers who study how the brain works tend to support the notion that girls might be born with stronger language acquisition skills than boys (Sousa, 2006; Logan & Johnston, 2010). Some researchers suggest that boys take longer to learn how to read than girls (Costello, 2008). In addition, neuroimaging has indicated that girls process language by using both sides of their brain, whereas boys use only their left side (Limbrick et al., 2011; Sousa, 2006). According to Sousa (2006), girls also have a larger bundle of neurons called the corpus callosum that connects both brain hemispheres, allowing the two sides to communicate faster. He assumes that this may be one reason why girls tend to acquire spoken language earlier than boys.

According to researchers, school-aged girls tend to read more than boys (Boltz, 2007; Farris et al., 2009; Griva et al., 2012; Senn, 2012; Taylor, 2005; Topping et al., 2008). Other researchers speculate that girls prefer to read fiction, are more motivated to read stories focused on relationships, and tend to use more comprehension strategies

while reading than boys do (Boltz, 2007; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Griva et al., 2012; Prado & Pourde, 2011). One correlational study designed to explore gender differences in reading motivation of 288 average third-grade students revealed that girls were more motivated to read, placed more value on reading, and struggled less than boys did in reading (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010).

In addition, some research indicated that girls tend to read for enjoyment more than boys (Boltz, 2007; Griva, et al., 2012; Senn, 2012). According to a study conducted by Griva et al. (2012), more girls tended to check more books out of local libraries, spent more money on books, and read for pleasure more often than boys. Findings from their correlational study of students in Grades 5-6 s revealed that girls enjoyed reading more than boys did, and preferred to read the types of human-interest stories and literature required for most English language arts classes. Boys, on the other hand, preferred comics and action-stories (Griva et al., 2012). Their study also indicated that girls used more reading comprehension approaches than boys. Participating girls in the study activated prior knowledge, used imagery while reading, and self-corrected while reading more often than the participating boys.

Furthermore, although research showed that girls tended to respond to many of the instructional approaches designed to increase reading achievement for all students, several studies indicated that girls in lower grades demonstrated increased reading ability when they received analytic-phonics instruction, or letter-sound relationships taught within the context of real words. They did not respond as positively when instruction

using a synthetic, or isolated letter-sound relationship method was used (Logan & Johnston, 2010; Griva et al., 2012).

Boys and Reading Achievement

Young boys, on the other hand, tend to acquire stronger reading skills when teachers implement instruction using a systematic, synthetic phonics method (Logan & Johnston, 2010; Griva et al., 2012). According to several studies, boys between ages 6 and 15 increased their reading achievement when teachers explicitly taught reading skills in isolation, one at a time, and according to language rules (Logan & Johnston, 2010; Griva et al., 2012). Other studies and reviews of research indicated that boys improved reading achievement when they found the reading tasks interesting and motivating, not too difficult, and a match to their individual learning style (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Buddy, 2011; Costello, 2008; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Meece et al., 2006; Senn, 2012).

Engagement, motivation, and male reading achievement. Many researchers tend to believe that engagement and interest towards reading has a strong impact on reading achievement (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Becker et al., 2010; Buddy, 2011; Costello, 2008; Limbrick et al., 2011; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; McGeown et al., 2012; Meece et al., 2006; Senn, 2012). Some researchers disagree as to whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation contributes more positively to reading engagement and achievement, yet they agree that motivation is positively related to reading engagement and achievement (Becker et al., 2010; McGeown et al., 2012). According to Senn (2012),

“Students who embrace a more positive attitude toward reading tend to be more successful readers in terms of ability” (p. 3). Other researchers support the notion that students who are motivated to read tend to read more, and have stronger reading fluency scores (Boltz, 2007; Logan & Johnston, 2010; Meece et al., 2006; Senn, 2012).

Research on gender preferences toward reading has suggested that girls tend to be more motivated to read and more engaged in reading tasks than boys (McKenna et al., 2012). One study involving 4,491 Grades 6 and 8 students from 23 states indicated that girls were more motivated than boys to read both digital and print academic text (McKenna et al., 2012). The study also found that boys tended to prefer reading online text rather than printed text.

Several studies suggested that boys in classrooms where teachers implemented instructional approaches designed to motivate and engage male readers had increased reading scores (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Logan & Johnston, 2010). In one study, boys who were allowed to choose interesting texts at their appropriate reading level showed increased motivation to read, were engaged in reading tasks, and had improved reading scores (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). Another correlational study that analyzed reading scores and student motivation concluded that a positive relationship existed between motivation and reading achievement (Applegate & Applegate, 2010). An additional study indicated that ten-year-old boys showed an increase in reading achievement when their attitude and motivation toward reading increased (Logan & Johnston, 2009).

Furthermore, research has also indicated that providing high-interest texts, authentic reading tasks, and engaging students in collaborative text discourse increased reading motivation for boys, and improved their reading achievement (Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Nystrand, 2006; Reis et al., 2007; Senn, 2012). One mixed-methods study involving Grade 5 boys showed that boys preferred factual texts, and appeared more motivated to read when offered a choice of texts (Farris et al., 2009). Likewise, an empirical study conducted with 10–13 year-old boys revealed that although 60% of the participants did not read for pleasure, 51% preferred to read action and adventure books and 50% stated that they read when they were allowed to choose books that interested them (Boltz, 2007).

Differentiated instruction and reading achievement for boys. In another study utilizing an experimental design with Grades 3 and 6, reading fluency scores for boys improved when participants received a differentiated reading program infused with challenging tasks, interesting texts, and choice (Reis et al., 2007). Participating boys in the reading program demonstrated a statistically significant improved attitude toward reading after 12 weeks of treatment. Authors speculated that continued participation in the reading program would probably lead to an increase in reading comprehension scores as well.

A similar experimental study conducted with Grade 2-5 students indicated that students receiving an enriched, differentiated reading program demonstrated increased reading scores, compared to students who received a traditional non-differentiated reading program (Reis et al., 2011). In addition, the results indicated that boys from lower

socioeconomic schools increased their reading scores more than boys from higher socioeconomic schools. These results were promising given the district under study had schools with high poverty rates.

Implications

Results from this case study supported the research suggesting that a combination of instructional approaches increased reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6. The instructional approaches that appeared to improve reading achievement for boys included differentiated reading instruction, collaborative learning, setting and monitoring of students' reading goals, using student choice and interest when selecting texts, and developing a positive teacher-student relationship. If teachers implement these instructional approaches during reading instruction, reading achievement for boys may increase. Comments from teachers explaining their point of view about which instructional approaches they believe improved reading achievement for boys in their classes will help other educators understand how best to implement the approaches.

Summary

Research on reading achievement suggests that teachers should implement a combination of explicit direct instruction, collaboration, critical thinking, and differentiated instruction in order to increase reading achievement for boys. Reading approaches that have been shown to increase reading achievement for boys include motivational approaches, gender-based approaches, explicit direct instruction, and differentiated instruction. Most reading research focused on specific instructional approaches. This study explored several instructional approaches in order to understand

which instructional approach most improves reading achievement, specifically for boys in Grades 3-6 in the district under study. The primary objective for this study was to provide insight to educators about which instructional strategies would best close the male reading achievement gap. Section 2 explains the research methodology that was used in this study.

Section 2: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand which instructional approach most improves reading achievement, specifically for boys in Grades 3-6 in the district under study. The goal of this study was to provide insight to educators about which instructional strategies would work best in closing the gender gap in reading.

The guiding question for this project study was as follows: How can reading instruction be improved in Grades 3-6 in the school under study to positively impact the reading achievement of boys in that population? In order to address this question the following subquestions were addressed:

1. What are the instructional approaches that teachers use to improve reading achievement in their classes, Grades 3-6?
2. What are the instructional approaches that teachers specifically use to improve the reading achievement of boys in their classes, Grades 3-6?
3. What explanations do teachers offer to account for the improvement in reading achievement of boys in their classes, Grades 3-6?

This section describes the research design, explains why a qualitative case study was most appropriate to address the local problem, describes the data collection methods and data analysis procedures, describes the setting and sampling procedures, and explains the measures used to protect the rights of participants.

Description of the Qualitative Tradition

Qualitative research tends to focus on understanding naturally occurring settings

and events to help develop an in-depth understanding of an occurrence or situation under study (Creswell, 2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The occurrence explored in this study was boys' strong reading achievement and how teachers accounted for this increase in reading proficiency. A qualitative *case study* is a thorough investigation of a phenomenon that occurs within a bounded, or closed, system (Creswell, 2012; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). According to Merriam (2009) a bounded system can be an individual program, classroom, person, or community. Here, the cases were the Grades 3-6 classrooms—natural environments bounded by time and setting—where boys demonstrated high reading achievement.

Justification for Using A Case Study Design

The purpose of this study was to understand which instructional approach most likely improved reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6 in the district under study, and how teachers accounted for boys' reading achievement. Utilizing a qualitative case study design provided a robust understanding of which instructional approaches teachers implemented in Grades 3-6 classrooms where boys demonstrated strong reading achievement, and how teachers accounted for boys' reading achievement. Gaining an in-depth understanding of the research questions helped identify specific instructional approaches that improved reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6.

A qualitative case study provided an in-depth investigation of the research problem. According to Maxwell et al. (2013), the purpose of conducting a case study is to efficiently collect detailed information about each case being studied. Merriam (2009) states that a qualitative case study usually focuses on understanding a particular situation

from a person's perspective, and consists of an in-depth investigation of a bounded system. Purposeful sampling is often used, and data analysis is usually inductive, consisting of interviews, observations, or document reviews (Merriam).

A person's behavior and how they experience life is never constant (Merriam, 2009). Each teacher in a classroom operates as an individual when delivering instruction. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that each teacher experiences and implements instruction differently. It was important to understand the nature of each participating teacher's perception with regards to answering the research questions (Nevin et al., 2008). Conducting a qualitative case study generated an increased understanding of which instructional approaches participating teachers selected for their individual classes during reading instruction, and teachers' explanations for their instructional choices.

In several studies that investigated the use of instructional approaches, researchers applied qualitative case studies to gain a thorough understanding of each teacher's perception regarding the implementation of the specific instruction approach or strategy (Berne & Clark, 2008; Jenkins, 2009; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Nevin et al., 2008; Peterson & Taylor, 2012; Pitcher et al., 2010; Puchner et al., 2008; Thomas & Marri, 2012). Furthermore, in one study, researchers used a case study design to gain thorough insight into the techniques that three superintendents from high achieving districts had implemented (Maxwell et al., 2013). Conducting a qualitative case study yielded an in-depth understanding of which instructional approaches teachers implemented in classrooms where boys demonstrated high reading achievement, and how teachers accounted for boys' reading achievement.

Rationale for Not Selecting Other Qualitative Research Methods

Several other qualitative designs were considered, but not selected for this study. Grounded theory was not utilized for this study because the purpose of the study was to investigate a local phenomenon, and to discover new themes as the data are collected and analyzed (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2012). Researchers implementing grounded theory research seek to derive a substantive theory grounded in the experiences and views of participants. Substantive theory is not *formal* or *grand* theory but rather “has at its referent specific, everyday-world situations such as the coping mechanisms of returning adult students, or a particular reading program that “works” with low-income children, or dealing with grief in the aftermath of a natural disaster” (Merriam, 2009. P.30). According to Merriam (2009), “Building a substantive theory involves the identification of a core category” (p.31). This study investigated a variety of instructional approaches that may have lead to increased male reading achievement. The purpose was not to identify a core or central theme related to boys’ increased reading achievement.

Phenomenology was not selected for this study because the purpose was not to focus on the essence or structure of a personal experience or phenomenon. Phenomenologists seek to “depict the essence or basic structure of experience. Often these studies are of intense human experiences such as love, anger, betrayal, and so on” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). Patton (2002) describes this type of research as based on:

the assumption that *there is an essence or essences to shared experience*. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed,

the essences of loneliness, the essence of being a mother, the essence of being a participant in a particular program. The assumption of essence, like the ethnographer's assumption that culture exists and is important, becomes the defining characteristic of a purely phenomenological study. (p. 106)

The focus of a phenomenological study is to uncover and interpret the inner essence of the participants' cognitive processing regarding some common experience. This study does not focus on the experiences, feelings, and beliefs of the participating teachers. The purpose of this study was to understand which instructional approaches participating teachers implemented during reading instruction that may have increased boys' reading achievement. A case study was selected for this study because an in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon (boys' increased reading achievement) that occurred in certain classrooms (a bounded system) was conducted. Understanding this phenomenon may help improve reading achievement for all students in the district.

Participants

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Participants for this study were purposefully selected from a neighboring district that had the same issue occur regarding certain Grades 3-6 classrooms where boys showed strong gains in reading achievement despite a district-wide gender gap in reading. No participants were selected from the district where the researcher is employed.

Participants for this study were volunteers from three different elementary schools within the district under study, and were purposefully selected based on certain criteria related to the research questions. The criteria used to select participants for this study

were (a) third through sixth-grade teachers who taught in the district being studied during the 2011-13 school years, and (b) whose boys demonstrated strong reading achievement as measured by 2011 and 2012 CST Reading scores. I met with the director of curriculum and the superintendent of schools in the participating district to discuss which teachers met the selection criteria.

Qualitative case studies often use purposeful sampling because participants are usually related to the bounded system being investigated (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Purposeful sampling is used when a researcher wants to select participants based on certain criteria or characteristics (Creswell, 2012; Lodico & Spaulding, 2010).

Conducting this study in an alternative district where I was unknown to participants helped to maintain ethical practices. According to Hatch (2002) implementing a study where the researcher is employed, and where the researcher is known, causes ethical issues. I am a well-known district-level administrator in a medium-sized district in Southern California. Walden IRB Research Ethics Guide (2014) warns against conducting research with colleagues or subordinates, and so data was collected from a neighboring school district with a similar profile where I was unknown to the teachers.

Justification for Number of Participants

According to Merriam (2009), “To find the best case to study, you would first establish the criteria that will guide case selection and then select a case that meets those criteria” (p. 81). There were 8 teachers in the district under study who met the criteria.

The teachers worked at different schools, and at different grade levels within the district. Out of the 8 teachers who met the selection criteria, 4 teachers agreed to participate in this study. Selecting this number of participants from various grade levels and school sites helped increase the maximum variation and validity of the study (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) recommended that case studies have less than 10 participants to ensure that a thorough data analysis can be completed. Other researchers recommend that sample sizes contain enough participants to ensure that an adequate number of participants are selected in order to provide redundancy and saturation of the data, and to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). It was important that the sample size was large enough to provide adequate data, but not too large to become unwieldy. Having four participants produced data saturation, and effectively addressed the research question.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

A letter of cooperation was obtained from the district's superintendent enabling me to conduct the study in that district (See Appendix B). Prior to contacting any candidates permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted (number10-13-14-0243870). I met with the director of curriculum and the superintendent of schools to discuss teachers who met the selection criteria.

Once Walden IRB approval to conduct the study was granted, candidates were contacted to begin the informed consent process. Each teacher meeting the criteria was contacted individually, via email or phone to notify them of the purpose of the study,

their possible role in the study, benefits of participating in the study, and were asked to attend a private informed consent meeting. At this meeting the purpose of the study, objectives of the study, the selection criteria, measures to ensure confidentiality, participant expectations, and the voluntary nature of the study were explained and reviewed. Participants were able to refrain from answering any question and were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Any questions individual participants had regarding the study were addressed.

Finally, an informed consent form was given to candidates allowing one-on-one recorded interviews to be conducted (Appendix D). Each candidate was given time to review the consent process, and was asked to sign the informed consent form after thorough review. All candidates agreed to participate, signed the consent forms, and received a signed copy. Participation in this study did not harm participants. The identity of participants and all data collected was kept confidential, and was not shared with others.

Methods for Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

A collaborative researcher-participant working relationship was developed during the initial email or phone contact. I explained the purpose of the research, the voluntary manner of the study, and invited possible participants to attend a private informed consent meeting at their school, during off-hours.

