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Effective Literacy Instruction Strategies among Teachers in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Grade Ranges

Melodie D. Fulcher

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EFFECTIVE LITERACY INSTRUCTION STRATEGIES AMONG TEACHERS IN ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND SECONDARY GRADE RANGES

by

MELODIE D FULCHER

(Under the Direction of Michael Moore)

ABSTRACT

Many studies have been completed to identify the most Effective strategies used by successful teachers. Research has determined some of the most valuable classroom practices to increase student achievement in the areas of Reading and Writing. These studies and research tend to isolate grade levels and specific areas of Literacy Instruction to vocabulary, comprehension, phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, or writing. Using the theoretical framework of Critical Theory and the instructional implications from John Dewey, Louise Rosenblatt, Paulo Freire, Lev Vygotsky, and M. M. Bahktin, this study proceeded with a concentration on Critical Literacy through student experiences, text interactions, cultural perspectives, individual interests, critical inquiry, and dialogue among students as well as texts. The purpose of this study was to identify instructional strategies and/or practices of Effective Literacy Teachers from multiple grade ranges. Once Effective teachers of literacy were identified by multiple quantitative and qualitative measures, interviews and observations were used to talk with teacher participants and identify specific methods of Literacy Instruction that were evident across Effective teachers of elementary, middle, and high school age ranges. Motivation and engagement of students, acknowledgement of student differences, and direct instruction of specific skills in literacy are all indicators of Effective instructional practices presented through research as well as denoted through observational and interview responses from teacher participants. Most of the participants indicated that they did not believe student success could be attributed to one strategy or a single instructional practice used regularly in their classrooms. They felt it was a combination of strategies that target student needs, experiences, and varying interest levels. When looking through the observations and interview responses, the variety and integration of strategies is supported by the frequency teachers discussed them as well as the numerous strategies observed in the classrooms. The teachers who participated in this study provided

evidence of instructional strategies centered on student interests and lives from which to build meaningful opportunities and experiences that can help guide genuine learning.

INDEX WORDS: Effective, Reading, Writing, Literacy instruction, Critical theory, Critical literacy, Effective literacy teachers

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ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND SECONDARY GRADE RANGES

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I've been told that a dissertation is an independent study; however, my experience through this process has been much different. It has taken the support and encouragement from quite a few family, friends, and colleagues to complete this journey in my life.

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Melodie D Fulcher

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CHAPTER 1

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Overview and Purpose of Study

Many studies have focused their research on specific classroom reading or writing instructional strategies. Some studies have looked into the strategies used by the teachers of elementary students, middle school, or high school students that have been effective in increasing student achievement in the area of reading, language arts, or writing. Studies have isolated one age range or grade. For example, one study may focus on kindergarten and first grade classrooms while another study may only research middle school age ranges. Studies tend to focus on a single aspect of reading such as phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, decoding, or writing. Few studies combine any of the previously mentioned aspects of reading and writing to include thoughtful and purposeful choices made by teachers and take account of student experiences, cultural backgrounds, individual interests (Fecho, 2004; Johnston, 1997) to help students learn how to critically analyze multiple forms of texts and identify meaning for themselves as well as to become agents of change for the world around them.

This study examines literacy in more broad terms than reading and writing to include meanings of literacy from John Dewey (1934, 1938), Louise Rosenblatt (1988), Paulo Freire (1987), Lev Vygotsky, and M. M. Bahktin (1981). Identifying literacy from the perspectives of some of these theorists provides the inclusion of student experiences, text interactions, cultural perspectives, individual interests, and critical inquiry and dialogue.

During the current trend of hyper media and immediate access to information, it is important for students to be able to read and analyze text for accuracy and meaning as it applies

to and enriches their lives as well as the world around them. Students must be able to encompass all of the areas of reading literacy into their search for information whether they are navigating web pages, interacting in a social network, or reading the assigned textbook pages. Students today need to learn critical literacies beyond the typical text structure to include technology literacies in order to broaden their understandings of themselves, the world around them, and foster communication around the worlds and differences among them (Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010). Access to and instruction around social networks with medial literacies can help students learn how to be critical of information gleaned from public sites and internet. Less is known about classroom instructional practices that increase the ability for students to transfer their critical analysis of a single text into the wider world around them. While we can read about possible methods different teachers use to find success in teaching students how to read, write, or comprehend texts, we must also find ways for students to use their understandings to critically analyze their world beyond textbooks and novels read in the classrooms. Connections from personal experiences, backgrounds, cultural influences, and text variety can help build student awareness of their surroundings in social and cultural contexts as well as academic arenas.

The purpose of this study was to identify instructional strategies and/or practices of effective literacy teachers from multiple grade ranges. Once effective teachers of literacy were identified by multiple quantitative and qualitative measures, interviews and observations were used to talk with the teachers and identify specific methods of literacy instruction that are evident across effective teachers of elementary, middle, and high school age ranges.

Problem Statement

Teachers have the opportunity to learn more about their students, identify student interests, provide opportunities to freely engage in text interaction, and build critical thinking

skills that can help students transcend stereotypical social domination. Through this study, I will capture the essence of instructional methods used by identified effective literacy teachers that are able to build student critical literacy abilities in the classrooms of elementary and secondary students.

Research Questions

Teachers hear many pundits proclaim to have found the perfect solution to student literacy achievement problems. For this study, I want to examine the focus questions: What are key instructional strategies effective literacy teachers practice in their classrooms? Which of these strategies do they most attribute to student success, abilities, and engagement with texts to critically analyze, make personal connections, and social interactions among texts? The following sub-questions will be examined to further illuminate the topic.

1. What type of materials and texts are used to engage students with literacy skills? Are these materials mandated by the district or chosen by the teacher? How many opportunities to learn using multi-media materials are available to students in effective literacy classrooms?
2. What strategies do effective literacy teachers utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult texts?
3. What writing strategies do effective literacy teachers cite as useful during classroom instruction to assist students in connecting reading and writing?
4. How often and to what extent do effective literacy teachers encourage student writing in the classroom?
5. How do effective literacy teachers engage students with multiple forms of texts?
6. Is there a consistency between standardized test scores and literacy practices among identified effective teachers?

7. How are students directed to engage in dialogue during instructional time?
8. To what extent do effective literacy teachers include student lives and experiences during literacy instruction?
9. How do effective literacy teachers acknowledge student cultural backgrounds during literacy instruction?
10. What role do current technology trends play in the classroom of effective literacy teachers?

Definition of Significant Terms

Identifying effective literacy instruction is not easy and involves more than determining a basic definition for literacy. Definitions are also needed for literacy achievement as well as a clear determination of what the term ‘effective’ means in regard to instruction. There are many different definitions to literacy as well as opposing views of determining effectiveness of instruction (Croninger & Valli, 2009; Harris & Hodges, 1995; Langer, 2001; Medwell et al., 1998). Studies that look at identifying effective instruction are usually “generic rather than specific to literacy teaching” (Wray & Medwell, 1998). Discussions continue today making attempts to determine the best way to identify effective teachers. From administrative observations, end-of-year student test scores, and value added measures, educational experts and the political atmosphere have discussed the need for successful ways of determining effective teachers. The following definitions of effective and literacy will be used to narrow the terms in the parameters of this study.

Effective

The term ‘effective’ as it relates to successful teachers of literacy is subjective. There are common grounds with the definition of the term such as producing a desired effect or obtaining

and accomplishing a desired goal or outcome. For the purpose of this study, the definition of effective will be as follows: teachers who are able to increase student achievement in areas of literacy as identified by local, state, and federal mandated assessments. The definition will expand through the research in this study to include the ability of teachers to:

- Explicitly and directly teach specific skills in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and text structures
- Provide balanced instruction that includes text variety and integrated instruction with reading and writing
- Instruct through modeling and exploration of reading and writing skills
- Provide social engagement for students from which to gain access to different viewpoints and perspectives
- Focus on instruction that increases motivation and engagement with a variety of literary experiences
- Use assessments to drive instruction in areas of student need versus areas of textbook progression

Literacy

Another cause for the difficulty of identifying effective literacy instruction is that in order to identify effective literacy, we must make clear the definition of literacy as well as understand what literacy achievement, success, and growth looks like. Many researchers and teachers don't always agree on the specific parameters of a definition of literacy, much less what effective literacy abilities demonstrate (Wray & Medwell, 1998).

Narrowing the term 'literacy' down to a single definition is not typically found in research. The definition for literacy is in constant change (Pressley, 2007) as education

progresses into more technological arenas. Some researchers and critical theorists currently define literacy in broad terms that include cultural backgrounds and experiences in addition to reading and writing. Other researchers may define literacy in more narrow terms to focus on the mechanics and abilities of reading and writing. However, the need for a common understanding of literacy for the purposes of this study is necessary. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Policy Research Brief defines literacy as the following:

Literacy encompasses reading, writing, and a variety of social and intellectual practices that call upon the voice as well as the eye and hand. It also extends to new media – including non-digitized multimedia, digitized multimedia, and hypertext or hypermedia. (NCTE)

This definition is implied when the term literacy is used throughout the remaining study.

Critical literacy is much broader than simply reading and writing with the student experience in mind. Critical literacy includes the visual arts (Seglem & Witte, 2009) as well as the ability to critically read, write, listen, speak, communicate, question, discuss, debate, and combine these skills into an understanding of the world through the eyes of the individual. Critical literacy continues this understanding into the awareness of the control and power agents in society that create domination and economic dictations (Freire, 1970). It can help students move the awareness of these previously mentioned factors for domination into agents of change (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Critical theory would include using these skills not only as an understanding of the world, but also as a way to identify the social constraints and domination that continue to dictate student learning as well as teacher instruction and resources used within the classrooms, then to

become students who will actively participate as change agents to discontinue the perpetuation of societal dictation and domination.

Context of Study

Literacy in today's world is a more confusing term than in past years. Today's literacy goes much further than simply reading, writing, and understanding written texts. Information comes to students in a variety of forms and at rapid rates through the technological advances of today's times. Students must not only read and make sense of words in many different formats, but must also learn how to discern what they read and interact with the texts to make meaning as it relates to their lives. Information is written by numerous authors whose perspectives may alter the truthfulness of information. For example, while Wikipedia.com provides a wealth of information, it also allows information to be added to the site from anyone with access to a computer. How does one discern whether the information available is accurate and up to date? How is this skill taught to students? Today's teachers are charged with teaching students how to read and comprehend multiple forms of texts as well as how to discern the accuracy of the texts and to determine how the texts are applicable to their lives.

Literacy is one of the more critical skills in which most teachers must engage students for success. This success and achievement will increase abilities in all subject areas as well as in the students' outside interests and daily lives. Effective literacy skills will be needed regardless of whether or not students choose more mathematical, service oriented, or scientifically focused occupational paths through college or completion of high school. Literacy and the ability to critically analyze text, media, and information for use outside of the classroom are two of the skills all students will need to become independent thinkers and participate in the world outside of the classroom successfully through critical inquiry (Aaron et. al, 2006).

The purpose of this study is to examine essential practices of effective literacy teachers from early elementary age groups through high school. By examining the practices of effective literacy teachers, I hope to determine instructional practices that will help teachers understand how critical thinking, comprehension, and interactions with multiple forms of literacies can be taught effectively to improve student learning.

Background of Study

Common agreements exist in some of the research for effective instructional practices of literacy teachers that can be seen in classrooms across multiple levels. The following represents some of the agreed upon recurring and common themes for effective literacy instruction.

Motivation and Engagement

According to Pressley & Fingeret (2007), effective literacy teachers include motivation for students as a critical part of their instruction. The use of challenging yet achievable assignments, working with peers in groups, high expectations, timely feedback, and student choice are all important aspects of a classroom that emphasizes motivation as a key component to student success (Pressley & Fingeret, 2007) and achievement. Effective teachers are able to care for students, their interests, and their abilities when designing activities and projects to help increase student motivation in learning (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; Finn, 2009).

The use of challenging assignments that offer discussion as a key component to the instructional support offered for students to increase their literacy achievement (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003) is another example of effective motivation. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) policy research brief on Adolescent Literacy reform (2006), literacy is a skill that goes beyond reading and writing to include social purposes as an important focus for adolescents. When the needs of adolescents are not met in

literacy instruction, they decrease their level of motivation and engagement in learning (NCTE, 2006).

Student choice and interests play a key role in motivation. Allowing students a choice in texts and content can provide a sense of purpose for students that drive the educational benefits around literacy skills (Bruner, 1982). Preparing students with a purpose and potential to change the world around them can offer motivational and engaging factors that lead to more in-depth learning (Bruner, 1996).

Technology Focus

With the rapid growth of technology in daily lives, the business world, and social interaction; it is important that teachers include media literacy in their instruction to help students learn skills that can translate outside of the classroom. Students need to think critically, problem solve, and communicate effectively through the use of media literacies as well as traditional texts. Twenty-first century technology incorporates the key elements of critical literacy and dialogue. It has become a primary source of social interaction and exposure to text variety that includes media text as well as printed texts (Weaver, 2005) and music and comedy in addition to traditional textbooks (Doll, 2000). The NCTE conducted a poll of English language arts teachers and found most teachers would agree that in order to build instruction which reinforces 21st century literacies, the skills need to be imbedded in instruction instead of isolated skills learned after the more traditional and basic writing, reading, and language (NCTE, 2010).

The teaching/learning methods most strongly identified with building 21st century literacies were (1) learning through cross-disciplinary projects/project-based learning; (2) inquiry-based learning; and (3) incorporating student choices as a significant part of instruction (NCTE, 2010).

This statement from the NCTE report, “Writing between the Lines – and Everywhere Else”, also highlights the previously discussed ability of effective teachers to include student choice as a part of motivation and engagement to learning.

Effective Use of Assessments

Effective teachers use assessment to help drive their instruction and to provide appropriate instructional opportunities for students (Popham, 2001). Effective teachers are able to include assessments that are meaningful and useful to their instruction as well as to student achievement without losing valuable instructional time by lengthy amounts of meaningless assessment measures. Providing a balanced and reliable assessment opportunity for students can help teachers understand what students know, what they may have missed during instruction, as well as what changes need to be made to future lessons to continue and deepen student understanding (Afflerbach, 2007). In regard to the assessment of reading and literacy, teachers must be strategic and purposeful with their assessment in order to provide the most appropriate instruction for students (Mckenna & Stahl, 2009).

Acknowledging Student Differences

Effective teachers of literacy acknowledge and build upon the increasing range of student differences that include race, socio-economic backgrounds, religious preferences (McKenna & Robinson, 2002), and individual student interests (Gallagher, 2009). Teachers who offer a variety of texts which highlight or include all forms of socio-economic backgrounds as well as ethnic backgrounds are helped by understanding the differences among students (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Teachers that can identify student interests and differences then include those choices in text selections can open more doors to literacy skills than using single textbook references (Miller, 2009; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). It is important to provide students

with safe places in the classroom where risk-taking is accepted and encouraged; students are given voices where ideas and thoughts are heard, students can interact with each other while learning through dialogue, and student differences are an important part of lessons (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; NCTE; Bahktin, 1981; Aaron et. al, 2006; Finn, 2009). Bringing the student individuality to the text can help students identify their own role in learning through their differences as they interact with texts (Rosenblatt, 1988).

Direct Instruction on Specific Literacy Skills

Effective literacy teachers appear able to provide students with direct instruction that imbeds and integrates specific components of literacy throughout the instructional time. This integration also appears transferrable to other curricular areas as well as to the students' social world (Langer, 2001; NCTE, 2010; Pressley et al., 1996). Direct instruction and utilization of the reading and writing connection creates a critical progression and continuation of learning to read and reading to learn more information as it relates to students' lives. Teaching students specific comprehension and writing skills can help build the foundations necessary for critical thinking (Allington & Cunningham, 1999, 2002).

In order to assist students with understanding more complex and technical reading passages, vocabulary acquisition is one component of instruction used by effective literacy teachers. Introducing key vocabulary terms prior to reading as well as encouraging discussion and previewing text passages can support students as they begin to comprehend and move into the more independent aspects of reading to learn (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; Allington & Cunningham, 1999; Rasinski et. al, 2008). Learning key vocabulary terms can help build students ability to comprehend and gain meaning from more difficult texts (Graff, 2003; Rasinski et. al, 2008)

Effective literacy instruction includes explicit comprehension skills, strategies, and techniques taught to students to increase student awareness of texts (Brophy, 1973; Johnston, 1997). Direct instruction of such skills helps students better understand their own abilities to comprehend texts as they read (Langer, 2001; Bakhtin, 1981).

