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Evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program for Middle School Struggling Readers

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education

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Joyce McCoy Booth

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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2019

Abstract

Evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program

for Middle School Struggling Readers

by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2006

BS, University of Phoenix, 2004

Project Study Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

This mixed methods study of an in-school Focused Reading Program employed a quasi experimental pre-posttest design to examine program effectiveness and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework. The quantitative research question inquired whether the program resulted in a significant difference in reading performance for participants receiving the instruction based on pre and post measures. Data analysis for this component involved descriptive and inferential statistics. Pre- and posttest scores for the combined groups of seventh and eighth graders were analyzed for significant differences through an independent t- test. The results revealed there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-posttest scores for seventh graders and the scores for eighth graders. Two qualitative questions inquired of the extent to which the Focused Reading Program was implemented with fidelity and teachers' and intervention tutors' perceptions of the program's strengths and challenges. Data analysis for the qualitative component followed procedures for content analysis which included identifying themes based on the frequency of similar words and expressions from interviews and open-ended survey questions. The emerging themes of Program Flexibility, Peer-Learner Focused, and Learning and Behavior revealed the program was implemented with fidelity. Leading program strengths were attendance, program schedule, methods for improving performance of struggling readers, and student engagement. Leading challenges included support services, resources, time for extended activities, and professional development. The study is intended to have a social impact in demonstrating ways to promote reading performance. The results will contribute to literacy research illustrating the effectiveness of an intervention that may remedy reading deficiencies among middle school students.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation to my parents, who are no longer with me; but their presence has immensely influenced my life. My parents instilled in me the importance of working hard, being a lifelong learner and to sore for my dreams. My parents inspired me go beyond all expectations to achieve my goals. They provided their children will love and taught us to love ourselves and other people.

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Evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program

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Section 1: The Problem

The need to provide effective reading programs is explicit in research reports that characterize the reading behavior and academic performance of adolescent. There are high percentages of students in schools across the United States whose performance in reading is below the proficient level. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2013) acknowledged that about 25% of eighth grade students across the country scored below basic in reading from 2009-2013 on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). Recognizing that the level of reading performance has a profound effect on school and career success, professionals have created various reading programs and strategies for enhancing students' ability to read.

The Local Problem

The site of this study is a rural middle school where a majority of the students have reading deficiencies demonstrated by their poor application of foundational skills (Administrator, personal communication, May 12, 2013). The school has data to suggest the lack of skill development is related to ineffective or limited program effectiveness used in reading instruction in the lower grades (Administrator, personal communication, May 12, 2013). The recognition of this deficiency prompted the implementation of The Focus Reading program (Belcher, 2014) designed to teach students those needed skills. Although this in-house reading intervention program is among those purported to

facilitate student success in reading, it has not been examined through teacher perceptions, student course performance, or test scores to determine whether or how the intent of the intervention is being achieved for the targeted population at the site.

Rationale

Consistent with the problem presented in this proposal, the necessity for reviewing the effectiveness of reading programs is visible in the research conducted within the Institute of Education Sciences (2015). Various programs designed to address reading comprehension and fluency revealed such programs as Fast ForWard and Reading Plus (Institute of Education Sciences, 2015) had positive or potentially positive effective ratings for these foundational reading skills. Selecting programs deemed effective for reading instruction is important in efforts to address reading failure. Nitzukin, Katzir, and Shulkind (2014) referred to reading failure as a national health problem. The extent of the problem is supported through the existence of more than 8 million struggling readers in U.S. upper elementary and secondary schools (Berkley, Lindstrom, Regan, Nealy, & Southhall, 2012). According to De Koning and Van der Schoot (2013), reading comprehension is especially difficult for these struggling readers. However, Nitzukin et al. suggested that middle schools can, if done correctly, provide students with a last chance to build reading skills that are necessary to succeed. This chance would be dependent upon the use of appropriate interventions identified through research.

The purpose of this study was to examine the in-house reading intervention, Focused Reading (Belcher, 2014), to determine its effectiveness in enhancing the performance of

struggling readers. Teachers' and intervention tutors' perceptions of the program's effectiveness with attention to its implementation and potential impact, as well as their recommendations for change, were also included in the purpose of the study.

Definition of Terms

Basic reading level: Students at this level "are able to perform some of the content standards at a low level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency as specified by the grade-level content standards. Remediation is recommended for these students" (Interpretive Guide, 2011, p. 4).

Intervention tutors: These tutors are reading specialists who provide "instruction to support, supplement, and extend . . . classroom teaching" for struggling readers (International Reading Association, 2000).

Minimum reading level: Students at this level are unable to consistently apply an understanding of basic skills at the grade level placed and require remediation for successful performance in the content for that grade (Interpretive Guide, 2011).

Proficient reading level: Students at this level have mastered skills and demonstrate the ability to perform at a level of difficulty consistent with expectations of grade-level content standards and indicate students can also respond to challenging content at the next grade level (Interpretive Guide, 2011).

STAR Reading assessment: A computer adaptive assessment tool that adapts to the student's level of performance. Skill specific information serves as an indicator of the student's performance level (Renaissance Learning, 2016)

Struggling readers: These students demonstrate low knowledge in basic reading skills

such as phonics and comprehension, have difficulties in visual processing, and are not able to keep pace with the materials required at their grade placement (Tankersley, 2005).

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for the local setting as a vehicle for providing information on the efficacy of the intervention. Evident from employing a new strategy is that past interventions have not met the identified needs of the site. This study provided research-based evidence regarding the effectiveness of the reading intervention program implemented at the site of interest. Thus, the results can support decision-making among district leaders regarding its potential for being integrated in curricula district wide.

The program focuses on skills required for one to comprehend narratives in different contexts; therefore, it may contribute to the literacy research, which is now focused on integrating reading into secondary content areas such as history (O’Conner, Beach, Sanches, Bocian, & Flynn, 2015). This integration, as well as the study in general, are examples of ways social change has been addressed in the teaching and learning literature. Also, assessing the program's feature of one-on-one supplemental tutorial instruction has implications for social change as the feature may contribute to increased student engagement in reading. Other investigations of reading interventions have been examined for their impact on reading engagement among low-achieving adolescents (Cantrell et al., 2014). Finally, the overall significance of the study is in determining the effectiveness of an intervention that may remedy reading deficiencies among middle school students.

Research Question(s) and Hypotheses

The overall research focus was examining the Focused Reading Intervention Program to determine its effectiveness in promoting student reading achievement through the change in reading achievement test scores over time. Teachers' and intervention tutors' perceptions of the program's effectiveness with attention to its implementation and potential impact, as well as their recommendations for change, were also included in the purpose of the study. More specifically, the following research questions and hypotheses were proposed:

Research Question 1 (Quantitative): Is there a significant difference over time in state assessment reading scores of seventh and eighth grade students who received Focused Reading Instruction and those who did not receive Focused Reading instruction?

H1₀ There is no significant difference over time in state assessment reading scores of seventh and eighth grade students who received Focused Reading Instruction and those who did not receive Focused Reading Instruction.

H1_a There is a significant difference over time in state assessment reading [pre and posttest] scores of seventh and eighth grade students who received Focused Reading Instruction [and those who did not receive Focused Reading Instruction.

Research Question 2 (Qualitative): To what extent is the Focused Reading Program implemented with fidelity?

Research Question 3 (Qualitative): What are teachers' and intervention tutors' perceptions of the Focused Reading Program's strengths and challenges?

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine the in-house reading intervention, Focused Reading (Belcher, 2014), to determine its effectiveness in enhancing the performance of struggling readers. I have reviewed and compiled a synthesis of information relevant to this examination. The following topics are included: struggling readers, reading strategies: implications for struggling readers; differentiated instruction; learning styles; and assessing reading performance. The reference sources included in the review were selected through Internet searches of databases including ERIC and ProQuest, online university libraries, peer-reviewed publications, books, and reliable and scholarly media sources. Relevant search terms used included struggling readers, reading skills, middle school readers, differentiated instruction, and learning theories. The review begins with a discussion of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, the study's conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study is differentiated instruction based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning with emphases on the concept of zone of proximal development. Differentiated instruction refers to instructional alternatives to support student learning that consider how learning takes place and the diversities that students bring to the classroom. This description is supported in the literature where differentiated instruction is defined as a process designed to maximize student learning, especially in environments where learners differ in abilities. As such, researchers have suggested that instruction begins where the student is instead of instruction beginning

with curriculum objectives and modification of the student based on the curriculum (Huebner, 2010).

There are various practices associated with differentiated instruction that illustrate the influence of sociocultural influences on learning. These practices include such approaches as cooperative, problem-based, and project-based learning, as well as small group instruction (De Jesus, 2012). Additionally, practices associated with differentiated instruction focus on managing the classroom environment to motivate student engagement, ensuring student readiness for tasks, and continuous assessments to address diverse learning styles (Huebner, 2010; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2010; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2011).

Differentiated instruction can assist teachers in making decisions regarding the capabilities of students and strategies that are most effective for diverse learners. Watts-Taffe et al. (2012) reported the results of a case study where teachers determined that learning centers were among appropriate strategies for elementary students. In a more comprehensive manner, Sousa and Tomlinson (2010) addressed the role of the curriculum, classroom management, student readiness, and assessments in diversifying instruction. These aspects of the learning process help to determine the student's cognitive abilities to perform a task independently or with assistance (Huebner, 2010; Tomlinson, 2014; Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). Teaching strategies planned in view of students' cognitive limitations are related to Vygotsky's (1978) description of the student's *zone of proximal development*. Differentiated instruction is embedded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and as a conceptual framework is linked to

instructing students based on their needs and classroom interactions. Tenets of the theory directly relate to student learning as influenced by social interaction, the environment, and instructional practices that recognize diversities, learning styles, and background experience. These tenets also suggest student learning is enhanced through purposeful instruction, scaffolding or incremental instruction and differentiated instruction.

The theory and associated differentiated instruction model have implications for the design and implementation of strategies within a reading program deemed effective in enhancing reading performance. To this end, this study involved teaching strategies in a model reading program that included peer interaction and tutorial assistance to help students learn concepts, assessments to identify students' needs and progress, and alternative patterns of classroom organization and learning experiences that promote internalized student learning. The strengths and challenges of the strategies included in the reading program can be identified through participants reflecting on these practices.

Further, as differentiated instruction has been instrumental in teachers finding what works or does not work for different groups of learners, the researcher assumed that guidance from the conceptual framework would help participants determine if, and how, the program assists students to improve their reading skills. Instructional practices and the influence of the program, thus, relevance to the theoretical constructs, would be evident from responses to the research questions posed for the study.

Review of the Broader Problem

Among on-going research topics is the reading performance of elementary and secondary learners in the United States. National assessments continue to report high

numbers of below proficient level readers among middle and secondary school students. Therefore, various programs and interventions are designed to focus on knowledge and skills needed to help student who struggle in reading. The struggle to comprehend material that continues for many students suggests there are some aspects of programs and interventions that may need further refinement.

Struggling Readers

Descriptions of struggling readers include how they perform and possible factors related to their performance. Descriptions most often focus on their inability to apply phonics and comprehension skills. Some researchers contribute this inability to language and cultural barriers, and also to learning disabilities. Regarding language as a barrier to reading proficiency, researchers studied English learners, the fastest-growing group of students in American schools (Richards-Tutor, Baker, Gersten, Baker, and Smith, 2016). These students represent a significant portion of students who struggle academically. These students have to learn a second or even third language while also mastering grade level English. The researchers concluded that the data show the importance of instructional interventions to support their academic progress as well as their English language proficiency abilities.

Poor performance on specific reading comprehension skills is associated with identifying struggling readers. Researchers have linked low achievement with reading comprehension (Mason, Davison, Hammer, Miller, & Glutting, 2012); students' performance in reading comprehension and finding main idea skills to reading anxiety (Kusdemir & Katranc, 2015); and students' disabilities with reading comprehension.

These skills have been identified as students try to process content area information. Ness (2016) stated that a significant number of students struggle with the complex academic and literacy tasks they encounter in their content area classes. According Ness (2016), approximately 8 million students in Grades 4-12 read well below grade level and of those struggling secondary readers, nearly 70% struggle with reading comprehension. This high percentage is better understood from observing that measures of fluency, decoding, and comprehension in middle school students have been found to overlap with one another (Cirino et al., 2012). However, the investigation of how measures of decoding, fluency, and comprehension overlap, did not show the relative frequency of different types of reading difficulties associated with this overlap (Cirino et al., 2012).

Watson, Gable, Gear, and Hughes (2012) provided an overview of possible factors associated with problems in reading comprehension among secondary students with learning disabilities. Their discussion underscores the fact that comprehension problems are evidenced by a heterogeneous group of students. Ritchey, Silverman, Schatschneider, and Speech (2015) identified struggling readers from deficiencies in several skill areas. The results of their investigation of middle school learners showed that reading problems at the end of sixth grade were defined by significantly below average performance (15th percentile) on reading factors defining word reading, fluency, and reading comprehension.

Investigations of phonemic awareness support this skill area as challenging to struggling readers. Edwards and Taub (2016) examined the primary difference between strong and weak readers is their phonemic awareness skills. Although this skill presents

challenges in word recognition among struggling readers, the study did not present a consensus regarding which specific components of phonemic awareness greatly contribute to reading comprehension. A low knowledge level of morphology also contributes to difficulty in reading comprehension, according to Mokhtari, Neel, Matatall, and Richards (2016) who examined the role of morphology in reading ability among 7th grade students in one middle school in the southwestern United States. The findings revealed differences in the level of morphological knowledge of skilled and less skilled readers.

Investigations of struggling readers also include long-term consequences as a result of their performance, reading deficiencies as factors in reading ability, and differences in reading ability based on gender. The consequences of struggling readers who are not identified early or receive effective remediation can be negative. For example, Wolff, Isecke, Rhoads, and Madura (2013) studied students who struggle with basic literacy skills and found that these students have difficulty performing well in school and are at risk of becoming disaffected, often dropping out of school. However, the literature reveals the success of some interventions. Among them is Striving Readers, a program supporting the implementation and rigorous evaluation of interventions aimed at raising the achievement of struggling adolescent readers. Boulay, Goodson, Frye, Blocklin, and Price (2015) reviewed evidence from 17 studies conducted under the program. Regarding reading deficiencies, Kaskaya (2016) studied students who have reading deficiencies although they do not have any mental or physical handicaps to overcome their reading problems. The study used the Neurological Impress Method

(NIM) accompanied by various activities as the intervention for developing students' abilities to use sight words as a process to teach them how to read. In terms of gender differences, Asgarabadi, Rouhi, and Jafarigohar (2015) investigated whether a learner's gender could make difference in the students reading comprehension and use of reading strategies in descriptive and narrative macro-genres. Investigations frequently identify more males as struggling readers than females.

