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Middle School Literacy Teachers' Perceptions of Their Self-Efficacy to Teach Reading Standards

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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by

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MA, Walden University, 2007

BS, Western Carolina University, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

With the implementation of more rigorous reading standards nationwide, teachers are feeling less secure about their abilities to teach students to become proficient readers. Utilizing Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as the conceptual framework, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers perceived their self-efficacy to teach complex reading standards to struggling readers. Seven middle school English language arts teachers from 2 schools in a southern school district participated in this study. The research questions addressed teachers' understanding of the recent Common Core literacy standards and perceptions of their own self-efficacy to teach mastery of these standards to struggling readers. Semi-structured interviews with teacher study participants were recorded, transcribed, coded, and then analyzed in search of common themes. Findings showed that teachers perceived themselves to be knowledgeable about the literacy standards but, believed themselves unprepared to teach mastery of the standards to students who read significantly below grade level. Middle school teachers in this study claimed they had received no training that emphasized effective strategies for struggling readers and believed that training in such strategies and more collaboration with colleagues would increase their self-efficacy to enhance reading skills of struggling students. The resulting project created from the findings was a series of professional development sessions for middle school teachers to explain reading strategies that support the reading development of struggling readers. This study could affect positive social change by identifying ways in which middle school teachers may become more empowered to teach struggling readers. When teachers are empowered, their confidence and self-efficacy levels increase, and students benefit from effective instruction.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Marvin Russell and my daughter Khalilah who at times had to take on my wifely and motherly duties as I spent many days writing, revising, and editing this paper. I continue to hear your voices telling me, “It’s okay,” when I was unable to make breakfast and dinner. I will not forget the sacrifices you made along this journey and while you both were not writing, your willingness to take on my duties made it all possible.

To my mother, whom as a single parent did whatever was necessary to ensure I had a college degree. For this doctoral degree, you were unable to provide the financial resources, but your constant encouragement kept me going. You told me many years ago, it did not matter what I wanted to become, I just needed to make sure that when I completed a task, I must make sure it was done to the best of my ability. With the help of others, I completed this task to the best of my ability.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my late aunt, Frances, who was my cheerleader up until the time she died. On days when we spoke, and I was working, you would get upset when I mentioned quitting. I want you to know that I did not quit. I made it to the end.

To the lady who saw more in me than I saw in myself and introduced me to the idea of enrolling in a doctoral program. I dedicate this paper to Dr. Vallerie Coathe Cave. Your unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement was second to none. Thank you for constantly checking in on my progress and for listening as I whined about the process. You never agreed with me when I would say, “it’s too much.”

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

One important goal established by leaders of K-12 educational institutions is to prepare learners to become literate citizens. To achieve this goal, school administrators must ensure that the teaching of rigorous literacy standards is a major component in the development of the literacy curriculum. Literacy lays the foundation for success in schools because proficiency in other content areas (math, science, history, and social science) is highly dependent on the mastery of literacy skills (Clinefelter, 2008; Franciois, 2005; Vacca & Vacca, 2008). Since students' chances of engaging in college level studies or achieving success in the world of work correlate with their literacy achievement levels (Tyner, 2012; Sulkunen, 2013), educators are always examining literacy standards and instruction to ensure that, upon graduation, students can contribute to society.

The development of literacy skills takes place in K-12 classrooms guided by teachers who are responsible for teaching the content of the intended literacy curriculum. The four factors that affect literacy instruction are establishing literacy standards, developing a literacy curriculum, delivering the curriculum, and assessing the achievement of literacy standards (Tyner, 2012). Of the four, delivering the curriculum is most critical and is the task undertaken by classroom teachers. Students' literacy development lies in the hands of teachers who must possess in-depth knowledge of grade-level literacy standards and must equip themselves with the tools needed to deliver

literacy curriculum to learners that perform below, on, or above grade levels (Tyner, 2012).

This project study focused on middle school English language arts (ELA) teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy to teach reading standards to struggling adolescent readers. While working with teachers as an academic coach, I became privy to their concerns about many educational issues. One issue was the new requirement to teach more rigorous literacy standards to students whose reading levels were significantly below grade level. My conversations with teachers revealed their disbelief in the demand to include more complex text in the curriculum of low-performing students, considering that their performance on reading less complex text was unsatisfactory (J. Bruce, personal communication, May 2015).

Effective teachers possess in-depth content knowledge, effective pedagogical skills, have excellent rapport with students and high sense of efficacy for teaching their content (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Wentzel, 2010). Teachers' sense of efficacy for teaching, as summarized by Woolfolk (1998), is the belief in having the skills that will lead to academic growth for all types of learners. Highly efficacious teachers can rise above challenges, such as teaching demotivated and low performing students (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy can overlook the external forces that may interfere with student performance and focus on designing meaningful learning experiences for the students (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998).

In this study, I investigated the self-efficacy of ELA teachers about teaching common core reading standards. Exhaustive research on the effects of teacher efficacy for teaching and its impact on students' academic growth returned conflicting results. Many researchers found that students taught by highly efficacious teachers perform better than those taught by less efficacious teachers (Hines, 2010; Mojavez & Tamiz, 2012; Olayiwola, 2011; Tella, 2008). Yet, other research into the effects of teacher efficacy and student progress revealed no correlation (Axon, 2012; Bejarano, 2000; Hines, 2010). Research on teachers' efficacy beliefs and the adoption of common core literacy standards is limited and constitutes a gap in the literature.

During this era of implementation of new English language arts standards, it is increasingly important that educators consider the results of teachers' efficacy beliefs about teaching to these new and more rigorous standards. Research into the effects of teacher efficacy during educational change indicates an association between efficacy levels and teachers' attitudes towards educational change (Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Mazze, 2013). The data gathered in this study about teacher efficacy may pave the way for (a) ensuring a smooth transition from old to new literacy standards, (b) improving teacher knowledge, and (c) making modifications to classroom instruction in the two schools in this study.

During periods of educational reform, teachers' sense of efficacy plays a critical role. Teacher efficacy has the potential to expedite or hinder the progress of such reform (Abernathy-Dyer, Ortilieb, & Cheek, Jr., 2013;Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Oxendime (2005), in discussing the claims made by theorists on teacher efficacy and

school reform, wrote, “high-efficacy teachers are motivated by the challenge of change; however, their counterparts, inefficacious teachers are beset by self-doubt, anxiety, and low expectations for succeeding as implementers of classroom change” (p. 2). This shows that highly efficacious teachers will easily embrace change whilst those teachers with lower levels of efficacies will have trouble adapting to change.

Early researchers investigating the effect of teacher efficacy were left pondering whether the construct of teacher efficacy for teaching referred to a “trait that can be captured by a teacher efficacy instrument,” or whether it was “specific to given contexts” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 203). In summarizing the findings of extensive research into teacher efficacies for teaching in their content areas, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) discovered that teacher efficacy fluctuates according to teaching context, content areas, and student groups. Chong, Klassen, Huan, Wong, and Kates (2010) confirmed the idea that academic climate and the socio-economic status of students determined whether teachers perceived themselves as high or low on the efficacious scale in teaching their content area. Likewise, Holzberger, Philipp, and Kunter (2013) found that teacher self-efficacy changes according to the content they teach.

This new development about the contextual nature of the self-efficacy construct led to the design of efficacy measurements that were specific to content areas such as math (Pajeres, 1996), special education (Egyed & Short, 2006), and literacy instruction (Tschanen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Bandura (2001), in response to the issue of measuring efficacy levels advised that efficacy measurement scales should be less

general; they should be more content and context specific. Considering the contextual nature of teacher efficacy, in this research, I concentrate on teacher efficacy for teaching common core reading standards to adolescent struggling readers.

Since academic year 2010, the American education system has been undergoing reform by way of adopting and implementing new academic standards in ELA and literacy. I began contemplating the idea to conduct my research when educational leaders in 43 states (including the state that is the site of this investigation) decided to adopt all or some components of the Common Core Standards in ELA (Center on Education Policy, 2014). The state in which this study was conducted initially adopted the common core standards in 2013. Though the common core standards were later renamed, the state's curriculum still reflects the common core standards.

Implementation of the new standards in ELA requires major instructional shifts. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI, 2017), these shifts constitute "regular practice with complex text and its academic language" (para. 1), "reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational" (para. 6), and "building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction" (para. 9). Such shifts leave school administrators pondering whether teachers are ready to tackle the new standards, which demand strategic, pedagogical changes in instructional practices. For this reason, my intention was to explore middle school ELA teachers' self-perceptions of their self-efficacy about teaching common core literacy standards to adolescents who struggle with reading. I also wanted to explore their perceptions about the preparations put in place for them to be effective in teaching the standards.

As previously stated, many school districts decided to transition from old, state specific standards to new common academic standards in ELA and literacy. If taught effectively these more rigorous standards have the potential to better prepare high school graduates to read literature found in the workplace and in college (Young, 2013; CCSI, 2010). Whether students decide to join the workforce or continue their education after high school, educational leaders must ensure that every learner receives high-quality literacy instruction to ensure a smooth transition.

For many years, students' performances on national literacy assessments indicated steady but slow progress. Since 1971, students have participated in The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) long-term trend NAEP and the main NAEP assessments in reading and mathematics. Every four years, the administrators in selected schools administer the long-term trend NAEP assessment to students aged 9, 13, and 17 years old. The long-term trend assessments in reading provide four decades of information about students' reading achievement. Results from the 2012 administration of the long-term trend reading assessment revealed that in 2012, 9- and 13-year-old students performed significantly better than their counterparts who took a similar assessment in 1971. Further examination of the most recent data revealed that only students in the 13-year-old category improved their average reading performance from 2008 to 2012. The data show that the performance of 9- and 17-year-olds has remained somewhat stagnant over the past 4 years. This revelation about the 17-year-olds is troubling and confirms that some high school graduates do not have the literacy skills needed to comprehend complex text. Complex text: are described as "works

characterized by dense meanings, elaborate structure, sophisticated vocabulary, and subtle authorial intentions such as a US Supreme Court Decision, an epic poem, or ethical treatise" (Bauerlein, 2011, para. 6). For this type of statistic to improve, students need to receive high-quality literacy instruction prior to promotion to high school. To improve the literacy levels of older students, teachers must be able to teach students how to analyze and derive meaning from nonfiction and other complex texts (Young, 2013). To accomplish this, teachers' knowledge, pedagogical expertise and practices, and their self-efficacy for teaching must reflect the new academic demands.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Schools in this southern state are facing many challenges, for example, promoting students with low reading abilities from one grade level to the next. Prior to school year 2013-2014, students in K-8 schools took the annual state summative assessments in reading, ARMT+ (Spring 2013 was the last administration of this assessment). Their performance on these assessments determined mastery of standards. On such state summative assessments, students performed at four levels of standard mastery, ranging from Level 1 to Level 4. Students who earned a Level 4 rating exceeded standard mastery. Those at Level 3 met the academic standards. Those who scored at Level 2 partially met academic standards, and those who scored at Level 1 did not meet academic standards. For the school district involved in this study, students in 3rd - 8th grades previously took the state's annual summative ARMT+ reading assessment. In this study, the ARMT+ scores for students in 6th- 8th grades will be discussed.

In the school year 2011-2012, the result from the ARMT+ reading assessment was that 34% of test takers in the district failed to meet the minimum academic standards (State Department of Education, 2014). In the school year 2012-2013, 32% of 6th graders, 43% of 7th graders, and 39% of 8th graders scored at proficiency levels 1 and 2. This means that approximately 68% of 6th graders, 57% of 7th graders, and 61% of 8th graders demonstrated mastery at levels 3 and 4.

In spring of the school year 2013-2014, students attending the two middle schools in the district participated in the first administration of a new state summative assessment in reading, called ACT Aspire. The ACT Aspire: are summative assessments administered to elementary and middle school aged students to measure how much the students have learned over time in any of five subjects (ACT Aspire, 2014). Its developers created and aligned questions to the new and more rigorous common core literacy standards. For the ACT Aspire reading assessments, students' proficiency levels are described as In Need of Support, Close, Ready, and Exceeds (discoveractaspire.org, 2014). According to the information retrieved from the (State Department of Education (2017), approximately 79% of 6th graders, 84% of 7th graders, and 77% of 8th graders failed to achieve minimum standards of proficiency. The second administration of the ACT Aspire reading assessment took place in the spring of the 2014-2015 school year. Based on the information retrieved from the State Department of Education (2017), 80% of 6th graders, 85% of 7th graders, and 71% of 8th graders failed to achieve the minimum standard proficiency.

A comparison of performances of middle school students on the ACT Aspire from 2013 – 2015 revealed minimal to no progress. A comparison of the old ARMT+ reading and the new common core aligned ACT Aspire assessment showed that students performed significantly better on the old assessment than they did on the new common core aligned assessment. Thus, a study of teachers' efficacy about teaching the new literacy standards and their perceptions of their preparation to teach the new standard is necessary.

In summary, a significant percentage of middle school students are performing well below basic proficiency levels in reading on statewide reading assessments. For all 3rd grade levels, the average nonproficiency rate is approximately 80%%. There has been little to no improvement in reading performance of middle school students over a 2-year period.

Another tool used to determine the reading levels of students is the Standardized Assessment of Achievement in Reading (STAR). To gather further information about the general reading abilities of students in the middle schools selected for this investigation, I spoke with the STAR test administrator. According to this media specialist (R. Daniels, personal communication, August 2012), each year, students complete the STAR reading assessment three times (August, January, and May) to determine their STAR reading levels.

According to Daniels (2012), the reports for the school year 2011-2012 revealed that the average reading level for each grade was two or more years below grade level. At every grade level, more than 50% of the students read significantly below grade level and

only a very small percentage read above the expected grade level. These statistics led to the concerns by middle school ELA teachers about teaching more rigorous literacy standards to struggling adolescent readers (J. Bruce, personal communication, May 2015; D. Golding, personal communication, May 2015).

These data show that in general, many students experienced high levels of success when tested on the former, less rigorous literacy standards than when tested on the newer common core aligned assessment in reading. With implementation of the new, more rigorous state literacy standards (compiled from the CCSS), there are mounting concerns about student performance and teacher efficacy in teaching these standards (V. Cave, personal communication, February 2014). The statistics on student performance on the summative assessments for the academic year 2011-2012 reflect the period before the adoption and implementation of more rigorous Common Core literacy standards. If some middle school students struggled when they were taught less rigorous literacy standards, it is essential to ascertain whether ELA teachers perceive themselves as capable teachers of raised academic standards and whether teachers feel efficacious about accomplishing the new task assigned to them.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The reading performance of adolescent readers in this school district reflects a statewide problem. The national results of the 2011 NAEP assessment in reading showed a slight increase in the performance of 8th graders from 2009 to 2011. However, 68% of the test takers from the state in which I conducted this study scored at the basic or below basic level, while 32% of the students performed at the proficient or advanced level

(NCES, 2012). Similarly, at the 4th grade level, 68% of students scored at or below basic, while 32% scored at or above proficient. Nationally, 66% of test takers at the 4th grade level scored at or below basic and 34% scored at or above proficient (NCES, 2012,). In 8th grade, the national reading results show that 66% of test takers scored at the basic or below basic and 34% scored at or above proficient. The results from the most recent administration of the NAEP reading assessments indicated minimal improvements in the performance of elementary and middle-aged students. The results of high school students showed no gains (Young, 2013). The literacy demands for success in college and the world of work have increased in rigor, and this dismal picture of students' performances on national reading assessments seems to indicate the level of unpreparedness among students. The data indicate a small percentage of students scored at proficient or above levels, and a high percentage of students are still performing at unsatisfactory levels.

In addition to the NAEP assessments, results from the initial and second administration of the common core (CC) aligned ACT Aspire assessment in reading reflected unsatisfactory reading performance statewide (State Department of Education, 2014). Teachers administered the new assessment to students in 3rd-8th grades. A comparison of the two administrations of the ACT Aspire reading assessment showed similarly poor performances over the 2-year period. Statewide results revealed that over 50% of all students who took the assessment (in the 2 years) achieved performance levels described as in need of support and close to their grade level benchmark scores (see Table 1).

Table 1

Results from the ACT Aspire Reading Assessment 2013-2014 and 2014-2015

Grades	Achievement Levels							
	In need of support		Close		Ready		Exceeds	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014 -15	2013 - 14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
3	42	42	23	23	21	21	13	13
4	29	31	32	31	23	24	15	14
5	34	34	33	31	19	19	15	15
6	28	29	30	28	24	25	17	18
7	31	33	34	33	29	27	7	7
8	25	38	27	28	34	31	14	13

Note. In need of support refers to students who scored the lowest. Close refers to students who partially met some standards. Ready refers to students who scored at the proficiency level, and Exceed refers to students who performed above grade level expectations. The numbers represent overall percentage.

This disappointing result in student reading performance extends to other countries. In a report highlighting the literacy performance of adolescent students in Europe, Sulkunen (2013) wrote that although some European countries saw improvement in students' literacy performances, "many European adolescents are struggling with literacy" (p. 528). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) found that one in every five 15-year-old, in the European Union member states, was a struggling reader (Sulkunen, 2013). In gathering this data on the literacy performance of adolescent readers, PISA included the performance of only 15-year-olds. Since the dismal reading

performances of students appear to be a quite widespread, the findings from this project study may have far-reaching effects on the instructional practices of reading teachers.

An additional statistic to confirm the dismal reading performance of older students is the 2005 sitting of the American College Test (ACT). In that year, only 51% of the test takers met the college readiness benchmark for reading and were considered college ready (ACT, 2006). Six years later, in the 2011 administration of the ACT, students meeting the benchmark for reading increased by 1%, equaling 52% (ACT, 2014). Analysis of the complexity levels of the passages on the assessment revealed that students who performed well on the ACT assessment responded accurately to questions from complex pieces of literature (ACT, 2006).

Success in responding to questions about a complex piece of literature is a good indicator of college and career readiness (ACT, 2006). In trying to prepare students for the increased level of reading required at the college level, including texts of higher levels of complexity is the recommendation for teaching the common core ELA and literacy standards (CCSI, 2010b). Incorporating texts that are more complex and providing more practice with nonfiction and informational readings are integral components of the new academic literacy standards (CCSI, 2010b). The realization that a significant number of American students lacked the necessary literacy skills to comprehend college level or job-related literature led to the authoring of the new academic standards (CCSI, 2010b).

Upon realizing that the literacy performances of students in the state were unsatisfactory, administrators in the department of education decided to adopt and

implement the states' version of the College and Career Readiness Standards in ELA and literacy in August 2013. The state specific version included the general common core literacy standards as well as a few state-specific literacy standards. To help students become ready for college or career, educators need to focus on the instructional shifts associated with the new literacy standards. As mentioned before, two of the instructional shifts are "to build knowledge through content rich literary nonfiction and informational text" (CCSSI, 2015, para. 9) and to engage in "regular practice with complex text and its academic language" (CCSSI, 2015, para.2).

Proponents of the Common Core literacy standards recommended that a ratio of 45%:55% literary to informational text be included in all 6th, 7th and 8th grade curricula. At the high school level, the authors of the CCSS recommended a ratio of 70%:30% literary to informational text in the high school curriculum (CCSI, 2012b). During the early stages of common core standards implementation, an early misconception was that only ELA teachers were responsible for meeting the increased demands for informational reading. This misconception was clarified by the authors of the common core literacy standards who explained that fulfilling the new demands for increased nonfiction and informational text is achievable if literacy instruction takes place in the classrooms of math, science, social sciences, and technical subjects (Coleman, 2010).

The common core requirement to incorporate more nonfiction and informational text in all content areas forces every teacher to become a teacher of literacy standards thus the old perception that literacy instruction is the sole responsibility of ELA teachers (Draper, 2002) is no longer acceptable. As required by the common core, all content

teachers – ELA, science, history, and teachers of technical subjects—must adopt the teaching of literacy standards along with their content standards. With the inclusion of more complex literary and nonfiction texts in the schools' curriculum, the instructional practices of middle school teachers need modifications.

Including more complex and informational texts, and using them effectively to teach literacy standards, will be highly dependent on how competent teachers feel they are about including these texts in daily instruction. Success at meeting the new literacy demands may correlate with teachers' beliefs in their capabilities to teach these rigorous standards and to include complex texts in their instruction to readers of all academic abilities. A study that examines teachers' perceptions about their self-efficacy to teach common core reading standards to adolescent struggling readers is timely and can provide some vital information on the potential need for curricular and instructional changes. The findings of such an investigation are expected to be beneficial to educational leaders who strive to provide classroom teachers with the tools for success that ensure student growth.

Although teachers are involved in making many decisions for their schools and classrooms, two areas that are out of their control are the selection of students they teach and the selection of curriculum from which they teach. Since classroom teachers have no control over the students they teach, almost every teacher encounters a significant number of students whose literacy skills are underdeveloped. Regardless of literacy abilities, teachers are responsible for teaching grade-level literacy and content standards to each student.

Investigating the link between teacher efficacy and the academic development of their students is not new to the field of education (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Mojavezi and Tamiz (2012) found that there was an association between teacher self-efficacy, student motivation, and student achievement. Alvarez-Nunez (2012) investigated whether teacher self-efficacy affected student learning in Math and ELA. The researcher compared the results of the teacher efficacy ratings to student performance on Math and English assessments. The results indicated that the students of teachers with high ratings on the efficacy scale demonstrated higher levels of achievement than students taught by those teachers with medium or low ratings. Likewise, in an investigation conducted by Olayiwola (2011), students' poor performances on external assessments correlated to their teachers' low self-efficacy ratings.

If educators consider the results from these studies, a study is now needed to gather teachers' perceptions and sense of efficacy regarding new educational requirements. Implementation of the new literacy standards across all grade levels and content areas will have significant effects on classroom instruction. Many teachers must modify their present instructional practices to address the new literacy standards. Implementation of these new standards and the instructional shifts associated with them may result in changes in teachers' teaching efficacies. As a result, knowledge of teachers' perceptions of themselves as instructors of these new literacy standards is critical if the intent of all learning institutions is to make students college- and career-ready.

Definition of Terms

Because of the ambiguous and contextual variations regarding the meaning of some words, this section provides the definition of the key terms used in this study. Providing the definitions of these terms lays the foundation for thorough understanding of the study. The key terms are as follows:

Alabama Reading and Math Plus (ARMT +): criterion-referenced assessments administered annually to students in 3rd-8th grade to determine levels of mastery of academic standards. Performance level ranges are: level 4 – exceeds, level 3 – meets, level 2 – partially meets, and level 1 – does not meet. The school year 2012-2013 was the last administration of ARMT+ summative assessments in the state of Alabama (Cox, personal communication, 2013).

Close reading: "an intensive analysis of a text in order to come to terms with what it says, how it says it, and what it means" (Shanahan, 2012, para. 4).

Literacy standards: statements of what students should know and be able to order to read, write, think, and speak in all content areas. The common core literacy standards fall under four main anchor standards – key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and ideas, and range of reading and level of text complexity (CCSSI, 2010, pp. 1-3).

Reading Interventions: additional instruction tailored to meet the specific learning needs of struggling students, provided to aid below grade level readers to become on grade level readers (Cooper, 2007).

Self-efficacy: the belief in one's ability to achieve a goal or outcome. "Self-efficacy influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves and act" (Bandura, 1995, p.2).

Teacher sense of efficacy: the teacher's confidence in him or herself about being able to promote academic achievement in all students, including those who are challenging students (Guskey & Passaro, 1994, as cited in McMaster, 2005)

Significance of the Study

This study comes about during a period of national education reform with the large-scale adoption of common academic standards. Periods of educational change or reform can be stressful and at times seem disorganized and chaotic, and, as such, lead to widespread resistance. The approach that educators take in leading the reform will influence the process of implementation. Teachers are the implementers of change, and they must have the resources for a smooth transition. Teacher efficacy, the belief in one's ability to achieve the desired outcomes with or without obstacles (Bandura, 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), weighs heavily during these periods. In this study, I explored (a) teachers' perceptions of the standards and their preparedness to teach the standards. and (b) middle school ELA teachers' self-efficacy about teaching new literacy standards to struggling readers. Although all content area teachers are now required to teach literacy skills, this research focuses on teachers of reading.

The findings from this investigation will be beneficial both to educators in the local setting, and educators on the national level. Examination of teachers' perceptions and sense of efficacy in implementing common core literacy standards will provide

administrators with information about areas in which teachers feel confident, in addition to those areas in which they need additional support. Educators will also learn about teachers' beliefs in themselves regarding accomplishing the task of teaching these new more rigorous literacy standards to struggling readers. Educators may find the results of this investigation useful as they seek recommendations and solutions for improved instructional practices, the selection of appropriate curriculum materials, and designing of useful, productive, and relevant professional development (PD).

As it relates to the larger population, the results from this study may open discussions for the redesign, design, and inclusion of additional literacy courses at the college levels. Making modifications or designing appropriate literacy courses will result in better prepare and more knowledgeable and efficacious preservice teachers of literacy. Having this information may also help educational leaders as they work toward finding solutions to improve the self-efficacy levels of in-service teachers

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their understanding of the new literacy standards?
2. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers?