Furthermore, writing is a literacy skill that enables students to articulate their thoughts and understandings of topics, texts, and their world. Studies indicate that when students are engaged in writing regularly in the classroom, their writing scores improve (Applebee & Langer, 2006; Allington & Cunningham, 2002). Research also suggests the need for students to produce more short and focused pieces with multiple opportunities to complete more extended writing that “explore ideas or develop arguments in depth” (Applebee & Langer, 2006).

Researcher Perspectives

I understand that my personal relationship with the schools and district may hinder my ability to see data with an unbiased viewpoint. It is for this reason, that there are multiple data collection methods being used throughout the study to ensure consistency and objectivity among interviews, observations, and data collected. There is also a bias on the part of the researcher for the beliefs and foundations as a reading teacher and literacy coach. The study will need to be conducted with an awareness of these biases to keep them from influencing the data collection or analysis of the results.

Delimitations

This study will take place within a single district with a specific student population. Four to five teachers will be selected to participate in interviews and observations from the following grade groups: 1-5, 6-8, and 9-12. These grade groups have been strategically selected to provide

an overview of literacy practices in classrooms common to each other even though the grade groups frequently exhibit differences in specific instructional strategies and/or materials.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives

To find consistent instructional strategies or methods to improve literacy acquisition may seem somewhat contradictory, on the surface, to the aims and beliefs of critical theory. Critical theory criticizes the pattern of the educational system to perpetuate social inequalities by using ‘one-size-fits-all’ textbooks, mandated methodology, and programs provided by policy makers and textbook companies driven by a monetary focus. Hoffman (1998) wrote about the potential devastation of teaching that utilizes narrowed and single teaching tactics.

Each time, as classroom teachers, we offer our students only one method or approach because we know it is the best and ignore all other options, we transmit a narrow vision of learning to our students. Each time, as teacher educators, we teach a method or an approach as if it is the right way or the only way, we set a group of future teachers on the wrong path of discovery. Each time, as researchers, we conduct a study designed to prove a method is superior, we contribute to a restricted view of knowledge, science, and effective practice...Perhaps when we are able to present this stance, enlightened policy makers will come to realize that the best educational policy is not to be found in the form of mandates for methods to teach, but in resource commitments and professional frameworks that encourage inquiry, risk taking, and diverse perspectives. (Hoffman, 1998, p. 111)

Under the current pressures to increase student achievement and prove increases with standardized testing measures and mandates, Hoffman’s quote seems even more applicable

today. It is important to find effective teachers with the ability to teach students how to read, write, speak, and view the world in a more critical manner across multiple types of texts and utilizing multiple strategies specific to their students' needs. The result of this critical viewpoint and perspective for students will help increase awareness of social injustice and decrease the continued ability for others to dictate social status and achievements.

Would a study that aims to define or identify a single instructional method for all students alleviate the current tendencies for single mandated teaching methods that critical theory attempts to rebut? The answer may lie in the results of the study. The goal is to find teachers that are successful with literacy achievement because they choose to defy or find ways to surpass mandates for specific and single methods of instruction. I hope to find teachers willing to engage students in dialogue and discussion about literature that leave students questioning, identifying multiple perspectives, and becoming critical readers of a variety of texts instead of limiting their ability to surface level interpretations using a single core textbook. My theoretical framework, based on critical theory, leads me to believe that I will find the most successful teachers in literacy instruction allowing and encouraging students to gain literacy achievement through inquiry and discovery that helps them become aware of the social inequalities and strive to free themselves from the pre-determined abilities prescribed through narrowly developed textbooks (Dewey, 1934, 1938; Freire, 1987). Teachers are most successful when they help students learn through meaningful discussion driven by student concerns, experiences, and questions (Dewey, 1938; Bakhtin, 1981; Bruner, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). The most effective literacy teachers are able to produce higher level thinkers by using multiple forms and varieties of texts (Doll, 2000) that are not necessarily reflected on standardized multiple choice tests. Mary Doll discusses the use of varieties of text that include comedy and music to help students

become critical analyzers of text and literacy. The inclusion of this variety in text types helps students look beyond the traditional texts provided in mandated curriculums to the world around them. Effective literacy teachers identify a student's abilities and push the student to interact with text that is appropriate and capable of increasing student literacy skills (Vygotsky, 1978). Is it possible for students to learn to read fluently, comprehend texts, and analyze meaning pertinent to them and the world without making the highest scores on mandated tests? What is it that effective teachers of literacy value as important when teaching students how to read, analyze, and critically think through texts?

Throughout my research on critical theory, the word challenge summarizes these theorists' goals and desires. Critical theory challenges education by asking questions such as: What is being learned in schools today? Why is it being learned? Who decided it should be taught? How will it produce inquisitive citizens of individual thought? When will students use the skills they learn? (Schubert et. al, 2002) Critical theory is a dialectical form of theory that doesn't assume the knowledge gained is perfect, but tries to identify where the knowledge originated and what purpose it has (Nowlan, 2001; Giroux, 1987). It looks beyond mere textbooks (Doll, 2000) within schools and analyzes the social context in which the texts were created as well as used (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 2004). By focusing a study on teachers who are believed to be successful with increasing student achievement in literacy, I will find teachers that are able to provide a critical look into social inequalities through student interactions using a variety of texts (Doll, 2000; Weaver, 2005) that expand through music, media, social surroundings, the corporate world, and life experiences (Dewey, 1938; Dewey, 1934). This takes students beyond the minimally prescribed curriculum. Richard Rorty (1985) believes in providing instruction through multiple layers of texts when teaching philosophy that

would include novels, poems, essays, etc. that move further than prescribed, pre-determined, or more narrow texts of inquiry. Through the lens of critical theory, this study will strive to find teachers enabling students to engage in critical literacy and learning to “question the world and act as agents in the world in order to change it” (Weaver, 2005, p. 103). Teachers willing to take risks with the instruction in their classrooms may find themselves leading students into a path of more critical thinking through literacy and analogy of the world around them beyond cultural barriers (Macedo, 2006). I agree with Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987) that it is the educator’s role in the classroom to either perpetuate social barriers or to build literacy skills through critical literacy instruction that can help students see the need to change such societal domination (Marcuse, 1964).

Unfortunately, in today’s classrooms, the tendency is for teachers to segregate and move students through a predetermined path of education that leads them into specific careers or future goals that may be beneath their true abilities, interests, or desires (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). When teachers choose to allow the outside systems and textbook writers to dictate the direction of their instruction in the classroom, they become actors that perpetuate the cultural constraints of a society focused on capital gains instead of critical thinkers and students willing to take risks (Apple, 1995). Teachers can use dialogue across multiple forms of texts in the classrooms to foster critical literacy, critical thinking, analysis of texts, and build communication in the classroom to help students take these risks (Freire, 2007; Aaron et. al 2006; Bakhtin, 1981; Weaver, 2005).

Through this study, my goal is to find the best way(s) to teach students how to think and critically analyze texts. “Effective literacy may not be about the students “getting” the facts and skills and keeping them long enough to give back on a test or an essay” (Wolk, 2009, p. 665).

This study may find that there is not a single instructional strategy that can use “one-way transmission” of knowledge in the classroom to successfully develop critical literacy skills. However, if there are teachers using an instructional method that focuses on the student backgrounds, experiences, abilities, and interests to develop student understanding of texts and the world through a more critical lens, critical theory can contribute its theoretical framework as a pivotal point of study and critical literacy can offer a pedagogical arena with which to center instructional opportunities.

Historical Perspectives

Critical theory gained its footing and terminology with the Frankfurt School which originally opened in 1923 by Felix J. Weil. Many theorists concur that the Frankfurt School is not a place, but a school of thought influenced by many, but mainly Karl Marx and others who attempted to ‘fix’ Marx’s theories with their own (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004). The main goal of the school was in overcoming social structures where domination and oppression are prevalent (Pinar et al., 2004). Since the Frankfurt School, critical theory has continued its quest not to analyze the negative (as the word ‘critical’ often denotes), but to question for contradictions and inconsistencies with education and the purposes for education. It is set to challenge typical theories in identifying their foundations in social and ideological dominations of the governmental hierarchy. Critical theory can be found in the social challenges dating back to John Dewey and throughout the 1900s. It is for this reason, that I add John Dewey’s focus on individual experiences (Dewey, 1929, 1934, 1938), social demands (Dewey, 1989, 2009), and the individual’s contribution to learning (Dewey, 1997) with critical theory. According to Richard Rorty (1992), Dewey would encourage education to help students use “self-creation and artistic creation, concrete, non-theoretical ways of blending” (p. 593) their

own cultures with the cultures present around them in other individuals and other cultures. John Dewey's philosophy, pragmatist views, and educational influences may be broader than critical theory; however, Dewey has influenced the role that experience and social realities play on critical literacy instruction (Dewey, 1938) by continuing a focus on the student and the way students must learn to critically analyze texts and media to identify its influences around them.

Dewey places the interests and experiences of the student "in the center of educational growth" (Tremmel, 2010, p. 139). The role of the teacher is to identify these interests, abilities, and experiences in order to provide meaningful instruction and resources that help students situate themselves within the learning (Dewey 1934; Vygotsky, 1978). Identifying effective teachers of literacy and observing the instructional techniques they use may assist in giving other teachers strategies they may confidently provide that offers meaningful learning opportunities for students in spite of the current accountability constraints placed within the educational field. Teachers are held to mandated testing, instructional methods, and teaching to the test instead of engaging students in critical literacy opportunities such as complicated problem solving activities based on their interests and experiences. Currently, many administrators and educational policy makers are not concerned as much with the interests, experiences, and backgrounds of students as they are with high stakes testing and accountability data (Tremmel, 2010).

While the focus of education on the student and their interests or experience can be found in educational literature dating back to the early 1900s and John Dewey, it is certainly a conversation that must begin taking on a 21st Century viewpoint to make some drastic changes in the course of education (Tremmel, 2010). Critical theory encompasses the viewpoint and ability to identify the societal dominations as well as the institutions that continue to perpetuate these social and economical supremacies (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Critical literacy is the ability "not

only to read and write but to assess texts in order to understand the relationships between power and domination that underlie and inform them” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 48). Teachers can use critical literacy practices in classrooms to teach students about the different societal dominations that exist and engage students using their experiences, backgrounds, and interests. Students can use historical texts as well as multimedia texts to engage in critical literacy activities for a more clear understanding of their current world and to realize their opportunities to influence change from the dominations that surround them.

John Dewey embraced an interdisciplinary fusion of study in order to foster critical analysis of historical domination through society by encouraging educators to use such subject matter interest of students to help engage them in a critical analysis of their world (Tremmel, 2010). Teachers today can continue to learn more about their students by taking time to engage in and listen to dialogue during class time and identify domination discussions that may occur in the classroom, find texts that can help students think critically beyond these tendencies, and foster student abilities to continue questioning and analyzing literature through a more critical lens (Enriquez & Jones, 2009; Finn, 2009).

Current Literacy Perspectives

David Wray and Jane Medwell (1998) conducted a study in the United Kingdom that was commissioned by the Teacher Training Agency to identify strategies and specific factors that contribute to effective instruction in literacy. Teachers who participated in the study were chosen according to recommendations by education specialists and the teacher’s ability to demonstrate average learning gains according to standardized assessments in reading (Wray & Medwell, 1998). The following points are areas found as a result of this study to be consistent

among the effective literacy instruction practices by those teachers chosen to participate in the study (1998).

- Imbedded instruction into real-world application
- Used modeling extensively
- Brisk paced lessons
- Clear and concise time frames for lessons
- Review of lessons at the end
- Mixed instruction using whole group, small group, and individual attention

These findings are similar to other studies that look at effective practices of literacy teachers (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996; Wray & Medwell, 1998). One such study that was referenced in the Wray and Medwell (1998) study also highlights effective instructional practices found in literacy classrooms. Michael Pressley, Joan Rankin, and Linda Yokoi (1996) conducted a study to find effective literacy instruction in primary teachers. Using the recommendations of reading supervisors, K-2nd grade teachers were chosen to participate in follow-up questionnaires that could help narrow down the common effective instructional practices in the area of literacy (Pressley et al., 1996) for primary grades. The findings of this study include the following:

- Integrated literacy instruction
- Extensive experiences with a variety of literature
- Modeling of skills and strategies
- Specific writing instruction
- Focused instruction to increase motivation and engagement in literacy instruction

(Pressley et al., 1996)

The Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) compiled the results of a study examining effective reading instruction. The study looked at effective instructional practices in the early elementary grades and brought to focus specific instructional practices related to five pillars of literacy instruction (NRP, 2000). Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension are the five core areas of Reading instruction according to NRP (2000). Effective instruction in the area of phonics would include systematic and explicit instruction (2000) as well as a variety of different approaches to include spelling and the study of specific word parts and their meanings (Cunningham, 2007; McKenna, 2002). Phonemic awareness is most commonly described as instruction that focuses on segmenting and blending word parts, identifying rhyme as well as manipulating phonemes in order to make new words (Cunningham, 2007). Fluency instruction focuses on the impact of reading with appropriate speed, correctness, as well as with proper phrasing or prosody (Kuhn, Rasinski, 2007). Providing a model for fluency in addition to assisting students with reading aloud and repeated readings can help students increase their abilities to read fluently (Kuhn, Rasinski, 2007). Vocabulary is another key component to the NRP research into reading practices. The focus for vocabulary and effective literacy instruction is to provide opportunities for students to become immersed in word learning, develop independent word learning skills, and use multiple sources to identify word meanings (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2007; Rasinski et. al, 2008). The fifth major focus of the NRP is comprehension. Recommendations for effective comprehension instruction would include direct and explicit instruction of comprehension strategies as well as modeling the strategies using texts that are meaningful to students and provide real-world examples of literary texts (Block and Pressley, 2007).

While these five components to reading are emphasized as key instructional areas for reading by the research and studies examined through the NRP (2000), there are some gaps and missing pieces in regard to effective literacy practices. Literacy is much broader than the scope of the five pillars of reading instruction as defined by the NRP. One missing component for literacy that needs attention from the NRP report in the early grades is writing (Allington, 2002; Pressley & Fingeret, 2007). Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer (2006) conducted a study that focused on effective practices with writing instruction for 4th and 8th grade students. Writing is a part of literacy instruction that helps build understanding of texts, text structure, and provide an opportunity for shared social interaction through the writing process (Applebee & Langer, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007; Bromley, 2007).

The Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy put together a research team to identify literacy best practices for adolescents. The resulting report, *Time to Act*, provided writing and reading strategies that should be in place among adolescent literacy classrooms. Steve Graham and Dolores Perin (2007) wrote a report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York which highlighted eleven specific instructional practices to increase writing achievement among adolescents. Biancarosa and Snow (2006) wrote a report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York highlighting specific practices for reading in adolescent classrooms. These studies focus their suggestions and instructional practices around the literacy achievement for adolescent learners specifically through reading and writing.

There is another study designed to find effective practices in literacy instruction for middle and high schools. Judith A. Langer (2001) conducted a five-year study that concluded positive affects on student literacy achievement when an integrated approach was used with

literacy practices (Langer, 2001). The following represent the major findings for effective literacy instruction in middle and high school classrooms (Langer, 2001):

- Varying lesson types
- Assessment used as a focus of what needs to be taught
- Cross-curricular connections are made
- Direct instruction for strategies is utilized
- Social interaction and collaboration is encouraged

In summary, there are many studies that have taken a look at effective literacy instruction. Some have focused on instruction as a whole rather than looking at literacy as a separate category. Some studies such as the study completed by Applebee and Langer (2006) and the NRP (2000) look at specific areas of literacy such as writing, word study, vocabulary, fluency, phonics, comprehension, and phonemic awareness. There are studies that focus on early or primary grades (Croninger & Valli, 2009; Wray & Medwell, 1999; Pressley et al., 1996; NRPR, 2000) as well as studies that look specifically at secondary or middle and high school literacy instruction (Langer, 2001; Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010). Few studies have looked at effective literacy instruction that views literacy as a broad definition to include social and cultural constructs along with interactions with multiple varieties of texts around reading and writing in addition to looking at effective literacy instruction across the early elementary grades through high school.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study used multiple methods to identify effective literacy teachers in a specific school district and determine the instructional practices they used in the classroom that they felt contributed to their success. Quantitative and qualitative methods were necessary to follow student achievement in literacy, identify effective teachers of literacy, and distinguish instructional practices used by these teachers. Student test score data and school personnel recommendation data were used to identify teachers who stood out as being effective in the area of increasing student achievement in literacy. Once teachers from elementary (1-5), middle (6-8), and secondary (9-12) grade levels were identified as effective through varied assessment instruments and recommendations, observations and interviews were used to discover strategies and instructional practices that were successful with increasing student engagement, analysis, and critical thinking abilities in the area of literacy.