During the informed consent meeting I explained my role, reviewed the participant's role and responsibilities, discussed the voluntary nature of the study, and highlighted the benefits of participating in the study. Participants were told that they were

able to withdraw from the study at any time, and that they had the right to refrain from answering any interview question.

In addition participants were assured that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained throughout the study by using pseudonyms, securing all data via passwords and locked files, and by using phone or Internet correspondence to maximize privacy. As soon as possible, all identifiers would be deleted and codes would be used to identify study documents. The coding key would be kept in a confidential locked filing cabinet to which only I had access. All responses to interview questions, information shared, participant identity, and site names and locations would remain confidential. Participants were guaranteed that all data only would be used for this study and the ensuing project (See Appendix D).

Measures for Ethical Protection of Participants

Protecting the rights of participants is an ethical and legal requirement when conducting research. As part of the Walden University Doctoral Program, I participated in and passed the National Institute of Health (NIH) Human Subject Protection Training. Throughout this study, ethical practices as per the Walden IRB were employed. Prior to the data collection process, Walden IRB approval and informed consent from teacher participants was obtained (See Appendix D). Part of this process included explaining to each participant the benefits and risks of participating in the study, the purpose of the study, how confidentiality would be maintained, and that all aspects of the study were voluntary. In addition, participants were informed that they did not have to answer all of

the interview questions, and that they could withdraw from participating in the study at any time.

The most important ethical concern for this study that needed to be addressed was confidentiality. The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants was maintained in several ways. First, initial contact was made privately via a phone call or email to make sure the identities of participants was kept confidential. Second, interviews were conducted after school hours to maintain confidentiality. Finally, unique identifiers and pseudonyms were given to all participants and schools. This helped maintain the anonymity of all participants.

To maintain the confidentiality of data, all documents, transcripts, recordings, and notes pertaining to the study were assigned codes to de-identify participants, and were stored in a secure location in a home office. All computer files were password protected. All data and identifiers were destroyed as soon as possible. In addition, there was minimal risk to participants involved in this study.

Data Collection

Justification for Data Collected

The major source of data for this study was gathered from voluntary individual 45-minute face-to-face interviews with follow-up member checks to ensure accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011). Interviews were conducted at each of the 3 elementary schools located with the district under study outside of the school day, in the participating teacher's private classroom. One-on-one interviews are effective when reconstructing past events, and gaining insights into the experiences and perceptions of

participants (Hatch, 2002). The events surrounding the phenomena being investigated for this study occurred in the past. Merriam (2009) stated that, “It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88). Interviewing the teachers involved in the local phenomenon helped me develop an understanding of which instructional approaches positively impacted the reading achievement of boys, and how teachers accounted for boys’ reading achievement.

Data Collected

Data was collected via one 45-minute face-to-face interview session with each participant answering the same set of six questions (See Appendix B). Prior to beginning the interview, participants were reminded that they could refrain from answering any question, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Interview questions, as shown in Appendix B, focused on having participants describe typical daily reading instruction as it occurred in their class, and which instructional approaches they implemented during reading instruction. These questions were designed to help answer the first and second research questions, which addressed the instructional approaches teachers, whose boys showed high, increased reading achievement, implemented during reading instruction. The next set of questions addressed the third research question, and asked participants to explain how they accounted for the increase in boys’ reading achievement, and which instructional approaches they attributed to the increase.

Interview questions contained semi-structured questions. Semi-structured interview questions contain some scripted questions as well as opportunities to ask

probing questions (Creswell, 2012; Lodico & Spaulding, 2010). The purpose of using a semi-structured question format was to maintain a constant focus on the research questions, while permitting participants the opportunity to expand upon the information they provided (Creswell, 2012). Although each participant was an individual with unique experiences related to the research questions, they were asked the same questions. According to Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), studies that include multiple cases, and where comparability, generalization, and the impact of the researcher is important, should contain more structured than unstructured questions.

I recorded interviews for later transcription to make sure all interview content was included in the data analysis (Creswell, 2012; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Following each interview, data was immediately transcribed, analyzed, and coded.

Gathering and Recording Data

Data was gathered through the interview process. Participants described which instructional approaches they implemented during reading instruction, particularly for male students, and were asked to explain what they attributed to the strong increase in male reading achievement that occurred in their classrooms. Interview data was audio-recorded, immediately transcribed, analyzed and coded following each interview.

Tracking the Data

I used a field note journal throughout the study to record notes, reflections, and emerging insights (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Jacob & Fergerson, 2012). The field note journal was “a place for ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about patterns that seem to be emerging” (Glesne, 2011, p. 71). Data were analyzed and coded following

each interview. A matrix display was also used during the data collection process to help track and organize the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Data analysis was conducted on an ongoing basis to code, organize, and record emerging themes.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

Access to participants was first made through the district's Superintendent of Schools, who signed a letter of cooperation to conduct research in his district (See Appendix C). The superintendent then contacted the principals to inform them of the study; therefore, principal permission was not required to conduct research in the district. Furthermore, principals did not have access to participant data.

Initial contact with the participants was made via district email or phone. An email was sent to qualifying participants. A few of the participants requested to be contacted via phone. Participants were invited to attend a private informed consent meeting where confidentiality of all audio-recorded interview data, participant identity, and participant and researcher roles was explained. Interviews were conducted during non-school hours in the teacher's classroom according to the participant's preference.

Role of the Researcher

Research for this study was conducted in a neighboring district. My role for this study was kept separate from my job as Assistant Superintendent of Instruction in the local district. No data was collected from the local district.

Although I worked in the district under study over twelve years ago, participants meeting the research criteria and their principals did not know me. My role in the district under study was as an investigator, which included being responsible for all aspects of

this study. The responsibilities included providing background information for the study regarding any personal biases toward the topic under study, purposely selecting and interviewing participants for the study, collecting and analyzing the data, and finalizing results to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2009).

Permission to conduct research in the district under study was obtained (Appendix B). Prior to conducting any data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Walden University IRB. Once IRB approval was obtained from Walden University, written informed consent from participants was sought. A letter was given to each participant that explained the purpose and objectives of the study, selection criteria, and participant expectations. Interview protocols to effectively record and document interview data, organize and analyze data, and maintain ethical behavior were followed.

One disadvantage that was considered as an outside researcher was my unfamiliarity with the school principals and participants. It was important for me to establish a positive rapport with school staff and participants. Establishing a positive researcher-participant relationship is an important component to conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Prado Clark, 2011).

The first step in building rapport was for me to contact participants to attend a private informed consent meeting where the purpose of the study, objectives of the study, the selection criteria, measures to ensure confidentiality, participant expectations, and the voluntary nature of the study was explained and reviewed. Questions participants had were addressed. It was important for the participants of this study to feel comfortable with me, and with the entire research process.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Procedures

The method of analysis used was manual content analysis of the interview transcripts. Qualitative collective case study analysis best answered the research questions. A collective case study investigates more than one case, or participant (Mills, Durepos, & Weibe, 2010). To best understand which instructional approaches are likely to improve reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6, it was necessary to examine a variety of qualifying participants at various grade levels.

The goal in qualitative data analysis is to make sense of the data by combining, reducing, and deciphering the data in order to answer the research question (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis for this study was conducted concurrently with data collection, with complete data analysis finalized after all interviews and all transcribing had been completed. This procedure of ongoing data analysis is highly recommended by qualitative researchers in order to streamline data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

To identify and understand which instructional approaches were most likely to improve reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6, and how teachers accounted for boys' reading achievement, data analysis for this study was conducted according to the 2-cycle coding model developed by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014). According to the authors, "First Cycle coding is a way to initially summarize segments of data. Pattern coding, as a Second Cycle method, is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller

number of categories, themes, or constructs” (p. 86). This method of coding and re-coding helped ensure accurate data analysis.

First, all raw data was processed into transcribed, understandable text. Then first cycle coding was conducted, where underlining key words and phrases in the text identified initial data clusters that were related to the research questions. After the initial codes were developed, the second cycle coding was conducted. This consisted of looking for emerging patterns from the initial codes and reducing the initial codes and patterns into larger categories. According to Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), the pattern codes can be summarized as “categories or themes, causes or explanations, relationships among people, [or] theoretical constructs.” (p. 87). Many of the pattern codes related to themes, causes, or explanations pertaining to the instructional approaches implemented during reading instruction.

Data was then charted on a matrix display to help identify themes and patterns. Matrix displays organize the data into a visual summary allowing effective review, validation, and analysis of the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Generalizations were made for each emerging theme or pattern.

Evidence of Data Quality, Accuracy, and Credibility

In order to ensure that data from this study was accurate and credible, several procedures were followed. First, all research procedures for collecting qualitative data recommended by the IRB to maintain credibility of the study were followed. A letter of cooperation was obtained from the superintendent of schools in the district under study allowing the research to be conducted. Informed consent with all participants was

obtained prior to conducting the study. Methods to minimize potential participant risks including maintaining data integrity and confidentiality were employed. All transcripts and recorded data were kept in either a locked file cabinet or password-protected files.

Second, data triangulation, member checking, peer review, and an external auditor were used to ensure that the data and findings were credible and accurate (Creswell, 2013). Interviewing more than one participant meeting the criteria and maintaining a research journal helped triangulate data. During this study, data from a minimum of 4 participants meeting the research criteria was collected and analyzed. According to Creswell (2012), data triangulation increases the accuracy of the results because data is collected from multiple sources. In addition, participants were selected from a variety of grade levels (3-6) and school sites to help create maximum variation for data collection (Merriam, 2009).

Furthermore, member checks were used to clarify and validate the interview data. Member checks, according to Merriam (2009), are used to increase internal validity of a study by ensuring that interview data is correctly understood and that personal bias is excluded. Each participant had the opportunity to review the data findings of their interview. Member checks lasted about 15 minutes and took place following each interview to provide participants the opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings and to check the accuracy of the findings.

A colleague was utilized to conduct a peer review. The peer reviewer was knowledgeable about the content and methodology of the study. She examined the raw data and determined the credibility of the findings based on the reviewed data (Merriam,

2009). The peer reviewer signed a confidentiality agreement stating that she would maintain confidentiality of all sensitive information and data (See Appendix E).

To further enhance the credibility of this study, an external auditor, unknown to the researcher and unfamiliar with the study, was utilized to perform a detailed appraisal of the study (Creswell, 2011). The external auditor was an experienced qualitative researcher familiar with qualitative reading research, and analyzing and objectively interpreting qualitative research. A confidentiality agreement was signed by the external auditor to maintain confidentiality (See Appendix F).

To further increase the reliability of the study, reflections, emerging understandings, and field notes from interviews and data analysis were collected in a research journal. The research journal included detailed notes from the field, insights from data collection, and emerging themes and insights gathered throughout various phases of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009; Glesne, 2011).

Finally, a rich, detailed description was used to report the qualitative findings. Lodico and Spaulding (2006) stated that providing a detailed narrative of the research findings develops a thorough understanding of the case. Painting a vivid picture of the case through words may help the reader visualize how the findings may be generalized to other settings (Glesne, 2011).

Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), researchers should actively seek out discrepant data and conduct further investigation to refine findings. Discrepant

data are data that disconfirm expected results (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Data displays and a data matrix were used to help identify any outliers or discrepant data.

Discrepant data was investigated via follow-up member checks or interviews as needed. These data was used to explore plausible explanations for the data discrepancies (Creswell, 2011; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Inspecting these data helped prevent bias, and might have led to alternative explanations, thereby strengthening the results (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Investigating the discrepant data helped validate possible findings, and bolster the validity of the study.

Qualitative Results

The purpose of this study was to provide insight to educators about which instructional approach is most likely to close the gender gap in reading, and to answer the guiding research questions for this project study, which were;

- (1) What are the instructional approaches that teachers use to improve reading achievement in their classes, Grades 3-6?
- (2) What are the instructional approaches that teachers specifically use to improve the reading achievement of boys in their classes, Grades 3-6?
- (3) What explanations do teachers offer to account for the improvement in reading achievement of boys in their classes, Grades 3-6?

Merriam (2009) indicated that conducting one-on-one interviews is necessitated when researchers want to investigate events that occurred in the past. The research questions pertain to events that took place in 2010 to 2013. A rich, thick description was utilized to explain the results of the data analysis, and to describe the instructional

approaches teachers in Grades 3-6 implemented from 2010 to 2012 in classrooms where students, including boys, showed a strong increase in reading achievement. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) first and second cycle coding methods were employed for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Four teachers in Grades 3-6 from a Southern California suburban district whose boys demonstrated strong reading achievement as measured by 2011 and 2012 CST Reading scores participated in this study. One participant taught Grade 3, two taught Grade 5, and one taught a combination class of Grades 3-5 special needs students. A collective case study design utilizing extensive semi-structured interviews was used to investigate which instructional approaches teachers implemented in classrooms where students, particularly boys, in Grades 3-6 demonstrated strong reading achievement, and how teachers accounted for that increase.

Methods for Tracking Data

Data were tracked during this study through the use of a field note journal, transcript data analysis, and utilization of a matrix display (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). A field note journal was used during interviews and data analysis. Notes during interviews, reflections, and emerging insights were recorded in the journal (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Jacob & Ferguson, 2012).

Demographic Data of Participants' Classrooms

Teachers selected for this study were from two elementary schools within the district under study. All participants met the following criteria; they taught Grades 3-6 in

the district being studied during the 2011-13 school years, and their boys demonstrated strong reading achievement as measured by 2011 and 2012 CST Reading scores.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of each participant.

All participants were tenured teachers who had taught for longer than eight years at their current school and grade level. The educational background of the participants varied. Two of the participants held a bachelor's degree in education, and two held a master's degree in education.

Three of the participants' classrooms consisted of 50% boys and 50% girls, and one participant's classroom comprised 70% boys and 30% girls (see Table 2). The demographic backgrounds of students were similar between the classrooms. About 75% of the students in each classroom were Hispanic, 10% were White, 10% were African American, and 5% consisted of other ethnicities.

Table 3

Demographic Profile of Participants' Classrooms

Participant	Teaching experience	Educational background	Grade level	Boys (%)
A	9 years	MA	5th	50
B	32 years	BA	5th	50
C	28 years	BA	3rd	50
D	12 years	MA	3-5	70

Interview Findings

The 4 participants were interviewed in order to explore which instructional approaches teachers implemented in Grades 3-6 classrooms where boys demonstrated strong reading achievement. During the interview, each participant described which

instructional approaches and strategies they implemented during reading instruction.

Interview protocols (see Appendix B) were utilized to help guide each interview.

Following each interview, data were immediately transcribed using specialized computer programs designed for this purpose. Transcribed data were checked and rechecked for accuracy by listening to each audiotape while making any needed corrections to the transcribed data. All transcribed data were saved on my personal computer using password-protected files.

Interview and field note journal data were immediately analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) 2-cycle coding method. First cycle coding consisted of assigning initial codes or labels to chunks of data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I used highlighting techniques and margin notes to assign codes to each chunk of data. Deductive and in vivo coding were utilized during first cycle coding.

Deductive coding involves creating a list of codes derived from an in-depth analysis of the literature review and conceptual framework prior to gathering data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In vivo coding utilizes exact phrases and words spoken by participants as labels. Although preexisting coding was utilized, I was committed to note any emerging codes stemming from the words of participants. Table 4 presents an example of first cycle coding.

Table 4

First Cycle Coding: Codes Assigned to Initial Data Chunks

Participant response	Initial codes identified
One component is what I call read to learn. It's more of a reading language arts kind of a curriculum. I do this because most of my kids are reluctant readers, and also some of them are passive learners. <u>I target the kids' interests in that area.</u> Theme based reading instruction that's based on a theme for four to six weeks, and it's purely for the excitement for reading. We're reading for practical reasons. <u>They're reading because they're learning something.</u> That something that they're learning, it's going to <u>manifest itself into a project, or some kind of performance,</u> or some kind of something.	I target kids' <u>Interests</u> <u>Theme-based</u> reading instruction Reading <u>because they're learning something</u> <u>Project or performance</u>

Transcripts were read and re-read to ensure that the emerging codes from first cycle coding were accurate. Once initial first cycle coding was complete, I employed second cycle coding. Second cycle coding consisted of grouping the initial summarizing codes into patterns or themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Through this process, I was able to combine the initial codes into common themes (see Table 5).