Review of the Literature

The purpose of the project study was to investigate how each of the middle school teachers describes his or her self-efficacy to teach common core reading standards to

struggling readers. This section presents a thorough review of scholarly literature that are pertinent to the research topic that embodies ideas related to self-efficacy, student achievement, and reading instruction. To locate data, I used the following keywords: *teacher efficacy*, *student achievement*, *literacy instruction*, *new implementation, self-efficacy construct*, *adolescent literacy, common core literacy standards, comprehension strategies, struggling adolescent readers, text complexity, vocabulary strategies*, and *close reading*. I used the following databases: ERIC, SAGE, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, ProQuest Central, Science Direct, and Google Scholar to engage in an exhaustive research of issues related to the research topic.

One of the major findings of the review of literature is the connection that exists within the concepts of teacher efficacy and the academic development of students. The review of pertinent literature also revealed that academic development is not the only factor associated with teacher efficacy. Student motivation, conduct, and efficacy; teachers' acceptance of education reforms; teachers' management strategies; and the number of student referrals for intervention services are variables that are related to teacher efficacy levels (Hoy, 2000). Characteristics such as positive work attitudes and knowledge of effective and flexible instructional practices are present in highly efficacious teachers and absent in teachers having low self-efficacy (Swackhammer et al., 2009).

The review of literature allows readers to become knowledgeable about what past researchers and educational experts have explored, found, and said about issues related to teacher efficacy, literacy instruction, common core ELA and literacy standards

implementation, and the new instructional shifts in ELA. In addition, the literature review also includes information about gaps found in the literature regarding issues relating to the project's topic. In exploring ELA teachers' perceived levels of self-efficacy, I began this literature review by summarizing the theoretical framework: Bandura's social cognitive theory that includes the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1986) is the individual's beliefs about performing required behaviors that may produce positive results. More specifically, teacher efficacy refers to "teachers' abilities to help students beyond the external factors that may impact the learning process" (Harris, 2010, p. 15). Research has shown that the process of school reform and new implementations may affect teachers' levels of efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). The adoption and implementation of the common core literacy standards is a major reform that is occurring in schools across the country. As such, knowledge about teachers' confidence is of utmost importance now.

Next, I provide an exhaustive review of the effects of teacher self-efficacy in relation to classroom activities and literacy instruction. An exploration of the concept of adolescent literacy and examination of past and present literacy practices and strategies for working with struggling adolescent readers follows. The review of the literature concludes with an analysis of the new literacy standards and a discussion of the instructional shifts brought on by these standards.

Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy Construct

Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory provides the theoretical framework for this project study. The social cognitive theory focuses on self-beliefs and self-regulative

influences as variables affecting human behavior (Pajares, 2002). Unlike Bandura's earlier behaviorist theory (social learning), the social cognitive theory indicates an intermingling of external and internal factors regulates human functioning. In arguing his point, Bandura (1991) wrote: "if human behavior were regulated solely by external outcomes, people would behave like weathervanes, constantly shifting direction to conform to whatever momentary social influence happened to impinge upon them" (p. 249). The social learning theory contrasts with the behaviorist theory that suggests that external stimuli mainly influence human behavior.

The social cognitive theory derives from the philosophy of human agency, which means humans display "intentional pursuits of action" (Alvarez-Nunez, 2012, p. 24). The intentional pursuits of actions are tied to the intermingling of personal (cognitive, biological, and affective processes), behavioral, and environmental influences. The intermingling of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences gave birth to the concept of "triadic reciprocal determinism" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 362). According to Schneider, Gruman, and Counts (2011), triadic reciprocal determinism refers to the interactions that occur among behavioral, environmental, and personal factors that result in all factors influencing and being influenced by the others. Triadic reciprocal determinism, whether directly or indirectly, is dominant in the educational arena. The personal, environmental, and behavioral influences can affect an individual's level of self-efficacy.

The construct of self-efficacy developed by Bandura (1977) forms the base for this project study. Self-efficacy emphasizes the achievement of personal goals under

desirable and undesirable circumstances (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1995) further defined perceived self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p.2). Bandura continued to state that self-efficacy influences humans' thinking, feeling, self-motivation, and action.

In addressing the self-efficacy construct, Bandura (1995) identified four forms of influences – mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (pp. 3-4). Mastery experience is the greatest determinant of possessing self-efficacy (Hoy, 2000; Mahmoee & Pirkamali 2013; Weiner, 2010). Mastery experience refers to performance accomplishment as it relates to success or failure in accomplishing a task. Previous success in completing a task increases self-efficacy whereas previous failure lowers self-efficacy (Erwin, 2012; Mahmoee & Pirkamali 2013). Secondly, vicarious experience refers to the effects of viewing others as they undertake a task, and the effects of observation on the successful or unsuccessful completion of similar tasks (Gavora, 2010). Social persuasion, the third form of influence, refers to feedback received after task completion (Gavora, 2010). Often, positive feedback raises self-efficacy and negative feedback lowers self-efficacy. The final influences are the physiological and emotional states of human beings. Humans use feelings of anxiety, stress, and fatigue, along with their mood, to judge their abilities. The emotional state of humans, whether positive or negative, can influence their perceptions of their abilities to accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1995).

Bandura argued that self-efficacy is not just the ability to accomplish a task, but it also extends to one's perception and belief in his ability to get the task done (Bandura,

1977, 1997). Peoples' beliefs in having the ability to accomplish tasks will determine initiation, engagement, effort, perseverance, and success or failure in carrying out duties. In discussing the influence of self-belief, Bandura (1977) indicated that, self-beliefs determine the type and complexity of the activities in which people engage. People will refrain from activities, which, in their minds, are beyond their capabilities, and are more likely to participate in intimidating situations once these individuals believe they can succeed (Bandura, 1977). Human thoughts and actions are predicted by their self-efficacy because what humans "think, believe, and feel affects how they behave" (Bandura, 1986, p. 25).

Self-Efficacy and Work-Related Performance

The concept of self-efficacy applies to a variety of work related settings because of its power to affect learning and task performance. Although much of the past research regarding self-efficacy occurred in learning environments, self-efficacy construct is also useful in other settings. Bandura (1982) identified three ways in which self-efficacy affected learning and performance. Self-efficacy influences (a) goals that employees set for themselves (b) the extent of learning of new job-related tasks and the effort to carry out these tasks and (c) the level of perseverance in completing new or difficult job-related tasks. Regardless of the working environment, the principles and knowledge of self-efficacy can lead to decisions for improvement.

The effects of self-efficacy are noticeable outside of the educational arena. In a study aiming to investigate self-efficacy in the work-place, Olayiwola (2011) found a correlation between how workers performed on their jobs, how satisfied they were with

their jobs and how efficacious they felt about their jobs. The researcher administered three research instruments to each of 150 participants, and supervisors administered the Annual Performance Evaluation Reports (APER) - a job performance assessment tool. Four hypotheses were tested and rejected, and the results revealed that all three variables, individually and collectively could easily predict job performance of staff members. The results from this study prove that workers who performed best were those who believed in their abilities, were motivated, and those who enjoyed their jobs (Olayiwola, 2011).

Other researchers have found that a correlation exists between levels of self-efficacy and personal or organizational performance (Lai & Chen, 2012; Randhawa, 2007; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Findings revealed that workers possessing high levels of efficacy are more competitive and thus set higher achievement goals for themselves. The researchers also found that employees with higher self-efficacy displayed more advanced work-related abilities than their peers with lower self-efficacy. For this reason, having knowledge of the perceptions and efficacy beliefs of classroom teachers could prove useful for successful teaching to standards mastery.

The self-efficacy construct formed the base for this project study. Bandura (1977, 1986, and 1997) identified four sources that influence self-efficacy as mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological arousal. The self-efficacy of middle school ELA teachers will depend on their responses to successes and failures in teaching the new reading standards (mastery experiences). Self-efficacy believes will also depend on the teachers' exposure to successful models around them (vicarious experiences), and words of encouragement or reprimands extended to the

teachers (social persuasion). Finally, the self-efficacy belief of the teachers will depend on their state of mind (physiological arousal).

Self-efficacy is a very general construct; whereas, teacher efficacy is more specific to educational research. Shaughnessy (2004) defined teacher efficacy as a teacher's belief in "his or her professional competence" (p. 1). Gavora (2010) explained teacher efficacy, as having the belief that one can use acquired knowledge and skills to plan and carry out the various responsibilities. Holzberger, Philipp, and Kunter (2013) confirmed that teacher efficacy determines the quality of performance and the quality of classroom instruction demonstrated by teachers. Teacher efficacy is self-regulatory (Cash, 2014) and leads to the instructional decisions that teachers make. The issue at hand is whether middle school ELA teachers are willing to adopt new instructional practices required to teach the new reading standards, whether they believe they possess the knowledge and skills, how prepared they think they are to utilize these skills to improve the reading development of low performing readers.

As disclosed previously, Bandura's teacher self-efficacy construct formed the conceptual foundation for this investigation. The interview included questions that required descriptions about teachers' beliefs about their level of competence to teach new reading standards to struggling readers. Also, teachers provided explanations about their reactions to students' performance on district and state reading assessments. Teachers also responded to questions about their perceptions of being given the task of teaching more rigorous reading standards to struggling readers.

Teacher Efficacy: An Overview

Teachers' sense of efficacy (shortened teacher efficacy) influences classroom instructional practices and teacher and student development. In the educational arena, teachers' self-efficacy is very important as it functions as a differentiator between effective and ineffective instructional practices (Holzberger, Philipp, & Kunter (2013). Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk, Hoy and Hoy (1998) explicitly defined teacher efficacy as teachers' confidence in their abilities to provide engaging learning experiences to unmotivated students or students whom others may describe as difficult.

The teacher efficacy construct was born from Rotter's social learning theoretical framework and Bandura's social cognitive learning framework (Cagle & Hopkins, 2009). Rotter proposed a locus of control theory that indicated the extent to which an individual believes that outcomes or events in one's life are controlled or determined by one's own actions (Fives, 2003). Bandura's theory indicates that expectations of outcomes substantially depends on one's belief that he can accomplish the task (Cagle & Hopkins, 2009).

The construct of self-efficacy gained prominence during the investigation of the effectiveness of various federally funded educational programs. Researchers at the RAND Corporation used Rotter's (1966) locus of control theory as a framework and included two items on the questionnaire that measured teacher efficacy. Classroom teachers completed the questionnaire. The design of the items was such that one item addressed beliefs about the degree to which external factors impacted student outcomes and the other item addressed beliefs about the degree to which internal factors impacted

student outcomes. The two items included in the questionnaire were (a) "When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment" (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly & Zellman, 1977, pp. 136-137) and (b) "If I really work hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students" (Berman et al. 1977, p.137). The first item suggests environmental factors have the greater impact on student performance and suggests that external factors may overcome teachers' efforts (Fives, 2003). The second item is the direct opposite of the first as it suggests internal factors such as personal control will propel teachers to meet the learning needs of all students regardless of the environments in which they live (Fives, 2003). The second item relates to the self-efficacy construct that promotes the notion that personal beliefs in one's capabilities will result in sustained efforts to ensure student achievement.

The effects of teacher efficacy on student academic achievement and educational changes began decades ago. The results from the RAND projects indicated that teacher characteristics were among the factors that affected reading achievement (Armour et al., 1976). Additional teacher behaviors known to promote academic growth include realizing and accepting that there are needs for changes and adoption of educational changes as they relate to new practices and initiatives (Berman, et al. 1977). In the wake of the adoption and implementation of ELA and literacy standards, teachers' willingness to accept educational reform came to the fore because of its link to teacher efficacy. Unless teachers gain a positive sense of efficacy in teaching the literacy standards, the change to these new academic standards may be in jeopardy

Effects of Teacher Efficacy on Classroom Activities

The teacher self-efficacy construct has many implications for all teaching and learning environments. Investigations about teacher efficacy and its implications for classroom and school practices have been ongoing since the RAND projects. The effects of teacher efficacy are predictive of factors such as student achievement (Ashton & Web, 1986; Guo, Conner, Yang, Roehrig & Morrison, 2012); student motivation (Midgley, Feldlaufer & Eccles, 1989), and personal efficacy, (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, as cited in Tschannen-Moran et al., 2001). Teacher efficacy belief does not only affect student outcomes. Teacher efficacy also contributes to a teacher's actions such as personal setting of goals, teacher effort in delivering instruction, encouraging student engagement, and teachers' levels of aspirations (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2001).

Findings from previous research identified three areas normally affected by teacher efficacy. These three areas: the ability to persevere even in difficult situations (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), a willingness to implement and undertake new initiatives and instructional practices (Brouwers & Tomic, 2003, Ordonez-Feliciano, 2009), and pupil's academic growth (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006). Gavora (2011) described high efficacious teachers as those from whom students learn more. This is because high efficacious teachers are more likely to include innovative, higher order thinking opportunities and differentiation during classroom activities.

Teachers with low efficacy display characteristics that affect student academic achievement. According to Bandura (1994), unlike their more efficacious peers who use motivating strategies to develop and improve students' study skills, low efficacious

teachers resort to stringent measures to get students to study. Low efficacious teachers believe their effect on student outcome is less important than external factors and so they do not utilize innovative instructional practices during instruction. Low efficacious teachers are also more prone to abort instructional activities they deem as challenging and feel that students' inability to learn is a result of factors beyond their control (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement

Much of the studies on the effects of teacher efficacy on student achievement reveal a relationship between the two. Amid the many investigations indicating a correlation, there were some that found no connection between teacher efficacy and student achievement. This section will begin with the inclusion of those investigations serving as evidence of the connection between teacher efficacy and academic outcomes. The second part of this section will include some investigations serving as evidence of contrary results.

Self-efficacy is a central part of teaching and learning (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Silver et al., 2009). Efficacious teachers believe they have the skills to positively impact student learning and academic achievement. With this belief, teachers having high efficacy utilize more intensive and efficient practices than do teachers having low self-efficacy. As a result, students taught by high efficacious teachers demonstrated high achievement levels as opposed to those students taught by teachers displaying low efficacy (Chong, Klassen, Huan, Wong, & Kates 2010; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Olayiwola, 2011; Tella, 2008).

The effects of teacher efficacy on academic growth have been evident across content areas. The findings from investigations by Alvarez-Nunez (2012) and Adu, Tadu and Eze (2012) indicated that students taught by highly efficacious teachers of various content areas (Math, ELA, Economics, Government, and Biology) demonstrated high academic performances. These results indicate that the relationship that exists between teacher efficacy levels and student performances extends across content areas.

As previously mentioned, levels of self-efficacy determine how much teachers conform and make necessary adjustments to educational change. Adopting new standards and implementing them in regular class activities may be challenging to some teachers, even those who once demonstrated high levels of efficacy in their teaching abilities. This is a result of the contextual and dynamic nature of self-efficacy (Raelin et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011).

Participating teachers from the districts involved in this study are experiencing educational reform, and the successful implementation of such reform lies on their shoulders. The expectation is that all teachers demonstrate effective practices as they tackle the new requirement of teaching literacy-reading standards during their content teaching. The success or failure of educational changes or reforms is dependent on teachers' attitude, acceptance and a willingness to conform to these changes (Akbari, Kiany, Naeeni, & Allvar, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). For this reason, findings from a study such as this should be useful in these times of new standards implementation.

The results from investigations seeking to determine if teachers' levels of self-efficacy correlate with student achievement led to the conclusion that regardless of students' ages or their grade levels, teachers' self-efficacy affects students' academic growth. Maguire (2011) and Hines and Kristonis (2010) looked into the relationship between teacher efficacy and the academic performances of high and middle school aged students and found that teacher efficacy significantly predicted student performance in Mathematics. In addition, Maguire's (2011) investigation revealed that high efficacious teachers could foster student engagement that resulted in improved academic performance.

Investigating the effects of teacher efficacy on student performance has seen conflicting results. Studies conducted to determine the relationship between personal teacher efficacy and academic performance in Math, Reading and ELA found no relationship (Bejarano, 2000; Towner, 2010; Vasquez, 2008). Students taught by teachers possessing high levels of efficacy did not perform significantly better than other students who were taught by teachers possessing low efficacy (Towner, 2010).

Teacher Efficacy and Literacy Instruction

A significant number of investigations about teacher efficacy and its effects on student achievement were found. For the most part, the researchers who investigated teacher efficacy for literacy instruction conducted their studies during periods when teachers taught literacy standards with which they were already familiar. There was no study found investigating middle school teachers' perceptions and self-efficacy during the adoption and implementation of new common core ELA and literacy standards. A

major gap exists in the research and there is the need for this type of investigation. Following are the overviews and findings from the limited literature relating to literacy instruction and teacher efficacy.

In investigating the correlation between teacher efficacy for teaching literacy and student reading achievement, Poggio (2012) used the Teacher Sense of Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI) scale (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011) to measure teachers' levels of efficacy. Poggio (2012) also examined students' reading achievements on the Kansas Reading Assessment. In addition to examining reading scores, the researcher examined demographic data such as teaching experiences and qualifications. Data analysis revealed that students' performances on the reading assessment and teachers' efficacy for teaching literacy shared significant associations. In a more recent study conducted by Guo et al. (2013), findings revealed that teachers possessing high levels of efficacy had positive effects on the literacy development and learning of the students they taught.

Unlike the results of Poggio (2012) and Guo et al. (2013), Eberle's results (2011), found that teacher efficacy levels and student performance in reading or math did not correlate. Eberle (2011) used a teacher efficacy scale designed by Bandura to gather self-efficacy data. The method used to determine the finding was a comparison between the individual teacher's student performance and teachers' efficacy rating. There were little or no achievement differences in the math or reading achievement of students taught by teachers with low efficacy when compared to those taught by highly efficacious teachers.

The effect of PD on levels of efficacy was a common theme found in the literature about teacher efficacy and literacy instruction (Cantrell & Calloway, 2008; Fine et al. 2011; Timperley & Phillips, 2003). Fine et al. (2011) found that teachers who engaged in PD opportunities experienced high levels of self-efficacy about teaching reading in their content areas. Timperley and Phillips (2003) investigated the self-efficacy of teachers of literacy who worked with disadvantaged students. The researchers found that prior to receiving professional learning opportunities on more effective teaching practices, the teachers possessed low levels of self-efficacy. After the interventions, self-efficacy about teaching literacy improved and so did the literacy performances of their disadvantaged students.

Cantrell and Calloway (2008) investigated the perceptions of implementers of literacy instruction who had participated in literacy PD opportunities. From the analysis of interview data, high and low efficacy teachers demonstrated similar, as well as, contrasting characteristics in the areas of "personal, general, and collective" (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008, p. 112) efficacy for literacy teaching. Cantrell and Calloway (2008) created groups based on teachers' responses about their ability to influence student literacy development, teachers' efficacy in addressing students' literacy needs, and teachers' roles as content teachers in engaging students in literacy instruction (p. 1741). The researchers found there were few similarities and distinct differences between the perceptions of high and low efficacious teachers. While acknowledging the influence of the home environment on students' literacy needs, high efficacious teachers believe they could overcome these barriers and develop the literacy skills of students. On the other

hand, the low efficacious teachers believed that their efforts were futile without parental support and involvement in their children's literacy learning. Another distinct difference found between high and low implementers of new literacy implementation was that high efficacious teachers remained persistent, approached barriers head on and devised action steps to overcome these barriers. In contrast, low efficacious teachers did not persist after failed attempts at implementing the new literacy instructional strategies. High efficacious teachers were more innovative in learning more about the new strategies, while most low efficacious teachers were unaware of where to locate additional resources for content literacy implementation (Cantrell & Calloway, 2008).

Providing relevant and extensive PD oftentimes results in increased self-efficacy. However, because of the contextual nature of self-efficacy, teachers demonstrating high levels of efficacy in one context may experience low efficacy in another (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). According to Cantrell and Hughes (2008), teachers' levels of self-efficacy dips during the initial phases of educational change but regains momentum as teachers become more competent from participation in PD opportunities. Effective PD is therefore imperative to the successful implementation of new initiatives because it aids in rebuilding levels of self-efficacy.

Literacy: An Overview

Proficiency in literacy is necessary for learning in every subject (Franciosi, 2005; Alliance for Education, 2006; Literacy in Learning Exchange, 2012). As students matriculate to higher levels of learning, their reliance on literacy skills increases because of increased exposure and interactions with wider ranges and amounts of text. Students

must therefore receive effective literacy instruction because effective literacy instruction unlocks the door to student success and achievement (Earle, 2012; Thomson, 2010).

The Common Core ELA and literacy anchor standards are general cross-disciplinary literacy expectations of K-12 learners (CCSI, 2010a). It is from these general literacy anchor standards that the common core authors wrote the more specific grade level standards in literacy. Reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language are the four strands of the common core literacy standards. In this southern state, the state's ELA and literacy academic standards reflect a combination of the 2010 Common Core State Standards along with additional state specific standards. This project study addresses the literacy strand of reading with an emphasis on reading comprehension. Below, are definitions of the term literacy as defined in the research literature.

Draper (2002) provided a definition of literacy that aligned very closely to the common core strands of the ELA and literacy standards. Draper (2002) referred to literacy as skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and symbolizing through a variety of formats for example print, digital, and video (Draper, 2002). The Organization for the Economic Corporation and Development, OECD (2010) defined literacy as being able to apply knowledge in all content areas to analyze, reason and communicate while posing, interpreting, and solving problems they encounter. Alber (2014) defined literacy as the ability to "make sense of and engage in advanced reading, writing, and speaking" (para. 1). Although the more detailed definitions may not state the involvement of all skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and language), readers can infer the definitions include these skills. As indicated previously, the definition of literacy

has seen modifications and educators are calling for a change in literacy practices. The concept of literacy is therefore quite complex and to remain focused on the goals of this project study, the definition of literacy will be limited to the reading process.

The process of reading takes place in every classroom and as secondary teachers prepare students for college or career, reading becomes increasingly complex in the upper grades. Reading, as defined by Clay (1991) is a "message-getting, problem solving activity, which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced" (p.6). The National Council of Teachers of English (2004) defines reading as:

> A complex and purposeful sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning from the text (para. 2).

The similarity between both definitions of reading is that reading is the process used to derive meaning from printed materials. For middle school teachers to be able to implement the new reading literacy standards, they must be efficacious in their abilities to help all types of learners (including adolescent struggling readers) gain meaning from all types of texts, in all types of formats.

Struggling Adolescent Readers (SAR)

Teaching, learning, and applying reading literacy standards lay the foundation for success in schools. Classroom teachers must make every effort to incorporate these reading literacy standards in all classroom activities, in all content areas, and to all students. Seated in almost every classroom at the secondary level, are students whose

academic performances reflect incompetence in reading. The 2013 reporting of the NAEP assessments in reading for 4th and 8th graders indicates improvement in 2013 when compared to the initial administration of the NAEP reading assessments in 1992. Despite the improvements, educators are still concerned because the minimal improvement is not indicative of the amount of investments (time and financial) made to improve literacy for all learners (Tyner, 2012). In summary, the report indicates that 34% of 4th and 8th graders scored at or above proficient levels. Stated differently, approximately 76% of test takers scored at the basic and below basic levels of proficiency. These statistics confirm the fact that many students are experiencing academic difficulties in reading.

Teachers who demonstrate high levels of efficacy can plan effective instructional activities for all learners. Before planning instructional activities for struggling adolescent readers, it is important that teachers are cognizant of the characteristics of a struggling adolescent reader. According to the National Reading Panel Report (2000), a struggling reader is one who reads 1–3 years below grade level. Kaywell (2009) considers a struggling adolescent reader as a student who is unmotivated to read because of distractions by life's struggles. Diamond (2006) describes a struggling adolescent reader (SAR) as middle or high school aged student, who not only performs poorly academically, but also a student who is emotionally affected by his inability to read. Many researchers include struggling upper elementary students (as low as 4th graders) in their definition of struggling adolescent readers (Hock, Brasseur-Hock, 2009). For this project study, struggling adolescent readers are middle school aged students who read two or more grades below grade level. According to the reading statistics gathered from

this school district, struggling adolescent readers represent almost 50% of the middle schools' overall population. This amount includes some students who met the required academic standards on state assessments.

To address the reading inadequacies of SARs, classroom teachers must be knowledgeable about the possible causes that often lead to students' reading struggles. Salinger (n.d.) summarized the findings of research on the causes of adolescent reading difficulties and wrote that although comprehension of text stood out as the most lacking skill, other learning to read difficulties such as identification of sight words, decoding and identifying unfamiliar words and fluent reading were evident among the tested adolescent readers. Similarly, reading profiles of adolescent readers have shown that struggling adolescent readers lacked decoding, word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Deshler, Hock, & Catts 2006) indicating that comprehension is only one of the reading components that may result in reading difficulties. Denton et al. (2007) identified causes of lacking comprehension. These causes include (a) ignorance to effective strategies that aid in organizing and recalling information, (b) deficits in vocabulary strategies, (c) inability to decode words automatically, (d) lacking word identification strategies, and (e) limited or no motivation and interest in reading. In a report on the causes of reading difficulties, Robinson, Mckenna, and Conradi (2012) listed academic, as well as, non-academic causes of reading difficulties. These are education and culture, poverty, text demands, and lack of instruction.

Prerequisites for Comprehension Development

In 2000, the authors of the National Reading Panel (NRP) report analyzed many studies about reading acquisition and found that effective reading instruction should include instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, strategies to develop fluency, and strategies for promoting textual comprehension (NRP, 2000). Recommendations according to the NRP report included the teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics to younger children who are learning to read at this stage. Instruction in fluency and comprehension development should be the focus of the upper grades because the focus then is reading texts to learn (NRP, 2000).

