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Lisa Putt

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Inclusion Teachers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Literacy Strategies

by

Lisa C. Putt

MS, The University of Akron, 2001

BS, Sterling College, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2017

Abstract

Students with disabilities (SWDs) at a combined junior/senior high school in a Midwestern state have opportunities to participate in inclusive education settings. However, they consistently score below proficient on state standardized reading assessments, despite an increased focus on literacy by content area inclusion teachers. Without improved literacy skills, many SWDs will experience a decrease in standardized test scores and graduation rates, which, in turn, will affect access to a college education and better careers and livelihoods. The purpose of this bounded qualitative case study was to explore 7th and 8th grade content area inclusion teachers' attitudes toward and perceptions of literacy, and how they used literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. Vygotsky's social development and constructivist learning theories, as well as Rumelhart's schema theory were used for the conceptual framework. Eight 7th and 8th grade inclusion teachers who taught science, mathematics, and social studies volunteered and participated in semistructured interviews and provided lesson plans for analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and axial coding. Themes, based on the conceptual frameworks, revealed that teachers need to coordinate lesson plans and instruction, offer differentiated instruction, and understand research-based interventions and strategies that are subject specific. It is recommended that inclusion teachers use the same research-based literacy strategies correctly for SWDs to understand content. These endeavors may contribute to positive social change by encouraging administrators to offer content specific literacy-based professional development for inclusion teachers to improve SWDs' academic performance and future educational and employment opportunities.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the most precious blessing God has ever given to me, my daughter Maggie, who has sacrificed so much during my doctoral journey. I love you to the moon and back, forever and a day, to infinity and beyond.

To my mom and dad, it seems I never grow too old to need you. I love you both.

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. ~Proverbs 3:5-7

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Special thanks go to the participants in the pilot study and the research study. I am deeply appreciative of your precious time and how forthcoming you were. Thank you to the teachers and administrators at my research site for their support throughout this process. It is my hope this study will help our students with disabilities achieve literacy success across the curriculum.

Thank you to my "sector." You are the finest group of educators I have ever met. Our students are lucky to have you. Thank you for all you do for them.

Thank you to Bobbi Jo for keeping me sane. I love you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Special education students in the United States often face challenges trying to receive a successful and appropriate education. Since the early 1990s, a key focus of educational reformers in the United States has been to include special education students in general education classes with appropriate support. Reformers have also sought to redefine the operational structure of current special education programs, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1997 and No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) have been instrumental in these efforts (Coyne, Kame'enui, & Carnine, 2011). More students than ever who have an individualized education plan (IEP) receive their education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) of a general education class, a cotaught inclusion class with both a general education teacher and an intervention specialist, or with special education support during the school day (Coyne et al., 2011).

However, special education students and teachers in the United States face some challenges. Coyne, Kame'enui, and Carnine (2011) indicated that the number of students in the United States who need special education services is growing at a rate too fast for educators to accommodate. According to researchers, classroom dynamics have also changed as a result of more general education placements for special education students. Rather than separating general education students and special education students during the day for academic classes, students with disabilities have been mainstreamed into general education classes and have started receiving more of their academic instruction in general classes with support (Coyne et al., 2011). In addition, as a result of NCLB (2010), teachers are now required to adhere to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which

are specific standards to be taught in each content area by grade level (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). They are also required to teach reading standards in the content areas (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Teachers are expected to teach their own content standards in the course of a year, with students reaching proficient levels in all standards, and they are expected to incorporate literacy standards that have been added to their content area, in addition to making modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities. Many SWDs are mainstreamed for content area classes such as science and social studies. The majority of students on IEPs, especially at the study site, have disabilities in the area of reading. Therefore, this standards-based educational reform movement across the curriculum has been a challenge for many students with disabilities (SWDs) and their teachers (Coyne et al., 2011). Because of these challenges, educators may not be able to fully meet the needs of their students with disabilities, and these students may not reach their full academic potential.

Acquisition of literacy skills is a specific concern for students in special education; therefore, SWDs need to receive content specific reading support across the curriculum if they are expected to be successful academically (Gilles, Wang, Smith, & Johnson, 2013). However, a lack of teacher expertise and training in the area of literacy is a barrier to school leaders' promotion of literacy across the curriculum (Gilles et al., 2013). According to Fenwick (2010), to strengthen middle school students' literacy skills in content areas, educators need to improve literacy interventions and strategies in cross-

curricular instruction. Coyne, Kame'enui, and Carnine (2011) recommended that educators use mediated scaffolding and strategic integration and that they prime students with the background knowledge they need to learn new concepts.

Despite an increased focus on literacy at the research site, a combined senior and junior high school in a midwestern state, SWDs are consistently failing content area classes such as science, social studies, mathematics, and art. Although these students receive academic support from an intervention specialist in either an inclusion, cotaught setting or in an academic assist class, their classroom performance, class grades, and ultimately their performance on the state standardized tests is far below average. It is necessary to determine why SWDs continue to fail in the content areas despite a building wide literacy focus. Improvements in the literacy skills of SWDs have many potential positive implications. First, the self-esteem and motivation of SWDs may increase as they began to experience academic success across the curriculum. Second, academic success for SWDs may benefit the school with increased graduation rates and standardized test scores. Academic success for SWDs may translate to college educations and/or better careers and livelihoods.

Chapter 1 contains the background, problem statement, and purpose of the study. The research questions, conceptual framework, and nature of the study are introduced in this chapter. Term definitions, assumptions, the scope of the study, delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study are also included in the chapter.

Background

Since the late 1990s, because of the implementation of federal laws and legislation such as IDEA (1997), many SWDs in the United States have moved from special education classrooms into inclusion general education classes. The authors of NCLB (2001) legislation and policies desired all students, including those with disabilities, reach proficient levels in reading by 2014. This goal was not met, despite the legislation and policies of LRE, one of the requirements of IDEA (1997) that allows students with disabilities to receive their education, to the greatest extent possible, with their nondisabled peers. The goal of having all students reading proficiently by 2014 was not achieved and students, especially the SWDs subgroup, continue the struggle to read at proficient levels (Wei, Blackorby, & Schiller, 2011). Since the introduction of IDEA (1997) and NCLB (2001), the SWD subgroup at the research site has consistently failed to meet proficient levels in state testing.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area inclusion teachers towards literacy, and the means by which they teach literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons with SWDs. I will use the findings to provide research-based recommendations for improving the instructional practices of teachers. Based on their findings, Pitcher et al (2010) suggested that school leaders address learning conditions and instructional practices rather than attempt to ‘fix’ learners. The testing, multi factored examination (MFE), and the individualized education plan (IEP) have established that the learner has learning disabilities. We are well aware of the modifications and accommodations each of our SWDs needs to find better

academic success. Since we know what the student needs and they are not finding success, we need to examine the learning conditions and the way the students are being taught to find out where the problem is so we can address it. This finding supports the purpose of my study.

To adhere to CCSS, content area teachers need to meet content literacy standards in their instruction (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). I was interested in determining whether general education teachers use strategies and interventions that embed literacy standards in their daily instruction in order to help SWDs comprehend content material and access course texts. In addition to teaching all the material in their content area, teachers are expected to support the reading needs of their students as they progress through texts with increasing text complexity (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Because the content area classes now have literacy standards and are expected to teach them, I presumed that they might be embedding literacy strategies and interventions in their instruction and I was interested in finding out what strategies and interventions they were using and how they were using them. Also, I specifically wanted to determine how teachers at my research site supported the reading needs of students with disabilities and how they helped SWDs understand content material. SWDs at the research site continued to score below proficient on state testing in reading (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2014). The building administration determined teachers at the study site to find ways to help SWDs increase their reading comprehension, especially in the content areas. I hope this study will prompt investigation into literacy instruction at the local site and promote necessary

social change at the local level, including extensive professional development in literacy for content area teachers, increased time for teacher collaboration, and a building wide commitment to reading (Pitcher et al., 2010).

Problem Statement

Many SWDs lack the literacy skills necessary to adequately access, comprehend, and manipulate the resources necessary for success in content area classes (Reed & Vaughn, 2012). The problem examined in this study was the consistently low performance of SWDs on state standardized testing, despite an increased focus on literacy by content area inclusion teachers. The low performance of SWDs has been a major concern of the building administration at the research setting, who have sought to focus staff attention on how the needs of SWDs are being met in the content areas, especially in the area of literacy (Research site teacher, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Administrators are concerned that low test scores indicate that, across the curriculum, teachers are not providing SWDs with the reading support they need. The specific focus of administrators is on teachers' use of instructional literacy practices in content area classes. Trend data from the past two state report cards of junior high school students from the research setting indicate failing grades of "F" in the following areas: closing the gap for SWDs, meeting value added for SWDs, and meeting the 80% passage rate on the state test to earn credit for the necessary indicators (ODE, 2014, 2015).

Scores for the SWD subgroup, the largest subgroup in the district, continue to be great concern to administrators. The head building principal said that it is necessary to examine what teachers are doing to help adolescent special education students access

textbooks and materials in their classes and how these students' reading needs are being supported. Because reading is not an isolated skill used exclusively in English/Language Arts (ELA), it is necessary to ensure that students with reading disabilities receive the reading support they need across the curriculum (Allington, 2013). According to Ivey and Broaddus (2001), comprehension strategy instruction is not common at the secondary level, especially in content areas. However, this type of instruction is necessary to equip adolescents who have reading disabilities with the literacy skills they need to be academically successful in junior high school and beyond (Guthrie, 2014). It is necessary to teach comprehension strategies and interventions directly to adolescent students to improve their skills to access and understand the information they need from their content area textbooks and class materials (Gilles et al., 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area inclusion teachers towards literacy, and the means by which they teach literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. I specifically examined how seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers of special education students with reading disabilities plan for, teach, and assess students in their inclusion classes. I examined how these teachers are currently providing literacy interventions in their content area across the curriculum. I did so to determine what strategies, interventions, and support teachers are providing to special education students with reading disabilities so that they comprehend course content. I drew upon Vygotsky's (1978) social development and constructivist learning theories. In addition to examining

content area teachers' perspectives about providing literacy in their classes, I explored how teachers at my research site could improve reading instruction across the curriculum.

Research Questions

Vygotsky's (1978) social development and constructivist learning theories and schema theory guided the subquestions and research question for this study. The teaching of reading in content areas is a unique and systematic process that occurs in a collaborative and social relationship between a teacher and a student (Gredler, 2012). It is through the guidance, direction, and assistance of an adult that a student's mental functions develop and mature (Gredler, 2012). I designed my grand tour, subquestions, and research question to focus on how seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach reading to SWDs, plan their lessons, design instruction, and assess SWDs in their inclusion classrooms. My grand tour question was, How do seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers teach content area reading to junior high students with disabilities? Following are the subquestions and primary research question I sought to answer:

Subquestion 1: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers activate SWDs' prior knowledge to better comprehend content materials?

Subquestion 2: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers plan instruction for SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social development and constructivist techniques?

Subquestion 3: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social developmental and constructivist strategies?

RQ: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers assess reading comprehension among students with reading disabilities?

Conceptual Framework

This case study was grounded in the concepts of Vygotsky's (1978) social development and constructivist learning theories and Rumelhart's (1980) schema theory. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach to education is social, rather than individually focused; learning is viewed as the interaction between a teacher and a student, not as the transmission of knowledge from one individual to another (Roberts, 2013). Vygotsky was involved in movements that advocated for educational reform and which sought the development of new teaching methods (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2009). He promoted methods that were more student-focused and which gave pupils a more active role in the learning process (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2009). The theorist held the conviction that schools are a key instrument for improving society (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2009).

For learning to be meaningful, teachers need to organize knowledge for students so that it is revealed: (a) out of social practice, (b) through social practice, and (c) for social practice. (Sestenko, 2010). The intention is that knowledge be rendered meaningful, relevant, and significant to students. According to Gredler (2012), Vygotsky described the period of adolescence as an extremely important time in the development of thinking. To develop their full thinking potential, adolescents need to be provided with

appropriate tasks, demands, or stimulation in their academic interactions with teachers and peers (Vygotsky, as cited in Gredler, 2012).

According to Vygotsky's theory in educational practice, students are provided with instructional strategies through teaching in a collaborative relationship with their teachers. The strategies and tools they can use as instruments to problem solve in their daily lives (Stetsenko, 2010). In Vygotsky's theory of learning, the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the distance between an individual's ability to problem solve with assistance and problem solve independently (Gredler, 2012). These differentiated levels of learning, or varying distances within ZPD, apply to both general and special education students (Rutland & Campbell, 1996). Leonard (2002) further explains Vygotsky's ZPD and social development theory. Thinking, learning, and communication are all developed and enhanced through social interactions between the learner and an adult (Sestenko, 2010). Guided by the instruction of their teachers in the social setting of the classroom, students can become good learners, problem solvers, and critical thinkers while developing relevant content knowledge (Harland, 2003).

Schema theory is an interactive theoretical model. Through schema theory, students process and comprehend new text by activating knowledge they already have and connecting it to what they are reading to make sense of the passage (Elmianvari & Kheirabadi, 2013). Because many SWDs have limited reading strategies to effectively comprehend what they are reading, they need specific reading strategies (Coyne et al., 2011). A text does not have meaning until the reader interacts with it and constructs meaning by applying meaning from his or her acquired prior knowledge (Elmianvari &

Kheirabadi, 2013). It is important in schema theory instruction that students are taught correct text structure and how to internalize the strategy so it becomes automatic. How students recognize and remember text structure affects how much information a student can remember (Eliamvari & Kheirbadi, 2013). An (2013) stated that comprehension of a text relies on interactions between the reader and the text.

Vygotsky's social developmental and constructivist theories and schema theory were appropriate for this study design. First, on a large scale, Vygotsky stressed the belief that learning and attaining knowledge are driving forces in individuals' lives. Vygotsky (1978) stated that learning is always mediated through others and that the developmental processes of students develop and operate best when children interact cooperatively in their learning environment, which includes teacher-student and student-student interactions. I focused on the interactions between teachers and students regarding literacy and the interventions and strategies teachers used to help their SWDs connect with content material. I drew on Vygotsky's (1978) theories to ground the data collection and analysis.

I also drew on schema theory to address the reading comprehension components of this study. Texts, both informational and fictional, have no meaning by themselves (Rumelhart, 1980). Readers, through an interactive process, apply meaning to what they read by relating it to what they already know (Carrell, 1984). Reading is perhaps the most dominant skill in learning (Miller, 2009), and by using schema theory readers make sense of what they read by connecting it to what they already know and predict what they might learn in their new material (Carrell, 1984).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area teachers who serve SWDs in their classes and how they implement literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. Using semi-structured interviews I asked the study participants about the collaborative relationships they have with their students, how they helped their students activate their prior knowledge, and how they scaffold their lessons. I explored how content area inclusion teachers plan lessons, deliver instruction to their classes, and assess the reading comprehension of their SWDs (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's (1978) theories are about social development, constructivist learning, and the collaboration among teachers and students (Stetsenko, 2010) and Carrell's (1984) schema theory focuses on how students can comprehend text by interacting with it and applying meaning to it through activating their prior knowledge. More detailed explanations of Vygotsky's theory and the schema theory will be provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative case study consisted of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with seventh and eighth content area inclusion teachers at the study site. The inquiry under investigation was related to literacy strategies and interventions implemented during instruction across the curriculum to assist students with disabilities to better comprehend content material and how to improve reading instruction across the curriculum, as related to Vygotsky's (1978) social development and constructivist learning theories and the schema theory. The teachers who participated in the study teach inclusion classes with students who have disabilities and struggle with literacy skills.

I gathered my data via one-on-one semi-structured interviews. I conducted individual interviews with eight content area inclusion teachers at a single junior high school in a mid-western state. The participants for this study were seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers. The SWDs assigned to inclusion classes at the study site are SWDs with any diagnosed disability, but most students in the district on IEPs have reading disabilities. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and included questions about what literacy strategies and interventions the inclusion teachers commonly use in their instruction to help their students with disabilities understand content material and perceived ways to improve reading instruction at the research site. The questions also focused on how the content area inclusion teachers utilize social developmental and constructivist instructional strategies and techniques to teach students with reading disabilities to comprehend content materials.

I conducted interviews individually, in a neutral and private location within the research site. Interview locations were chosen at the discretion of the study participants. All interviews were audio recorded to allow for accurate transcription. I transcribed the interview data after the completion of each interview. Merriam (2009) indicated that qualitative data collection and data analysis often occur simultaneously, therefore with each interview the theories, themes, and conclusions I made about my study were revised and changed based upon the responses of each additional participant. The data analysis method I used was thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012). I examined the data for patterns using axial coding in the responses of all participants to identify categories and emerging

themes. Once all interviews were completed and the themes had been grouped, there were emerging themes about how seventh and eighth grade content inclusion teachers teach reading strategies across the curriculum.