Table 5

Second Cycle Coding: Summarizing Codes Into Common Themes

Initial codes	Common themes
I target kids' <u>Interests</u>	Motivation (interest)
<u>Theme-based</u> reading instruction	Inquiry-based
Reading <u>because they're learning something</u>	Motivation (interest)
<u>Project</u> or performance	Inquiry-based

I tracked the emerging themes according to each research question using a matrix display (Appendix G). A matrix display helps organize the data in a visual chart or table to help the researcher view the data all at once for better analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). During second cycle coding, I read and re-read the initial codes to discern the common themes according to each research question, and identified specific, strong examples to use during the descriptive narrative, which helped give voice to the participants (Hatch 2002).

The matrix display provided a visual description of the common themes emerging between each participant and the research questions. The themes and sub-themes that developed helped highlight those instructional approaches teachers implemented that may have led to strong male reading achievement. Figure 1 illustrates the major themes and sub-themes that were identified for the first research question.

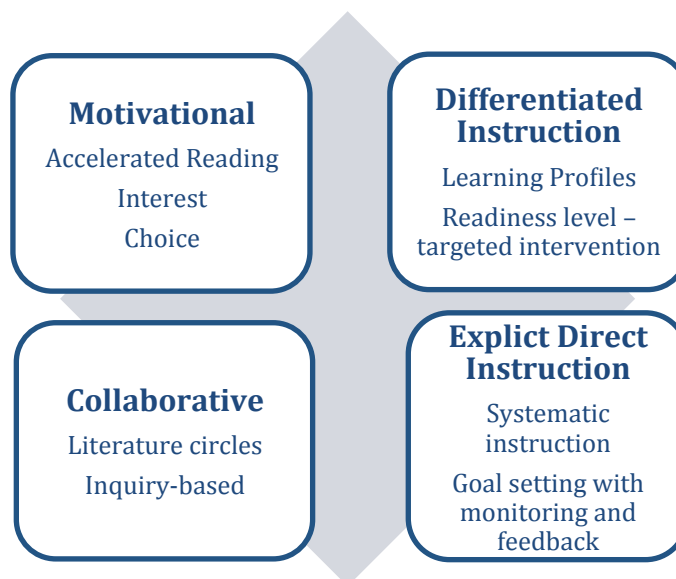


Figure 1. Themes and sub-themes identified during data analysis.

A thick, rich, detailed description was used to report the qualitative findings. Writing a detailed description with examples and exact quotes from participants helped to create a thorough understanding of which instructional approaches may lead to improved reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6 (Lodico and Spaulding, 2006). Vividly describing the case through words may help the reader visualize how these findings may be generalized to other settings (Glesne, 2011).

Research Question 1

The first research question sought to understand which instructional approaches teachers use to improve reading achievement in their classes, Grades 3-6. The major themes that developed through data analysis were, *Motivational Instructional Approaches*, *Collaborative Instructional Approaches*, *Differentiation*, and *Explicit Direct Instruction*. Within each major theme, sub-themes emerged regarding particular

instructional approaches that were related to each major theme. The major themes and corresponding sub-themes for the first research question are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Instructional Approaches Teachers Used During Reading Instruction

Emerging themes	Sub-Themes from original emerging themes
Motivational Approaches	Accelerated Reader
	Choice
	Interest
Explicit Direct Instruction	Systematic instruction
	Goal setting with monitoring and feedback
Collaborative Approaches	Literature Circles
	Peer collaboration and discussion
	Inquiry-based learning
Differentiated Instruction	Readiness level (intervention)
	Learning profiles

Motivational Instructional Approaches

All four participants implemented several motivational strategies and approaches designed to increase students' reading engagement and motivation. The motivational approaches fell into several subcategories or themes.

Accelerated reading. All four teachers implemented a program designed to increase students' motivation to read called AR. The AR program asks that students

select books at their independent reading level, take comprehension assessments related to the book, earn points or credit for successful assessment scores, and monitor their progress. According to Participant B:

I do a lot of reading using AR at their lowest independent reading level to build their self-esteem about reading. I am really on them to keep up with their AR goals. They have to read four books a trimester. They have to pass four tests a trimester at 80% or higher. One of the things I do with AR is that if they read a book that is in a series and the first one is at their level I let them read out of their level, because I want them to read the series. I want to hook them into loving reading.

Similarly, Participant A required that her students read daily from their AR books, and required that they help set and monitor their AR reading goals. Students were able to self-select texts according to their interests, but had to select different genres throughout the year. Participant A stated that AR motivated her male students to read. She stated, “Its like I feel as if there’s buy-in and accountability for reading, then they are more active readers and rise to the challenge, and improve.”

Participant C also used AR as a tool to motivate students to read. Students were able to self-select books at their appropriate reading level, but had to explore a variety of genres. She described the process as follows:

I gave them 3 genre choices and try to have them read a non-fiction and a fiction book to give them a little variety. I try not to allow them to pick two of the same genre in a row. They can read the same genre for the third book. I give them a

pretty broad opportunity to read different books, and that worked really well, kids loved it. They read that book in addition to the regular reading series so they still focus on reading skills, but they had this great opportunity to read.

She explained why she believed allowing students to select books based on their interest attributed to improved reading for her male students stating, “Perhaps providing students with a variety of literature selections helped their reading scores because they felt a little bit more in control of what they were able to read based on what they were interested in.”

Participant D taught students in Grades 3-5 who had reading disabilities. She implemented AR as a motivational tool for her fourth- and fifth-grade students. She explained that when her students began to realize that they were behind their peers in reading, she used AR to help students set personal reading goals, and helped them monitor their own progress. She made the following observation:

If they're really bright kids and they're also cognitively bright enough to understand what's going on, I begin the education about where they are, what their goal is, what their reading level is, what does 2.3 AR really mean. We use Accelerated Reader.

Participants agreed that the AR program helped motivate their students to read, particularly their male students. In part, they believed, because students were able to self-select books, set and monitor their own reading goals, and discuss their AR books with peers.

Choice and interest. In addition to implementing the AR reading motivational program, all four participants constantly integrated other methods of student choice and

interest into the reading curriculum. Participant D utilized student interest and choice as she and her class determined a central learning theme from which student would read a variety of texts. She described it as follows:

The other component is what I call read-to-learn. It's more of a reading language arts curriculum. Because most of my kids are reluctant readers, and also some of them are passive learners, I target the students' interests for reading. Theme based reading instruction that's based on a theme for four to six weeks, and it's purely for the excitement for reading. We're reading for practical reasons. They're reading because they're learning something. What they are learning, it's going to manifest itself into a project, or some kind of performance, or something.

When asked to provide an example, she stated:

At the beginning of the year, every year, we vote on what the topics are going to be, or what the topic for 'read-to-learn' will be this year. We discuss what the topics are that they want to learn about, and then I structure our fun language arts around that. This year the hot topic was science. A lot of the kids wanted to learn science so we played around with that. We did a music video last year about music history. Whatever their interest is, I just build reading, writing, language arts into that.

Participant A also integrated choice and interest into her reading curriculum. She attributed her students' high reading performance to the opportunities of choice and interest-based tasks she imbedded during reading instruction. She stated, "I love student

choice. For spelling they have a menu of task options. Anytime I can incorporate a menu, they have one, because I feel like there is more buy-in to read.”

Participant B also embedded student choice and interest into her curriculum. Her students were provided options for research topics, self-selected literature circle texts, and created their own text-based questions used for book discussions. She also allowed students to choose books they were interested in for their daily reading and responding homework. She explained her practice:

They choose their own book at their level. I have a vast library because I have my own children’s books. I have books I get all over the place. The librarian does a really good job of teaching them to go online to find books. They can find any book they want. We used to only have fiction. Now we have non-fiction although it's harder, but they choose whatever they want. I tell them, "If you don’t like the book, stop reading it. Find something you like. Don’t read something you're not interested in.”

Participant C also wanted to let her Grade 3 students have opportunities to self-select reading tasks and texts. She focused on integrating students’ interests into her reading curriculum. Her students, for instance, enjoyed learning about the planets. To help foster this love for learning, she had students design and create individual planet books based on *The Important Book*. Students were able to select the planet, and include “whatever facts they wanted” in the book. She explained:

We were reading from the science book, and then we just took little small pieces of the text and re-created the information. I read *The Important Book*. What's

important about daffodils? Then we discussed the most important thing about daffodils. We took that idea and we created it with the planets, for example, “The most important thing about Neptune is blue, it has moons but the most important thing about Neptune is that it's blue”. We read the science text, we learned facts about our planets and then we added some writing and a little bit of poetry in the style of that important book. Every student made their own.

Each participant integrated student choice and interest into various reading tasks to help motivate students to engage in reading activities. They found that students were motivated to read when they were interested in learning about the topic or in completing the reading task.

Collaborative Instructional Approaches

Along with embedding student interest and choice into reading curriculum, all four participants implemented a variety of collaborative instructional approaches during reading instruction. The four participants implemented literature circles, peer collaboration and discussion, and thematic or inquiry-based learning in their classrooms during reading instruction.

Literature circles. All four participants utilized literature circles during reading instruction. Students were able to select their literature group based on their reading interests. Although each group read a text related to a core curricular theme, students had a variety of text selections to choose from. In addition, all participants required students to create higher-order text-based questions to ask their peers. Participant B described her literature circles saying:

I do a lot of cooperative learning. I taught my kids how to work cooperatively in discussions, in literature circles. My class did a whole sequence, a whole series focusing on 30 questions related to literary skills to explore deeper meaning.

Similarly, Participant A implemented literature circles.

In her class, students used the literature circle books to practice previously taught comprehension skills. This allowed students opportunities to apply previously taught comprehension skills with their peers.

In addition, students had rotating roles within their groups. All students were responsible for explaining and presenting information to the class. Participant A stated:

Then with my own class, something I started was literature circles. Those are male and female groups, or combined, depending upon the book they select. Students have to switch roles each time. One week a student might be a leader, illustrator, or scribe. They also have to document, either with the reading skill or what we've been focusing on in class. They collaborate in the literature circles, and they each get a role. At the end, they are in charge of presenting what they did. Each student will have a voice. Even though there is a presenter, each student has to back up what they did. If I'm the scribe or the illustrator, I have to stand up and I have to say, "This is why I drew this," or "This is why I said this", or "This is why my group decided on this."

In a similar manner, Participant C assigned roles and responsibilities to members of each literature circle group. The group leader assigned the homework, including the number of pages members had to read. She explained:

There would be one person that was the leader for the week and they would be responsible for letting everyone know when they had to read and would assign the homework and ask the questions. They would say, “Read to chapter three by Thursday,” or something. Then when they come back on Thursday the leader would ask them questions. As a group the kids had to raise their hands, the leader chose students, and it was really fun. They all got to feel important, have ownership.

Participant D taught a smaller class of struggling students. Her entire class formed one literature circle group. The class selected a theme, then read and discussed texts related to that theme. She described:

One year it was Titanic. I had a majority fourth grade kids. The *Titanic* was being read in the general education curriculum, but it was an abridged version in the language arts curriculum. We dove deeply into the Titanic, reading fiction and non-fiction books along with the book.

Participants utilized literature circles as a method to motivate and engage students to read. The participants supported the idea that students, including males, enjoyed collaborating in structured literature circles with their peers. They believed literature circles contributed to an increase in male reading achievement.

Inquiry-based learning. Another collaborative instructional approach all participants implemented during reading instruction was inquiry-based learning. Participant D implemented an inquiry-based instructional approach based on her students’ interests. Her work with students with learning difficulties required her to find

ways to engage and motivate her students to read. She found that when she allowed students to research and investigate a topic of interest, and to have a purpose for reading, her students would read and engage with more texts. She explained:

There has to be a reason for learning. Purely reading basals to get better at their reading didn't quite work out for them. There has to be a function. The kids I work with, they come to me as passive learners. They don't see the value of reading a lot at times. It's either because of low self-esteem, or it's because they don't see the value. They say, "Why do I have to learn how to read this? I don't want to read it." It's really important to get buy-in to give them a reason for reading. We either do project-based learning or inquiry.

She went on to describe one theme students loved researching:

One project we did was learning about insects, one insect a year. Last year was worms. We read about worms, we wrote about worms, non-fiction and fictional stories about worms. We got our own worms as pets. All of this is really to sneak in reading, they don't really realize they're reading about it. The next thing you know, they're voluntarily bringing in articles or looking on the internet. Reading kind of gets snuck in that way.

Similarly, Participants A and B implemented inquiry-based learning as a method to connect science and social studies content with the reading curriculum. Both participants created inquiry based units of study around social studies and science content. Participant A stated, "I feel with the science and social studies curriculum, the boys really get excited, especially when it comes to history. We do a theme on the

revolution that boys really like. We learn about James Barton, who was enslaved on a ship.”

Participant A believed that basal reading alone did not help students master reading skills or content. She utilized inquiry-based reading and project-based learning to help students comprehend text. She described:

If they just read about it, take a quiz, read it, take a quiz, they don't remember the content. But if they're building the ship, reading about it, and they have to justify what they did and they have to write what it was used for, then I feel the content sticks with them longer. It is the same with the revolution. We create timelines. We do projects.

Participant C also implemented an inquiry-based thematic approach during reading instruction. She merged reading instruction with the science and social studies content. Students investigated a variety of subjects depending upon their interest and the content being studied. Participant C described her planning process: “I pull in the different subjects. I mean the reading language arts is all mixed in with the other content.” One of the examples she gave was when students created their own planet books. Students researched their own planet and created an informational booklet about their selected planet.

Participant B explained how she focused curriculum development around reading: “Everything comes back to reading, every subject ties to the reading. In math we have reading, science, social studies... they are always reading.” She worked with the other

fifth-grade teachers to create inquiry-based thematic units infused with reading tasks and assignments.

Differentiated Reading Instruction

Differentiated reading instruction that included differentiation according to learning profile and readiness level was another instructional approach all four participants implemented during reading instruction. Participants were keenly aware of their students' individual learning levels and needs.

Readiness level. All four participants differentiated their instruction according to students' learning level, or readiness level. Several teachers implemented a procedure called Universal Access Time where teachers at an entire grade level assessed the reading level of their students, then switched students according to their readiness level and skill needs for a period of time during the school day. Students were able to receive targeted instruction at their appropriate level. Participant D explained the instructional level: "I play with the instructional level, the independent level, and try to figure out within that independent level at what point is it frustrational level and at what point is it too easy. At the frustration level they'll quit, and if it is too easy, they'll get bored."

Participant D assessed students in reading at the beginning of the year to determine their optimal instructional reading level. This helped her understand how to plan instruction, and how to intervene for each student. She described the following:

I assess the kids at the beginning of the year, and I use different assessment measures. Some assessments I use are from the reading programs themselves. That helps me place them, and I adjust accordingly. If somebody needs heavy

phonics, I'll have them spend more time on phonics than they would Read Naturally. For the most part, it's through beginning of the year assessments that I determine where to focus reading instruction. I don't rely that much on what the IEP says. I go based on what I'm seeing at the beginning of the year. Then I re-evaluate every trimester and make adjustments to instruction accordingly.

Once teachers knew each student's instructional level, they placed students in the appropriate intervention or enrichment class, depending upon their needs. Participant B described how her grade level structured the reading intervention classes: "We started an intervention program in the mornings for our students needing intense reading intervention, and then we have additional intervention classes in the afternoons."

Participant C differentiated according to readiness level in a slightly different manner. All students in her grade level followed what is called an "Early Bird/Later Gator Schedule." Students were assessed in reading at the beginning of the year. Students requiring additional intervention and learning time arrive to school earlier than other students. They also stay later to attend intervention classes, thereby extending their school day and learning time. Participant C explained the following:

We have Early Bird/Later Gator schedules so I only have 12 students in the morning, and 12-14 in the afternoon.... I always run small groups of four or maybe five or six.... For the most part the early group has lower readers because they have some challenges. I even have some students that come early and stay late for a double dose. These kids usually need that extra time and confidence with their reading.