Reading Strategies: Implications for Struggling Readers

The literacy literature is replete with strategies for teaching reading skills. According to best practices, the focus of reading instruction in primary grades is on developing literacy through the basic skills of word recognition and comprehension (Grayson, 2017). Instruction is aimed at teaching students to read and prepares them to apply the skills to understand content as they move upward in grades. These basic skills are often deficient in the performance of struggling readers.

Select reading strategies. Instruction in reading is integrated with continuous assessments to identify students' strengths and to determine instructional alternatives that can address areas in need of improvement. Miciak et al. (2014) described reading comprehension strategies provided students in an investigation of the cognitive attributes of middle school students. The study provided comprehension instruction focused on improving comprehension strategies, particularly question generation. As students read the text, teachers provided explicit instruction on formulating literal questions, questions requiring a synthesis of information, and questions dependent on the application of concepts from the text. The findings revealed that student responses after the Tier 2

reading intervention were inadequate and adequate for both students with and without specific difficulties with reading comprehension.

Other examples of reading instruction include techniques for developing skills based on the important role that comprehension plays in student learning. The importance of reading comprehension as a necessary tool for students to increase reading levels and to give meaning to what is read has suggested that diverse strategies are needed to address the performance of struggling readers and to prevent reading disabilities among secondary learners (De Koning & van der Schoot, 2013; Eker, 2014; LaGue & Wilson, 2010). The need for explicit and direct reading instruction at the secondary level that involves vocabulary instruction, repeated reading, and teacher-scaffold reading is evident in the literature, including in contributions of Seok and DaCosta (2014). These authors viewed that this form of instruction should be aligned with classroom-based assessments and recommended that they are individually or collectively implemented in classes.

A plethora of studies link the importance of strategies, including direct instruction for improving reading in general, and specifically for struggling readers in middle school. Bui and Fagan (2013) researched the effects of integrating reading comprehension with story maps, story grammar instruction, and prior knowledge and prediction. Reading was related to specific content areas in Fang and Wei's (2010) examination of the effects of an inquiry-based science curriculum on reading skill development and science literacy and in O'Conner, Beach, Sanches, Bocian, and Flynn's (2015) study of the effects of teaching reading skills through U. S. history content for 38 eighth graders. These researchers identified poor readers whose reading ability ranged between second and

fourth grade levels.

Similar to the recommendations of Seok and DaCosta (2014) and observations of other researchers, such as Eker (2014), that diverse strategies are needed to improve secondary learners' reading skills, Ulu and Akyol (2016) concluded from a study that repetitive reading and preview-question-read-summarize (PQRS) strategies were beneficial in the elimination of reading and comprehension problems of students. Ulu and Akyol's conclusion is supported through research that examined the effectiveness of supplemental repeated reading intervention delivered through a computer-assisted program. Keyes, Cartledge, Gibson, and Robinson-Ervin (2016) examined the effectiveness of supplemental repeated intervention on the oral reading fluency, comprehension, and generalization of students who were at risk for reading failure and found it was a helpful strategy.

Increasing attention to how students are taught to read is reflective in reports of different strategies used with elementary through secondary grades. In one report, the authors observed that the abilities students demonstrate in elementary schools do not permit them to meet the demands that struggling adolescent readers face when they enter middle school (Berkley et al., 2012). Therefore, these authors recommended that supplemental reading instruction should take place in the middle school. Findings that show the relationship between reading skills and total reading performance support the need for supplemental reading strategies. Fenty, Mulcahy, and Washburn (2015) believed there is clear evidence that reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are strongly associated with each other. They noted that some evidence suggests that when

instruction in fluency is targeted, systematic, and explicit, it can positively impact achievement in vocabulary and comprehension.

Implementation of strategies and professional development. Implicit in teachers employing diverse strategies is the need for professional development for the selection and implementation of these strategies. In this regard, discussions of the variance in reading comprehension scores between students, classes, schools, and districts for children in grades 3–10 (Young-Suk, Petscher, & Foorman, 2015); and the need for re-envisioning instruction for mediating complex text for older readers (Robertson, Dougherty, Ford-Connors, & Paratore, 2014) are most appropriate for enhancing instructional knowledge to address these concerns. Also, Baydik, Ergul, and Kudret (2012) identified reading fluency problems of students with reading difficulties and their teachers' instructional practices towards these problems. The researchers concluded that these instructional practices would make a significant contribution to the development of more effective in-service education programs. Techniques such as guided practice may also require training to implement successfully. Kostewicz, Kubina, Selfridge, and Gallagher (2016) found that students improve oral reading fluency to a greater extent with systematic, guided practice, rather than independent sustained silent reading or the teacher encouraging students to read more. Reports of instructional practices related to implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) indicate the need for further training and ongoing professional development to instruct, assess, and monitor student progress. Researchers Ciullo et al. (2016) studied middle school educators (Grades 6–8) who provided reading interventions within Tier 2 and Tier 3 of a RTI framework.

Intervention sessions were analyzed to understand the frequency and type of evidence-based strategies implemented for students with learning disabilities and reading difficulties. Evidence from this and other studies suggest that individual teachers and teams responsible for making decisions and implementing the strategies engage in on-going professional development.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is defined as a process designed to maximize student especially in environments where learners differ in abilities. As such, researchers suggest that instruction begins where the student is instead of instruction beginning with curriculum objectives and modification of the student based on the curriculum (Huebner (2010). The use of differentiated instruction refers to instructional alternatives in support student learning that consider how learning takes place and the diversities that students bring to the classroom.

The focus of some research about differentiated instruction focus on strategies that are framed in sociocultural learning. Among examples of researchers using this focus are Ng Chi-Hung, Bartlett, Chester, and Kersland (2013) who studied the effects of combining strategy instruction and motivational support. Emphases on interactions and experiences to understand concepts are visible in the works of Ankrum, Genest, and Belcestro (2014), who researched the power of verbal scaffolding; and Park (2012), who provided information on using visualization to bridge comprehension and literacy.

Diversified instruction involves using such strategies as small groups, tutoring, and multi-level materials to supplement classroom instruction and to individualize learning

experiences for struggling readers. Some programs, similar to the purpose of this study, have been evaluated for their effectiveness in diversifying instruction and enhancing reading performance of school-aged learners. Studies include those of Cantrell et al. (2014) who researched the impact of supplemental instruction on low achieving adolescents' reading engagement; Van Keer and Vanderlinde (2013) who addressed the effects of pairing reading comprehension with peer tutoring. Another study investigated the patterns of teacher modeling in group and interactive dialogues, and student experiences and perceptions of reading intervention of two types of online remedial reading interventions on reading strategy, comprehension, motivational beliefs, and self-efficacy of 36 low-achieving students (Huang & Yang, 2015). Strategies in these three studies demonstrate diversified instruction as reflected in the program examined in this study.

Learning Styles

The unique characteristics students bring to the classroom include how they learn information. The conceptual framework for this study recognizes that students learn in different ways and that their ways of learning are influenced by several factors. Vygotsky's (1978) theory suggests that the social environment is a major influence on student learning. Therefore, instruction that is directed to involve peer interaction, teacher-student interaction, and consider how students learn is consistent with procedures that acknowledge students' construction of knowledge is influenced by sociocultural experiences.

Learning styles are associated with the modalities (visual, tactile, for example).

Students feel most comfortable in processing information through specific senses that promote the individual's capacity to learn. Several studies have applied learning styles to students' ability to read. Alharbi (2015) examined the relationship between learners' reading styles and reading comprehension, while Strasser, Larrain, and Lissi (2013) studied the effect of specific reading styles on the comprehension of stories among at risk students. Reading strategies have also been explored in terms of their effectiveness in promoting reading success. A recent example is a study that Mahdavi and Tensfeldt (2013) conducted that investigated reading comprehension strategies taught to young, at-risk students based on the hypothesis that the use of peer learning, story mapping, story grammar, and text structure can increase reading comprehension abilities of these students. The strategies assessed reflect various modalities to include learning through listening, interacting, and learning through visualizing. These studies align with student characteristics (learning styles), skills, and instructional practices that are included in this investigation of a program designed to promote reading performance.

Assessing Reading Performance

On-going assessments of reading performance permit teachers to engage in a databased decision-making process for instructing diverse learners. The assessment component of the intervention investigated in this study integrates the STAR Reading (Renaissance Learning, 2016) test as its major assessment tool. The tool and other assessment strategies facilitate progress monitoring of skills attained.

The STAR Reading test (Renaissance Learning, 2016) is a computer adaptive assessment tool that adapts to the student's level of performance. Skill specific

information serves as an indicator of the student's performance level (Renaissance Learning, 2016). According to the website, the STAR Reading test (Renaissance Learning, 2016) assesses 46 reading skills in 11 domains. These skills are categorized as foundational, reading literature, reading information text, and language. The category of language skills encompasses vocabulary acquisition and use and includes word relationship and vocabulary in context skills. The level of difficulty of test items automatically adjusts to the student's prior performance on the test (Renaissance Learning, 2014). Findings on the use of STAR Reading (Renaissance Learning, 2016) support that the tool has sufficient reliability and validity for assessing reading skills. The nation-wide use of STAR Reading (Renaissance Learning, 2016) in school districts and its recognition from the National Center on Response to Intervention are among observations of its appropriateness. Additionally, findings showing the combined-grades reliability coefficients of 0.85 for internal consistency and 0.79 for consistency on retest, along with results of predictive validity studies where "average correlations observed in these studies range from 0.52 to 0.77" (Renaissance Learning, 2014, p. 21), suggest the tool has a moderate to strong validity.

Assessment tools. Assessment tools vary in their procedures and objectives for measuring reading performance. Nitzkin, Katzir, and Shulkind (2015) developed comprehension assessments designed to provide an assessment of student performance that extended beyond reading scores on annual standardized tests. Consistent with the objectives of the just mentioned researchers, similar assessments are designed to provide information regarding how students responded to an item, as well as possible factors that

influence the score. In another example, Baker et al. (2015) examined the criterion validity and diagnostic efficiency of oral reading fluency, word reading accuracy, and reading comprehension for students in Grades 7 and 8.

Evaluating students and the assessments that identify skill needs are beneficial to the student as well as to the teacher as a student advocate. Assessments are completed to discover information that may prevent further difficulties in reading and in forecasting the impact of poor reading skills for a career in which a student has shown interest. Ergul (2012), for instance, studied the frequency of third grade students who had not acquired the grade level reading skills; their reading skills were evaluated in terms of the risk of having learning disabilities. Studies also related reading skill development to careers and assessing reading performance. Examples of these are Wichowski (2011) who believed that better reading skills do not just boost test scores, but also add to the implementation of career technical education, explored the importance of providing educators with strategies for integrating reading instruction into such programs.

Assessing instructional programs and strategies. As is the intent of this study, researchers assess the impact of instructional programs on reading performance. Hawkins, Marsicano, Schmitt, McCallum, and Musti-Rao (2015) used an alternating treatment design to compare the effects of two reading fluency interventions on the oral reading fluency and maze accuracy of four fourth-grade students. The observation that responses to assessments are reflective of changes needed to improve students' reading underscores Schmoker's (2012) belief that schools can make a profound difference if they increase the amount of purposeful, close reading, discussion and writing that students do in school.

Similarly, Hughes-Hassell et al. (2012) expressed the belief that actively engaging students, providing opportunity for them to reconnect to reading and writing, as a part of their development should occur. They concluded that enabling texts are powerful enough to help students define themselves and develop problem-solving skills.

The response of an urban school's efforts to support its middle and high school students in reading included an independent reading instructional component. Francois (2014) concluded that independent reading emerged as vital to the way students and staff oriented themselves around literacy. Johnson (2016) discussed an effective approach to reading instruction for students reading at the emergent and beginning level, as well as students with severe reading difficulties. The strategy-involved students describing an experience while the teacher wrote what students reported. This technique enabled students to practice reading using words and concepts within their experience. In another study, Bastug and Demirtas (2016) examined the effectiveness of a child-centered reading intervention in eliminating the reading problems of a student with poor reading achievement. The research was conducted with a student having difficulty in reading. A reading intervention was designed that targeted multiple areas of reading and aimed to improve reading skills through the use of multiple strategies.

Researchers also study differences in the performance of students based on various factors. Two studies reported a focus on gender differences and reading performance. The first one, Husband (2012), identified significant reading achievement gaps between boys and other groups; similarly, a second study, Prado and Plourde (2011), found differences in gender in relation to gains and losses in reading skills. Factors related to

assessing students and the setting best conducive for intervention were observed in a study that Ortlieb and McDowell (2016). Their investigation of the need for systematic and intensive reading interventions determined that literacy clinics are an ideal setting for struggling readers to experience success. According to Ortlieb and McDowell, success would be achieved through the implementation of a cyclical approach to individual assessment, planning, instruction, and evaluation.

The call for a systematic and cyclical approach was also the objective of Sencibaugh and Sencibaugh 's (2015) recommendation for instructional practice. These researchers studied the systematic, explicit instruction of a questioning strategy for improving the text comprehension of middle school students. The reading comprehension of six 8th grade students was investigated to determine whether the questioning strategy, QtA, led to an increase in the reading achievement of a narrative text. Questioning the author is a thinking-questioning approach credited to Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, and Kugan (1997). As students actively read the text “they construct the meaning, wrestle with the ideas, and consider the ways information connects to construct meaning” (Beck et al., 1997, p. 33). Reading Rockets (2017) and other programs have research-based accounts of QtA as an effective explicit instructional strategy. Explicit and targeted instruction has emerged as a common theme in several studies reported in this review regarding assisting struggling readers.

Implications

The literature reviewed for this study has implications for providing professional development for individuals who have direct involvement in the program implementation

and for leaders who may make final decisions regarding program operations. As innovations usually require a period of testing processes, and then making adjustments, a professional development plan may also be an appropriate outcome related to the review of the Focused Reading Intervention Program.

The contents of a professional development plan based on the study would include a template mirroring those of instructional planning. Goals and objectives would be included based on assessed needs from the results of the study. The template would also contain strategies, topics for discussion, and a completion timeline for each activity. As indicated in the literature reviewed with regards to student assessments, important in the professional development plan would be on-going assessments, observations, and progress monitoring to determine both formative and summative processes. Finally, the plan would provide incentives for modifying practice based on training and reflecting on practice, then follow-up that entails participants creating an extended action plan to ensure the program's success.

Summary

Sections included in this document presented an overview of the study and implications for a project study based on the review of the literature. The literature review section contained a synthesis of studies and views of experts in fields associated with the purpose of the study. This study was framed in the concept of differentiated instruction embedded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. The theory and research questions influenced by both the problem and the research literature guided the procedures of this mixed methods study. The research design and procedures identified for the study's implementation are discussed in the next section of this document.