Definitions

Language: written or spoken human communication; the use of words in a written or spoken form; a system of communication used by a group of people; a system of words, signs, or gestures used by people to communicate thoughts, needs, wants, or feelings to one another

Literacy: possession of education; the ability to read and write; the ability to use arithmetic; an ability to read and write coherently; to be able to think critically about the written word

Assumptions

In this study, I focused on how students with disabilities are being taught reading strategies in the content areas to examine if they are receiving reading support across the curriculum and how reading instruction can be improved. An assumption was the belief that all interview responses from the teachers' interview questions were truthful, detailed, and factual. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggested planning ample opportunities for intense or prolonged exposure to the topic under study to reduce the potential for social desirability responses during interviews. This goal was achieved through additional probing and follow-up questions.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this case study was how seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers embed literacy interventions and strategies into instruction to teach reading so SWD comprehend content material. The first research question specifically addressed the provision of reading instruction by inclusion teachers in content areas. There was a concern that students with disabilities and deficits in reading were not receiving reading support in the content area classes, causing them to fail these classes. This lack of support may have caused students to fail classes because they did not understand the material. The second research question addressed how inclusion teachers plan reading instruction for students with disabilities, using social development and constructivist techniques for their content area inclusion classes. The third research question explored how inclusion teachers instruct reading for SWDs using social development and constructivist techniques in the classroom to improve students' comprehension of classroom materials. The final research question examined the ways the seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers assess comprehension of their SWDs based on the social development and constructivist methodologies. I interviewed seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers and examined their lesson plans to determine what literacy interventions and strategies they embed in their daily instruction.

This study was delimited to the teachers of seventh and eighth grade inclusion art, mathematics, science, and social studies classes. Teachers of English/Language Arts were not included in this study, as reading instruction is part of their curriculum. Students,

those with and without disabilities, will not be included as participants in this study due to my role as a teacher at the research site.

The results of qualitative case studies are not usually generalizable to other study settings; however, the lessons gleaned from a study may be useful to individuals in similar situations. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) explained that transferability is the degree of similarity between a study site and other sites as determined by the reader of the study based on the detail and vividness of the descriptions provided by the researcher. Through descriptions of the context, participants, resources, school, and policies, a reader will find many similarities between the research site and their own site. Readers of this study will identify with the research questions as similar to concerns from their own sites about how content area inclusion teachers are providing reading instruction and planning, instructing, and assessing literacy interventions and strategies in their instruction to students with disabilities.

Limitations

Limitations of the case study design included reporting the data in a concise format. Case studies allow for the abundant collection of data from multiple data sources, which in this study are interviews and lesson plans. Attempting to glean the important, key elements of information and provide a succinct narrative can be a difficult task for a novice researcher (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Since the study took place in my home district, I know each of the participants personally. As a researcher who knew all of the participants, my expectation was that all participants would answer each question honestly, however there was a possibility that

teachers would not answer all interview questions truthfully because they did not want to represent themselves unfavorably in the interview. When data contradict what a researcher expects, they will need to be reported and the researcher reports it as a contradiction, or discrepant case, which could be a potential explanation for the results of the study (Anney, 2014). During the interviews the participants shared how they provide literacy strategies in their instruction, but some expressed concerns that they did not know correct the terminology to use and did not include these strategies in their lesson plans.

Finally, this qualitative study had limitations that might have occurred from personal biases, resulting from the fact that I am an ELA teacher. Personal biases were addressed through using thematic analysis procedures. My personal biases, experiences, and preconceived notions were addressed through the technique of bracketing. Tufford and Newman (2017) explained that bracketing helps researchers keep biases, personal experiences, and preconceptions from tainting their research processes in harmful ways. In bracketing researchers also set aside previous knowledge and research findings by keeping bracketing notes in bracketing journals, allowing for more objective inquiry of interview participants and analysis of data. Bracketing allowed me to manage my biases during interviews and while reviewing lesson plan and interview data (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Significance

Based on recent data from the Ohio Department of Education, students with disabilities continue to miss meeting adequate yearly progress and proficient scores on standardized testing (ODE, 2014). The Ohio Department of Education 2013-2014 State Report Cards progress scores for the SWD subgroup, the largest subgroup in the district, continues to be an area of great concern. Value-added reading data for 2013-2014 eighth graders indicated a score of -2.28 or “F” (ODE, 2014). These data demonstrate that students’ reading scores fail to show that students achieve a year of growth in reading during their eighth grade year. The results suggest that SWDs in the local setting need literacy interventions that support their reading needs across the curriculum. Reading support and instruction can change the brain and how students interact with text, when the strategies are used properly and effectively (Coyne et al., 2011). Content area teachers have the responsibility of finding relevant texts and teaching students how to approach and comprehend substantive text in their content areas (Gutchewsky & Curran, 2012). Unfortunately, many middle school teachers are reluctant to teach reading because they do not feel that they have been trained well enough to teach reading, or because they believe it is someone else’s responsibility to teach it (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Literacy skills need to be integrated into the secondary school curriculum to meet the varied needs presented by students with disabilities as they attempt to manipulate complex content texts (Ehren, Deshler, & Graner, 2010). Content area teachers must find interventions and strategies that meet the unique reading needs of each reader in their class, and the different complexities of their subject area text.

Ultimately, special education students with reading disabilities need literacy strategies to be successful academically in all content areas. The results from this study will be used to help school leaders make informed decisions related to improving the teachers' literacy instruction across all content areas. Reading is a foundational skill used in every subject area and reading skills must be supported in order for students to explore, analyze, and comprehend other content areas (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Helping students change how they approach texts and how they learn can positively affect their futures. Damico and Baildon (2011) suggested that it is necessary for adolescents to become literate within and across subject areas.

Every subject area has its own particular language and terms that must be learned and understood. Therefore, readers, especially those with reading disabilities, must be taught interventions and strategies that give them access to that particular style of text (Reed & Vaughn, 2012). Gilles, Wang, Smith, and Johnson (2013) indicated there are different aspects of language used for the reading of content area texts including the way the disciplines create, disseminate, and evaluate knowledge. Special education students, in particular, need strategies and interventions that allow them to comprehend the content material if there is to be comprehension and manipulation of the content. Like all learners, students with disabilities have certain learning interests and preferences which can make it difficult to focus their interest on content material (Heacox, 2002). Miller (2009) emphasized that students with disabilities need teachers who support them as they develop reading skills in the content area, as well as to help them feel successful academically.

Results from this case study could provide social change with better literacy instruction across the content areas for SWDs. Once the study has concluded, data from the study may help decision makers for seventh and eighth grade make changes in current literacy instructional practices at the junior high school level. Results from the study will reveal attitudes and behaviors as they relate to literacy interventions. Students with disabilities should benefit greatly from improved reading instruction across the content areas, allowing for an increased comprehension of content area texts and materials. With increased reading support in the content areas, students with disabilities should find greater academic success and work independently on class assignments. The results of this study could help the decision makers at the research site make additional decisions for grades 9-12 with current trend data showing increasing numbers of high school students at the research site scoring in the lowest achievement levels on the state tests and fewer students achieving advanced scores (ODE, 2015).

The improvement of reading instruction for students with disabilities at the junior high school level could have far reaching positive social change for the research site and the community. Currently the district is struggling to pass operating levies necessary for the day-to-day financial operation of the district. The community has used annual report cards to rate how well the district is performing, basing district worth on test scores. Feedback at board meetings and the polls indicate our community does not have much faith in the district based on annual state report cards, continually defeating renewal levies on the ballot (ODE, 2015; ODE, 2014). This study has the potential to improve academic success for students with disabilities, thus improving the district report card for

the district. With improved results, the community's confidence in the district could be renewed and there should be less difficulty passing necessary levies in the future. Additionally, the passage of necessary operating levies will create a financially healthy outlook for the district for the future, fund needed academic programming, and save teacher jobs.

Summary

Chapter 1 included a discussion of how students with disabilities placed in general education classrooms as their LRE need extra academic support to be successful. This study explores how seventh and eighth grade content inclusion teachers teach reading to junior high students with disabilities to close the gap in teaching reading practice. It also examines how seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers plan for, teach, and assess students in their inclusion classes. Also of interest is the social change this study may provide for the study site. Chapter 1 also introduced the background of the study, the problem, the purpose, the theoretical framework, and the significance of this case study. The nature of the study, definitions of key concepts, some assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, and the significance of the case study were also explained. In Chapter 2, I review literature related to the study including: literature related to the problem, the Common Core State Standards, recommended reading practices, and studies related to key concepts in the study, the theoretical framework for the study, and methodology for the study. In Chapter 3, I explain the research methodology, research design, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, role of the researcher, and ethical issues related to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

SWDs at the research site consistently score at a low level on state standardized reading tests, and other subject state tests requiring reading. This is despite an increased focus on literacy by content area inclusion teachers building wide. One reason is SWDs often do not have the literacy skills they need to adequately comprehend and manipulate the necessary resources and materials for success in content area classes (Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area inclusion teachers towards literacy, and the means by which they teach literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. In this case study, I examined how seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach reading to junior high students with disabilities to close the gap in practice. I also examined how seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers of special education students with reading disabilities plan for, teach, and assess students in their inclusion classes. Chapter 2 includes literature and research related to literacy across the curriculum common core state standards, and literacy interventions and strategies for students with disabilities.

Literature Search Strategy

In this chapter, I will present literature and research on the following topics: (a) my theoretical foundation, (b) my research problem, (c) teachers’ attitudes, (d) CCSS, (e) recommended reading practices, and (f) studies related to key concepts in my study. The primary resources I used in conducting the literature review were: Walden University Online Library Education Research Complete Database, Google Scholar, ResearchGate.

com, and Questia.com. Key search terms included: *content reading*, *inclusion*, *learning disabilities*, *literacy, reading disabilities*, *reading instruction*, *reading interventions*, *reading strategies for students with disabilities*, *schema theory*, *special education*, *teacher attitudes*, *teaching content reading*, *Vygotsky*, and *Vygotsky in education.*

In an effort to find timely research, I searched key terms both individually and in a variety of combinations within the databases and other sites I used. To find articles related to my study, I started by searching each term individually. I then combined the terms to find articles more specific to my study. The focus of many of the Vygotsky articles I found was on learning in general, so I narrowed my search to articles that were specific to Vygotsky and reading instruction. I also limited schema theory articles to those that were specifically related to reading instruction. With the exception of the Vygotsky framework and schema theory articles, I tried to avoid any research material that was dated prior to 2011 in order to keep my research current.

Conceptual Framework

According to Briggs (2010), Vygotsky's theoretical foundation of intellectual development was socially derived and premised on the belief that learners absorb, integrate, and develop within the social context of the practices, attitudes, and ideas of those around them. Vygotsky rejected the concept that children simply acquire subject knowledge as a complete and finished package (Gredler, 2012). He explained instead that learning is a mental process involving a socially and internally connected process of forming concepts (Gredler, 2012). In his framework, Vygotsky's stresses the importance of the social factors and interactions children experience within their cultures (McLeod,

2014). Because of this emphasis, adults are viewed as an important source of cognitive development for children (McLeod, 2014).

Vygotsky concluded that learning is based on a child's development and that successful learning is only possible when a child's mature mental functions are addressed. He stated, for example, that for a child to process the learning necessary for speech he or she must first have the prerequisite skills of attention, memory, and intelligence (Roberts, 2013). A child's maximum amount of learning occurs in the ZPD, a level of learning unique to each child. ZPD is defined as the distance between where problem solving tasks can be completed independently and problem solving tasks are solved with support and guidance from an adult or a more intelligent peer (Vygotsky, 1978). The role of the teacher in the ZPD is to guide the student to key aspects of the problem until the child solves the problem independently (Roberts, 2013). Within the social paradigm of school, the teacher guides and instructs the student focusing not on what the child currently knows, but on what he is capable of learning alone (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's ZPD is the concept on which the instructional concept of scaffolding reading is built. In their research, Fisher and Frey (2014) found that for students to understand the content they are being taught, it is necessary for them to receive instruction from texts they can read with 95%-98% oral reading accuracy and 75%-89% comprehension rates. With district adopted textbooks, it is not possible to provide students with a text leveled to their reading level. Scaffolding reading instruction, which involves providing leveled, customized instruction to students so that they understand

complex informational text, will allow students to comprehend important content area material, according to Fisher and Frey (2014).

Scaffolding instruction, including the selection of which literacy interventions and strategies to use during instruction, is the responsibility of the teacher. The principle of scaffolding is derived from Vygotsky's framework and firmly uses the ZPD for each student, with teachers carefully considering content, ability levels, the processes students will use when interacting with the content, and resulting products when selecting components of instructional time (Fisher & Frey, 2014). In the classroom setting, teachers' use of the Vygotsky framework also fosters a cooperative or collaborative relationship between teacher and student (Vygotsky, 1978). The student seeks to understand and then internalize new concepts, then develop new schema, after having the new concepts modeled and guided by the teacher (McLeod, 2014).

For students with disabilities, there is the concept of remediation or designing instruction to facilitate an emphasis on acquiring the tools appropriate for the child's culture and environment, to allow the necessary support for the formation of higher mental functions and problem solving skills (Bodrova, Leong, & Akhutina, 2011). Vygotsky believed that teaching is one of the essential factors in development, especially in the different disciplines, giving students the tools they need to understand the content they will encounter (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2009). McLeod (2014) discussed Vygotsky's tools of intellectual adaptation, which encompass the ways that students can use memory strategies and basic mental functions they have learned from the culture and environment in which they have been raised, effectively and adaptively. He stated that

children are curious, active learners, and they are involved in their own learning, capitalizing most from the social contributions made by those with whom they interact. Children are a product of the culture and the environment in which they are raised; they are social creatures (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Vygotsky, learning, especially language learning, does not occur in isolation; it is a social practice (Roberts, 2013). Vygotsky's theoretical framework has had an impact on educational reform and instructional practice, shifting focus away from teacher-centered direct instruction to student-centered instruction (Petrova`, 2013). In a classroom based on Vygotsky's theory, students acquire knowledge through active exploration of the environment and in contexts that are meaningful to the student, not taught in isolation (Stetsenko, 2010).

Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning and development are not independent of one another, but are intertwined from the beginning of development. Therefore, it is necessary to provide students with developmentally appropriate instruction (Briggs, 2010). Adolescents especially, will not develop to their intellectual potential if they are not provided the necessary stimulation they need from the people around them to advance to new goals (Gredler, 2011).

The ability to read, understand, and remember information are critical skills for students during the adolescent school-age years. Unfortunately, SWDs have deficits in most of these skills. Schema theory teaches reading comprehension as a reconstruction of text meaning built from the interaction between the reader and the text (Elmianvari & Kheirabadi, 2013). Chou (2013) indicated there are three stages to this type of

processing: declarative knowledge stage, associative knowledge stage, and procedural knowledge stage. Within these stages SWDs use the strategy to strengthen and expand their schema so they can connect what they already know with the new information they are learning (Rumelhart, 1980). Learners build and organize the new information they are learning with the prior information they knew into chunks. These chunks become integrated into their pre-existing schemata and eventually become their prior knowledge (Chou, 2013). Depending on how well students are taught to do this and how well they understand text structures, the more automatically they will be able to do this process when presented with new material (Elmianvari &Kheirabadi, 2013).

This study benefits from both the Vygotsky (1978) framework and schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980) because the purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area teachers who serve SWDs in their classes and how they implement literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. The Vygotsky framework discusses how best to instruct students in social, interactive activities and the schema theory discusses how best to teach comprehension to SWDs, using the activation of prior knowledge when faced with new text material.

Although Harland's (2003) study involved students and my study will involve teachers, his study was very similar to mine. He used Vygotsky's theoretical foundation and ZPD to inform practice and improve teaching. In his action research study, students were involved in problem-based learning (PBL) curriculum to problem solve real-life problems. The study used Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding to help students as they each entered their ZPD, progressing toward their own levels of independence. The teacher and

student relationship was a complementary process with teachers challenging learners to their full potential and learners developing confidence in their own abilities as teachers gradually withdrew from direct teaching to supporting roles (Harland, 2003).

Although Vygotsky lived and worked in the early 20th century, his theoretical framework is still pertinent to teaching and learning in the 21st century. Petrova` (2013) indicated that learning in schools is a constant interplay and interaction between students and teachers and students and students as part of a learning community. Since teachers have the knowledge, it is their responsibility to find interventions and strategies that will allow each student to learn in their own ZPD (teacher, personal communication, April 4, 2016). Vygotsky's framework is built around the collaborative relationship between teachers and students, a strong parallel with the research questions for this study (Gredler, 2012). This study explores the use of the social development and constructivist approaches in planning instruction for, instructing, and assessing SWDs, seeking to determine if students with disabilities are receiving reading support to access and comprehend content area text. Vygotsky's framework works well for all students, including those with learning disabilities and suggests ways to improve students' ability to learn from the text in content areas.

One suggestion for literacy instruction that has emerged from Vygotsky's theories (1978) of thought and language is the concept of reciprocal teaching. Vygotsky's framework is based on the ideas that human beings can learn from one another how and what to think because learning occurs in "plain sight" and that there is a relationship between thought and language (p. 309). Internal thought processes help to guide the

student during learning and self-regulation, while language serves as a medium for thinking. Since thought and language work together, they develop or emerge concurrently during early childhood (Roth, 2009). Reciprocal teaching is a social way of learning between either teachers and students or groups of students that involves the practices of: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting when using informational text (McLeod, 2014).