She went on to describe how successful this was for her students:

They are more confident. They are answering the questions. They are more familiar with the vocabulary words so they feel more confident. They feel smarter because they have had more practice with the reading.

All participants differentiated instruction according to students' readiness level during the school day, and invited students to participate in the reading intervention classes held before and/or after school.

Learning profile. All four participants considered their students' learning profiles when they designed reading instruction. They were cognizant of each student's learning profile and tried to create reading lessons that fit those learning profiles. Participant A, for example, stated, "With reading, it's just more of the tying into the different learning styles."

Participant D was also cognizant about her students' learning profiles, and made sure to include these preferences when planning reading instruction. She also helped her students recognize their strengths and learning profiles. She understood that in order to keep her students engaged and motivated during reading instruction, she had to include a variety of modalities in her lessons. She incorporated learning centers, or "stations" where students engaged in a variety of reading tasks that utilized multiple learning styles. She stated:

At one station it's grammar focused. At another station it's written expression focused. At another station it's phonics, kind of a "Words Their Way" focus. Then the other station is internet based. In each of the stations I'm trying to do multiple

modalities as well. We're working on writing, but there's just enough time where the kids can get up, rotate. Even the act of getting up and moving gives them a mental break to rejuvenate for the next topic.

Even during explicit direct instruction, Participant D made sure that she considered the learning profiles of her students. She explained:

Whole group instruction is always complemented with some type of overhead presentation, so I'm doing whole group instruction but there's always some kind of visual thing for my visual learners who opt to really kind of shut down. Whole group instruction with video and audio at the same time.

Other participants made sure to use visual and auditory support during reading instruction, but were not explicit about why they did it. Participant C, though, specifically spoke about the need to create “fun” reading lessons. She infused art into her reading curriculum. She found that many of her students had strong visual and artistic preferences. She stated, “I try to infuse art into reading. They were doing like a pop-up book. We were doing story summaries or chapter summaries with each pop-up page to help them practice summarizing in a fun way.”

Participant B also considered the learning profiles of her students, but did not directly refer to learning styles, profiles, or modalities, as did the other participants. Most of the examples she gave referred to projects and thematic planning, which included incorporating different learning modalities.

She did consider her student's learning strengths when planning her daily reading instruction. For instance, she knew that her students understood the text better when the text was read aloud. She explained:

We listen to the chapter on tape after they read it at home the night before because I think it's really important that kids hear literature the way it's supposed to be read. I think that when they're doing popcorn reading they lose interest, they can't hear the kids and it just doesn't encourage active listening, and I want them to be engaged in what they're reading.

All participants shared that they understood how their students learned best, and that they considered students' learning needs when planning reading lessons.

Explicit Direct Instruction

Explicit direct instruction (EDI) is another instructional approach all participants utilized during reading instruction. EDI requires that teachers systematically and explicitly teach skills and concepts to students, and provide continuous monitoring and specific feedback to students regarding skill attainment (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009; Tracey & Morrow, 2012).

Systematic explicit instruction. All participants introduced new reading concepts, comprehension skills, and vocabulary using an explicit direct instructional approach. The direct instruction lesson was usually followed by independent practice in either small or large group, giving students time to apply what they had learned.

Participant D explained the following:

We do whole group instruction first. I give the big explicit direct instruction lesson on what we're focusing on, and then I work with my instructional assistants or my paraeducators to complement what the whole group instruction was. Generally I'd go from whole group to small group. Altogether as a family we break off and work either leveled, or grade leveled or academically leveled in smaller groups, but there's an umbrella theme of this is what we're covering. Then they rotate through each group, making sure that I hit each modality. This group is going to use the general education classroom paper pencil kind of task, this one is conceptual hands-on, and this one is interactive which is video. Each group is focusing on the same skill or concept.

Similarly, when asked which instructional approaches she implemented during reading instruction, Participant A stated, “ I’d say definitely EDI, direct instruction, at least to start, but a lot of collaboration, a lot of pair share, small group, large group, differentiating a lot.”

Participant B also stated, “I do a lot of direct instruction in the beginning of a lesson, but I also have them work in partners, small groups usually two unless it’s a bigger group then it’s three.”

Participant C spoke about providing direct instruction during vocabulary development and when introducing comprehension skills. She stated, “I start the week, with vocabulary development before we start the story. I use direct instruction to teach the vocabulary first.” She also used explicit direct instruction to teach reading concepts and skills. Her grade level taught the same direct instruction lesson to the whole group,

then divided students up according to instructional need, and provided targeted differentiated instruction to students. She explained:

We use direct instruction to teach the reading skill like cause and effect. We all taught cause and effect. Then we switched classes. I had the middle group. We all used the same worksheet plus we'd add other activities. We all focused on the same skill, the higher kids could go faster. With my middle kids, we did it together. The lower kids they needed a lot more practice. Then we moved on to more enrichment from there. All the kids got the same skill.

Participants shared that they utilized explicit direct instruction when introducing a new reading skill or concept to students, or during small group instruction if students were struggling with a reading concept or skill.

Monitoring and feedback. In addition to providing systematic explicit instruction, all participants carefully monitored students' reading goals and progress, and provided feedback to students. The participants in this study all utilized reading fluency and comprehension assessments to determine each student's reading readiness level. Students were aware of their reading level, set goals for improvement, and, along with their teacher, monitored their progress. Participant A described the process as follows:

I made all of them meet with me and make goals. I had a goal sheet. They had to write their goal, "I'm going to be at 4.6 level by the end of the trimester." They had to give me three reasons or things they're going to do to attack the goal. I made them sign it. They had to tell me where they were going to put it, on their fridge, in their binder. They are accountable for sharing progress every Friday.

Participant B shared a similar story. She reflected:

I really was on them to keep up with their goals. They had to read four books a trimester. They had to pass four tests a trimester, 80 or higher. Most of the kids did that because otherwise they'd have to answer to me, [laugh] so they did that. I met with them a lot to talk about their goals.

Participant C also had her students create reading goals, and helped them monitor their progress. She met with her students weekly to make sure they were selecting appropriate books and passing the comprehension tests that went along with each book. She stated:

I did keep track and said, "You need to read. I want you to read this book."

Especially if it's a picture book it needs to be read like three times to ensure that they pass. I did monitor and let them know probably every week or even every two weeks, "This is how many points you have, this is how long you have until report card" to keep them on track.

In Participant D's classroom, all students were struggling readers. Participant D shared that her students needed to be aware of their reading strengths and areas for growth. She shared:

We begin the self-awareness, so that, "Yes I am behind in my reading. This is what this means." I start to really show them their data and what that means.

Oftentimes that helps them say, "Well, I don't want to be at a 2.3 because I'm in fourth grade." That sometimes motivates my boys a lot too. Once that happens then going from a 2.5 to a 3.0 makes sense to them. They're like, "Okay, every

time I pass a test I'm moving up to another level. That's getting me closer to my goal, which is that I want to get to this level by the end of the year." I do tell them, I say, "You're at a 2.5, by June our goal is to get you to a 3.5. You may not catch up this year, it may not happen until high school, but you've got to keep working towards catching up." I do those kinds of speeches to my kids. They're reflections of me.

Participants utilized the AR program to assist with goal setting and monitoring. They believed that without goal setting and monitoring, students would not have been as motivated to read their AR books. In addition, they stated that it was important that they assisted their students in monitoring their reading goals in order to help them attain them.

Research Question 2

Identifying which instructional approaches teachers specifically used to improve the reading achievement of boys in their Grades 3-6 reading classes was addressed by research question two. All participants stated that they had not considered using different instructional approaches specifically for boys or for girls. Instead, they considered the individual needs of each student. Participant A stated, "I don't know offhand. I guess I haven't thought about it. I think sometimes I do things just without thinking. It's subconscious."

All four participants struggled with this question. After prompting and reflection, participants responded. Several themes emerged, that were related to instructional approaches utilized for all students. The themes and sub-themes are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Instructional Approaches Teachers Used Specifically for Boys.

Emerging themes	Sub-themes from original emerging themes
Motivational Approaches	Choice and interest
Differentiated Instruction	Readiness level (intervention)
Goal Setting and Monitoring	Learning profiles

Motivational Approaches

One instructional approach participants used to improve boys' reading achievement was implementation of motivational approaches during reading instruction. All participants purposely considered students' interests when selecting texts, or allowed students to self-select texts. Participant C speculated that providing student choice and books of high interest may have improved boys' reading achievement in her class. She said, "Maybe providing students with a variety of literature selections helped their reading scores because they felt a little bit more in control of what they were able to read based on what they were interested in."

Participant B, when considering instructional approaches that may have helped increase reading achievement for her boys, reflected:

It might be helping them find books that they're really interested in, it might be making a really big deal when they pass the test, or whatever it is that makes them successful. That's what I want to do. There's not one thing. Finding that series, recommending a series that they'd like, or finding what they are interested in may

have helped. I guess just thinking about the average fifth-grader, I think that having options and a choice in what they read, would be more appealing to a boy. Similarly, Participant D described the instructional approaches that may have positively impacted boys' reading achievement in her class:

It's a combination of efficiency, effective intervention programs, and then incorporating English language arts that starts with their interests. Then build on their interests. Whatever their interest is, just build reading, writing, language arts into that.

Participant B also mentioned that she considered the interests of her boys when designing reading instruction as one reason why her boys demonstrated strong reading achievement. She speculated the following:

It might be helping them find books that they're really interested in, it might be making a really big deal when they pass the test, or just whatever it is that makes them successful. That's what I want to do.

All of the participants believed that their boys excelled in reading activities when they were intrinsically motivated to read. They reported that their boys tended to be more motivated to read informational text rather than literature, especially when they were interested in the reading content.

Differentiated Instruction

All four participants considered the implementation of differentiated instruction according to learning profile and readiness level as another instructional approach implemented during reading instruction that may have led to an increase in reading

achievement for their boys. They noted that their boys demonstrated a strong increase in reading achievement when provided additional learning intervention time, focused on closing gaps in reading achievement.

Readiness level. When asked to describe specific instructional approaches she used to increase reading achievement for her boys, Participant D mentioned implementing research-based, targeted intervention. She described how she struggled to find intervention programs designed to target the specific reading deficiencies she saw in her boys. When she described the approach, she stated, “Targeted. That, I think, made a huge difference. The reason why it made a huge difference is, because they (the programs) were efficient.”

Similarly, Participant B noted that a few of her boys receiving the intervention classes showed strong improvement in reading achievement, and shared a success story stating:

I had two struggling kids at the beginning of the year. We picked the kids who read at the basic level. Both of them started in the afternoon reading intervention, both of them tested out by second trimester. One of these readers that read like 10, 12 books every trimester, I mean, I don't know what happened. He just started reading and it just... like something happened. He assessed at the high level, and this is the kid who had been in intervention!

Similarly, Participant A believed that universal access (UA) time assisted her boys more than her girls. She explained:

When we differentiate or rotate students for UA, we're still focusing on the overall skill. I don't have the low, far below basic students, I have the low averages, below basic students. This group will rotate, typically, as the year goes on. I find that my males tend to ... I don't know if it's just a comfort level, but they tend to shine a bit, participate more, are more verbal, than the females sometimes.

Participant C did not specifically mention intervention or readiness level as one of the instructional approaches she specifically implements to help improve reading instruction for her boys. Like the other participants, she struggled to think about what she did differently based on gender. She stated, "I don't know. I never even thought about between boys and girls, how they achieve more or how to encourage one or the other." She did utilize daily intervention with all of her students during UA time.

Learning Profile. Only one of the participants specifically mentioned that considering her students' learning profile was one instructional approach she used to increase reading achievement for her boys. She stated:

With reading, I guess I it's just more of the tying in to the different learning styles I feel like girls at this age can sit and attend to a story, and read it and answer questions. I feel like boys, especially in this videogame day and age, need something different.

She knew that most of the boys in her class required movement, collaboration, and active involvement to learn. She stated, "I use a lot of collaboration, a lot of pair

share, small group, large group, differentiating a lot.” One of the examples she provided related to reading and investigating the concept of fusion. She described:

I do a lot of acting out though. I especially find that boys at this age, it's hard for them to attend for that many minutes. We were learning about fusion, and they had to stand up. They had to heat up like the hot temperature in the sun. They had to boil around. They were the helium, the hydrogen. I find that's the only way they can really understand that vocabulary, that they can connect to it, because things like fusion and energy and hydrogen are so abstract.

The other participants did not specifically mention learning profiles or learning styles as an instructional approach they implement during reading instruction to directly improve boys' reading achievement. They did, however, mention incorporating competition into their daily reading instruction. All participants utilized the AR reading program, which assigns reading levels and points as students read and pass comprehension tests. Two of the participants specifically mentioned AR point competition between boys as one of the factors leading to an increase reading achievement for their boys. Participant C considered differences in gender-specific learning profiles when delivering reading instruction. Her boys, for example, were very competitive and liked to compete against each other. She used this to help motivate them to read. She explained the following:

I think in general it's stereotypical but they are competitive, very competitive.

So, if I say so and so has 15 AR points they say, "What? I have 14. I'm reading another book tonight." In that way I think they like the competition. I only

announce the top so the kids that are close to the top know that they can maybe compete and maybe get the top. I do notice that more with the boys. The girls want to meet their goal, they want to do well but they are not vocally competitive. The boys say, "I'm going to read tonight and beat you by tomorrow."

Similarly, Participant A stated, "It could be that competition within them that I put with the goals.... I find that they are very competitive with each other at this age." She utilized a graph in her classroom that showed each student's earned AR points. This was done purposely because she knew how competitive her boys were.

Participant D also used competition in her classroom, but did not mention it when asked to describe which instructional approaches she specifically used to improve reading instruction for her boys. She had mentioned competition earlier when describing the reading approaches she implements. She stated, "I start to really show them their data and what that means. Oftentimes that helps them say, 'well I don't want to be at a 2.3 because I'm in fourth grade' That sometimes motivates my boys a lot too."

Participant B did not mention learning styles or competition when asked to describe which instructional approaches she implements specifically to increase reading achievement for her boys. Like the other participants, she had not considered utilizing gender-specific instructional approaches. She stated, "I don't really think about it. Let me think. I think it doesn't really matter if it's a boy or girl or high or low reader. I think you have to find the hook that grabs them." She did, though, attribute considering her students' learning styles as a way to help motivate and inspire all students to achieve.

Goal Setting and Monitoring

Two out of the four participants stated that goal setting and monitoring, by both student and teacher, was an instructional approach that might have improved reading achievement for boys in their classes. All participants utilized a point system with the AP program to help increase students' motivation to read. Students, along with their teacher, would set reading goals, and monitor progress toward attaining the goals.

Participant A described one male student's success with goal setting and monitoring:

I had a boy who's really ... I wouldn't say meek, but he definitely kept to himself. And he just, in that conference, just surprised me. He was ... I called him the negotiator. He said, "I'm going to read at 3.7 this week and next Friday I'm going to read at 3.8. Are you going to consider bumping me up to a 4.0 if I pass both of those?" I thought, "Where did you come from?" His mom was so quiet during the conference. This was all him. He just had a plan. I'll tell you, since that conference, he has come in and he has stepped to it. He's actually even taking tests before the little deadline in his head.

Participant C found that some of her boys were struggling to meet their reading goal. She described how she helped the students monitor and achieve their reading goals:

I did have some boys that did start off low and I did have to adjust their AR range. It was a little bit lower because they weren't passing their AR tests. I made it all about, "I really want you to get your points so I'm going to start you off on this book." And then, "OK, you passed that test. Here's your new book." I made it

very easy for them to achieve by just handing them the books and they saw their progress so they were thinking that they could meet that five-point goal.

She went on to say that her struggling males became voracious readers. By the end of the year they were reading on grade level.

Research Question 3

Similar to Research Question 2, teachers did not know how to account for their boys' reading improvement. Participants had not realized that the boys in their classes had demonstrated strong improvement in reading achievement. State API and AYP criteria did not consider gender as a subgroup. Teachers and schools had not focused specifically on improving reading achievement according to gender. Participant B stated, "I didn't even know that was true so I have no idea, but I don't know, maybe, I don't know. Maybe it was just luck." Similarly, Participant A stated, "I don't know offhand. I guess I haven't thought about it. I think sometimes I do things just without thinking. It's subconscious."