Section 2: The Methodology

Mixed Method Design and Approach

To address the problem of whether the program is effective, I used a mixed method design. I relied primarily on quantitative data for identifying the trend of student achievement through results of test scores. Qualitative measures were expected to support the interpretation of quantitative findings through analysis of the open-ended responses of intervention teachers and tutors who described the program's implementation and perceptions of program effectiveness. Creswell (2012) indicated that quantitative data yields measurable findings that can be statistically analyzed and produce results to understand the existence and direction of trends. However, qualitative data can help to develop an in-depth understanding of how the intervention was implemented and may have contributed to the impact on student test score data. Therefore, the rationale for using the mixed method design was for the search of clarity in what students' score reports may represent. A clearer understanding of factors that contributed to the scores were attained from interviews with program personnel. The results of data were used to recommend a project for instructional support (Appendix A).

Quantitative Sequence

The quantitative component consisted of data in the form of reading scale scores from the STAR Reading assessment (Renaissance Learning, 2016) and responses to closed-ended items on a Likert scale from a researcher-created instrument (Appendix B) administered to intervention teachers and tutors. Data represented students' scale scores from seventh and eighth grade classes of participating teachers. The quantitative

component represented a pretest-posttest quasiexperimental design to examine differences over time in student test scores. Following the recommendations for quasi-experimental research (Creswell, 2013), the design is appropriate for collecting data for a program evaluation using pre- and posttest scores of a convenient sample of seventh and eighth grade students organized as control (not enrolled in Focused Reading) and experimental groups (enrolled in Focused Reading). The evaluation was summative in nature with the end goal being to determine whether post scores of students participating in the intervention were consistent with state standards for reading proficiency. Specifically, posttest scores for participants were analyzed to determine whether there was a significant difference over time in state assessment reading scores of seventh and eighth grade students who received Focused Reading (Belcher, 2014) instruction and those who did not receive Focused Reading instruction.

Qualitative Sequence

The qualitative component focused on teachers' and intervention tutors' perceptions of various aspects of the program attained through open-ended questions included on the researcher-created instrument. (Appendix C). To add depth to the survey responses, interviews (Appendix D) for the sample of Focused Reading teachers and tutors were also conducted. The evaluation determined the extent to which the program was implemented with fidelity, and its strengths and weaknesses based on the perceptions of teachers and tutors in response to the second and third research questions. Qualitative data were analyzed for categories and emerging themes. These themes and differences in students' scores were reported as the results of the evaluation.

Data Collection Strategy

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed concurrently over a period of one school year. The survey was administered to teachers and intervention tutors at the beginning of the fall semester at the site of the study. The analysis of survey data was completed by the end of the fall semester. Similarly, teachers administered the STAR assessment (Renaissance Learning, 2016) at the beginning of the fall semester, which yielded pretest scores. Survey results provided data for further examination in face-to-face interviews with the convenient sample of participating teachers and tutors. Face-to-face individual interviews were conducted during the spring semester no later than April 2018, prior to the end of the school term. Interviews were held at an agreed upon time in a private conference room at the school. Data from posttest administration were collected by May 2018, prior to the end of the school term. During and after data collection, the analyses of data involved a continuing process of examining test scores, survey results, and interview data to identify patterns, differences, and to triangulate findings.

Setting and Sample

The setting of the study was a middle school in one school district located in the southern region of the United States. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) (2016), the student population consisted of 225 eighth grade students and 200 seventh grade students. The socioeconomic status of 40% of the student population was at or below the poverty level (MDE, 2016). The reading test score data also showed a large percentage of students scoring below proficient at both seventh (98%

below) and eighth (98% below) grades (MDE, 2016). Quantitative data were projected to represent 100 scale scores of seventh grade students enrolled in Focused Reading Intervention as the experimental group. The remaining 100 scale scores of seventh graders were projected to constitute the control group. Similarly, 100 scale scores of eighth grade students enrolled in Focused Reading Intervention were projected to represent the experimental group and 100 scale scores of students not enrolled in the program were projected to constitute the control group. The convenient sample of scale scores comprised the total population of the two grades included in the study for the 2017-2018 school term. The scores represented one year of exposure to the Focused Reading program.

A convenient sample of teachers and tutors from the total population of seventh and eighth grade instructional personnel identified through the school's website was asked to participate; intervention tutors provided extended support services to students, a key feature of the program. Scores from 200 seventh graders and 200 eighth graders were projected to constitute the sample as either control or experimental groups represented in the pre-post design of this mixed methods study. All student scores for seventh and eighth grade students enrolled at the site from the beginning to the end of the study period met the eligibility requirement for the study. All licensed teachers of language arts (eight teachers, three interventionist) in these grades were eligible to participate in the study.

The researcher's role in the study was to ensure participants were treated ethically and informed of their rights, including not participating or withdrawing from participation. The role also included maintaining confidentiality of their responses and participation. In

this regard, I followed guidelines established for conducting research involving humans to include acquiring their informed consent to participate. After receiving permission to conduct the study (Appendix E), the informed consent process began with an invitation letter (Appendix F) that contained the purpose of the research and an invitation for interested teachers to attend a meeting where the study would be explained and they would be provided an opportunity to ask questions. Detailed information was included on consent forms (see Appendix G) and mailed through the postal service to individuals at the school site after the meeting. Participants were asked to return the consent form in the self-addressed and stamped envelope provided within 10 days if they agreed to participate. As students were not directly involved in the study, they did not receive this information. Student test score data represented de-identified data that were accessible through the office of the test coordinator in the district. All students in the state are assigned an identification number that is used in school, district, and state assessment reports.

In accordance with permission to conduct the study, the test coordinator provided me with a list of de-identified pretest scores of students placed in the reading program as the experimental group; however, scores for students not placed in the program were not available to represent the control group as proposed. The absence of the scores from the students who did not participate in the Focus Reading Intervention program affected the original projection for the student data. The coordinator maintained the identifiers of selected participants and provided me with their posttest scores for the experimental

group. All data were kept in a confidential and locked file in my home and will be destroyed by shredding after the required years of maintenance, usually 5-7 years.

Data Collection Strategies (Concurrent)

Quantitative Séquence

Data for the quantitative focus of the study included reading scale scores from the STAR Reading assessment (Renaissance Learning, 2016) for pre and posttest scores of participants in the program. Usable scores for a total of 126 students were collected. Scores where either a pre or post score was missing were eliminated from the data collection pool. Only scores for students enrolled in the program were available to the researcher. Scores represented secondary data; I did not administer the STAR test (Renaissance Learning, 2016). The STAR Reading test (Renaissance Learning, 2016), a combined grades instrument, assesses 46 reading skills in 11 domains categorized as follows: foundational, reading literature, reading information text, and language (Renaissance Learning, 2016). As students take the computer-based STAR test (Renaissance Learning, 2016), the level of difficulty of test items automatically adjusts to the student's prior performance on the test (Renaissance Learning, 2014). Findings support that the tool has sufficient reliability and validity for assessing reading skills. The reliability coefficients of 0.85 for internal consistency and 0.79 for consistency on retest. Predictive validity studies suggest the tool has a moderate to strong validity with correlations ranging from 0.52 to 0.77 (Renaissance Learning, 2016). The results for test reliability and validity apply to both seventh and eighth grades, as the STAR test (Renaissance Learning, 2016) is a combined-grades assessment. The overall scale score

that reflected all subsets of reading skills was the measure tested for significant difference in the study between pre and posttest scores for seventh and eighth grade students enrolled in the Focused Reading program.

The quantitative component also included responses of participating teachers and intervention specialist to closed-ended items on a survey (see Appendix B). The survey contains 20 Likert-scale questions; three of the items were used in response to Research Question 1. These are Item11 (students show reading growth); Item16 (reading comprehension is improved; and Item18 (students' reading scores increase). The items for analysis are arranged on a 4-point Likert scale as follows: 1 (*strongly agree*); 2 (*agree*); 3 (*disagree*); 4 (*strongly disagree*). Other variables measured with the survey items were: program effectiveness, program implementation, program strengths, program areas in need of improvement, and clarity of program goals and objectives. These variables as imbedded in questions are suggested in the literature as appropriate for formative and summative program evaluation models (Kirkpatrick, 1994; Scriven, 1967; Smith & Ragan, 1999).

Questions were peer-reviewed as suggested in the research methodology literature (Creswell, 2013), to ensure the content would provide responses appropriate for answering research questions prior to administering to participants. The peer reviewers consisted of five individuals with teaching experience in K-college, research experience, and expertise in curriculum and development, reading, research methodology, and English. Three reviewers held doctorates in curriculum and instruction, supervision and leadership, and education with concentrations in English and reading. Two panelists held

masters and specialists' degrees in education with concentrations in research methodology and psychometry. Reviewers rated the strength of each question on a 3-point Likert-scale as follows: 1 (*strong*); 2 (*average*); 3 (*weak*). The evaluation included a comment section for each question. The points were averaged resulting in strong items; the results did not include recommendations for revisions.

A pilot test of the instrument established its reliability for internal consistency. Eight middle school teachers with prior experience in the Focused who did not participate in the actual study responded to the 20-item component of the instrument. According to Statistics How To (2019), an informal method of determining good internal consistent is observing whether respondents' answers are the same for each question. I used the Likert-scale ratings as scores and compared responses to even and odd items. All responses were ratings of 1 and 2 with the exception of two participants scoring 3 on two different items. Applying the Pearson correlation formula for split-half reliability resulted in a correlation coefficient of -.31 indicating a moderate relationship between the two sets of scores for even and odd items.

After establishing content validity and internal consistency for the survey, the instrument was disseminated to the study's participants. Responses for each item were calculated and results for response categories were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. All raw data will be retained in a locked file at the researcher's home.

Qualitative Sequence

Data were collected through a survey (see Appendix B) mailed through postal services to the school site containing open- (see Appendix C) and closed-ended questions to address Research Questions 2 and 3. The closed-ended items are arranged on a 4-point Likert scale and provided quantitative support in the mixed methods analysis for the research questions. Both the 17 closed-ended items (1-10; 12-15; 17, 19, 20) included in the survey and the five open-ended questions addressed program effectiveness, program implementation, program strengths, program areas in need of improvement, and clarity of program goals and objectives.

Data were also collected for Research Questions 2 and 3 through an interview researcher-designed protocol (see Appendix D) administered face-to-face to teachers and intervention tutors who described the program's implementation and perceptions of program effectiveness. The protocol contains components that researchers suggest for qualitative interviews, which include directions for establishing rapport with interviewees, the major questions to be asked, prompts to encourage elaboration of a question posed, and a space to make notes (Creswell, 2013). Audio taped interviews (See example in Appendix C) were scheduled to last no longer than 45 minutes and were conducted in a private room at the site at a time convenient for each participant. The interviews were conducted during the spring semester as an extension of survey responses collected during the fall semester.

Access to participants was acquired through a letter to the appropriate authority of the school district requesting permission to conduct the study. A copy of the permission to

conduct the study was delivered to the school's principal in a meeting where I explained the study and acquired additional directions for holding a meeting to explain the study to the faculty, mailing surveys, and interviewing participants at the site. As an employee in the district, I did not have any authoritative responsibility for any potential participants. As the researcher and through reflective practice, I actively refrained from projecting any personal biases in the procedures or results.

Data Analysis

Data for the first research question were collected from STAR Reading test (Renaissance Learning, 2016) results. Pre- and posttest scores of the experimental group were used in the analysis as scores were not available for a control group as initially proposed; therefore, the first research question and corresponding hypotheses were modified to exclude the control group. Scores for the combined groups of seventh ($n = 64$) and eighth graders ($n = 62$) were analyzed for significant differences through an independent t- test calculated using SPSS software. Data for the second and third research questions were collected through an interview protocol, 17 closed-ended survey items, and open-ended survey questions. Responses for each item were calculated and results for response categories were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

Both data collection and data analysis were performed concurrently. The study included the analysis of survey and pretest data completed during the first three months of the 9-month study. Likewise, the study consisted of data collected and analyzed from

posttest scores after the intervention, and interview data during the last two months of the study.

Content analysis was used for interview data and for responses to open-ended survey items. The process followed procedures suggested for forms of qualitative research; therefore, steps involved identifying codes to correspond to research questions (Creswell, 2013). Responses were read to determine those supportive of the first, second, and third research questions. The responses were also categorized based on the variables measured in the survey. Categories were added or eliminated as dictated by responses. The examination of content within categories resulted in the identification of thematic meanings determined, in part, by the frequency of similar expressions found in responses. These themes constituted results of the qualitative analysis.

Data were coded using alphabets and numbers to correspond with research questions, data categories, and also with demographic items for the survey data. Examples of codes were RQ3: D1a = Research question 3, demographic item 1a, teacher; RQ3:S1 = Research question 3, survey item 1; SICF = survey item, conceptual framework. Similar codes identified themes that emerged from the data and determined when there was a relationship between themes, the conceptual framework, and the numerical analysis of closed-ended survey data. The connection between the quantitative data and qualitative data is discussed as triangulated findings. The validity of the quantitative data represented through students' scores was assured with the validity of the STAR instrument (Renaissance Learning, 2016) from which these scores resulted. The content validity of the data from the survey was established through a peer assessment of the

survey questions. The validity and trustworthiness of both forms of data were assured through the selection of a sample that was most qualified to offer information based on the purpose of the question, the use of appropriate statistical tests, the connection of the conceptual framework to qualitative findings, and employing member checking to ensure participants' responses were captured accurately, and that researcher bias did not influence the report of findings.

Limitations

The absence of student test score data that was going to be a control group for the study created a weaker research design than that was originally proposed. The study involved self-reported data, which may not accurately reflect the questions posed in the survey and interview. Responses may also represent incomplete answers. The data from interviews and open-ended questions may not be comprehensive enough to provide program evaluation results that consider all factors influencing program effectiveness. The length of time that the program has been in operation and the available resources for program implementation are among factors that may also place limits on findings from the evaluation. Finally, generalizability of the findings may be limited to the population employing the Focused Reading Intervention program.

Data Analysis Results

The collection and analysis of data for the study followed a concurrent design. Findings that addressed the problem investigated and the research questions posed for this study resulted from an analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Students' test scores and teacher participants' responses to 20 closed-ended survey items constituted the quantitative data. The analysis included secondary data representing students' overall scale scores from the STAR Reading assessment (Renaissance Learning, 2016) that were provided the researcher as de-identified score reports. The findings for Research Question 1 resulted from the STAR data and three items from the Program Evaluation Survey. These items were used to triangulate findings from the STAR data. Seventeen closed-ended items provided quantitative results for the second and third research questions.