Chou (2013) and Elmianvari and Kheirabadi (2013) conducted separate studies utilizing schema theory for comprehension of expository text in English. These studies were chosen because the participants were English as a second language learners and their English proficiency was considered low by the researchers. This researcher felt the results would be transferable to results of SWDs. While study participants struggled with activating prior knowledge due to cultural differences, they were able to learn how to chunk information. Information chunking in comprehension allows the working memory to process other information, giving the learner a better chance of recalling what he/she read (Chou, 2013).

Liu's (2015) mixed methods study sought to determine the effect of schema theory on both comprehension and the speed of recall of information. Interestingly, the study revealed that information that was chunked and assimilated into the brain's prior recall becomes more stable and is retained longer than other information. Schema theory is considered to be both practical and feasible. Schema theory suggests that text has no meaning on its own until assigned meaning by the reader, therefore teachers need to pay

attention to what is going on in the minds of their students, focusing on learner and process centered activities to promote reading comprehension (Liu, 2015).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Literature Related to the Problem

Education has shifted from exclusion to inclusion. Students with disabilities, formerly excluded from most classes and programs, have now been integrated and included in most aspects of the school day. Although this is a positive step for students with disabilities, many are behind in academic skills and struggle to comprehend content area texts as they encounter curriculum content of increased difficulty (Fenty, McDuffie-Landrum, & Fisher, 2012). IDEA (1997) and NCLB (2001) have helped define the educational course for students with disabilities in the regular curriculum, with inclusion classes or general education classes being the LRE placement for many students with IEPs. Unfortunately, LRE placement of special education students in general education classrooms does not equate to comprehension and success in the general education curriculum (Deshler et al., 2001).

Coyne, Kame'enui, and Carnine (2011) indicated there is a continued national focus on literacy development for students, especially those with learning disabilities. In the middle grades, effective comprehension of content area material involves a combination of content specific knowledge and strategy instruction (Coyne et al., 2011). Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) stated it is not possible for students with disabilities to learn the sophisticated and higher level skills embedded in challenging cross curricular texts if they have not mastered the progressively more difficult and technical literacy

skills and tasks. In their research Van Garderen, Stormont, and Goel, (2012) stressed, that the number of students with disabilities being serviced in the general education setting is increasing every year, yet so is the failure rate of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. This direct correlation should not be occurring with the IEP accommodations and supports provided for SWDs in inclusion classrooms.

Fenty, McDuffie-Landrum, and Fisher (2012) indicated that approximately 80% of students with disabilities have a reading disability and read three to five years below grade level. These students need more support than basic reading instruction throughout the school day and would benefit from strategy use during instruction in inclusive settings across the curriculum (Fenty et al., 2012). Daniels and Steres (2011) indicated that within the academic context, leaving students alone with a text is only effective if the reader: (a) possesses the requisite skills to make sense of the reading, (b) knows what strategies are needed to make meaning of what is being read, (c) knows how to use the strategies across a variety of texts, and (d) is interested in the text despite its level, complexity, or style. Unfortunately, these conditions do not always exist for students with disabilities. Curricular texts have difficulty levels and skills that are not easy to learn for students with disabilities (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

School curriculum is not typically at a skill, interest, or complexity level that students with disabilities are able to navigate independently (Daniels & Steres, 2011). Teachers need to find interventions and strategies, such as the Question Answer Relationship (QAR) and a collaborative relationship between general and special

education co-teachers to ensure that students with disabilities, reading below grade level, can success when they work independently with the course text (Fenty et al., 2012).

Literature Related to Inclusion Teachers' Attitudes About Literacy

Content area teachers, who are specialists in content material, are uncomfortable with and not prepared to help students who do not read at grade level by implementing literacy strategies to help them understand the content course material they are required to teach (Warren-Kring & Rutledge, 2011). Unfortunately, many teachers feel overwhelmed when asked to address the literacy needs of students with disabilities in the content areas when they also have content material to teach (Reed & Vaughn, 2012a). Students expect teachers to teach literacy skills they need to be successful in their classes, but teachers who struggle to meet all the demands placed on them in an academic year, often sacrifice literacy learning for their subject area material (Wendt, 2013).

Warren-Kring and Rutledge (2011) conducted a study grounded in Vygotsky's instructional framework of teacher modeling, scaffolding instruction, and embedding comprehension strategies into content area texts. Pre-service teachers in content areas were enrolled in a literacy course and taught various research-based reading comprehension theories, interventions, and strategies to assist students who read below grade level. In addition to taking this class, these pre-service teachers were required to complete field observations of secondary teachers and tutor a secondary student one-on-one. A major focus of this study was the attitudes of content teachers toward implementing adolescent literacy strategies in their classrooms. The pre-service teachers reported a growth in understanding, knowledge, and conceptions regarding adolescents

and their literacy needs in the content areas. Pre-service teachers reported that their comfort level for teaching and implementing literacy strategies in the content areas changed by becoming more positive as the semester progressed (Warren-Kring & Rutledge, 2011). As the study participants learned and understood literacy interventions and strategies in their literacy class, they began to understand the importance of supporting adolescents in their comprehension of content area texts. When the teachers applied the Vygotsky based learning techniques they had learned to real learners in the tutoring situations, they observed how effective the strategies are. The pre-service teachers' understandings, feelings, and beliefs were changed as the semester progressed based on their increased understanding of how important direct teaching of literacy strategies is within the content areas (Warren-Kring & Rutledge, 2011).

Warren-Kring and Warren (2013) conducted a similar study utilizing Vygotsky's framework within a literacy strategy class for pre-service teachers. The participants answered questions related to their attitudes and beliefs about implementing reading strategies in their content areas. Participants were taught research-based reading comprehension strategies such as: teacher modeling, scaffolding instruction, and embedding comprehension strategies in content texts. Then the participants were required to participate in one-on-one tutoring sessions with secondary students who needed assistance with reading in the content areas. Data from the study revealed a significant change in the attitudes of the pre-service teachers about incorporating literacy strategies into content area lessons. Participants reported a greater understanding of the mixed reading abilities of secondary students and expressed a greater degree of comfort with

how to implement literacy strategies. The study participants also learned how to bridge gaps in understanding based on Vygotsky's theories of scaffolding and ZPD (Warren-Kring & Warren, 2013).

Warren-Kring and Rutledge (2011) indicated direct teaching of literacy strategies in the content areas is the most effective way to help SWDs understand content material. However, many teachers have complained that although they would like to provide what research says their students need, their school does not have the funds to allow them to do so (Allington, 2013). Teachers have also reported feeling inadequate and uncomfortable implementing literacy strategies in their content area classes, with many secondary teachers finding adding reading strategies to their curriculum an awkward and time-consuming process (Warren-Kring & Warren, 2013).

Copeland et al. (2011) suggested that despite the focus on literacy education for SWDs, there has been little focus on the preparation of teachers to provide the literacy instruction for these students. Legislation for the education of students with disabilities requires both general and special education teachers to be highly qualified to teach in their content areas because children with and without disabilities receive instruction from individuals with expertise in core content areas in the general curriculum (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). SWDs need reading instruction and support beyond what standard teacher preparation programs provide and many teachers do not have that extensive knowledge of reading (Copeland et al., 2011). Teachers expressed frustration based on their lack of knowledge about how to teach students how to read. This lack of knowledge has caused them to rely on published literacy programs, rather than develop individualized plans for

their students. They also felt that a lack of understanding of the reading process caused them to have very low expectations for literacy growth for SWDs (Copeland et al., 2011).

Another issue teachers faced was finding sufficient time to address the extensive reading needs of SWDs within content area classes. Teachers reported significant challenges with determining what to prioritize in their courses and how much time to devote specifically to content literacy instruction for SWDs (Copeland, Keefe, Calhoon, Tanner, & Park, 2011). Teachers struggled with how much time to devote to academic literacy and how much to devote to functional skills (Copeland et al., 2011). Teachers are frustrated by policymakers making unrealistic decisions about literacy curriculums, noting a huge disconnect between policy and reality and challenging those who make decision about adequate yearly progress to come to their classrooms and face the reality of what really happens on a daily basis (Copeland et al., 2011).

Literature Related to Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (2010) identified reading and writing standards 8th graders in Ohio are expected to master by year-end. Since the CCSS are written as goals for students to achieve, there is no remediation written into the standards, with no margin for error and no exceptions for students with learning disabilities written into the standards. In fact, there are no references that address diverse learners, such as students with disabilities, in the CCSS (Kern, 2014). Annual state standardized tests are based on these standards and students with and without disabilities are required to prove proficiency on these assessments regardless of modifications or accommodations.

The CCSS for reading and writing are specifically for ELA classes; however, there are also sections within these standards that address reading and writing skills within core content classes. Literacy is not a skill isolated to ELA and cannot be compartmentalized; teachers in all the content areas must acknowledge the increasing literacy gap among adolescents (Wendt, 2013). Fenwick (2010) discussed the necessity of literacy support within core content classes such as: mathematics, science, and social studies. In the content areas, literacy interventions and strategies are important for two reasons: teaching students how to understand and comprehend what they are reading in the text and also why they need to learn the material (Parsons & Ward, 2011). Texts in the content areas are specialized and place an emphasis on the language and text favored, valued, and specific to that subject area. Secondary level teachers assume that all students are equipped to comprehend the texts assigned for their class (Fenwick, 2010).

The CCSS for literacy have indicated that students are expected to attain literacy across the disciplines by the time they graduate high school to be competitive in the global workforce (Wendt, 2013). Wendt (2013) further explained that the CCSS literacy standards for the content areas encourage students to engage in inquiry, critical analysis, and the dissemination of material through evidence-based experiences that are meaningful and realistic for them. While these high standards are the goal for most educators, the reality is that there is a need for teachers to provide differentiated instruction for each student in their zone of proximal development (ZPD), including students who have only basic knowledge and skills (Reed & Vaughn, 2012a). Students do not all read and comprehend at the same level and are often placed in appropriately

leveled classes for their ELA classes. Unfortunately, this same consideration is not given, or available, for content area classes. Students who struggle with reading will struggle with reading in all subject areas.

Literature Related to Recommended Reading Practices

The annual report card for the research site reported that 51.6% of 8th graders received proficient scores on the Ohio Achievement Assessment in Reading, with the SWD subgroup continuing to miss meeting annual yearly progress (AYP) (ODE, 2014). This is a strong concern for building administrators that current instructional practice is not adequate for students with disabilities. Bottoms (2004) indicated that to develop secondary level literacy skills, it is necessary for schools to emphasize literacy across the curriculum. Students and staff members alike need to feel motivated about learning to find academic success (Daniels & Steres, 2011). Lewis (2004) stated that to stay in the regular classroom and be successful academically: students with disabilities must receive specialized instruction and innovative strategies. She stressed that academic standards must not be changed for students with disabilities, but rather, effective teachers must help these students demonstrate how they have mastered them.

The content reading problem continues into high school, where many U.S. high school students are unsuccessful academically due to low levels of literacy. Many of the necessary human resources to help provide reading support for adolescent students are available in the typical classroom: patience to instruct students who need extra explanation, a sense of urgency about the literacy problem, and a steering committee to align internal activities to meet the school’s literacy vision (Blankstein, 2011). Although

having these supports in place does not guarantee the SWDs will learn to read nonfiction texts, it does keep literacy as a focus for content area teachers.

Unfortunately, lack of time for teachers to collaborate is referenced as a major obstacle to building commitment, a common mission, and common goals when poor student achievement is discussed (Bacevich & Salinger, 2014; Corrin et al., 2011). When teachers have time to work collaboratively, they have better opportunities to identify and remediate students struggling with content material.

Students reaching junior high school without the fundamental reading skills to successfully navigate the junior high curriculum is a major problem (Boser, Baffour, & Vela, 2016). However, there is also an issue with current instructional practices for content area reading at this level. Ineffective reading interventions and strategies across the curriculum are impacting whether or not students with disabilities can find success with reading at this level (Pitcher et al., 2010). Moss and Brookhart (2012) discussed how teachers are still using ineffective reading instructional techniques, such as round-robin reading, questions at the end of a chapter, and unstructured lecture and note-taking to instruct students in listening and comprehension skills. Moss and Brookhart (2012) also discussed how learning targets are an important strategy for engaging students in their learning. Teachers should provide learning targets for their students to: tell, show, and engage their students in understanding the lesson. By posting the learning target, the learning objective, the standard, and the agenda, the student has more responsibility and ownership for their learning.

Israel, Maynard, and Williamson (2013) suggested moving beyond having students with disabilities read instructional texts independently in the content areas for the sole purpose of learning facts. They suggested meeting students at their current literacy levels by using primary level texts, with independent reading instruction, to teach students the necessary content material. Picture books are another resource content area teachers can use to provide information to and improve literacy skills of students with disabilities. Picture books can be used to introduce new concepts, explain difficult material, or scaffold content material for students with disabilities. Older readers often find the narrative format of picture books more interesting to read than the informational format of the textbook (Senokossoff, 2013).

Scaffolding, strategies closely aligned with the Vygotsky framework (1978), are another instructional literacy intervention in the content areas to assist students with disabilities move from being a dependent reader to an independent reader. Fisher and Frey (2014) explained scaffolding as a process that includes many instructional activities such as: the teacher reading to students, teacher modeling, and students collaborating with each other in reading and comprehension activities. Teachers have an important role in scaffolding instruction for students with disabilities and designing authentic tasks that contribute to students' content literacy learning. By designing authentic academic tasks that integrate content material and literacy, teachers are validating that content and literacy are relevant and important for students (Parsons & Ward, 2011).

Round robin reading is an ineffective instructional literacy strategy many content area teachers resort to when they want to make sure the text is read in their class. Fair and

Fair and Combs (2011) suggested that the use of round robin reading and other ineffective strategies inhibits the development of independent literacy skills of adolescent students with disabilities. The authors suggest moving SWDs along a continuum of strategies that may include: reading partners, think-pair-share, think aloud, guided oral reading, and reciprocal teaching in an effort to read silently and independently. Utilizing Vygotsky's ZPD (1978), students can start with strategies that require more assistance and then move to more independent strategies as their skills improve. The ultimate goal would be to perform most academic reading tasks silently and independently by the end of junior high or high school. Using these strategies can encourage and improve SWDs independent reading (Fair & Combs, 2011).

Without additional literacy interventions, strategies, and support provided by their teachers, students with reading disabilities tend to have lower levels of reading motivation and strategy use, and therefore continue to fail content area classes (Cantrell, Almasi, Rintamaa, Carter, Pennington, & Buckman, 2013). Blankstein (2011) explained that failure is not an option for students in today's educational system, making it necessary for today's teachers to find ways to help all students succeed in the classroom. With students continuing to fail, it is the moral purpose of educators to develop their leadership and instructional practices to educate all students to the highest standards possible; trying to ensure that academic failure is not an option for any child in any public school and making students' academic success the goal (Blankstein, 2011). There is a need to rethink and redesign a curriculum of literacy instruction for the content areas that

includes common academic language, but also respects the unique practices and content materials of each discipline (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

A whole school approach to literacy, at the secondary level, is important if the desired result is all students, including those with disabilities, being able to access curriculum texts effectively (Fenwick, 2010). Cantrell et al (2013) reported that participating in strategy based intervention techniques helped struggling readers change their approach to processing what they read over time, with the less proficient readers tending to prefer text-focused reading strategies, like paraphrasing, to understand what they are reading. As their study progressed over time, the researchers indicated that the struggling readers began to use reading strategies that allowed them to delve deeper into the text, allowing for deeper understanding and comprehension (Cantrell et al., 2013). Daniels and Steres (2011) indicated that schools that focused on creating school-wide reading programs create a family of readers in the school and influencing student engagement, sometimes the first obstacles necessary to overcome when working with reluctant readers. Teachers and students in the whole school had a belief that a structured and systematic approach to sustained silent reading was extremely valuable, taking reading out of the English classroom and showing how important reading is in every subject. Deshler (2005) wrote about basic literacy skills and the importance of their inclusion as an integral part of the curriculum at the secondary level. The broad spectrum of needs and problems perpetuated by adolescents lacking literacy skills cannot be addressed by one program or instructional approach.

Studies Related to Teachers' Instructional Practices

To affect change on the current reading practices, the instructional practices of teachers need to be addressed. Content area teachers need quality teacher training and professional development; unfortunately lack of or inefficient training can hinder teacher progress and educational change (Newman-Thomas, Hassaram, Rieth, Raghavan, Kinzer, & Mulloy, 2012). Education has changed so much in the past few decades that teachers need to feel empowered and supported to make changes in their instructional practices and to make decisions in their classrooms that will benefit their students (Dierking & Fox, 2013). As the stakes for student learning continue to increase, a major priority for schools to address is investment in the implementation of effective professional development that improves teacher buy-in and the implementation of evidence-based instructional interventions (Miller & Stewart, 2013).