To address the reading struggles of adolescents, teachers must be knowledgeable about effective practices and have "deep understandings of the kinds of instructional practice that affect students' comprehension" (Robinson, Mckenna & Conradi, 2012, p. 72). A persistent topic of debate in the field of education concerns the effectiveness of literacy instruction designed for struggling adolescent readers. One such debate argues whether older students benefit from basic skills instruction such as phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Ivey and Baker (2004) wrote that throughout their years of working with older struggling readers, no student benefitted from phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Allington (2011) agreed that a focus on decoding to improve the reading levels of older students is ineffective. Boardman et al. (2008) confirmed previous findings of the ineffectiveness of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction to older struggling students. "Word study, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and motivation" (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013, p. 161) are areas of

focus for struggling adolescent readers. Similar to Marchand-Martella et al., Boardman et al. (2008) also found that the areas mentioned above are areas of focus when working with struggling readers. According to Boardman et al. (2008), advanced word study and instruction on decoding multi-syllabic words were more beneficial to older students than phonemic awareness and phonics instruction.

Roberts, Torgeson, Boardman, and Scammacca (2008) cautioned educators about the use of word study as the sole measure of reading intervention for struggling adolescent readers. In proving this point, Roberts et al. (2008) reported on past research that found students made small to moderate gains when their intervention centered on just word study. Word study intervention coupled with comprehension strategies instruction yielded more positive results than word study alone (Brasseur-Hock, Hock, Kieffer, Biancarosa, & Deshler, 2011; Roberts et al. 2008).

In making recommendations for improving the reading abilities of ASRs, some researchers did not include instruction in word study but focused on strategies to build comprehension. Torgesen, Houston, and Rissman (2007) did not include word study as one of their recommendations for effective literacy strategies for struggling adolescent readers in middle and high schools. Instead, the five recommendations were comprehension strategies, multiple opportunities for discussion, setting high standards, making reading-writing connections, and motivation and engagement. A report from the National Governors Association outlined the findings from a research conducted on 5th grade struggling readers. From the findings, educators learned that most adolescent struggling readers have trouble with comprehending a text and not word level issues. In

fact, the report stated that only 10% of the students tested required word level interventions (Brasseur-Hock et al. 2011).

Conversely, other researchers (Edwards, 2008; Regina, 2012; The National Institute for Literacy, (2007) highly recommended the teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics as prescriptive treatment for reading improvement. of struggling adolescent readers. Other researchers such as Edwards (2008) and Regina (2012) believe that providing older learners with explicit and structured phonics intervention resulted in increased fluency, word recognition, and comprehension. Kamil et al. (2008) authored a practice brief that provided recommendations for improving the reading abilities of adolescent readers. Included in the five recommendations is the need to provide individualized instruction for struggling adolescent readers. The intensive intervention for struggling adolescent readers includes instruction in "fundamental skills such as phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding, and other word analysis skills that support word reading accuracy" (Kamil et al., 2008, p. 31).

Instructional Practices to Support Comprehension Development for SAR

As indicated previously, the reading difficulties experienced by adolescent struggling readers, often result from their inability to gain meaning (comprehend) from textual information. This is because SARs must interact with increasingly difficult pieces of literature as they matriculate from one grade level to the next. Knowledge and implementation of effective instructional practices by highly efficacious teachers lay a foundation for improved comprehension and academic success for secondary students.

Below, are descriptions of practices used to improve comprehension among struggling readers.

Reading Interventions in Middle Schools

In addressing the literacy gaps for adolescent readers, many schools and school systems invest in remedial reading programs and struggling students attend these remedial classes. The components of these remedial reading programs vary; however, Fisher and Ivey (2006) recommended, "access to high quality, readable texts and instructions in strategy to read and write across the school day" (p.181) as features of successful remedial reading environments. Fisher and Ivey (2006) described guidelines for the selection of the most effective reading interventions for struggling adolescent readers. These guidelines are:

- Teachers actively diagnose learner needs and design appropriate instruction;
- Teachers must design interventions that foster the reading/writing connection;
- Teachers use the results from various assessments to determine the type of intervention;
- Teachers must provide many opportunities for students to read and write extensively.

In addition to having access to reading intervention programs, teachers who teach struggling adolescent readers must incorporate researched based instructional practices in daily class activities. When teachers are armed with a plethora of useful research based instructional strategies and realize the positive effects that these have on improving the reading abilities of students, their sense of efficacy increases because of the influence of

mastery experience (Bandura, 1995) on the concept of teacher efficacy. This propels teachers to be committed to the mission of improving student reading difficulties through their personal efforts and to ignore the external factors that may contribute to the reading difficulties.

Investigations into effective practices for improving the comprehension abilities of struggling adolescent readers have resulted in a plethora of recommendations. The recommendations for improving comprehension abilities include teacher instruction and practices (Biancarosa, 2005; Taliaferro & Parris, 2009) and general school practices (Bornfreund, 2012). Biancarosa (2005) identified strategies for instruction and structural support. Strategies for instructional practices are direct, explicit comprehension instruction and comprehension taught through content area texts, by content area teachers. Other strategies for effective comprehension practices are instruction that motivates and promotes engagement; strategic, intensive instruction; inclusion of a wide variety of age appropriate texts; and ongoing opportunities and instruction in writing. The final strategies recommended by Biancarosa (2005) are inclusion of technology resources and applications for struggling readers and ongoing formal assessment of student progress and strategy effectiveness.

After interviewing secondary teachers who have had successes in motivating secondary readers, Taliaferro and Parris (2009) identified the following as effective practices: establishing relationship with students, text selection based on interests and needs, promoting student choices, selecting relevant texts, and teacher modeling of good reading strategies. Three years earlier, Manuel (2003) identified similar practices that

proved successful in building the comprehension abilities of adolescents who have difficulty with literacy skills. Similarly, Bornfreund (2012) completed a summary of effective literacy practices for early and struggling adolescent readers. Bornfreund (2012) grouped these practices in two major headings – school practices and teacher practices. School practices for improving the comprehension skills of struggling adolescent readers include intensive strategies to develop word meanings and textual analysis and additional interventions, especially for those students who read well below grade level. Teacher practices for increasing the reading abilities of struggling adolescent readers include allowing students to engage in extended discussion of textual meaning and interpretation, incorporating motivational and engaging activities, embedding literacy instruction in content, using diverse texts, promoting intensive writing, and conducting ongoing formative assessments (Bornfreund, 2012).

Allowing students to engage in extended discussions of text, embedding literacy instruction in content, using various types of texts, and promoting intensive writing are strategies to improve reading comprehension. Unfortunately, implementing these effective strategies may pose challenges for low efficacious teachers. To increase levels of self-efficacy, administrators in school districts must provide opportunities for teacher learning and ongoing support through various formats (Bornfreund, 2012).

While instructional strategies play a significant role in developing comprehension, other researchers identified motivation as a major component of literacy learning (Allington, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2011). One way to motivate readers is by allowing them choice in the types of text they read (Gainer & Lapp, 2010; Hinchman & Moore,

2013; Morgan & Wagner, 2013; Sulkunen, 2013). If allowed to select their reading materials, students are more willing to tackle texts that are complex because students have a personal interest in the information contained in their selected reading material (Bomer, 2011). Mandated texts and other reading materials drive the curriculum of many classrooms. Allowing students to have the freedom of selecting their reading materials is therefore an "add on" that would require flexibility and innovative actions from teachers.

Analysis of reading achievement data across the nation resulted in questions about the effectiveness of reading instruction in all classrooms. National and statewide data reveal poor performance on various types of reading assessments. Increased reading demands and the recent unsatisfactory performances resulted in the belief that most of the nations' learners are not adequately prepared for the challenges that come with reading college level and job-related literature (ACT, 2006). In responding to these reading deficiencies, the National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices (NGACBP, 2010) decided that the inclusion of more rigorous, common academic standards in ELA and literacy in the schools' curricula is the answer to helping students across K-12 classrooms prepare for college and workplace literacy demands. A collaboration of the two founding groups of common core standards, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGACBP), and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) led to the authoring of more rigorous ELA (ELA) standards, known as Common Core State Standards in ELA.

Before designing the ELA common core standards document, the authors examined reading statistics provided by the ACT which reported that students who

demonstrated satisfactory performances were those who possessed the literacy skills to accurately respond to questions about literary and nonfictional complex texts (ACT, 2006). Thus, two key instructional shifts for the new literacy standards state that students must begin to build knowledge through content-based non-fiction texts and increased opportunities to analyze complex text and its academic language (NGACBP, CCSSO, 2010). The authors of the common core ELA standards developed literacy anchor standards, which are detailed literacy goals for the areas of English, social studies, history, science, and technical subjects. These literacy goals are cross-curricular and emphasize the teaching of literacy standards in non-traditional literacy classrooms. The literacy anchor standards "define the skills and understandings that all students must demonstrate" (CCSSI, 2010, p. 10) in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language.

Reasons for Implementing Common Core Standard

Proponents of the common core ELA and literacy standards believe that adoption and implementation of these common academic standards is a move in the right direction for a number of reasons (Adams-Budde, 2014). With states previously designing their own standards, several concerns became evident. First: there were too many variations that existed in content and rigor of state standards. Second, the proficiency levels for state assessments did not reflect similar levels of proficiencies on national assessments such as NAEP. Third, the growing number of students whose reading proficiency levels made it difficult for them to become gainfully employed or become admitted to college without having to participate in remedial reading classes

(Rothman, 2012). In summary, upon graduation from high school, many students were not college or career ready.

Implementing Common Core Standards: The Challenges

Implementing educational changes can be quite complicated and therefore pose challenges (Armstrong, 2011). The wide scale adoption of the common core ELA standards requires educational changes, thus making the implementation process non-exempt from challenges. Some of these challenges include: financial costs of adopting the standards: teacher preparation to teach the new standards: concerns about the premature use of new common core aligned assessment to determine student growth: overcoming both internal and external resistance to the standards adoption (Center on Education Policy, 2014).

The adoption of common core ELA and literacy standards affects all stakeholders. However, since classroom teachers are responsible for the implementation of educational changes and reform (Adams-Budde, 2014), the teachers face many of the challenges. Adams-Budde (2014) identified three of the main challenges teachers face as they attempt to implement the common core ELA and literacy standards. These are more rigorous standards that will require curricular and instructional changes, preparing students for new common core aligned assessments, and the need to participate in ongoing training. Teachers' levels of self-efficacy drive the success of curricular and instructional changes (Adams-Budde 2014).

Text Complexity

A requirement of the instructional shifts is that all classroom teachers across all grade levels begin to include texts that are more complex and that students critically read more informational and nonfiction text during instruction (CCSS, 2010b). Increasing the text complexity level of reading materials poses a challenge to many teachers (Adams-Budde, 2014). To address this challenge, teachers across all grade levels and content areas must be cognizant of the qualities of a complex text and must be able to demonstrate effective, rigorous, and innovative instructional practices. Earlier definitions of a complex text included a focus on the sentence length and the inclusion of multi-syllabic words (Shanahan, Fisher & Frey, 2012). In clarifying what makes a text complex, the Common Core Standards (2010b) "define a three-part model for determining how easy or difficult a particular text is to read" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, Appendix A, p. 3). The model of the common core text complexity emphasizes what students read and how students read. In understanding the what and how the model identified three measures of text complexity. These measures include "quantitative dimensions, qualitative dimensions, and reader and task considerations" (CCSSI, 2010, p.4).

Comprehension Development in an Era of Common Core Implementation

Effective instructional practices are fundamental for student success. Teachers who demonstrate high efficacy design classroom instruction using effective instructional practices. Highly efficacious teachers are also willing to make changes geared to meet the diverse learners in their class (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). In other words, high

efficacious teachers demonstrate flexibility in their teaching strategies. As academic standards evolve, so too should the method used for instruction. As teachers across the nation teach the Common Core Literacy Standards (literacy standards across all content areas), there are extensive discussions about what effective reading instructional practices should look like in the era of the common core. Unlike previous instructional practices, such as text placement based on students' instructional level (leveled readers), classroom teachers must include some texts that are above students' instructional level and must provide scaffolding so that students may experience success at deciphering difficult texts (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012). Shanahan (2011) suggested teachers provide students with extensive instructional support as they grapple with difficult text. Heibert (2012) provided a detailed list of seven action steps that teachers must adopt as they provide comprehensive instructional support to aid student understanding of complex text. These steps are: "focus on knowledge, create connections, activate students' passion, develop vocabulary, increase the volume, build up stamina, identify benchmarks" (pp. 2-8). Including these during reading instruction serve as the support that students will need to make sense of text written at increased levels of complexity.

Close Reading

The implementation of the new academic standards in ELA gave rise to an old instructional practice called close reading (Shannahan, 2012; Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2012). Reading a piece of literature closely, commonly termed as "close reading" (Fisher & Frey, 2013) is a strategy that practitioners recommend because of its effectiveness in comprehending complex text. Close reading as defined by The Partnership for the

Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC, 2011) is a process of reading a given complex text multiple times to analyze, compare, and synthesize ideas. Fisher and Frey (2012) defined close reading as an "instructional routine in which students critically examine a text, especially through repeated readings" (p. 179). Close reading according to Fang and Pace (2013) referred to multiple readings while paying careful attention to words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and determining how one affects and connects to the ideas and purposes of texts. From observing and synthesizing the results of classroom observation, Fisher and Frey identified key features of close reading: "select short worthy passages" (p. 8), "design the lesson so students reread" (p. 9), "ask students to read with a pencil" (p. 9), "remind students to note confusions" (p. 9), "model the text" (p.9), "discuss the text" (p. 10) and "ask text dependent questions" (p.10). The process of close reading can therefore be quite complex; however, because the teacher provides ongoing scaffolding and support during close reading lessons, the practice lends itself to deeper comprehension.

The practice of close reading is not new to education (Frey & Fisher, 2013) and the common core requirement for students to read texts closely, means a renewal of an old practice. With the unfolding of the new more rigorous literacy standards and the instructional shift to include more complex text, educators realize the need to encourage students to slow down the pace of reading to gain deeper understanding (Newkirk, 2010). Close reading is experiencing a resurrection and teachers of all content are responsible for providing students with opportunities to close read. To engage students with close

reading practice, once again teachers must have the knowledge, skills and the confidence (attributes of self-efficacy) to engage students in close reading activities.

Several linguists and literacy specialists have outlined procedures and components for close reading (Brown & Kappes, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2012; Shanahan, 2013). However, outlining procedures will not reap the benefits of close reading (Fang & Pace, 2013). According to Fang and Pace (2013) relying on multiple readings of complex texts, by itself, will be frustrating to struggling readers. To improve comprehension of challenging text, teachers must aid students in, "unpacking the often dense and abstract language of disciplinary text" (Fang & Pace, 2013, p. 107). This means close reading must take place in all classrooms.

Vocabulary Strategies for Understanding Complex Text

Effective instruction in vocabulary development is another best practice for developing comprehension of complex text. Vocabulary acquisition and development correlates with reading comprehension (NRP, 2000; NCES, 2013). Increasing engagement with nonfiction and literary texts that are more complex will undoubtedly expose students to new and more difficult words. The new instructional shifts indicate the need for teachers to help students develop word knowledge by explicit teaching of academic vocabulary (Common Core Initiative, 2010). Teachers must not only possess a plethora of vocabulary instructional strategies, but teachers must have the knowledge, skills and, beliefs in their capabilities (efficacies) to provide effective vocabulary instruction to adolescent struggling readers.

Vocabulary tiering (Beck, McKeweon & Kucan, 2013) and *Flood, Fast, Focus* (Blachowicz, Bauman, Manyak, & Graves, 2013) are two vocabulary strategies that teachers use as a framework to group unfamiliar words according to levels of difficulty to comprehend. Beck et al. (2013) organized words in tiers. Words considered Tier 1 are common everyday words, Tier 2 words are considered general academic words that are cross-curricular, Tier 3 words are domain specific that ensure understanding in their specific disciplines (Common Core Initiative, 2010). For students to benefit from vocabulary instruction and experience comprehension of a piece of literature, King (2010) in an interview for Engage NY recommended the strategic identification of Tier 2 words and that teachers engage in explicit vocabulary instruction of such words

Blachowicz et al. (2013) designed a vocabulary instructional framework that is very similar to vocabulary tiering. The name of the framework is Flood, Fast, Focus. The developers designed this vocabulary instructional framework under the premise that ongoing word learning is a continuous process because students learn words explicitly and incidentally. The *Flood, Fast, Focus* model includes exposure to a plethora of words. Fast refers to the pace at which teachers teach those words with meanings that are easy to comprehend. This means there is no need to exert too much time teaching easy words. Focus refers to the explicit and timely instruction of more complex words that are critical to understanding the information. Teachers should include visual aids such as semantic maps and graphic organizers as they teach vocabulary acquisition using the *Flood, Fast, Focus* framework (Blachowicz et al. 2013).

There are many complex processes involved in literacy. One of such components is comprehension, which is the literacy focus of this project study. In many instances, an author's message is in textual form and exposure to complex text means exposure to more complex vocabulary. Researches over the years show a direct correlation between students' word knowledge and comprehension (Bromley, 2007; Manzo, Manzo, & Thomas, 2006; Mehrpour, Razmjoo & Kian, 2011). The number of academic and vocabulary terms that students are required to know is quite overwhelming. This result from the fact that although some academic words may overlap content areas, there are many words that are content specific and understanding of such terms are critical to comprehending the information taught. Teachers should be knowledgeable about various ways of selecting and teaching the critical academic and content vocabulary so that students will reap the benefits of the instructional activities (Neuman & Wright, 2014).

At the middle and high school level, content area teachers are responsible for teaching both academic and content area vocabulary. Teaching both academic and content vocabulary will pave the way for better textual understanding of complex text. To accomplish this, teachers must demonstrate high levels of self-efficacies, knowledge, and skills to help students gain meaning from texts that include complex vocabulary.

Tiering or classifying vocabulary words for instruction are practices that teachers engage in before instruction. Rather than focusing on strategies for classifying or tiering academic and content vocabulary terms, other researchers described practices to incorporate during instruction (Marzano, 2009; Fisher & Blachowitz, 2013). Marzano (2009) outlined a six-step process for vocabulary instruction. The first three steps are:

describing, explaining, or giving examples of new words; allowing students to restate the given description based on their understanding; and allowing students to show their understanding of the word by drawing a picture to represent the word. The next three steps are: involving students in activities that will enhance their knowledge of the new word, allowing opportunities for students to have conversations about the words, and including classroom games.

Like Marzano (2009), Fisher and Blachowicz (2013) outlined vocabulary development strategies that teachers should use during instruction. Fisher and Blachowicz described four "during instruction" practices of effective vocabulary instruction for math and science academic vocabulary. These practices include providing extensive manipulation of the term through hearing, reading, speaking, seeing, and writing; including visual representations such as graphic organizers; allowing students repeated exposure and revision of academic words through oral activities; using additional media formats which includes visuals, and teaching meaningful word parts (Fisher & Blachowicz, 2013).

As all teachers begin to incorporate fictional texts that are more complex, they must also ensure that students are reading more informational and nonfiction texts. Reading statistics indicate that historically, students do not perform well on responding to questions taken from informational text (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012). One of the reasons students perform unsatisfactorily when responding to questions from nonfiction or informational text results from the fact that informational text structures are usually quite different from literary text - making them more complex (Shanahan, 2013).

The ELA common core requirement for informational text states that students at the K-5 level should read an equal amount of literary and informational text (50:50 ratio), in the middle grades, students reading should include 55% literary and 45% informational. At the high school level, students' exposure to informational text should be 70% and 30% literary (CCSS, 2010b). The large percentage identified for informational text is a combination of nonfiction literature read across all content areas (Shanahan, 2013).

Since students struggle with understanding nonfiction texts, the requirement to increase this type of text may not be welcoming to classroom teachers. Miller (2013) discussed various instructional ways to ignite students' interests in nonfiction text. These methods include: engaging in book talks about nonfiction text, incorporating regular read aloud with nonfiction text, incorporating non- fiction mentor texts during literacy lessons, pairing nonfiction with text of similar topics, allowing students choice of nonfiction text related to curriculum content, and providing the necessary scaffolding for students' success. Frey and Fisher (2013) described teachers as guides who "lead our students through the challenging terrain of informational texts" (p. 34). Frey and Fisher suggested the use of five "access points" (p. 34) to ensure deepened understanding of informational text. The five access points are establishing a purpose for reading the text, engaging students in close strategic reading of the text, allowing opportunities for discussion and interaction with the academic language through collaborative conversations, encouraging reading of a variety of content related text by providing additional time for independent or whole class reading, and allowing students to demonstrate understanding of textual

content, assessing the demonstration and planning instruction based on students' understanding.

Another recommended strategy for improving the comprehension levels of struggling adolescent readers is the *Three Important Words* strategy (Hock, Bernhardt, Murphy-Schiller, & Fisher, 2013). Hock et al. wrote that in many instances, struggling readers have difficulty in comprehending nonfiction, complex material because they encounter unknown words and may have limited background knowledge. Finding the main idea, supporting details, and making summaries are two critical strategies that struggling adolescent readers find challenging. While working with struggling readers during a summer reading program, Hock et al. incorporated chunking the texts and the *Three Important Words* (p.4) to build comprehension. For this strategy, after reading short chunks of the text, readers select three words of importance from the text. From these three words, students identify one that describes the main idea. The reader records the three important words on a graphic organizer and constructs three sentences using those three words. The graphic organizer becomes a guide that the student uses to write a summary.

Developing Comprehension through Literacy across the Curriculum

The implementation of Common Core Standards in ELA created a revival of the educational conversations regarding content area literacy. This resulted in arguments put forward by disciplinary experts about the distinct differences between content area and disciplinary literacy, (Meyer, Stewart, Moorman, & Brozo, 2012). In the common core document, the authors recommend that the responsibility of teaching literacy be shared

within the school (Common Core State Standards, 2010). Reading and writing across the curriculum, oftentimes referred to as content area literacy, (Collier, 2011), opens doors for student learning because students can experience the effects of reading and writing success as they realize the influence that literacy has on gaining new knowledge. Collier (2011), an advocate for teaching literacy in all content areas, argued that exposure to similar literacy instructional strategies across content areas otherwise known as generalized strategy instruction (Faggella-Luby et al., 2012), or strategy-based instruction (Cantrell et al., 2010) resulted in increased comprehension and problem- solving. The inclusion of literacy standards in all content areas demonstrates the importance of mastering literacy standards to learn all subjects (Collier, 2011).

Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) provided clarity regarding the content area literacy concept. In an investigation that spanned over two years, Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) discovered that text content experts and secondary teachers read texts about their disciplines quite differently and utilized different comprehension strategies. Unlike instruction with younger learners, where "decoding, fluency, and basic comprehension strategies" (p. 56) are adaptable to most texts, texts at the secondary level are more complicated because of content specialization. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) recommended that educators not rely on general reading strategies but for content experts and teachers to design new strategies that are applicable across all disciplines.

Other specialists share similar views regarding the distinction between content and discipline literacy (Brozo, Moorman, Meyer, & Stewart, 2013; Fang & Coatoam, 2013). According to Fang and Coatoam (2013), content literacy focuses on the use of

generic strategies to comprehend texts from different content areas. Disciplinary literacy aims to create learners who demonstrate cognitive processes similar to the processes used by experts in the various disciplines (Lee & Spratley, 2010).

Proponents of disciplinary literacy, while valuing the importance of literacy strategies, have identified flaws with this generic approach to literacy in all disciplines. One argument for a solution is the need for literacy teachers and content area teachers to identify each other's expertise in their fields and engage in collaborative conversations on ways of incorporating both literacies (Meyer, Stewart, Moorman, & Brozo, 2012. The disciplinary literacy model includes the use of specific discipline based literacy strategies used to enhance learning in various disciplines (Fang & Coatoam, 2013). To meet the requirements of the new literacy standards, all teachers must experience high levels of efficacy in content knowledge and effective literacy instruction to address the diverse learners in the classrooms**.**

While acknowledging the importance of disciplinary literacy instruction, Fagella-Luby et al. (2012) argued that replacing general strategy instruction with disciplinary literacy instruction would not necessarily improve the literacy needs of ASRs. According to Fagella-Luby et al. disciplinary literacy, "fails to consider the academic diversity of today's schools in which majority of students have yet to master the necessary pre-requisite skills for discipline-specific instruction" (p. 71). They argue that while the common core standards demand students to critically close read and analyze more complex literary and informational texts, the standards do not provide the scaffolds necessary to achieve these demands. To lay a foundation for success in disciplinary

literacy instruction, the recommendation for ASRs is effective instruction in and application of general reading strategies such as visualizing, summarizing, asking and answering questions and monitoring comprehension. The researchers recommended that content teachers should refer to and use the content enhancement routines (CERs) when planning literacy instruction for SARs. Content enhancement routines include selecting and providing instruction on the critical features of the content, differentiating instruction, refraining from watering down the content, and establishing teaching and learning partnership between the teachers and students (Fagella-Luby et al., 2012).