Quantitative Findings: Research Question 1

Quantitative analysis through descriptive statistics permitted data to be recorded in frequencies and means. Means were tested for significance through uploading into SPS and applying an independent t test. The findings are summarized in tabular form when appropriate. Research Question 1 was revised and stated as follows: Is there a significant difference over time in state assessment reading pre and post test scores of seventh and eighth grade students who received Focused Reading instruction? The following are the null and alternated hypotheses associated with the question:

H₁₀ There is no significant difference over time in state assessment reading pre and posttest scores of seventh and eighth grade students who received Focused Reading

instruction.

H1a There is a significant difference over time in state assessment reading pre and posttest scores of seventh and eighth grade students who received Focused Reading instruction.

The pre and posttest scores for each grade were included in the analysis for significant difference using a *t* test of paired means with an alpha of .05 level for significance. The results revealed there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-posttest scores for seventh graders and the scores for eighth graders; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected for the alternative hypothesis. Table 1 contains these results.

Table 1

T test for Seventh and Eighth Grade Pre-Posttests

Variable	Pre <i>M</i>	Post <i>M</i>	<i>M</i> Diff	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>N</i>
7th grade	440.7969	450.422**	9.625	2.4135	0.0094	64
8th grade	481.0161	489.032*	8.016	1.8614	0.0338	62

**p* < .05. ** *p* < .001.

The mean differences reported in Table 1 revealed that posttest scores were higher than pretest scores for both grades. Significance is seen at the .01 and .05 region of rejection. A review of raw score results showed 46 of 62 eighth grade scores met the average scale score target of 501 and the average scale score of 497 to make growth on the state assessment. Of the 64 scores for seventh grade, 28 scores met the average scale

score target of 575 and 29 met the average scale score of 571 to make growth on the assessment.

The data were also analyzed to determine whether the mean scores for the pretest were higher for either grade. Computations of a two-sample t test with equal variances revealed a statistically significant difference in the comparison of pretest scores of seventh and eighth grade participants at the specified .05 level, $t(124) = -4.47, p < 0.00$. The calculations are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

T test for Seventh and Eighth Grade Pretest Differences

Pretest	M	SE	SD	95% CI	
				LL	UL
7	440.7969	6.140193	49.12155	428.5267	453.0671
8	481.0161*	6.589436	51.88527	467.8397	494.1925

* $p < .05$.

In examining differences in the pretest scores, the results revealed that pretest scores for eighth grade students were statistically higher than those of seventh grade students. The results of the analysis for 7th and 8th grade posttest scores are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

T test for Seventh and Eighth Grade Posttest Differences

Post	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI	
				LL	UL
7	450.4219	6.185052	49.48041	438.062	462.7817
8	489.0323*	7.620666	60.00518	473.7938	504.2707

* $p < .05$.

As seen in Table 3, posttest scores for eighth grade students were higher than those of seventh graders. The calculations show the posttest scores for eighth graders were statistically significant at the .05 level established, $t(124) = -3.94$, $p < 0.0001$. The computations of the two-sample t test with equal variances resulted in a mean of 469.4206 for the combined grades with a standard deviation of 58.02266.

Participants' responses to three closed ended survey items served to triangulate the score report. The items required responses on a four-point Likert scale: 1 (*strongly agree*); 2 (*agree*); 3 (*disagree*); 4 (*strongly disagree*). The items were "students show reading growth" (item 11); "reading comprehension is improved" (item 16); and "students' reading scores increase" (item 18). The means for these items were 1.64 (item 11); 1.64 (item 16); and 1.36 (item 18). The means represent that participants agreed that the students improved in reading. Responses to items 11 and 16 revealed participants were close to strongly agreeing. These results show that participants also saw improvement from students completing program activities; their post results were different from their pre measures.

Qualitative Results: Research Question 2

Qualitative data for the study were collected through individual interviews and responses to five open-ended survey items. Coding the data enabled the researcher to identify similarities and differences in responses. Themes emerged from the data from a process of reducing categories of data. These themes provided answers to the second and third research questions. Member checking provided validity for the themes. Participants reviewed the themes to ensure they provided a realistic account of what was described, and supportive comments were sufficient. The themes represent findings, which are reported according to the research question. Themes are triangulated with numerical findings from closed-ended survey responses. Themes are also supported with select statements of the participants.

Research Question 2 was: "To what extent is the Focused Reading Program implemented with fidelity?" Primary data for this question included responses to five of 10 questions posed in individual interviews and two open-ended survey questions. Triangulation of these data was established through responses to 11 closed-ended survey items. All responses for these data sources were organized in four categories: adherence, exposure, instructional delivery, and engagement.

Interview items elicited responses regarding the role of the teacher/tutor, organization of program sessions, professional development, instructional delivery, and student engagement. These questions were included in interview items 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7. Open-ended survey items associated with this research questions elicited opportunities for student engagement (item 4) and overall impact of program delivery (item 5). Similarly, closed-ended survey items were organized in four categories to determine

implementation fidelity supporting its effectiveness: adherence to the program's design (items 1, 3, 4, 5, 13); exposure of students to the delivery of instruction (items 8, 9, 10, 12); quality of instructional delivery (items 2, 6, 14, 20); and student engagement in services (items 7, 15, 17,19). The analysis of data from these three sources resulted in three major themes: Program Flexibility, Peer-Learner Focused, and Learning and Behavior.

Themes: Research Question 2

Responses to the key interview items (1, 2, 5, 6, 7) that involved the role of the teacher/tutor, organization of program sessions, professional development, instructional delivery, and student engagement resulted in the following major descriptive terms and phrases used in defining themes: facilitator, schedule, periodic, individual needs, grouping patterns. Responses to the two open-ended survey questions resulted in the key terms peer partnering and self-esteem that described student engagement and overall impact of program delivery. The reduction of categories of data and the frequency of similar expressions resulted in the following themes for program fidelity: Program Flexibility, Peer and Learner Focused, and Learning and Behavior. Explanations of these themes follow with participants' supporting statements.

Program flexibility. This theme described the organization of services to students and the variety of activities and learning experiences based on the individual needs of students. Flexibility refers to whether facilitators adhered to the plan of delivery, the number and length of sessions, differentiated instruction and its quality, and the responsiveness of the students to program implementation. Fidelity and flexibility were

visible in program facilitators adhering to a planned daily schedule that provided different grouping patterns for the delivery of instructional services: whole and small groups, one-on-one instruction, and peer instruction. Participant 2 provided the following account of a typical session.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 45-minute sessions.

Focus Statement (what and why we're learning the skill). Explicit Instruction of the skill. Model (I do it). Think Alouds. Guided Practice (We do it.).

Independent Practice (You do it.). Kagan strategies independent and group activities. Wrap Up/Follow Up/ Share (I, We).

Other participants reported similar components of the session but also noted activities organized in 13-minute intervals.

Facilitators and tutors viewed their role as being responsive to the needs of students. The prevailing sentiment of participants regarding their role was that of facilitating the development of reading skills, and in particular reading comprehension. Regarding the role, Participant 5, a tutor, explained, "I influence the student to develop an enjoyment for reading; getting them to understand that the skills learned can be applied to any audience." Participant 5, a teacher with more than 10 years of experience said, "My role in the program is to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to self-confidence, which enhances reading skills." Participants with less than 10 years experience typically included specific strategies or equipment in describing their role. The remarks of Participant 1 is an example, "My role in the program is to provide quality education through pathways of learning including technology."

Flexibility refers to whether facilitators adhered to the plan of delivery, the number and length of sessions, differentiated instruction and its quality, and the responsiveness of the students to program implementation. Program fidelity was expressed in participants' acknowledgment in interview item five that they engaged in professional development, although five of 11 participants indicated professional development was periodic. However, tutors indicated development opportunities occurred weekly through meetings and in various ways within the school and district. Despite the infrequent offering of professional development, all participants expressed that they provided quality instruction that addressed the individual needs of learners and provided multiple opportunities for student engagement.

Participants responded to the category of program fidelity, instructional delivery, through describing the nature of instruction and instructional arrangements in interview item six. Responses supported differentiated instruction as a basic strategy. Participants most frequently used the terms and expressions "hands-on," "tailored to the needs," and "small and peer groups" in their responses. Participant 2 responded, "Differentiated instruction is implemented during the teacher-led activities. I form small, flexible groups based on student data and observations." Participant 4 explained differentiation to include advancing students based on their mastery of skills.

Student exposure and engagement were the final aspects related to program fidelity from the perspective of the theme, flexibility. Exposure of students to diverse activities and peer engagement were central to all participants' responses to question 7 in the interview protocol. Peer critiques, peer instruction, small group engagement, individual

activities, and shoulder partner were among examples for student exposure and engagement. Participants 5 and 9 respectively, summarized the general meanings of other participants through explaining, "Students are allowed to engage in small groups after whole group instruction, research, and practice" and "Students have opportunities to work with fellow students on critiquing their own and their fellow students' work."

Consistent with the qualitative descriptions, 11 closed-ended items triangulated the primary data sources. These items were arranged on a 4-point *Likert* scale as follows: 1(*strongly agree*); 2 (*agree*); 3 (*disagree*); 4 (*strongly disagree*). Questions related to adherence to the program's design (items 1, 5, 13), inquired of goal clarity, program coordination, and varied instructional arrangements. Questions focused on exposure of students to the delivery of instruction (items 4, 8), questioned sufficiency of program scheduled services and student contact time. The quality of instructional delivery (items 2, 6, 14, 20) focused on teacher support, planning, resources, and ways students learn. The final test of fidelity was student engagement in services (items 7, 19) related to their engagement in program activities and engagement with peers.

Responses to these items were computed for mean scores. As shown in Table 4, the highest means found were for the following categories schedule, contact time, and peer engagement. The means reported reveal differences in items within categories. The category of engagement shows that peer engagement is higher than activity engagement. Similarly, items 6 (planning) and 14 (resources) have the highest means for the category of instructional delivery revealing that their planning considers that different students require different resources.

Table 4

Means for Fidelity Program Implementation Categories

Item Engagement	<i>M</i>	Exposure	Adherence	Delivery	
1. Goal clarity	1.45		X		
2. Teacher support	1.64			X	
4. Schedule	1.82	X			
5. Program coordination	1.55		X		
6. Delivery plan	1.73			X	
7. Activity engagement	1.64			X	
8. Contact time	1.82	X			
13. Instructional arrangement	1.55		X		
14. Resources differ	1.73			X	
19. Peer engagement	1.82	X			Peer and
20. Student learning	1.64			X	learner

focused. The primary data for this theme were items from interviews and open-ended survey items. The peer-learner focused theme emerged from participants' responses to interview questions 6, 7, and 8 that inquired of instructional services, student engagement and interaction, and assistance for struggling readers. Responses to open-ended survey questions 2 and 5 also contributed to the theme. Qualitative responses found support in closed-ended survey items 12 and 20.

Implied from participants is that they perceived the entire program as peer-learner

focused. In responding to open-ended items 2 from the survey, participants shared that students had daily opportunities to interact with peers one-on-one and in small group arrangements. Participant 4 said, "Students interact during small group sessions; the stronger readers naturally have an inclination to help their peers and this has yielded positive results." The term peer or expression peer help or tutoring was used 10 of 11 responses to item 2. Participants responded to the question, "How are instructional services differentiated for students?" Responses included the following: "through hands-on experiences, audible learning, and visual aids to ensure well rounded development"; "tailoring the instruction to the needs of students"; "using technology and small group instruction"; and "using student data and observations for grouping." Participant 8 summarized the focus on students in the comments, "Instruction services are prepared to fit specific needs of all students in the program. Once the student's needs are identified, the information is documented, and a plan of action is put in place."

Participants viewed a major objective of the program was engaging students in experiences to enhance their reading abilities, with attention to struggling readers. They agreed that peer interaction and engagement in small group instruction "helped many students to learn from one another." Participant 4 supported this view through commenting, "I believe that peer tutoring helps struggling readers. Our struggling readers have gained competence in reading that they didn't have prior to peer tutoring." Participant 5 captured the value of learner centered and peer focused activities in student achievement through explaining that "students quiz and review with peers as well as create their own assessments to assure they retain the information." The closed ended

items supporting this theme resulted in means of 1.45 (item 12-good support service) and 1.64 (item 20-instruction considers how students learn). A number of positive results support the benefits of the learner-focused theme for struggling and other readers that are included in the learning and behavior theme.

Learning and behavior. Explanations of changes in students' performance and behavior were cited in interview dialogue and survey entries. Responses germane to this theme were to open-ended survey items 1 and 2, which inquired of differences in the performance and behavior of students and skills and knowledge gained as a result of the program's activities. Primary questions inquired of the benefits of the program for struggling readers (interview item 3) and ways the program helps struggling readers (interview item 8). Responses to closed-ended survey items 11 and 15 related to reading growth and student attendance supportive of student learning and behavior.

Participants credited the instructional arrangement, which provided students opportunities to engage in instruction focused on their individual needs to fostering reading improvement. Identifying skills in need of attention and prescribing a plan for addressing those skills enabled students to progress. The plan involved peer tutoring and activities included in whole group and individual instruction. According to participants, as students progressed, their self-esteem became positive, and so did their behavior. In terms of differences seen in students' reading performance and behavior, Participant 11 said, "I have seen an excitement in the students as they increase their reading comprehension. I have seen them go to the library and check out more books."

Confident, comfortable, self-motivated, engaged as opposed to indifferent are among

descriptions found throughout the data regarding the change in behavior and performance of students. Participant 9 noticed the increase in students' confidence in reading as "they are willing to read out loud more often and they better understand the process of their reading assignments." Students were also described as having overcome their difficulties and blossomed as a result. Participant 2 felt that "the students' reading performance tends to blossom when they're in the small group setting and they are more relaxed and not inhibited." This participant described how students' vocabulary had increased: "their common knowledge of not so general words has risen due to their exposure to more nonfiction text; their ability to connect with the text at different levels has improved."

Peer tutoring, teacher modeling, teacher/student interactions, and specific instructional strategies led to improvement in reading comprehension. In a survey response that described interactions, the respondent wrote the following account:

Students are often engaged using techniques and strategies from the Kagan program. Techniques such as Traveling Pair Share, Rally Coach/Sage-N-Scribe, Mix and Match, and Who Am I that are introduced and modeled to students at the beginning of the term provide them with the opportunity to interact with and learn from each other. All of the techniques require students to work with partners or groups in some form of role-play. They switch roles, discuss, and interact.

Skills commonly noted that students attained or showed improvement included phonemic awareness; vocabulary; making inferences; critical thinking; reading fluency, accuracy, and with appropriate tone; and reading comprehension in general. For the struggling reader, the program has been helpful because interventions start at the lowest deficient

skill and as students master the skill, the level of complexity increases. This contributes to the student building confidence and morale and continuous progress in reading.