Major keys to increasing the academic performance of students with disabilities are the training of the teaching staff and the instructional practices used in the classroom. Orcutt (2014) conducted a mixed methods case study about the reading instruction of students with disabilities. Her research determined the following themes are needed for success: highly trained teachers, high expectations of success, resources provided by the school/district, collaboration/communication, teacher/school response when a student is not making progress, and instructional delivery. Miller and Stewart (2013) also completed a qualitative case study focusing on the teachers. They wanted to determine if facilitating professional development through the use of team coaching could maximize literacy instruction. Results of the study indicated that literacy coaching maximizes the

professional elements of professional development and capitalized on participants' abilities to work collaboratively for solving more complex teaching problems. Risko, Roller, Cummins et al (2008) completed a critical analysis of 82 empirical research studies on teacher preparation programs for reading instruction and found that while teacher preparation programs have shifted back to a more constructivist foundation, the focus in teacher education research is fragmented and scattered. Researchers noted a need for focus on content reading instruction skills for those teaching content areas at the secondary level (Risko, et al., 2008). Professional development and teacher education are key components for empowering teachers, and allowing them to continue learning from each other the skills necessary for authentic classroom transformation. Therefore, in order for students with disabilities to receive the necessary literacy support they need to understand the curriculum across the content areas, teachers need to be properly trained and participate in quality professional development that will allow them to focus on literacy instruction within their content areas (Fenwick, 2010; Miller & Stewart, 2013; Orcutt, 2014; Risko et al., 2008).

Examining changes in how teachers provided instruction and resulting student outcomes were the focus of an observational case study that took place over three years (Newman-Thomas et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers' instructional behaviors changed in response to collaborative professional development, and whether or not the change in teacher behavior affected the outcomes of the students. Results showed that teachers needed different levels of collaboration and support, based upon their years of teaching experience. Teacher participants created learner-centered

instructional classes based on their participation in the study. Ultimately, the study showed most beneficial results were for the students with disabilities. These students developed better higher order thinking skills and achieved access and engagement across the curriculum (Newman-Thomas et al., 2012).

Cantrell et al (2013) conducted a two-component longitudinal study focused on junior high school students. The researchers examined the effects of reading interventions on the reading engagement and performance of sixth grade students. Target literacy interventions in this study included word identification, self-questioning, vocabulary, paraphrasing, summarizing, and making inferences, which are all components of reciprocal teaching, part of Vygotsky's pedagogy (McLeod, 2014). The second major component of this study was teacher training, ensuring that teachers were following correct instructional protocol and demonstrating fidelity of implementation of the interventions. Findings indicated that the sixth grade students receiving the reading intervention became more proficient in reading over time. These students started using more and varied strategies when they were reading and reached deeper levels of text comprehension. This study relates well to Vygotsky's framework (1978) with the reciprocal teaching elements of paraphrasing, summarizing, and making inferences (McLeod, 2014). Harland (2003) used the Vygotsky framework in his study by structuring his action research around Vygotsky's ZPD. The concept that learning is the result of the collaborative problem-solving interactions between teachers and students is embedded in the social constructivist framework of Vygtosky (Harland, 2003). Scaffolding learning for students and then gradually taking it away as students were able

to demonstrate independence in their ZPD for the PBL experiences allowed the researcher to determine that theory was being realized through practice (Harland, 2003). Ultimately, students in this study worked independently and seldom asked the teaching team for help, separating the teacher from the learner and giving the learner autonomy (Harland, 2003).

School-wide programs can be a successful way to integrate literacy interventions and strategies for students with disabilities across the curriculum. Daniels and Steres (2011) conducted a case study examining how and why a school-wide shift to reading changed the culture and student engagement of the school. In this case study, nearly all the teachers in a middle school promoted reading in their classes, regardless of the content area. The school administration provided extensive support to allow this program to happen. The new principal made reading a priority at this school where the majority of students lived below the poverty line. Staff meetings devoted time to teaching the teachers how to talk about books with their students. Everyone in the school would read silently for 15 minutes daily and all teachers, across the curriculum, were expected to keep stocked bookshelves for students. The school provided funding to help teachers purchase young adult books for their classroom libraries. This school was able to create a school culture where reading was something students were engaged in and enthusiastic about because the school incorporated the motivation.

Walsh (2010) conducted a mixed method qualitative case study to learn more about how to plan for literacy learning using both digital and print-based communication. This study sought to ensure sustainable outcomes for literacy learning and teaching.

Study participants included sixteen volunteer teachers. Participants worked in teams to create integrated literacy programs across the curriculum using print and digital texts for students' engagement in reading and responding to texts. Results of the study indicated students were engaged in literary practices and benefitted from extended interventions in literacy. The information from these studies are actions to consider for the research site to work toward for fostering student motivation toward reading. These actions are to: (a) prioritize reading as a school-wide goal and as the subject of staff discussions, (b) provide ongoing professional development focused on young adult literature for teachers, (c) commit time and money to comprehensive classroom libraries and how to effectively manage them for all classes (Daniels & Steres, 2011).

Literature Opposing the Recommended Reading Instruction in the Study

The reading comprehension instruction portion of this study relies heavily on the conceptual framework of schema theory, the belief that text on its own has no meaning until the reader gives it meaning through connections with prior knowledge (Liu, 2015). However, not all researchers, reading experts, and teachers agree that children learn to read and comprehend the same way, often leaving reading instruction full of mixed messages and inconsistencies (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). While many agree that children learn to comprehend best by chunking new material with prior learning and moving it into long-term memory, others have vastly different beliefs about how reading instruction and comprehension take place (Chou, 2013).

Diversity in text, student efficacy, and student engagement are often considered the three most important keys for effective adolescent literacy instruction. Alvermann

(2002) suggests the following six strategies for effectively teaching comprehension: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organizers, answering questions, generating questions, using text structure, and summarizing (Alvermann, 2002).

Reading aloud to students is a popular reading strategy in many reading instruction programs. Pinnell (1999) advocated the use of reading aloud to students, buddy reading, and partner reading in the guided reading literacy program. In this program students are grouped by reading levels and read books together with the teacher, with a buddy or silently to themselves. The teacher is responsible for observing and keeping track of each student and making teaching points based on what is observed. For students who find reading difficult to learn, Fountas and Pinnell (1999) helped design the research-based Reading Recovery program which focuses on phonological awareness (the ability to hear sounds), orthographic awareness (spelling), and word learning in reading and writing (sight words).

Some reading specialists have advocated that the use of invented spelling is a precursor to decoding and pre-reading. It is believed that the more children improved in the phonetic representations and sophistication of their invented words, the more likely their success in learning to read words would be. Students learn the power of the alphabet with a game called “Making Words”. They are given letters and attempt to make as many words as possible from the letters they are given, learning how to rhyme, match, sort, and make patterns (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992).

Cunningham, Hall, and Defee (1998) developed the Four Blocks approach to reading instruction. The Four Blocks approach divides a 2½-hour language arts block into four blocks of guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words. The first goal of the Four Blocks program was to meet the needs of all children without ability grouping; materials are leveled rather than set at grade level.

Pacheco and Goodwin (2013) focused on comprehension reading strategies that break down reading to the explicit understanding of each part of a word. Using this strategy, students are taught how to break down words into their morphemes, or individual units of meaning. By teaching students how to break down unknown words into their smallest units of meaning, they can improve their word usage, spelling skills, and support their reading comprehension.

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) indicated that after conducting a survey of 1,765 sixth-grade students about what made them want to read in their reading and language arts classes, students responded that they want time to read, self-selected reading materials, and teachers reading aloud. Students maintain that silent reading time allows for extra time to concentrate, comprehend, and reflect without distraction. They also stated that teachers reading aloud serve as lesson scaffolding and modeling.

Block (1993) focused on reading comprehension in a literature-based classroom by utilizing cognitive thinking strategies and children's literature. Students are taught how to use thinking and comprehension strategies before they begin reading, then they are assigned a reading selection and told to apply the thinking and comprehension

strategy as they read. In this program students are allowed to choose their own reading material, set goals, participate with classmates during group discussions, and self assess.

Other reading specialists have indicated that picture books and intense vocabulary instruction are the key strategies to text comprehension. Koss (2015) studied the utilization of contemporary picture books as artifacts to help students learn, using picture books as educational tools in the classroom to help students connect with other cultures, represent cultural groups with little authentic information, or help SWDs comprehend content material at their reading level. While Beck, Perfetti, and McKeown (1982) stated there is a strong correlation between an access to word meanings and understanding texts. Therefore if comprehension is related to word meanings, there needs to be a strong emphasis on vocabulary instruction. The semantic processes involved in comprehension include accuracy, fluency, and richness and require specific vocabulary instruction.

Summary and Conclusions

Several themes have emerged from the analysis of the literature that expand from the Vygotsky (1978) and schema theory frameworks. The importance of social interactions and how literacy learning occurs through interactions and collaboration with a skilled teacher (McLeod, 2014), combined with the belief that texts do not have meaning until students interact with them and give them meaning by connecting their prior knowledge to what they are learning (Liu, 2015). Vygotsky (1978) believed that life is about learning and children seek to understand from their teachers who model and provide collaboration and dialogue so the children can understand and internalize, guide, and regulate the knowledge within their own ZPD (McLeod, 2014). As these children

learn more literacy strategies from their teachers, especially how to automatically access information they have already learned to understand new concepts, they will have more success comprehending the content materials they need to be successful in their classes across the curriculum (Liu, 2015).

In an effort to improve the reading instruction in the content area classes, it is necessary to ensure that teachers across the curriculum receive high quality, evidence-based staff development. Teachers need to be supported and empowered as they support the reading needs of the students with disabilities in their classes.

Areas Yet to Be Studied in the Discipline

The study of reading in the content areas is an ongoing process. The collaboration between teacher and student in the area of literacy is an important component in the development of reading skills across the curriculum, but is certainly not the only process for teaching reading. The interaction and collaboration of an adult and student alone should not be considered the only effective learning process for teaching students to read (Petrova`, 2013). Further research in teaching adolescent students how to read in the content areas would be greatly beneficial.

There is a major dearth of research regarding adolescent literacy. While literacy itself is a popular topic, especially when focused on elementary students, there are too few studies focused on adolescents who are unable to read or understand complex texts (Wendt, 2013). Many adolescents with learning disabilities have barely basic literacy skills (Wendt, 2013). Boser, Baffour, and Vela (2016) reported that in many states low income and black students are among the lowest performing students in the nation on

standards-based assessments. There is much research to be done to determine where and what the literacy crisis is.

Another area for future study is improved teacher training and professional development in the area of literacy instruction, especially in the area of schema theory. Jenkins and Agamba (2013) indicated that there is frequently a one-to-one correlation between mandates required of classroom teachers and the supports they need to implement them; therefore, teachers will require well-designed professional development of the CCSS to improve their instructional practices in literacy instruction.

Addressing the literacy needs across the curriculum of adolescents with disabilities from the point of view of the students and/or the parents is an area of research that would be extremely useful. Hearing from the students and their parents exactly what literacy interventions and strategies they feel they need to be successful in the content areas would be beneficial research to this discipline (Pitcher et al., 2010).

Finally, with 21st century learning skills as a focus in today's schools, further research is needed in the area of technology. Expanding research to include technology in the area of reading instruction specifically to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and having qualified staff to use this technology, is a research topic worthy of exploration (Pitcher et al., 2010).

Filling the Gaps and Extending Knowledge of the Discipline

Harvey and Goudvis (2000) argued the importance of helping students access content material, and being taught strategies to better help them understand the text they are reading, while becoming better, more thoughtful readers. The goal of this study was

to make sure teachers across the curriculum were embedding literacy interventions and strategies in their instruction so students with disabilities could learn how to use the interventions and strategies, and also construct meaning, build knowledge, and understand the texts they were working with in their content area classes (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area inclusion teachers towards literacy, and the means by which they teach literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. Based on current data, students with disabilities have scored ‘F’ ratings in the components of Gap Closing and Progress based on the State Report Card (ODE, 2015). The component ‘Gap Closing’ is indicative of how well district students are performing in mathematics, reading, and graduation regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or disability. The ‘Progress’ component is the value added category that determines how much a student has learned in one year (ODE, 2015). There is an adolescent literacy crisis that is affecting junior high school students right now and a lack of focus and attention on literacy in the content areas at the secondary level is adding to the crisis (Wendt, 2013).

Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature and research related to literacy across the curriculum, common core state standards, and literacy interventions and strategies for students with disabilities. This chapter also explored literature based on the theoretical foundation, the research problem, the Common Core State Standards, recommended reading practices, and studies related to key concepts in my study.

Chapter 3 will discuss the central concept of this case study, the research design, research designs that were rejected for this study, the role of the researcher, the methodology used for the study, and issues of trustworthiness in the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area inclusion teachers towards literacy, and the means by which they teach literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. Many SWDs attempt to function within a junior high school curriculum, but fail because they struggle to access content area texts and comprehend class material across the curriculum (Ehren et al., 2010). In Chapter 3, I will state and define the central concept of this case study. I will also explain my rationale for choosing a qualitative case study research design. In this discussion, I will also explain why I rejected other research designs for this study. In the chapter, I will also describe my role in the research process, the methodology I used for the study, and issues of trustworthiness in the study.

Research Design and Rationale

Grand Tour Question: How do seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers teach content area reading to junior high students with disabilities?

Subquestion 1: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers activate students with disabilities' prior knowledge to better comprehend content materials?

Subquestion 2: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers plan instruction for SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social development and constructivist techniques?

Subquestion 3: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social developmental and constructivist strategies?

RQ: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers assess reading comprehension among students with reading disabilities?

The central issues studied in this case study were the instructional practices rooted in from the Vygotsky (1978) and schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980) frameworks of the seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers at the research site. I explored how teachers report activating the prior knowledge of SWDs while teaching reading in their content inclusion classes, as well as how these inclusion teachers plan for, instruct, and assess SWDs using social development and constructivist learning activities. Inclusion teachers were interviewed and their lesson plans were reviewed to determine current planning, instructional practices, and assessments, especially those involving schema theory, social development theory, and constructivist theory.

I determined that a qualitative case study was the most appropriate research design for answering these research questions. Case studies allow for close collaboration between the researcher and the participants, which enable participants to tell their stories, describe their views, their beliefs, and their perceptions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Such collaboration gives the researcher the best opportunity to understand the actions of participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Yin (2013), researchers should use a case study approach when the focus of the study is to answer “how” or “why” questions and when the behavior of participants cannot be manipulated.

In this study, I interviewed junior high school general education teachers about how they taught students in their inclusion classes using literacy interventions and strategies and whether the strategies related to Vygotsky's (1978) social developmental and constructivist learning theories and the schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980). I embedded these theories in the interview questions. A case study approach was appropriate for my study because my research questions were "how" questions, and I did not manipulate the behavior of any of my participants (Yin, 2013).

There are benefits and limitations to the use of case studies in education. Active learning is facilitated and critical thinking skills are developed during case studies (Popil, 2011). Researchers use case studies to apply theory to practice, practice decision making, incorporate alternate viewpoints, analyze data, and synthesize content, which are all critical components of any study (Yin, 2013). Using a case study design for this study was most appropriate, as I sought to examine what literacy strategies were used to teach SWDs across the curriculum at the research site. With any study, the research design is dependent on the research question or questions being asked (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Case studies have an important place in research design. In fact, Yin (2013) advocated for case studies as the primary research design, rather than just an initial exploratory phase of research in qualitative research studies. Contemporary questions that ask "how" and "why" are the main questions in case studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Case study design allows for thorough examination of both simple and complex situations while also taking into account how a phenomenon is influenced by the context in which it is situated (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Conducting case study research requires

organization and rigorous methodology, including a dedication to maintaining a chain of evidence and investigating opposing theories (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case study research does not have to be the initial process of successful research; it can be the entire research design, if done properly and with integrity (Yin, 2013). The case study design was useful for the thorough investigation of how inclusion teachers plan for, instruct, and assess SWDs in the content areas, while still allowing me to consider the context of each situation. I kept field notes and maintain an accurate chain of evidence.

The increasing popularity of qualitative case studies for educational research has resulted in many research studies using the case study research design in the area of adolescent literacy (Chun, & Kalendberg, 2013; Glesson, 2015; Richards, & Dennen, 2014; Ruppar, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015; Slabon, Kiefer & Ellerbrock, 2012; Smith, 2012; Wasburn-Moses, 2013). By interviewing teachers as part of their data collection, researchers were able to gain a deep, thorough understanding of the research questions and problems related to their settings. The use of interviews allows qualitative and case study researchers to gain valuable insight into the perspectives of study participants, the impact of cultural practices, and the thoughts and perceptions of those directly involved in the daily operation of each program being studied (Rumrill et al., 2011). Through the interviews with the participants in my study, I not only learned valuable information about their planning, instruction, and assessment methods, but I also gained more insight into how they felt about literacy, lack of time to collaborate with their peers, and other concerns they had about teaching literacy in the content areas. I could not have gleaned this information from a paper and pencil survey.