There were no clear emerging themes from research question 3. Participants appeared to be guessing, and referred back to earlier instructional approaches when trying to account for their boys' improvement in reading achievement.

Student-Centered, Caring Teachers

One theme that emerged throughout the data collection was the notion that all participants were caring, student-centered teachers. Participant A, when considering what may have attributed to the increase in reading achievement for male students in her class stated the following:

I think sometimes they just need to know that you care. I remember my Sebastian a couple of years ago. I saw the biggest improvement with boys when they knew that I cared, which is surprising to me, because I would think that the girls would connect more to the emotion.

All 4 participants throughout the interview consistently described how they considered the individual learning needs of their students. They learned students' strengths and areas for growth, and worked with each student to help them improve.

Participant B stated:

You have to meet them at their place with level and interest or anything. If they are low readers I'll do whatever it takes. For example, I have one boy who can't pass an AR test and so I'm evaluating, looking at data. He couldn't find success, so I'll do whatever it takes to make him successful.

Similarly, Participant A consistently met with students to motivate them and help them improve their reading achievement. One boy she had in her class was not progressing in his reading achievement as anticipated. She relayed the following:

You know what I think helped? He came to me not reading. He wasn't reading so much. I made a comment. I said, "Your fourth-grade teacher commented on how, when Scholastic came out each week, you had money in your wallet and you were pulling it out, and you were buying books consistently." I said, "I haven't seen you take any AR test in like three weeks." I don't know if he needed that reminder or if he felt like he had something to prove after I said that. In that conference, I saw a totally different kid. He's just been reading and

reading since. I don't know. Sometimes, they just kind of need that. I don't know if it's motivation or a reminder or guilt. It shows that I care, that I'm paying attention. That I've asked previous teachers.

Participant C shared a similar story. Two of her boys were not showing much progress in reading. She adjusted their reading goals to help make them successful, and monitored and encouraged them each day. She shared:

I think initially when they weren't passing their tests they just, they'd given up. They were pretending to read the books and took the tests. When I did end up lowering their goal for the starting point, they were successful. Two kids I know in particular, two boys, were successful.

The participants appeared to put their students' learning needs above all else. Participant D, for instance, even re-arranged her daily staffing schedule to accommodate her students' needs. She described the changes she made as follows:

I adjusted how my staff gets disseminated. It used to be that you get an AM aide and a PM aide. They come in your classroom. That was a structure that worked for the school setting. It never really worked for the students.

She adjusted scheduled to make sure that her staff could work with students according to the students' instructional needs.

She also shared how she held high expectations with her students. Even though her students had learning disabilities, and were often not held accountable for demonstrating improvement by other teachers, she encouraged her students to rise above their challenges. She stated the following:

I set high standards too. It's a tough love kind of a thing too. There's a fine line, because a lot of times with the kids that I teach people tiptoe around them because they're quote unquote "special," and they don't know what to do. They say, "The child didn't do their homework, but he's a Special Ed kid so I don't want to say anything. I don't want to do anything." I make sure that there are high expectations, whether they're the lowest kid or the highest kid.

All participants demonstrated their genuine dedication to their students. They strived to create positive relationships with their students, and fostered student-centered classrooms.

Patterns, Relationships, and Themes

Interview data from the four participants were analyzed to establish possible relationships and common themes concerning which instructional approaches third-through sixth-grade teachers utilized in classrooms whose boys demonstrated strong reading achievement, and how they accounted for this increase. A descriptive thematic approach was used to provide an in-depth understanding of which instructional approaches are likely to improve reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6.

Results indicated that participants implemented a combination of motivational approaches, collaborative approaches, explicit direct instruction with goal setting, feedback and monitoring, and differentiated instruction during reading instruction. All participants used explicit direct instruction to introduce new reading concepts and skills, followed by differentiated instruction based on individual students' learning profiles and readiness levels. In addition, participants embedded motivational approaches during

reading instruction that were designed to increase students' desire to read. Discussion and collaborative approaches were also infused throughout reading instruction.

None of the participants had ever considered utilizing instructional approaches specifically to improve reading achievement for boys in their classes. They selected instructional approaches based on students' learning needs. They each relayed specific male student success stories. These examples identified certain motivational approaches, collaborative approaches, differentiated instruction, and goal setting with ongoing monitoring as specific approaches that improved reading achievement for their boys.

One theme that emerged throughout the data collection was having a student-centered teacher. Participants constantly focused on making sure all students were successful, and were willing to do whatever it took to help all succeed. All four participants relayed stories that demonstrated their strong commitment to their students' success.

The results from this study support the research that recommends implementation of a blended approach to reading instruction (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; McKeown et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2013). Specifically, Allington & Gabriel (2012) suggested that instruction combining explicit direct instruction, and motivational strategies increases students' reading achievement.

Evidence of Quality

Several procedures were used to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of data and findings. First, participants were from different schools and taught at different grade levels. In addition, three teachers taught in the general education setting and one taught

students with disabilities. This helped maintain maximum variation of the data (Merriam, 2009). Second, member checks were employed to clarify interview data and to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell, 2011). Third, a peer reviewer was utilized to examine raw data and to check the accuracy of the findings (Merriam, 2009). Fourth, an external auditor was enlisted to appraise the findings of the study (Creswell, 2011). Finally, rich, thick descriptions were used to communicate the findings and to develop a thorough understanding of which instructional approaches are likely to improve reading achievement for males in grades three through six.

Summary

The guiding question for this project study was, “How can reading instruction be improved in Grades 3-6 in the school under study to positively impact the reading achievement of boys in that population?” Results indicated that a combination of motivational approaches including interest and choice, goal setting and monitoring, and differentiated instruction with targeted intervention and consideration of individual students’ learning profiles, led to increased reading achievement for boys in the district under study. Results also imply that teachers did not consider implementing different instructional approaches during reading based on gender. In fact, teachers were unaware that their boys had demonstrated a strong increase in reading achievement. Section 3 describes the project created to address the research questions and explains the research findings.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

This qualitative case study sought to provide insight to educators about which instructional approaches will most likely close the gender gap in reading. Qualitative data were collected via individual interviews. After analyzing the data and reviewing the findings from this study, I concluded that a white paper presented to district administration and teachers would be the most appropriate project for this study. This section describes the project, and the rationale for selecting the project genre. This section also provides a review of the literature related to the selection of the project and how the project addresses the local problem. A project evaluation plan and project implications are also discussed in this section.

A white paper, or position paper, promotes a specific product, service, or solution to a problem and is based on evidence (Gordon, 2013). The purpose of this project was to help find solutions that would help close the gender gap in reading. The white paper describes the local problem and provides insight to educators about which instructional approaches are most likely to improve male reading achievement. The paper follows the problem/solution format. It includes an introduction (focusing on the purpose), a description of the problem addressed in the study, proposed solutions to the problem, (based on results from the study), a conclusion, and references.

Rationale

The purpose of this project was to address the reading achievement gap present in the local district, and to provide possible solutions to the problem, which was garnered

through analysis of the study's data. A white paper was chosen as the project (see Appendix A) because it was the best method to present the local gender gap in reading problem, and to suggest solutions for solving the local problem. According to Gordon (2013), "A truly effective white paper helps readers gain a better overview of an issue, provides helpful insights on how to solve a problem, or gives useful pointers on how to make an important decision" (Giving Readers Something New section, para.1). The problem and solutions presented in my white paper correspond to the local district's reading achievement gap between boys and girls. My white paper provided research-based solutions with instructional approaches teachers can implement to help close the reading achievement gap. I utilized a white paper for this project in order to help stakeholders in the local district understand the gender gap in reading, and to propose the implementation of specific instructional approaches that emerged from my research findings as a possible solution to help close the achievement gap in reading.

I did not select a program evaluation report as my project genre, because the study did not focus on the evaluation of a specific program (Office of Educational Assessment, 2015). Data analysis and findings from this study indicated that teachers whose boys demonstrated strong reading achievement implemented several instructional approaches in their classrooms. This study did not focus on a specific program or instructional approach.

A curriculum plan was also not selected for this project. A curriculum plan is a plan for learning content and skills, and has specific goals for student learning (Marsh, 2009). My goal was not to create a curriculum plan. My goal was to address the local

problem, which was the gender gap in reading, and to provide possible solutions to the problem.

A professional development plan was also not selected for my project. A professional development plan for this project would need to cover all of the instructional approaches that emerged from the data analysis and findings. Reeves (2010) argues that professional development should focus on helping teachers acquire new skills and strategies. The instructional approaches that emerged out of the data analysis as possibly contributing to an increase in reading achievement for boys are not new approaches. Teachers in the local district have received training on these instructional approaches. It was important for me to highlight the need for teachers to implement instructional approaches that research from this study indicated may improve boys' reading achievement. A white paper focusing on the local problem and possible solutions to that problem as determined from the data analysis was the best genre for my project.

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature comprises the content and problem/solution format of a white paper, which is the project genre selected for this study, and motivational approaches, differentiated instruction, goal setting and ongoing monitoring, and student-teacher relationship which are the major themes that emerged from the data analysis of this qualitative study. This study focused on understanding how reading instruction can be improved in Grades 3-6 in the district under study to positively impact the reading achievement of boys in that population.

The following databases were used for this literature review: Educational Research Complete, Eric, SAGE Premier, Google Scholar, and Walden Dissertation Database. Key search terms included *white paper*, *position paper*, *reading and motivation*, *reading achievement and learning styles*, *reading achievement and differentiated instruction*, *reading and goal setting*, *teacher-student relationship*, and *reading achievement and teacher-student relationship*. All articles used for this literature review were published between 2010 and 2015.

White Paper

The white paper was originally created by Winston Churchill to outline a peace plan for Palestine (Boys, 2014). Today, white papers are persuasive tools used to either endorse certain products or services, or to present a solution to a particular problem (Boys, 2014; Graham, 2013). The white paper for this study focused on presenting a solution to the problem of the gender gap in reading.

Recently, white papers have been developed in the educational community to promote the implementation of various instructional approaches and educational policies. In 2010 the International Reading Association Commission produced a white paper asking that Response to Intervention (RTI) policy reflect precise language around RTI being a systemic process rather than a program (Steere, 2010). Similarly, the Texas Institute for Educational Reform produced a white paper in 2015 arguing for the implementation of certain instructional strategies as a solution to the reading crisis noted in Texas public schools (Jenkins & Johnson, 2015). The purpose of my white paper was to educate district leadership and educators about the reading achievement gap existing

between boys and girls, to present the findings from this case study, and to propose that teachers should implement specific instructional approaches as a means to close the gender gap in reading.

Choice and Interest

Data from my study indicated that boys were motivated and engaged in reading activities that promoted choice, interest, and engagement. Motivation to read and engagement in reading activities directly relate to reading achievement (Fletcher et al., 2012; Malloy et al., 2013; Post & Guthrie, 2014; Robertson et al., 2014). Specifically, promoting students' choice of text, cultivating student interest in the reading content, and developing collaborative activities around text increases reading achievement, specifically for boys (Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie et al., 2013; Limbrick, Wheldull, & Madelaine, 2011; Malloy, Marinak, & Gambrell, 2013; McGlynn, 2015; Serafin, 2013). In one experimental design study conducted with 615 middle school students results indicated that students demonstrated increased reading achievement when provided with reading instruction consisting of student choice, collaboration, relevance, and cognitive scaffolding (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). Authors argued that results showed that, relevance and choice, in combination with other motivations, were strong variables pertaining to student achievement.

In a recent study on PISA results, findings confirmed that boys need to be more engaged and interested in reading activities. Authors suggest that teachers should allow students to select texts that interest and engage them in order to increase boys' reading achievement (Brozo et al., 2014). Allowing students to self-select texts and to have a

voice regarding reading activities and projects enhances students' reading motivation and achievement (Guthrie, 2011; Robertson et al., 2014). With the increased reading demands of the Common Core State Standards, it is imperative that teachers encourage students to explore topics of interest, and to discover new areas of interest to foster the desire and stamina to read more complex texts (Post & Guthrie 2014, Robertson et al., 2014).

Guthrie (2014) emphasizes that teachers should incorporate reading activities with relevant hands-on experiences in order to foster students' reading motivation. He argues that students need to engage in reading tasks that are of high interest and appropriate challenge in order to meet the reading goals of the Common Core State Standards. He stated:

Moreover, students need motivation to comprehend texts more deeply than ever before. They have to believe in themselves to sustain their investment of effort. Kids who are interested in what they are learning work harder and those who can share literacy integrate what they learn. Boosting these motivations daily is critical to a teacher's classroom success. (Post & Guthrie, 2014, p. 4)

Similarly, Gambrell (2011) describes seven "rules of engagement" (p. 172) that increase students' reading motivation, including providing variety and choice about what students read and how they engage in reading tasks. Teachers who provide options to students about what they read and how they investigate content take more responsibility for their own learning, and are more intrinsically motivated to read (Gambrell, 2011).

Motivational approaches including offering choice and interest-based reading options and activities to students, promote reading achievement.

Collaboration

Collaborative reading and cooperative learning activities are research-based instructional approaches that have proven to enhance student motivation, achievement, and engagement in reading activities, specifically for male students (Guthrie et al., 2013; Kahn & Ahmad, 2014; Law, 2011; Puzio & Colby, 2013). Wood and Jocius (2013) in their article on strategies to enhance boys' reading achievement, they define a collaborative classroom as one where, "The students know and understand that as a group, all are working to become more proficient and critical readers" (p. 666). Although all students demonstrated an increase in reading achievement when placed in collaborative reading groups, boys tended to show stronger achievement (Wu et al., 2013).

The boys in my study were engaged in, and demonstrated an increase in reading achievement when involved in collaborative literature circles. Literature circles are an instructional approach utilizing collaborative discussions where students read text and engage in critical reading and discussion (Shelton-Strong, 2011). Students in effective collaborative discussion groups have safe, critical conversations around evidence-based meaning and points of view derived from texts (Wood & Jocius, 2013). These types of engaging reading activities motivate male students to read, and enhance boys' reading achievement (Guthrie et al., 2013; Law, 2011; Post & Guthrie, 2014).

A meta-analytic review of 18 intervention studies involving students from Grades 2-12 revealed that students demonstrated a stronger increase in reading achievement when intervention classes included collaborative reading activities (Puzio & Colby,

2013). Boys in another study demonstrated a stronger increase in reading motivation than girls when involved in collaborative discussions (Wu et al., 2013). Students in this study participated in collaborative discussions where students read text, took and defended positions related to central ideas in the text, and constructed arguments using evidence from the text to defend their positions and critique others (Wu et al., 2013). This style of collaborative text discussions was motivational and engaging for students, particularly males.

Differentiated Reading Instruction

Differentiated reading instruction is an instructional approach that motivates students to learn (Little et al., 2014). In an experimental study measuring the effects of differentiated reading instruction on middle school students, results suggested that students receiving differentiated reading instruction had stronger fluency scores than students in the control group (Little, McCoach, & Reis, 2014). Results from my study indicated that boys increased their reading achievement when teachers differentiated their instruction according to learning profile and readiness. The differentiated approaches teachers in my study implemented that most impacted boys' motivation and reading achievement were targeted and direct extended-day reading intervention based on individual learning needs, and the integration of a variety of learning modalities into reading tasks.

According to Coyne et al., (2013) students demonstrated a stronger increase in reading achievement when provided direct instruction and additional intervention targeted to their individual learning needs. Kindergarten students in their experimental

study receiving the targeted intervention showed a significant increase in reading achievement as compared to the control group. Students should be assessed to determine mastery of specific reading standards and skills, then provided intervention programs to help students master areas of weakness. Intervention time should extend the school day, hence providing more instructional time for the struggling student (Coyne et al., 2013). This cycle should be ongoing to ensure that students are challenged at their instructional level, and make adequate progress (Coyne et al., 2013). Providing targeted reading instruction and intervention based on learning readiness improved reading achievement (Little et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2013). Results from my study supported data from other research. Teachers from my study used ongoing assessment results to provide intervention classes for struggling readers that were focused on individual students' learning needs, and closed achievement gaps.