Participants 7 and 8 indicated that struggling readers are assisted through guided reading which has improved their ability to choose an answer and justify their choice. Participants concluded that the guided reading strategy, teacher/student ratio, and individual assistance have contributed to the success of struggling readers in their academic performance.

Qualitative Results: Research Question 3

Answers to the research question, "What are teachers' and intervention tutors' perceptions of the Focused Reading Intervention Program's strengths and challenges" resulted from participants' responses to interview items 4, 3, 8, 9,10; and open-ended survey items 1, 2, and 3. Also, closed ended survey items 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, and 17 provided support to the qualitative findings. These results are reported as strengths and challenges in the program's implementation and fidelity of implementation.

Strengths. Participants identified several strengths of the program. One strength was associated with assistance provided struggling readers. Assistance through one-on-one and peer-led groups that targeted specific skills resulted in building morale and confidence. This confidence translated to skill improvement in vocabulary and reading comprehension. Program organization focused on interaction was also supportive of assistance to struggling readers. Students supported and learned from each other in their interactions in groups and peer tutoring sessions. Students received the extra help needed through these arrangements.

An overall program strength identified through interviews was in methods used to improve reading deficits. In essence the methods addressed students' needs for engagement, reading comprehension improvement, and for having tools to enhance their academic success. Comments from several participants defined this strength. Participant 1 said, "the program provides methods for students in the lowest percentile to help them to develop needed skills in reading." Participant 8 related the strength of program methods in supporting regular classroom instruction but also identified an area in need of improvement. The participant commented, "it provides the student who is reading 2-3 grades below his/her level with the opportunity to increase those levels. The program needs more time within the class period to give the students the opportunity to complete the assigned work and discuss it with their peers." However, the overall perception of all participants is summarized in Participant's 11 comment, "the students have increased achievement on tests which had led to high self-esteem."

Strengths of the program were also revealed in open-ended survey items. Participants perceived the program as a bridge for closing the gap between struggling and proficient readers. The resounding comment was that students had shown improvement in decoding words and in literal and inferential comprehension. Participants concluded that the program had positively impacted students, teachers, and the school as seen in Participant's 9 responses in responses to the value of the program on student performance: "They have improved a great deal with their reading skills. The teachers can see a change in their understanding of skills being presented. The school is impacted by better scoring." Similarly, responses to closed ended survey items assessed the

program's strengths in view of reinforcing reading achievement, providing resources, planning time, providing support services, student attendance, contact time with students, and in students' awareness for attending the program. The highest mean averages for these as strengths were for contact time and student attendance.

Challenges. Interviews with participants revealed challenges in implementing the program and its sustainability. The overall operational challenge was in having sufficient time for the delivery of services to students. The time was constrained by federal and state testing requirements, class schedules. Participant 10 recognized that "an increase in the class time would make the program better, giving the students longer to work on their skills." Similarly, in responding to challenges Participant 7 said, "enough time to collaborate with the students who need the support the most." Participant 6 registered the need for more time and saw interruptions in tutoring sessions for testing as a challenge. The participant also added the challenge of having more resources. As a recommended program change, Participant 7 thought that "if more time is allotted to work in the program at an earlier level would help to improve their reading."

The minority view of challenges related to formative feedback, attendance, and tutoring staff. Participant 1 saw as challenging "consistently providing students with formative feedback that show student growth." Participant 3 noted that "when students do not attend the sessions daily, they miss the needed instruction," and Participant 11 noted that "the only challenge I see is the need for more tutors." Two of the 11 interview participants said there were no challenges. Parent participation and guidance were cited as challenges on the open-ended survey items.

Although not identified as challenges, participants provided recommendations that could be challenging. The most frequent recommendation related to funding for the program to purchase instructional resources, materials, and for implementing the program in other schools and in earlier grades. Participant 10 recommended "that the class time is changed to a block schedule and that we have more professional development opportunities." Other participants concurred with the need for professional development. Participant 7 recommended, "staff professional development and collaboration with elementary schools to promote consistent growth."

Closed-ended items revealed strengths and challenges related to program fidelity. Means for the 20 items ranged from a low of 1.45 to a high of 1.91. These items were categorized as they related to program fidelity. Items in the adherence category represented program attributes related to program delivery as planned. All items in the adherence category averaged 1.53; exposure items averaged 1.59; instructional delivery averaged 1.63; and engagement averaged 1.70. Other items on the survey represented effective program outcomes based on the purpose of the program. Items 11, 16, and 18 required participants' responses regarding student growth in reading, improvement in comprehension, and increases in reading scores. These items were used to respond to the first research question. The means for these items were 1.64 (item 11); 1.64 (item 16); and 1.36 (item 18). Table 5 reveals means for agreed upon strengths and challenges.

Table 5

Strengths and Challenges Mean Scores

Closed Survey Item	<i>M</i>	Adherence	Exposure	Delivery	Responsive
3. Reinforces reading	1.27	FC			
4. Program schedule	1.82	FS			
6. Instructional plan	1.73			FS	
8. Contact time	1.82		FS		
10. Resources	1.45			FC	
12. Support service	1.45			FC	
15. Attendance	1.91				FS
17. Knows reason for attending	1.45				FC
19. Student engagement	1.82				FS
20. Considers student learning	1.64			FS	

Note. FC = fidelity challenge; FS = fidelity strength.

As depicted in Table 5, attendance was the strongest aspect of the program followed by student engagement. Both these items represent the category of student responsiveness to the program offering. Similar strengths are seen in contact time and program schedule as indicators of the program providing opportunities for student exposure to activities on an adhered to schedule. The mean scores suggest that facilitators implemented the program with the accuracy proposed for scheduling and tutoring struggling students. However, the means for students knowing the reason for

attending, and teacher support, along with the majority indicating a need for professional development serve as a rationale for developing a professional development project to enhance the effectiveness of the Focused Reading Program.

Summary

The findings revealed there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-posttest scores for both seventh and eighth graders. The post scores showed students' reading performance improved. Qualitative results supported these findings. The results also supported that the program was implemented as planned as explained in the following themes: Program Flexibility, Peer and Learner Focused, and Learning and Behavior. However, results also revealed challenges in delivering services to students that included the time needed to provide services. Challenges supported a need for program staff to have professional development throughout program implementation and in collaboration with elementary schools to promote consistent growth. The Evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program Executive Summary shown in Section 3 and Appendix A was created in response to the challenges of preparing for the needs of struggling readers and issues related to adequate time for instructional delivery.

IRB will enter approval number 09-18-17-0439620 and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

This section is a detailed description of the Evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program Executive Summary (Appendix A) for staff of the Focused Reading Program. School data suggested that ineffective or limited program effectiveness contributed to students' lack of skill development; therefore, the school administration created a new program. This mixed methods study was an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Focused Reading Intervention Program in enhancing students' reading performance. The findings of this study revealed that although students' reading performance improved, there was a need for program staff to have professional development throughout program implementation and in collaboration with elementary schools to promote consistent growth. Therefore, this Evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program Executive Summary is created in response to the resulting need for engaging program staff in continuous training to address the reading needs and programmatic issues such as time for working with struggling readers.

This Evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program Executive Summary is also based on a review of the literature and research-based best practices for developing and enhancing the expertise of program staff to implement and evaluate program services. The Executive Summary includes training components and types of activities along with goals and objectives, implementation timeline, and evaluation measures. Featured components are team meetings, demonstrations, seminars, and observations.

The Executive Summary is designed for the engagement of program personnel in training each semester and during the summer prior to the beginning of the school term.

Rationale

This evaluation project resulted from observations of the principal of a rural school. The principal discovered that the foundational reading skills of middle school students were deficient and began implementing the Focus Reading Intervention program as a corrective measure. The level of reading performance has a profound effect on school and career success; therefore, professionals create various reading programs and strategies for enhancing students' ability to read. The project, an evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention program, was a mixed methods study that employed a quasi-experimental pre-posttest design to examine program effectiveness. The study examined the in-house reading intervention, Focused Reading (Belcher, 2014), to determine its effectiveness in enhancing the performance of struggling readers.

The researcher collected interview and survey data from the program's staff of eight teachers and three interventionists. Findings revealed students showed significant improvement on post reading scores, that the program was implemented as planned, and the need for professional development. These findings along with participants' recommendations for change were factors for recommending the addition to the professional development services imbedded in the program. Participants' expressed needs for professional developments were consistent with the tenets of Vygotsky's (1978) social cultural theory with emphases on socio cultural influences and differentiated instruction. Their comments reflected that recognizing a student's zone of proximal

development and diverse needs are necessary for designing instruction to maximize student learning, especially in environments where learners differ in abilities

Review of the Literature

This review is of literature associated with professional development for training teachers to implement strategies identified as best practice for working with struggling readers. The results of this study and the literature reviewed support that continuing education offers the type preparation teachers need to remain current and to use research based best practice instructional strategies. The varying characteristics of struggling readers also suggest the value of frequent professional development to better serve their needs. References included in the review were selected through Internet searches of databases including ERIC and ProQuest, online university libraries, peer-reviewed publications, books, and reliable and scholarly media sources. Relevant search terms used included professional development, continuing education, reading programs and interventions, and teachers' needs for instructing middle school learners.

The Nature of Select Reading Programs

The purpose and features of the reading program dictate the need for specific professional development. A variety of programs have reported success in students' reading performance. Reading Recovery, a program that Marie Clay authored in the 1970s (Holliman, 2017) involves daily, 30-minute lessons that include several activities. These activities involve students in re-reading two or three familiar books in which they apply phonic knowledge to make phonemic connections. Embedded work with letters

and words is also incorporated throughout the lesson. The intervention sets out to close the reading gap between children with literacy deficiencies and their peers. Students are directed through a teacher trained as a Reading Recovery teacher through a prescribed curriculum and practicum. These techniques are applicable for improving the reading performance of struggling readers as evidenced from participants' comments regarding the deficits in word recognition and comprehension skills of students in Focused Reading.

The review revealed that in addition to developing specific reading skills, the objective of some reading programs is to enrich students' reading experiences. In a study of an enrichment reading program, Kuruyer, Akyol, Karli Oguz, and Has (2017) used a single-subject research method and the between subjects' multiple probe design to study the effects of an enrichment reading program on the cognitive processes and neural structures of children experiencing reading difficulties. Within the context of the study, memory capacities, attention spans, reading-related activation, and white matter pathways of the students were determined before and after the application of the enrichment reading program. For students with reading difficulties, the results revealed improved reading profiles with respect to cognitive processes and neural structure.

Lane and Hayes (2015) discussed the advantages of the professional model in Florida. The Florida Reading Initiative (FRI) responded to the national need to improve reading performance and instruction through creating a reading conceptual framework. The framework focused on improving reading as a school-wide effort that involved planning

for teachers implementing evidenced-based instruction. The framework also informed the development of sustainable professional development activities.

Other programs target reading comprehension and improvement through teacher professional development. van Kuijk, Deumk, Bosker, Ritzema, and Evelien (2016) investigated a PD program for reading comprehension that targeted goals, data use, and instruction. The researchers examined the effects of the program on second and third grade student achievement using a pretest-posttest control group design. The study showed students in the experimental condition were more than half a year ahead of students in the control condition. Strategies for applying similar targeted instruction for struggling middle school readers can be included in teacher professional development workshops.

Professional Development: Forms and Content

The developmental needs of teachers can be addressed in various forms of professional development training. Commonly identified training courses, workshops, and peer mentoring. These and other forms have been the subject of research to determine whether they benefit the teacher and student performance.

Workshops. De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, Haerens, and Aelterman, (2017) studied the effects of teacher professional development workshops focused on how to enhance students' reading motivation. The workshop, founded upon self-determination theory, aimed to assist teachers in developing the knowledge and skills necessary to implement an autonomy-supportive and structuring motivating style in classroom reading activities. The researchers evaluated the workshop using a quasiexperimental research

design, which controlled for one group of teachers participating in training for implementing strategies and another group not receiving the training treatment. Growth analyses resulting from pre and post testing showed an increased motivation to engage in leisure reading among students in the experimental classes, especially for boys.

Coursework. Formal and informal coursework is also frequently identified in the literature as a method for professional development. Courses may be delivered on college or university campuses and at local school sites. Courses have also been included in descriptions of job imbedded professional development that features different elements as an ongoing process. Heller, Daehler, Wong, Shinohara, and Miratrix (2012) studied three courses integrated science content and course methodology as a form of professional development. The courses explored the following: teaching cases, looking at student work, and metacognitive analysis. The method that trained staff developers used to incorporate teaching and the way learners think was the key difference in the courses. The courses focused on teaching cases and student work resulted in improved student performance. Improvement was seen in students' responses to test items and the completeness and accuracy of their written justifications for answers given. The results also revealed sustained effects on teachers' written justifications associated with the teaching cases course. For designing professional development, Heller et al., recommended the integration of content learning and analyses of student learning and teaching as opposed to limiting professional development to single emphases on advanced content or teacher thinking.

Mentoring. Mentoring programs and instructional teams have also proven profitable

for advancing teacher learning, and thus, student learning. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) reviewed published studies of mentoring programs for novice teachers and determined they were effective in improving teacher retention, teacher satisfaction, and student achievement. Langdon (2017) reported that although mentoring facilitates the development of new teachers, the mentoring role is complex but can also have a positive effect on the mentor. Similarly, Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom (2015) attributed teacher performance and student achievement to collaboration through instructional teams. The researchers found teachers who work in a collaborative environment improve faster and that student performance in math and reading also improves. Collaboration and instructional teams are also features of professional learning communities (Vega, 2015).

Communities of learners. Professional development is often organized as communities of learners. Vega (2015) defined professional learning communities (PLC) as "groups of teachers that share and critically interrogate their practices in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting way to mutually enhance teacher and student learning" ("Professional learning communities" section, para. 1). Such communities incorporate professional development that involves strategies to promote both teacher and student learning. According to Vega, successful PLCs have focused on collaboration, student learning, continuous teacher learning, teacher decision-making related to their own needs, and engagement in decisions regarding curriculum and school governance. Vega also noted PLCs feature such

professional development activities or practices as video-based reflections, lesson study, mentoring programs, and grade-level teams.

The input of teachers from their own self-assessments and reflections is important to the work of the community of learners. Strahan (2016) referred to self-guided professional development where "participants identified their own personal goals for improving instruction, designed plans of action, and assessed results" (p. 1). However, collaboration and sharing were important for the success of teachers' personal growth. Romen (2019) presented findings of a study on learning communities in which teachers who became leaders found the classroom teaching-learning process challenging because of their changing roles. The author recommended that the challenge could be addressed through emotional awareness, self-reflection, and transformative leadership.