Implications

Implementing more rigorous literacy standards is a current trend in K-12 learning environments. Like previous implementations, teacher preparation and perceptions of self-efficacy are critical to successful transitions (Cantrell & Calloway, 2008). In this qualitative project study, I examined middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of the reading standards, their perceptions of their preparedness to teach the standards, and perceptions of their self-efficacy to teach the standards to struggling readers. preparedness about the reading standards. and self-efficacy to teach reading standards to struggling readers. Such a project involves potential implications for district curriculum leaders, teachers, and students. In addition to curriculum leaders, teachers, and students, potential implications may extend to leaders in teacher training colleges who may determine if preservice teachers are adequately trained to facilitate the comprehension development of SARs by teaching the new common core literacy standards.

The findings from this study resulted in the development of a project designed to allow teacher time to collaborate and engage in conversations about best practices and effective strategies to incorporate when teaching common core standards to struggling readers. The project is in the form of PD sessions, during which time teachers will gain information about comprehension strategies for use with struggling readers. This project genre was selected because it promises the best results for teachers as they gain practical experiences and strategies to teach reading standards. The strategies that I include in the PD series are readily applicable for classroom instruction. Researchers have found that ongoing PD is necessary for teachers' professional growth and is needed especially during this period of implementations (Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Perry & Manery, 2011).

Summary

In this study, I explored middle level teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy to teach common core literacy standards to struggling readers, in addition to their perceptions about the measures taken to prepare them for effective instruction of the standards. Review of the pertinent literature suggested strong connections between teacher efficacy and student achievement. In addition to teacher efficacy, teachers' ability to motivate students, teachers' years of experience, and teachers' willingness to modify instructional practices are additional factors that contribute to student achievement.

In helping teachers to meet the demands of the more rigorous standards, researchers have explored old and new instructional strategies and have made recommendations about literacy instruction in an era of common core. The literature indicated that integrating past and present research based comprehension strategies

(general reading strategies, content and disciplinary literacy strategies, vocabulary strategies, and close reading) are effective ways of helping adolescent struggling readers comprehend complex text (Fagella-Luby, 2012). Successful implementation of the new common core literacy standards is also dependent on teacher collaboration and effective PD opportunities. The literature review revealed that after participating in PD about new instructional practices, high efficacious teachers required less follow-up support that their counterparts with low self-efficacy (Cantrell & Calloway, 2008).

In Section 2 of this project study, readers will find information about the methodology used for conducting this research. A qualitative case study design is appropriate for a study that examines perceptions and teacher efficacy because the focus here is to get detailed and descriptive personal beliefs or perceptions from individuals who are experiencing the phenomena. The focus of this investigation was to explore middle school ELA teachers' perceptions and self-efficacy to teach more rigorous literacy standards to students who read significantly below grade level.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The main purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate middle school literacy teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy to teach reading standards to their struggling readers. This section includes a discussion regarding the research methodology, including descriptions of participants, setting, sample, data collection and data analysis procedures. In addition, included in this section are literature-based rationales for all the components of this section. I used the research questions to guide the type of research design selected for this study. For the most part research questions, that begin with "how" (Creswell and Plano, 2007) and focus on exploring personal beliefs and participants' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) are better answered through the application of a qualitative approach. Guided by the research question, I sought to gather information about how ELA teachers feel about their abilities to teach to Common Core literacy standards. In addition, I investigated perceptions about personal knowledge, understanding, and preparedness to teach the new standards. Two research questions guided this study:

1. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their understanding of the new literacy standards?
2. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers?

The Research Design

The focus of this project study was to gather perceptions from middle school ELA teachers who work in two rural middle schools. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006), when the researcher's focus is to gather perceptions and beliefs, a qualitative case study approach is appropriate since qualitative case study designs emphasize, "giving voice to the feelings and perceptions of the participants of the study" (p. 264). Yin (2003) recommended the use of qualitative designs when the researcher wishes to gather responses to questions that ask how and why, since these types of questions provoke personal feelings and interpretations. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding. The researcher, who is the primary medium to collect and analyze data, follows an inductive process. For the inductive process, researchers discover and build theories, hypotheses and concepts as the research evolves and the final product is very descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

A qualitative case study, according to Baxter and Jack (2008), examines a phenomenon using multiple lenses and leads to in-depth revelations and understandings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The design for this investigation was based on Creswell's definition of a qualitative case study as an investigation that explores programs, events, or individuals, considered "bounded" (p. 465), in relation to time, place, or physical location (Creswell, 2012). The investigation related to the self-efficacy of middle school ELA teachers about teaching common core reading standards to struggling readers. The case in this investigation involved several middle school teachers who work in two

schools in a rural low- performing school district. In building a case, it was imperative that I outline boundaries to keep the investigation focused on the issue at hand. The teaching levels of the teachers (middle school) and the locations in which the study took place (a district in a southern state) were boundaries set for this research.

In determining the type of research design for this project, I conducted a thorough research of all the qualitative designs, including phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Merriam, 2009). I rejected the phenomenology design since that design focuses on studying strong, human, emotional experiences. This study's focus is not on emotional or affective human experiences, but rather on teachers' perceptions of teaching to common core standards to struggling readers. I rejected the grounded theory design whereby the researcher examines the data and develops a theory (Lodico, 2006). My goal for this investigation was not to build theories but to gather perceptions. Ethnography designs that usually extend over long periods of time and involve the investigation of groups in a cultural setting (Lodico, 2006) were not necessary for this investigation. These three designs were rejected because they would not yield the kind of data required to answer the research questions

The Participants

The population for this study consisted of eight candidates who were selected via purposeful sampling. The goal was to identify participants who had a wealth of pertinent, first hand, and accurate information that addressed the research questions (Creswell, 2012; Sproull, 1995). The characteristics of these participants fit the criteria set for this

investigation: all were certified teachers in a low-performing district with a very high percentage of struggling adolescent readers.

There are six middle level (6^{th}-8^{th} grade) ELA teachers and two media specialists (who were former ELA teachers) who provide reading instruction to the students. All teachers from the middle schools are certified to teach ELA which includes the instruction of reading. The middle schools are Title 1 identified schools. This investigation targeted the problem of middle school ELA teachers. It therefore makes sense that I use the purposeful sampling approach.

As soon as I received approval to collect data Walden IRB (Approval No. 09-22-16-0103897), I contacted the media specialists from each school who willingly accepted the role of being gate keepers. The initial meetings were scheduled and held on regularly scheduled faculty meeting days. The researcher met with only ELA teachers to discuss the project. The duration of the meeting was approximately 25 minutes. During the initial meeting with the teachers, I shared an overview of the research (topic and purpose) and provided the reasons the schools were selected as sites to conduct the study. I also informed the teachers that the goal of the study was to design a useful project based on the findings from the data collected. I informed the teachers of their rights as participants and explained how I would maintain privacy and confidentiality by using researcher derived codes used in place of real names and locations.

I extended invitations to participate to all middle school ELA teachers in the district. The sample size for qualitative research studies varies from researcher to researcher. Moustakas (1994) suggested that for qualitative studies, total participants can

be between five and ten. Creswell (2012) recommended a maximum of 40 participants for qualitative studies. These small numbers are acceptable because in qualitative studies, data analysis can be very time consuming and exhausting. Creswell (2012) wrote, "It is typical in qualitative research to study few individuals or cases" (p. 209). Creswell continued that samples in qualitative research can range from "1 or 2 to 30 or 40" (p.209). Creswell (2012) warned about having many participants because too many participants can lead to "superficial perspectives" (p. 209). In considering the objectives and procedures involved in conducting qualitative studies that are designed to gather detailed descriptive information, the selection of a sample size of eight seems appropriate. Of the eight potential teachers, seven participated in the research study.

Qualitative research involves contact and communication between researcher and participants. Establishing researcher-participant relationship lay the foundation for successful data collection (Merriam et al., 2010). Having worked in the school district prior to the implementation of the Common Core standards, allowed me to have a previous relationship with most of the participants. In continuing to establish a relationship with the participants, I scheduled an initial meeting during which time I reintroduced myself to the participants, provided them with information about the study, and sought their participation. I continued communication with teachers about the study through their personal email and conducted face to face interviews with them.

In establishing relationships with the teachers, after I conducted the initial meeting, all other communications were done directly between the teachers and me. I maintained confidentiality by communicating with the participants through their personal

email accounts. I also emphasized the possible benefits to the teachers for participating in the study. The benefit is that after data collection and analysis, I will design and present a project to address the findings.

Data Collection

To conduct this investigation, I contacted the superintendent of the district and sought permission to conduct this qualitative research study. Upon receipt of the IRB approval, I immediately began the data collection process. I relied on the gatekeepers to arrange a time for the initial meeting with the teachers. After the initial meeting, I no longer had to rely on the services of the gatekeepers because I could engage in personal contact with the teachers.

To facilitate the research process at the school level, I identified one individual from each of the two schools who served as gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are individuals who can provide permission for accessing the site (Deroche & Lahman, 2008), who have the capability to assist in identifying appropriate candidates for the study, who are supportive of the investigation, and are individuals who understand the social change which the study targets (Creswell, 2012). I selected the media specialists (one from each school) as the school level gatekeepers. Having identified the gatekeepers, I provided them with provisional documents that briefly outlined the intent of the investigation. The provisional documents included information relating to reasons the sites were selected, the type and method of data collection, a timeline for the collection of the data and information regarding possible interruptions that may occur while data is collected. The

gatekeepers from each school were informed of their responsibility, which was to assist in setting up schedules for the initial meeting with the teachers.

With the assistance from the gate keepers, convenient days and times (after school during pre-scheduled faculty meetings) were scheduled to conduct the initial meeting with the teachers. The gatekeepers selected times that did not result in significant disruptions to the regular activities of the school. The initial meetings were held on regularly held faculty meeting days. Only ELA teachers were present for the first 25 minutes of the meeting. During the initial meeting with the teachers, I shared an overview of the research (topic and purpose) and expressed my desire for teacher participation.

Instrumentation

Since the purpose of this study is to gather perception and self-efficacy information from middle school teachers, the most appropriate method for collecting data is to conduct interviews. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006), researchers can gather qualitative data through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Creswell (2012) categorized the methods for gathering qualitative data and found "observations, interviews and questionnaires, and documents" (p. 212) to be most useful.

As stated earlier**,** semi-structured interviews were used to gather efficacy beliefs and perceptions data. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee to respond to previously prepared questions, thus giving the interviewer the flexibility to include additional questions (Lodico et al., 2006) for clarification during the interview session. A

researcher produced semi-structured interview protocol was used to gather answers to the research questions.

The interview questions were designed to gather information about teacher efficacy beliefs and perceptions about teaching mastery of new literacy standards to struggling readers. Using the research questions as the foundation, I designed interview questions that led to the exploration of how teachers perceived their understanding of the new literacy standards and how efficacious they believed they were in implementing the new standards during instruction to struggling adolescent readers. Additional information gathered through the interviews was teachers' perceptions of having to teach more rigorous literacy standards to struggling readers. The interview questions required teachers to discuss their feelings of self-efficacy about the requirements that are involved in teaching the new standards, especially the need to include more complex text in the curriculum. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed in preparation for the data analysis stage. All participants agreed to have the interview audio recorded. I scheduled approximately 45 minutes for each interview. I conducted all interviews either before or after regular school hours.

Since the interview protocol was researcher produced, to ensure the interview questions are valid and appropriate for this investigation, I sought the assistance of three ELA experts to review and revise the interview protocol. The expert team included a district level ELA coordinator, a district level literacy coach, and a district level ELA common core turn around coach. Members of my Walden committee assisted in reviewing and refining the interview questions. The interview questions were written to

elicit responses such as the challenges (if any) experienced when teaching common core literacy standards to struggling readers.

Recording and Analyzing

To gather information from qualitative research, researchers must engage in the processes of organizing, transcribing and analyzing the data either by hand or using computer software (Creswell, 2012). For this study, I used one-on-one semi structured interviews to gather information from each participant. The interviews were used to gather answers for all interview questions and a tape recording device was used to record each interview.

The interview protocol included sections for note taking purposes during the recording of the interviews. During the recording of the interviews, I made notes of body language information by inserting codes such as “P” for pauses and “H” for hesitation as I took manual notes. I made sure that I included these codes when I transcribed the audio interview to text. The process of transcription began within 2–5 days of conducting each interview.

After transcribing data from the face-to-face interviews, I began to employ the qualitative data analysis steps outlined by Creswell (2012). These steps included engaging in multiple readings and writing memos in the margins of the transcript. In addition, I did as Creswell (2012) suggested and began the process of coding the text by engaging in the process of chunking the text and identifying themes.

Prior to data collection. I used the information from the literature review as a guide to create a list of tentative codes. I began the data analysis process by first

searching the data for these tentative codes I developed these tentative codes from the review of the conceptual framework of self-efficacy. I developed the codes from statements relating to general self-efficacy beliefs, in addition to statements referring to more specific teacher self-efficacy beliefs.

To make sense of the interview data, throughout the transcription process, I wrote margin notes that revealed my thoughts about the information. After the initial phase of reading and writing notes, I began the coding process by deconstructing the text to generate and create a list of general ideas that emerged from the data. These general ideas were later chunked to form major themes (Creswell, 2012).

For the first question (How do middle school ELA teachers describe their understanding of the new literacy standards?), I examined the data for tentative codes that describe teacher ratings as great understanding, limited understanding, or average understanding. For this research question, I asked teachers to provide information about the method they used to learn the standards and the tentative codes are: standards mostly self-taught, standards learned through collaboration with other teachers, or standards learned during workshops.

For the second question (How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescents?), the tentative codes were confidence in ability, self-doubt in ability, fluctuating self-efficacy beliefs, contributing factors to self-efficacy beliefs, reactions to teaching struggling readers, inclusion of complex text, opportunities to observe successful colleagues, networking with other ELA teachers, reactions to positive and negative feedback, spirit of

perseverance, and anxiety or confidence to teach reading standards. In addition to examining the data for these tentative codes, I further explored the data and found additional codes such as: demonstrating a spirit of perseverance, perceptions of student academic growth, administrators setting unrealistic academic goals, engaging in continued PD, challenging task, attitudes towards feedback from administrators, instructional challenges, frustrating assessments, low efficacy for strategies when teaching using informational texts, need for specific comprehension strategies when teaching struggling readers, and access to resources.

The next phase of data analysis was focused coding. After transcribing the interview responses, to chunk the ideas I created electronic folders using Microsoft Word and labeled each folder based on the ordinal position of each interview question. For example, I created a folder and labeled it Question 1. In this electronic folder, I copied and pasted each participant's response to the first interview question. I also added any initial tentative codes that I found during the first coding phase. On the Word document, I used the identification codes that I earlier assigned to each participant for identification purposes. I used a similar process for each research question.

After all interview responses were numbered and placed in their respective electronic folders, I began the phase of focused coding. Repeated readings of the participants' responses resulted in emerging and repeating ideas. During coding, I made an extensive list of all code words and then searched the list for recurring words, phrases, or ideas that reflected the theoretical foundation of the study. Next, I engaged in further examination of the data and grouped similar ideas together to have a more concise and

manageable list. From the grouped ideas, I generated major and sub-themes. These major themes represented the findings for this investigation and were considered in determining the type of project that I designed.

I thoroughly searched the data for information that answered the research questions and ignored any information that did not address the research question or the theoretical base of the study. I examined the data for responses that aligned with the sources of efficacy – mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. In addition, I looked for information about teachers' motivation and perceptions about teaching literacy to struggling readers.

As mentioned earlier, I sought the assistance of gate keepers to arrange and schedule the initial meeting with the teachers. After I discussed all pertinent information regarding the study, I responded to questions the teachers had and then handed out informed adult consent forms. I included information that was pertinent to the research such as: purpose, procedures for collecting data; teachers' rights, benefits and any possible risks on the consent form. I also provided each teacher with a teacher information sheet and a blank unaddressed white envelope in which teachers were to return the adult consent form and information sheet. I then extended a formal invitation for their participation in the study. I requested the return of all consent forms (regardless of decision) and informed the teachers of the process to return the forms. I instructed the teachers to place both the consent form and teacher information sheet in the unaddressed white envelope, seal the envelope, and place the sealed envelope in the locked drop box that I placed in the office. Although I allowed the teachers a maximum of seven days for

reviewing and returning the consent forms and the teacher information sheets, three teachers from one of the schools expressed interest in participating and returned the consent forms and information sheet to me on the same day.

I returned to the schools to retrieve the locked box in which the other teachers placed their consent forms and information sheet. An additional four teachers expressed interest in participating in the research. This increased the number of participants to seven. After receiving the returned documents, I began communicating with the teachers using their personal email accounts. This was a measure used to ensure further privacy and confidentiality since the transfer of communication was no longer through the schools' public communication system. As such, the dialogue between the participant and the researcher was not traceable by any member of the school district. Through phone and email contact, I could schedule interview times at the teachers' convenience.

Role of the Researcher and Researcher Bias

A key component of conducting qualitative research is to ensure there is an established researcher-participant working relationship. For the school years, 2010 – 2012, I served as an academic coach, hired not by the school district but by an educational management organization (EMO). The members of the EMO worked alongside school district personnel to implement practices geared towards school improvement. I served as an academic coach prior to the implementation of the Common Core standards in ELA and literacy. Having worked in the district, I already established a working relationship with some of the teachers. Presently, I do not have a supervisory role with any of the participants.

During this investigation, as the researcher, I engaged in conducting interviews and recording, transcribing, organizing and analyzing data. Since I took an active role in the data collection and analysis process, I was aware of any personal bias and I made every effort not to reveal that bias in any form to the participants. Having examined the reading data since the administration of the new ACT Aspire common core aligned assessment, my bias was linking student performance to teachers' knowledge and pedagogy skills to teach the standards. With such low reading data results, I began to think teachers were not efficacious in teaching the standards. With this bias that I have, I made a conscious effort not to reveal my thoughts through the wording of the interview questions. I made sure the interview questions were worded appropriately, free from ambiguity and not leading. I expressed the bias described above to the members of the expert team who reviewed my interview protocol. It was necessary to express this bias to the members of the expert team, so that as they reviewed the interview questions, they could check for any evidence of bias that may be evident from the way that I constructed the questions. After reviewing the first draft of the interview protocol, two of the reviewers questioned a follow-up question: "You mentioned being confident and having great understanding of the literacy standards, so why are almost 70% of the students underperforming." As a result, I removed this follow-up question from all other drafts of the interview protocol.

Data Analysis

This section presents the findings from the information collected during the data collection process. The purpose of this qualitative case study was twofold: (a) to explore

teachers' perceptions of the reading standards and their preparedness to teach the standards and (b) to explore the self-efficacy of these teachers to teach reading standards to struggling adolescent readers. A semi structured interview was used to gather the data. The two research questions outlined below were used to develop the interview questions. Each interview question aligned to some information gathered from the literature review and the theoretical foundation of self-efficacy. The research questions for this study are:

1. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their understanding of the new literacy standards?
2. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers?

Teacher Demographics

The sampling method used to select participants for this study was purposeful sampling of eight middle school ELA teachers who matched the selection criteria of being certified teachers of literacy. These are teachers who teach in two low performing middle schools in the school district. Of the eight teachers who were invited to participate, seven returned positive consent forms. Each teacher experienced teaching both old and new standards. There were slight variations in the demographics of the participants especially regarding years of teaching experience and highest degree earned. All but one of the teachers have been teaching the common core literacy standards since its implementation in 2011.The teacher demographics outlined below in Table 2 were significant in the selection process.

Table 2

Teacher Demographic Information

Participant code	Total years teaching	Highest degree earned	Years teaching CC literacy	Taught previous standards
HM1	6	Bachelor's	5	Yes
HM2	14	Specialist's	5	Yes
HM3	14	Specialists	5	Yes
HM4	23	Specialist's	3	Yes
LM1	25	Specialist's	5	Yes
LM2	18	Master's	5	Yes
LM3	6	Bachelor's	5	Yes

For this study, I used one-on-one interviews to gather data about self-efficacy and perceptions to teach common core literacy standards to struggling adolescent readers. The data analysis process began with the transcription of each recorded interview followed by intensive coding of the data. The process of transcribing the data required repeated listening, writing, and reading of the information. The transcription process allowed me to begin identifying commonalities among the responses.

To begin the coding process, I made paper versions of each transcript and then wrote notes in the margin of the document. I took notes of words and phrases taken from the interviewees' responses that I considered critical to the study's purpose. My notes also included my interpretation of the transcribed text. During this initial phase, I referred to my predetermined list of tentative codes and made notes on the transcript where these tentative codes appeared. In addition to looking for the predetermined tentative codes, I searched the data for other key words, phrases, and ideas that were pertinent to the study.

After the initial coding, I began a more in-depth coding process called focused coding. Benaquisto (2008) described the process of focused coding as the process by

which initial codes are refined and combined to arrive at more specific categories or themes. During focused coding, I separated the responses to the various interview questions and created word documents specific to each interview question. For example, all seven responses to the first interview question were copied and pasted onto a Word document. I focused on each question as I compared responses and searched for commonalities among the responses. As I reviewed the responses from each question, I looked for repeated words and recurring ideas from which multiple themes emerged.

The multiple themes that emerged were rigorous standards, content knowledge, instructional shifts, confidence, motivation, perseverance, response to student achievement, response to feedback, inadequate resources and instructional time, unrealistic goals, collaboration, peer observation, relevant PD, and instructional strategies. I determined it was necessary to create broader and fewer themes, so I further examined the multiple themes by listing, grouping, and assigning labels for each group. The labels became the major themes. The major themes are teachers' perceptions, teacher attitude and confidence, impediments to success, and teachers' needs. I ensured the ideas that were selected for generating the themes directly related to the self-efficacy construct. I analyzed the data for any ideas that reflected the sources of self-efficacy – mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and human emotions. I also examined the data for ideas related to improved and decreased efficacy beliefs.

Evidence of Quality

In qualitative research, researchers must make a conscious effort to ensure the findings are credible and trustworthy. Through repeated listening and reviewing of the

audio recording, I transcribed the information from the interviews. To ensure the transcriptions were accurate, each participant was sent the transcript of the interview to review. I began emailing the transcripts approximately two weeks after each interview. All seven participants agreed that the transcriptions were correct. I also used peer debriefing and member checking to ensure credibility and trustworthiness.

Triangulation

Creswell (2012) defines the process of triangulation as a corroboration of evidence from different individuals, different types of data, or different methods of data collection. The triangulation process that I employed in this study was to analyze the data from ELA teachers in two different schools. The participants were seven teachers from two middle schools in a school district in a southern state. In triangulating the data, I looked for commonalities and differences among the responses. I include all responses in the report of the findings of the study.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is another strategy that I used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. The peer debriefer is usually an individual who examines the collected data (interview transcripts) for researcher bias (Lodico et al., 2006). I selected the peer reviewer because of her former role at a local university as a professor. She had also served on dissertation committees.

Member Checks

I used member checking by participants as evidence of quality. In member checking, the researcher sends drafts of the findings of the interview to the respective

participants so that they can review the results for accuracy (Creswell, 2012). To do this, I informed participants at the beginning of the interview that after I transcribed the interviews and arrived at the findings, I would share the transcript with each participant. The participants received their transcripts one to three weeks after the actual interview. A second document with the interview transcripts, the notes that I took during the interview process, and my analysis of the responses was sent to each participant for another review (member checking). Documents for member checking were sent out approximately four to eight weeks after the interview. None of the seven participants reported instances of misrepresentation or misinterpretations. They all agreed to the information and interpretations outlined on the transcripts.

Discrepant Cases

An in-depth analysis of the responses to one interview question revealed two discrepant cases. All seven teachers were asked to explain what motivates them to teach the literacy standards, even in times when students' literacy performances were unsatisfactory. Of the seven participants, two from the same middle school expressed being highly motivated because of their students' performances on district and state assessments. Both participants discussed receiving awards for student performance on reading assessments. These discrepant cases did not affect the overall findings of the study; however, I think this may lead to possible dialogue and further study about the reasons student performance in one school is better than performances in the other middle school.

Data Analysis Results

This section presents the findings from the information gathered during the data collection process. The main purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy to teach common core literacy standards to struggling readers. A semi-structured interview was used to gather the data. Two research questions outlined In Table 4 were used to develop the interview questions. Each interview question aligned to some information gathered from the literature review and the theoretical foundation of self-efficacy.

The instrument for data collection was face-to-face interviews. During each interview, I used an audio recording device (an ipad) to record the conversation. Soon after I collected the data, I began a process of transcribing the data in preparation for initial coding. The transcription process allowed me to begin identifying commonalities among the responses.

I conducted the coding manually using paper versions of the interview transcript. I transferred any notes from the interview protocol on which I made quick notes throughout the interview. I also added my interpretation as side notes. As I engaged in the initial coding, I referred to the list of predetermined, tentative codes that I generated from the information gathered during the literature review. Although I used predetermined codes, I continued to search the data for other big ideas derived from the participants' responses.

Another round of focused coding was done. During this time, the responses from each interview questions were separated and copied and pasted on to their respective

word document. This means that all the responses from, for example, interview question number one were copied and pasted onto its own word document. Having done this, I was able to analyze and compare all responses by question. As I used this approach to examine the data, I could generate multiple themes. I examined the multiple themes, grouped them based on similarity and then created labels as major themes. The major themes for this study are teachers' perceptions, teachers' attitudes and confidence, impediments to success, and teachers' needs.