Population Sample

The district used for the study has 8 elementary schools (K-5) that have approximately 50 teachers in each school. The three middle schools have an average of 10 ELA (English Language Arts) teachers in each and the two high schools have 12 ELA teachers in each school. The selected teachers were given a letter of informed consent and asked to voluntarily participate in the study. The study observed and interviewed six teachers from grade levels one through five, four teachers from grade levels six through eight, and four teachers from grade levels nine through twelve.. Since data collection to identify effective teachers of literacy was collected over the previous three years, participants needed to teach in positions that required teachers to instruct students in the area of literacy even though they may have changed teaching positions to

a different grade level. However, if a teacher was identified as effective and the teacher no longer taught a literacy subject, they were not used in the study. In addition, since teacher group averages were used in assessment data collection, those groups with fewer than ten students were not used in the study in order to ensure a more accurate average of student achievement.

Data Collection

This study alleviated some of the uncertainty with solely using students' scores by including an element of patterned progress or student growth and multiple test score data over time. Patterned progress looked at teacher averages for student growth over 2-3 years using scale scores instead of performance levels of CRCT achievement. It was important to use both the Reading and English Language Arts data instead of just one measurement of literacy. By looking at a pattern over multiple years, the study was able to identify teachers who stood out over other teachers by helping students progress further than where they were when they entered the classroom.

For the purpose of identifying effective literacy teachers, the question was raised in regard to the reliability of using standardized tests scores as the only method to distinguish effective teachers from teachers who are less effective. Did the connection of student scores and effective literacy teachers oversimplify the instruction that occurred daily in the classroom (Stevens & Piazza, 2010)? The use of multiple assessments of literacy scored using differing methods gave this research more clear information to identify effective teachers of literacy. The following assessments were used to identify effective teachers of literacy.

Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)

One of the more common methods for identifying student academic achievement is the use of standardized test performance (Willis, 2009). The following will describe the standardized tests and test data used in this study. Since most schools, districts, and states use common and standardized testing measures to indicate student performance in specific grade levels in accordance with specific common standards as identified by the state, this data was also examined through this study. In Georgia, the most commonly used high stakes standardized test for students in grades 1-8 is the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Students in grade 1-8 take this test in Math, Reading, and English Language Arts. Literacy and language skills are broad abilities that narrow and single multiple choice measures can not truly assess (Afflerbach, 2004). This study aimed to uncover any correlation between test scores and identified effective teacher practice. With such emphasis as student promotion and ability classification on a single score during a single day of testing, student motivation and self-esteem can be effected (Afflerbach, 2004).

Procedure

This study looked at Reading and English Language Arts CRCT scores for the past two years. Data was tracked from 2008-2010. Student scores for each teacher were averaged and analyzed based on scale score growth from the previous year. To account for grade level differences, the county average growth/decline was applied to each teacher's average growth/decline to determine the amount of growth the teacher was able to influence from the previous year to the current year using the raw scale score versus performance level for a more specific and detailed look at growth. This same process was applied to reading and English language art's scores for the past three years.

State and Local Writing Assessments

In addition to the CRCT, student test score data in the area of literacy also included writing assessments. State mandated writing assessments such as the Georgia High School Writing Test were used to determine the abilities of writing skills for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 in Georgia as well as the district in this study. For students taking the assessment in high school, it is a gateway of promotion and graduation. The tests from grades 5, 8, and 11 are sent to the state educational department where two different ‘raters’ use a rubric to determine student writing abilities on the given topic. Having two different raters help identify a more consistent and less biased score using the state provided rubric. These writing tests allow students to write a timed response rather than using a multiple choice assessment format. The use of the writing tests’ scores to help identify effective literacy teachers gave the researcher additional information not provided by multiple choice assessments of reading achievement.

The district in which this study was conducted also utilizes formative writing assessments across all grade levels from K through grade 8 during the time of the study. The writing samples in grades 4, 7, and 9 are sent to the state as predictor assessments with outside raters giving a more objective view of student writing abilities. This data of writing skills provides a window into teachers’ ability to instruct students in their abilities to write effectively on a given topic.

Procedure

This study looked at the average score results from teachers in grades four, seven, and nine from the past two years. Teachers who had consistently high percentages of students who met and exceeded the standards were identified as effective teachers of literacy.

Local Benchmark Assessments

The district under study also employed teacher created benchmark assessments three times a year in English language arts for grades 6-8 during the time of the study. This assessment, designed in multiple choice formats, is based on state standards predetermined to be taught at three different intervals throughout the school year. This assessment is analyzed by student achievement on each test item and then used by teachers to inform their instruction after the test.

Procedure

This study looked at the growth pattern of ELA (English language arts) teachers over the past two years by looking at pre and post assessment results. Those teachers identified to have consistently increased the percentage of students who met and exceeded the standards were included in the number of effective literacy teachers.

State End of Course Tests

The high school level (grades 9-12) uses State End of Course Tests (SEOCT) in the area of literature. The use of the SEOCT scores were used to identify high school teachers who were demonstrating a pattern of success in building student abilities in the area of literacy. However, unlike the CRCT, the ability to determine growth using these scores was not possible. Students take a test that covers different content each year so using scores from a previous year would not indicate growth on the following year.

Procedure

This study used SEOCT scores of multiple years to identify teachers that demonstrate consistent effectiveness with their pass rates.

Fluency Assessments

Another assessment consistently used within the area of the study is DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and STEEP (System to Enhance Educational Performance). These timed assessments are designed to inform teachers of each student's fluency abilities with decoding and early reading skills. While this assessment may be a small and limited piece of the puzzle to a child's reading abilities, it is often used to place students in ability groups and intervention groups as the only measure of the student's reading and literacy abilities. Again, the use of a single assessment designed for a small and specific purpose does not truly identify a student's literacy abilities. This study used DIBELS and STEEP assessment data as a means to identify teachers in grades 1-5 who were effective in increasing student abilities in decoding and fluency with decoding skills.

Procedure

The study took the beginning of the year scores and compared them to the end of the year results to determine an average pattern of growth for each teacher's class. Those teachers who made the largest amount of measurable growth over a two year period were identified as effective teachers of literacy.

Using multiple literacy assessment measures over a two to three year span helped identify teachers who demonstrated effective teaching abilities in raising student scores over time rather than during a single year. By looking at the scores over multiple years in addition to using a variety of assessments with reading, English language arts, and writing assessments, the researcher was able to address some of the problems that existed with the use of single high stakes multiple choice assessments in literacy achievement. While looking at the testing data,

the researcher was cognizant of factors with grade level testing and the level of difficulty for each test in different grade levels. For example, on the 7th grade CRCT, teachers may seemingly have risen to the top of effectiveness due to the fact that the language portion of the test is easier than the 6th grade and 8th grade tests respectively. There is less new content covered in 7th grade language and students seemed to achieve at higher rates. Through the use of multiple years of data and multiple assessments, the researcher accounted for the increase of scores and was still able to identify teachers who were excelling in their literacy instruction.

Standardized Test Scores Combined with Recommendations

Wray and Medwell (1998) conducted a study to identify and then observe effective literacy teachers in the United Kingdom by using a combination of respected educator recommendations as well as gains made by student achievement scores. A similar study was conducted by Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi (1996) that only used recommendations from administration and expert educators to identify effective literacy teachers. By using a combination of scores and recommendations, the reliability of chosen effective literacy educators increases. Using overlapping and complimentary methods to identify, observe, and interview effective literacy teachers increased the validity and reliability of any single standardized assessment scores (Croninger & Valli, 2009).

Effective Teacher Group 1

In addition to the use of student scores, recommendations from school staff were used to help guide the selection of the teachers used in the final phase of the study (Wray & Medwell, 1998; Pressley et al., 1996). Multiple school personnel in each school were given a questionnaire asking their perspective of effective teachers in their building. The school personnel chosen were those who had access to teacher classrooms during the time of the study,

had opportunity to observe teachers during the instructional day, and had content knowledge sufficient to determine effective literacy skills. The questionnaire found in Appendix A was used to guide school personnel in their choices for effective teachers of literacy in their building.

Effective Teacher Group 2

For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified effective literacy teachers using the assessment scores available in the district such as the CRCT, writing tests, DIBELS / STEEP assessments, teacher created benchmark assessments for ELA, and State End of Course Tests (SEOCT). The scores were analyzed across multiple years and multiple measures of progress to include performance level, scale scores, and measurable growth patterns. Additionally, reading, English language arts, fluency, and writing tests provided an overall picture of literacy achievement rather than the use of a single literacy area.

Teachers who were recommended by school personnel as well as obtained assessment scores that indicated their successful abilities to increase student literacy achievement were invited to participate in the study.

Participants were given a letter of invitation (see Appendix B) indicating their ability to remove themselves from participation at any time during the study. The letter of invitation (informed consent) detailed the process of identification and the intent of future observations and interviews.

Methods to Identify Instructional Practices of Effective Literacy Teachers

This study used a combination of student scores and recommendations to identify effective literacy teachers in addition to observations and interviews to then identify what the teachers were doing in their classrooms that they believed contributed to the increase of achievement in students' literacy scores. It was important that any observations and interviews

used in this study be consistent across all participants in order to maximize results of the data (Fletcher & Francis, 2004). Utilizing one observational protocol and specific interview questions as well as consistent student data across all schools, increased the validity and reliability of each measure combined rather than independently.

Observations

Teachers are often evaluated by administrators who conduct classroom observations. In an article from the Denverpost.com retrieved 2/22/10, Jeremy P. Meyer reports that “62% of teachers say the evaluation process fails to provide an accurate assessment of performance” (para 7). Teacher evaluations are often underused to remove teachers who are not helping students meet achievement standards (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). With concern surrounding the existing observational measures for teachers, it was important for the observations used in this study to be clear, concise and consistent across all classrooms participating in the study.

One aspect of evaluating teacher effectiveness in classrooms through observations is the use of observation protocols. Consistency of observations can help increase reliability of data gained through observations (Pianta & Hamre, 2009) and a single observational protocol can help. Robert Pianta (2006) discusses the need for improving consistent observations through the use of CLASS or Classroom Assessment Scoring System and ECERS or Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised. The CLASS focuses mainly on what teachers do in the classroom and how they interact with the students (Pianta, 2006). The ECERS is designed to address the physical environment, materials, and activities within the space of the classroom (Pianta, 2006). Both observational protocols have limitations within the purpose of this study since they focus on pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade rather than extending through the high

school aged classrooms. However, both are important examples and indicators that a consistent measure and observational protocol will be needed before data can be collected. When observing classrooms, the researcher for this study used an observational protocol designed by the researcher from the information gleaned from research within this study (see Appendix C). This provided a single consistent instrument that included multiple grade ranges, instructional practices, as well as materials used in the classrooms observed.

The observational protocol found in Appendix C of this proposal was used during observations in the K-12 classrooms. This instrument was designed by the researcher with the previously mentioned resources as references. The researcher has successfully used this protocol to identify specific literacy instructional practices that are evident during multiple observation opportunities.

Interviews

Pressley, Rankin, and Yokoi (1996) found that the surveys and interviews they used were more effective and reliable with written responses. The participants responded more fully with written comments and remained focused on specific questions (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). In a similar fashion, this study used interviews with specific and direct questions to help minimize error and information that may or may not contribute to the study. McKeown, Beck, and Blake (2009) found that participants did not always address the questions being asked when the interviews were more free and open. Using semi-structured interviews with specific coding and theme identifiers helped eliminate some erroneous information from interviews that become more open (Perry, 2009). Interview questions came directly from the research questions of the study and remained focused on previous research and factors that contributed to literacy instruction and effectiveness in teacher's classrooms.

Consideration was needed throughout this study of the possible Hawthorne effect (Sprinthall, 2007). The participants involved in the study were aware of the purpose and direction for the study and; therefore, may have changed their behavior or responses to questions out of flattery or the condition of attention being paid to their classroom instruction. While this was a concern, the factors previously discussed with consistency in protocols and multiple measures of data collection helped to alleviate such concerns and still provided some correlation data to support further instructional practices and further research into more specific causal factors of effective literacy instruction.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study began as a search for effective literacy teachers to identify what choices they make in regard to instructional practices that make a difference in student achievement. The results chapter is organized initially in terms of the process for identification of effective teachers using quantitative data as well as qualitative data through recommendations from school personnel. After results have been presented on effective teacher identification, observation and interview data used to ascertain the strategies of effective teachers in their classrooms to promote student growth in literacy will be presented. Results for observations and interviews will be presented separately due to the slight variance in responses and for clarity of the results. The results from observations will be presented first for each research and interview question. After observational data is given, the results for interview data will be given under each research and interview question.

The first step in the study was to identify the most effective teachers of literacy within a single district with similar instructional requirements. To begin the search and create the first pool of teachers, data were collected from the past 2-3 years in order to identify a pattern of teachers who consistently demonstrated high achievement or the most growth in student achievement as compared to other teachers with similar assessments. Multiple measures were used to include Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and System to Enhance Educational Performance (STEEP), Benchmark Assessments, Writing Scores, and State End of Course Tests (SEOCT). The next step to identify effective teachers was

to question school personnel as to their perspective on teachers from their building thought to be effective. School personnel were chosen based on their experience and opportunity with teacher observations, working with teachers on a daily basis, and knowledge of curriculum and literacy skills.

Identification of Effective Teachers

At the beginning of the study, the portion designed to identify effective teachers was meant to be a small beginning step to the bigger picture of teacher strategies that are effective in supporting student achievement with literacy skills. As the study progressed and data were analyzed, the part of identifying effective teachers turned out to be just as important as identifying effective strategies. Because of the importance of supporting those teachers chosen as effective teachers of literacy and the extensive measures taken to ensure adequate assessment data collection, the first portion of this section will detail results of each separate data collected for effective teacher identification.

CRCT Data

The Criterion Referenced Competency Test is a standardized state mandated assessment given to students in grades 2-8 in the spring of each year. For the purpose of collecting as much literacy data as available, the study used the reading and English language arts portion of the assessment. Table 1 gives a snapshot of the information gained by taking each teacher's students from grades 2-8 and subtracting each student's previous year's scale score from the current year's scale score to determine a measure of growth made throughout the year with the current teacher. Student scores were used if both previous year scale scores and current year scale scores were available.

These measures of growth were averaged to obtain each teacher's average amount of growth from grades 2-8 for two years. In order to remove factors such as a common amount of growth in scale score for all students in a particular grade level, a county average of growth or decline was applied to each student's amount of growth prior to obtaining the teacher's overall growth average. This did not alter the ranking of teachers significantly but did give a more accurate range of growth for each grade level within the participating school district. The reading and English language arts teacher averages were combined to create an overall average of growth. Once all averages were calculated, teachers in each grade level were ranked according to the amount of growth to identify teachers who remained in the top of the list for both years.

Table 1 indicates those teachers who were able to influence student growth from their previous year's growth by at least 10 scale score points. Also identified within Table 1 are those teachers recommended by school personnel as being most effective in the area of literacy. Also identified are those teachers who were asked to participate in the study because they were both recommended by school personnel and had consistently high averages of scale score growth.

Table 1

Sample Summary Grade 3 CRCT Data over Two Year Period

2008-2009			
Teacher number	Average Reading Scale Score Increase / Decrease	Average ELA Scale Score Increase / Decrease	Sum of Average Increase / Decrease for ELA and Reading
*/**40	14.36	10.73	25.09
**42	6.71	12.00	18.71
*/**44	14.13	0.38	14.50
**45	-1.52	15.52	14.00
*59	3.67	-3.58	0.08

*60	9.00	-9.78	-0.78
61	-4.47	3.29	-1.18
65	-12.27	3.27	-9.00
*69	-6.50	-4.92	-11.42
74	-28.41	-6.41	-34.82

 2009-2010

Teacher Number	Average Reading Scale Score Increase / Decrease	Average ELA Scale Score Increase / Decrease	Sum of Average Increase / Decrease for ELA and Reading
*/**40	19.87	18.87	38.73
*/**44	12.73	12.80	25.53
**155	14.88	2.65	17.54
*69	9.89	0.63	10.51
61	4.89	4.47	9.37
42	6.27	-0.16	6.11
43	-9.39	10.29	0.89
*60	1.65	-1.74	-0.09
*59	-12.33	-5.27	-17.61
74	-16.43	-9.43	-25.86

Note. *recommended by school personnel, **10+ scale score growth averages, */**effective teachers as identified by both recommendations and high scale score growth averages

DIBELS / STEEP Data

Fluency measures are used in schools to determine a student's number of words read in one minute. The district participating in the study has eight elementary schools that use one of two assessment programs for identifying the number of words read in one minute for each student. The assessment programs require a student to read an unfamiliar passage for one minute to an adult or testing administrator in a one-on-one atmosphere. The person giving the assessment marks off any words a student pronounces incorrectly and adds up the number of words read correctly to give the student a score. This

assessment is given three times a year to monitor student growth in fluency. Fluency is an important indicator to comprehension abilities (Rasinski et. al, 2008) in students.