An examination of PLCs that Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) reported revealed that student scores increased on reading, writing, math, science, and social studies subject tests. PLCs had a positive effect on student learning. Similar to Vega's (2015) report, Vescio et al. found four characteristics were inherent in learning communities that worked to promote positive changes in teaching cultures: collaboration, a focus on student learning, teacher authority, and continual teacher learning.

PD focused on leadership and literacy. Policastro (2018) observed that educational leadership programs and professional development opportunities do not include the development regarding literacy knowledge and trends, literacy coaching, or literacy leadership. Yet, many schools today are striving to become communities where best practice in literacy pedagogy becomes a catalyst for transformative change. Policastro

observed that schools have changes that happen on many levels and are providing ongoing and systematic professional development that forges a path forward in schools. The author noted that such professional development is not always easy to implement and often presents difficult challenges.

Other studies have investigated professional development from the perspective of time required for teacher development and other development needs. Childress (2017) proposed regular participation in professional development for teachers to help the teacher stay abreast of current changes in their discipline. Childress believes student engagement needs to include the development of speaking skills, reading comprehension, writing skills, mathematical reasoning, and scientific reasoning. Supporting the view that professional development can facilitate student achievement, Mraz, Salas, Mercado, and Dikotla (2016) concluded that in-service professional development can help practitioners thoughtfully adapt to changing classroom and curricular contexts.

That students develop strong literacy skills early is also linked to teacher knowledge of appropriate strategies facilitated through professional development. Folsom, Smith, Burk and Oakley (2017) presented results of a systematic investigation of change in educators' knowledge and classroom practices associated with professional development that showed the increase in teacher knowledge of early literacy skills was associated with progress in the professional development program. Educators who had completed the program scored an average of 2.90 points higher on an assessment of change in knowledge than did educators who had not engaged in the program. The results also

revealed student achievement in reading increased above the proficiency level, which demonstrated solid academic progress.

Web-based PD. Another form of professional development is web-based. Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, and Lun (2011) described the results from employing Teaching Partner-Secondary, a web-mediated professional development system focused on improving teacher-student interactions in the classroom. The results of a randomized controlled trial with 78 secondary school teachers and 2,237 students, showed achievement of the average student progressed 9 percentile points after program completion. The researchers attributed gains to the quality of changes in teacher-student interactions.

Web-based professional development can also employ video-based lessons. Roth et al. (2011) reviewed the Science Teachers Learning from Lesson Analysis (STeLLA) project, a PD program used for enhancing teacher and student performance at the upper elementary level. The project guides teachers in the analysis of student work and their own performance in an attempt to improve practice. The review of the STeLLA program in a study of experimental and control groups illustrated that teacher application of teaching strategies increased, student science content knowledge increased, and teachers' knowledge of science content increased significantly. Accounts of video-based lessons show that teachers study video clips of their teaching in meetings or video clubs to examine each others' strategies (Vega, 2015). The examination is a collaborative effort for understanding the teaching and learning process. Brantlinger, Sherin, and Linsenmeier (2011) traced the video-based lessons to a group of secondary mathematics

teachers preparing for national accreditation. The teachers used the clips to examine the following themes: techniques for facilitating discourse, contextual factors affecting discourse, and criteria for evaluating discourse. Discussions led to the group functioning as a professional community for the collaborative examination of practice.

PD pedagogy, content, and teacher interest. Recommendations for professional development emerge from research examining pedagogical practices and content taught through various methods. One recommendation resulting from a reading methodology was that the facilitators for professional development should focus on teachers remaining current about issues specific to motivating reading interest and selection of appropriate literature. Garst and Ozier (2015) made this recommendation after their study of a camp-based reading program methodology. The camp was based on the premise that many children experience summer learning loss, which means they lose academic skills as measured by grade-level equivalents on standardized tests. Because of summer learning loss, children's test scores are lower when they return to school in the fall than when they left school in the spring. This learning loss impacts students, regardless of gender or ethnicity. Garst and Ozier (2015) found that outcomes for youths studied included improvement in reading practice, word recognition, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and comprehension. They concluded that camp-based reading programs can provide an opportunity to reduce summer learning loss by exposing youth to academic enrichment.

Hollenbeck and Katchman (2013) examined teachers' instructional methods in reading comprehension subsequent to professional development (PD). They explored the gap

from a conceptual change perspective, positing that some level of discontent or disapproval with an existing belief, conception or practice is central to its successful revision. The researchers concluded that PD for teachers should begin from the point of inherent pedagogical dissatisfaction, with current practices self-identified as problematic. Hollenbeck and Katchman suggested that the design of the PD in reading comprehension instruction support conceptual change.

In a study involving middle and high school English teachers, Doubet and Southall (2018) questioned the perceptions of these teachers regarding the merger of reading and writing in instructional practices. They examined the tactics teachers used to merge reading and writing instruction and how staff development experiences modeling these techniques affect the teachers' practices. Doubet and Southall determined that focused professional development has the potential to form and enhance teachers' practices.

Differentiated instruction has been addressed from its influence on teacher efficacy. In a study of differentiation, professional development, and teacher efficacy, Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, and Hardin (2014) examined the role of professional development (PD) in teachers' feelings about differentiating instruction. The results of surveys from participants in two school districts showed increased efficacy of teachers having engaged more frequently in PD over those who had not engage in PD. Strategies that can be incorporated in PD are found in publications including those of Juliani (2014) that feature firsthand classroom experiences that are appropriate for teachers just beginning to differentiate instruction. Additionally, Roberts, Inman, and Tracy (2014) included tiering lessons and class activities along with graphic organizers, interest inventories, and

templates that can be incorporate in demonstrations to novice teachers; while Moreau's (2014) work contains directions for teachers creating a differentiation environment while focusing on the implementation of curriculum and instructional strategies. These resources are particularly helpful resources for addressing the needs of struggling readers in regular classroom settings. These needs suggest that teachers need to be prepared to address the diverse characteristics of struggling readers (Moreau, 2014) that can be provided through differentiated instruction. Research also reveals that more advanced students can benefit from teachers' knowledge of differentiated instruction (Shaunnessy-Dedrick, Evans, Ferron, & Lindo, 2015) as reading comprehension and attitudes toward instructional strategies are influenced by teacher knowledge and awareness.

Project Description

The project was an evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program in which I used the mixed methods design to determine the effectiveness of the reading intervention in enhancing student's reading performance. This section is a description of the project, a report of the findings, and a recommended change to the project's professional development. The results of the study indicated the need for the engagement of program staff in continuing professional development. The Focused Reading Intervention program is organized as a collaborative learning experience with job-embedded features. The experience involves teacher/tutor planning along with on-site training for instructional delivery. The program is structured to offer both after and within school tutoring to struggling readers with the goal of improving performance measured through the STAR assessment. The project included information from surveys,

interviews, and reviews of documents to assess program strengths, areas in need of improvement, and overall program effectiveness. The recommended plan for adding to the program includes Professional Development training components with different types of activities, goals and objectives, implementation timelines, and evaluation measures. Aspects of professional development are designed for implementation each semester and during the summer prior to the beginning of the school term. The nature of the proposed PD for school implementation reflects knowledge regarding the amount of time teachers engage in professional development, the way teachers learn new skills, the focus and structure of professional development, and the integration of professional development with student assignments. Consistent with recommendations in the literature, other considerations in the design include budgeting, mentoring, or other support training services, teaming and collaboration; and leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Gulamhussein, 2013; Harris & Sass, 2011; Mizell, 2010; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Vega, 2015). The implementation will also include content based on participants' comments in the data collected for improving their practice.

Project Resources

Findings from the project evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program revealed that required several resources according to its specific features.

Workshops will permit participants to engage in hands-on experiences related to specific concepts and will require consultants and material resources. Topics in the full day workshops include the middle school learner, teaching reading skills, instructional

arrangements and strategies, motivational techniques and self-concept building, and student assessments. Online courses will engage participants in such instructional modules as creating classroom environment, research-based strategies, differentiated instruction, research in reading, and behavior management. The need for exposing teachers to diverse instructional strategies will consider findings from a study involving self-assessments of teachers' use of evidence-based practices. Borgmeier, Loman, and Hara (2016) reported the results of an on-line self-assessment, which showed teachers at the primary, intermediate, and secondary levels differed significantly in their use of classroom practices. Their results have implications for the content of PDs. Video-based lessons will involve participants in creating scripts for their best-practice video teaching episodes to be shared for feedback with other teachers. Resources for these activities require funds for tuition, computers, Internet services, and video equipment.

Coaching and mentoring will involve services of expert teachers or individuals employed as literacy coaches. According to Lofthouse (2019), coaching is among valuable forms of professional development for specifically assisting individuals to manage challenges in educational settings. Therefore, in addition to scheduled coaching and mentoring sessions, coaches and mentors will assist as teachers identify the need. Conferences for teachers will be offered for them to learn new strategies and to interact with professionals in the field. These activities will require monetary support for travel and related fees. Other resources involve time allocated for team meetings for planning and sharing.

Some resources are available at the site. The building is equipped with computers

and wired for Internet service. Video equipment and material products are also housed at the site. Additionally, a literacy coach and teachers who can serve as mentors are also available. Resources needed include funds for consultant services, conferences, and course tuition. A commitment of time for the activities to occur within and outside of the school day is also needed. Events scheduled outside the school day may require release time or extra compensation.

Proposed Implementation: Timeline and Activities Next Step Recommendations

Project activities will be implemented for one year, August -July. A one-week orientation, needs assessment, planning, and training meeting will begin the project prior to the opening of school in August. Thereafter, team training will occur once monthly through June. The culminating, reflective meeting will occur in July. One-hour team meetings will occur each week; one virtual or real visit to other classrooms will be scheduled once per semester; and attendance to a conference, professional seminar, or meeting will be scheduled one time for participants during the year. A timeline of project activities appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Timeline of Professional Development

Component	Description	Timeline
Start-up	Orientation, needs assessment, planning, and initial training meeting	August 12-16 (5-full day)
Team meetings	Sharing experiences, techniques, concerns and proposing ways to address concerns; clarification of week's objectives; feedback	Weekly Wednesday 11:00-12:00
Team training	Workshops; video lessons; planning based on	7:30-2:30 (1st

	needs; mentoring; coursework.	Tuesdays)
Observation visits	Site visits to classrooms, other schools, and virtual observations	Twice per year (7:30-2:30)
Formative evaluation	Reflective logs; interviews; observations in team meetings and classrooms. Feedback in individual conferences and overall program operations in team meetings; make modifications for goal attainment.	On-going
Mid-year review progress report		December 15 (Project director)
Conference Seminar	Literacy, reading, and other related local, state, national conferences.	March or April (1-2 days)
Culminating Meeting,	Review categories in self-reflection logs, interview teachers/students; review student samples and performance records. Disseminate findings/PD debriefing; feedback; recommended next steps.	July

The project will involve teachers working with students in the Focused Reading Intervention Program to implement lessons learned from professional development experiences. Teachers will maintain a log of activities and experiences that connect their acquired understandings to the students served. The log will serve as their personal evaluation of their experiences and their impact on student performance. The log will be among talking points in team meetings for sharing and feedback. The team leader or project director will be responsible for planning follow-up activities for teachers based on self evaluations and the director's observations and assessment of the teachers'

performance.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers associated with the scheduled events include lack of funds to defray costs for consultants and conferences. Four workshops are proposed for the first week of training with an additional six for the remaining project year. Additionally, the plan proposes for a minimum of three teachers to attend a major literacy or reading conference. In the event that funds will not be available to defray full costs, the number of teachers to attend conferences will be reduced and a plan for the attendee(s) to collect information and share with other project personnel will be implemented during the team meetings. Funds needed to pay the 10 consultants for the scheduled workshops will be requested from other special project budgets. The trainer-trainer model will be used as an alternative if funds will not be available from the instructional resource and special projects budgets. The trainer-trainer model will involve one expert teacher shadowing and assisting the workshop consultant in preparation for leading other workshop sessions.

Project Evaluation Plan

Formative and summative evaluation approaches are included in the evaluation component of the Focus Reading Intervention program. Formative evaluation, according to Scriven (1967), is a process for collecting information during the initial stages of the project that will guide changes. Formative evaluation activities are implemented at specific time intervals. Chen (2015) noted the need to timeliness of the evaluation in order to collect information that would increase chances for realizing project goals. Adhering to Chen's suggestions for forms of formative evaluation, this PD will

use on-site observations, discussions in team meetings, teachers' reflective logs, and individual interviews for determining needed improvements in the type PD activities offered, the format of the activities, and the delivery of instruction. The project director will have the major responsibility for coordinating both formative and summative evaluation activities to ensure that problems and their sources and that modifications address these problems.

Scriven (1967) also suggested that measures used to determine whether the PD goals have been met constitute summative evaluation. Measures in this project will include end-of-year team meetings, checklists, and interviews. An interview protocol will guide the inquiry process. The protocol will include questions about project goals, implementation, and potential application for future PD activities. Questions will also target PD objectives to determine whether the nature of performance feedback (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017) contributed to needed revisions for ensuring a collaborative culture that promoted student engagement and achievement.

The processes of formative and summative evaluation are appropriate for this PD as formative measures inform practice and provide evidenced-based justification for modifying practices in view of intended outcomes. Early and ongoing application of formative assessments provides needed support and motivation for attaining goals. The overall goal of the PD is to equip teachers with knowledge and tools through collaborative efforts to enhance the reading performance of struggling students. The project involves the participation of teachers and students as key stakeholders. Parents,

the school and community are also stakeholders who will ultimately benefit from a more literate society.

Summative evaluation will occur at the end of the project in July. Checklists, interviews with teachers and tutors, teacher reflective logs, and reviews of students' work and progress reports will be used to determine whether goals and objectives of the project are met. Teacher self-reflection will be a major summative assessment tool. The tool will contain categories for teachers to describe their personal growth and provide a rationale for how the category led to their growth. Categories will include workshops and conferences; selection of strategies and materials; courses; team meetings/sharing; mentoring/coaching; influence of personal growth on student performance; and areas in need of attention.