The participants for this case study consisted of seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers, excluding ELA teachers, in a suburban community located in a Midwestern U.S. state. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), case studies are detailed examinations of one setting. The researcher can determine how to distribute his or her time, whom to interview, and what to explore in depth (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this case study data collection occurred through participant interviews and the examination of lesson plans. I conducted a case study exploring the instructional practices of general education teachers' embedding literacy strategies in their daily lessons to support the reading needs of SWDs. In this case study, data were collected by interviewing seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers about their use of literacy interventions and strategies in their instructional practices. A case study allowed me to answer the research questions, explore the current instructional practices at the research site, and determine how teachers are, or are not, providing literacy interventions or students with disabilities.

Qualitative study designs that were considered and rejected include ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory. Ethnography was rejected because it focuses on the culture of a group of individuals (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). I did not plan to focus my study on the beliefs, behaviors, groupings, or practices that define 'culture' of the participants in my study. I was not seeking to determine a new theory for the research question, and the psychological phenomena involved in the processes of embedding literacy interventions and strategies into instruction are not part of this study, therefore phenomenology and grounded theory designs were rejected (Percy, et al., 2015).

Role of the Researcher

I am an eighth grade English/Language Arts (ELA) teacher at the research site and I have worked for this district for over 20 years. In this district I have been employed as a special education tutor, a third grade teacher, a fourth grade teacher, a seventh grade ELA teacher, and I have taught eighth grade ELA for the past 9 years. I have known all of the participants as teaching colleagues for varying numbers of years. I have personal friendships with some of the teachers at the school. I am not a department or grade level chair and I do not have a supervisory or authoritative role over any participant in my study. My collegial relationship with the participants eliminated any coercion upon their participation.

As a researcher, I strove to be objective, unbiased, and respectful of each teacher I had the privilege of interviewing. However, as an ELA teacher I was aware of my biases about the importance of reading and reading skills at the middle school level as I worked on this study. I kept track of these biases through bracketing and in my field notes (Tufford & Newman, 2010). I have taught English/Language Arts (ELA) for 16 years, so I was most familiar with ELA standards and unfamiliar with the curricula of the other content areas. However, I had a strong understanding of the reading strategies and interventions used in the content areas. A majority of reading strategies and interventions, especially at the junior high level, can be used across the curriculum.

In order to limit bias in my study I used triangulation and member checks. Anney (2014) noted that both triangulation and member checks could be used to eliminate researcher bias. Triangulation eliminates researcher bias and allows for cross-

examination of the responses given by study participants, while member checks can assist with the analysis and interpretation of results (Anney, 2014).

To triangulate the data, I compared the responses teachers gave during interviews to information provided in their lesson plans. I examined these data to determine if teacher responses during the interviews accurately reflect what their lesson plans indicate they do for planning, instruction, and assessment. How teachers write their plans for instructing and assessing their SWDs and how they talk about instructing and assessing their SWDs will be compared and contrasted and examined for planned literacy strategies.

As a member checking procedure in this study, after I completed my data analysis, I hand delivered each participant a two-page summary of the findings from my study, and asked them for their input and feedback. I asked each participant to reply to me with feedback either in person or in writing within 5 days. The feedback I sought was to affirm that each summary accurately reflected the data each participant provided to me. Each participant provided confirmation of the summaries, requesting no changes, giving additional credibility to the study, because the participants were able to make corrections or challenge my interpretations of the data they provided, if they needed or wanted to do so (Creswell, 2012).

To minimize the influence of my biases in the interviews, in my data collection from the lesson plans, and throughout my research, I used a technique called bracketing. Bracketing is designed to assist with the management of intense emotional reactions of the researcher, the subtle differences in the way questions are posed to participants, or

even whether the body language of the researcher may influence responses during interviews (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Through bracketing I acknowledged and suspended any preconceptions, biases, and assumptions I already had during the course of my study (Tufford & Newman, 2010). For this study, I bracketed my biases about reading standards, reading strategies, and reading interventions as I interview the teachers and studied their lesson plans.

The context of this study was a combined senior/junior high school in a Midwestern state with an enrollment of approximately 1,102 students in six grade levels. The junior high wing is comprised of approximately 370 students in grades 7 and 8. Ninety educators are assigned to the building as teachers and/or administrators. While most teachers teach either junior or senior high school exclusively, there are several educators who teach both levels during their duty day (building secretary, personal communication, March 30, 2015). The combined 7-12 building has been in operation since January 2014, with the former high school having been demolished and the former junior high school building becoming an elementary school. Approximately 70% of the student population qualifies for the free or reduced lunch program. The district also has greater than 25% of its students identified and receiving special education services (building secretary, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

The research site leaders provide inclusion to students on IEPs in two different ways. The first way is inclusion with co-teaching and there are two teachers assigned to the class, one general education teacher and one intervention specialist. Intervention specialists will not be included in this study. The class is a mixed grouping of general

education students and students on IEPs. This mixed grouping classroom setup contains students of mixed abilities in the same classroom learning together. In the co-teaching inclusion classes the general education teacher is the content specialist and the intervention specialist is the accommodation specialist. Inclusion classes are taught using a variety of co-teaching methods depending upon the preference of the teachers involved. Co-teachers can parallel teach, use one teach/one support, alternate teach, team-teach, or station teach (Cook & Friend, 2010).

The second manner in which the research site provides inclusion is with one general education teacher and a mixed grouping class of general education students and students on IEPs. In this type of inclusion setting, the inclusion teacher is responsible for meeting the needs of the SWD within the classroom setting without the assistance of an intervention specialist. Modifications, accommodations to the curriculum, and grading are typically done by the inclusion teacher. If accommodations include having tests read aloud, SWDs can go to their intervention specialist of record to have the test read during that class or during a study hall to take the test. Some students in this situation see an intervention specialist at some point during the day for tutoring, but for many this setting is considered their special education service.

Tutoring is designed to be the least restrictive environment at the study site. SWDs in tutoring are assigned to the tutor, an intervention specialist, for one period, a maximum of five days per week to work on homework, study skills, or any skill related to their IEP. The student to tutor ratio is 3 to 1 each period.

Participant Selection

Currently there are 13 teachers assigned to teach junior high school classes. For the purposes of this study, I was interested in interviewing seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers who teach content area classes, such as mathematics, science, social studies, and art at the junior high school level. Presently there are 12 teachers at the research site who meet the criteria for this study. Due to the small size of available educators, I used a purposeful sample of seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers. I chose to use purposeful sampling because I wanted to invite participants for this study based on their qualifications and their ability to be 'information rich' (Creswell, 2012). I invited every teacher who met the criteria to participate in the study. While it would be ideal for all teachers to participate in my study, it was my hope that at least eight teachers would volunteer to participate and allow me to study the research questions and provide a picture of the issue being studied at the research site. Creswell (2012) indicated that qualitative case studies are typically limited to the study of a small number of participants. When case studies add more participants to the study, the ability to provide deep, rich, in-depth study of the research question becomes diminished.

I did not anticipate recruitment procedures yielding too few participants for this study, but I was prepared to conduct the study with fewer participants. This study could have been completed with the active participation of three general education teachers if I interviewed them more than once and created more interview questions for either more information or to clarify information already given. Another option would have been to seek more participants by including seventh and eighth grade intervention specialist co-

teachers. By definition case studies investigate processes in-depth, focusing on individuals, small groups, or situations (Lodico et al., 2010).

While working on my proposal, I met with the superintendent of the school district to discuss my study and seek permission to conduct my study in the 7-12 building. He signed the Letter of Cooperation required by the IRB. He approved my research study in the district. I also met with the principal of the 7-12 building to ask permission to conduct my study in his building and he gave his permission for my study to be conducted in his building.

The IRB approved my Research Ethics Review Application on October 18, 2016 and assigned me the IRB approval number 10-18-16-0355106. Upon receipt of IRB approval, I invited potential participants to participate in the study. I invited the participants via written invitation, which I hand delivered to each seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teacher in the junior high school wing. The invitation also included: the Consent Form and a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix A). The consent document explained, in detail, the rights of the participant, the expectations of the interview, and the right of the participant to cease participation in the study. Goals of the study, the right to discontinue participation in the study, and my role in the process of the study were also included on the consent form. Before the study began, all participants were provided with my contact information and copies of the interview questions. Due to the fact that work email addresses could be accessed by the administration and could not be secured, I made all contact with participants in person. Teachers who were interested in participating in the study were asked to respond to the study invitation and return the

completed consent form to me, either in my mailbox or personally, within 5 days. Eight teachers volunteered and four teachers declined to participate in my study. Due to the small number of teachers who met the criteria, the study will be small and focused (Creswell, 2012).

Instrumentation

The data collection instruments used in this qualitative case study included an Interview Protocol Sheet and an Interview Question sheet that I constructed (see Appendix A). The Interview Protocol Sheet was designed to ensure that all the interviews followed the same consistent routine (Lodico et al., 2010). The interview questions were designed for semi-structured open-ended interviews and to probe deeply into the area of interest for the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The interview questions were created to encourage the interviewees to talk freely about the topic of their instructional practices and foster scholarly discussion. Questions were designed to sufficiently address each research question and collect data related to how the seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach reading to students with disabilities and align their planning, instruction, and assessments with teacher-student and student-student focused activities in the classroom (McLeod, 2014). Probes were included on the interview question sheet to prompt interviewees if their answers were vague or if more information was needed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The content validity for the interview questions was established using a pilot study. The questions were piloted using feedback from three teachers who will not be involved in the study. Creswell (2012) recommended piloting interview questions to

ensure that participants are able to answer them, poorly worded questions can be changed, and any issues with the data collection instrument can be revised prior to the study. In addition to taking notes during each interview to keep track of my reflections and observations, I audio recorded each interview. The audio recordings provided audio artifacts of each interview, and also allowed me to determine if I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) the same way for each interview, if I asked the questions the same way with every interviewee, and it allowed me to ensure that there was a certain degree of standardization for every interview conducted (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). As soon as possible after each interview, the audio recordings of each interview were transcribed to aid with the data analysis process.

Collection of Data

In this qualitative case study, data were collected using one-on-one interviews with teachers and teacher prepared lesson plans. Interviews conducted in a case study provide advantages for the researcher because the interviewer has better control over the questions being asked and the type of information being received (Creswell, 2012). Although one-on-one interviews are time consuming, if the interviewee is willing to share her experiences, the researcher is able to gather a great deal of information about the designated topic (Creswell, 2012). Interviews were scheduled and conducted individually and at the convenience of the participants being interviewed. Interviews were conducted during normal school hours, in a location of the participant's choice, between October 24, 2016 and October 26, 2016. Each interview lasted no longer than 45 minutes in duration. Interviews had an interview protocol to lead the discussion (see

Appendix A). Participants were interviewed once, and interviews focused on reading instruction to assist SWDs with comprehension of content material and how inclusion teachers plan for, instruct, and assess SWDs in their classes. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. No interview lasted longer than 45 minutes. In addition, the seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers provided one week of inclusion lesson plans in an effort to find a potential planning cycle that included instruction and assessment with reading instruction embedded. Participants were asked to provide their lesson plans to me on the day we met for our interview. It was not necessary to clarify information; therefore I did not need to speak with a participant briefly for a second time.

The interview questions (see Appendix A) were open-ended and designed to elicit in-depth answers from the participants related to the research questions. Creswell (2012) suggested using probes, or sub-questions, to elicit more information if I needed the participants to expand on ideas, clarify points, or explore content in more detail. Examples of probes or follow-up questions included, 'Please explain…' or 'Tell me more…' and were included on the Interview Question Form.

One complete week of lesson plans were collected from each teacher participating in the study at their interview. Lesson plans for each teacher will be placed with the interview transcript for that teacher so data analysis on the interview and the lesson plans for each participant can be completed at the same time.

Data Analysis

All the interviews were audio recorded, and the recordings were used for transcription. I transcribed the interviews. The exact words of each interviewee were transcribed, including nonverbal communication, such as sighs, laughter, and changes in tone. I transcribed all the recordings; no other individual saw or heard the data. I noted non-verbal portions of the interview in my notes in brackets (Lodico et al., 2010). Any discrepant cases in the data analysis, those with data significantly different from the others, were also noted and reported. Anney (2014) indicated that it is important to report when discrepant cases or data emerge that are negative and contradictory to the expectations of the researcher, because they increase the credibility of the study. By reporting the discrepant cases, plausible alternative explanations for the outcomes of the study are being provided.

The data analysis technique I used was thematic analysis. I coded data from the narratives into themes using axial coding and then thematic analysis. By identifying the themes from the narratives of each interview, I was able to delve into the complexity of each individual story and provide depth and insight into the individual experiences of each participant in the study (Creswell, 2012). I heeded the warning from Baxter and Jack (2008) to remember not to treat each data source separately and report the findings of each separately. The findings from both the interviews and the lesson plans were converged to understand the overall study.

As I read through the transcripts of each interview, I wrote down key words and phrases that represented key concepts represented in the initial review of the data (Lodico

et al., 2010). Key concepts were those concepts that were repeated by study participants, as well as concepts key to inclusion in the content areas, teaching reading, and the social development and constructivist theories. Initially, I coded the data using axial coding to reduce and organize data into initial categories. As the categories and themes emerged, I used thematic coding once I had more definitive data categories to analyze my data (Lodico et al., 2010). Participant lesson plans were also reviewed and coded based on key concepts related to the research questions: teaching reading, planning, instructing, and assessing students with disabilities. I grounded all data based on Vygotsky's social development and constructivist learning theories and the schema theory. Axial coding was used for the lesson plans and both axial and thematic data coding were used for the interviews to relate my data categories and key concepts through a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning.

After I established my data codes, I began to script a narrative of the study that included detailed descriptions of the study participants, the research site, and the events of the study to provide thick descriptions of the experiences, participants, and perspectives represented in the study (Lodico et al., 2010). Qualitative research requires detailed, in-depth descriptions of the mundane, ordinary moments of daily life to help readers relate to the study and live the experiences represented in the study (Lodico et al., 2010).

Lodico et al. (2010) described themes as the 'big ideas' that combine several codes from the data that allow the researcher to answer the questions guiding the research. The themes provided the organizing ideas to explain what I learned from this

research study. My final report will be based on the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Dissemination of the Study Findings

Results and recommendations from this study will be shared with all study participants, the building principal, and the superintendent of the district when the study has been completed (Lodico et al., 2010). A written copy of the entire study will be given to the district superintendent and the building principal. A brief written summary of the findings will be shared with the study participants. The superintendent expressed interest in having the study findings shared at a Board Meeting, which are open to the public, for the community to have access to the results.

Trustworthiness

Once the study was conducted and the data were gathered and analyzed, the portions that were to be used in the final report were member checked to ensure that I correctly analyzed and interpreted the data provided by the participants. Each participant received a short summary of approximately two pages that included the findings of the study. No study participants expressed concerns about their data in the findings. Member checking is considered to be crucial process in the credibility of a qualitative study (Rumrill et al., 2011). Researchers have a responsibility to include the voices of study respondents in the analysis and interpretation of the data and member checking allows that to happen (Anney, 2014).

Creswell (2012) suggested the use of triangulation, or corroborating evidence from multiple data sources, to enhance the accuracy of a research study. I collected data

using multiple sources including interviews and lesson plans. Due to the fact that data for this study came from multiple sources, participant interviews and lesson plans, I was able to use triangulation for both credibility and dependability for this case study. Through my use of field notes, and bracketing, this study will meet the standards for conformability (Anney, 2014). Field notes in qualitative research are researcher notes that include both descriptive and reflective information that occurred during observations or interviews (Creswell, 2012). These field notes include things I observed, concerns I had, and any other thoughts and ideas that occurred while I conducted the interviews or analyzed the data.

Ethical Procedures

The protection of human subjects in research was my first concern, as with any researcher, and I had a focus and concern about the physical, emotional, and psychological health of each my participants. This protection included the right of any participant to cease participation in the study at any time (Lodico et al., 2010). This right was printed on the consent form and participants were reminded of this right prior to the interview. Participants were protected from harm in several ways. Through my completion, submission, and subsequent approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application at Walden University, I was ensuring that I, as the researcher, complied with the ethical standards and federal legislation related to research involving human participants. Creswell (2012) maintained that the role of the IRB was to assess any potential risk factors that could affect research participants, and ensured that my research study suggested no violations of any human rights. Until I received approval by the

Walden University Institutional Review Board and the assignment of an IRB approval number, no data were collected. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-18-16-0355106 and it expires on October 17, 2017.

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants in my study, I did not use their names or identifying characteristics in the study. Participants were always identified by the pseudonyms they chose when I processed, analyzed, collected and reported data during interviews or from lesson plans (Creswell, 2012). All participants signed consent forms when agreeing to participate in the study, and acknowledged that they understood all efforts would be taken to ensure their anonymity during the process of the study and after. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and at any time participants could choose to cease participation for any reason. Data are stored on a separate memory stick in a locked file drawer in my classroom. Data from the study will be securely stored for five years in a locked drawer in my classroom and then it will be shredded.

My district superintendent granted permission to conduct my research study in my school. I also received permission from my building principal to conduct the study in his building. The superintendent and the building principal served as the official gatekeepers in my district, and they are the individuals who granted me permission to access the participants I needed for my study.