For the purpose of this study, data were collected from each school indicating each teacher's scores from the fall administration of the assessment and the spring administration for the past two years. The fall and spring scores for each student were subtracted to determine the number of words per minute each student grew in achievement throughout the year. The student growth numbers were averaged for each teacher giving an average of growth in fluency for each teacher. The teachers were ranked according to the average growth in number of words per minute made by their class. The student numbers used in the average were those students who were present in the teacher's classroom consistently throughout the year. Student numbers were not used if they only had a fall or spring score. Teacher groups were only used in the study if there were at least ten student numbers to average in the teacher average growth numbers.

Table 2 represents an excerpt of the data used to determine teachers who were able to achieve high numbers of growth in fluency with the students in their classroom over the past two years. The teacher numbers indicated by an asterisk identify those who were also recommended by school personnel as effective teachers of literacy and asked to participate in the study.

Table 2

DIBELS / STEEP Data for Second Grade Sample Summary Level 2

2008-2009		2009-2010	
Teacher	Average Class Increase /Decrease	Teacher	Average Class Increase /Decrease
*50	70.73	79	64.00
*51	61.24	*50	62.06
*52	58.82	96	59.94

53	58.63	*51	56.14
79	40.58	99	54.53
91	33.46	*52	54.40
92	33.21	91	49.57
96	29.82	100	43.65
99	27.67	53	40.83
100	25.32	92	33.54

Note. * Effective teachers as identified by both recommendations and high scale score growth averages

Writing Assessment Data

Writing is a part of literacy that is often left out of the conversation due to the importance and weight given to reading and the components of reading instruction (Gallagher, 2006). For the purpose of this study, writing assessment data was included for the purpose of identifying teachers who were consistently keeping their students meeting or exceeding standards for writing. The writing assessment used for this study is a county-wide timed writing assessment given to students in the 4th, 7th, and 9th grade levels. The writing prompt and guidelines are similar to the state writing assessment guidelines given in grades 5, 8, and 11. Assessment papers are sent off for scoring to give a more objective view of student performance. Scores are received indicating whether or not a student met, exceeded, or did not meet standards for the writing assessment.

Data were collected from the writing assessments for the past two years and teachers were ranked based on their collective class percentages of students who met (M), did not meet (DNM), or exceeded (E). For the purpose of this study, teacher ranking was created using the DNM percentages. Table 3 is an excerpt of some of the teachers' score results from the writing assessment for the past two years. Those teachers whose names

are highlighted were also recommended by school personnel as being effective in the area of literacy instruction.

Table 3

Sample Summary Data from Grade 7 and 9 Writing Assessments for January 2009

Teacher Number	Grade Level	DNM%	M%	EXC%
*1	7	10.00	90.00	0.00
2	7	20.20	78.70	4.40
3	7	27.90	72.10	2.40
4	7	30.30	69.70	0.00
5	7	33.30	62.70	1.30
6	7	38.10	60.80	0.00
7	7	42.20	56.60	3.50
8	7	80.50	19.50	0.00
9	7	84.00	16.00	0.00
*10	9	15.00	82.10	3.00
11	9	28.70	69.30	2.00
*12	9	36.80	63.20	0.00
13	9	40.00	60.00	0.00
*14	9	42.50	57.50	0.00
15	9	42.90	57.10	0.00
16	9	48.90	51.10	0.00
17	9	57.35	53.20	5.20
18	9	71.40	28.60	0.00

Note. *Teachers recommended by school personnel

ELA Benchmark Assessment

Another measure of reading and English language arts is the county-wide ELA benchmark assessment given three times each year. Teachers work together across the district being used in the study to create a benchmark assessment for standards that have been taught up to that point in the school year. Once the test is given, teachers analyze the results to determine which standards need to be taught again. The questions for the tests are compiled from a state data bank of released multiple choice test items.

Results are given to teachers in various formats such as testing items, student scores, teacher averages, and by school. The scores are similar to those received by the CRCT assessment with did not meet (DNM), meet (M), and exceed (E). For the purpose of this study, teachers were ranked based on their ability to assist students in meeting standards by identifying the lowest percentage of did not meet (DNM). For the past two years, there were no measurable scores in the exceed category. Table 4 represents an excerpt of scores from one year in grade seven. Those teachers highlighted were recommended by school personnel as being effective in the area of literacy. Teacher groups were only used if they had more than ten students from which to obtain achievement percentages.

Table 4

Sample Summary Data from Grade 7 ELA Benchmark Scores for 2008

Fall 2008			Winter 2008		
Teacher	DNM%	M%	Teacher	DNM%	M%
*30	0.00	100.00	*30	14.00	86.00
40	5.00	95.00	40	18.00	82.00
41	6.00	94.00	41	21.00	79.00
42	7.00	93.00	42	23.00	77.00
43	8.00	92.00	43	26.00	74.00
44	13.00	87.00	44	29.00	71.00
45	18.00	82.00	45	31.00	69.00
46	21.00	79.00	46	38.00	62.00
47	33.00	67.00	47	44.00	56.00

Note. *Effective teacher identified through recommendations and scores

SEOCT Data

The State End of Course Tests (SEOCT) are given to high school students at the end of each core subject class taken. These scores are used to provide fifteen percent of a student’s final grade point average for each course where the SEOCT is given. The

results can also be used to identify specific strengths and weaknesses from which to target student instruction.

Table 5 provides an excerpt of the scores for grade 9 over two assessment periods. Because the district participating in the study utilizes block scheduling, students take the courses within one semester giving each teacher two sections of the class each year. In a similar method as the benchmark assessments and writing assessment scores, teachers were ranked according to the lowest percentage of those students who did not meet (DNM) for each of their classes. Those teachers highlighted are those recommended by school personnel.

Table 5

Sample Summary SEOCT Scores for Grade 9 Literature and Composition

Dec-09				May-10			
Teacher	EXC%	M%	DNM%	Teacher	EXC%	M%	DNM%
*1	83.3	16.7	0.0	*5	17.9	82.1	0.0
2	73.1	26.9	0.0	*5	82.8	17.2	0.0
*3	96.0	4.0	0.0	2	76.7	23.3	0.0
*3	80.8	19.2	0.0	*3	50.0	46.9	3.1
4	31.3	65.6	3.1	*3	40.0	56.7	3.3
*5	9.1	81.8	9.1	4	30.0	63.3	6.7
*1	22.7	68.2	9.1	*5	39.3	60.7	9.7
6	29.2	58.3	12.5	*1	36.7	50.0	13.3
*5	7.7	76.9	15.4	4	20.0	40.0	26.7
*5	0.0	60.0	40.0	7	3.3	26.7	30.8

Note. *Teachers recommended by school personnel

School Personnel Recommendations

Even though quantitative data gave a large pool of teachers who are consistently effective at helping students successfully pass county and state assessments as well as increase achievement on assessments, this study also used the qualitative measure of

school personnel recommendations to identify an additional pool of teachers who are effective in literacy instruction. Two administrators and/or school personnel were chosen to complete a questionnaire identifying teachers in their building who they believe are consistently effective in teaching literacy skills and increasing student achievement in literacy. The questionnaire found in Appendix A provided the questions given to school personnel for recommendations. Twenty-six questionnaires were sent to two school personnel in each of the thirteen schools. Twenty-one questionnaires were returned completed. All schools were represented giving all teachers within the school system the opportunity to be recommended as an effective teacher of literacy.

School personnel asked to complete the questionnaire were chosen based on the following criteria: experience observing the teachers during instruction on a regular basis and content knowledge to make an informed decision. After the recommendations were received, the names given were indicated on the quantitative data to identify teachers who fell in both quantitative and qualitative pools of effective literacy teachers. Seventeen teachers were identified to be effective in all possible measures within their respective grade level and; therefore, were asked to participate in the study. There was one teacher on maternity leave who did not participate in the study. Fourteen of the seventeen teachers agreed to participate in the observations and interviews to identify instructional strategies used by effective teachers of literacy.

Table 6 gives a summary of qualitative and quantitative data collected for the purpose of identifying effective teachers of literacy. If a teacher who was recommended did not have consistently high quantitative data, they were not included in the final pool of teachers requested to participate in the study. However, if a teacher received

recommendations from school personnel and had consistently high quantitative data in those areas available for their grade level, they were considered effective teachers of literacy and asked to participate in the study.

Table 6

Summary of Teachers Identified for Possible Participation in Study

Teacher Eligible for Study	Teacher Number	Grade Level	Suggested by School Personnel as Effective	CRCT	DIBELS / STEEP	Benchmark	Writing	SEOCT
	1	1		N/A	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
*	2	1	*	N/A	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
*	3	1	*	N/A	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
*	4	1	*	N/A	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	5	1	*	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A
	6	1	*	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A
	7	1	*	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A
	8	1	*	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A
	9	1	*	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A
*	10	2	*	*	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
*	11	2	*	*	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	12	2	*			N/A	N/A	N/A
	13	2	*		*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	14	2	*			N/A	N/A	N/A
	15	2	*			N/A	N/A	N/A
	16	2	*	*		N/A	N/A	N/A
*	17	3	*	*	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
*	18	3	*	*	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
*	19	3	*	*	*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	20	3	*			N/A	N/A	N/A
	21	3	*			N/A	N/A	N/A
	22	4	*			N/A	*	N/A
	23	4	*	*		N/A	*	N/A
	24	4	*			N/A	N/A	N/A
	25	5	*		*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	26	5	*			N/A	N/A	N/A

	27	5	*	*		N/A	N/A	N/A
*	28	6	*	*	N/A	*	N/A	N/A
*	29	6	*	*	N/A	*	N/A	N/A
*	30	7	*	*	N/A	*	*	N/A
*	31	8	*	*	N/A	*	N/A	N/A
	32	8	*		N/A	*	N/A	N/A
*	33	9	*	*	N/A	*	*	*
*	34	9	*	N/A	N/A	N/A	*	*
	35	9		N/A	N/A	N/A	*	*
*	36	9	*	N/A	N/A	N/A	*	*
*	37	11	*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	*
	38	12	*	N/A	N/A	N/A		
*	39	12	*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	*

Note. * indicates high assessment scores and/or recommended by school personnel

N/A indicates the assessment data is not applicable to the grade level and/or teacher

CRCT and DIBELS/STEEP measure growth patterns while Benchmark, Writing, and SEOCT identified consistently high assessment scores as compared to other teachers across the same district.

Effective Literacy Teacher Classroom Data

There were two forms of data collected for the purpose of identifying the strategies used consistently among effective teachers of literacy. Observational data and interview data were used to assist in identifying those strategies or instructional practices most used by the teachers identified as effective through the quantitative portion of the study. Both forms of data revealed similarities as well as differences under final analysis. The coding system used for both observational data collection and interview responses were consistent throughout the study and were created using the interview questions that stemmed from the research presented earlier in the study as well as those codes specific to teacher participant responses during the analysis of information provided.

After quantitative data were analyzed along with school personnel recommendations, requests for participation were disseminated among possible teacher

participants. A total of fourteen teachers agreed to participate in the study. It was important to ensure that those fourteen participants represented adequate grade level ranges to give a broad perspective of effective practices across multiple grade levels. There were six participants throughout grades 1-5 representing grades 1, 2, and 3; there were four participants throughout grades 6-8 representing each grade level; and there were four participants throughout grades 9-12 representing grades 9, 11, and 12. Multiple observations were conducted for each teacher participant over the course of one year. There were a total of fourteen observations for the six teachers representing grades 1-5, twelve observations for the four teachers representing grades 6-8, and twelve observations for the four teachers representing grades 9-12. Each teacher participated in one interview to answer the questions identified in Appendix C for a total of fourteen interviews.

Code Preparation and Analysis

The first set of codes were created by looking through the research questions presented in chapter one of this study as well as the research identified as effective practices through the literature review in chapter two. Table 7 indicates the original codes created using the interview questions for participants that came directly from the research questions.

Table 7

Original Codes Created for Observations and Interviews

Choice in Material

Struggling Student Support

Multiple Forms of Text

Student Dialogue (inclusion of)

Student Lives / Experiences (inclusion of)

Cultural Background (inclusion of)

Technology (use of)

Comprehension (direct instruction)

Vocabulary (direct instruction)

Grammar / Conventions (direct instruction)

Fluency (direct instruction)

Phonics / Word Study (direct instruction)

Writing (direct instruction)

Writing – Connected to Reading

Writing – Frequency

Motivation – Social Interaction

Motivation - high expectations

Motivation - student choice

Motivation – Technology

Observations and interviews were completed and coding began to be placed within participant responses and observational protocols. Through analysis, additional coding emerged as a result of specific responses and strategies evident through observations as well as interviews. Table 8 indicates those codes that were added through more in-depth analysis of observational data collected.

Table 8

Additional Codes Added Through In-depth Analysis of Observations and Interviews

Modeling of Strategies and/or Skills
Assessment (use of during instruction)
Variety in Materials and/or Strategies
Repetition / Routine
Integration of Skills and Strategies

Motivation was another theme that became evident through the interviews as a key strategy used by many of the teachers. More coding was needed to interpret the different themes of motivation that emerged. Using the research on motivation from the literature review, additional motivation codes were implemented to give respect to teacher responses around the importance of motivation to their instruction. Table 9 indicates the codes that were added for a more in-depth analysis of motivation as a key instructional strategy used by effective teachers of literacy.

Table 9

Additional Codes Added for Motivation

Motivation - student engagement with instruction
Motivation - physical movement
Motivation - feedback provided to students during instruction

After multiple reviews of observation and interviews were completed, a final theme emerged that became critical to include with the original codes already used for analysis. This theme was passion. There were two different levels of passion identified

through the interview responses as shown in Table 10. Prior to final analysis of the interviews, passion was not included as a theme since it is difficult to define. However, three teachers used the word to describe how they felt about their students and about their jobs. One teacher's comments were, "I love my job and my students. If they can't see my passion for them, they will not work as hard" (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). Once the term was added as a theme, additional combing of interview data was needed to see if there was evidence of other indicators of passion. When teachers used words like "this is fun" (Personal communication, February 25, 2011) and "Whatever they need, I will do for them because they need me" (Personal communication, March 3, 2011), the theme of passion for their job and passion for their students were coded. One teacher explained her passion for her students by stating, "I'm a firm believer in knowing the kids, their sports, their hobbies. I will play with them outside to learn more about them. You gotta win them over and get interested" (Personal communication, February 25, 2011).

These codes of passion were added to the original codes for a final list of codes. Once there were no additional themes emerging from the analysis of observations and interviews and there was no evidence of repetition through the codes, the list became final and was applied to all observational protocols and interview responses.

Table 10

Additional Codes Added for Passion as Indicated by Teacher Interviews

Passion for their job

Passion for students

Through the analysis of observations and interviews, multiple opportunities were needed for coding information. At the point where no additional codes were placed, no codes were removed, and there was no additional information emerging from the responses, the coding process ceased and full analysis began using a frequency chart. The frequency chart coding remained separate pieces of information for observations as well as interviews. Both sets of qualitative data gave varying perspectives of analysis for effective instructional strategies.

Observational Data Collection

Using the observational protocol found in Appendix D, coding was placed and analyzed in order to identify the key strategies used by effective teachers of literacy. Observations were conducted prior to interviews for discussion purposes during the interviews. The information that emerged from the observational coding was slightly different from the information revealed from interview responses. Observational data were collected using the protocol and identifying if specific strategies were present during instruction or not. The information received gave more evidence of specific direct instructional practices being used consistently among participants as well as materials and student interactions during instruction. Table 11 indicates the frequency chart created using the codes for observations.