Research also indicated that students improved reading achievement when they were provided reading instruction according to their individual learning preferences (Connor et al., 2011; Faulk & Faulk, 2013; Watts-Taffe et al., 2013). Watts-Taffe et al. (2013) argue that teachers should honor the way students learn by understanding students' interests and learning styles and by incorporating them into daily reading activities. One example from a case study on effective differentiated reading instruction depicted an elementary teacher who created literacy learning centers acceding to her students learning preferences and styles (Watts-Taffe et al., 2013).

Data from another case study involving elementary students learning Spanish indicated that students showed a stronger increase in Spanish language acquisition when

provided differentiated instruction based on students' learning styles. Learning styles and preferences can include group or individual work, hands-on activities, visual supports, arts integration, games, and technology (Faulk & Faulk, 2013; Watts-Taffe et al., 2013). Teachers in my study knew the learning preferences of their students, and incorporated them into their reading instruction and tasks accordingly.

Goal Setting and Monitoring

Students who are involved in setting learning goals for reading, and who work with their teachers to monitor their progress toward meeting their goals, demonstrate an increase in reading motivation and achievement (Cabral-Marques, 2015; Forster & Souvengier, 2014). Data from a quantitative study conducted with Grade 3 students indicated that goal setting and monitoring was a strong motivator for reading achievement (Smithson, 2012). In a similar experimental study with Grade 4 students, students who set and monitored their own reading goals demonstrated a stronger growth in reading than the students in the control group who did not set or monitor reading goals (Forster & Souvengier, 2014). In my study, teachers whose boys demonstrated strong reading achievement met regularly with their students to set realistic reading goals, and helped students monitor and attain their reading goals.

According to Cabral-Marquez (2014) goals set by students must be specific, time-bound, challenging, and supported if students are to be successful. Students must understand what actions they need to engage in in order to improve. They also must understand when they should be expected to meet their goal. Teachers must ensure that

students' reading goals are challenging enough to enhance motivation, yet be attainable (Cabral-Marquez, 2014).

Setting up ongoing conferencing time with students to discuss and monitor their goals is an important component of helping students successfully attain their reading goals (Cabral-Marques, 2014; Serravallo, 2014). During these conferences, teachers should share what specific strategies students can employ to help them meet their goals. In addition, they should encourage students to write down their goals and reflect on their own progress frequently (Jenkins & Terjeson, 2011; Serravallo, 2014).

Positive Teacher-student Relationships

Research has shown that a positive teacher-student relationship increases student motivation and achievement, particularly at the elementary level (Hughes et al., 2011; Roorda et al., 2011). Research has shown that boys with reading difficulties tended to rate prior teacher-student relationships as very negative, and that these students demonstrated strong reading achievement when provide warm, caring teachers (Hughes et al., 2011; Sanacore, 2012). According to Sanacore (2012), "Children and their teachers are more likely to achieve success when genuine caring is connected to literacy learning. This connection is important because it increases the chances of success across the curriculum and through the grades. (p.188)" Teachers throughout my study relayed their strong commitment toward building positive relationships with their students, particularly their struggling boys. They were willing to do whatever it took to help their students succeed. Their constant focus on students appeared to enhance their boys' reading achievement.

Teachers build positive relationships with students by giving students voice and choice in classroom happenings, connecting with them on a personal and intellectual level, believing in them as learners, and showing students that they genuinely care about them (Sanacore, 2012). Teachers in my study utilized student choice, involved students in the learning process, encouraged and addressed their individual learning needs. All students deserve a caring and supportive teacher, particularly struggling boys. Research has shown that boys with reading difficulties tended to rate prior teacher-student relationships as very negative, and that these students demonstrated strong reading achievement when provided warm, caring teachers (Hughes et al., 2011; Sanacore, 2012).

Literature Review Summary

This literature review focused on white papers, and instructional approaches that research suggests increase boys' reading achievement including choice and interest, collaboration, differentiated reading instruction, goal setting and monitoring, and positive teacher-student relationships. The literature review supported data from my study, which indicated that these approaches motivate and engage male students in reading activities, and support boys' reading achievement.

White papers present a problem, propose research-based solutions to the problem, and can shape public policy (Graham, 2013; Powell, 2012). The white paper for this project explained the gender reading achievement gap present between boys and girls in the local district as well as state and nation-wide. The paper also proposes that educators implement instructional approaches that research indicates increase boys' reading achievement and may help close the achievement gap. A formative evaluation will be

used to assess the effectiveness of my white paper. The implementation process of the project is explained in the following section.

Project Description

The white paper for this project was written according to white paper guidelines, and will be presented to the superintendent in the local school district. The goal of the white paper is to address the gender gap in reading present in the local district, county, and state, and to recommend that educators implement the proposed research-based instructional approaches to help close the achievement gap.

The superintendent will decide how to distribute the final project's white paper. He will decide whether paper or digital copies should be distributed and to whom. The district superintendent may request that the white paper be presented at a board meeting, or presented to school sites during staff meetings. He may also ask that I assist in developing additional resources or presentations related to the white paper.

Required Resources and Existing Supports

Resources needed to distribute the white paper will depend upon the superintendent's implementation procedure. Physical resources that might be required include paper, a copy machine, a stapler with staples for paper distribution, a computer and email addresses for electronic distribution, and a laptop and projector for board or other presentations.

Personnel resources may also be required. District staff may assist with distributing paper copies of the white paper. Site principals or office managers may need to help distribute the white paper to teachers. Principals may have to give up part of a

staff meeting to provide teachers time to read through and discuss the white paper, or teachers may have to allow time during their collaboration (PLC) time to read and discuss the white paper.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers for this project are minimal. The project will not meet its goal to help close the gender gap in reading in the local district if the superintendent refuses to distribute the white paper to teachers and administrators within the district. The superintendent and administration have the right to refuse the research results. The superintendent may decide to conduct further research based on the findings of this study.

In addition, principals and teachers may not want to read or discuss the white paper. They may not want to give up staff meeting or PLC time to read and discuss the white paper. If the educators and administration in the local district are not willing to read the white paper, then the project will not meet its intended outcome.

Implementation Proposal and Timeline

Once approval of my doctoral study and white paper is obtained from Walden University I will contact the local district's superintendent and schedule a meeting to review and deliver my white paper to him. At this meeting I will ask him if he would like me to schedule meetings with additional administrators or board members to answer any questions pertaining to the study and project. We will also discuss distribution options of the white paper.

The superintendent may also discuss a timeline for training and/or implementation of the various instructional approaches discussed in the white paper. He may want me to

meet with site and district administration to review the white paper and to discuss how they may focus professional development or teacher collaboration time around the various instructional approaches presented in the white paper.

The superintendent may also want me to present the white paper to the school board. He may want me to create a presentation to the board around the results of my study and the highlights of my white paper. The board may want further clarification or information pertaining to the instructional approaches mentioned in the white paper.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

Writing, delivering the white paper to the superintendent, and addressing any questions will be my primary responsibility for this project. The superintendent will be responsible for deciding how and to whom to distribute the white paper. He may ask me to present the white paper to the local school board and/or to site and district administration. He may also ask that I work with principals or teachers to help them discuss implementation strategies around the white paper's recommendations.

If the superintendent decides to distribute the white paper to site principals, then the principals will take responsibility for distributing it to their teachers. Teachers will be responsible for reading and responding to the white paper. Principals or teachers may ask me to provide additional training or clarification regarding the white paper's recommendations.

District administration and teachers will be expected to complete the formative evaluation after they have read the white paper. The superintendent, principals, or teachers may decide to implement some of the recommendations presented in the white

paper and may ask for my assistance or input. Ultimately, the teachers have the power to implement the instructional approaches discussed in the white paper.

Project Evaluation Plan

The purpose of my white paper was to present the gender gap in reading problem, and to propose a solution to the problem by suggesting that educators implement specific research-based instructional approaches during reading instruction. The key stakeholders that will benefit from this white paper include district administration, principals, and teachers, specifically those teaching Grades 3-6. To evaluate the effectiveness of the white paper, I will provide a formative evaluation tool after distribution of the white paper to attain feedback on the project. Formative assessments are used to gauge initial learning and to provide information to help modify instruction to ensure learning (Cornelius, 2013). My purpose for using a formative assessment is to measure teacher and administrator understanding of the white paper, possible implementation strategies, and then to provide additional information and support as needed. My hope is that principals and teachers will ask for more information pertaining to how best to implement the instructional approaches discussed in the white paper. If teachers implement the instructional approaches discussed in the white paper, reading achievement may improve for students, particularly boys.

I will use a questionnaire to assess administrator and teacher understanding of the concepts and instructional approaches presented in the white paper, and to ascertain their interest in implementing the instructional approaches. Should teachers or administrators need clarification on any aspects of the white paper, I will provide it. If asked, I will also

work with principals and teachers to discuss how they might begin to implement the instructional approaches reviewed in the white paper.

Project Implications

Local Social Change Implications

Students will benefit from this project, particularly boys in Grades 3-6, because it will help teachers learn which instructional approaches will best close the reading achievement gap. Implementing effective instructional practices, student goal-setting and self-assessment, and developing a positive teacher-student relationship are shown to increase student achievement more than other approaches (Hattie, 2009). The white paper highlighted the gender gap in reading present in the district, and provided specific instructional approaches teachers can implement to help close the gap. If teachers implement the strategies outlined in the white paper, reading achievement may improve for all students, particularly boys.

Social change may occur if teachers implement the instructional approaches outlined in the white paper. The gender gap in reading may close between boys and girls in the local district. If reading achievement increases, the district may meet all AYP targets, and may move out of program improvement. This may improve learning for all students, decrease the number of students requiring special education services, and may help increase student enrollment.

Larger Context Social Change

This study and project may influence boys' reading achievement on a more global level. The gender gap in reading is a global issue, impacting other nations along with the

United States (Cohen et al., 2012; Costello, 2008; Marks, 2008). The white paper identified instructional approaches that improved reading achievement, specifically for boys in Grades 3-6. If educators and policy-makers understand the specific instructional approaches teachers can implement to help close the reading gap, educational policy, professional development opportunities, and teacher collaborative efforts can focus on implementing these approaches. Closing the gender gap in reading could improve college and career opportunities for boys.

Conclusion

This section explained the project for this study, which is a white paper. Project goals, rationale, literature review pertaining to the white paper, project implementation, evaluation, and implications for social change were described in this section. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand which instructional approaches increased reading achievement for boys in Grades 3-6, and how teachers accounted for that increase. Closing the gender gap in reading was the main goal of this study. The white paper described the gender gap in reading, and provided educators with an overview of the specific instructional approaches that can close the achievement gap. The white paper included the findings from this qualitative study, described the local and global gender gap in reading, and presented a description of the instructional approaches shown to have improved boys' reading achievement. The recommendations presented to help close the gender gap in reading were based on the data analysis, findings from this study, and the literature review presented in section 3. Section 4 focuses on personal reflections and conclusions from this project study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Discussion

This section includes the reflections and conclusions I drew from my project study. It includes the following:

- Project strengths and limitations
- Recommendations for alternative approaches
- Personal reflection on scholarship
- Personal reflection on project development
- Personal reflection on leadership and change
- Personal reflections on the importance of the work
- What I learned throughout the process
- Implications, applications and directions for future research

Project Strengths

The major strength of this study was discussing possible solutions to the gender gap in reading existing between boys and girls in Grades 3-6 in the school district under study. Research revealed that some teachers were implementing a variety of instructional approaches in classrooms where boys demonstrated strong reading achievement. The white paper explained the gender gap in reading, and described specific instructional approaches teachers should implement to help improve reading achievement, specifically for boys.

One recommendation made in the white paper was for teachers to implement differentiated reading instruction according to students' readiness level, interests, and

learning profiles. Data from my study indicated that boys' reading achievement increased when teachers differentiated reading instruction. Teachers utilized an extended-day reading intervention targeted to each student's learning level. Teachers also implemented reading centers and learning stations that were based on students' unique learning styles and readiness levels. Differentiated instruction has been proven to increase student achievement in all content areas, including reading.

The second recommendation made in the white paper supported that teachers incorporate student interest and choice into reading assignments and activities. Teachers in my study encouraged students to select texts that were of interest to them, and planned reading tasks and activities that were based on students' interests. This motivated students to read and engage in reading activities. Students were more motivated to read when they were allowed to self-select texts that are of interest to them. Students who were allowed to choose reading activities, projects, or products to demonstrate learning, tended to be more engaged in reading and learning processes. Research has shown that intrinsic motivation is strongly related to reading achievement.

The third recommendation proposed in the white paper was for teachers to include collaborative learning opportunities during reading instruction. Teachers in this study implemented a variety of collaborative learning activities during reading instruction including literature circles, inquiry-based learning, and book discussions. Collaboration is a strong component of the Common Core State Standards and the new California English Language Development Standards. Reading achievement increases when students are provided opportunities to engage in critical conversations around texts. There is a strong

body of research indicating that collaborative reading instruction increases reading achievement, specifically for boys.

The fourth recommendation discussed in the white paper was for teachers to set specific, time-bound reading goals with students, and to help students monitor their progress toward meeting their reading goals. Teachers involved in this study worked with their students to set reasonable reading goals, monitored the reading goals, and encouraged students to continue to attain their goals. Teachers adjusted students' reading goals to ensure that students were successful. This motivated students to continually progress with their reading skills. When students were able to set personal reading goals, and witness success in attaining their goals, they were motivated to continue reading. This enhanced reading achievement.

The final suggestion made in the white paper was for teachers to establish a positive relationship with their students and create student-centered classrooms. Teachers should get to know their students academically and personally, and make positive connections with them. Students thrive in positive learning environments. The teachers in this study created positive learning environments, knew their students' interests, learning styles, and readiness level, and genuinely cared about their students. Students are more motivated and put forth more effort when they have caring teachers who create a positive, student-centered classroom.

The local district will be able to use the white paper to help educators understand the gender gap in reading, and to help them identify instructional approaches that can help close the achievement gap. Teachers can discuss how best to implement the

recommended instructional approaches during their weekly collaboration time. If the local district implements the approaches outlined in the white paper, reading achievement may increase for all students, particularly boys.

This study may also have a positive impact on other districts facing gender gaps in reading. When conducting this study, I realized that I could not conduct research in my local district. I found another district with a similar gender gap in reading, and was able to work with this district to conduct the study. This project can be shared with this district, as well as other districts with similar gender gaps in reading.

Project Limitations

The primary project limitation is that the white paper was focused on addressing the gender gap in reading found in the local district. This project will only be useful in districts with similar reading gaps. Results from this study were limited to Grades 3-6. Other districts would need to duplicate this study under similar conditions and in similar grade levels.

Another project limitation is that local district may not use the white paper. District administration may find that they do not have the time or resources to apply the recommendations made in the white paper. They may have an alternative instructional focus outlined in their Local Control Accountability Plan, and may not want to alter or add to that plan. In addition, district or site administration may disagree with the results, despite the data analysis related to the local problem. Finally, teachers may refuse to implement the white paper's recommendations. They may feel as though they need to focus their efforts on other district initiatives.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

This study focused on investigating the instructional approaches teachers in Grades 3-6 implemented during reading instruction in classrooms where boys demonstrated strong reading achievement. The purpose of this study was to investigate how the local district can close the gender gap in reading. I chose to conduct a qualitative study utilizing face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The research process could have included classroom observations. Observational data could have added further insight into the instructional approaches teachers implemented during reading instruction. I did not utilize observational data because the classroom events explored for this study had occurred in the past.

Current pre-assessment and post-assessment data on student reading achievement could have been collected to determine present levels of boys' reading progress. This data could have been combined with interview and classroom observation data in a mixed-methods study to determine which instructional approaches teachers implemented in classrooms where boys demonstrated a strong increase in reading achievement. I did not select a mix-methods study because it would have disrupted regular school and classroom procedures.