Findings

For this project study, I interviewed seven middle school ELA teachers after which I engaged in a process of coding the data in search of emerging themes. Two main research questions were used in this project (see Table 3). The teachers responded to interview questions that pertained to these two overarching research questions. The teachers' responses to the questions were used to support the findings which I discuss in this section. To ensure confidentiality, I used pseudonyms to identify each participant. Pseudonyms that begin with HM represent participants from one school and pseudonyms that begin LM represent participants from the other school

To substantiate the findings of this study, I engaged in another review of literature. While conducting the review, I discovered gaps in the literature about middle school teacher efficacy to implement common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers. Due to this gap in research, some findings could not be substantiated. Table 4 shows the overall findings from the interviews and the grouping of these findings into minor and major emerging themes.

Table 3

Emerging Themes for each Research Question

Research question	Minor themes	Major themes
RQ1. How do middle school teachers describe their understanding of the new literacy standards?	Rigorous standards, content knowledge, confidence, instructional shifts	Teachers' Perceptions
RQ2. How do middle school ELA teaches describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers?	A. Confidence, motivation, perseverance, response to student achievement, response to feedback	D. Teacher Attitude
	B. Inadequate instructional time, limited resources, unrealistic goals	B. Impediments to Success
	C. Collaboration, peer observation, relevant PD, instructional strategies	C. Teachers' Needs

Research Question 1: Emerging Themes

The interview data were transcribed, analyzed, and coded in search of themes. Following a series of coding and grouping like ideas and terms, multiple themes emerged. I continued to analyze the data in search of themes that were common among the participants' responses. Rigorous standards, content knowledge, confidence, and instructional shifts are common minor themes that aligned with the first research question: How do middle school ELA teachers describe their understanding of the new literacy standards? These minor themes were grouped together to create and recoded as a major theme of teachers' perceptions.

Teachers' Perceptions

The minor themes rigorous standards, content knowledge, confidence, and instructional shifts provided evidence of the teachers' understanding and perceptions of the common core reading standards. Teachers were asked to describe the standards and compare them to the older literacy standards. Researchers including Carmichael, Martino, Porter-Magee, & Wilson, (2010), Rosetti (2016), and Sanchez, (2016) confirmed these findings that the new standards are more challenging. All participants of this study described the standards as very rigorous compared to the old standards, they are much more difficult for students to understand. HM1 stated that, "Common Core literacy standards go more in-depth than the ALCOS...one thing I love about the new standards is that it enables students to think critically." HM3 responded, "Common Core allowed for students to think critically as they explain how they arrive at various solutions to the exercises presented to them." HM4 and LM3 agreed that the new standards are much more rigorous, more difficult to understand and require in-depth textual analyses. LM2 stated, although the standards are more rigorous, she enjoys teaching them because students are forced to provide proof for their responses and readers must understand concepts like author's craft. LM3 thinks the new standards are not just preparing students for success in school but also success in life after school.

To effectively teach the Common Core literacy standards, teachers must make changes to their instructional practices (Kane, Owens, Marinell, Thal & Staiger, 2016). To meet the rigor of the Common Core standards, 100% of participants admitted to making shifts in their instructional practices. The teachers agreed that learning about each

standard and what it means was critical to effective instruction. LM2 explained the shifts she had to make.

> Teaching the new standards effectively required changes in my instruction. First, I had to spend my own time learning the standards. From reading I realize two main areas of emphasis, nonfiction and academic vocabulary. So, my daily instruction had to include implementing vocabulary development.

The participants discussed instructional shifts, such as having to teach in small groups and differentiate instruction. HM2 remarked, "Thank God for my elementary background. With common core standards, so rigorous and some of my students' low performances, I had to provide small group instruction." HM3 agreed that because she had to go back to teach the basics, she had to do much small grouping in class. LM1 and LM2 also discussed having to use small groupings to meet the needs of their students. HM4 discussed using small grouping in middle school as quite new, "I never had to teach in small groups before but now I have to. When some students understand, there are others who just need more time. Small group is the answer to helping the slower students." The teachers were prompted to discuss the effectiveness of their small group instruction. All teachers, except one, discussed no official training on small group structures. All teachers mentioned making efforts to include small group instruction in their class activities. However, they expressed having limited knowledge in setting up effective small group structures because such structure was not previously required at the middle school level.

When asked to rate their understanding of the common core literacy standards, using a rating scale of 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest, five out of seven teachers rated their knowledge as a four and two rated their knowledge as five. HM1 remarked, "After teaching the standards since its first implementation, I have become a better teacher since I am more comfortable teaching them." HM3 stated,

> The trainings that I underwent for the first couple of years have helped me to truly understand the standards. Having this understanding makes me confident in teaching them and I know I am prepared to work with new teachers in getting them to understand the standards.

All but one of the participants began to teach the standards since the year common core standards were implemented throughout the school district. The teachers were also involved in districts training on unwrapping the standards, and this, they claimed contributed to their understanding of the literacy standards. HM3 expressed that she knew the standards extremely well and was confident that she could lead trainings for new teachers on learning the standards.

The confidence that these participants expressed is contrary to the results of research into teacher knowledge and understanding of the standards. Fernandez (2017) found that while experience with teaching the standards resulted in increased confidence, teachers currently describe their knowledge and understanding of the common core ELA standards as "still developing" (p. 84). Findings from RAND Corporation (2016) was also in contrast to the level of standard knowledge expressed by the participants in this study. The RAND Corporation finding was that only 46% of ELA teachers in states that

adopted the Common Core standards expressed familiarity and understanding of the standards.

The responses provided by the teachers indicated that not only were they confident about their understanding of the standards, but they were confident in their abilities to teach to mastery of the standards. They are aware that the standards are more rigorous and have expressed a willingness to do what is necessary to teach the standards effectively. This willingness includes making the necessary instructional shifts.

As discussed previously, one of the instructional shifts that teachers had to make was to include small grouping structures during instruction. Having to make this type of instructional shift is not unique to the participants in this study. Toavs (2017) found that of eight participants in a study to discuss the implementation process of the common core standards in two rural districts, seven teachers (across various grade levels) discussed having to provide additional instruction through small group structures to "increase the depth of understanding of new content and skills related to the standards" (p. 202).

In expressing their perceptions about teaching common core literacy standards, the participants of this study revealed that the assessments tend to frustrate some of the students. HM2 and HM3 mentioned in their responses that students often complain about how lengthy the passages are. HM3 stated that her students get turned off when they see the lengthy passages and complain about not being able to finish the assessments. Although she does not yet know how, HM3 knows she needs to find a way to help students to work faster as they navigate longer passages.

Research Question 2: Emerging Themes

Multiple minor themes that aligned with the second research question, "How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers?" also emerged from the data analysis process. The minor themes that aligned with the second research question are*:* motivation, confidence, perseverance, response to student achievement, response to administrators' feedback, inadequate instructional time and resources, unrealistic goals, collaboration, peer observation, relevant PD, and instructional strategies. Again, I synthesized the minor themes to form three major themes which are teacher attitude and confidence, impediments to success, and teachers' needs.

Teacher Attitude and Confidence

Data coding led to the emerging of themes that fall under the category of teacher attitude and confidence: are motivation, perseverance, response to student achievement, and response to feedback. These themes listed relate to the research question: How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers?

A recurring theme from the data analysis was the high level of confidence that the teachers had in their teaching abilities. These findings align very closely with the self-efficacy construct. Bandura (1997) argued that although self-efficacy involves the ability to get a task done, this alone does not truly represent self-efficacy. The ability in getting the task done must be coupled with having a willingness to initiate and engage in strategies to overcome obstacles. One characteristic of self-efficacy is demonstrating

persistence in one's efforts during times of success and failure. The teachers' persistence and motivation even when the reading performance of their students are undesirable was very evident throughout the conversations. In demonstrating strong self-efficacy beliefs, HM1 discussed having to try ways and different strategies to transfer information to students when they are not learning. HM2 discussed that a desire to see students succeed forces her to work hard at helping them realize their academic goals. In demonstrating characteristics of high self-efficacy, LM3 claimed that weak performances demonstrated by students do not deter her efforts to work with her students and helping them become better readers. LM3 takes full responsibility for her students reading development.

All participants discussed how challenging the task of teaching struggling readers was; however, they were quick to express that effective teachers must be highly motivated and confident in their responsibilities. Motivation comes from being passionate about one's role as a teacher (Mart, 2013). When teachers are passionate, they are committed to the success of their students and work tirelessly to perform their duties with efficiency (Mart, 2013).

Participants were asked to explain what motivates them to teach the literacy standards, even in times when students' literacy performances were unsatisfactory. HM2 explained how motivated he gets when he sees his struggling students make some progress. He added that he spends time commending those students who demonstrate growth and provide encouraging words for those who did not. HM4 is intrinsically motivated and does not focus on the academic levels but focuses on ways to ensure student reading abilities are improved. LM3 acknowledged that most students want to

learn and she is motivated by her students' demonstration of the desire to learn. Additionally, LM3 explained how she takes ownership of the type of academic future her students will have and is willing to do her part in aiding in their success.

Of the seven participants, two mentioned being highly motivated because they historically had students who performed well on formative and summative assessments. Though they expressed being intrinsically motivated, they were also extrinsically motivated because of rewards they received based on the student performances. LM1 noted, "Earning an award for student performance is very motivating." LM2 agreed that satisfactory student performances raise confidence and belief in one's teaching abilities.

Participant HM3 discussed feelings of disappointment when administrators examine student performance data and they begin to blame the teachers for student low performances. Felder and Brent (2016) wrote that students fail assessments, not only because of ineffective study habits but also because teachers demonstrate ineffective teaching practices. In an interview with Kevin Kumashiro, Long (2013) learned that it is a belief that teachers "aren't working hard enough, or they're greedy, or they're not accountable" (para. 6). Long found that instead of focusing on what Kumashiro described as a broken system, teachers are used as scapegoats and all reforms are focused on changing teaching practices.

LM3 also spoke about how the feedback from administrators can affect how one feels about his/her teaching abilities. In support of this belief, LM3 stated that she teaches six groups of students and even though four of the groups do well on reading assessments, administrators question the performances of the two low performing groups.

This focus on the lower performing students affected LM3 greatly. On the contrary, LM1 and LM2 were highly confident and possessed high self-efficacy because their students usually receive the highest performances on local and state reading assessments.

The participants in this study expressed mixed feelings about the feedback that they receive from administrators. For those who received positive feedback, there was increased confidence levels. On the contrary, those who received negative feedback, expressed feelings of disappointed and decreased confidence in their teaching abilities. The participants' reaction to feedback aligns with one of the sources of self-efficacy: social persuasion. Social persuasion refers to humans' reactions to any external and verbal reactions that they receive after job completion (Bandura, 1995; Gavora, 2010).

Impediments to Success

Responses from the participants revealed that there were factors that prevented them from being more successful. Inadequate instructional time, limited instructional resources, and unrealistic goal setting were the underlying themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes align with the second research question: How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers?

All seven teachers agreed that limited time and resources are factors that result in decreased self-efficacy. Other researchers Croftcheck (2015), Gonzalez-Rodriguez (2015), and Retchko (2015) found that inadequate instructional time and limited instructional resources were challenges to effective instruction. In addressing the question of adjusting instructional strategies to meet the needs of struggling adolescent readers,

HM1 discussed having the students just for one year is not enough time to get struggling readers to comprehend grade level texts. In agreement with HM1, other teachers discussed the need for extra instructional time for literacy instruction with struggling readers. LM1, LM2, and HM4 agreed that if they had more time to teach the struggling students, the performance of these students would be much more improved. HM2 discussed the need to ensure that struggling readers are provided basic foundational instruction while teaching grade level standards. To elaborate, HM2 stated,

> I had to stop and teach the skills they lacked before moving on. Having to go back and teach skills that they were supposed to already have, placed me behind in terms of the pacing. With my struggling readers, we play catch up for the entire year. We never catch up, though.

The idea that limited instructional time impedes progress and in turn affects teacher self-efficacy, was also addressed by LM2, who explained that although the reading results of her struggling readers prove that they are not proficient, she is encouraged by the tremendous growth that they usually make. She believes if these students are given additional instructional time for reading, they would eventually become proficient. Participant HM4 believes if given extra time, struggling students would do better. HM4 remarked, "If I had more time, my confidence level would be much higher."

This call for more instructional time to expedite the reading performance reflects recent research into increasing student academic performance. In advertising a product designed for struggling readers, researchers at Scientific Learning Corp. (2017) claim

that struggling readers require anywhere between 10 to 30 times more reading opportunities if there is any hope of catching up to their peers. In a study to determine ways to increase the reading abilities of lower elementary students, Van de Grift (2008) named seven practices that led to increased reading abilities. Two of those seven strategies are making the best use of reading instruction time through strategic planning of reading lessons and scheduling extra time (outside of the regularly scheduled reading time) for reading instruction. Creating opportunities for improving student performance through additional reading time extends into older school settings. Somers et al. (2010) reported that providing additional literacy instructional opportunities for ninth grade students through an intervention program led to increased reading performance during the experimental year. The researchers found that removal of the intervention during the following school year did not result in sustained academic performance.

The teachers in the interviews discussed the need for additional time, however, the schedules that they presently use leave no room for additional time. With no time during the regular school day, school leaders have been creative in their efforts to provide additional learning time for their students. Resorting to extended learning options is one way of providing this additional time (National Education Association, 2008). Creating opportunities for extended learning time to increase student performance is still used in schools. Farbman (2015) argued that extending instructional time beyond the school day can result in improved skills mastery and academic performance.

The teachers all agreed to not having adequate resources to teach the common core standards. They discussed how time-consuming it was to locate resources and that

determining the appropriateness of the resource can sometimes be challenging. The teachers mentioned relying on each other to share common core aligned resources. Resulting from limited common core aligned resources, teachers discussed also relying on colleagues from other schools, in addition to, relying on resources created by other teachers on websites such as Pinterest and Teacher Pay Teacher.

Four of seven participants reported access to differentiated common core aligned resources as one way that they could increase self-efficacy. HM2 stated, 'The Common Core calls for more nonfiction text at the middle level. Without a reading program, locating resources has been challenging." LM3 expressed concerns about locating differentiated resources: "Now I have to locate the resources to teach. With my two low performing groups, I have to find differentiated resources and finding good quality differentiated resources takes time." HM1 and HM4 also spoke of the difficulty in locating good differentiated resources that reflect the common core literacy standards.

Five of seven participants claimed that the creation of unrealistic goals can impede success. The participants explained that often the goals that are set by administrators are beyond the reach of the students. Faced with this reality, HM1 and HM4 stated that in such a situation, both teacher and students can easily become demotivated. Chambers (2015) found that because school leaders have elevated expectations about test scores, teachers are pressured to return high test scores. This type of high expectations by administrators have led to low morale and demotivation among teachers (Chambers, 2015).

Throughout the interviews, I explored the concept of teacher self-efficacy from various angles. In-depth analyses of the ideas and concepts from participants' responses to the interview questions lead to the grouping of minor themes into four major themes. Two of these major themes are teacher attitude and confidence and impediments to success. I found five minor-themes that can lead to decreased self-efficacy (see Figure 1).

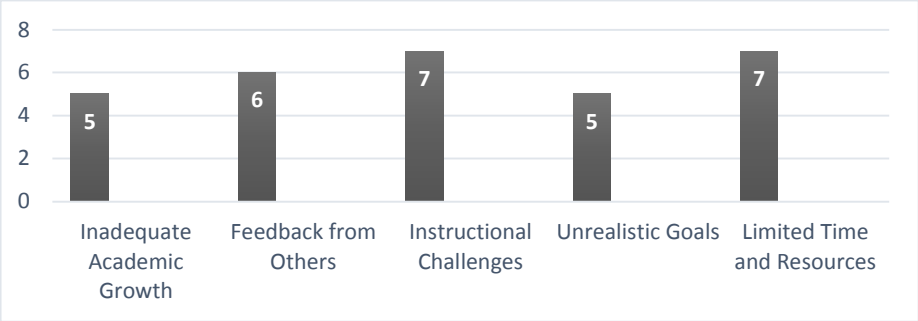

Figure 1. Themes relating to negative self-efficacy.

Teachers' Needs

While conducting the first interview, I felt the need to ask additional questions to gather additional data about teacher efficacy. One of the inserted questions required the teachers to identify specific things that they thought would make them more successful and efficacious in teaching the reading standards to struggling readers. During the interviews, the teachers discussed some factors that they believe could increase or improve their self-efficacy about teaching the literacy standards to struggling adolescent students. The themes that emerged from the teachers' responses were collaboration, peer observation, relevant PD, and instructional strategies.

These teachers' needs discussed by the participants were similar to the needs identified in a study conducted to determine the instructional challenges expressed by teachers who work in an alternative setting. Through interviews with teachers of struggling students, Retchko (2015) found that teachers were lacking in strategies that supported the literacy needs of struggling readers. More specific needs expressed by the participants of same study were peer collaboration with a focus on learning about literacy strategies and additional professional learning opportunities that are focused on improving teachers' knowledge about strategies that promote vocabulary acquisition and deeper comprehension of low performing student (Retchko, 2015). Collegial collaboration was a common thread expressed by all the participants. Other researchers (Hinkley, 2016; McCray, 2016; West, 2015) also found that teachers felt that opportunities to collaborate during PD offerings could result in increased teacher knowledge and confidence.

Participants in this study were asked, "Do you know any colleague (at your school or any other location) who has experienced success at teaching the common core reading standards to struggling readers? If yes, how has this affected your self-efficacy to teach the standards? If no, do you think collaborating with these colleagues could increase your self-efficacy?" To this question, every participant agreed that collaborating and learning from colleagues has helped. HM2 stated that with limited resources available to teach the common core, weekly collaboration has allowed them to share resources and strategies. HM4 and LM1 named a colleague whose students have always done very well on assessments. HM4 said, "There is a sixth-grade teacher whose students have historically

done well in reading. All her students do not get proficient, but in comparison to the rest of the district, they do very well." When asked how that could help, HM4 added, observing the teacher or having the teacher lead some PD could help. LM2 spoke about friendly competitions that take place among not only the teachers but the students as well. LM2 is motivated by the excellent work done by her colleagues. Peer collaboration (Gonzalez-Rodriguez, 2015) is a necessary component of teacher professional growth.

Relevant PD was discussed as a teacher need and one way to improve teachers' self-efficacy to teach to mastery of the common core standards to struggling readers. The teachers all considered themselves very knowledgeable about the common core literacy standards and that there is no longer the need to get more training in this area. When asked, "Describe your training to teach the new literacy standards as it relates to instructing adolescent struggling readers," all teachers indicated that the workshops that they had attended over the years did not specifically target struggling readers. The request for professional learning opportunities that are more targeted towards reading strategy instruction for struggling readers was consistent with findings by Retchko (2015) HM1 noted that she could not recall having any training specifically designed for struggling readers. HM2 said that general strategy instruction was given. HM3 added, that her knowledge of comprehension strategies comes from collaborating with colleagues and not from the training provided by the district. LM2 remarked she uses the same strategies for all leaners. However, the strategies are modified and are differentiated. She continued to express that the methods teachers use to teach and the time allotted to teach the strategies are most important in seeing improvement.

Further conversations with the teachers led to the discussion of what they felt were specific needs to increase teaching abilities and self-efficacy to teach the literacy standards to struggling adolescent readers. An added question during the interview was, "What do you think would truly make you feel more efficacious to instruct the lowest performers in your class?" Table 3 provides a summary of the topics that teachers felt could address the instructional needs and result in increased levels of self-efficacy.

Table 4

Participants Generated Ideas for Increasing Self-Efficacy

Instructional Needs	Responses
Longer instructional time	3
Strategies to teach comprehension of nonfiction texts	5
Training and use of intervention programs	3
Availability of differentiated Common Core resources	4
Vocabulary Strategies	3
Strategies specific to struggling readers	4

Note. Responses refer to the number of participants who discussed that statement as an instructional need.

Five of seven of the teachers believe that learning about more strategies to teach comprehension of nonfiction texts would positively affect their self-efficacy (see Table 3). In response to this added question, HM1 remarked, "Low performing students need so much more… but for me more strategies to teach nonfiction text." HM 1 continued, "Learning more effective strategies would lead to much more confidence on my part. Not

that I lack confidence, it would just be higher." HM3 responded that there is a need for more ongoing PD regarding new researched based strategies that are specially designed for reading the various forms of informational text. HM4 stated, "anything to help students do better at comprehending all types of text, not just literature but informational as well." LM2 added that any training that is specifically geared towards effective comprehension strategies for students who are reading below grade level would be beneficial.

Five of the participants (see Table 4) reported that teachers' self-efficacy to teach the literacy standards to struggling readers could improve if they received training on reading strategies that were geared towards struggling readers. LM3 stated, "There must be different strategies for underperforming students. That's what I want to learn about. Some different things, you know." HM2 requested "more PDs on strategies to teach common core to struggling readers." Some teachers asked for an intervention program which would provide differentiation for struggling readers.

Self-Efficacy Findings from the Data

Bandura (1995) identified four sources of self-efficacy. These are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. The level of influence that some of these sources have on personal self-efficacy was quite evident. The teachers' success is often tied to student performance and repeated great performance results in increased self-efficacy. Two of the teachers interviewed expressed satisfactory student performance on the reading assessments which result in their being very motivated and efficacious in their abilities.

Other participants expressed that although their students show growth on the assessments, they still function below grade level. Some of the teachers admitted that having repeated instances of inadequate growth results in fluctuating levels of efficacy. HM3 stated, "I am confident in teaching the standards...I must admit I have yet to feel satisfied with the performances of my struggling readers. I spent much time planning but it does not seem to be enough."

In responding to the question, "Has your self-efficacy for teaching reading changed since the implementation of the new literacy standards?" HM1 stated, "For a moment after district and state assessments results are received, the human nature is to feel depressed when the results are not as good...I cannot remained depress for long." HM3 responded, "when my students do well, my confidence level is very high. The opposite occurs when they do not do so well." In responding to the above question, HM2 remarked,

> I still know I am a strong teacher of reading. But when over 70% of students read below grade level and thus their results on assessments place them functioning at the need support or close performance levels, thinking about one's effectiveness does cross the mind.

These responses show that mastery experiences affect the participants' efficacy beliefs in that repeated instances of student failure decreases self-efficacy beliefs.

Social persuasion as a factor that affects self-efficacy was also a common thread throughout the interviews with the teachers. The teachers expressed their feelings about the feedback they received from administrators. Two teachers, LM1 and LM2, received

awards from the district for student performance on reading assessments. Some of the other teachers described their administrators demands as "unrealistic goals" (HM1). One participant expressed feeling down trodden when she is blamed for the low performance of the struggling readers. HM3 expressed that administrators never seem to acknowledge the progress made by her struggling readers because in the administrators' minds the growth is not sufficient. She also mentioned how it is easy for administrators to blame teachers for students' academic performance.

I also found themes that aligned with factors to increase self-efficacy. The participants identified team collaboration, peer observation, and continued PD as ways to increase self-efficacy. When asked about the trainings to teach literacy standards to struggling readers, all the teachers respond to not having any specific training to teach struggling readers. During the first interview, I felt the need to insert additional questions. The final question on the interview protocol was an inserted question that I asked of each participant. The final question was, "What do you think would even better help you in teaching the standards to the struggling readers?" Participants' responses included learning about specific reading strategies for low performing readers, strategies that aligned with teaching nonfiction texts, and learning strategies to effectively teach vocabulary acquisition.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was twofold: (a) to explore teachers' perceptions of the reading standards and their preparedness to teach the standards and (b) to explore the self-efficacy of these teachers to teach reading standards to struggling

adolescent readers Since literacy is such a broad and complex topic, the focus was on comprehension. A qualitative research design that used interviews was best suitable for this study. All ELA teachers engaged in one to one semi-structured interviews. These semi-structured interviews were used to gather more in-depth and detailed information from the teachers' perspectives. Seven middle schools ELA from two middle schools were purposely selected as they had firsthand experience implementing the standards and teaching mastery of the standards to struggling readers. The seven teachers who participated in the study provided information about their self-efficacy and perceptions about teaching common core literacy standards. The research study included two main research questions, along with sixteen interview questions. The interview protocol is in Appendix D.

The participants' responses to the interview questions were analyzed and coded and multiple themes emerged. The minor themes that emerged were content knowledge, confidence, motivation, perseverance, student performance, responses to administrators' feedback, limited instructional time and resources, unrealistic achievement goals, collaboration, peer observation, relevant PD, and instructional strategies. All the minor themes that emerged I later grouped into four major themes: teachers' perceptions, teacher attitude and confidence, impediments to success, and instructional needs.

From the data collection and analysis, I determined that a series of PD opportunities was necessary to meet the needs of the teachers. Section 3 includes information about the rationale for this genre for the project and a review of literature. There is also information about the description and goals of the project and potential

resources, supports, and possible barriers associated with the project. Additional information in this section includes a proposal for implementation and timeline for implementation. The section concludes with an explanation of possible local and far reaching changes that may occur because of the implementation of this project.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The problem that prompted this study was the state mandate to implement more rigorous literacy standards in the curriculum of all students, including those who read significantly below grade level. With this mandate, I explored the middle school ELA teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy to teach reading standards to struggling readers. From the findings, four major themes emerged – positive effects of self-efficacy, negative effects of self-efficacy, factors to increase self-efficacy, and perceptions about teaching common core literacy standards to struggling readers.