Table 11

Frequency Chart of Coding for Observations Ranked by Total

Description	Total	Number for Grades 1-5	Number for Grades 6-8	Number for Grades 9-12
Student Dialogue (inclusion of)	28	11	7	10
Comprehension (direct instruction)	25	8	6	11

Motivation - social interaction	24	9	5	10
Phonics / Word Study (direct instruction)	22	11	5	6
Model of Strategies and/or Skills	21	10	5	6
Integration of Skills	21	9	6	6
Grammar - Conventions (direct instruction)	20	7	8	5
Vocabulary (direct instruction)	20	6	7	7
Writing - connect to reading	18	6	5	7
Technology (use of)	17	7	8	2
Multiple Forms of Text	16	4	8	4
Fluency (direct instruction)	15	11	4	0
Writing - frequency	12	5	3	4
Student Lives / experience (inclusion of)	12	2	2	8
Writing (direct instruction)	11	3	4	4
Motivation - engagement	11	2	3	6
Struggling Student Support	10	6	2	2
Motivation - student choice / interests	5	1	0	4
Motivation - movement (physical)	3	2	0	1
Repetition / Routine	1	1	0	0
Assessment (use of)	1	0	1	0
Motivation -feedback	1	0	0	1
Choice in Material	0	0	0	0
Variety of Materials and/or Strategies	0	0	0	0
Cultural Background (inclusion of)	0	0	0	0
Passion with Job	0	0	0	0
Passion with Students	0	0	0	0
Motivation - high expectations	0	0	0	0
Motivation - technology	0	0	0	0

The following are the research sub-questions that the observational data aimed to answer. Results from the observations will be presented through the research questions in isolation of the interview results for clarity and isolation of information gained through observations as well as interview results. Some of the questions are more easily analyzed and identified through observations than others. The observations lasted approximately twenty to forty-five minutes in length and detected specific parts of instruction evident through observation such as student and teacher interaction as well as specific direct

instruction methods used by teachers. Multiple observations were conducted and used for analysis for each teacher participant to strengthen understanding and results of data.

1. What type of materials and texts are used to engage students with literacy skills? Are these materials mandated by the district or chosen by the teacher? How many opportunities to learn using multi-media materials are available to students in effective literacy classrooms?

All teacher participants were observed using materials provided by the district in a variety of ways. Since the observations did not take place over the entire day, identifying all materials used by the teacher participants was not possible through observations alone and would need to be asked of participants during the interview process. Multi-media materials were used through different applications across all classrooms and there were multiple forms of texts available to students throughout the observations during instruction as indicated in the frequency chart under Technology and Multiple Forms of Texts. The variety in materials was not evident due to the short amount of time during observations.

2. What strategies do effective literacy teachers utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult texts?

Many teachers offered assistance to students who struggled with the difficulty of text through multiple ways. Some teachers offered support for students by working one-on-one with the student, pairing the student with a partner, or repeating expectations during instruction. Teachers were observed reading passages to students offering a model of fluent reading while other teachers revisited specific sets of instruction to help guide students through understanding and access to the difficult texts. During the

observation, some teacher participants would group students by their ability and provide alternate forms of the text to assist students in accessing the text material to work on specific skills as needed according to their varying levels of ability.

3. What writing strategies do effective literacy teachers cite as useful during classroom instruction to assist students in connecting reading and writing?

Most of the teacher participants valued the importance of having students reflect on their reading through some type of writing. The teachers in all grade levels used modeled writing and graphic organizers to help students get their thoughts in a more understandable sequence. The teachers would sit with small groups of students to model a specific strategy such as how to answer the five “w’s” (who, where, when, why, what) in the introduction of their writing. Another teacher sat with a group to journal-write beside her students. One classroom had students take a final draft and share it with a partner. The partner that listened to the story was to make a list of the describing words used and then together, they would brainstorm more descriptive words to use instead. There was a high frequency of evidence for teachers of all levels of classrooms using writing as a connection to reading. One teacher had her second grade students write a paragraph focusing on the main idea of a story they just read. A twelve grade teacher used writing to have her students respond to a piece of poetry in the margin of the paper with their thoughts, feelings, and analysis at specific points of the poem. In order to have students combine different reading texts, a third grade teacher had her students write a brief comparing and contrasting essay for two stories previously read. The majority of writing being used as a connection to reading was observed through summary writing, response to literature, and using the literature as a model for their own writing.

4. How often and to what extent do effective literacy teachers encourage student writing in the classroom?

Writing frequency is an area of instruction observed often during the separate opportunities to watch teachers during different lessons. Students were observed writing through direct instruction, connections to reading, grammar / conventions lessons, independently, in small groups, and with partners. A seventh grade teacher used writing to help students identify character traits and emotions of a text. She gave a specific emotion of a character and then had students work together to write multiple sentences that would depict the emotion without using any synonyms of the word. The majority of writing observed was through assigned writing topics or specific directives for the writing. However, one of the teachers was observed on “Free Friday” which is their weekly time to write in their daily journals about anything they would like. It can be something that is on their minds, a reflection of something read, or they could create a new narrative or informational writing piece. Another teacher gave students the option of choosing a character in their novel to write about and give their perspective and description on the emotional traits of the character. After a story was read in a second grade classroom, students were given the choice of writing the next scene in the story, a friendly letter to one of the characters, or a play showing one of the scenes.

5. How do effective literacy teachers engage students with multiple forms of texts?

Multiple forms of texts were evident across teachers from early elementary through high school classrooms. Teachers were observed providing different types of leveled text to help support struggling readers as well as to engage and motivate older

learners through the use of technology. The students enjoyed reading the different passages from the internet where images were imbedded and animated to help tell the story in more exciting ways than through worksheets and reading passages that were copied. In the elementary classrooms, this was seen as electronic texts that varied in ability ranges with animated characters. The older classrooms compared poetry to more traditional literature from their textbooks with current song lyrics. In a twelve grade classroom, the students and teacher were analyzing the poem 'The Leap' by James Dickey. One of the students talked about how the poem reminded her of a current song. Some of the other students agreed and they began a debate on the specific connections. A middle school teacher had students write the dialogue of different characters from different silent films such as *Tom and Jerry* while studying author perspectives. Students in these classrooms were encouraged to analyze across multiple forms of texts such as television shows and poetry as well as work together to identify similarities and differences among the varying perspectives.

6. Is there a consistency between standardized test scores and literacy practices among identified effective teachers?

According to the questions identified at the beginning of the study that emerged from the research literature, one item for exploration was the alignment of high standardized test scores for teachers and their perceived effectiveness by school personnel and other assessment measures. It became important for answering this question to identify whether or not the teachers identified as effective through this study regularly practice the strategies identified as effective from the research.

At this point in the study, it was evident that many teachers who were perceived as effective by school administration and personnel also had evidence of high assessment scores as compared to other teachers of literacy in the same district. While there were teachers who displayed high test scores and were not recommended as well as teachers who were recommended whose test scores were not among the highest in the district, these exceptions did not hinder the study by limiting the number of possible participants who were recommended by school personnel while also demonstrating abilities to maintain high test scores. Further discussion and analysis is needed to connect effective teacher practices with those identified by current research and will be discussed in the interview section of the results as well as in detail through chapter five of this study.

7. How are students directed to engage in dialogue during instructional time?

One of the most observed instructional practices that emerged was the use of student dialogue. All classrooms demonstrated evidence of multiple types of student dialogue from those initiated by the teacher to those initiated by students during small group and independent work. There was a constant quiet hum of talking in most classrooms during the observations due to the amount of student conversation around the rooms. During times of teacher initiated dialogue, students were constantly asked ‘why’ questions. For example, in one classroom the students used electronic response systems (clickers) to identify the answer to a multiple choice grammar / conventions quiz on the big screen at the front of the classroom. One of the questions observed asked students to identify the part of speech for the word “apple”. The choices given were noun, verb, and adjective. Once the responses were received to the teacher’s computer, the teacher called on a volunteer to share their response. After the student gave the answer of “noun”, the

teacher asked the students why they chose noun and not adjective or verb. This led to a deeper conversation and debate among the students while they worked through the possible answer choices. One question that pushed the students into deeper debate was with the word, “his”. The answer choices were noun, pronoun, and verb. One student suggested that the word was a noun because it described a person. The other students discussed the possibility before deciding it was a pronoun because it renamed the noun. Throughout the conversation, the teacher remained silent while the students decided on the correct response and why the response was more correct than the other choices. It was evident that this type of behavior and discussion was regular in this classroom by the way the students took over the discussion from the teacher who listened while the whole group engaged in a respectful dialogue about the answer choices.

8. To what extent do effective literacy teachers include student lives and experiences during literacy instruction?

Student lives and experiences also played an important role during observations although not as high of frequency as student dialogue. There was more evidence of student lives and experiences being elevated in the high school classrooms versus elementary and middle grade ranges. While evident in the lower grades through the text selections and small group discussions with the teacher, the higher grade ranges gave more focused attention to the value of student experiences. For example, one ninth grade teacher gave an assignment for students to complete at home with their parents that brought in the student and parent perspective of dating prior to a study on Romeo and Juliet. The assignment was for the parent to complete a questionnaire on their perspective of the perfect mate for their child. The students were to complete the same questionnaire

as to what they thought their parents would say is the perfect mate as well as their thoughts on if they agreed or not. When the assignment was completed, the students were to bring it in and discuss it as a connection piece to one of the themes of the text. The teacher shared that the assignment had become a concern with two of the parents. One parent wrote a letter to the teacher telling the teacher the assignment was inappropriate and that she was not prepared to discuss dating and mates with her child yet because the child was not old enough or ready for the conversation.

Another ninth grade teacher exemplified the way she valued student experiences with her journal writing assignment. The teacher took her journal to the small group once the other groups were settled and working. The topic for writing was “memories from your life you will still have 15 years from now”. The teacher talked about her own struggle with the topic and engaged the students in a discussion around their thoughts and feelings toward this topic prior to writing. Once students shared, they all began writing together in their own journals but frequently discussed the challenge from their own experiences during the time allotted for writing.

9. How do effective literacy teachers acknowledge student cultural backgrounds during literacy instruction?

During observations, there was limited evidence of teachers acknowledging different cultural backgrounds other than text selections. Further discussion of these results will be found in the results of interview responses and in the analysis of data in chapter five of this study.

10. What role do current technology trends play in the classroom of effective literacy teachers?

Technology seems to play an important role in the classrooms observed during the study. Most elementary and middle grade ranges used technology during some point of instruction. All of the teachers in the study have an Interwrite system with projector. Some of the classrooms have a Promethean board instead of a screen so students can interact with the screen during lessons. One teacher has an Interwrite system but chooses not to use it because she says she is more comfortable with her over-head projector. Each classroom only has one, two, or three computers at the most. In each building, teachers have access to one or two computer labs where they can sign up for a time to take their students and complete lessons as a whole class. Each building also has a classroom set of responders (clickers) to use as well as needed, but only three teachers indicated that they use them and expressed concern as to their availability as well as working condition when available.

The role technology played varied in each room from computers for assessments, Power Point presentations of information during lessons, different forms of text viewed through the computers, to in-depth studies on the internet of topics that emerged during class discussions. One teacher said she had a student that was interested in presidents. The topic came up and the student asked a question that she could not answer. They stopped their work and began using the Interwrite system so all students could watch while the teacher and student navigated through web pages to find the answer and more information on the president. After the discussion, all students were eager to ask more questions and learn more information about many of the presidents. The teacher decided to take a couple of days and let the students bring in information they found while searching the internet at home.

While not observed as the most important tool used for effective instructional strategies, it was evident that technology has surfaced as one of the pieces of instruction many teachers use on a daily basis to support their instructional practices even if it is as a more advanced discussion tool or way to keep students actively engaged in lessons.

Interview Data Collection

Each teacher participant agreed to an interview after their observations were completed. Some teacher participants were uncomfortable with face-to-face interaction and chose to conduct the interview over the phone. There were a few participants whose schedules would not allow for timely completion of the interviews and they requested to submit responses to questions electronically. Ten out of the fourteen interviews were conducted face-to-face or via phone conversations. The information received from all types of interviews was consistent throughout the study by using the same questions across all participants regardless of delivery format. Due to the variety of ways the interviews were conducted, the questions remained the same and the researcher did not add or delete any questions during the study. Teacher participants were given the interview questions prior to their scheduled interview to allow for thorough discussion of responses and to provide an opportunity to clear up any confusion some of the questions may have caused. For example, there were a couple of teacher participants who requested specific information in regard to the meaning of “multi-media” in one of the questions. Once the terminology was clarified, the participants continued through their responses. All interviews were conducted within a few weeks of the most recent observations and within a few weeks of all other interviews to increase the level of consistency across interviews as well as analysis. Complete analysis and coding did not

begin until all observations and interviews had been conducted. Interview responses were re-read multiple times before coding began. Once thorough coding had been placed within each interview and observational protocol, repeated attempts were made to identify contradictions or additions of codes. At the time when repeated reads did not delete or add any codes on the observational protocols or interview responses, analysis began and frequency charts were created to assist in dissemination of data.

Since the observational data were collected prior to the interviews, the interview results added a layer of information to that previously gained from the observational data. This additional layer of data is indicated by the results section of interview results as separated from the results section of observational data. Table 12 indicates the frequency chart for coding used during the analysis of interviews. The coding system is the same as the coding used for analysis of the observational data even though the order is varied due to the ranking of frequencies for each code by interview responses versus observational data. The only difference is the additional column that provides the key strategy each teacher participant was asked to identify as the strategy responsible for their effectiveness as a teacher of literacy at the end of the interviews. There is a higher frequency number total in this column than the number of participants because some participants chose to give more than one answer as a key instructional strategy. Participants were not given the terminology in the codes at this point due to the fact that the codes were not created at the time of the interviews.

Table 12

Frequency Chart of Codes for Interviews Ranked by Total

Description	Key Strategy Identified by Teacher	Total	Grade 1-5 Total	Middle School Total	High School Total
Multiple Forms of Text		58	17	17	24
Student Lives / experience (inclusion of)	5	56	22	13	21
Motivation - student choice / interests	1	47	15	16	16
Motivation - social interaction		44	20	7	17
Choice in Material		43	23	13	7
Technology (use of)		42	22	11	9
Comprehension (direct instruction)		39	16	7	16
Motivation - engagement	1	38	15	12	11
Writing (direct instruction)		36	14	10	12
Student Dialogue (inclusion of)		35	17	4	14
Struggling Student Support		29	15	6	8
Writing - frequency		29	13	7	9
Writing - connect to reading		28	10	5	13
Vocabulary (direct instruction)		25	15	7	3
Phonics / Word Study (direct instruction)		21	17	3	1
Fluency (direct instruction)		17	10	3	4
Model of Strategies and/or Skills	1	17	6	2	9
Assessment (use of)		16	14	0	2
Cultural Background (inclusion of)		15	6	4	5
Motivation -feedback		14	7	3	4
Passion with Students	5	14	7	3	4
Repetition / Routine	3	11	2	6	3
Motivation - technology		10	8	1	1
Motivation - high expectations		10	6	2	2
Passion with Job	2	10	4	3	3
Motivation - movement (physical)		9	6	2	1
Grammar - Conventions (direct instruction)		8	2	4	2
Variety of Materials and/or Strategies	5	7	4	1	2
Integration of Skills		3	3	0	0

The following provide a summary of the results in terms of the research sub-questions identified earlier in the study.

1. What type of materials and texts are used to engage students with literacy skills? Are these materials mandated by the district or chosen by the teacher? How many opportunities to learn using multi-media materials are available to students in effective literacy classrooms?

As indicated by Table 12 there was a high frequency in interview responses to address these questions. Multiple forms of text, choice in material, and even the use of technology are all discussed frequently during the interview process. In regard to technology and its role in multi-media materials, one participant added, “I feel that I have to use this kind of technology in order to keep the interests of my students. They were born into a technology rich environment and I need to teach them in that world” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). All teacher participants had similar responses in regard to their choices in material. While all indicated that some materials were mandated and other materials were chosen, they felt they could easily bring in any materials needed to supplement as needed for their students. The materials that were mandated by the district included the core reading textbook or basal, Daily Grammar Practice resource, and Thinking Maps which is a set of eight graphic organizers for all content areas. The range of materials used that were selected by the teacher included multiple phonics resources suggested by Reading First, Saxon Phonics programs, on-line decodable texts downloaded by the teachers, and various teacher created power points. While smiling, one teacher said that in previous years, it was more difficult to bring in additional resources but now that they were given more freedom she was more excited to get to look for things to bring in for her students (Personal communication, February 24, 2011) One teacher participant responded, “I choose which materials to use and how to

use the materials to best fit my students' needs" (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). Another made a similar comment, "The basal is supplied by the county, but as long as the skills are taught, I can pick and choose the resources" (Personal communication, March 2, 2011).