This study could have also encompassed data from several districts with the same anomaly found in the local district and in the district under study. Data collected across several districts could have added to the validity of this study and strengthened the findings. Results could then be generalized across other districts across the nation with

similar profiles and anomalies. This would have taken more time and resources than I possess.

My project did not make recommendations about professional development activities to support the implementation of the proposed instructional approaches. I could have outlined a step-by-step professional development plan for implementing the proposed instructional approaches. My plan could have included a district-wide academic review where teachers and administrators examine current practice related to instructional approaches utilized during reading instruction, and compare the data of actual practice to the instructional approaches outlined in the white paper. The plan could have included a long-range professional development plan for the proposed instructional approaches.

I did not select a professional development plan for several reasons. First, teachers in the local district have had training in most of the instructional approaches described in the white paper. Teachers would not appreciate going through additional training on topics they are familiar with. My goal is to emphasize why teachers need to implement the suggested instructional approaches. The white paper does that.

Another reason why I did not select a professional development plan was because the scope of the plan would have been too extensive for this project. A professional development implementation plan would have to be created for each instructional approach. The time and resources required to create and implement this type of long-range professional development plan might be beyond what the local district is willing to invest. It is more probable that the local district will utilize the white paper.

I also selected a white paper because it allows the local district more choices regarding implementation. I am no longer employed in the local district, and there is a new superintendent and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. The purpose of my white paper is to help close the gender gap in reading. District staff may be more open to receiving a white paper over a fully developed professional development plan. They will want to decide how to present the findings from this study, and how best to implement the recommended instructional approaches. The white paper opens discussions regarding implementation, rather than dictating a certain approach.

Scholarship

This project study taught me how to properly conduct research and write in a scholarly manner. It taught me that conducting a doctoral study is challenging, and requires deep learning. One challenge I faced early in my doctoral course work was learning to write in a scholarly manner. I was not familiar with the type of scholarly writing required for a doctoral study. Learning APA formatting and how to write in active versus passive voice was new to me. Luckily, the APA manual and Walden Writing Center assisted me. The more I wrote using scholarly language, the easier it became.

Scholarly writing goes beyond the regurgitation of information. It includes the analysis and synthesis of current research in relation to my own findings. Scholarly writing, I learned, cannot include any of my own opinions or ideas. All of my writing had to be based on the analysis of peer-reviewed articles and books. I learned how to synthesize peer-reviewed research articles and to incorporate the information into my

review of literature. I learned how to conduct a thorough review of research, how to search for current peer-reviewed articles, and how to use the reference section from other research articles to lead me to additional sources.

Scholarship also requires in-depth learning. I learned the importance of digging deep into the field of reading research. I joined several reading organizations and subscribed to periodicals related to reading. Becoming a scholar involved stretching myself to learn as much as I could about reading instruction and effective instructional practices. The *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, the *Reading Research Quarterly*, and *The Journal of Educational Research* provided numerous current research studies pertaining to reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher* and the International Reading Association gave me additional information and links to further reading research.

Scholarship is also about contributing to existing research and knowledge. Adding to what is known about reading research has been exciting for me. I have been able to discuss my research findings with other district administrators and colleagues. In my current position, I work with staff from the California Department of Education. They have asked for copies of my white paper once approved. Knowing that my project study may add to research related to closing the gender reading achievement gap is exhilarating.

Project Development and Evaluation

I learned that project development and evaluation requires purposeful thought and consideration. It was difficult for me to select the most appropriate project for the

research problem. During the proposal stage, I thought that my project might be a professional development activity. After analyzing the data, I realized that a professional development activity was not a viable project option. Data from my study indicated that several instructional approaches led to an increase in reading achievement for boys. I selected the white paper because teachers had already received training in some of the instructional approaches. My goal was to show them the importance of implementing the approaches. Producing a white paper would help me explain the gender reading achievement gap, share my data analysis, and offer recommendations to help educators increase male reading achievement and close the reading gap.

I chose the problem-solution format for my white paper because I wanted to provide suggestions to solve the local gender gap in reading problem. I knew that my audience would be the local district's administration and teachers. I wrote the white paper so that it was easy to comprehend, caught the reader's eye, utilized bulleted items, and presented concise information. The paper was organized to first describe the local problem, discuss solutions to help solve the problem, and finally to provide recommendations regarding which instructional approaches should be implemented during reading instruction.

I selected a formative evaluation for my project evaluation because I wanted to make sure that the teachers and administrators understood the suggestions made in the white paper. That way questions could be addressed immediately. A formative evaluation also provided me with feedback on whether teachers supported the recommendations made in the white paper, and if they intended to implement any of the suggested

instructional approaches. This project helped me appreciate the purpose of project selection as it relates to data analysis, and the importance of utilizing an assessment tool to determine project effectiveness.

Leadership and Change

I never expected to become an educational leader. When I began teaching, I thought I would teach third grade until my date of retirement. That changed when the superintendent asked me to join his team as a professional development expert and coach for the district. In that position I realized that I loved working and learning with teachers. A few years later I earned my administrative credential and obtained a masters in educational leadership, and served as an elementary school principal. Curriculum and instruction was my passion, so I volunteered for additional leadership roles working on district committees and overseeing district programs. Before I knew it I was an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Leadership positions always seemed to find me.

Currently, I am highly involved in leadership development and systems change. I am employed as the chief academic officer for a district under state receivership. My responsibilities include implementing district reform initiatives to improve student achievement. I work with the district administration, teachers, the local county, and the state department of education to make effective reforms in the district.

I believe that leadership is not just about being knowledgeable about a particular field of study. It also entails having a focused vision and knowing how to inspire people to take on leadership roles that help support that vision. Change and leadership are often

intertwined. The effective leader is able to motivate people to make changes that benefit the organization (Reeves, 2006).

When I first began my doctoral journey, I served as the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for the local district under study. This project study was a result of a data analysis session conducted with the district leadership team. The team realized that boys were performing much lower than girls in reading. Upon further analysis, the team realized that in certain teacher's classrooms, boys were demonstrating strong reading achievement. The question was raised regarding which instructional approaches those teachers were implementing during reading instruction. This study was born from a collaborative effort. Effective leaders are able to focus people on results, while empowering them to take action (Fullan, 2008).

My leadership style is based on distributive leadership principals. I believe in creating a tight-loose system that fosters continuous learning and a focus on results. I do not lead from the top, but rather try to create an effective team by building leadership capacity. As a leadership team we develop a sense of purpose, focus on a shared vision and results, and learn together. My role in working in a district under state receivership is to make changes and create results. I do not do this alone. I nurture effective leaders who want to make the necessary systems changes required to advance the district.

Technical change is not hard to implement. Cultural and systems change is difficult and take time. Fullan (2010) explained that leaders must recognize how difficult this type of change can be, and must support people throughout the change process. As a leader, it is important for me to recognize when people are feeling frustrated and

experience what is called the “implementation dip.” I work with administrators to help them narrow the number of district-wide initiatives to the two or three that will impact student achievement the most. I ask them to do the same with their teachers. We focus and “pull the weeds” by removing ineffective initiatives. This helps everyone put their effort towards accomplishing a few goals, and allows them to dedicate resources and time toward attaining those goals.

The doctoral study process helped me grow as a leader. I learned that I needed to remain very organized, communicate effectively, and value where employees and other administrators were in the change and learning process. I learned to be patient. Perhaps experiencing the humbling feedback and ongoing revision process when working through my proposal nurtured my ability to be easygoing and to help others persevere. I also learned that there is always more to learn. Managing my current district’s change process is much like working through my doctoral study. I am constantly learning alongside my administrative team, encouraging them to persevere and succeed, and celebrating milestones with them when we accomplish small wins.

Analysis of Self as a Scholar

My transition into a scholar included learning how to read and analyze peer-reviewed literature, collect and analyze data, and write concisely and descriptively, citing research correctly. Prior to enrolling in Walden, I knew that I wanted to attain my doctoral degree, but wanted to select a university that would challenge my intellect and help me make a difference in the educational arena. Walden University has helped me make positive change, grow as an educational leader, and become a scholar.

The doctoral process taught me how to search for and locate research pertaining to the topic of my study. At first it was arduous to conduct database searches only to find few peer-reviewed articles pertaining to my study. I realized that I could broaden my search, and find numerous articles on a variety of instructional approaches related to reading achievement. Although it was challenging to synthesize the research, connect it to the local problem, and to align the problem to the research questions, literature review, and research method, I found that the longer I persevered, the less challenging and clearer the study became.

Learning to write in a scholarly manner following APA formatting and style was difficult for me at the beginning of the doctoral process. The literature review was a challenge to write. I learned how to organize the research using a spreadsheet. This helped me correlate the research for my study in an effective and efficient manner.

The literature review also expanded my knowledge of reading instruction and the gender reading achievement gap. My understanding of how certain instructional approaches improve motivation and reading achievement for males increased. What I had originally thought might increase reading achievement for males turned out to be incorrect. I learned to watch the findings emerge from the data. That was an exciting experience. My confidence as a researcher and scholar has increased, and will continue as I continue to research and explore additional approaches related to educational reform and improvement.

Analysis of Self as a Practitioner

I have been an educational practitioner for over 25 years, and have served as an administrator for 14 years. Whether in the classroom working with students, or outside the classroom working with teachers or administrators, I have always kept student learning at the forefront. It has always been my responsibility to remain current with the latest educational research and best practices. My mantra has been to constantly strive for educational excellence for students, and to impart that drive to other educators.

Throughout my career I have sought to share the knowledge I gained through research and professional development offerings to others. It was my job as a staff developer to attend trainer-of-trainer workshops, learn as much as I could about certain instructional practices, and deliver training, coaching, and support to teachers to help them implement the practices. I continue to share what I have learned with others, hoping that together we will make a positive impact on student achievement.

The doctoral process has positively impacted my ability to share and apply best-practice and current research. I feel as though I have fine-tuned my leadership skills, and am able to model scholarship and effective practices with colleagues. The work I have done with reading research has positively impacted my work in both my current and previous districts. The districts are now mindful of the gender gap in reading, and how their boys are performing academically. This demonstrates that my work through Walden University may lead to positive change.

Analysis of Self as a Project Developer

The doctoral project study process has taught me the importance of aligning project goals, design, and assessment according to the intended audience. Although I have produced many projects throughout my career, I have never created a white paper or a position paper based on data and research. A white paper provides an overview of a problem, provides research-based solutions to the problem, and proposes solutions to the problem. To me, the white paper was a culmination of all of the hard work I had done. It presented the local problem, shared relevant data about the problem, and provided research-based recommendations to solve the problem. The white paper provided a thorough overview of the gender gap in reading, and proposed specific instructional approaches teachers can implement to close the achievement gap.

Although I have read position papers and white papers, I learned that writing one required me to synthesize my doctoral study into a concise document. It was hard to condense the entire review of research and data analysis into a few pages. I worked with my committee chair, colleagues, and an editor to assist me with this. I also read several white papers on reading instruction to help me organize my white paper in a manner that would make sense to the reader, and would convince them to implement reading approaches to help close the gender gap in reading.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

This project study will add to the research on reading instruction, increasing boys' reading achievement, and closing the gender gap in reading. It will assist the local district in providing concrete actions that educators can take to help increase reading

achievement for boys in Grades 3-6, and help them close the gender gap in reading.

During this study I gained a deeper understanding of reading approaches that increase boys' reading achievement in Grades 3-6. I also learned that teachers might not be aware of the gender gap in reading, and that there are certain instructional approaches they can implement that will improve reading achievement for boys.

Experiencing the doctoral study process changed my perspective and abilities as an educator. I learned how to manage time more efficiently, research and identify reliable sources, evaluate and analyze data, and become an independent learner. I also learned how to conduct interviews with participants, and how to code and analyze qualitative data. Most importantly, I realized that I could be a successful change agent, and possibly impact student achievement on a grander scale.

The gender gap in reading continues to plague states and nations. Data from this study indicated that differentiated reading instruction, collaborative reading instruction, interest and choice, setting and monitoring reading goals, and developing a positive relationship with students were instructional approaches that increased boys' reading achievement. I hope that this project study adds to the current research on closing the gender gap in reading and increases reading achievement for boys. This research project focused on an individual district and particular grade levels. Researchers may utilize this work to explore other related areas of study.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Closing reading gaps and improving reading achievement for all students is a concern for many nations. The local district noted that there had been a reading

achievement gap between girls and boys since 2002. Much of the research on boys' reading achievement focused on student motivation and whether students were motivated to read. Few studies focused on instructional approaches that increased boys' reading achievement.

The purpose for this study was to investigate how can reading instruction be improved in Grades 3-6 in the district under study to positively impact the reading achievement of boys. Results indicated that there were certain instructional approaches that increased boys' reading achievement. Results from this project study will provide the local district with information that can help them close the gender gap in reading.

There are several implications that this study presents for the local district and the field of education. The local district and other districts with similar gaps in reading can make positive changes if they utilize the results and recommendations from this project study. They can implement the instructional approaches described in the white paper to increase boys' reading achievement. In addition, they might use the white paper to build awareness about the gender gap in reading, and begin to have conversations around gender-based instruction.

Districts can also take the recommendations from the white paper and create professional development modules around each instructional approach. Teachers can have in-depth discussions around how best to implement each approach. The information presented in the white paper should be a starting point for districts to begin implementing instructional change.

Further research should be conducted to examine each instructional approach and how it impacts boys' reading achievement. Researchers may utilize experimental studies to determine the effect the various instructional approaches have on boys' reading achievement. My research focused on Grades 3-6 classrooms. Additional research could be conducted with older or younger grades to determine whether certain instructional approaches are more successful at different grade levels. Researchers will continue to investigate methods to help close reading gaps. Hopefully my research study will assist them in their efforts.

Conclusion

The gender gap in reading has existed for many years. In the local district there had been a 12-point difference in every grade level between girls' and boys' reading achievement, favoring girls (California Department of Education, 2012a). The rigorous reading demands required for students to master the Common Core State Standards for literacy have intensified. It is imperative that teachers implement instructional approaches proven to increase reading achievement, otherwise, gender achievement gaps may persist and expand.

My project study investigated which instructional approaches teachers implemented in Grades 3-6 classrooms where boys demonstrated a strong increase in reading achievement. The purpose of my study was to explore how to close the gender gap in reading. Findings suggested that a combination of differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, student interest and choice, goal setting and monitoring, and

building positive teacher-student relationships contributed to an increase in boys' reading achievement.

Hopefully, the local district and other educational agencies will examine the suggestions made in my white paper, and begin to close the gender gap in reading. Educators need to realize that reading gaps between various subgroups, including boys and girls exist. They also need to implement instructional approaches that close those gaps. Reading achievement must improve for all students, including boys, if we want them to succeed and graduate high school, college and career ready.

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Appendix A: The Project

Closing the Reading Achievement Gap

Instructional Approaches to Increase Male
Reading Achievement



Walden University

A White Paper by Tiffany Rudek

Introduction to the Problem

Reading is a required skill that all people need to succeed in the global workforce (Faust & Kandelshine-Waldman, 2011; White, 2007). According to the most current National Assessment of International Progress (NAEP) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, the gap between females and males in reading achievement still persists. There is a 31% difference in reading achievement in the United States between males and females in favor of females, and a 38% difference in favor of females world-wide (OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, 2013). This reading gap has increased over the last few decades (Marks, 2008).

Gender Gap in Reading

The gender gap in reading achievement may be contributing to the current decline of the male student enrollment rate in colleges and universities (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). The latest research indicates that 57% of the US college students are female, and that 63% of the African American US college students are female (Conger, 2015). According to Conger (2015) this is due to females having higher GPAs than males. In California, students with higher ranked GPAs are guaranteed admission into the UC/CSU system.

In the local district, this gender gap in reading has persisted since 2002. Male students in grades three through six have been underperforming female students by about 12 percentage points on state reading achievement tests since 2002 (California Department of Education, 2012a). Data from the 2012 California Standards Test indicated that female students in third-grade outperformed males in reading by 13 points. Fourth-grade female students scored 8 points higher than males, fifth-grade females scored 6 points higher, and sixth-grade female students scored 14 points higher in reading than male students in reading (California Department of Education, 2012a).