In my school district there is only one 7th-12th-grade building that houses both the junior and senior high school students. Due to lack of another available junior high school in the district, my research study was completed in my own building. Creswell

(2012) stated that the ethics related to this issue are similar to those of action research. I acknowledge that participation and data collection for my research study were not coerced from the participants and I did not seek to establish caring relationships with the participants, these research relationships were established based on a commitment to social change (Creswell, 2012). This type of research relationship also required a commitment for open and transparent participation, respect for the knowledge of the people involved, democratic processes, and sustainable social change (Creswell, 2012).

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to examine how the seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers at the school were providing reading instruction to SWDs and how they plan for, instruct, and assess SWDs. The participant sample, role of the researcher, researcher's bias, interview process data collection, and data analysis were discussed in this chapter. The ethical protections put in place for the physical, mental, and psychological safety of the participants in this study were also discussed in this chapter. The transferability of this study was viable due to the thick description provided in the narrative, allowing readers to relate to the problem represented at the research site. Study participants represented a wide variation of people through experience, age, and gender. Chapter 4 will address the implementation of the pilot study and the research study at the research site, information including: the setting and demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area inclusion teachers towards literacy, and the means by which they teach literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. To reach this goal, the lesson planning, instruction, and assessment practices of eight content area inclusion teachers through one-on-one interviews and review of their lesson plans. I guided the study with the following research questions:

Grand Tour Question: How do seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers teach content area reading to junior high students with disabilities?

Subquestion 1: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers activate students with disabilities' prior knowledge to better comprehend content materials?

Subquestion 2: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers plan instruction for SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social development and constructivist techniques?

Subquestion 3: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social developmental and constructivist strategies?

RQ: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers assess reading comprehension among students with reading disabilities?

Vygotsky's (1978) social development and constructivist learning theories and schema theory provided the conceptual framework for this study. The findings from this study provided in-depth, descriptive information supported by current research (see Cantrell et al., 2013; Fenty et al., 2012; Fisher & Frey 2014; Israel, Maynard, & Williamson 2013; McLeod, 2014; Newman-Thomas et al., 2012; Reed & Vaughn, 2012) regarding recommended reading practices, teachers' instructional practices, and teachers' attitudes about literacy. Chapter 4 will include a discussion of the administration of the pilot study, the setting and demographics of the participants involved in the research study, data collection and analysis procedures of the research study, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the research study.

Pilot Study

On October 18, 2016, Walden University's Institutional Review Board approved my application (Approval No. 0355106, expiration date of October 17, 2017) to conduct my research study. Upon receipt of IRB approval, I made copies of consent forms for both the pilot study and the research study and interview questions and began distributing consent forms and asking individuals to participate in either the pilot study or the research study. I distributed informed consent forms individually to individuals who did not meet the eligibility criterion for the research study, for participation, in the pilot study. These individuals included the seventh and eighth grade ELA teachers and the junior high school ELA intervention specialists. In all, I invited five individuals to participate in the pilot study. The pilot study consent form included a brief description and background of the study, expectations of pilot study participants, an explanation of

the voluntary nature of the pilot study, the risks and benefits of participating in the pilot study, a statement that there would be no payment for participation in the pilot study, privacy information, and a statement of consent to be signed by the participant. Of the five consent forms I distributed for the pilot study, I received four-signed consent forms. I scheduled those four individuals for one-on-one interviews for the 2 days immediately following receipt of the consent forms.

I conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews with three of the four pilot study volunteers using the research study interview questions and the interview protocol. The fourth individual was ill during the administration of the pilot study; I was unable to reschedule her interview. During the one-on-one interviews, I used the interview protocol to ask the pilot study volunteers each of the interview questions. In addition to using the pilot study to test the interview questions for trustworthiness, I also asked the participants to give me feedback on my body language, facial expressions, how I asked the questions, how I reacted to their answers, and whether I remained neutral during the interviews.

Each pilot interview was conducted in the setting of the participant's choosing. I asked participants in the pilot study to choose a pseudonym to protect their identities, even though their results would not be included in the final study. I used the pilot study to determine if the interview protocol or interview questions needed any changes. I also practice using my audio recording device during pilot study interviews.

The pilot study interviews all went as planned. Participants answered all of the interview questions. I requested feedback on the wording of the questions, my questioning style and pacing, and the timeframe of the interviews. I did not receive any

feedback suggesting that I needed to change the focus or wording of any questions. When I asked for feedback regarding my body language or whether I remained neutral during the interviews, Maria indicated that I did not react to her responses and that I did not show any indication to how I felt about what she was saying. All three participants indicated that I seemed “neutral” during their interviews and that content area teachers should have little difficulty answering the interview questions. The only cautionary note I did receive was from Thelma. She warned of the potential problem that research study participants might be defensive about not teaching literacy skills in their classrooms because they are not ELA teachers. Conducting the pilot study did not lead me to make any changes to the research study interview protocol or the research study interview questions. However, it was an important way to validate the interview questions, and it gave me practice in conducting the interviews.

.Setting

At the time of the study, there had been no recent major changes to the setting, personnel, budget, or organizational structure that should have affected or influenced the participants, their experience in the study, or my interpretation of the study results. However, if this had been a year where the faculty union was either in negotiations for a new contract or about to enter negotiations, it would have been difficult, I believe, to find volunteers to participate and the participants would have been less willing to share about their classroom experiences. I timed my study at the very end of one sporting season and prior to the start of another, so participants who coached teams were willing to give me some of their time if I promised to make the interview fairly short. Teachers have many

tasks to accomplish during a school year and do not relish the thought of taking on one more. The timing of my study during the school year and the relatively low participation requested of the participants, beyond providing a copy of their lesson plans and answering interview questions at one interview session, were in my favor. In addition, participants had an element of power over their participation in the study, because they knew they could drop out of the study at any time and for any reason. The timing of this study, which was around the middle of the second quarter, was about the most normal, uninterrupted time of the school year. The brief lull in sports; the fact that there was no levy on the ballot, and with no contract negotiations underway, made for favorable conditions for data collection. If the participants were angry, stressed, and unhappy in their jobs, it would have negatively affected the results of the study.

I invited all of the seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers at the study site who were eligible, to participate in the study. I met with each individual face-to-face, briefly explained the study, invited them to participate, and gave them a consent form. These forms included: study information, participant requirements, sample interview questions, explanation of the voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of the study, notification that there would be no payment for the study, privacy notice, contact information, and a statement of consent to be signed by the participant. I told each potential participant to take time to think about whether or not they wanted to participate in my study, read over the consent form, and return the form to me, or that I would come back in a day or two. I handed out 12 consent forms. I also made sure to tell

each potential participant that I would need 1 week of lesson plans, if they chose to participate.

Within 3 days of distributing the forms I had contact from all 12 eligible study participants and I had a final sample size for the study of eight. The participants for the study were both male and female and represented all the subject areas: science, social studies, mathematics, and art. Teaching experience for study participants ranged from 2 to 24 years.

Data Collection

Data were collected over the course of 3 days, between October 24, 2016 and October 26, 2016. Participants were interviewed during one-on-one interviews, following the interview protocol. Each interview lasted no longer than 45-minutes and took place during the participant's planning period, during the school day. One week's worth of lesson plans was also collected from each participant at the time of interview. Each interview was audio recorded on a handheld audio recorder, with the participant's permission. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to choose a pseudonym to be used in place of their actual names. Amy, Andrea, Clint, Emma, Jeremy, Lacey, Mike, and Sheila were the pseudonyms used to identify the participants for the remainder of the study. These teachers taught in a range of inclusion settings; some taught in inclusion settings with no intervention specialist, some taught in inclusion settings with and intervention specialist, and others taught in inclusion with classroom aides. The interviews were conducted in a private location of each participant's choice between October 24, 2016 and October 26, 2016. Other than the occasional interruption

over the PA system for an announcement, there were no unusual circumstances encountered during data collection. These interruptions are noted in the interview transcripts. In some interviews the participants chose to talk over the announcements, in others the participants chose to pause and resumed their comments at the end of the announcements.

In each interview I started by explaining that the questions were divided into three sections: planning, instruction, and assessment and that although many of the questions may seem the same, they were not. I also informed the participants that although I was recording the interview, I would also be taking notes, so to please not be nervous if I started to write things down while they were talking. I then started asking the questions verbatim from the interview question sheet. For some participants I had to repeat questions, for others I had to explain questions to them. The content of each interview varied with respect the character, style, and personality of each interviewee.

During each interview, I read every interview question to the participant verbatim from the interview question sheet. Even though the interviews were recorded, I took notes on the interview question sheet (see Appendix A). I did not write down what the participant said word-for-word, but I wrote down key words that I wanted to remember, important body language, personal thoughts that their responses made me think, and any environmental issues I wanted to remember, such as the announcements interrupting a response. I referred to my handwritten notes many times, especially during the transcription process.

The interview questions (see Appendix A) were aligned to each research question. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by me into a Word document. At each interview participants provided one complete week of lesson plans as a second source of data.

Once the interview transcriptions were completed, initial data analysis of the interviews and lesson plans was completed. Initial data analysis involved reading through the transcripts and lesson plans and coding key words in different colors. I categorized the key words as they related to the grand tour question, the sub questions, and the research question. Key words used during data analysis included, but were not limited to: strategies, comprehension, differentiation, time, literacy, interventions, guided, modeling, and assessment.

Data Analysis

In qualitative case studies, themes emerge through the continuous review of data (Creswell, 2012). I read through the transcripts five times, coding key words that I felt were related from each transcript in the same color. I placed key words into categories, each labeled with a different color that represented each research question. For example, in each transcript, I underlined everything related to providing instruction in green. These pieces of data were placed in the category labeled, instruction. My categories were: Activating Prior Knowledge, Planning, Instruction, and Assessment. I used axial and thematic analysis for my data analysis (Creswell, 2012). First, I examined the data from all of the study participants looking for patterns using axial coding to identify categories and emerging themes. Once all interviews were completed and key words had been

grouped into categories using axial coding. I used thematic coding to determine the following themes, related to the research study questions: teacher planning and instruction correlation, differentiation, and understanding research-based interventions.

After the initial data analysis procedure, individual participants were presented with a printed two-page summary of the findings I gleaned from their interview and lesson plans for member checking. I asked the participants to review the data and to let me know if there was anything they wanted me to change regarding their contributions to the study. There were no requests for changes, corrections, or clarifications from participants.

After the final thematic analysis of the data, the emergent themes for this study were directly related to the research questions: teacher planning and instruction correlation, differentiated instruction, and understanding research-based interventions.

Results

The analysis of the data collected during this study resulted in the emergence of three major themes related to the research questions from this study. The three themes that emerged from the data of this study were: teacher planning and instruction correlation, differentiation, and understanding research-based interventions. Each of these themes extends from the research questions.

Grand Tour Question: How do seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers teach content area reading to junior high students with disabilities?

In this study I explored how the study participants planned their instruction and completed their lesson planning process, to activate the prior knowledge in order to comprehend content materials, using social development and constructivist techniques.

Theme 1: Teacher Planning and Instruction Correlation

The first goal in this study was to find out how seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach content area reading to their SWDs and how seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers help their students understand content materials by activating their prior knowledge.

Subquestion 1: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers activate students with disabilities' prior knowledge to better comprehend content materials?

Subquestion 2: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers plan instruction for SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social development and constructivist techniques?

The majority of the participants shared that they do not use the textbook assigned to their class because it is too hard for their students to comprehend. Instead, many of the participants reported trying to find leveled materials online, creating guided notes that are similar to the text but with "friendlier language" or copying sections of their texts and highlighting, underlining, and annotating for their students. Students are provided with leveled outlines for taking notes, with blanks or definitions filled in based upon pre-assessment data. Study participants were asked if they used specific reading interventions or strategies in their instruction to teach reading to their students. The specific literacy

strategies discussed during the interviews were: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, predicting, and activating prior knowledge. All of the strategies the study participants were asked about, with the exception of activating prior knowledge, were strategies used building-wide and strategies for which all content area teachers had been provided materials such as graphic organizers and teaching strategies. In addition to the interviews, the lesson plans of each participant were examined to determine if teachers listed these reading strategies in their lesson plans.

Study participants were asked questions about the lesson planning process and asked how the IEPs of SWDs were accessed and used for lesson planning purposes. Participants provided detailed responses about how they planned for their classes and how they considered the needs of their SWDs during their planning. While sharing how they planned their lessons, study participants also provided ways they planned to differentiate their lessons for their students with disabilities.

The data from the lesson plans did not corroborate the data reported by the study participants in the interviews. Each lesson plan listed common core state standards, objectives, assignment procedures, materials needed, and other basic items found on lesson plans. Although the lesson plans reflected content specific to their respective courses, none of the lesson plans contained information regarding reading non-fiction texts, comprehension activities, or using literacy skills. In addition, none of the lesson plans referenced literacy activities, differentiated instruction, or accommodations for SWDs. Collected lesson plans were not a clear representation of the intended instruction or academic activities in any class.

As part of the lesson planning process, study participants were asked during their interviews how they obtained access to the IEPs of their students. The content area teachers all reported reading at least the accommodations and modifications needed for each of their SWDs. The respondents reported various ways they were provided with information about their SWDs. Participants indicated they had accessed IEPs via the online grade book, and through paperwork from and briefings by the case managers.

Clint stated, "I have been given, by all the teachers of record, most of them are the inclusion specialists working with me, they have given me their IEPs and reviewed them with me." But he reiterated that he does not do the modifications to the lesson plans or use the IEPs when he writes his plans, "[The inclusion teachers] do the modifications. Oh, no, no. I don't do that." Lacey shared how she could access IEPs through the online grade book or the teacher of record, and she created a file for each class detailing the accommodations required for each of her SWDs. She used these files to take notes on her SWDs on an attendance sheet so she could have a "snapshot" outlining the needs of her students. However, despite her detailed accommodations list, Lacey admitted she did not use the list when writing her lesson plans and did not include the information in her plans.

Andrea does not put any modifications or accommodations in her lesson plans either, "I have their accommodations in the back of my mind." Mike said he has used both the master list from the intervention specialists and the online gradebook, "There's a master list that one teacher put together and gave us and then using the online grade book, you can click on the actual file and investigate and kind of learn about students

individually that way." Jeremy has also relied on Progress Book, but indicated that he has had some issues accessing the IEPs, "I keep them on Progress Book. We use that as access, but a lot of times they don't show up there, so whatever the special education teacher gives me, I use that." Amy said she uses Progress Book. Andrea said she has used a mix of Progress Book and the paper work that the intervention specialists have given her, "sometimes I am given a full paper copy, sometimes I am given a summary page." Emma said the same thing, but indicated, "to be honest I look at the computer a lot more often because it is written right there." Sheila said that she has been sent all the modifications, but "I have a co-teacher so he's really good about knowing exactly where every student is…"

When participants were asked how they used the IEPs to help them write their lesson plans, the responses varied greatly. Summarize how they varied before providing transcript excerpts. Sheila indicated that using current IEPs, she and her co-teacher, "When we're planning…we kind of base it off of what we've done in the past and saying based on this group's IEPs, their modifications, and their skill level, how long do we think it's going to take?" Emma said that she reads the IEPs and adheres to "the personal aspects of it and then the accommodations and modifications," but she relies more on classroom performance for levels and abilities. When writing her lesson plans Andrea indicated that she has, "their accommodations in the back of my mind, so I know if someone needs to take a test or a quiz with [the tutor]."

Amy indicated that none of her students have IEP goals specific to her class, so although she helps her students with organization, she helps all of her students, not just

her SWDs. Jeremy indicated that he reviews the summary and accommodations before he writes his lesson plans. Mike shared, “I want to make sure that any modification or accommodation that’s required is going to a part of every one of my lessons so I can make sure I don’t miss anything. It’s not hard to do when you teach inclusion every year.” Clint and Lacey both indicated that they do not put IEP information in their lesson plans.

When the study participants were questioned about providing literacy instruction in their content area inclusion classes, they were asked if they used the following literacy strategies: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, predicting, and activating prior knowledge regularly during instruction. The study participants reported that they used these strategies, and other literacy strategies, regularly.

Theme 2: Differentiated Instruction

The second goal of the study was to determine how study participants use differentiated instruction in both their lesson planning and during instruction to ensure that all students, especially SWDs better understand content material. Study participants were asked to share how they were able to ensure that SWDs were able to independently read and comprehend content area materials based on their ability levels, how they differentiate instruction, and how they helped their SWDs overcome reading challenges in their classrooms.

> Subquestion 3: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social developmental and constructivist strategies?

With the exception of Mike, who reported that he obtained the reading levels of his students from their state test scores, the study participants had no knowledge about the reading levels of their SWDs. In some cases the teachers admitted that they did not know where or how to find out the reading level of their students. These data, combined with the fact that study participants did not include IEP modifications and accommodations on lesson plans, were a concern with teachers not knowing the strengths and weaknesses of their students.