2. What strategies do effective literacy teachers utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult texts?

Teacher participants gave multiple responses to identify the different strategies they each used for struggling students and support offered to assist them with skills. Most teachers indicated repetition of instruction, targeted skills by the individual students, and more direct instruction of texts, background knowledge, and vocabulary to provide more support and engagement for students during their time reading. Teachers indicated the use of one-on-one instruction for certain students as well as small group instruction that would serve students of similar ability ranges. Specific strategies used and explained by the teacher participants included PALS (a support system of partners within their classroom), RCRR (read, cover, retell, reread if necessary), graphic organizers, double entry journals, and TPCASTT (title, paraphrase, connotation, attitude, shifts, title, theme). The RCRR strategy was particularly useful for students who struggled and became overwhelmed by the amount of reading they needed to accomplish. The teacher would instruct them to use the size of their hand as their gauge for the amount of reading to do each time. They would start at the beginning of a passage and use their hand to indicate the amount of text to read. The students would read the amount of text, cover it back up, retell what they read to a partner, and if they could not remember what the passage was about, they would reread. A twelve grade teacher used

TPCASTT to analyze and discuss poetry. Using a double sided journal, students would take each section of TPCASTT and respond using textual evidence to support their analysis. For example, the students would predict the meaning of the poem using the title, paraphrase it after reading, identify meaning beyond the literal meaning using figurative language, identify the narrator's attitude toward the subject, note any shifts in tone or attitude, re-examine the title, and determine the theme of the entire passage. Providing these step by step ways to help support students gave them a more concrete manner to attack abstract thought and analysis.

3. What writing strategies do effective literacy teachers cite as useful during classroom instruction to assist students in connecting reading and writing?

Connecting writing and reading was another area of instruction that many teacher participants found to be important although it was not indicated as important during observations as it was during interviews. Of the 38 observations, there were eleven direct instruction writing lessons observed and only seven of those lessons observed made direct connections of writing and reading. However, during interviews, there were a total of 28 separate times when teachers indicated that connecting reading to writing was important to their instruction. Modeled writing by the teacher and read alouds were cited by teachers in the elementary grades to be most effective for making the explicit connection of reading and writing. Strategies cited by teachers of higher grade levels included writing a personal response to the literature, writing on topics and themes that were directly linked to the current reading text, and summary writing after reading separate sections of non-fiction texts.

4. How often and to what extent do effective literacy teachers encourage student writing in the classroom?

Daily writing and multiple writing opportunities beyond direct writing instruction were indicated by most participants. As stated earlier, of the 38 observations, there were 18 writing lessons viewed. A variety of writing lessons were observed from self-selected journal entries to full writing lessons focused on one area of instruction. For example, one teacher worked with her students to strengthen their introductions by answering the five “W’s” such as when, where, why, who, and what. Some teacher participants referenced full process writing pieces while also indicating a regular and consistent writing time up to three times a week. These teachers used their regular writing times each week to teach mini-lessons on specific writing skills such as introductions, word choice, or conclusions. At the same time, students would work on an assigned essay over a longer time period incorporating the mini-lesson topics into their larger paper. One teacher stressed the importance of writing in her room by stating, “I believe that if they write it, it goes beyond and into more areas of the brain than just talking about it. They have to write it in all areas. Everyday. Even if it is a different kind of writing. Not formal but at least everyday. Something” (Personal communication, March 3, 2011). Multiple teachers at the elementary grade levels discussed writing in all content areas beyond reading to include social studies, science, and math. Students would be required to write an informational essay around a topic being studied in their social studies class or writing the steps to solve a math problem. Another teacher participant explained the variety of regular writing in her classroom as being “more reflective, some are

collaborative, and some are more formal and analytical” (Personal communication, March 2, 2011).

5. How do effective literacy teachers engage students with multiple forms of texts?

Multiple forms of texts was the most frequent strategy indicated through interview responses. Most teachers discussed the need for multiple types of texts in reference to offering student support and engaging students during the lessons to increase access to texts. Many teachers discussed using magazines, newspapers, cartoons as text, television shows, poetry, song lyrics, and commercials as just a few of the types of texts used in the classroom that was beyond the normal textbook. One teacher even mentioned cereal boxes and the fact that in her classroom “reading was much more than reading words. It’s thinking. Even watching TV is reading in a way” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). The teacher participants referred to the need to find a variety of text formats to connect students with their abilities by using different leveled texts and their personal interests by using comic book and magazines in order to keep students motivated with different pieces of instruction.

6. Is there a consistency between standardized test scores and literacy practices among identified effective teachers?

To identify a positive alignment between standardized test scores and effective practices among teachers, the results would need to indicate that those teachers identified as effective through this study based in part by standardized test results practiced the same strategies identified through the research at the beginning of the study. The research indicated multiple repeated strategies identified as effective instructional

practices in literacy. Imbedded and integrated instruction (Wray & Medwell, 1998; Pressley et al., 1996; Langer, 2001) along with varied materials and lessons (Langer, 2001), modeled lessons (Wray & Medwell, 1998; Pressley et al., 1996), specific writing instruction (Pressley et al., 1996; NRP, 2000) social interaction (Wray & Medwell, 1998; Langer, 2001), and a focus on motivation and student engagement (Pressley et al., 1996; Pressley & Fingeret, 2007; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; Finn, 2009). Table 13 indicates that across observation and interviews, there is evidence through the amount of times these strategies were observed and discussed that support the importance placed on motivation through social interactions and student choices, modeling of skills, direct instruction, and varied lessons and material used by effective teachers of literacy. All of these areas of effective instruction were indicated as the top five strategies either by teacher identification, observations, or interviews through the study.

7. How are students directed to engage in dialogue during instructional time?

Teacher participants gave a variety of responses in regard to specific instructional uses for student dialogue. Students were observed discussing writing while working together to revise and edit their writing pieces. One classroom was observed during small group instruction where the teacher asked a question about the text being read and students discussed their thoughts on each section and posed additional questions to each other during the conversation. When asked how often student conversation and dialogue were used in the classroom, all participants indicated a minimum of daily. One teacher participant stated that she required students to talk every ten minutes using the term “bottoms up, heads in” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011) to indicate to students to lean in to their partner sitting directly across from them for discussion.

Teacher participants each use dialogue in different ways but many discussed having students talk to each other and repeating something just learned in their own words. Specific comments were “I don’t like quiet classrooms and encourage discussion often. The students sit at tables with the hope of them making meaning together” (Personal communication, March 6, 2011) and “Often the students can learn a lot from one another” (Personal communication, March 4, 2011). One teacher commented that she used student dialogue and discussion as much as she could stand it without the students losing control (Personal communication, February 25, 2011).

8. To what extent do effective literacy teachers include student lives and experiences during literacy instruction?

The importance of student lives and experiences was one of the most frequent responses given during the interviews among teacher participants. Many teacher participants discussed involving student lives in the reading and writing topics chosen from major events in their lives such as new siblings down to minor events such as getting glasses or a new pet. The frequency of including student lives into instruction was always indicated as a constant focus for their classrooms. One teacher participant became emotional during the interview over this specific question and stated, “It’s all about their lives and experiences” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). Another referred to addressing student experiences by stating, “If I can’t figure out a way to include students’ experiences, I usually can’t get them to care about the text. I have made comparisons between all aspects of their lives in effort to have them see the relevancy of our study” (Personal communication, March 6, 2011).

9. How do effective literacy teachers acknowledge student cultural backgrounds during literacy instruction?

Most teacher participants struggled with this question and acknowledged that they did not do a good job of acknowledging cultural backgrounds of students. Some teacher participants discussed the lack of diversity within the different cultures of their students. One teacher stated, “I have all white students in my classroom. In other schools, I did a better job, but here there is not a need to focus on that right now” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011) Other teacher participants revealed that their own lack of familiarity with different cultures hindered their ability and comfortableness with bringing them in to regular instruction. A few of the teacher participants stated they brought in as much literature on different cultures as possible and treated each one with respect. One teacher participant related cultural backgrounds to student lives and experiences by stating “All students’ contributions are valid in my classroom. The contributions may or may not be relevant or appropriate to the current topic, but they are valid. The cultural backgrounds aren’t too diverse in my classroom, but all are celebrated” (Personal communication, March 6, 2011). Another teacher participant discussed having students take the lead in this area and bring in different cultural backgrounds they were interested in studying. One student was interested in Italy so she started bringing in different books on Italy and discussing the similarities. She indicated that when they bring in the cultures they want to study, she felt they could “unlock the cultures and literature from the cultures” (Personal communication, March 3, 2011). Another teacher stated that she was embarrassed to admit her lack of strength in this area. She said that she made sure to bring in literature from the few cultures represented in her

room but did not go beyond those few. These discussions were mainly around Christmas where she brought in the ways different cultures celebrate that time.

10. What role do current technology trends play in the classroom of effective literacy teachers?

The responses from interviews around the use of technology indicated a high frequency of use but low importance during discussion. Teacher participants ranged in response from “Technology plays a big role in my classroom and I consider it a necessary tool” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011), “huge” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011), “I feel that the students are much more engaged and in focus when I can pull in technology” (Personal communication, March 2, 2011), “supportive” (Personal communication, February 24, 2011), “minimal – I use it but it is not what I would contribute to student achievement” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011), “not a lot, but if I had more computers I would do more. They may not boost scores more, but I could use technology for other things” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011), “some but not much at all if any. I don’t like technology.” (Personal communication, March 4, 2011), “Honestly, technology trends don’t affect my classroom too much. When something seems able to aid instruction, I’m glad to bring it in to the classroom but not just because it is the latest and greatest thing. In fact, there are some trends that I’d like to have in my classroom but due to monetary constraints they are not an option” (Personal communication, March 6, 2011). One teacher participant gave multiple examples of how technology is used in her classroom and then concluded with “My list will continue as long as technology continues to advance” (Personal communication, March 2, 2011). In regard to technology and its use in the classroom as

an effective strategy for literacy, one teacher participant had the following to say “I am a digital immigrant, not a digital native. My students laugh at me because I say that a lot. I tell them I am from the Pac Man Generation. I allow my students to see that struggle and I allow them to help me. I consider myself a lifelong learner and I am constantly trying to find ways to incorporate technology because it is a way of life for the students I have now” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011).

Summary

At the end of each interview, teacher participants were asked to identify what strategy or instructional technique they thought made them stand out above the other teachers in the district as being the most effective in the area of literacy. In response to this question, one teacher stated, “Whatever they need, I will do” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). Another teacher responded with, “UGH...this is hard! As I said, it really takes a combination of strategies” (Personal communication, March 2, 2011). A sixth grade teacher gave her response as “I constantly review key concepts and never let it die” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011).

These responses indicated strategies that were different according to the ranking of frequency for instructional strategies discussed throughout the interviews. It is possible that when the teachers were asked to narrow down the one or two strategies they most attribute to student success, it was more difficult than discussing all of the strategies they use since each participant was able to discuss multiple instructional practices used regularly in the classrooms. Most participants were humbled and struggled to identify the one thing they felt to contribute the most to student achievement in literacy in their classroom. Table 13 indicates the comparison of the top five pieces of instructional

strategies evidenced by observations and interviews. It also indicates the frequency with which the teacher participants indicated specific key instructional strategies that contributed to student success in literacy skills.

As evident from Table 13, the responses from the interview questions and observations did not indicate the same frequency of importance as the key instructional strategy identified from each participant when asked to target and narrow down the strategies of most importance. Some participants could not narrow it down to one and gave two responses. Some participants verbally identified one, but described a different strategy. For example, one participant said that the key instructional strategy to help students grow as literacy learners is motivation. However, her discussion to support her choice focused on her love of the students and how important they were to her indicating a strong sense of passion for her students. Another participant indicated the key instructional strategy for him was routine and repetition. However, he supported his choice by talking about his love of the job and the amount of experience he had that helped him target student needs, watch them grow, and then get the opportunity to do it again the next day indicating the importance of his passion for his job.

Table 13

Comparison of Key Instructional Strategies Identified Through Observations, Interviews, and Specific Strategy Indicated by Each Teacher Participant

Description	Key Strategy Identified by Teacher (Frequency)	Total by Observations (Ranked)	Total by Interviews (Ranked)
Multiple Forms of Text			#1
Student Lives / experience (inclusion of)	5		#2
Motivation - student choice / interests	1		#3
Motivation - social interaction		#3	#4

Choice in Material		#5
Technology (use of)		
Comprehension (direct instruction)		#2
Motivation - engagement	1	
Writing (direct instruction)		
Student Dialogue (inclusion of)		#1
Struggling Student Support		
Writing - frequency		
Writing - connect to reading		
Vocabulary (direct instruction)		
Phonics / Word Study (direct instruction)		#4
Fluency (direct instruction)		
Model of Strategies and/or Skills	1	#5
Assessment (use of)		
Cultural Background (inclusion of)		
Motivation -feedback		
Passion with Students	5	
Repetition / Routine	3	
Motivation - technology		
Motivation - high expectations		
Passion with Job	2	
Motivation - movement (physical)		
Grammar - Conventions (direct instruction)		
Variety of Materials and/or Strategies	5	
Integration of Skills		

The separate columns indicate the frequency ranking for observations and interviews indicating the top five strategies after coding and analysis. The first column in Table 13 indicates the responses of teachers when asked which strategy they felt made them more effective than other teachers in the area of literacy. It is important to note the differences in strategies according to the method of data collection. While all strategies on the chart can be identified through research, there are some that seem more frequently used by the effective teachers of literacy identified in this study.

After analyzing assessment data and recommendation from school personnel, teachers who emerged as consistently effective were observed and interviewed to establish instructional patterns across numerous instructional grade levels. In the

following chapter, the results of this data collection presented throughout chapter 4 will be discussed and analyzed.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The final chapter of the study will discuss the results presented in chapter four. After a brief summary of the background, problem statement and purpose, and methodology, results will be discussed and analyzed through the lens of the research questions and literature identified in chapters one and two. Final conclusions will be argued as well as recommendations for further study, implications for future research and for utilizing the results of the study, and closing remarks in regard to the study.

Identifying specific instructional strategies and practices of effective literacy teachers was the aim and focus throughout this study. Using the theoretical framework of critical theory and the instructional implications from John Dewey, Louise Rosenblatt, Paulo Freire, Lev Vygotsky, and M. M. Bahktin, this study proceeded with a concentration on student experiences, text interactions, cultural perspectives, individual interests, critical inquiry, and dialogue among students. The teachers of today are faced with many challenges to identifying student interests in order to provide instruction that engages them around text interaction. Teachers are given mandated materials along with mandated instructional methods that often limits their use of materials or methods that will assist their students with building critical literacy abilities to transcend stereotypical social domination and become leaders in critical inquiry of the world around them. By identifying effective teachers of literacy and then finding the key instructional practices they use regularly can provide much needed help and suggestions to all teachers as they strive to make improvements with student learning.

Problem Statement and Purpose

There have been many studies completed to identify the most effective strategies used by successful teachers. Research has determined some of the most valuable classroom practices to increase student achievement in the areas of reading and writing. These studies and research tend to isolate grade levels and specific areas of literacy instruction to vocabulary, comprehension, phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, and writing. The goal of this study was to look through multiple years of assessment data and identify teachers of grade levels 1 through 12 who consistently increased student achievement in different areas of literacy or consistently held higher successful percentages of student achievement than other teachers within the same district. In order to support the assessment data, recommendations were also requested from informed school personnel for the names of teachers they felt were more effective in the area of literacy instruction than the other teachers in their building. Once the teachers were identified and supported as effective teachers of literacy through assessment data and school personnel recommendations, the researcher completed multiple observations and interviews to ascertain the specific strategies used by the teachers for increasing student achievement in the area of literacy. Unlike other studies previously mentioned and discussed in chapters one and two, this study looked at literacy from broad terms to include writing, reading, and comprehension skills as well as student experiences and interactions with multiple texts and dialogue with their peers. Another difference in this study than other previously completed studies was the focus on multiple grade ranges rather than remaining centered on more narrow ranges of grade levels.

Data Collection

There were two main parts of data collection within this study. The first piece was to identify teachers as effective in the area of literacy instruction. In order to identify effective teachers of literacy, qualitative and quantitative data were collected.

Identifying Effective Teachers of Literacy

Initially, it was my perspective that school personnel would recommend teachers with the highest assessment measures. The school personnel who gave their perspective on effective teachers in the study were in positions at each school that had access to the assessment measures and scores for each teacher in their building. As evident in the sample of responses identified in Table 6, there were school personnel who recommended teachers as effective who did not have consistently high assessment measures. There were also teachers who had consistently high assessment measures for multiple assessments and yet were not recommended by school personnel. While this contradiction did not hinder the progression of the study by limiting the number of teacher participants who had high assessment scores as well as recommendations from school personnel, it does indicate a concern as to the reliability of a single measure such as school personnel recommendations to identify teachers as effective within a school system as is often used in school districts.