I collected and analyzed data from the participants and used the findings to determine the type determine the type of project to develop (see Appendix A). This project was designed based on the needs stated by the teachers during each one's interview. During the project phase, I will facilitate 3 full days of PD modules. Participants will learn how they can implement a readers' workshop as a framework for literacy instruction. Participants will also learn about literacy strategies that can improve the reading achievement of struggling readers.

Section 3 explains the project genre and the rationale for selecting it to address the needs of the participants. It includes a general description and discussion of the overarching goals of the project. It also includes a review of the literature, a detailed plan for the implementation of the project, in addition to explanation of the evaluation plan.

Rationale

The findings from the data analysis process led to the decision to develop a series of PD for this study. In Section 2, data were gathered through interviews with seven middle school ELA teachers. These responses were analyzed to find answers to the study's two guiding questions. Participants' responses revealed that, based on the training they had received about the literacy standards, coupled with having taught the standards since their implementation, they felt they were quite knowledgeable about the common core literacy standards.

Additional findings were that although being highly motivated, some teachers experienced times when their efficacy beliefs fluctuated based on the feedback they received about student performance on district and state reading assessments. The participants also shared what they thought would yield increased levels of efficacy in teaching literacy standards to struggling readers: (a) gaining increased knowledge about effective literacy strategies for struggling readers and (b) team collaboration and observation of peers. As such, I decided that designing a series of PD sessions was appropriate for addressing these needs. Retchko's work (2015) supported the idea of creating relevant PD opportunities that reflected teachers' immediate literacy needs for improved performance and student achievement

I developed the project with two goals in mind. The first goal was to help teachers implement a reading workshop instructional framework that breaks down the reading block into segments for specified reading instruction (Candler, 2011). These segments include time for mini- lessons, guided reading group instruction, independent reading and

conferring, and collaborative literacy work (Calkins & Tolan, 2010). The reading workshop allows for instructional time designated for teachers to work with students based on strengths and weaknesses in their reading. Another goal of this project was to build teachers' repertoire of effective literacy strategies that they can use during instruction.

Review of the Literature

To address the issue of raising teacher efficacy levels for teaching common core literacy to struggling readers, a series of PD sessions was designed. For this literature review, I obtained current and pertinent literature (which include peer reviewed documents) from the following databases: ERIC, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Central, Scholar Works. I used the following key words: *andragogy, andragogy vs. pedagogy, professional development, professional development models, professional development and teachers' perceptions, common core literacy and struggling readers, readers' workshop, comprehension,* and *nonfiction text.*

This review of literature begins with an overview of andragogy which leads directly into discussions about PD, characteristics of effective PD, and teachers' perceptions of PD. A thorough review of a recommended instructional framework—a readers' workshop— follows. The literature review concludes with an emphasis on the themes that emerged during the data collection: effective literacy strategies for struggling readers.

Andragogy

Andragogy is a learning theory that explains how an adult learns. It has been referred to as "any intentional and professionally guided activity that aims at a change in adult persons" (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2015, p. 39). For effective professional learning sessions, it is imperative that facilitators are not only cognizant of the principles that guide adult learning, but that they use these principles as guidelines for preparing and conducting professional learnings. The andrological model makes six assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners – the adult learners' need to know, self-concept, experiences, readiness to learn, orientation to learn, and motivation to learn (Carpenter-Aeby & Aeby, 2013; Knowles et al., 2015).

One of the prominent principles of andragogy is that adults are more receptive of learnings that they consider relevant and easily applicable to their needs (Boudreau & Twiggs, 2011). The sessions that I designed will provide the teachers with a literacy instructional framework that will allow them to meet the specific literacy needs of their learners. In addition, teachers will learn about various research-based reading strategies that have proven effective in increasing the reading proficiency of struggling adolescent readers.

One of the striking differences between andragogy (adult learning) and pedagogy (child learning) is that andragogy includes a measurement of effectiveness that adult learners have the option to determine (Pew, 2007). The previous statement means that when adults participate in learning activities designed for their needs, they get the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning activities. Although the PD

workshop series was designed to address the instructional needs of the teachers, there is no guarantee that these sessions will meet the teachers 'needs or achieve the intended goals. Therefore, it is imperative that time is allowed for the participants to provide feedback that reflects their assessment of each session. For this project, time is allotted each day for teachers to reflect and evaluate the sessions.

Professional Development

Classroom teachers undertake the task of transferring academic knowledge and skills to students across K-12 learning institutions. Of the factors that directly affect student performance, classroom teachers are most effectual (RAND Education, 2017). A correlation between student achievement and teachers result from factors including teacher preparedness (Bayar, 2014). Creating opportunities for teachers to engage in ongoing PD can have positive effects on teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

PD programs, according to Guskey (2002), "are systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and their beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students" (p. 381). *Learning Forward* (2015) gives a similar definition that defines PD as any activity that equips all levels of educators with the tools that they need to positively effect student learning of the academic standards. These two definitions confirm the notion that the intent of any form of PD is to transform teaching practices with the goal of positive effects on student outcome.

Unfortunately, traditional PD models failed to lead to expected outcomes because they were mostly offered as single events with little input from participants (Garet et al. 2001; Nashimura, 2014). Information from *Learning Forward* (2015) and Wood et al.

(2016) explained that high-quality PD must be ongoing, very intensive and focused on improving teachers' instructional deficit areas.

How PD experiences are determinants of their effectiveness. Hunzicker (2010) identified four characteristics of effective PD. High-quality PD must be "supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative, and ongoing" (p.2). Desimone and Garet (2015) named content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation as features of effective PD. Other researchers noted that real change in practices through PD becomes evident only through PDs that are enhanced through participants' collaboration (Yoon & Armour, 2015) and PDs that are sustained over time and have follow up components (Glover et al. 2016; Sharma 2016). PD offerings are teacher focused and the success of such offerings are highly dependent on the teachers themselves. Professional learning and teacher professional and personal ethics must find common ground (Learning Forward, 2015). Four prerequisites as outlined by *Learning Forward* (2015) lay the foundation for intended PD outcomes. These are:

- Teachers' genuine commitment to providing high-quality education to students by always seeking new learning
- Teachers' readiness to learn through a collaborative atmosphere that emphasizes relevant and useful learnings.
- Teachers' willingness to be respectful, open minded, acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses and willing to tap into the resources of other educators.

- An agreement that PDs need to be differentiated to meet the specific needs of the teachers.

In developing this project, I reviewed the prerequisites outlined above. Further analysis of the interview data with the teachers revealed that some of the prerequisites mentioned above are already in place. The level of motivation discussed throughout the interviews is indicative of a willingness to learn. Teachers identified collaboration as one method that they believed could increase their self-efficacies. Teachers discussed the areas in which they believed they are lacking and have requested opportunities to tap into the resources of more successful teachers. I will facilitate the PD sessions to all seven participants. Since some teachers may require more support to implement or longer times frames for implementation, I intend to make myself available to provide any additional support.

Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development

As stated above, research has indicated that not all PD offerings have yielded the benefits they were supposed to. This has led to the investigations into the structure, components, and characters of effective PD models**.** As stated earlier**,** effective PD offerings have sustainability, include follow up opportunities, promote collaboration, are job-embedded, relevant and useful, and are driven by some form of data **(**Desimone, 2011; Hunzicker, 2010); *Learning Forward*, 2015**).** When PD opportunities are designed with these characteristics, the results can be rewarding. In a study to gather information about the perspectives of science teachers about PD offerings, Qablan, Mansour, Alshamrani, Aldamash, and Sabbah (2015) found that of 609 participants, 88% indicated

that they learned from the Continuous PD (CPD) in which they participated. Closed ended surveys was one of the methods used to collect data. The teachers agreed that participating in CPD lead to positive effects on eight areas – the top two of which are increased student achievement and improved teaching practices.

Other research into teacher perspectives about PD have not been as positive. The results from a study conducted by Glynne (2015) revealed that teachers' perceptions about PD experiences include irrelevant content, insufficient collaboration among teachers, and lack of differentiation. A study conducted by Hirsch (2015) revealed both positive and teachers' negative perceptions of PD. Teachers claimed PD offerings led to collaboration among teachers and provided differentiated opportunities through small grouping structures. Teachers also identified no accountability and inadequate time as weaknesses of the PD program.

Readers' Workshop – A Literacy Instructional Framework

The Readers' Workshop is an instructional framework that has been used in classrooms across the United States for many years. Although most of the research found discussed implementation and success of readers' workshop in elementary schools (Brown, 2014) reader; workshop has resulted in improved reading abilities of students in middle (Thomas, 2012) and secondary (Lause, 2004; Morgan & Wagner, 2013) levels. The readers' workshop emphasizes the importance of student choice and adequate time for independent reading, in addition to time allotted for working with small groups of students based on their literacy needs (Calkins & Tolan, 2010; Candler, 2011; Serravallo, 2015).

Throughout the interview, common concerns such as students' lacking foundational reading skills, underdeveloped comprehension abilities, students lacking motivation, limited time for reading instruction, and teachers inability to address the needs of the chronically struggling readers, prompted the selection of the readers' workshop as a literacy instructional framework. The participants in this study also expressed needs for effective reading strategies. The readers' workshop is not a reading strategy; however, it is an instructional framework that promotes reading improvement in students across all grade levels who struggle in reading (Calkins, 2010). The RWM allows time for students to read self-selected texts independently. When teachers allow students to choose the books they want to read, the result is increased motivation and engagement in reading (Allington, 2012; Ivey & Johnston, 2011; Stevens, 2016).

The readers' workshop is so structured that time is allotted for meeting homogeneous groups of students, during which time the teacher works with students based on areas of identified reading deficits. As is the case with struggling readers, the deficits areas may not only be comprehension of texts but also word identification. In addressing the needs of students who are reading significantly below grade level, implementing the readers' workshop will ensure students are provided instruction specific to their needs through various small grouping structures.

According to Brown (2014), the readers' workshop follows a very specialized structure. The reading block begins with a mini lesson delivered through direct instruction for anywhere between 15 and 20 minutes with a focus on grade level literacy standards. After the mini lesson, students disperse to learning centers or stations where

they work collaboratively or independently on differentiated tasks to develop and improve any literacy deficiencies. Another component of readers' workshop occurs simultaneously as the teacher pulls groups of students with similar literacy struggles and provide guided instruction. An additional key component of readers workshop is a segment for independent reading.

Strategies for Struggling Readers

The findings from this study indicated that teachers felt that learning about specific strategies for improving the reading abilities of their struggling readers would increase their self-efficacy beliefs. In addition to recommending the implementation of the Readers' Workshop Model, I will provide training on some general researched based strategies that can have positive effects on the reading development of struggling readers. The research-based reading strategies that I will discuss are: incorporating graphic organizers, graphic novels, popular culture texts, opportunities for engagement in close reading and developing comprehension through the reciprocal teaching strategy. Additional strategies that I have discussed are deepening comprehension by analyzing the structures of nonfiction texts and strategies to aid vocabulary development.

Graphic Organizers. Graphic organizers are defined as "visual and spatial displays designed to facilitate the teaching and learning of textual material" (Walden, 2015, p. 5). As visual cues, graphic organizers lend themselves to the organization of content important concepts, thus resulting in increased understanding of information. Graphic organizers serve many purposes, three of which are: promoting critical thinking

through analysis and synthesis of textual information, fostering memory recall, and showing connections between ideas and facts from text.

Segura (2016) found that of the twenty best practices named by special education teachers, they rated graphic organizer use as the second highest best practice to meet the common core literacy standards expectation. Although this project study refers to struggling general education readers and not special education students, Martel (2009) found that through co-teaching between special education and general education teachers, the sharing of instructional practices led to increased teacher motivation and increased academic and behavioral performances of students. Other studies proved that incorporating graphic organizers lead to more understanding of the content presented to struggling readers (Singleton & Filce, 2015; Walden, 2015; Stallings, 2016).

Graphic Novels. The use of graphic novels for class instruction has evolved over the years from what was considered inappropriate to now being considered an effective enhancement to the teaching of various academic content (Gavigan, 2013). Descriptions of graphic novels include being called sub-literature (Gavigan, 2013) and not real reading (Moeller, 2016). A shift in thinking, however, resulted in more positive perceptions about graphic novels by educators all over. From recent research, I learn that when used appropriately, graphic novels lead to positive effects on the comprehension development of students (Griffith, 2010; Hughes & Morrison, 2014; Jennings, Rule, & Zanden, 2014; Yildirim, 2013). The multimodal structure of graphic novels which uses images and text to convey information appeal to struggling readers and English language learners (Hughes & Morrison, 2014). Since struggling readers are not faced with text only, they

can use the images to aid in the reading process (Wooten & Cullinan, 2015; Yildirim, 2013;). In today's classroom, teachers are using graphic novels to teach concepts such as inferencing, making predictions, story plot development, character analysis and summarizing.

Popular Culture Texts. Popular culture texts include movies, music, popular novels, magazines, and games (Hall, 2012, 2016). Pop culture is beneficial to learners because it lends itself to active engagement and creates a bridge between learning that takes place in school and activities that students participate in out of school (Beavis, 2014). Struggling readers are often turned off by the type of text they are required to read and the pace at which they are expected to read. Their perceptions of themselves as poor readers daunts their motivation to read. Including familiar pop culture texts have the potential of increasing motivation as students can relate to familiar information.

Hall (2016) reported the efforts of an English teacher who included pop culture in her unit on reading and writing memoirs. The teacher included a rap poem and although not every student enjoyed the choice of pop culture, all students expressed that through watching and analyzing the spoken word poem, their understanding of a memoir improved. The result of this experience was that the struggling readers had more positive perceptions of their reading abilities since there was a sense of success in achieving the literacy learning outcomes. For this project, I selected music as the form of pop culture used to improve comprehension of complex concepts.

Close Reading. The common core reading standards require close reading of text for all grade levels. Close reading refers to the repeated reading of a text that involves

deep analysis and use of text dependent questions to deepen comprehension (Boyles, 2013). For close reading to be effective with struggling readers, Boyles (2013) recommended the use of short complex text. As students read these short complex text, repeated reading, annotation, responding to text dependent questions, and in-depth discussion of the text are critical to the success of the close reading process (Fisher & Frey, 2014). The extensive teacher support that occurs during close reading lessons serves as scaffolds for struggling readers, thus resulting in improved comprehension skills.

Reciprocal Teaching. Reciprocal teaching (Mclaughlin & Rasinki, 2015) is a proven effective discussion type strategy for use with struggling readers as they navigate different types of text. During reciprocal teaching, students practice the use of four important comprehension strategies that effective readers use as they construct meaning from text. During reading sessions, students summarize, question, clarify, and make predictions based on a given text (Oczkus, 2013). Effective implementation and regular practice with reciprocal teaching resulted in "one to two years' growth in three to six months" (Oczkus, 2016, p. 35). Since students take turns with different roles, they get opportunities to improve in all four areas of comprehension strategies. The success of using the reciprocal teaching strategy with struggling readers is highly dependent on explicit instruction and repeated modeling of the process by teachers (Okkinga, Steensel, van Gelderen, & Sleegers, 2015).

Analyzing Nonfiction Text Structure to Deepen Comprehension. Educators all over have agreed that struggling readers experience more difficulty comprehending

nonfiction than they do fiction text. The difficulty comprehending nonfiction text occurs because the structure used in nonfiction text is different from the structure used when reading or writing informational text (Smith & Robertson, 2016). One strategy that teachers use to aid students in understanding nonfiction text is to provide explicit instruction on how authors organize the ideas in a text (Clark, Jones, & Reutzel, 2013). Students must become readers can identify and analyze the various text structures (description, compare/contrast, chronology, problem/solution, and description) used in a text. When students can determine the text structure, their level of comprehension increases because they can see how the ideas in a text connect.

Vocabulary Strategies to Improve Comprehension. Vocabulary acquisition is an area that poses reading challenges to struggling readers (Mclaughlin & Rasinki, 2015; Wilfong, 2014). Struggling readers according to McLaughlin and Ransinski (2015) acquire vocabulary incidentally and through explicit instruction. Explicit vocabulary instruction includes using context to determine word meanings, using concept maps to deepen understanding of words, and instruction on word derivatives.

The review of literature adds to the rationale for selecting a series of PD opportunities to address the needs of the participants. To design and deliver effective PD sessions, it is imperative that facilitators are knowledgeable about the theory of andragogy. Outlined in the literature review. is information about the characteristics that facilitators should consider in order to design effective PD sessions. Researched into the andragogy theory and characteristics of effective professional sessions allowed me to design the learning opportunity that should be beneficial to the participants. The main

purpose of the project was to meet the expressed needs of the participants. All participants expressed needs for learning about effective research based strategies that may improve the reading abilities of struggling readers. I engaged in thorough research to arrive at the content that I needed to design a worthwhile project.

Project Description

To meet the needs of the participants, I developed a series of PD. The PD sessions will be delivered through a face to face format over a period of three full days. These three days equate to approximately 24 hours of PD training. The focus of each session is to increase middle school ELA teachers' levels of self-efficacy by providing them with effective strategies to implement during literacy instruction as they work to improve the reading levels of struggling readers. The components of this PD series are:

- Session 1 – Introduction and training on implementing Readers' Workshop
- Session 2 – Training about research-based strategies that promote reading development in struggling readers. These strategies include: close reading, use of graphic organizers, and incorporating pop culture to improve reading abilities
- Session 3 – Analyzing real student data to form guided reading groups and creating lesson plans for use during Reader's Workshop. Training on additional strategies (nonfiction focused) to increase the reading levels of struggling readers (Reciprocal Teaching, Vocabulary Strategies, using a graphic organizer to write short and extended summaries).

I extended invitations to participate in the study to eight ELA teachers. This number includes six regular ELA teachers and two media specialist (former ELA teachers) who alongside with performing duties as media specialists are responsible for teaching remedial reading to groups of low performing students. Of the eight teachers, seven returned positive responses about participation.

As stated in the data collection section of this study, I requested the services of the media specialist in each school as gatekeepers. I worked with the gatekeepers to determine a date for conducting the initial meeting with the teachers. The media sent the initial meeting dates to me and I began making the arrangements to present my project study to the teachers. After providing all pertinent information about the study and responding to teachers' questions, I extended an invitation to participate.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The implementation of this project requires time, human resources, financial resources, and support. The proposed schedule for this PD series is three full days and as such, time must be set aside for its implementation. In addition to time, the district leaders must consider the financial resources that are necessary for the full implementation of the project. Full implementation of the readers' workshop requires the purchase of instructional materials such as leveled reading materials for use during guided reading time. In addition, each teacher will need an extensive classroom library from which students will select books to read during independent reading.

The success of this PD series depends on various members of the school district and members of each local school to do their part. This series will occur over three days

and must be added to the district's PD calendar. This district PD coordinator is responsible for adding the three days to the PD calendar for the academic year. The curriculum coordinator's support is also required as he will play a role in deciding whether to purchase the materials needed for the implementation. Building principals must also support the implementation and be willing to allow the required staff members to attend the training. In allowing the required staff to attend the training, each principal will ensure important school based training do not coincide with the three-day training.

Support for this project will come from students, parents, and the director of the local Boys and Girls Club. On the first day of the PD series, I will model how to conduct a mini lesson. In addition, I will model other strategies such as close reading with students from the Boys and Girls club as participants. I will invite pre-selected students from the local Boys and Girls club to participate during this modeling sessions. To do this, there is the need for some parents and the club's coordinator to grant the permission to include the student in the activities.

Finally, the media specialists are also existing supports for this project. The media specialist in each school is responsible for teaching one group of struggling readers, and so they serve dual roles – as media specialist and reading teachers. The media specialist will play a vital role in helping students select books in their Lexile range when the students report to the library to check books out. The media specialists may also have to purchase additional leveled texts from which students will select their independent readers. Also, the media specialist will be responsible for purchasing high-interest texts so students will be able to select books they are interested in.

Potential Barriers

Findings from this study indicated that the teachers needed training on instructional strategies to teach literacy to struggling readers. The readers' workshop instructional framework was selected, not as a strategy, but as a framework that will cater to providing instruction to struggling readers in a structure that may result in improved reading skills. Implementing the Readers' Workshop will require financial sacrifices to purchase materials. The purchase of new materials for this purpose will be an addition to the budget and if the district is unable to fund the materials, a major barrier exists. In the event of inadequate financial resources, one possible solution is to locate free online reading websites that have texts that are leveled using the Lexile measurement. Another possible solution is to seek financial assistance from businesses in and around the community and to seek sponsors from members on Donor's Choose. Donor's Choose is a website created to assist schools and teachers in the purchase of resources and materials for students.

Another barrier may be the time designated to reading instruction in the school. Presently, the reading blocks range from 55 minutes to 70 minutes. To effectively implement the critical components of the readers' workshop instructional framework, the reading block needs to be a minimum of 80 minutes. This timeframe includes mini lesson, small group reading occurring concurrently with collaborative literacy centers, and a segment for independent reading and teacher/student conferring. It is very important that the critical pieces occur daily and with the present time allotted for reading, tracking the effectiveness of the implementation is going to be difficult.

The unsatisfactory performance of the students has been an area of concern, and it is necessary for district leaders and principals to work together to prioritize their focus. In so doing, district leaders and principals will consciously make the decision to narrow the focus to reading instruction. In so doing, daily schedules will be rewritten to accommodate any additional time that is required for the effective implementation of the readers' workshop model.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

These three-day PD sessions are designed to meet the needs of the ELA middle school teachers in improving their self-efficacy to teach reading to struggling readers. During the three days, participants will be introduced to and receive training on how to implement readers workshop as a literacy instructional framework that was designed to improve students' literacy skills. The participants will also participate in analyzing STAR benchmark reading assessments and learn how to use the results of these assessments (data) to determine the type of instruction that they will provide for each student. Participants will receive information about various research-based strategies for reading improvement.

To launch this PD series, I plan to communicate with the PD and curriculum coordinators of the district. During this time, I will discuss the findings from the study and describe the plan to address the findings. The conversation will include the projects' content which includes the overall and specific goals and objectives of the training. The conversation will also include information about a timeline for the implementation. The intent is to conduct all three sessions during the first semester of a school year.

The first two sessions will occur at the beginning of the school year when teachers return to school for the weeklong planning sessions. The first two days will run consecutively. On the Day 1, the focus will be on the implementation of readers' workshop instructional framework. On Day 2, the focus will be on learning about research-based strategies that have proven effective with struggling readers. Participants gather information about how to use close reading, graphic organizers, graphic novels, and pop culture as instructional strategies for low performing readers.

Participants will also receive training on strategies used by their colleagues during a segment called, Collaborative Group Share. During the interviews, participants from both schools provided names of colleagues whose students' (both on and below grade level) performances have historically been proficient or close to proficiency. On Day 2, the teachers will get an opportunity to learn from their colleagues. Before the training, I will ask these teachers to lead the Collaborative Group Share session. It is very important that the participants get to learn from each other as this may lead to increase self-efficacy. One of the sources of self-efficacy discussed throughout this paper is vicarious experiences. Seeing others succeed at tasks can increase the beliefs others have in accomplishing similar tasks.

The third and final session will be scheduled approximately one month after the initial training days. The reason for this timeframe is that a requirement for participating in this session is completion of the beginning of the year STAR diagnostic assessments. During the first half of the day, the teachers will work collaboratively to analyze students' data, form guided reading groups, and create lesson for guided reading groups.

For the second half of the day, the facilitator will provide training about strategies specific to comprehending informational/nonfiction texts. These include reciprocal teaching, explicitly teaching vocabulary strategies, using nonfiction graphic organizers to write short and extended summaries. I discussed these strategies in the review of literature section.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

After conducting the data analysis, I had to design a project that catered to the needs of the participants. Consequently, I serve as the designer of the project and will facilitate all 3-day training sessions. As the researcher, I developed the contents of the projects based on my research of effective literacy strategies for struggling adolescent readers. I created an outline of the implementation plan (Appendix A) and a schedule for the project's implementation. Although I will facilitate most of the sessions, the project includes as one of its components, a time for local teachers to share some of the strategies that have proven effective in the reading development of their struggling readers.

The teachers who participated in the research are responsible for being in attendance on all three days of the PD training. Equally important, the teachers are responsible for the implementation of a new instructional framework, which within itself requires shifts in instructional practices. Teachers are also responsible for modeling and teaching students about different strategies for reading development. Building principals and district level personnel must have a plan in place for accountability as this will ensure full implementation by teachers.

Project Evaluation Plan

Conducting evaluations of PD can be regarded as best practice. The main purpose of evaluations is to determine the degree to which the goals and objectives are met. For this project, I included formative evaluations for the first two days of training and a final summative evaluation at the end of the training (Appendix B). Formative evaluations provide immediate information about participants' satisfaction and can provide vital information about whether teachers are acquiring the knowledge and skills to improve their instructional practices (Haslam, 2010). This formative assessment uses Likert scale structure for which teachers will provide their perceptions of the training.

Participants will also complete a summative assessment at the end of the third day. Summative assessments are so designed to provide perceptions of the overall training. This summative assessment requires participants to respond to prompts through descriptive narratives or explanations. The feedback from summative evaluations helps in determining whether the training has led to changes in the behaviors of trainees and eventual improvement in students' literacy abilities.