Although the study participants did not include IEP accommodations or differentiation strategies on their lesson plans, most study participants did report the implementation of differentiation strategies during instruction. Lacey indicated that she did used the accommodations from the IEP as a “starting point” at the beginning of the year, but then differentiated for her students based on their classroom performance, not the IEP documentation, “I know who the kids are, or depending on what I end up finding out from the entry ticket or for that next day, who needs what.” Emma initially begins her instruction using the concept of Universal Design. She believes that when she designs her lessons if she includes something that she feels is going to be useful for her SWDs, then she should make it available to her other students, too. However, “I know there’s some students that work at different paces, so sometimes I will shorten or adjust an assignment for students that work at a slower pace. And I do that at a more individual basis, as I get to know the students and their work level.” Jeremy and Clint differentiate by finding leveled worksheets online that have less material, but still cover the important concepts. Based on pretest scores for each unit in his subject, Mike differentiates for his students by

providing different levels of outlines based on the ability levels of his students. Blank outlines are provided for students who score the highest on the pretest and the lowest level students receive outlines with all the words and some of the definitions filled in for them as a guide. Mike also modifies assignments for his SWDs by reducing the number of questions they have to answer. Lacey surveys her students at the beginning of the school year to help them learn what their learning style is and then tries to differentiate for them based on their learning styles. Clint indicated that he relies heavily on his intervention specialists to make the modifications and do the differentiation in his classes, but for assessment SWDs have a slightly different rubric.

The majority of study participants shared that they seldom use their district-adopted textbooks. The consensus among the respondents was that they felt their texts were too challenging for their students. Mike and Jeremy both discussed how they did not use the text often, but when they did they would copy off a section at a time on the copier for their SWDs so they could highlight, underline, and annotate the section for them. They do this to eliminate any extra or confusing material and to help their students better comprehend the reading. Lacey indicated that the text for her subject area is fairly new and very difficult. In fact, she will not give the textbook to her students if they struggle in her subject area. In her department, Lacey and her partner teacher work together to create Smart Notebook pages to replace the textbook.

> For lack of a better word, we "dumb it down" a tiny bit. We still use the graphics, but we try to put the words in seventh grade-friendly format. We're watering down the verbiage from the book, but we make it kind of look like the book.

> We'll use the same pictures, we'll use the same story problems, examples, those kinds of things, but in the notes, you make it short and sweet. (Lacey, personal communication, October, 26, 2016)

Lacey continued to explain that when looking for information online or creating notes for her students, she tries to "water it down." Lacey stated that too often the mathematics text is written at a higher level, so she tries to decipher it and put the words in a seventh grade-friendly format.

Theme 3: Understanding Research Based Interventions

The third goal of this study was to find out how teachers teach SWDs using social developmental and constructivist strategies in order to comprehend content materials. The relationship between teacher and student is a crucial element in learning (Harland, 2003). I wanted to know if the study participants used teacher-to-student or student-to-student activities to foster learning in their classrooms, as they relate to Vygotsky's (1978) social developmental framework. The third sub question was:

> Subquestion 3: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social developmental and constructivist strategies?

While many strategies related to the social developmental and constructivist theories were reported as instructional strategies used in the classrooms at the study site, none of the respondents made reference to Vygotsky's (1978) learning theory or a student's ZPD, nor were they asked to state what learning theory they used to direct their instruction. Despite indicating that they used many different differentiation strategies,

study participants rarely used the term “differentiation.” Typically the participants discussed working one-on-one with students, grouping based on ability, grouping by concept, or relying on the intervention specialist for modifying assignments.

The study participants shared various ways they used social developmental and constructivist strategies to differentiate their lessons in order to teach their SWDs to comprehend content materials. Common activities for activating prior knowledge included pretesting, anticipation guides, and think-pair-share. The content area inclusion teachers also reported the use of a large selection of social developmental and constructivist strategies. These strategies included flexible grouping, chunking material, think-pair-share, graphic organizers, conferencing, scaffolding, and pre-testing. Sheila explained how she groups her students by ability and used the strategy “think-pair-share”.

> We group them based on ability, so the students who are struggling with a certain concept will work together so everybody’s thinking, everybody’s working, and everyone has to participate. We do a lot of think-pair-share. They work on a problem by themselves, they get with a partner, then we discuss it as a class. (Sheila, personal communication, October, 24, 2016)

Sheila expressed a desire for more training to find more strategies that could help her with teach reading comprehension. She stated that her students appear to have the mathematical processes of a problem mastered, but the reading comprehension portion causes issues when attempting to ultimately solve the problem.

> Maybe if there are some other strategies that we can use to help with comprehension especially, I think that's where a lot of my students fall off the

> wagon. Like they think they have the math down, it's reading that and really comprehending what the questions saying. (Sheila, personal communication, October, 24, 2016)

Mike indicated that while he gives individual attention to students as often as possible: "I try to teach to the whole group, and then from there it would be small group." Sheila, Andrea, and Amy all indicated that they use pre-test data to group their students by ability for based on concepts they are working on in class. They also use the think-pair-share strategy so that students have a chance to work independently, with a partner, and then share out in class. Sheila said, "We do a lot of think-pair-share. They work on a problem by themselves, they get with a partner, then we discuss it as a class." Jeremy indicated that he likes to work individually with his students after he has taught his lessons, "It's just one-on-one. I mean there's just no real other option. We can put them with groups, but in my experience it doesn't always work out to the best."

The study participants also explained how they try to help their students build their understanding of new concepts, rather than expecting them to grasp new concepts immediately. Jeremy explained how he taught an entire unit, starting at the very basic stage of definitions, then working the students all the way to 3-D projects, helping them construct their understanding of the concept through classroom activities and discussion. Clint does something similar by spiraling his curriculum. "Everything is always in a constant spiral. I've got a common theme. Everything is taught, pretested, taught, tested, retaught." Students are able to construct learning about new topics because, "everything is constantly being taught and recycled all the way through the year."

Discrepant Cases

There were no discrepant cases in this study from either the lesson plans or the one-on-one interviews. Creswell (2012) explained that analyzing and interpreting data, as well as, providing thick description of it is a complex process. Taking apart the provided data, to determine individual responses to questions, then putting them back together in a detailed rendering representing the participants, their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes is a process involving coding and themes during the data analysis process. During data analysis all data provided were considered and included, as all perspectives are important in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

During the research study process, trustworthiness was a priority. In order to ensure the credibility and internal validity of the interview questions, as well as obtain feedback on the interview protocol, a pilot study was conducted. Credibility and internal validity of the study were ensured in several ways. Field notes assisted with the data collection, and also helped to keep track of personal thoughts and comments throughout the study. Field notes were also used to track my activities during the study and can be used as an audit trail. The field notes can be used to determine how well credibility techniques were followed to ensure the credibility and internal validity of the study (Rumrill at al., 2011). Member checking was also used for credibility. Member checking followed the primary data analysis of the interviews and lesson plans, allowing study participants to validate their own data, further ensuring credibility (Rumrill, Cook, & Wiley, 2011). Study participants were given a two-page summary of my initial findings

which included the themes that emerged from the lesson plan and interview data that was analyzed to member check. Participants were asked to review the summaries to ensure that the information they provided was correct and that they were represented correctly. At this time every participant had an opportunity to request changes or corrections to their data. None of the participants had concerns about their data in my findings and no one asked me to change anything pertinent to the study. Anney (2014) explained that member checking ensures credibility and internal validity in a study because it includes the voices of the study respondents in the data analysis and interpretation portion of the study.

Triangulation was used to corroborate the data collected in the study. Data collected from the individual one-on-one interviews was compared to data collected from lesson plans. The use of multiple sources of data allowed for triangulation, enhancing accuracy and corroborating the evidence (Creswell, 2012). Data including types of activities planned for SWDs to activate prior knowledge, literacy strategies and interventions, and differentiation activities were sought from both the lesson plans and the interviews for comparison and analysis.

In qualitative studies the researcher assumes the results will be transferable, as the transference is the responsibility of the individual reading the findings (Barnes et al., 2012). Therefore, it is assumed the findings of this study would be transferable. This study has provided further suggestions for study and the limitations of the study; therefore, even though the participants of the study do not represent every seventh and

eighth grade content inclusion teacher, the findings from the study are able to be transferred (Barnes et al., 2012).

Anney (2014) indicated that my use of field notes and bracketing met the standards for conformability or neutrality in this study. My field notes are not only an audit trail of what I did and when during the study, they contain notes about things I observed during interviews, concerns that I had, thoughts, feelings, and ideas that occurred to me while I conducted the interviews and analyzed the data. The field notes also contain the bracketing notes that I made before and during the study.

Summary

This chapter focused on the results from the data analysis of the one-on-one interviews and lesson plans of seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers. This chapter revealed the main themes of the study that emerged from the analysis of the data collected from the study participants and the lesson plans. These themes, directly related to the research, are lesson planning and instruction correlation, differentiated instruction, and understanding research-based interventions. These themes reveal areas of concern at the study site and are the basis for recommendations for both further research and recommendations for future practice at the research site. In addition to the results, in the chapter I also described the pilot study, the setting of the study, the demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. In chapter 5 I will discuss the purpose of this study, summarize key findings, interpret the findings, discuss limitations of the study, describe recommendations for further research, and discuss implications for impact for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area teachers who serve SWDs in their classes and how they implement literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. This qualitative case study consisted of one-on-one semistructured interviews with eight seventh and eighth content area inclusion teachers at the study site. The inquiry under investigation was related to literacy strategies and interventions implemented during instruction to assist SWDs to better comprehend content material and how to improve reading instruction, as related to Vygotsky's (1978) social development and constructivist learning theories and schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980). The study participants taught inclusion classes, either with or without intervention specialists, with students who have disabilities and also struggle with literacy skills. The study was conducted to determine how to improve content literacy instruction at the study site for seventh and eighth grade SWDs.

Data were collected from the lesson plans and one-on-one semistructured interviews with eight content area inclusion teachers at a single junior high school in a midwestern U.S. state. The SWDs assigned to inclusion classes at the study site are students with any diagnosed disability, but many of the students in the district with IEPs have reading disabilities. All interviews were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix A), and included questions about what literacy strategies and interventions the inclusion teachers used in their instruction to help SWDs understand content material. The questions also focused on how the content area inclusion teachers used social

developmental and constructivist instructional strategies and techniques to teach students with reading disabilities how to comprehend their content materials.

I conducted each of the interviews individually, in private locations around the research site chosen by each of the study participants. Interview locations included vacant classrooms, and an empty conference room. All of the interviews took place during school hours and lasted no longer than 45 minutes. All of the interviews were audio recorded to allow for accurate transcription. All interviews were transcribed into a Word document, which I then printed out.

The study was guided by the following questions:

Grand Tour Question: How do seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers teach content area reading to junior high students with disabilities?

Subquestion 1: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers activate students with disabilities' prior knowledge to better comprehend content materials?

Subquestion 2: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers plan instruction for SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social development and constructivist techniques?

Subquestion 3: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach SWDs to comprehend content materials, using social developmental and constructivist strategies?

RQ: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers assess reading comprehension among students with reading disabilities?

A disconnect related to teacher lesson planning and instruction was noticed during the analysis of the data collected during the study. Tenets of Rumelhart's (1980) schema theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social and constructivist theories, the conceptual frameworks of the research study, were recognizable in many responses given by the study participants, although participants did not refer to social or constructivist theory by name. The study participants referred to various teacher-student and student-student interactions in their classrooms. These included whole group, small group, partner, and individualized instruction, demonstrating an understanding that students learn best when they are in groups of varying size and that the teacher is the key agent in learning. Teachers indicated that in order to help students understand what they are learning, they take as many opportunities as possible to work one-on-one with students. They also described units that allow students to construct meaning of new concepts through participation in classroom activities.

Analysis of the data revealed a disconnect between teachers' planning processes and their instruction. Participants reported performing lesson planning activities during the lesson planning process, such as differentiation and warm-up activities, but analysis of the actual lesson plans did not indicate that these activities were incorporated in lessons. For example, several study participants mentioned using the literacy strategy "think-pair-share," but analysis of their lesson plans, which represented 1 week's worth of lessons, did not reveal any mentions of use of this strategy. Lesson plans did not include information about SWDs or activities for differentiation. During interviews, I asked participants what they did during their lesson planning process, including accessing

IEPs, and what teachers reported doing for their lesson plans and the lesson plans that were submitted that did not match.

Interpretation of the Findings

Three major themes emerged from the analysis of collected data. The three major themes emerged from the interview data. The themes are indicative of gaps of practice at the research site. The themes that emerged from the data analysis in this study are teacher planning and instruction correlation, differentiation, and understanding research-based interventions.

Theme 1: Teacher Planning and Instruction Correlation

Study participants reported teaching content reading to SWDs in a variety of ways. Content area inclusion teachers reported using summarizing, questioning, and predicting along with other literacy strategies to teach reading in their subject areas. They reported using various strategies related to summarizing, questioning, clarifying, predicting, and activating prior knowledge to instruct SWDs in their inclusion classes. The study participants activated prior knowledge by introducing concepts from prior units or earlier grade levels. Many teachers reported using questioning, pictures, songs, and short videos to activate the prior learning of their students about the concept they were about to learn. The study participants also reported modeling strategies such as questioning to activate prior knowledge for their students.

I found that the lesson plans did not match the information provided by the study participants in the one-on-one interviews regarding the instructional strategies and interventions they planned for their students. The lesson plans collected from the study

participants at the interviews did not contain information about literacy strategies, IEP accommodations, differentiation strategies, or any detailed lesson procedures regarding literacy. Most of the participants admitted that they do not write their whole lesson plan down; some said it was "in their head." Thus, there appears to be a disconnect between the planning and instructional processes at the research site.

Comparison of Findings with Literature

The findings revealed several concerns based on current research. Current literature has indicated that it is most beneficial for SWDs to have a combination of strategy instruction and content specific knowledge (Coyne et al., 2011). Within the Vygotzky framework, social ways of learning literacy between teachers and students or groups of students involve the practices of: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting when using informational text (McLeod, 2014). Mike indicated that summarizing was especially helpful for people, battles, and places. Clint stated, "In [my class] we do a lot of predicting. It's called hypothesizing. That's a fundamental part of my curriculum, and they frequently do lab activities and they are required to make predictions." Jeremy teaches his students to predict, or as he calls it "infer," by showing them pictures and making them do quick writes about what they see, what they think the picture might be, or what made the picture happen. "It's kind of a way to get the facts and then you predict or infer what you think is happening because of those facts." Emma explained that she has used breaking down the question many times because she has found that students do not seem to grasp questions with multiple parts. "They have a hard time if a question has two parts to it. So we talk about reading the whole question first

and breaking it down in that way and kind of answering what it asks for." All of the study participants talked about how they teach their students about questioning and how to look at all parts of a question and how to answer what a question is really asking.

It is important for teachers to think about what they are going to teach and how they are going to teach it before they teach it. Lesson planning is an important part of the instructional process. Giving advance thought to what types of strategies and interventions will work with class content and the academic needs and accommodations of students, especially those on IEPs. Newman-Thomas et al., (2012) examined over the course of a 3-year study how student outcomes changed based on how the teachers provided instruction (Newman-Thomas et al., 2012). Scaffolding, a strategy closely aligned with the Vygotsky framework (1978), is an instructional literacy intervention used in the content areas to assist students, especially those with disabilities, move from being a dependent reader to an independent reader. Fisher and Frey (2014) explained that scaffolding is a process that includes many instructional activities such as: the teacher reading to students, teacher modeling, and students collaborating with each other in reading and comprehension activities. Teachers need to make sure they are designing authentic tasks for teaching reading like journals, word walls, interactive computer programs, and other real world activities. Scaffolding, a key process in teaching reading, can align with these authentic tasks when doing activities like Show and Tell or using visual aids and graphic organizers to explain a new concept. Teachers should provide many instructional reading and comprehension activities where students and teachers can collaborate and students can collaborate with each other (Frey, 2014).

Theme 2: Differentiated Instruction

Study participants reported many and varied differentiation techniques for their SWDs. Lacey explained that at the beginning of the year their department gives the students a “What’s Your Learning Style?” test so students can find out if they are more audio, visual, or kinesthetic. “Then that way they know, if you are an audio person, you can just listen and not write.” She goes on to explain that everyone can get copies of the notes, but they try not to force students to write if they are audio learners. Jeremy explained that he differentiates with guided notes and outlines and sometimes he finds leveled worksheets that have the same content at different levels, “Lower ability…the same types of things…like sometimes I can find them where they are leveled and I will give them the one that has less in it, but still has the important concepts, but doesn’t take it too far. But, in some instances, teachers stated that they provided modifications and interventions to all of their students and “blanketing” them with modifications. By providing class-wide modifications, the teachers are no longer differentiating their instruction.