The district being used in the study uses an evaluation tool completed by a building administrator once or twice each year to determine if a teacher is effective or not. It is interesting to note, that the school personnel and administrators did not always choose teachers with the highest assessment scores as the most effective in their building. The rate of accuracy for a positive match of those teachers identified as effective through

school recommendations and high assessment data is less than fifty percent. It is possible that those administrators who participated in the study were responding to teachers who are seen as passive and more agreeable than other teachers who may have higher assessment scores. It could be that the school personnel do not hold the assessment scores as a critical component of teacher effectiveness and prefer to focus on the perspective of parents, colleagues, those teachers willing to participate on committees, and those who argue policy the least. These results lead to the manner in which education can become politically driven rather than driven by evidence based assumptions of effective behaviors through student achievement and progress. It is possible that the school personnel are motivated by their choices using more bias, personal gain, and monetary perspectives.

The quantitative portion of identifying effective teachers looked at multiple pieces of assessment data through multiple year lenses. Looking at the data over multiple years gave evidence of teachers who have a pattern of success with high assessment scores. While multiple assessment measures helped give different views of literacy instruction to include writing, comprehension, language arts, and decoding, the measures were analyzed in various ways from growth patterns to class percentages highlighting different teachers with each measure.

Identifying Instructional Strategies Used by Effective Teachers of Literacy

The second main part of data collection to the study was observing teachers using the observational protocol found in Appendix D. The protocol focused on pieces of instruction previously identified as effective through historical and current research

presented in chapter two. Teachers were observed for direct instructional strategies that promoted word study, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, assessment, and writing.

The final data collection part of the study came through interviews with each teacher participant. Teachers were asked questions given to them prior to the interview to engage the teachers in a discussion that revealed the instructional decisions made in their classrooms that promote student achievement in literacy.

Limitations

Looking within a single district can give specific information on effective literacy practices under similar constraints of policy, materials, and technological resources.

Although this did provide a level playing field for the teachers, it could be viewed as a limitation that narrows the possibilities of variety in instructional strategies. This could also be considered a point of recommendation for further study and broadening of the research. For the purpose of this study, the decision to learn from effective teachers in a single district was purposeful and necessary to assist in isolating instructional strategies that can be shared with other teachers under the awareness that they are practiced regularly within similar expectations of instruction and availability of resources.

However, by using the single district, the strategies were also limited by the scope of materials and technological resources available. Teachers indicated the need for more technological resources from which to engage students and build upon their interests.

This district is limited by present financial constraints to support the technological advances being made and to stay current with the latest tools and resources.

An additional limitation of the study was found with the assessment data. There were grade levels that had more assessment measures than others giving some teachers

more of a chance to become recognized as effective and others less of a chance to be included in the study. This limitation often had the tendency to cause more harm than good with certain grade levels that had multiple assessment measures. For example, a teacher may have been effective in one assessment measure but not in an additional measure; therefore, they were not asked to participate in the study. The question remains for whether or not these teachers are effective simply because they did not have consistently high assessment scores. It is possible that the teachers have a particular strength that is highlighted in one assessment and not in another. For those teachers with high CRCT scores but lower DIBELS / STEEP scores, it could indicate that fluency instruction is not an area of focus in her classroom where the skills assessed by CRCT are more of a focus for her. When looking at CRCT scores, there was one teacher who increased her students' abilities in reading by the same average in which her students declined in their abilities with English language arts. Once the reading and English language arts growth averages were combined, the results demonstrated that the teacher made no gains in student achievement on CRCT. Subsequently, she was not included in the pool of teachers identified as effective using assessment data. This teacher may need to use her reading instruction to demonstrate the connection of language skills to reading to help support the English language arts scores and bring them closer to her reading scores.

Some of the assessment measures were unable to provide measures of growth for teachers. The assessment results from DIBELS / STEEP and CRCT provided pre and post assessment averages giving teachers a measure of growth average. This growth model indicates the abilities of the teachers to increase student achievement during the

time they are in their classrooms. This measure of growth also eliminates the tendency for teachers of higher ability students to have higher averages at the end of the year and teachers of lower ability students to have lower averages at the end of the year since it looks at how much each student grew in that particular measure of literacy. In a sense, all teachers were put on a level playing field in regard to their assessment data. Since a measure of growth was not included in all assessment measures, the data from the assessments with this limitation could not account for varying types of student populations within the classrooms. Some teachers whose classroom consisted of lower achieving students may be effective at increasing student achievement but since students enter that year already below their peers, the comparative measures may place the teacher as less effective. Alternately, teachers who teach high achieving or gifted and talented populations may present as highly effective since the students already exude higher test scores.

Another weakness evident in the study is with the limitation of identifying teachers who were new to the district involved or those who had fewer years of experience than needed for complete data collection. These teachers did not become identified as effective due to the lack of multiple years of consistent data available. It is possible that some of these teachers are highly effective with increasing student abilities in the area of literacy but were not included in the study due to the limitation of inadequate assessment data available. There were also veteran teachers with many years of experience in the classroom that were not included in the study because they were not teaching in the same district for an adequate number of years to have ample assessment

data through local assessment measures. These teachers may have been more effective than some who participated in the study.

A final limitation that was also a strength of the study was the researcher relationships with the teacher participants. Because of the relationship, the researcher was able to gain information from participants in a relaxed and comfortable manner. The teacher participants trusted the researcher and knew their responses needed to be as accurate as possible since the researcher visits classrooms on a regular basis. The limitation to the relationship was the fact that since teachers were aware of the researcher's role in the district as central office personnel, some were hesitant to indicate any negativity toward mandated resources or methods of instruction.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The results from the observations and interviews gave a range of responses for identifying instructional strategies utilized by effective teachers of literacy. In fact, the ranking of strategies only demonstrated a couple of similarities as noted in Table 13. One of the areas of similarity was motivation through social interaction. A possible reason for this discrepancy is due to the focus difference for observations versus interviews. The observations identified the instructional practices from a viewpoint of observable direct instruction. The interviews revealed background information and choices made by the teachers as to the rationale for decisions of materials and direct instructional strategies. While both methods for collecting information were needed, they both indicated slight deviations from each other. This provided more evidence for the areas of effective practices as well as the purpose behind each instructional practice.

The information gained from the use of both observations and interviews confirmed the use of each instructional strategy as intentional versus accidental coincidence. In most cases, these confirmations indicated a strong link between the instructional strategies practiced by the teacher participants and the effective practices found in research. However, there were some cases where the information gained from interviews did not match strategies observed in the classrooms. For example, a first grade teacher expressed the need for a variety of materials and strategies in her classroom when there were very limited varieties of material observed in her classroom over three different observations. Another teacher discussed the importance of writing in her classroom, yet there was no writing instruction observed. However, there were also teachers who were reluctant to discuss as many wide spread effective strategies as were observed in the classrooms. Those teachers did not feel as if they did anything beyond any other teacher and just a few short observations proved otherwise. For example, one ninth grade teacher did not elaborate on any word study strategies to support students who struggled with text. However, in her classroom, there were many examples and demonstrations of supported learning for students through hands-on interactive word study using pictures and real world relationships that related to student experiences and lives to build understanding and discussion of important words. She had students act out the words while they tried to relate the words to something they already knew about in their own lives. In less than ten minutes of observation, the teacher had already taught a language lesson, word study, vocabulary, and was already starting a novel study with small groups of students all around the room.

Focus Research Questions

- What are key instructional strategies effective literacy teachers practice in their classrooms?

While Table 13 indicates a slight discrepancy in the frequency of each instructional strategy across the observations and interviews, each code was created from the responses around both. The teachers were not given the list of codes nor did they discuss the list prior to giving their responses. Since the codes were created from the responses, it is evident that effective teachers use a variety of instructional approaches with their students. The responses given by teachers correspond with the effective practices presented in chapters one and two of the study. Motivation and engagement of students (Pressley & Fingeret, 2007; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; Finn, 2009; NCTE, 2006; Bruner, 1996), acknowledgement of student differences (McKenna & Robinson, 2002; Gallagher, 2009; Moore et.al, 1999; Finn, 2009), and direct instruction of specific skills in literacy (Langer, 2001; Allington & Cunningham, 2002; NRP, 2000) are all indicators of effective instructional practices presented through research as well as denoted through observational and interview responses.

- Which of these strategies do they most attribute to student success, abilities, and engagement with texts to critically analyze, make personal connections, and social interactions among texts?

There were many instructional practices identified as effective in increasing student achievement in literacy through the research as well as supported by observational and interview responses. Narrowing down the key strategy denoted by teachers was more difficult for them than I had anticipated. Most of the participants

indicated that they did not believe the student success could be attributed to one strategy or instructional practice used regularly in their classrooms. They felt it was a combination of strategies in order to target student needs, experiences, and varying interest levels. When looking through the observations and interview responses, the variety and integration of strategies is supported by the frequency teachers discussed them as well as the numerous strategies observed in the classrooms.

Sub-questions

1. What type of materials and texts are used to engage students with literacy skills? Are these materials mandated by the district or chosen by the teacher? How many opportunities to learn using multi-media materials are available to students in effective literacy classrooms?

The overwhelming response to the first question was a variety of materials. Teachers had a difficult time listing all of the materials used in their classrooms and would frequently return to the question throughout the interview by adding different materials and texts to the list. All teacher participants said they had choices in their supplemental materials and were given freedom with the core materials that were mandated by the district. Most of the teacher participants indicated some hesitation with the term multi-media, but expressed the desire to provide more varied resources for students to engage. Funding and a lack of availability to multi-media materials were cited as main reasons to the teachers' lack of abilities to provide more opportunities for their students with multi-media materials.

2. What strategies do effective literacy teachers utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult texts?

The responses given through interviews and activities observed in the classrooms indicated some differences in this area among grade level ranges. In grade levels 1-5 the main strategy discussed was with materials by using leveled texts appropriate to student abilities and interests. The responses by teachers representing grade levels 6-12 were more along the lines of strategies to support the students rather than material and text differences. The teacher participants referenced strategies such as reading the text to the students, breaking the text up into smaller chunks, reading questions before reading passages for assessments, RCRR (read, cover, retell, reread if necessary), building background knowledge, peer coaching, individual assistance, and summarizing techniques. One teacher indicated in her interview that she didn't think she really did anything different for students who struggled even though she knew she should. However, during multiple observations, it was evident that she supports students through a variety of specific strategies as needed and that helping struggling students was very natural to her. The student assistance as needed was so imbedded in her practices that she didn't think she did anything specific at all.

3. What writing strategies do effective literacy teachers cite as useful during classroom instruction to assist students in connecting reading and writing?

The range of responses to identify specific writing strategies used by effective teachers was diverse. All teachers discussed using some type of graphic organizer to help students organize their thoughts. Modeled writing, summary writing, and shared writing with partners or groups was also mentioned as helpful when connecting writing to the reading. Teachers indicated the importance of providing opportunities for students to write self-selected pieces in addition to prompts and writing assignments that are more

directed. One teacher mentioned doing a recent study of an article and presentation by Robert Probst that helped her identify the importance of allowing students to connect to reading and writing from their own worlds through Reader Response theory (Personal communication, March 2, 2011). Even though this teacher did not mention Louise Rosenblatt, I was excited to hear the connection of the theoretical perspective of student interaction with texts (Rosenblatt, 1988).

4. How often and to what extent do effective literacy teachers encourage student writing in the classroom?

All teachers emphasized the importance of writing frequency although for different purposes in their classrooms. The frequency of writing for the classrooms was daily at a minimum. The following represent the numerous different responses in terms of the frequency to writing in the classroom: “We teach writing each week” (Personal communication, March 6, 2011), “as much as we can without losing control” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011), “Daily when possible, but at least three times a week” (Personal communication, March 2, 2011), “multiple times each day” (Personal communication, February 24, 2011), “everyday, all during the day and not just when I’m teaching writing” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). They specified the writing frequency included writing in all areas of learning to include responses to literature, content area writing, and personal reflections of lessons learned.

While all teachers indicated that writing was important through the interviews, it was not observed as frequently as discussed. Out of the 38 observations, there were only 11 observations that included some type of writing lesson whether it was a full writing lesson, mini-lesson, content area writing, or a response to literature. This disconnect

leads me to believe that teachers believe in the power of writing but also feel it is one of the pieces of instruction that is time consuming and can be left off if needed. It could be that teachers felt they needed to be up in front of the class teaching during the observation and working with students while they were writing may not be something they wanted the observer to see.

Although the writing frequency was indicated as critical to all teacher participants, it was the extent and depth of the writing that provided the variety as indicated in the multiple types of writing observed and discussed in interviews. Some teachers used writing as a deep connection to reading while others used a more informal daily journal.

5. How do effective literacy teachers engage students with multiple forms of texts?

Teacher participants all revealed the importance of using multiple forms of texts to help engage students with learning. They discussed the use of narrative and informational texts as well as cartoons, poetry, newspapers, magazines, movies, music, commercials, and advertisements to assist in teaching students how to analyze and connect to multiple types of perspectives and writing styles. One teacher of third grade had students look through the newspaper for different sentences and statements. The students had to identify if the statement or sentence was a fact or an opinion and support their choice using two to three sentences. Another teacher of older students had his students watch an episode of the *Tom and Jerry* cartoon. Since the cartoon does not include dialogue, he had his students write the conversation between characters. He also instructed them to tell about the episode from Tom's perspective during one writing

opportunity and from Jerry's perspective on another day. His reflection of this activity was that he had never seen his students so interested and excited to write. They actually wanted to write each day. He was even more surprised when his lower level students started writing two to three pages each day when before the inclusion of the cartoon, he couldn't get them to write a complete paragraph.

6. Is there a consistency between standardized test scores and literacy practices among identified effective teachers?

While there were teachers whose assessment scores were not consistent enough across all data points causing them to be excluded from the study, the teachers who participated in the study all had consistently high standardized test scores and exemplified effective strategies as identified by the research discussed in chapters one and two of the study. The results indicate a strong alignment between standardized test scores and the practices of effective literacy teachers. Since the study utilized multiple assessment scores with the addition of school personnel recommendations, the teachers chosen can be identified as effective through all measures. Through the observational data and interview data, the strategies used by these teachers can be determined effective strategies. The strategies identified by the teachers in the study can also be found in the research discussed in chapters one and two.

7. How are students directed to engage in dialogue during instructional time?

The teacher participants did not always indicate specific ways in which students were instructed to participate in dialogue in the classrooms, but during observations, it was evident that student dialogue is used frequently in the classrooms. One teacher indicated that she stops every few minutes to instruct students to "bottoms up, heads in"

(Personal communication, February 25, 2011) which is the indicator to get with their partners and discuss or retell what they just learned. During one observation of a high school teacher, the students were analyzing a poem using the TPCASTT (title, paraphrase, connotation, attitude, shifts, title, theme) graphic organizer. When discussing the narrator's shift in tone and attitude toward the subject, the students became engaged in a discussion and debate around the meaning of the passage. They discussed the possibilities of the man in the poem being the husband, a lover, a mirage, or just a past memory. During the conversation, the teacher remained silent other than to add thoughts from her other classes to add additional perspectives and thoughts. While all classrooms indicated frequent student dialogue, the extent and frequency of the dialogue varied from explicit directives to less formal and understood implications of discussion.

8. To what extent do effective literacy teachers include student lives and experiences during literacy instruction?

A critical and recurring theme throughout the responses to all questions during the interviews was the importance of student interests, experiences, and lives in instruction. The inclusion of student lives and experiences during instruction ranked as the second highest effective strategy according to the frequency of discussions during the interviews. It was also identified five times out of the fourteen participants as the most critical strategy to contribute to their effectiveness. The frequency number was 56 with the highest number of 58 attributed to multiple forms of texts. Interestingly, the highest frequency number for any strategy in the observations was 28. All teachers involved in the study had evidence of acknowledging student lives through conversations with students, text selections, and activity choices for students as well as in the roles students

played in many of the decisions made in the classrooms. One teacher talked about the importance of talking with the students to find out what their interests are and to make sure the books she chose to read had similar experiences. She said the kids loved seeing themselves in the stories whether it was about getting new glasses, a new sibling, losing a tooth, or playing outside at recess. It was important to her to make sure that they learned around things that were happening to her kids (Personal communication, February 25, 2011).