Project Implications

Local Community

This project was designed to increase the self-efficacy of ELA middle teachers as they teach reading standards to struggling readers. I used graphs and tables to summarize the information gathered and examined the collective responses of the participants to determine the focal points for this project study. Most of the teachers stated that their

efficacy levels could improve if they were knowledgeable about some research-based strategies that are designed to improve the literacy levels of student.

The effect of increased teacher efficacies to teach new reading standards may result in increased student performance on all forms of reading assessment. Having learned about research-based strategies, teachers may begin to feel more confident about their ability to teach these standards to struggling readers. If teachers implement the readers' workshop framework and teach these research-based strategies appropriately, students may be better able to grapple with all forms of text, since they are more equipped to read at deeper levels. Improved reading abilities is important to all stakeholders and will result in more positive perceptions of the instruction that occurs in the classes.

In addition to the effects that this project may have in the middle schools, district leaders could begin to think about implementing the readers' workshop literacy instructional framework at the lower levels. Also, the research-based strategies that are discussed and modeled during the training could also be used at the lower levels. The content, materials, and narrative of the 3-day PD series are available for the district's use for training at the elementary level. For effective training, however, district leaders will have to conduct more research to become very knowledgeable about readers' workshop and the literacy strategies.

Far-Reaching.

Since the implementation of the common core reading standards, statewide and nationwide reading assessment data shows that a very high percentage of students are

performing below their expected grade level proficiencies. Reading assessment data provided by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that for the assessment year 2015, 36% of 4th graders and 34% of 8th graders achieved scores that placed them at or above proficient reading levels (NAEP, 2017). This data means that reading performance for 4th graders was not significantly different from the performance two years prior. For 8th graders, the 2015 performance represents a decrease from two years prior.

The statewide assessment used to determine reading proficiencies is the ACT Aspire common core aligned reading assessment. The results of reading assessments in the state in which I conducted this study was somewhat more promising with slight increases across grade levels. Unfortunately, the slight increases still reveal a very dismal picture of the reading abilities of test takers. On an average, 38% of test takers (3rd-8th grade) scored at or above proficiency levels (State Department of Education, 2017).

This project study can be utilized not just in the local middle schools but may have far reaching implications for reading instruction across the state. The structure of the Readers' Workshop framework allows for grade level instruction during mini lessons and differentiated instruction when teachers meet students to provide instruction at their instructional level. During readers' workshop, time is allowed for book choice (Stevens, 2016) and independent reading. Noted researchers (Allington, 2012; Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Calkins, 2010). recommend student book selection and opportunities for independent reading as ways forward to reading improvement. Including the components

of readers' workshop in the reading block across grade levels may be the answer to the reading difficulties faced by students across the state.

One of the concerns expressed by a few of the teachers who participated in the study was their struggle to incorporate small group instruction during class. The teachers believe that their inability to establish and maintain effective small groupings results from not receiving this type of training while they were in college. Curriculum designers from educational departments could use the components included in this project to revise or to create a reading course that will prepare preservice middle school ELA teachers for implementation of readers' workshop and forming of effective guided reading groups during their reading block.

Conclusion

Section 3 included information about the goals, description, components, a timeline for implementation, and methods of evaluation. I included rationale for the selection of a PD genre for this project. I also provided a literature review that includes detailed information related to the PD genre. Additionally, I thoroughly explored information about the readers' workshop instructional framework, and research about the instructional best practices for improvement of reading abilities.

Information about critical resources and supports for the implementation of the project were included. Next, I discussed potential barriers and possible solutions along with a tentative timetable and implementation details. The section ended with information about the implications of this project not just for the local schools and school district but also includes far reaching implications for other school districts in the state.

Section 4 begins with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the project and continues with my reflection and analysis of myself as a scholar, a practitioner, and project developer. Section 4 concludes with information about social change brought on by this project and discussions about possible future research that may add to the findings of this project study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The purpose of the case study was to explore the self-efficacies and perceptions of seven middle school ELA teachers about teaching reading to struggling adolescent readers. In Section 4, I will reflect on my journey as a doctoral study who was tasked with researching a problem and developing a project to address it. I designed a series of PD learning opportunities to address the needs expressed by the participants. In this reflection, I discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the project. I include key points about my learning with respect to scholarship, project development, and evaluation, leadership, and change. I then offer an analysis of myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Finally, I discuss the project's implications for social change, its applications, and some possible directions for future research.

All projects have strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths is that the content of the project is based on the needs that the participants listed during the interviews. After data collection and analysis, an examination of the themes indicated that the majority of the teachers believed that their self-efficacy to teach reading standards to struggling readers could be increased if they were knowledgeable about effective research-based strategies that were designed to help struggling readers. In other words, a strength of the project is that the content of this project was determined by the expressed views of the teachers.

Another strength of this project is the authentic practices that the teachers will participate in as I demonstrate how the strategies are to be taught. Teachers learn best from experiences that allow them to participate in hands-on experiences, by observing others, and by collaborating with peers (Desimone 2011; Forte & Flores, 2014; Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015). For this project, I will invite students from the local Boys and Girls club with whom I will model some of the strategies. This will allow the teachers to see students' authentic reactions to the strategies. The students' responses as the strategies are modeled may provide indications of the effectiveness of the strategies, in addition, to possible challenges that may arise when the strategies are implemented during literacy instruction. This type of information would be very beneficial since teachers will be able to engage in discussions about ways to address the challenges should they occur in their classrooms.

Finally, the design of this project includes many opportunities for teachers to engage in discussions, team work, and collaboration. Team collaboration throughout the sessions includes common lesson planning, designing activities for student collaborative learning sessions during the Readers' Workshop time, examining benchmark assessments and determining student grouping, and planning common guided reading lessons.

Three major limitations are associated with the implementation of this project. First, the implementation of the Readers' Workshop instructional framework can be time-consuming since teachers are not planning just for whole group instruction— a common practice in most middle schools and high schools. For Readers' Workshop, teachers must plan whole group mini lessons, guided reading group lessons; and they must plan for

standards-based activities for groups of students to work collaboratively while the teacher sees students for guided reading time. As a new implementation, initial set-up requires an investment of time.

Second, the time needed to plan for full implementation may trigger another limitation: Teachers may revert to their old, whole-group teaching methods since it is more convenient and requires less planning time. The third limitation is that the content outlined in this project emphasizes reading to learn strategies (comprehension) and not the foundational skills of word identification (learning to read). Throughout the interviews, a very small percentage of the teachers expressed concern about the foundational skills that were lacking in her students.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

This project study is an exploration of middle school ELA teachers' perceptions and self-efficacy to teach reading standards to struggling adolescent readers. I decided to address the needs of the participants through designing a series of PD learning sessions. For the project, I focused on ways to increase teachers' self-efficacy to teach these struggling students. One alternative approach could be a change in the format of presentation of the PD series. This series could have been presented using online electronic formats such as webinars or video conferencing. In such formats, the presentation could be saved and made available as a quick reference source. Presently, there are three days of intensive training and having the sessions in such format would be very beneficial to all who participated in the workshop.

Another alternative approach could focus on ways to motivate these struggling readers and to build the students' reading stamina. During the interview, some teachers discussed that the students are not motivated to read and that they also seem to get discouraged when given lengthy passages on the reading assessments. In this alternative approach, the focus will turn to the students and teachers would learn about ways to build motivation and reading stamina with their students.

A final alternative approach could be to locate and become partners with schools (with populations having similar demographics) that serve students who perform at high achievement levels on the state's reading assessment. In so doing, the research must be within the same state since this guarantees that students take the same reading assessments. When local district or school leaders identify these schools, representatives from the local district (district in which this study was conducted) should contact and plan to visit and learn about the best practices and structures that school leaders use for reading instruction in those successful schools

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Throughout this doctoral journey, I spent much time researching, reviewing, analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing information. These skills are critical to producing scholarly writing. Success at these skills was not forthcoming initially, but perseverance and assistance from my committee chair resulted in improvement over time. These skills are now so entrenched in me that in my present role as an instructional coach, I subconsciously examine everything from more in-depth analytical lenses.

I began this journey with preconceived ideas about what the results of my findings might be. After collecting, coding, and analyzing the data, the findings did not align with my perceptions. This was a learning curve for me that supports the reason that researchers must engage in thorough research of educational problems before making recommendations for possible solutions. Scholarship led to the reporting of the findings based only on the responses from the participants, Researchers must make every effort to report the data as is, without including personal opinions or thoughts. Reporting the data as found, is especially crucial to credibility in qualitative research.

Scholarship requires patience in all aspects of completing a study. I had to engage in ongoing search for articles and other publications that aligned with my topic of investigation. The requirement to include 50-75 peer reviewed articles, written within the past 5 years, initially seemed unrealistic considering my topic was new when I began writing my study about 3 years ago. Patience led to determination and in times when it seemed like I had exhausted all related sources, I got creative and decided to join professional organizations from which I was able to access educational journals. Joining these organizations resulted in my increased knowledge on educational issues. Having subscriptions to these organizations and finding time to read the published articles made me much more aware of educational issues about which I previously had no interest.

Patience was the overall theme that led to the completion of this project study. Not only did I demonstrate patience and diligence in locating pertinent resources, but I also had to exert a high level of patience throughout the data collection process. The process of recruiting participants and data collection was quite a humbling experience,

and I truly understood the phrase, “no man is an island.” Collecting data is that phase of the research where I was no longer relying on my actions but the actions of others. To recruit the teachers, it was imperative that they understood how they would benefit from participating. I had to work around the teachers’ schedules and when arrangements fell through, I had to reschedule. When participants did not respond to emails and text messages in a timely manner, I had to continue to send friendly reminders. I had to remain positive and could not give up because I needed the teachers much more than they needed me.

Project Development and Evaluation

I must admit that developing this project was probably the best part of this dissertation process. As a classroom teacher, my most fulfilling moments were finding solutions to problems that were faced by my students. Presently, as an instructional coach, my passion is to help solve instructional problems that teachers encounter. For this project study, I collected and analyzed the data which revealed that the teachers felt their self-efficacy could be positively affected if they were equipped with strategies to teach the reading standards to struggling readers. Developing this project was a pleasurable experience knowing that the goal is to help teachers build their confidence to teach reading to struggling readers.

After I had examined the findings, I decided that the most fitting project genre would be a series of PD opportunities. Having made that decision, I spent some time thinking about PDs that I participated in as a member of the audience. It did not take me long to recollect that my impression about many of the sessions that I attended was that

they were a waste of my time and the activities were briefly or never implemented. I realized that to make this series very effective, I needed to explore characteristics of effective PDs and include as many of the characteristics as I developed the project.

As discussed throughout the previous section of this paper, relevance, team collaboration, hands on experiences or modeling, quality time, ongoing support are key characteristics of effective PD. All characteristics were considered as I developed this project. I hope that the district level personnel who will be the local support will make themselves available to the teachers. I will also make myself available for additional support outside of the 3-day session, if needs arise.

Evaluation allows us to be able to determine to what extent the intended goals objectives were achieved. To determine achievement of the intended goals, I include daily evaluations for the teachers to complete. As the facilitator, I will examine each evaluation and make any immediate adjustments that fall within the framework of the project itself. I will share the evaluations with the district personnel who can use the feedback from the teachers to make appropriate decisions.

Leadership and Change

An effective leader must possess the ability to function as a change agent with the ability to inspire necessary changes in others. As an instructional coach, I am a part of the leadership team at my place of employment. Throughout my journey as a doctoral student, the courses in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, in addition to research on my own, have given me the knowledge necessary to make recommendations for school, teacher, and student improvement. I speak to my colleagues from an informed

perspective and so have been able to assist teachers in exploring issues and situations from various lenses.

Changes in instructional practices usually begin with the offerings of learning opportunities. It is imperative, though, that these learning opportunities directly address teachers' needs. One the changes that I must work towards in my present learning community is the "cookie cutter" approach to team meetings. Previously, coaches plan a schedule of learning sessions, and these sessions are offered to the entire staff. Now that I am a member of the coaching staff, I have expressed my views about the need for learning opportunities to be specific to the identified needs of teachers. In my argument for changes about conducting professional learning opportunities, I present scenarios and ask questions such as, Why should a teacher sit through a professional development on classroom management when his/her management skills are effective? With my push for changes, the coaches and I generated a list of topics for PDs. We shared the list with the teachers who selected the professional learning that they felt would be most beneficial to them.

In my previous role as an instructional coach working for a school improvement educational management organization (EMO), I conducted trainings based on the school improvement deliverables. Though some of these sessions aligned with teachers' needs, others were not. Teachers sat in these sessions, whether or not the content was applicable to their teaching situation. Data were not always the driving force behind the content of the PD sessions.

The importance of using data to determine learning opportunities for teachers became profound as I developed the project. The data came from the teachers themselves which strengthened the project. As a local school leader, I will continue to advocate for changes to the way PDs are determined, delivered, and the way the audience is selected for attendance

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Analysis of Self as a Scholar

Prior to beginning my degree at Walden, I did not see myself as a change agent, but as someone who taught in a school to whom decisions are passed down. The lessons learned throughout this degree process has increased my knowledge, improved my analytical and critical thinking skills, and enhanced my ability to produce scholarly writings. Prior to conducting this study, my knowledge about self-efficacy was very limited, but since my research into this theoretical framework, I have gained a thorough understanding of the topic. Subconsciously, I began to explore my personal self-efficacy and must admit I discovered low self-efficacy in certain areas of my role as a teacher. I benefitted from my research into this topic since I was informed about the sources of self-efficacy and I engaged in practices to improve my beliefs.

The research process for me has been an uphill task and on many occasions, quitting looked quite attractive. I had experienced great success in my prior educational endeavors and thought success for a doctoral program would come just as easy. I was in for a rude awakening. Throughout the process, I found myself spending many hours revising my paper based on the feedback that I received. There were days when in my

estimation, I did the best job that I could do and upon receipt of my reviewed paper, it seemed it was the worst job that I could do. Then, I felt downtrodden, but over time the amount of revisions decreased. The decreasing revisions were indicative of the growth that I made regarding my writing.

As I persevered, championed on by my committee chair and colleagues, I now find the research process quite interesting. My readings and research aroused many questions for which I would love to explore answers. One of the things that I would now like to explore is the reason so many middle school students are reading below their expected reading levels. I wonder about the effectiveness of the reading instruction at the elementary level.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Years ago, when I began contemplating my next educational move, I toyed with the thought of completing a doctoral degree. At that time, I engaged in conversations with friends and colleagues, and over time it was clear that the type of advanced degree that would benefit me the most and one that suits my educational experience is to complete an EdD and not a PhD. I have an increased passion for identifying issues and proposing possible ways to address these issues. As a practitioner, I am working in the field, identifying educational problems or concerns, collecting data from pertinent sources to gather in depth information, and researching ways to address the problems identified. As a practitioner, I want to solve problems and I want to contribute to educational changes. I want to make teachers better at what they do and through the assistance that I can offer to the teachers, increased student achievement may occur.

As a practitioner, I will adhere to what I have learned about conducting effective PD. I will ensure that teachers are offered ongoing support after participating in learning opportunities. I will move away from conducting PDs where teachers are passive participants to conducting sessions where teacher collaboration is encouraged.

My passion for finding solutions to the reading dilemma that faces the local community and other communities at large has truly increased as I worked on this study. The research that I conducted made me realize that students' inability to read is a widespread problem and although stakeholders have investment much financial resources and time to the problem of low reading achievement, there still exists a major problem. As a practitioner, I will narrow my focus to research related to reading deficiency and continue to share my knowledge about research based reading strategies with teachers.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

In developing a project, it is important that the developer begins and end with an achievable goal in mind. Throughout the process of developing a project, it is necessary to frequently refer to the goal to determine the achievement or lack thereof. Throughout this project development, I was forced to review the goals and objectives constantly. The constant review ensured that the content that I included in the PD series addressed the daily goals and objectives.

As an instructional coach, one of my roles is to deliver district mandated PDs. The school district PD department staff provides training, materials, and even sometimes the script to all coaches. The district's training follows a strict structure because the training developers hope that during the redelivery by local school coaches, the content and

language remains as they intended. For district mandated training, there is not much autonomy.

On the other hand, I can utilize the skills that I acquired to design and deliver school based professional learning sessions. Through the development of this project, I realized that many of the PDs that I conducted previously were ineffective and even though teachers seemed interested and actively engaged, the absence of key characteristics such as ongoing support and teacher input to determine their needs, may have adversely affected the outcomes of those training. Presently and for the future school based training, I will ensure that my knowledge of adult learning theories and the qualities of effective PD drives decision about the content, the audience, and the process of delivery. I will serve more as a facilitator and allow opportunities for teachers to collaboratively problem solve once given the tools to be able to do so.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

All seven participants who participated in this project study expressed they perceive themselves as being very knowledgeable about the reading standards since they have been teaching the standards since their implementation in 2013. For this reason, the teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy about teaching the standards were quite high. Regarding their knowledge of effective strategies for teaching these standards to struggling adolescent readers, most of the teachers felt they needed help in this area. In fact, some teachers spoke about the many opportunities they were given to learn about the standards, but no consideration was given to train them about how they were to meet the reading needs of students who read significantly below grade level. This project is

just the beginning of a wider initiative to provide these middle school teachers with tools to teach reading to their students. One implication of this study is that the district leaders need to find additional ways to address the needs expressed by these middle school teachers.

As I analyzed the data from this research, I found that students in one of the middle schools performed better than those at the other middle school. Learning about the differences in student performance between the two schools was quite puzzling since both schools have many similarities in student demographics, teacher qualifications, and teacher experience. The students are from the same school district and so they shared similar socio-economic status. I would recommend a future study to determine if there is a reason for such a situation.

Future research needs to be conducted to determine the reasons a significant number of students enter the middle schools reading two or more grade levels below where they should. Research conducted at the elementary level may provide information about the stage at which students reading development begin to lag. With this knowledge, the appropriate intervention can be put in place so that students actual reading levels will align or closely align to their grade level expectations.

Conclusion

The decision to conduct this research arose from various observations and conversations that I had with teachers, consultants, and school principals. As the news spread about the general adoption and implementation of more rigorous ELA standards, teachers and other stakeholders began to express concerns as to whether this move was

necessary. This concern resulted from their knowledge that some students were unable to demonstrate grade level proficiency on less rigorous standards. Administrators queried whether teachers would be able to provide the instruction at the degree of rigor required. In addition to the views expressed by the teachers and other stakeholders, my examination of student performance reading data created an interested in exploring the perceptions and self-efficacy of middle school teachers to teach mastery of reading standards to struggling readers.

An unexpected finding from data collection and analysis was that all seven participants perceived they possessed thorough knowledge and understanding of the common core literacy standards. This finding leads one to ponder whether there is a correlation with knowledge and understanding of standards and ability to effectively teach the standards. I propose a follow-up research that investigates how teachers are teaching these literacy standards in their classes.

While there was the above mentioned unexpected finding, most of the participants articulated that the challenge that they face was inadequate or ignorance of research-based literacy strategies that they could incorporate into their lessons. As the researcher, I listened to the expressed needs and in responding, I designed a series of PD opportunities to address these needs.

Implementation of the recently adopted Common Core literacy standards has resulted in decreased student achievement in reading assessments. While teachers received exhaustive training to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the

standards, the teachers who participated in the study, have yet to receive training that is geared to help them as they teach struggling readers to master these standards.

The project study not only brings the teachers' dilemma to the attention of the district leaders but also provides a route to raising the self-efficacy of middle school teachers through the PD sessions. In this era of rigorous common core standards, literacy teachers must possess the attitudes, characteristics, and work ethics of their highly efficacious counterparts. As indicated by the participants, teaching reading to the struggling adolescents is quite a challenge. However, each teacher expressed feelings of motivation and a willingness to go the extra mile to help their struggling readers. The data indicate, however, that the participants lack some tools that are necessary for success. Teachers at all levels require the tools they need to carry out their duties. For this project study, the tools for success are the implementation of readers' workshop and a toolkit of strategies to aid in the literacy improvement of struggling readers.

It is no secret that schools and school districts are rated based on student academic performance. To maximize student achievement, it is imperative that the group of stakeholders that have the most influence on student outcomes (the teachers) are prepared and equipped to carry out all duties. The full implementation of this project has the potential of effecting positive social change for teachers, students, school leaders, and the school district at large. Being equipped with new literacy strategies designed for working with struggling readers leads to teacher empowerment and increased self-efficacy beliefs. The students in turn become beneficiaries of more efficient literacy instruction which leads to improved reading abilities. Improved reading abilities are

prerequisites for success on reading assessments and for comprehending college or job-related literature. As students become better readers, their performance in other content areas should more likely improve. This project allows for social change in school leaders because it allows them to be cognizant of the teacher's PD needs and having this knowledge, administrators can provide teachers with targeted support.

Social change that could result from this project extends beyond the walls of the middle schools. District leaders have the option of implementing this project in other local schools to reduce the number of struggling readers. The content of this project is not just suitable for teachers at the middle school level but are applicable to other school levels. Implementation of the project, at especially a lower level should lead to a decrease in the number of struggling middle school aged students. Implementing this project at higher levels may result in increased graduation rates Improving student reading performance at all levels (through the implementation of this project) may lead to an increase in the overall district rating, thus making the school district more attractive to migration of families with school age children. Potential impact of this study also extends to other school districts across the state and country that serve students who have historically demonstrated low performance in reading.

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Appendix A: The Project

Purpose: The professional development series include three full days of collaborative learning to address the concerns and needs of the English language arts teachers who participated in this study. The findings from the study indicate a need to increase teacher self-efficacy to teach common core literacy to struggling adolescent readers by providing teachers with effective research-based strategies that teachers can implement throughout their literacy instruction. The PD series will begin with an intense exploration of the research based literacy instructional framework – Readers' Workshop. Additional sessions will include using reading assessment data to group and plan guided reading instruction. The sessions will also include modeling and information about research-based literacy strategies for teaching common core standards to struggling readers.

Topic: Improving Teacher Self-Efficacy for Teaching Reading to Struggling Readers

1. Teachers will understand the processes for implementing the Readers' Workshop" as a part of their literacy instruction.
2. Teachers will learn how to use reading assessment data form homogeneous grouping and plan guided reading lessons.
3. To widen teachers' knowledge about effective literacy instructional strategies for struggling adolescent readers.
4. To provide teachers with strategies that will aid in students' comprehension of nonfiction texts

Table 1

Implementation Schedule

Session	Session Title	Proposed Time	Duration
1	Implementing Readers' Workshop	Teacher In-service (beginning of the school year)	8 hours
2	Literacy Strategies for Struggling Readers	Teacher In-service (beginning of school year)	8
3	A. Using Data to Drive Instruction B. Strategies for Comprehending Nonfiction Texts	End of August (after all diagnostic reading assessments have been administered)	8
		Total	24

Goal 1: Teachers will understand the processes for implementing the Readers' Workshop" as a part of their literacy instruction.

- Teachers will learn about the components of a Reader's' Workshop.
- Teachers will gain an understanding of how to implement Readers' Workshop as a literacy instructional framework.

Goal 2: Teachers will understand how to analyze and use reading data to plan instruction for guided reading groups.

- Teachers will learn how to group students according to Lexile reading levels.
- Teachers will learn how to group students and plan for differentiated guided reading instruction.
- Teachers will work collaboratively to plan guided reading lessons

Module Title: Implementing Readers' Workshop		
Materials Needed: Access to computer, screen or whiteboard to project power point slides		
Texts: Guiding Readers and Writers, Guide to the Reading and Writing Workshop, Power Reading Workshop		
Access to ELA standards		
Time	Mins.	Activities
7:30 -8:00	30	**Welcome and Introduction** Share research findings Discuss the purpose of PD Sessions
8:00 – 8:10		**Establishing Group Norms** Participants will create groups norms by which they will be guided throughout the 3-day professional development sessions.
8:10 – 8: 20	10	**Protocol – Bridges and Barriers**

		Participants will participate in the Bridges and Barriers Protocol http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/barriers_bridges.pdf Participants could reflect on their own perceptions and attitudes regarding barriers and bridges in teaching common core literacy standards to struggling adolescent readers.
8:20 - 8:25	5	Review Goals and Objectives
8:25 – 9:05	40	**Introduction to Readers' Workshop** Participants will respond to the question – What is Readers, Workshop? This is just to check on background knowledge. The facilitator will note the responses on a chart paper to which she will refer throughout the training to confirm or refute the responses. The facilitator will allow participants to watch a video in which the readers' workshop instructional framework is described (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-d7XQNmbWH4&t=57s) Begin video at 2:21. After watching the video, the participants will engage in a table discussion about how the readers' workshop model is different or similar to what they presently do. Volunteers will share out aloud to the class. The facilitator

		will next provide information about the readers' workshop instructional framework. The information will include the history of readers' workshop, noted proponents for the workshop model, and the benefits of readers' workshop model.
9:05 – 9:30	25	**Components of the Readers' Workshop** For this section, three different articles outlining the components of the readers' workshop will be handed out to the participants. Participants will read and annotate to identify the components of the readers' workshop. The facilitator will ensure that teachers sitting in the groups will be given different texts. After reading, the participants will discuss the information from their various articles. Participants will focus on the similarities and differences about the components of the readers' workshop as discussed in the three articles. **Materials**: Guiding Readers and Writers, pages 45-48 Guide to the Reading and Writing Workshop, pages 14-16 Power Reading Workshop, pages 17 -21
9:30 – 9:45		BREAK
9:45 – 11:30	90	**Components of the Readers' Workshop (ctd.)** The facilitator will provide information about each component. Videos will be used as each component is

discussed. Each participant will be given a handout (created by the facilitator) that lists and explains the key components of the readers' workshop.