The local gender gap in reading widened as the reading scores of various subgroups were considered. Scaled score data from the 2011 CST Reading Test indicated that the gender

gap in reading was wider with English language learner and socio-economically disadvantaged students (California Department of Education, 2012a).

District 2011 CST Scaled Reading Scores by Subgroup and Gender

Subgroup	Scaled Score	Scaled Score	Difference
	Males	Females	
District Total	378	390	12 points
English-Language Learners	311	328	17 points
Hispanic	368	382	14 points
Socio-Economically disadvantaged	354	371	17 points
White	392	406	14 points

* A scaled score of 350 or higher is proficient

The local district failed to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in Reading with the Hispanic and English-language learner subgroups. Failure to meet AYP caused the district to become a “Program Improvement District” under the 2001 Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

In certain third- through sixth-grade classrooms within the local district, male students have performed as well as, or better than females in reading achievement as measured by the 2011 CST Reading Test (California Department of Education, 2012a). Further data analysis revealed that the male students in these classrooms had outperformed females in reading achievement, and had shown improved scaled scores on the CST Reading Test from 2009 to 2011 (California Department of Education, 2012a). Individual male student scaled scores from the CST Reading test at the beginning of the year were averaged and compared to the averaged scores obtained at the end of the year. Data indicated that in certain classrooms, male students demonstrated strong growth in reading.

Cohort Data Growth for Teachers' Classes with Strong Male Reading Achievement

Teachers' Classroom	Percent Proficient in Reading: Male Cohort 1		Total Growth	Percent Proficient in Reading: Male Cohort 2		Total Growth
	2010-11 Beginning of Year	2011-12 End of Year	Year 1	2011-12 Beginning of Year	2012-13 End of Year	Year 2
1	29%	64%	+35%	50%	65%	+15%
2	58%	84%	+26%	38%	76%	+38%
3	77%	94%	+17%	62%	76%	+14%
4	69%	85%	+16%	78%	90%	+12%
5	50%	55%	+5%	84%	94%	+10%
6	71%	83%	+12%	75%	79%	+4%
7	62%	71%	+9%	80%	86%	+6%
8	75%	93%	+18%	78%	90%	+12%

In order to close the gender gap in reading, it was important to understand which instructional approaches teachers were implementing in classes where male students demonstrated strong reading achievement.

Solving the Gender Gap in Reading

Research has shown that there are instructional approaches that motivate students to engage in reading activities, and increase male reading achievement (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Applegate & Applegate, 2010; Costello, 2008; Logan & Johnston, 2009;

Logan & Johnston, 2010; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010; Senn, 2012). The instructional approaches that are shown to increase male reading achievement the most are:

- **Differentiating reading instruction according to students' learning preferences and readiness level** (Connor et al., 2011; Coyne et al., 2014; Faulk & Faulk, 2013; Little, McCoach, & Reis, 2014)
- **Promoting student interest and choice** (Brozo et al., 2014; Guthrie et al., 2013; Limbrick, Wheldull, & Madelaine, 2011; Malloy, Marinak, & Gambrell, 2013; McGlynn, 2015; Serafin, 2013)
- **Implementing collaborative and cooperative learning activities** (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Kahn & Ahmad, 2014; Law, 2011; Puzio & Colby, 2013)
- **Helping students set and monitor personal reading goals** (Cabral-Marques, 2015; Forster & Souvengier, 2014; Smithson, 2012)
- **Developing a positive teacher-student relationship** (Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villarreal, & Johnson, 2011; Roorda, et al., 2011; Sanacore, 2012)

Differentiated Reading Instruction

Differentiated reading instruction is an instructional approach where teachers proactively plan instruction according to students' learning readiness level, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2003). Teachers who effectively differentiate reading instruction align reading activities according to students' learning preferences and interests, adjust instruction according to students' level of learning, and include student choice when designing lessons (Tomlinson, 2003; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011).

Differentiated reading instruction includes:

- Providing direct reading instruction according to students' learning needs
- Providing targeted extended-day reading intervention
- Implementing literacy stations based on students' learning preferences and choice.

Research has shown that students exhibited an increase in reading achievement when provided direct instruction and additional intervention based on their individual learning needs (Coyne et al., 2013). In one study with kindergarteners, students receiving differentiated reading instruction according to their individual learning needs showed a stronger increase in reading achievement compared to students not receiving the differentiated reading instruction (Coyne et al., 2013). Teachers involved in the local study whose male students demonstrated strong reading achievement noted that they implemented direct reading instruction based on their students' learning needs, and provided targeted extended-day reading intervention to struggling readers. Instruction during intervention time was based on students' reading assessment results, and was focused on improving each student's reading deficits.

Teachers from the local study also included different reading activities based on students' learning preferences during reading instruction. Some teachers implemented literacy stations where students rotated through a variety of reading tasks, each focusing on a different learning modality. Other teachers incorporated project-based reading tasks based on students' learning styles into reading instruction. According to some researchers, teachers need to incorporate students' interests and learning styles into daily reading instruction in order to increase students' reading motivation and reading achievement (Connor et al., 2011; Faulk & Faulk, 2013; Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor, & Walker-Dalhouse, 2013).

Student Interest and Choice

Allowing students to self-select books based on their interest, increases student reading motivation, which is directly related to reading achievement (Brozo et al., 2014; Gambrell, 2011). Research has concluded that male reading achievement increased when teachers allowed students to select reading materials and activities according to their interests (Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood, & Parkhill, 2012; Malloy et al., 2013; Post & Guthrie, 2014; Robertson, Dougherty, Ford-Connors, & Paratore, 2014). Results from

one study involving middle school students indicated that when students were provided with reading instruction that promoted student choice and relevant interest-based learning, their reading achievement improved (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). Authors believed that relevance and choice, in combination with other motivations, led to an increase in reading achievement for students.

Teachers involved in the local study incorporated student choice when determining reading materials. They also integrated student interests when designing reading tasks. Several teachers based thematic units on the interests of their students. This motivated students, particularly males, to engage in reading activities. According to Gambrell (2011) students are more intrinsically motivated to read, and take more responsibility for their own reading achievement, when their teachers allow them to determine what they can read and how they can investigate content.

Collaborative Reading Instruction

Collaborative reading instruction engages students in meaningful group discussions around complex texts (Senn, 2012). Literature circles and cooperative learning, where students read text and work in groups to solve a problem, are examples of collaborative reading approaches. Results from several studies show that reading achievement increased for students when they were able to work in collaborative groups, or had collaborative discussions around interesting texts (Avici & Yuksel, 2011; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Kahn & Ahmad, 2014; Law, 2011; Puzio & Colby, 2013; Senn, 2012; Shelton-Strong, 2011).

In one study conducted with fourth grade students, reading motivation and comprehension improved when students worked in literature circles (Avici & Yuksel, 2011). Literature circles are an instructional approach where students read the same text, then engage in collaborative, higher-level questioning and critical thinking around the text (Shelton-Strong, 2011). Students from this study relayed that they enjoyed

collaborating with their classmates, and that collaboration helped them remember the content of the text (Avci & Yuksel, 2011). Educators involved in the local study implemented collaborative reading instruction including literature circles. Literature circles, or book clubs, were utilized in each classroom. Students were able to select their own groups and books based on their interest in the topic, or the book being studied. Each day the students met with their group and engaged in critical thinking and questioning around their texts. Several participants noted that collaboration helped motivate and increase reading achievement for their male students.

The teachers involved in the local study also implemented collaborative discussions around science and social studies texts, and used an inquiry-based learning approach to help motivate and engage their students. One participant described how engaged her male students were in reading the novel *The Titanic: End of a Dream*. Students were highly interested in learning more about the Titanic. She created a thematic unit around the topic, and allowed students to research individual topics of interest pertaining to the Titanic. Students wrote reports, created re-enactments, and were able to retell the historical events surrounding the Titanic tragedy. Reading activities like these help motivate male students to read, which leads to enhanced male reading achievement (Guthrie et al., 2013; Law, 2011; Post & Guthrie, 2014).

Selecting and Monitoring Reading Goals

Data from several studies have shown that when students help set and monitor their own reading goals, their reading achievement increases (Cabral-Marques, 2015; Forster & Souvengier, 2014). The reading goals must be specific, challenging yet attainable, time-bound, and monitored with teacher support in order to be achieved (Cabral-Marquez, 2015). In one study conducted with third-grade students, students set specific personal reading goals, and charted their progress weekly. Results indicated that students' reading achievement increased (Smithson, 2012).

Teachers included in the local study set reading goals with all students. They met weekly with students to monitor their progress toward meeting their goals, and strategized with students regarding how to continually improve. The teachers utilized a program called Accelerated Reader to help assess students' text comprehension, and to help students set reading goals and monitor their progress. Several teachers described accounts of how setting reading goals and monitoring progress increased male reading motivation and achievement. One teacher shared that a student struggling with reading at the beginning of the year began reading voraciously in order to increase his reading progress. At the end of the year, this student had one of the strongest reading scores on the CST Reading Test.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Developing a positive teacher-student relationship is critical to increasing student achievement. In John Hattie's (2009) book *Visible Learning*, positive teacher-student relationships is ranked near the top with regards to having an impact on student achievement. Other research indicated that struggling male students demonstrated a stronger increase in reading achievement when they had warm, caring teachers (Hughes, et al., 2011; Sanacore, 2012). The impact of a positive teacher-student relationship is strongest at the elementary level, but it does impact learning at higher levels as well (Hughes et al., 2011; Roorda, et al., 2011).

In the local study, all teachers whose students demonstrated strong reading achievement developed positive teacher-student relationships with their students. They had a "do whatever it takes" attitude, and worked with students to help them succeed. One teacher, for instance, noticed that one of her male students had been struggling with reading. He was embarrassed that he could not read the social studies text and began withdrawing from classroom reading activities. The teacher met with him, and assigned a book on the same topic, but at a lower lexile level, so he could grasp the content. No students were aware of the situation. The student was able to read and comprehend the content, and soon began reading more and engaging with the class. Teachers involved in the local

study had the belief that all students can learn at high levels and succeed. They imparted high expectations on all students no matter their ability, race, language status, or gender. When students fell behind they intervened. They built positive relationships with their students through their caring attitude, their unwavering belief in them, and by considering their learning needs when planning instruction.

Recommendations to Close the Gender Gap in Reading

Recommendation 1: Differentiate reading instruction according to students' learning preferences, interests, and readiness levels. Assess students in reading using a universal screening tool to determine each student's strengths and learning needs. Plan reading instruction and intervention around students learning needs.

Recommendation 2: Provide opportunities for student choice and interest. Learn what interests your students, then design reading activities based on those interests. Allow students to self-select books, reading tasks, projects for inquiry, or products to demonstrate their learning.

Recommendation 3: Implement collaborative and cooperative learning activities during reading instruction. Provide opportunities for students to engage in peer discussions around complex texts. Use strategies such as think-pair-share, collaborative groups, cooperative learning, or literature circles to engage students.

Recommendation 4: Assist students with setting specific and time-bound reading goals that are realistic yet challenging. Involve students when setting reading goals, and help them monitor their own progress as you support the process.

Recommendation 5: Develop a positive relationship with students. Get to know what they are interested in learning, what their strengths and areas for growth are, and understand how they learn best. Believe that all students can learn, have high

expectations for all students, and support their learning needs. Genuinely care about your students.

Conclusion

The foundation for this study was to understand which instructional approaches are likely to improve reading achievement for males in grades three through six, and how teachers accounted for male reading achievement. The overall goal was to provide insight to educators about which instructional approaches can assist in closing the male reading achievement gap. This white paper is designed to address the local gender gap in reading and to offer recommendations to educators regarding how to increase male reading achievement and close the reading gap.

Interview data collected during this study revealed that several instructional approaches closed the gender gap in reading by improving male reading achievement. Implementing instructional approaches during reading instruction that motivate students to read were instrumental in increasing male reading achievement in classrooms where male students demonstrated strong reading achievement. Approaches such as differentiated reading instruction, collaborative reading activities, student interest and choice, goal setting and monitoring, and positive teacher-student relationships motivated and engaged students in reading activities, and increased reading achievement, specifically for males. Teachers can begin closing the gender gap in reading by implementing these instructional approaches during reading instruction, which are proven to increase male reading achievement.

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Appendix B: Interview Questions

Date of Interview _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____

Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher will state:

This interview will be audio-recorded for transcription accuracy. If there are any questions asked that you do not wish to answer, or if you wish to stop answering questions at any time, please let me know.

Demographic Information:

- What grade(s) do you currently teach?
- How many years have you been a teacher?
- What is the demographic make-up of your students?
- What is your educational background (i.e., degrees, content areas, special certifications)?

Research Question 1: What are the instructional approaches that teachers use to improve reading achievement in their classes, grades three through six?

Please describe typical reading instruction in your classroom on a typical day.

Additional Probes:

- a. How much time, on average, do you spend on reading instruction daily?
- b. Please tell me about the approaches you use and how they work for your class.

Tell me more about that
Anything else?

1. What instructional approaches do you use most often during reading instruction? Why? On average, how much class time do you spend on each approach?

Probe: Tell me more.

Research Question 2: What are the instructional approaches that teachers specifically use to improve the reading achievement of males in their classes, grades three through six?

2. Please describe how you teach reading to your male students.

Probe: Tell me more about that

3. Is there a difference between which approaches you use to teach your female students and which approaches you use to teach your male students?

Probe: Please tell me more about that.

Research Question 3: What explanations do teachers offer to account for the improvement in reading achievement of males in their classes, grades three through six?

4. How do you account for the improvement in reading achievement of the male students in your class?

Probe: Anything else?

5. Which instructional approaches do you attribute to the increase in male reading achievement in your class?

Probe: Anything more to add?

6. Is there anything else regarding reading instruction that you wish to share with me?

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation from Superintendent to Conduct Research

[REDACTED] **SCHOOL DISTRICT**

[REDACTED] Ed.D., Superintendent

June 16, 2014

Board of Trustees

[REDACTED], President • [REDACTED], Clerk

[REDACTED], Member • [REDACTED], Member [REDACTED], Member

Dear Mrs. Tiffany Rudek,

[REDACTED]

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled, "Instructional Approaches that Increase Reading Achievement for Third Through Sixth Grade Male Students" in the Wiseburn Unified School District. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct the following data collection activities:

- Teachers will participate in a 45 minute interview that will be audio-recorded
- Teachers will participate in a 15 minute follow-up meeting to review interview transcripts and/or confirm validity of researcher's interpretations (member check).

Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. 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.

Appendix D: Confidentiality Agreement of Peer Debriefers

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in reviewing data and findings for this research: "Instructional Approaches That Increase Reading Achievement for Third Through Sixth-grade Male Students" I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participants.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge copy, release, sell, and loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature:**Date:**

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement of External Auditor

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in reviewing data and findings for this research: "Instructional Approaches That Increase Reading Achievement for Third Through Sixth-grade Male Students" I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participants.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

8. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
9. I will not in any way divulge copy, release, sell, and loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
10. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
11. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
12. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
13. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
14. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature:**Date:**

Appendix F: Matrix Display of Themes

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub Themes</i>
<i>Question 1: What are the instructional approaches that teachers use to improve reading achievement in their classes, grades three through six?</i>	Motivational Approaches	Accelerated Reader Choice Interest Systematic instruction
	Explicit Direct Instruction	Goal setting with monitoring and feedback
	Collaborative Approaches	Literature Circles Peer collaboration and discussion Inquiry Based Learning
	Differentiated Instruction	Readiness level Learning Profiles
<i>Question 2: What are the instructional approaches that teachers specifically use to improve the reading achievement of boys in their classes, grades three through six?</i>	Motivational Approaches	Interest and choice Learning Profiles
	Differentiated Instruction	Readiness Level – Targeted Intervention
<i>Question 3: What explanations do teachers offer to account for the improvement in reading achievement of boys in their classes, grades three through six?</i>	Goal setting with monitoring	
	Unsure and Never Considered	
	Student-Centered Teacher	