Project Implications

Wilterdink and Form (2017) described social change as an idea of continuous progress that occurs as a result of innovative humans who add new knowledge based on lessons learned from trial and error. The added PD component of the Focused Reading Intervention Program provides opportunities for teachers to experience trial and error; thus, the ability to select the most promising ideas tried. Teacher growth in the ability to differentiate instruction, acquire teaching strategies, and identify ways to encourage positive student performance are among the potential positive social change impacts from the project which has implications for all stakeholders.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The problem of poor reading performance in middle school is evident through findings that more than eight million struggling readers in U.S. are in upper elementary and secondary schools (Berkley et al., 2012). Further, reading comprehension is especially difficult for these struggling readers (De Koning & Van der Schoot, 2013). However, opportunities for these students to acquire the reading skills needed for future success can occur in middle schools provided that interventions are appropriate based on research (Nitzukin et al., 2014). A strength of the project was visible in the mean differences in pretest and posttest scores in reading performance. The posttest scores were higher than pretest scores for both grades. The raw score results showed 46 of 62 eighth grade scores met the average scale score target of 501 and the average scale score of 497 to make growth on the state assessment. Of the 64 scores for seventh grade, 28 scores met the average scale score target of 575 and 29 met the average scale score of 571 to make growth on the assessment. This strength was supported in participants' comments regarding student growth. Performance differences were attributed to practices in the literature including differentiated instruction. That the program was implemented following a planned schedule and students received individualized instruction was also project strengths.

The time needed with struggling readers was a notable limitation. Additional time was needed in the Focused Reading Intervention Program for one-on-one guidance in support of in-class instruction. Although participants engaged in professional development, it

was infrequent and cited as a limitation. A frequent complaint of teachers in the study about PD was the reliance of "telling about rather than showing how-to" use an intervention. This observation follows the concept of experiential professional development that involves experimenting and reflecting on practice (Girvan, Conneely, & Tangne, 2016).

The deliverables of the PD plan include a template of strategies and resources that can improve the performance of struggling readers. This PD plan is based on hands-on experiences, sharing, trying out with the assistance of coaches and mentors, and self-reflection. Therefore, its greatest strength is that is an active learning process involving trial and error in a community of learners. This strength is comparable to recommendations in the literature for effective and active teacher learning, professional learning opportunities should be aligned with the needs of the teacher and the school (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

The diversity of activities and assessment measures for formative and summative evaluation are also among its strengths. These measures provide teachers opportunities to continuously reflect on their practice, self-assess, and receive assessment feedback to modify practice, as suggested in the literature (Borgmeier, Loman, & Hara, 2016; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017), in a non-threatening and collaborative environment. Consistent with other PD efforts described in the literature, the next step PD plan has limitations related to time and funding. Some experiences that are a part of the deliverables require monetary support for enabling teachers to have exposure to wider audiences. Ideally, all teachers would profit from attending national reading conferences where they receive

first-hand information from leading scholars and are able to examine the latest materials and resources. Depending upon the financial strength of the district, this may not be possible. However, this limitation can be addressed through preparing one or two attendees to deliver aspects from the conferences to the remaining teachers.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

A majority of the students at the site of the study illustrated reading deficiencies demonstrated by their poor application of foundational skills; therefore, a reading initiative was created to provide enhanced instruction as a correctional strategy. Problematic was that evaluations of the initiative had not occurred to determine if it helped students to achieve in reading. The study was an evaluation of the program.

Alternatives for determining whether the initiative worked would be limited to some form of assessment. Rather than a formal evaluation, informal measures would also provide information that could suggest whether aspects of the initiative were feasible. A review of progress reports in content areas would have some implications regarding the ability of students to read and comprehend the material. Questioning parents and students would also produce possible benefits of the initiative. However, these measures without the control that a formal study provides would not produce as reliable results.

If the Focused Reading Intervention Program did not exist, possible solutions for enhancing reading performance would include a school-wide sustained reading activity. This activity would require scheduling a period where everybody would read material of their choice at the same time. Each day, individuals could be designated to share one idea or lesson learned from their reading. Teachers could use these shared ideas and titles

of the material read to construct vocabulary lists for students to create and read sentences that may illustrate their interpretations of a story's ending. This strategy is similar to Johnson's (2016) language experience approach in which students practice reading using words and concepts within their experience. Also, if in planning the reading activity students are provided questioning prompts (who, what, when, where, how), instruction in vocabulary and comprehension skills based on what students share will have personal meanings for them. In redefining the local problem as students having limited engagement in reading, this type activity may encourage interest in reading and the desire for students to learn from reading and communicating ideas.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

A lesson learned from a review of the literature and applicable to developing the project centered on time. Time was addressed from the perspective of sufficient time for teacher engagement in activities, time for acquiring skills to successfully transfer new knowledge to practice, time for addressing the specific needs of students, and time related to the distribution of tasks that impact engagement. Through developing the project, challenging was the realization that manipulating time where all of the events could occur would be crucial to the effectiveness of the experiences offered.

Authors of an early publication on professional development stressed time as an important element of effective professional development. Guskey and Yoon (2009) discussed the structure of PD as including content and pedagogy, which requires time for it to be effective. The importance of time is not only supported for teacher development but for student achievement. Fisher, Carlyon, and Peter (2017) made this point from

multiple forms of data collected from teachers who noted that time was a constraint in their efforts to meet students' needs. Fisher et al drew implications from this finding to how principals allocate teacher time.

Developing the project has enhanced sensitivity to the role and responsibilities of school leaders. Professional standards for principals and leaders provide some guidance in ensuring teachers maintain quality in their teaching. However, the personal growth of teachers encompasses more than standards. Implications from the literature suggest that the leader should possess traits associated with transformational leadership whereby teachers can observe behaviors modeled for self-enhancement (Romen, 2019).

Developing the project provided opportunities for growth as a scholar and practitioner. The process required selecting and synthesizing a body of scholarly work and current practices reported in various media forms. Personal experiences, theoretical understandings, and reflection informed the selection of the literature presented. The review of literature confirmed that proposing professional development activities is a thoughtful process that involves matching ideal experiences and activities with what in reality might be feasible. Finally, the experience illustrated that there is no one best way to advance knowledge and awareness of what is needed to equip teachers with tools for helping the struggling reader.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The opportunity to conduct the evaluation was an important learning experience for the researcher and the participants. The process identified strengths and needs that led to the recommended plan for professional development as a next step in the Focused

Reading Intervention Program. Further, the experience provided a great deal of insight regarding the value of engaging in continuing education with a cohort of individuals working toward a common goal. The planning also increased awareness of issues school districts likely encounter in efforts to improve teacher and student performance. Money to defray expenses and time to permit on-site PD are among such issues.

Technology has provided alternatives to delivering professional development activities. However, human interaction remains a most effective and desired strategy for individuals to communicate and receive corrective feedback. The participants in the study supported the need for additional professional development to better meet the needs of struggling readers. They determined that exposure to additional curriculum and materials were also needed. Video lessons and virtual tours would not provide the type hands-on manipulation these teachers require to enhance their instructional practices. Therefore, a lesson learned is that early contact with mentors, coaches, or other experts would provide a good start for all PD activities.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The methods employed in this evaluation project have implications for use in other contexts where the focus is on improving teaching and learning. The types of activities, the time allotment for teacher engagement, and the collaborative nature of the recommended next step PD have support in the professional development literature as best practice for facilitating continuous learning. The recommended PD project engages participants as a community of learners where interdependence in trial and error and mentoring was encouraged and respected. Additional research that explores the constraints of time on project activities and identifies alternatives for addressing this constraint would respond to this recurring theme in intervention and PD models (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

Conclusion

The teacher is among the most valuable keys for student achievement. Students enter the classroom with diverse abilities, interests, needs, and expectations; the teacher is considered the "all knowing instrument" for delivering the best practice to address each student and his or her diversities. Professional development is the "all knowing vehicle" for arming teachers to delivery this task. This study revealed that despite the expertise and desire teachers possess to help struggling students, because of our ever-changing society and demands for schools to produce learners equipped with skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of a changing world, teachers need to be engaged in continuing education. Professional development can occur in many forms. The planner must be

aware of what forms would best serve teachers through beginning the PD process with eliciting the voices of participants in an assessment of needs.

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Appendix A: The Project

Evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention Program Executive Summary

Project Rationale

This evaluation project resulted from observations of the principal of a rural school. The principal discovered that the foundational reading skills of middle school students were deficient and began implementing the Focus Reading Intervention program as a corrective measure. The level of reading performance has a profound effect on school and career success; therefore, professionals create various reading programs and strategies for enhancing students' ability to read. The project, an evaluation of the Focused Reading Intervention program, was a mixed methods study that employed a quasi-experimental pre-posttest design to examine program effectiveness. The study examined the in-house reading intervention, Focused Reading (Belcher, 2014), to determine its effectiveness in enhancing the performance of struggling readers.

The researcher collected interview and survey data from the program's staff of eight teachers and three interventionists. Findings revealed students showed significant improvement on post reading scores, that the program was implemented as planned, and the need for professional development. These findings along with participants' recommendations for change were factors for recommending the addition to the professional development services imbedded in the program. Participants' expressed needs for professional developments were consistent with the tenets of Vygotsky's (1978) social cultural theory with emphases on socio cultural influences and differentiated instruction. Their comments reflected that recognizing a student's zone of proximal

development and diverse needs are necessary for designing instruction to maximize student learning, especially in environments where learners differ in abilities.

Recommended Next Steps

The recommendation of an extended professional development component to the Focused Reading Intervention program is designed to assist staff with strategies that ensure instruction begins where the student is (Huebner, 2010) as directed through concepts of social cultural theory. Although students' reading scores increased, the results also indicated participants needed the advantages of being able to engage in continuous professional development for enhancing the program.

As a suggested one-year trial, the PD extension includes training components with different types of activities, goals and objectives, implementation timelines, and evaluation measures. Aspects of professional development are designed for implementation each semester and during the summer prior to the beginning of the school term. The nature of PD will reflect knowledge regarding the amount of time teachers engage in professional development, the way teachers learn new skills, the focus and structure of professional development, and the integration of professional development with student assignments. Consistent with recommendations in the literature, other considerations in the design include budgeting, mentoring, or other support training services, teaming and collaboration; and leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Gulamhussein, 2013; Harris & Sass, 2011; Mizell, 2010; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Vega, 2015).

Featured components are team meetings, demonstrations, seminars, and observations.

The goals and associated objectives for the program are the following:

Goal 1: The participants perform as a community of learners where collaboration and shared understandings characterize the communication process. Goal one is designed to address the cooperative nature of sharing and learning that would enhance program effectiveness implied from participants' responses.

Objective: The teacher promotes a learning environment that encourages the development of positive self-concept, self-motivation, critical and creative thinking, and positive social interactions.

Goal 2: The participants leverage professional development experiences to improve their practice. Goal two is based on the need for on-going training for implementing strategies and content in a manner that students comprehend best.

Objective: The teacher uses a variety of instructional arrangements, strategies, materials, assessments, and technologies to encourage student participation, develop their interest in reading, enhance their ability to achieve, and perform specific skills independently.

Goal 3: Improved practice through professional development results in improved student performance in reading. Goal three was created because of participants' overall concern for acquiring and applying various strategies for motivating learners to learn.

Objective: The teacher reflects on training and practice to continuously assess performance on students and identify areas of strengths and needs.

Goal 4: The professional development model serves as a vehicle for continuing teacher learning and for applying lessons learned to classroom instruction. Goal four is associated with attention to participants' concerns for identifying techniques for differentiating instruction to meet learners' needs.

Objective: The teacher understands the central concepts and tools of inquiry for teaching reading and can create and implement meaningful learning experiences for students.

Objective: The teacher understands diversities in how students learn and provides instruction that supports their development.

Research Support for the Plan

The professional development literature contains varied accounts of the need for teachers to continue their education. Researchers recognize that globalization has resulted in a very diverse society and P-12 classrooms (Mor Barak, 2016). To prepare students with a complexity of skill needs, teacher engagement in professional development training is needed to continuously refine their teaching strategies (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). The results of this project study supported the need for professional development to better meet the needs of struggling readers in the Focus Reading Intervention Program. Therefore, the genre of professional development/training and associated curriculum and materials was appropriate in helping to enhance effectiveness of the program for promoting student learning.

This professional development will directly address the problem of enhancing the programs effectiveness through evidenced-based practices cited in the research literature.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined professional development "as structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes" (p. v). The literature reveals that limited quantitative studies identify professional development models that result in improved teaching or student achievement; most studies use descriptive as opposed to quantitative research (Rebora, 2011). However, reviews of different approaches to professional development report several observations that lead to improvement of teaching strategies and student performance. These observations relate to the amount of time teachers engage in professional development: the way teachers learn new skills; the focus and structure of professional development for active teacher learning; the integration of professional development with student assignments; budgeting, mentoring, or other support training services; teaming and collaboration; and leadership (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Gulamhussein, 2013; Harris & Sass, 2011; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015; Vega, 2015). The content of the project will include strategies recommended for improving reading performance of struggling readers and will also consider lessons learned from prior research and participants' observations to ensure that the needs of teachers are addressed.

Suggested timeline and activities of the professional development plan. A recommended timeline for implementing the extended plan is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Timeline of Professional Development

Component	Description	Timeline
Start-up	Orientation, needs assessment, planning, and initial training meeting	August 12-16 (5-full day)

Team meetings	Sharing experiences, techniques, concerns and proposing ways to address concerns; clarification of week's objectives; feedback	Weekly Wednesday 11:00-12:00
Team training	Workshops; video lessons; planning based on needs; mentoring; coursework.	7:30-2:30 (1 st Tuesdays)
Observation visits	Site visits to classrooms, other schools, and virtual observations	Twice per year (7:30-2:30)
Formative evaluation	Reflective logs; interviews; observations in team meetings and classrooms. Feedback in individual conferences and overall program operations in team meetings; make modifications for goal attainment.	On-going
Mid-year review progress report		December 15 (Project director)
Conference Seminar	Literacy, reading, and other related local, state, national conferences.	March or April (1-2 days)
Culminating Meeting,	Review categories in self-reflection logs, interview teachers/students; review student samples and performance records. Disseminate findings/PD debriefing; feedback; recommended next steps.	July

A sample activity for select components of the PD plan includes the objective, leader's role, directions for teachers, suggested resources where applicable, and the suggested time for the activity.

Start-up: Orientation Activity (5-days, 5-hour sessions)

Objective. To: establish climate for motivated learning, assess participants' needs, establish PD goals and objectives based on assessed needs and results of program evaluation; establish/convey procedures including PD format, ethical processes for teamwork, and schedules.

Activities

Ice breaker for each session (Facilitator responsible for Day 1; Paired teachers responsible for Days 2 - 5; 10-minute time limit)

Assessment - Day 1 and 5 Only (Self-assessment instruments containing items that identify teachers' interests, strengths, skill and instructional needs, self-efficacy, and learning styles. Some items from the two assessments presented in this section may be included; 30 - 45-minute time limit). **Day 5** (Debriefing plans a for year-long PD that will include objectives and activities). Facilitator is responsible for leading this component.