Key Components are: mini lesson, guided reading, independent reading, collaborative learning centers, conferring, and closing. The facilitator will stress that some components occur daily (mini lesson, guided reading, independent reading, and collaborative learning centers) while others may not be done as regularly (conferring).

Participants will watch a video of a mini lesson being done. Participants will talk about the parts of the mini lesson they saw.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eO4aNmOQWsY)

After the video discussion, the participants will observe a real-life demonstration of a mini lesson with a group of students from the local Boys and Girls Club.

Time to Practice: Participants will work in grade level teams. Participants will select an ELA standard for which they will write and model a mini lesson. Participants will locate a text to be used for the mini lesson.

The facilitator will next explore other components of the readers' workshop. Participants will watch the videos and

		provide their reflections orally. Guided Reading: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywzqEwxi4y8) Conferring/Strategy Grouping https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/personalize-reading-workshop Participants will also teach about the differences between guided reading groups and other small group structures such as strategy/skills groups that may be included during the reading block.
11:30 – 12:30		LUNCH
12:30 - 1:00	30	**Implementing the Readers Workshop** For this section, participants will learn about how the readers' workshop can be implemented in their classes. The facilitator will provide information about Needs for Readers' Workshop – An extensive leveled library will be discussed Participants will determine a timeline for modeling and teaching about the expectations during readers' workshop (recommendation – minimum of 10 days). Collaboratively, participants will create schedules that include the components of the readers' workshop. Participants will create the schedules

		on chart paper which will be shared with the whole group. **Readers' Workshop Management** Participants will respond to the question – What can teachers do to ensure students have access to books they want to read? Teachers will locate or create reading interest inventory for use at the beginning of the school year. Participants will collaboratively create daily/weekly schedules to ensure management and student engagement throughout the reading block.
1:00 - 2:30	90	**Using Diagnostic Reading Assessments to form Guided Reading Groups.** Participants will peruse the Lexile for Reading website and watch a video to review how students' reading levels are determined. Common Core aligned reading assessments report students' reading scores in the Lexile format. Participants will watch to gain a better understanding about what the scores mean. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUznnqghDAE The facilitator will inform participants about common reading websites that have reading passages that are leveled using the Lexile measurement.

		Participants will be given fake STAR reading reports (created by the media specialists prior to the day's training). Collaboratively, participants will analyze the report and use the information to form homogeneous guided reading groups. . After forming the guided reading groups, participants will work to create a guided reading lesson plan. Participants will select resources from the reading websites to use for their lesson.
2:30 - 3:00	30.	Lesson plan gallery walk and feedback
3:00 - 3:00	30.	PD Review - Day 1 Formative Evaluation Questions for Parking Lot

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Professional Development Series – Day 2

Overall Goals:

Goal 1: Teacher will gain an understanding of who struggling readers are.

Objectives:

- Teacher will learn about the characteristics of struggling readers.
- The teacher will engage in conversations about factors that lead to reading struggles.

Goal 2: Teachers will learn about some researched based literacy strategies that were proven to positively affect the reading development of struggling adolescent readers.

Objectives:

- Teachers will learn about some general literacy strategies for working with struggling adolescent readers.
- Teachers will engage in discussions about the benefits of close reading to struggling readers.
- Teachers will be guided through the process of writing a close reading

lesson.

- Teachers will write and share their sample lesson plans for close reading lessons.
- Teachers will learn about how to use graphic organizers to improve the reading abilities of the struggling readers.
- Teachers learn about reciprocal teaching.
- Teachers will participate in reciprocal teaching lesson modeling.

Module Title: Literacy Strategies for Struggling Readers		
Time	Mins.	Activities
7:30 -7:45	15	Welcome Response to Parking Lot Questions, concerns, statements
7:45 – 8:00		Review Group Norms Discuss goals and objectives for Day 2
8:00 – 8:15	15	Activator: Anticipation Guide Participants will be given statements about the day's topics. Participants will review each statement and indicate agreement or disagreement with the statement. Participants will share their responses (No feedback will be given at this moment because after the day's training, participants will refer to their anticipation guides and revise if necessary. Participants will share their anticipation guides as a closing activity.

8:15 – 9:00	45	Who are struggling readers? This question will be projected on the board. Participants will be allowed a few minutes to think and provide a response to the question. Characteristics of struggling readers The facilitator will engage participants in a sorting activity to identify the characteristics of struggling readers. Pre-written statements about qualities and non-qualities of struggling readers will be written on strips. Participants will create a T chart to sort. T chart will be labeled "Qualities" and "Non-qualities" of struggling readers.
9:00 – 9:10 BREAK		
9:10 -10:10	60	Implementing Close Reading Turn, Talk and Share – What is close reading? After sharing, participants will watch 2 videos explaining what close reading is? The facilitator will instruct participants to identify the common key ideas brought out in both videos. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w9v6-zUg3Y. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xj6bc5pgMoU The facilitator will engage participants in a brief discussion relating to the common ideas that were mentioned in both

		videos. The facilitator will next provide an analogy to close reading (learning about football by multiple visits to the games) in an effort to aid in understanding the concept. Next, using the information on the power point slides, the participants will learn how close reading is used to aid the comprehension development of struggling readers. The participants will be provided a handout outlining the steps in conducting a close reading session. Facilitators and participants will review the steps of the close reading lesson after which a close reading lesson will be modeled. After the modeling, participants will briefly provide feedback about the modeled lesson. Text for modeled lesson: "A Bird Came Down the Walk"
10:10 – 11:00	50	Lesson Planning for Close Reading Given a close reading lesson plan template and two texts, "*Casey at the Bat*" and "Nature" participants will chose on text from which they will collaboratively plan a close reading lesson. Sharing of Close Reading Lesson Plan
11:00 – 11:30	30	Collaborative Group Share Teacher Sharing of Instructional Strategies During this segment, local teachers will share some of the

		strategies that they have used with their struggling readers.
		11:30 – 12:30 LUNCH
12:30 – 1:00	30	Collaborative Group Share (ctd) Teacher Sharing of Instructional Strategies During this segment, local teachers will share some of the strategies that they have used with their struggling readers.
1:00 – 2:00	60	Using Graphic Organizers to Improve Literacy Abilities of Struggling Readers The participants will engage in a gallery walk of traditional graphic organizers (not common core aligned) During this walk, they will identify graphic organizers that they have used in their class. After the gallery walk, participants will discuss the pluses and minuses of using traditional graphic organizers. To begin, the facilitator will use a few power point slides to discuss the benefits of not just using graphic organizers, but the importance of using graphic organizers that are aligned to creating understanding of common core reading standards. The facilitator will next display two graphic organizers – a traditional and a common core aligned. Participants will compare the two and then engage in conversations about the one that may yield deeper

understanding of common core standards.

The facilitator will then discuss the need to sometimes design one's own graphic organizer to ensure the cues on the graphic organizers are aligned to reading standards, thus leading to better comprehension. In so doing, it will be necessary for teachers to truly understand what the standards mean and how students need to demonstrate understanding of the standard. The facilitator will project a sample common core aligned graphic organizer and have participants discuss its alignment with a specific common core reading standard (Anchor Standard 3). The facilitator will next model the use of one common core aligned literary graphic organizer (Character's Response to Story Events) This organizer helps students to track various story events and how the character responds to changes in the story. Participants will next participate in examining sample common core aligned graphic organizer. Collaboratively, participants will match ELA standards with selected graphic organizers. Participants will discuss how the common core structure of the GO my lead to deeper comprehension, especially by struggling readers. They will next discuss ways that they could use the GO in their lessons.

2:00 – 3:00	60	Using pop culture (music) to increase comprehension of complex concepts The question, What is pop culture? will be projected on the board. Volunteers will provide responses. The facilitator will next engage participants in a brief discussion of various forms of pop culture and inform participants that the day's focus will be on music to improve word identification and comprehension skills. The facilitator will provide information about the benefits of including music to build stronger readers. The facilitator will then use the song, "Am I Wrong" to model how pop culture can be used to promote quick word identification and most importantly comprehension of difficult concepts such as understanding theme or central idea. Participants will next few a clip from a television series, Thelma and Louise." In groups of four, participants will discuss reading standards that could be taught using the video clip. Participants would work collaboratively to design a mini lesson from the video clip. Groups will share out their ideas.
3:00 – 3:30	30	Review and revision of anticipation guides – Participants will refer to their anticipation guide and use the information gained throughout the day's session to revise their guide.

	Anticipation Guide Share Reflections and Formative Evaluation – Participants will complete a formative evaluation.

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Professional Development Series – Day 3 (After teachers have completed reading diagnostic assessments)

Overall Goals:
Goal 1: Teachers understand how to create and plan for guided reading based on STAR diagnostic reading assessment.

Goal 2: Teachers will learn about research based strategies for improving comprehension of nonfiction/informational texts

Objectives:

- Teachers will examine STAR reading diagnostic assessments and use the information to create guided reading groups.
- Teachers will be able to demonstrate an understanding of reciprocal teaching and

participate in a reciprocal teaching lesson.

- Teachers will learn about the importance of vocabulary instruction to support reading comprehension of struggling readers.
- Teachers will learn how to tier vocabulary words to determine words that must be explicitly taught.
- Teachers will learn about graphic organizers that their peers use to foster vocabulary development.
- Participants will learn how to use a non-fiction summary graphic organizer to help struggling readers write short and extended summaries.

Module Title:		A. Using Data to drive Instruction B. Strategies for Comprehending Nonfiction Texts
Materials Needed: Leveled Reading Materials		
Time	Mins.	Activities
7:30 - 7:45	15	Welcome Response to Parking Lot Questions, concerns, statements Review Group Norms Discuss goals and objectives for Day 3
7:45 – 8:00	15	Activator: Block Party Protocol
8:00 – 9:15	75	Teachers will work collaboratively to examine their STAR reading diagnostic data to form guided reading groups. Teachers with students reading at similar Lexile ranges will work together to create guided reading lessons.
9:15 – 9:25 BREAK		
9:25 – 10:45	20	Teachers will continue to work collaboratively to examine reading diagnostic data and form guided reading groups.

		Teacher will begin to plan guided reading lessons for the groups identified. Materials: The Continuum of Literacy Learning Leveled Readers
10:45 - 11:00	15	Participants will begin to learn about specific strategies for nonfiction text. A quote will be projected on the board to which participants will respond. After all has responded, volunteers will provide support for their response. For this activity, participants will agree or disagree with the quote. Quote - "Only struggling readers experience difficulty comprehending nonfiction text."
11:00 - 11:30	30	**Reciprocal Teaching to Increase Comprehension of Struggling Readers** A consensogram chart will be placed on the wall at the back of the room. Each participant will be given a sticky note on which they will write their names. The facilitator will project the term" Reciprocal Teaching" on the board and ask each participant to determine their level of knowledge about reciprocal teaching by placing the sticky note on the corresponding level on the consensogram chart. The facilitator will lead a brief discussion driven by

	the information on the completed consensogram chart. The facilitator will allow the participants to watch a short video about reciprocal teaching. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5XocqPJKWg) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsfzZKMickI) After viewing the video, participants will discuss each role during reciprocal teaching and the importance of the roles. The facilitator will next provide information about how reciprocal teaching is to be introduced to students. In so doing, the facilitator will discuss the importance of teaching students through modeling the expectations of each role. The facilitator will provide each participant with the reciprocal teaching role sheet. The facilitator will discuss the appropriate use of reciprocal teaching with longer texts. Participants can find more information about reciprocal teaching from https://www.nbss.ie/sites/default/files/publications/reicipro cal_teaching_strategy_handout__copy_2_0.pdf
11:30 - 12:30	LUNCH

12:30 - 1:00	30	Participants will next practice the strategy in groups of four. After practicing the strategy, participants will discuss what they like about the strategy, in addition to sharing their concerns about implementing the strategy. Collaboratively, the group will provide recommendations for any concerns that arise.
1:00 - 2:00	60	**Vocabulary Strategies for Struggling Readers** This segment on vocabulary development will begin with an open discussion about effective and ineffective vocabulary instructional strategies. The facilitator will next briefly discuss the importance of vocabulary instruction, especially with struggling readers. Next the facilitator will discuss the three most common strategies for vocabulary acquisition and development. These are: Use of Content (Around the Word Strategy, Use of Word Parts ((In the Word Strategy) and Use of Reference Materials (Outside the Word Strategy. The facilitator will also discuss the use of concept maps to develop vocabulary. The facilitator will begin by discussing the importance of

vocabulary tiering as a strategy to determine words that are to be explicitly taught. The facilitator will discuss putting words from texts into 3 tiers. Tier 1(already know words) include basic, everyday high frequency words that do not require explicit instruction. Students learn these words incidentally over time. Tier 2 words (must know words) include multiple meaning words and used that can be used across a variety of subjects. Tier 2 words must be explicitly taught. Much time must be spent teaching tier 2 (should know) words. One recommended strategy is to use Marzano's six steps vocabulary process. Tiers 3 are domain specific words and can be taught through preloading or direct reference to dictionaries or glossaries. Tier 3 words are to be taught as the need arise

To practice tiering, participants will be given a nonfiction text. Collaboratively, participants will identify words that may be unfamiliar to students and determine the tiers in which the words fall. Each group will represent their tiering on chart paper. Participants will engage in an open sharing of the tiered words. Participants must be prepared to provide explanations about how the words are tiered. Next, the facilitator will proceed to the next vocabulary

		instruction strategy which is to explicitly teach word derivatives through "Root of the Week" activities. The facilitator will introduce teachers to a weekly word study routine process outlined on the power point slides. This strategy will include the use of word tree templates and concept mapping to deepen word knowledge.
2:00 - 2:45	45	Using graphic organizers to improve comprehension of nonfiction texts (focus on writing short and extended summaries). The facilitator will model how to use graphic organizers to aid students in identifying main idea/central idea, supporting details and in writing simple and extended summaries. Graphic organizer template for RL6.3
2:45 - 3:00	15	Daily Concept Review
3:00 - 3:30	15	Summative Evaluation -Participants will complete a detailed summative evaluation of the 3-day professional development sessions. Closure

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Appendix B: Project Evaluation

Day 1 and Day 2 Professional Development Formative Evaluation Form

Title of Professional Development Session:

Participant Name (optional) Date:

Facilitator: Training Location:

Please provide a rating for each of the areas outlined below. The options range from 1 being the lowest to 5 being the highest. Read each statement carefully before selecting an option.

CONTENT	Rating				
	1	2	3	4	5
The goals and objectives of the training were met.					
The content aligned very well with the purpose of the training.					
The training provided me with useful ideas that I can immediately apply to my classroom instruction.					
PRESENTATION					
The training was organized and delivered effectively.					
The materials used throughout was appropriate and useful.					
The time allotted for the session was adequate					
FACILITATOR					
The facilitator was quite knowledgeable about the topic.					
The information was delivered in a cohesive and comprehensible manner.					
The facilitator responded in a timely manner to questions I had.					

Professional Development Summative Evaluation Form

Title of Professional Development Session:

Participant Name (optional) Date:

Facilitator: Training Location:

1. Briefly provide comments as responses to the following prompts.

2. Do you feel the overall goals of the professional development series were met?

3. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the facilitator?

4. How has the content of the workshop met your needs to provide effective literacy instruction to struggling adolescent readers?

5. Describe the implementation process in your class.

6. To what extent has the training you received changed your literacy instruction?

7. What suggestions do you have for improving this training?

Appendix C: Project Handouts

Components of a Reading Workshop

Mini Lesson

Mini lessons are usually done at the beginning of the readers' workshop. During this time, the teacher informs students of the learning objectives and models an aspect of reading that students need to master in order to become proficient readers. During mini lessons, teachers teach about reading strategies, in addition to teaching grade level common core reading standards. Read alouds are typically done during this time.

Guided Reading

During guided reading, the teacher meets with groups of students who demonstrate similar reading deficits. For the most part, students are instructed at their instructional levels which means, they read texts with sections for which they will need teacher support and sections which they can decipher on their own. Using before, during, and after reading strategies, the teachers helps groups of students to become better readers.

Independent Reading

Students sit in a comfortable reading spot and read from texts that are mostly self-selected. Independent reading should be uninterrupted reading time for enjoyment. Students may complete reading logs or response to literacy assignment as given.

Collaborative Learning Centers

These centers run concurrently with guided reading. Collaborative groups can be formed using various grouping structures and must not always be homogeneous. During these centers, groups of students work collaboratively to complete assigned literacy tasks.

Conferring

The teacher engages in individual conferring with students. The conference is all about dialogue about reading. Reading conferences allow teachers to find out what students have learned from their reading and experience and what they may need to practice. Conferences with students should last between 3-5 minutes.

Closure

The closure of the mini lesson is very important for the students. Students reconvene as a whole group during which time volunteers reflect on their understanding of the lesson. The closure also serves aa a time to inform the students of the reason for learning the activity during the mini lesson which is for students to apply their learning to real life reading.

Anticipation Guide

Agree	Disagree	Statement	Agree	Disagree
		A student who reads one grade level below actual grade level is considered a struggling reader.		
		Ineffective instructional practices have minor effect on students' reading struggles.		
		Close reading instructional process should only be used with advanced readers.		
		Students should close read every text that they are required to read.		
		Graphic organizers are effective tools for use with only English Language Learners.		
		Including pop culture during reading instruction is a waste of time.		
		Graphic novels are just appealing because of the images but serve no instructional purpose.		

Close Reading Planning Tool

Essentials

Teacher:
Academic Standard:
Grade:
Date:
Title of Text:
Author: Genre:

Before Close Reading Lesson

Determine the ideas in the text that require close reading. Select from the list.

Language (Choose from the list)

Word Choice, Vocabulary, Figurative Language

Other (Name):

Craft and Structure

Text Structure, Author's Point of View/Claim, Text Features

Other (Name):

Context

Historical Background**,** Author's Background

Syntax: Sentence Structure**,** Repeated words/phrases

Begin to think about a list of text dependent questions that reflect the **complex ideas** and **standards** being addressed. These questions will be used to guide class conversations and understanding of the text.

During Close Reading

1st Read

Establish a Purpose: The purpose of the first read is to find out what the text says. Do not engage in too many pre-reading activities.

First Read: What does the text say? Decide who will do the first read. (students)

◯ Teacher ☐ Students

Teacher Notes

1st Class Discussion: Allow students to talk freely with each other about the information they just heard or read. Encourage students to discuss their annotations.

2nd Class Discussion: Allow students to share what they have read about. Ask students to identify words or phrases which were unclear to them (Take notes of the words) Begin to engage students in comprehension by asking text dependent questions related to Key Ideas and Details.

Text Dependent Questions:

Second Read: How does the text say it? Craft and Structure. Teacher rereads as students follow. Teacher models good reading strategies as she reads. Teacher models how to gain meaning of the unknown words that students indicated during the 2nd discussion. After reading, teacher engages students in discussion on the Complex Ideas selected above. (Language, Craft and Structure etc).

Text Dependent Questions:

Third read: How does the text say it? Craft and Structure

Focus on rereading just the sections for discussion. Continue to focus on the Complex Ideas targeted.

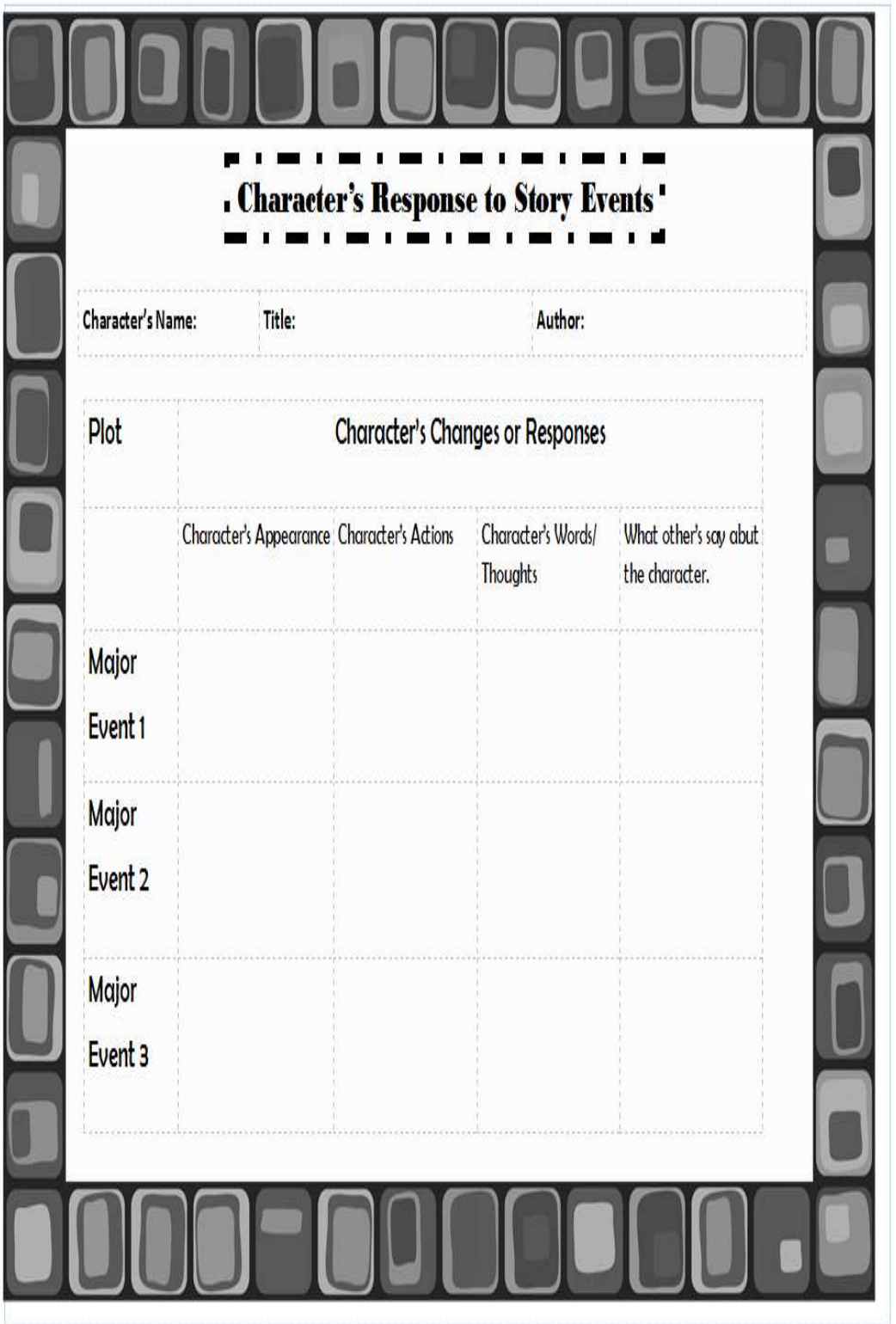
Text Dependent Questions

3rd Discussion: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
Evaluate the quality and value of the text
Possible Questions

Connect the text to other texts
Possible Questions:

Strive for Meaning: Check understanding by assigning writing prompt or engage in further discussion as needed.

Common Core Graphic Organizer



Character's Response to Story Events

Character's Name:	Title:	Author:

Plot	Character's Changes or Responses			
	Character's Appearance	Character's Actions	Character's Words/ Thoughts	What other's say abut the character.
Major Event 1				
Major Event 2				
Major Event 3				

Nonfiction Summary

Title of the Text	Choose a Verb Names, provides, tells discusses, gives, shows, tells about, compares, describes	Finish the Thought
Supporting Details		
Final Summary		

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their understanding of the new literacy standards?
2. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling

Interview Instrument for One- to- One Interview with ELA teachers

The following interview questions will be used to gather information from ELA teachers

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

Title of the Project Study: Self-Efficacy and Perceptions of Middle School Literacy Teachers to Teach New Literacy Standards

Interview Questions

3. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their understanding of the new literacy standards?
    - Describe the earlier standards. Who mandated the previous standards?
    - How were previous standards evaluated?
    - How are the new CCSS for literacy different from previous standards that were used by the school?
    - How would you describe your personal transition from former literacy standards to teaching the new common core literacy standards?

- Could you explain the methods that you used use to learn about the new reading standards?
- How would you rate your understanding of the new standards? Using a scale of 1 -5, with 1 being minimal understanding to 5 being excellent understanding. Please provide an explanation for the rating you gave yourself.
- Did the implementation of the new standards require any instructional shift on you part? If so, explain the instructional shifts you had to make. (effort)

4. How do middle school ELA teachers describe their self-efficacy to teach new common core reading standards to struggling adolescents?

- With which group of students do you feel most efficacious to teach the new common core literacy standards? (on grade level, above grade level, below grade level)
- Explain how motivated you are about teaching the new reading standards to below grade level readers? (motivation)
- Describe your level of confidence to teach the common core reading standards to struggling adolescent readers?
- Hass your self-efficacy for teaching reading changed since the implementation of the new literacy standards? Explain
- How would you describe the performance of your struggling readers on district wide reading assessments that are aligned to the new literacy standards and are used to evaluate student learning?

- Explain what motivates you to continue to teach new literacy standards to the best of your ability, even in times when students show minimal to no understanding of the new standards.