Comparison of Findings with Literature

Daniels and Steres (2011) stated that SWDs do not independently navigate a general school curriculum because it is not typically at complexity, skill, or interest levels compatible with these students. Therefore it has become the role of the general education teacher and the special education teacher to find strategies and interventions to make SWDs with reading challenges successful in the content areas with the general school curriculum (Fenty, McDuffie-Landrum, & Fisher, 2012). While high academic standards

are the goal for most educators, the reality is that there is a need for teachers to provide differentiated instruction for each student in their zone of proximal development (ZPD), including students who have only basic knowledge and skills (Reed & Vaughn, 2012). The findings from the one-on-one interviews with the study participants revealed some issues at the study site. Students do not all read and comprehend at the same level and are often placed in leveled ELA classes, such as resource ELA. However, the same consideration of leveled classes is not given, or even available, for content area classes at the study site. Students who struggle with reading will struggle with reading in all subject areas, but do not receive the academic support they need to be successful. Fair and Combs (2011) suggested that teachers should consider differentiation for SWDs along a continuum of strategies including reading partners, think-pair-share, think aloud, guided oral reading, and reciprocal teaching in an effort develop more independent reading skills.

Copeland et al. (2011) suggested that while there has been an increased focus on literacy education for SWDs, there has been little focus on the preparation of teaching literacy for the teachers who provide the literacy instruction for these students. Legislation for the education of students with disabilities requires that both general and special education teachers to be highly qualified to teach in their content areas, because children with and without disabilities receive instruction from individuals with expertise in core content areas in the general curriculum (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001). Students with disabilities need reading instruction and support beyond what standard teacher preparation programs provide, but many content area teachers simply do not have that

extensive knowledge of reading (Copeland et al., 2011). Israel, Maynard, and Williamson (2013) suggested moving differentiation beyond having students with disabilities read instructional texts independently in the content areas for the sole purpose of learning facts and meeting them at their current literacy levels using primary level texts, picture books, and other lower level materials to provide content information to and improve literacy skills to students with disabilities.

Theme 3: Understanding Research Based Interventions

The study participants reported instructional delivery methods in alignment with schema theory and Vygotsky's (1978) social and constructivist theories related to literacy in the content areas. Through their responses, the participants indicated that they had an understanding that students learn best when they are involved in activities with their teacher and their peer. Instructional strategies and settings varied dependent upon the lesson, the strategy being used, or the need of the student. The participants mentioned included whole class, small group, partners, and one-on-one. Sometimes the one-on-one pairings were teacher-student and other times they were student-student. Instructional strategies related to social developmental theory included conferencing, think-pair-share, reading aloud, games, and modeling to allow students to learn literacy strategies either with their teacher in a one-on-one or small group situation, or in groupings with classmates. Examples provided of constructivist learning related strategies were portfolio notebooks and units with interdisciplinary integration. Sheila and Lacey both referred to the notebooks that students were required to keep in their classes. Sheila mentioned that they continually refer their students to their notebooks to reteach themselves and

construct meaning on their own, "We have students look back at their notes to refer to prior skills before they come ask us a question. We'll say where are your notes? Did you look in your notes?" Lacey has even recreated the textbook, which she believes is too hard for her students, into Smart Notebooks. "We're watering down the verbiage from the book, but we make it look like the book. We'll use the same story problems, examples, …we tried to group the thoughts, and things are chunked visually."

Comparison of Findings with Literature

The findings are consistent with the literature that in order to learn literacy, students with disabilities need to participate in learning activities with their teachers and classmates. Students with disabilities tend to have lower reading motivation and strategy use and continue to fail their content area classes if they do not have additional literacy strategies, instructional time, and support from their teachers (Cantrell et al., 2013. However, the findings also indicate that there are issues related to understanding strategies within the theoretical framework. While the study participants reported use of many Vygotsky (1978) and Rumelhart (1980) framework related literacy strategies such as scaffolding and journaling, they did not always use them correctly. At times study participants reported using a strategy, for example scaffolding, using the correct name of the strategy, but then described a different strategy. Clint made the comment, "Discussing literacy is hard for me." and Jeremy stated that he was a bit nervous because, "I don't know the big words!" Lacey admitted that reading "is not my specialty" so she doesn't want students who struggle in reading to feel threatened by it either.

Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) stated that it is necessary to redesign a literacy curriculum for the content areas that includes common academic language. Within Vygotsky's (1978) framework, is the belief that life is about learning and that children learn from their teachers through interaction with them and dialoguing with them. In an effort to begin the creation of a common academic language, the study site has created a school-wide literacy culture with the vision, "We Read, We Write, We Succeed." but the data revealed is teacher concern about whether or not they are implementing the strategies correctly. Combs (2011) suggested that SWDs instruction be comprised of a continuum of strategies that include: reading partners, think-pair-share, think aloud, guided oral reading, and reciprocal teaching in an effort to read silently and independently. By utilizing Vygotsky's ZPD (1978), SWDs can start with literacy strategies that require more assistance and then move to more independent strategies as their skills improve. But, ultimately, SWDs are encouraged to read independently (Fair & Combs, 2011).

Analysis/Interpretation of Findings in Context of Theoretical Framework

Briggs (2010) stated that Vygotsky's theoretical framework is about the development of thought and reasoning and placing value on social interactions, with learners developing, absorbing, and integrating within the social contexts of the people around them and their ideas, practices, and attitudes. Most of the study participants I interviewed for this case study reported using strategies from schema theory, and Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theories. In addition, according to the data provided during the one-on-one interviews, each of these educators has reportedly designed their

instruction with an understanding that adults have an important role in the cognitive development of children, and that a child's maximum learning occurs during involvement in active and authentic learning activities with the teacher or classmates (Vygotsky, 1978). In fact, Clint holds the belief that students come to him with little to no schema in his content area. "I assume there is no prior knowledge. I can't control the prior knowledge. All I can control is the knowledge that is acquired when they were with me…I reflect on all the schema they acquire with me. We build on that." The study participants reported that they lead and guide their students through instruction with instructional strategies and with social interactions, until their students are able to complete tasks independently and successfully (Roberts, 2013). In the content areas, literacy interventions and strategies are important for two reasons: teaching students how to understand and comprehend what they are reading in the text and also why they need to learn the material (Parsons & Ward, 2011).

Limitations of the Study

The case study design was a limitation of the study, limiting the data report in a concise format. Baxter and Jack (2008) explained that the copious amount of data collected from the lesson plans and interviews would render my skills to write a short, concise narrative impossible.

Another limitation of this study was that all data were reported by the study participants and not observed by me. Because the interview data and the lesson plan data did not align, lesson observation would be a valuable data source. If I would have had the opportunity to observe the study participants teaching, I would have been able to

determine if they used the literacy interventions in their teaching or not. I could have observed if they interventions they said they used were actually the interventions they were using. For example, the individual who indicated that she used scaffolding but then described a different strategy; it would have been more reliable data to see her teaching and using a literacy strategy correctly, rather than listening to her describe a strategy incorrectly. Data would have been more reliable if I had observed the study participants using the literacy strategies during instruction, as reported during their interviews. Observation would have improved the reliability of my study because it would have been one more source of data for triangulation. Triangulation of data would have been strengthened if I had observed teachers during instructional time in their classes.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the data findings, my analysis, and the current literature, I have several recommendations the research site to improve the implementation of literacy strategies and interventions for SWDs in the content area classes.

The first recommendation would be for further research in high-quality, long-term, site-based professional development focused on adolescent literacy rooted in Rumelhart's (1980) schema theory and Vygotsky (1978) social and constructivist theory strategies. Staff development that focused on research-based literacy strategies and interventions, and how to implement them, would be beneficial for all staff members. First, it is necessary to ensure that all staff members are implementing the same research-based literacy strategies with the instruction of their students. Second, it is important that

staff members are implementing the strategies and interventions correctly. The data collected with this study indicated that in some cases study participants were using terms interchangeably or teaching strategies incorrectly. Literacy is a key element in learning content material and the better students can read and comprehend, the more effectively they will learn content in the content areas. Each content area uses different comprehension strategies to understand their subject. Wolsey and Faust (2013) explained that each content area required different comprehension strategies. In social studies students are asked to focus on authors purpose, point of view, and how to analyze different accounts of historic events. On the other hand, science classes require students to inference, visualize, interpret graphs and charts, and make inquiries with difficult and complex vocabulary. Finally, mathematics texts are written differently than standard reading texts and require special attention to text features and discipline specific words (Wolsey & Faust, 2013).

A second recommendation would be further research in the area of a more standardized way of notifying teachers about SWDs on their rosters and their required accommodations and modifications and how to hold those responsible for a student's IEP accommodations and modifications accountable. A key part of lesson planning is differentiating instruction for all students, especially SWDs. Study participants were asked how they differentiate for SWDs in their lesson plans. Responses varied, and actual lesson plans showed no actual documentation for differentiation for students with disabilities. It was noted during the interviews with the study participants that they received notifications about accommodations and modifications for their SWDs in a

variety of ways, ranging from checklists with modifications to photocopied summaries from the IEPs. There appeared to be no official format for notifying teachers of required academic accommodations or modifications. In order to provide appropriate differentiated instruction to SWDs and adequately meet the legal requirements of a student's IEP, teachers need to be made aware of and be held accountable to the accommodations and modifications on a student's IEP. It would also be important to include the reading levels of each student on this document, for easy reference for content area teachers. The creation of a standardized method for all case managers to use for notifying content area inclusion teachers in the building about the accommodations and modifications of SWDs would be a responsible way to keep all stakeholders updated and ensures that everyone is compliant with the IEPs of SWDs.

Implications

Methodological, Theoretical, Empirical Implications

There were no methodological, theoretical, and/or empirical implications for this study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of content area teachers who serve SWDs in their classes and how they implement literacy interventions and strategies in their lessons. The population I identified for this research study was seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers. This population was significant for the study. Data provided by this population allowed me to explore the research questions supported by the literature review in Chapter 2 and provide recommendations for social change that could increase the academic success and literacy skills of adolescent SWDs.

Positive Social Change-Local

Upon completion of data collection and analysis, the findings of this study revealed many issues related to understanding research-based literacy strategies and how to correctly teach and implement them at the research site. In order to meet this challenge, teachers need quality, research-based professional development and training to closely align planning and instruction related to literacy instruction. The seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers would learn to work collaboratively with inclusion specialists to create lesson plans that meet the instructional and accommodation needs of SWDs in the content areas. Classroom instruction would align with lesson plans that include differentiated, research-based practices designed to benefit every learner. Teachers would be sure to include activities based on Vygotsky’s (1978) practice of scaffolding learning by breaking new concepts down into chunks or Rumelhart’s (1980) schema theory, where everything a student knows is stored as units of information and how they interact with one another, activating information students already know to increase their comprehension. Students with disabilities will have better success in classes with plans and instructions that are aligned and embedded with researched-based literacy interventions that the teachers understand and are comfortable teaching them. As these students begin to see success in their content area classes, their confidence will increase and so will their grades. Student success in the classroom has the potential to affect test scores and ultimately graduation rates.

I anticipate many positive social changes from this study, if the decision makers of the district accept the research-based recommendations based on the analyzed data.

First, after quality, research-based professional development in the areas of literacy instruction and the theoretical frameworks, teachers at the research site will be more knowledgeable about literacy strategies, schema theory, and the social and constructivist theories. Although the teachers already know numerous literacy strategies, they do not necessarily know how to teach them to SWDs or teach SWDs how to use them when they are working independently. Through quality professional development, content area teachers will learn how to embed literacy strategies into their subject areas to support their students and help students construct meaning when they read content in their disciplines (Gilles et al., 2013). They will better understand how to teach literacy strategies in the content areas and have a better concept of how students learn and the importance of the teacher in the learning equation. With better training and professional development, teachers at the research site will be more confident and empowered to teach literacy and embed it into their subject areas because they will understand that content areas require different types of reading than developmental reading (Gilles et al., 2013).

Another positive social change I envision at the local site is improved lesson planning by inclusion teachers at the research site that aligns with instruction. Teachers need high-quality, research-based professional development to gain a better understanding of how to develop lesson plans for meeting the accommodations and modifications of their SWDs and active their prior knowledge so they can comprehend content materials. Teachers also need to incorporate social development and constructivist techniques in their lesson plans. Warren-Kring and Warren (2013) described professional development that allowed teachers the opportunity to work

collaboratively within their schools for a year, to develop and integrate literacy into their content instruction. Over the course of the year the teachers from all disciplines worked together and supported one another in order to implement content-area literacy strategies and interventions in their lessons. This was a successful endeavor for this site, as they not only encouraged each other, but they adjusted their teaching methods and saw improvement in the literacy skills of their students. Providing content area teachers and intervention specialists with daily time to collaborate, conference, and plan interdisciplinary lessons and activities would be provide positive academic results for SWDs.

Positive Social Change-Societal

The results from this study contribute to the literature on adolescent literacy, which is lacking in breadth. The goal of adolescent literacy is more than simply ensuring basic reading skills for middle school students. Adolescent literacy implies that students can within complex texts, making inferences, learning vocabulary from context, connecting with the text, and summarizing the main idea (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013). Working to improve the literacy skills of adolescent learners, especially those with learning disabilities, can have an effect on the instructional practices of those who teach this age group. Ultimately, working with adolescent SWDs who have reading limitations has no finite end. Working to make literate adolescent SWDs has so many positive effects on society. Adolescent SWDs with better literacy skills have opportunities to take higher-level high school courses, including foreign languages. In addition, when SWDs are able to keep passing grade point averages in high

school, they are able to attend the local career center, which is a consortium of four local high schools, to study and apprentice in master trades. When SWDs are more successful in secondary school, college or trade schools become an option, allowing for better employment opportunities as high school graduates.

Conclusion

Through the creation, planning, implementation, and completion of this study I have been many things: student, researcher, colleague, outsider, teacher, and friend. I have viewed the subject of content area literacy through many lenses and various perspectives. Though I did not find the answer to how to unlock literacy strategies for adolescents with SWDs in this study, I am grateful I had the opportunity to explore literacy outside of my classroom and subject area and find out how other teachers are working hard to help adolescent SWDs navigate the path of literacy. I was exposed to the educational ideas, philosophies, and practices of fellow educators that I would not have experienced had I not embarked upon my doctoral journey and I learned much more than I ever could have learned on my own.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

1. Greet the interview participant and thank them for participating in the study
2. Remind the participant that all responses shared in the interview will be kept confidential
3. Obtain general descriptive information about the participant and the setting for notes
4. Remain neutral
5. Remember to use probes during the interview process (Lodico et al, 2010).

Interview Questions

Grand Tour Question: How do seventh and eighth grade inclusion teachers teach content area reading to junior high students with disabilities?

Sub question 1: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers activate students with disabilities' prior knowledge to better comprehend content materials?

Sub question 2: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers plan instruction for SWDs to activate prior knowledge to comprehend content materials, using social development and constructivist techniques?

Sub question 3: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers teach SWDs to activate prior knowledge to comprehend content materials, using social developmental and constructivist strategies?

RQ: How do seventh and eighth grade content area inclusion teachers assess reading comprehension among students with reading disabilities?

- How many students are in one of your inclusion classes? How many of those students are identified as a SWD?

- What literacy interventions do you implement in your instruction to help students with learning disabilities better understand their textbooks?

- Please describe how you teach literacy skills to your students with disabilities.

- When planning your lessons, how do you differentiate instruction? Explain.

- How do you obtain access to the IEPs of your students for lesson plan writing, and how do you use the IEPs when writing your lesson plans?

- When planning your lessons, what types of activities do you include to help activate the prior knowledge of your students?

- How do you ensure that all students, including those with learning disabilities, understand the text and other reading material in your class? Please explain.

- Explain how you scaffold content material in your class to help students better understand more complex concepts? If so, please explain how you do it.

- How are you able to determine what content your students are able to read independently based on their ability levels?

- What types of leveled materials do you provide for your lower ability students to enable them to understand content materials?

- During instruction time, how do you help your students activate prior knowledge of the topic in order to help them comprehend necessary reading assignments?

- Do you use any of the following comprehension interventions or strategies in your instruction, and if so, how do you teach them?
    - summarizing
    - questioning
    - clarifying
    - predicting
    - activating prior knowledge

- How do students' poor literacy skills serve as a barrier to comprehension in your content area?

- Please describe how you help SWDs overcome reading challenges in your classroom.

- We have a universal school vision, "We Read, We Write, We Succeed." What more do the teachers and school leaders need to do to make that vision become a reality?

- Describe the support you receive to teach reading skills to students with disabilities in your classroom?

- Please describe the types of assessments you give in your classes to determine if your students have understood your class content.

- In the assessments you use for your inclusion classes, do you embed questions, graphics, or other information to help students activate their prior knowledge? Please explain.

- What do you do if a student fails an assessment?

- Do general education and special education students take the same assessments? Please explain.

- What, if any, training did you receive to be an inclusion teacher?

- What additional training/staff development do you need to assist you in teaching reading skills in your content area to help your students comprehend your material?

- Describe any extra or special resources available for your inclusion classes. What resources would assist you in teaching your inclusion classes? Describe any additional human resources (excluding the interventionist) provided to you for your inclusion classes? What is their role?

- Is there anything you would like to add?

Clarifying Probes
Tell me more about…
Did you talk with…
What does "not much" mean?

Elaborating Probes
Tell me more…
Could you please explain your response?
I need more detail about…