Sharing and Feedback (Day 1 devoted to sharing self-assessment needs for inclusion in PD training; consensus-building for establishing goals/objectives; 1-hour time limit). **Days 2 - 5** sharing understandings from team meetings and training sessions; establishing teaming possibilities for expanded learning experiences, modeling, and observing. Facilitator will present a PowerPoint lesson on applying a selected skill/technique for instructing struggling readers; team members will demonstrate a lesson of their choice using appropriate technological support.

Planning (Planning in teams for a selected goal/objective from the agreed upon list of objectives. The facilitator will distribute and explain a planning guide that

includes the name of the activity, objective, theory or best practice guiding the activity, procedures, assessment of the activity, and timeline for modeling/observing the activity. Teachers will conduct an Internet search for ideas and best practices associated with the activity to assist in completing the form. The team will identify a group leader, writer, historian, assessor, and modeling designer for demonstrating hands-on activities during the sharing session. Brainstorming and sharing will be the major communication for completing this task; 2-hour limit for Day 1; 3-hour time limit for Days 2-5).

Team Training Workshops

The focus of workshop training activities will include guided reading and scaffolding where instruction is adjusted through prompts that allow students to respond to activities that pose challenges. Training will also include show and tell activities for targeted instruction and modeling for word acquisition and reading comprehension skills. The following is a sample team training workshop activity.

Reading Comprehension Activity

Objective: After the workshop facilitator reviews best practices in teaching comprehension skills, teachers will engage in mock instructional lessons for modeling a reading lesson to Focused Reading students incorporating a 4-step process.

Pre-Teaching - Guiding question: What do you think are the most important words needed for understanding the passage?

Teachers will identify words that may pose challenges or have special meanings in the text. These words may also include names representing the setting or events in the narrative (Festival of Lights, for example). This step sets the stage for independent

reading where the teacher builds background knowledge for students to understand the main points of the narrative.

Introducing Important Idea - Guiding question: What is the most important idea that you want students to understand from the passage?

Teachers will identify a purpose for reading through providing understandings or key ideas from the narrative. Building background continues through the teacher informing students of what to look for while reading - - the idea (s) that the students are to grasp.

Previewing Text: Teachers will describe prompts for students to use to identify the purpose, key ideas, and link information to their previous knowledge and experiences. They will provide procedures/discussion points for giving feedback to students on the accuracy of their responses.

Questioning: Teachers will develop questions that students could ask during and after reading the narrative that will facilitate their understanding of the passage. Teachers will also develop questions that the teacher should ask of students about the passage. These questions must demonstrate different levels of knowledge (Application, synthesis, evaluation, for example).

For a selected narrative, teachers will write responses to the process on chart paper and post on the wall for the group discussion. Consensus on the most appropriate responses for guiding struggling readers is expected to occur by the end of the workshop.

Evaluation Components

The project also incorporates formative and summative evaluations of the program. The evaluations will follow the outcomes logic model design that focuses on program inputs (resources allocated for implementation); activities (interventions for changes in performance); intended results in the form of outcomes (changes in student/teacher performance); and impact of the project on student learning. The formative evaluation occurs during the professional development phase to determine any changes that are needed in training to address both PD goals and those of the Focused Reading Intervention program. The summative evaluation occurs at the end of the year-long professional development activities.

Evaluation tools include checklists and journals where teachers record their progress. Teacher self-reflection will be a major summative assessment tool. The tool will contain categories for teachers to describe their personal growth and provide a rationale for how the category led to their growth. Categories will include workshops and conferences; selection of strategies and materials; courses; team meetings/sharing; mentoring/coaching; influence of personal growth on student performance; and areas in need of attention. Sample checklists for formative and summative evaluations follow.

Figure 2. Checklist of Workshop Experience (Formative Evaluation)

Please place a check in the appropriate box of program provisions to indicate your level of agreement with items using the following scale: 1 (*strongly agree*); 2 (*agree*); 3 (*disagree*); 4 (*strongly disagree*)

Statements	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Disagree 3	Strongly disagree 4
Strategies helped me to promote student learning				
Strategies were appropriate for my situation				

Time was appropriate for the presentation and for my understanding concepts				
I could easily model activities demonstrated				
The workshop included activities useful for teacher preparation and implementation				
I apply strategies at each program session				
I need additional training in some skills				

Please respond to the following questions. Your responses will help to identify what needs to be modified for both professional training and services for students.

1. Describe two of the most useful activities in which you engaged.
2. What are areas presented in the workshop that you feel you need more training?
3. Which strategy do you feel most comfortable in modeling to other teachers?
4. What recommendations can you give for improving professional development training focused on teaching struggling students; what changes would you make for the professional development component?
5. What recommendations can you give for improving the Focused Reading program; what changes would you make in the program?

Figure 3. Checklist of Workshop and Program Experiences (Summative Evaluation)

Please place a check in the appropriate box of program provisions to indicate your level of agreement with items before the year's training and after the training using the following scale: 1 (*strongly agree*); 2 (*agree*); 3 (*disagree*); 4 (*strongly disagree*)

Before Training				Individual and Program Performance	After Training			
1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
				Program goals/objectives are clear				
				Program teachers have needed support				
				Program reinforces reading achievement				

				Program schedule of services is adequate				
				Coordination of program is effective				
				I have a plan to follow in delivering services				
				Students are engaged in program activities				
				Contact time with students is sufficient				
				Program planning time is provided				
				Resources are provided for program				
				Students show reading growth				
				Program is a good support service				
				Instructional arrangements vary				
				Resources differ based on the student				
				Student attendance is consistent				
				Reading comprehension is improved				
				Students know why they attend				
				Students' reading scores increase				
				Students are engaged with each other				
				Instruction considers how students learn				

Conclusion

This executive summary serves as a white paper that provides directions to the school in planning professional development for the expressed needs reported in findings of the study. The plan incorporates ideas consistent with developing PD to reflect the concept of learning communities where teachers learn together, share ideas, and support each other in the training process. In concert with the study's findings, training strategies are designed to emphasize the need for targeted instruction and engaging teachers in show and tell activities to promote ease of application in classroom settings. Teacher modeling is practiced in training and assessed in classroom delivery through observations and self-reflection. Research for best practice and theoretical underpinnings of instructional strategies and other decision making for teaching struggling students are core parts of the planning component of the plan. The engagement of administrative leaders and teachers in this research and sharing process is recommended.

Appendix B: Program Evaluation Survey

The purpose of this survey is to identify perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the Focus Reading Intervention program, designed to teach students those needed skills for reading success. The 20 items included are intended to identify program effectiveness, program implementation, program strengths, program areas in need of improvement, and clarity of program goals and objectives. Please respond to the demographic items and to the 20 closed-ended and the 5 open-ended questions.

Demographics

Directions: Please check the appropriate box

1. What is your position?

- Teacher Tutor

2. What is your gender?

- Male Female

3. What is your age range?

- 18 – 22 years 23 – 27 years 28 – 32 years 33 or older

4. How many years of teaching or tutoring experience?

- 1 – 5 years 6 – 10 years 10+ years Other _____

5. How long have you been involved in the Focus Reading Program?

- 1-12 months 1 – 5 years Teacher Other _____

6. What is your level of formal education?

- High school graduate College
 Graduate school Certification level _____

Survey Part I: Please place a check in the appropriate box of program provisions to indicate your level of agreement with items using the following scale: 1 (*strongly agree*); 2 (*agree*); 3 (*disagree*); 4 (*strongly disagree*)

Statements	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Disagree 3	Strongly disagree 4
1. Program goals/objectives are clear				
2. Program teachers have needed support				
3. Program reinforces reading achievement				
4. Program schedule of services is adequate				
5. Coordination of program is effective				
6. I have a plan to follow in delivering services				
7. Students are engaged in program activities				
8. Contact time with students is sufficient				
9. Program planning time is provided				
10. Resources are provided for program				
11. Students show reading growth				
12. Program is a good support service				
13. Instructional arrangements vary				
14. Resources differ based on the student				
15. Student attendance is consistent				
16. Reading comprehension is improved				
17. Students know why they attend				
18. Students' reading scores increase				
19. Students are engaged with each other				
20. Instruction considers how students learn				

Part II. Please provide answers to the questions based on your experience with the program.

1. What differences do you see in the students' reading performance and behavior? Please elaborate to describe changes based on the students participating in the Focused Reading program.

2. Please explain what knowledge or skills you think students have improved upon from their engagement in the program.

3. What changes do you perceive would make for a better program to help students to improve their reading?

4. How do students have opportunities to interact with their peers in the program? Are these opportunities planned to permit them to learn from each other? Please explain how activities are organized to permit this interaction.

5. What has been the overall impact of the program on students, teachers, and the school?

Appendix C:

Sample Participant Open-Ended Survey/Interview Responses

Demographics: Interviewee 10 is a teacher/tutor in the Focus Reading Program. A female in the age range of 33 to older. The teacher/tutor has 10 + years of experience, she has been involved in the program 1-5 years, her formal education is Graduate School. The teacher/tutor informed of her busy schedule, explain why I had to wait to perform the interview. The interview was in her classroom after school hours. We talked for about two minutes before we began the interview. This teacher/tutor drew a diagram explaining the procedures that are used.

Part II. Please provide answers to the questions based on your experience with the program.

Interviewer: What differences do you see in the students' reading performance and behavior? Please elaborate to describe changes based on the students participating in the Focused Reading program.

Interviewee 10: When their academic performance improves so does behavior in most cases.

Interviewer: Please explain what knowledge or skills you think students have improved upon from their engagement in the program.

Interviewee 10: Reading comprehension achievement is increased.

Interviewer: What changes do you perceive would make for a better program to help students to improve their reading?

Interviewee 10: An increase in the class time would make the program better giving the students longer to work on their skills.

Interviewer: How do students have opportunities to interact with their peers in the program? Are these opportunities planned to permit them to learn from each other? Please explain how activities are organized to permit this interaction.

Interviewee 10: the student's work with a partner and also in groups.

Interviewer: What has been the overall impact of the program on students, teachers, and the school?

Interviewee 10: Student achievement has increased which has led to higher moral in each of the students in the program.

The Interview

Interviewer: How do you see your role in the program?

Interviewee 10: I see myself as one who implement the skills that the students need to improve.

Interviewer: Please describe a typical session. What is the schedule like? What do the students do? What do you as the teacher (tutor) do?

Interviewee 10: The sessions are 50 minutes of explicit direct instruction, I do /we do/you do.

Interviewer: In your opinion, how does the program help struggling readers?

Interviewee 10: The program helps them to become more successful because of teacher/student ratio.

Interviewer: What challenges does the program present to students; to staff?

Interviewee 10: The challenges are the time constraints.

Interviewer: What opportunities are provided for your professional development? Do you think professional development should be a part of the program's design?

Interviewee 10: We have professional development periodically, they should be a part of the program's design.

Interviewer: How are instructional services differentiated for students?

Interviewee 10: The instructional services are based on the individual needs of each student.

Interviewer: What opportunities do students have to engage in small groups; to interact with their peers?

Interviewee 10: Peer interaction happens on a daily basis as well as small interaction.

Interviewer: Do you think this interaction and instructional organization helps struggling readers? Explain.

Interviewee 10: Yes, because the students have the opportunity to learn from each other.

Interviewer: What are the program's strengths/areas in need of improvement?

Interviewee 10: I believe that the strength is teaching based on individual needs, weakness is the need of more time within the class period.

Interviewer: What are your recommendations for improving the program to produce better readers?

Interviewee 10: I recommend that the class time is changed to a block schedule and that we have more professional development opportunities.

Appendix D: The Interview Protocol

Date: _____ Participant: _____ Place: _____

Introduction

Introduce myself as the researcher. Thank participant for agreeing to participate in the interview. Establish rapport. Briefly review the study and consent form to ensure participant is aware of rights including not responding to any question that presents discomfort in responding.

Instructions (I will give these instructions)

Questions for this interview are associated with the research questions for this study designed to examine the in-house reading intervention, Focused Reading to determine its effectiveness in enhancing the performance of struggling readers. These questions inquire about program effectiveness, program implementation, program strengths, program areas in need of improvement, and clarity of program goals and objectives. Your opinions as to how the program operates and its impact on students' reading performance. Responses will be determined by your own personal and individual experiences. Your candid responses are appreciated. There are no correct or incorrect responses. As you respond, I will be tape recording the interview and writing notes on your comments. To ensure that I fully understand your intended meaning, I may at times ask additional questions for clarity using such statements as “please explain,” or “can you give an example.” Please be reminded that you may elect not to respond to any question asked that you feel uncomfortable in answering. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions (Possible Examples)

1. How do you see your role in the program?

2. Please describe a typical session. What is the schedule like? What do the students do?
What do you as the teacher (tutor) do?

3. In your opinion, how does the program help struggling readers?

4. What challenges does the program present to students; to staff?

5. What opportunities are provided for your professional development? Do you think professional development should be a part of the program's design?

6. How are instructional services differentiated for students?

7. What opportunities do students should engage in small groups; to interact with their peers?

8. Do you think this interaction and instructional organization helps struggling readers?
Explain.

9. What are the program's strengths/ areas in need of improvement?

10. What are your recommendations for improving the program to produce better readers?

Appendix E: Invitation Letter

You are invited to participate in a research study that will be used to determine the effectiveness of the Focused Reading program for struggling readers in seventh and eighth grade. This study is being conducted by a researcher named [REDACTED], who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher as a teacher at the school where the study will be conducted, but this study is separate from that role. You are eligible to participate in this study because you are a seventh or eighth grade language arts teacher or tutor in _____ school in Mississippi. The information gained from this study may be used to assist school leaders in decisions related to student improvement. If you decide to participate, you will rate a 20 closed-ended item survey on a 5-point scale based on your perception of the program's effectiveness. The survey also contains 5 open-ended questions that ask for your written comments about whether you think the program is meeting its objectives. Also, you may be selected to participate in a one-on-one audio-taped interview with me and respond to 10 questions about the implementation of the program. The survey should not take more than 30 minutes to complete, and each interview will take approximately 45 minutes. Also, you will meet with me for about 20 minutes to review my written interpretations of interview responses at the end of the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. You may also skip any question and continue to complete the rest of the interview. Your responses to these questions will be kept private and confidential. Declining or discontinuing participation will not negatively impact the relationship between the participant and the

researcher. When research results are reported, responses will be aggregated (added together) and described in summary. You will not receive any type of compensation for completing this survey. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study.

If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact me at _____.

You are also invited to ask questions at a meeting on _____ at _____ where I will provide an overview of the study. After the meeting, a consent form will be mailed to your school address and you will be asked to sign and return the form in the self-addressed and stamped envelope provided within 10 days, if you agree to participate. Upon receipt of the form, I will send the survey and contact you to schedule the interview on site in a private conference room at a time convenient for you.

Thank you