9. How do effective literacy teachers acknowledge student cultural backgrounds during literacy instruction?

Most of the teacher participants in this study indicated the inclusion of student cultural backgrounds as a weakness for them. Two of the teachers asked for clarification as to what I meant by ‘cultural backgrounds’ for the students. This question could have been problematic for some of the teachers indicating that the information gained is inaccurate or slightly skewed. The main strategy described by the teachers to include cultural backgrounds was through stories and texts that discuss different ethnic cultures or are centralized around a specific ethnic culture. One consideration for the lack of discussion with teachers around cultural background could lie in the lack of diversity in the district under study. The population in the district under study is 76% white and 1% Hispanic on average. While this does indicate a strong minority population, the teachers may be accustomed to the ratio of ethnic diversity and do not view the minority population as significant enough to alter text selection or instruction around a variety of cultures. This narrow scope of cultural backgrounds could lead to a lack of focus for

teachers on the need to highlight and include different cultures into regular classroom instruction.

Another possible indication of the lower frequency for culturally diverse instruction is in the terminology. Many teachers indicated the only view of culture as ethnic and did not elaborate around culture as race, religious, or even gender. Including an interview question that was more specific to the multiple types of culture could have produced different results.

10. What role does current technology trends play in the classroom of effective literacy teachers?

Technology seems to be something that the teacher participants do not completely agree upon. Some feel it is very important, others do not. Each teacher has one to three computers in their classrooms. One of the computers is connected to their Interwrite system. Each school has a computer lab and a classroom set of student responders (clickers) available for students to check out and schedule to use as needed. One teacher stated she just doesn't have time to learn the new technology ways of teaching and is not willing to waste her students' time learning to try and figure it out. She has an Interwrite system installed in her classroom, but continues to use the over-head projector. She said the students try to teach her things with her computer and she is glad they are patient with her, but she did not see the importance of technology to her students' success. Another teacher said if it wasn't for technology, she would never be able to get students involved with learning or catch their attention. This teacher also has an Interwrite system and pulls a variety of stories and animated text passages from the internet for students to watch while reading. She uses the large screen and computer along with the student response

system (clickers) for discussion during an assessment. After each question with animation is completed and answered by all students, the students discuss their responses before moving on to the next question. This gives students immediate feedback as well as the opportunity to discuss with others during an assessment to strengthen their internalization of the skill.

Conclusions

Consistent with the research presented in chapters one and two of the study, the effective teachers of literacy use a variety of instructional practices to support student learning and achievement. Student motivation and engagement were viewed as critical components to effective instructional practices. Teachers engage students and increase their motivation by bringing in text types that relate to students' interests, experiences, and backgrounds. Diversity among students is reflected among the diversity of materials and strategies used within each classroom. The teacher participants selected in the study also engage in regular direct instruction of specific skills such as vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing strategies through the use of a variety of lessons and activities.

As indicated in chapter one, my goal was to find teachers that were consistently inconsistent with their instructional practices. I hoped to find teachers that used multiple texts and text types that brought in student experiences, background, and cultures to the table of learning literacy skills. After conducting interviews with the teacher participants, it became evident that there was not a single instructional strategy or resource used by all effective teachers identified. This is one of the explanations for why the items identified as effective varied from observational results to interview results. Each teacher uses an

assortment of literature, materials, resources, and strategies to engage students and motivate them to think critically and question the world around them. One teacher participant specifically commented, “I don’t reuse anything. My students are different and I have to use different things to keep them interested” (Personal communication, March 3, 2011).

John Dewey focused his research around student experience and the importance of integrating meaningful and purposeful experiences through which learning takes place (Dewey, 1938). The teachers who participated in this study provided evidence of instructional strategies centered on student interests and lives from which to build meaningful opportunities and experiences that can help guide genuine learning. Teachers connect reading and writing experiences that have a genuine purpose that is relevant to their lives rather than literacy instruction that is mechanical and boring (Vygotsky, 1978). These interactions around texts can help strengthen student engagement and learning with literacy skills.

While not specifically contradictory to the research presented in chapters one and two, the findings did represent some deviations from a few of the key points of effective practices identified earlier. The deviations from the research could be due to restrictions or limitations beyond the control of the teachers identified in the study. One specific difference was the importance of technology use in the classrooms. Some of the teachers indicated that technology use was very important while others said they use it frequently but it is not as important as other strategies they use to engage students. The general consensus from the teachers was that if they had more technological resources available, there would be an improvement in student interest with lessons that could assist

engagement with learning. This indicates that effective use of technology is more of a means to an end or the path to engage and motivate students therefore increasing their learning potential. Unfortunately, the district in which the study was conducted is limited with current technological resources; therefore, twenty-first century literacies did not play a large role in the identification of effective teachers of literacy. It is possible that further professional development could be used to assist teachers in providing additional technologically focused lessons that would continue to encourage motivation and engagement for students.

An additional deviation from the previously mentioned effective strategies is the use of assessments to guide instruction. Only two teacher participants indicated the regular use of assessments to guide their instruction for specific student needs. There were no assessment measures viewed in the classrooms during observations. However, the teachers rarely engage in assessment measures when they are being observed by someone from central office so this may have altered the accuracy of the observed use of assessments as regular elements in the classrooms of effective teachers of literacy. Also, it is possible that the inclusion of interview questions related specific to assessment use that is formal as well as informal in the classroom may have produced results to indicate assessment as more meaningful to instruction than indicated in the present results.

Passion and motivation are difficult pieces to define for research purposes. Originally, motivation was the only abstract strategy mentioned in the study because it repeatedly appeared in the research. Coding was not created to include passion until analysis and interpretation had begun of the completed observations and interviews. Several teacher participants identified passion for their students and their jobs as central

components to their teaching and the main cause for their students' success. Once passion was used as a separate instructional strategy, additional review of all interviews revealed a recurring theme of passion through many responses. For the purpose of this study, a contextual definition of passion is necessary. Passion is defined as an intense desire, excitement, and appreciation for teaching and working with students. When teachers made comments such as, "It's all about the students and their lives" (Personal communication, February 25, 2011) and "I like my kids and I love my job" (Personal communication, February 25, 2011) the term passion is implied. At any point during interviews where the teacher indicated an excitement or appreciation for their students or their job, passion was coded and analyzed throughout the response.

Questions remain as to the necessity of certain strategies over others and the affect they have on student achievement. There are many strategies and practices identified from the data collection of effective teachers of literacy. The teachers indicated that student motivation was critical, direct instruction of skills was needed, writing was needed on a regular basis, and including student lives and experiences not only helped keep students engaged but also supported their background knowledge which assisted their understanding. Not indicated as a critical strategy was technology and assessment use. One teacher was highly recommended by school personnel as well as student scores and yet stated that she rarely uses technology to assist her teaching. Since assessment use was not observed or specifically discussed during interviews, it is difficult to determine if the teachers would view it as a critical component of their instruction. Teachers usually view assessment as a test given at the end of the year or a unit of study rather than an instructional tool. Further study and analysis is needed on effective teacher use of

assessment as well as use of technology for instructional purposes. It would be important to determine if some or any of these strategies recognized could be eliminated from the regular classroom practices while student achievement and success remain. Would it be possible to remove any use of assessment or technology and still have student scores that rise above others? It is my opinion that these teachers naturally imbed assessment even though they don't identify it as such. For example, when teachers listen to students read a story and interact with the students to support student understanding, they are using more informal assessment measures to determine if the student is successful or if more support is needed. As for the use of technology, I feel that some teachers use technology to engage students and motivate them. If another teacher who is uncomfortable with technology can motivate and engage students in other ways, the technology focus may not be as critical for her to a certain point. However, as students learn more and become more advanced in their skills, to hinder their technology skills by keeping it from the classroom can only hinder their full development in such a technologically developing world.

Recommendations

There are steps that can be taken to further this research and continue digging deeper into the identification of effective teachers of literacy as well as identifying the instructional practices utilized on a regular basis to increase student achievement and abilities with literacy skills. These steps became evident as the study progressed and especially during analysis of the data collection.

An important piece of information emerged from the data collection for effective teachers that would need to be considered if replicating this study. While the majority of

assessment data and recommendations matched for teachers, there were some inconsistencies where teachers were recommended who did not have consistently high assessment scores as well as teachers with consistently high scores who were not recommended. One recommendation would be to take a deeper look at the consistency between recommendations and assessment data. Conducting additional interviews with school personnel as to their reasons for choosing teachers as effective when assessment data did not support the decisions could reveal pertinent information to support teachers in their efforts to increase student achievement in their classrooms. It is possible that the school personnel would not view the assessment data as a critical piece of identification for effective teachers. They may look at other sources of data not evident through the results of major assessments. Some of these sources of data could include parental perspectives, colleague relationships, working ethics, and daily student interactions to aid in determining the success of their teachers. It is possible that some school personnel may have chosen teachers that have fewer office referrals which could indicate stronger classroom management. Some school personnel may have chosen teachers based on how many committees they volunteer to serve or who complain about policies the least.

One key step to consider as an important recommendation would be to compare the information gained throughout this study of effective teachers to teachers who are not identified as effective. By comparing the practices of identified effective teachers with those seen as ineffective, the researcher would have more specific pieces of instruction that differ and separate the instructional practices as effective from ineffective. While comparing the strategies practiced by those teachers who are identified as effective as well as ineffective, an additional follow-up recommendation would be to conduct post

analysis interviews with the participants. During post analysis interviews, the researcher would have a better opportunity to ask questions around the larger perspective of instructional strategies chosen by teachers. For example, researchers could begin to question why teachers make the instructional decisions of different materials and strategies as well as where they learned about the effective practices to put them in place with their students. These responses could give insight into effective professional development opportunities, conferences, or trainings.

An additional recommendation would be to continue data collection over a longer period of time to track effective teachers and identify their ability to remain effective in terms of assessment measures as well as school personnel recommendations. Using data collection over a period of two to three years was a good way to identify a pattern for many teachers, but following the patterns of success beyond the qualitative data collection would also be interesting to document. While following their assessment measures, it would be important to continue conversations and observations with them as to the instructional practices and decisions regarding these practices in their classrooms.

Along the same lines as continuing the study for a longer period of time to establish consistent instructional strategies with prolonged existence would be to replicate the study in multiple systems across multiple states. It is likely that the conclusions found among the effective teachers of this district would mirror those found in other districts with similar resources and populations. However, it would be possible to find different results with systems or districts with varying resources or more advanced technological capabilities.

A final yet critical recommendation would be the inclusion of all literacy teachers regardless of class size or abilities. Since assessment data collection relied heavily on class and group averages, a purposeful decision was made to exclude classrooms with less than ten students to increase the reliability of the numerical averages. However, this decision also eliminated many teachers of special education students whose class sizes do not regularly exceed ten students. It became evident through the questionnaire results that many school personnel valued their special education teachers as more effective than their regular education teachers in multiple buildings. Recognizing ways to include these teachers in the study could have been beneficial to the outcomes and results.

Implications

There are important implications that emerged to suggest possibilities beyond the confinements within this limited study. It would be important for this district to continue looking toward successfully identifying effective teachers of literacy as well as other content areas. The schools within this district can analyze their assessment data carefully to consider a growth model application of assessment data that allows teachers to demonstrate their abilities to help students progress beyond the limits of grade level expectations and deepen their understanding of the content within each course as well as their understanding of the world around them. Growth models have the potential to assist in revealing a teacher's abilities to improve student learning from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Successfully identifying effective teachers can help schools highlight instructional strategies that can continue to increase student learning. Other teachers within the building or within the school system can observe and learn from teachers who have the ability to promote growth with student achievement.

Validating the use of effective instructional strategies through this study confirmed the need to assist teachers in utilizing these strategies as frequently as possible. Professional development opportunities for teachers to observe other effective teachers and discuss effective strategies are needed to help build the variety of strategies teachers are comfortable using with their students. While it is difficult to teach or convince someone they need to have passion for their job and students, providing support and assistance with other strategies could build teacher confidence. Specific professional development opportunities designed to help teachers learn and discuss ways to integrate direct instruction lessons, learn about other types of materials and resources to provide multiple forms of texts for students, and participate in technology training to help build teacher confidence in using technology with students is an important step to take.

More research and analysis is needed to cross reference the multiple forms of data collection used in this study to identify effective teachers of literacy. However, there is a positive indication that the multiple measures used in this study are effective at identifying successful teachers since the strategies revealed from the teachers align with the strategies discussed from the historical as well as current research presented in chapters one and two.

Concluding Remarks

It was my intent to identify effective instructional practices of literacy teachers for the sole implication of taking the strategies and practices to teachers within the district. My current educational position provides the opportunity to talk with and provide professional development as needed for teachers of literacy in grades 1-12. Throughout the study, I was able to learn valuable pieces of information that could help all teachers

increase student achievement in the areas of literacy as well as improve student abilities to think critically and use more in-depth analysis of texts. Students receive information at such rapid rates with the current technological advances and social networking that it is important they learn how to navigate and question the origins of information and determine its usefulness to their lives.

Instead of completing the study with a wealth of strategies and practices to begin sharing with other teachers, my assumptions were confirmed in that many of the instructional strategies and practices that are used most often by effective teachers can not be taught. The common characteristics that emerged from the effective teachers identified through this study were things that are difficult to define or teach. Passion for the students and motivating students with a focus on their personal lives and experiences are items that come from within each teacher. While sharing practices such as a variety of texts and text types and a focus on specific skills such as comprehension, word study, and writing instead of materials or resources is important, it also became evident through this study that the most important factor in student achievement is the teacher that stands in front of them. Rather than valuing methods and resources for teachers to imitate and use, I learned that it is the quiet spirit of teachers who care about their students and are most interested in their student growth versus their own that pushed these teachers to become identified as effective. Each teacher interviewed was humble and did not understand why their name was chosen as an effective teacher. Several teachers even made comments such as, “I don’t do anything different from any other teacher” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). One teacher indicated her thoughts as to why she was identified as an effective teacher of literacy. Her response signifies the results of this

study, “whatever they [students] need, I will do. I didn’t choose education. It chose me” (Personal communication, February 25, 2011). By the end of the study, I determined that each teacher, while very different, had something special to offer. Each teacher had a passion for learning, a passion for their job, and a passion for students.

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APPENDIX A

ADMINISTRATOR / PEER RECOMMENDATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Disclaimer:

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the teaching strategies and practices of effective literacy teachers. If you participate in this research, you are asked to answer a few questions in regard to your perspective on the literacy teachers from your building. Your participation is strictly voluntary and will take approximately 10 minutes. You may refuse to participate without fear of negative consequences of any kind.

The information you provide for this research will be treated confidentially and will be kept in a secured file by the researcher. Individual confidentiality will also be maintained. While there will be no immediate benefits from your participation in this research, your responses will inform the selection of teachers used in the research to identify strategies of effective literacy teachers. Information learned from the research can help other teachers of literacy gain insight to effective literacy instruction and further increase student achievement and success with literacy skills.

A written signature is not required for minimal risk participation such as interviews or survey questionnaire completion. Completion of the following questionnaire / interview questions designates your consent to participate in this research according to the terms and conditions outlined above.

Please respond to the following questions regarding the ELA teachers in your building. You can choose one teacher per grade level or choose any number of ELA teachers in your building you believe are the most effective teachers of literacy. There is no minimum or maximum number of teachers to include in your response.

- 1. What is your relationship with the literacy teachers in this building? Would you recommend any of them as effective teachers of literacy? If so, which teachers would you recommend as the most effective in the area of literacy instruction?**
- 2. What have you seen him/her do in the classroom that leads you to the conclusion that he/she is an effective teacher of literacy?**
- 3. What materials and technology does he/she use in the classroom during direct instruction?**
- 4. What materials does he/she use in the classroom during times that do not involve direct instruction?**
- 5. Does he/she use any assessments beyond the mandated state standardized assessment? If so, what type of assessments does he/she use?**

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

The following is a letter of informed consent detailing information for participation in a research study conducted by Melodie Fulcher, a Doctoral Student at Georgia Southern University. Please read the following information and determine willingness to participate in the study.

1. My name is Melodie Fulcher and I am a Doctoral Student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting the following research as part of my dissertation study to identify literacy instruction strategies used by effective teachers. This research will take place in your district and I would like to request your participation. The following letter contains specific details in regard to the study and your participation.
2. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to identify instructional strategies and/or practices of effective literacy teachers from multiple grade ranges. Once effective teachers of literacy have been identified by multiple quantitative measures, interviews and observations will be used to talk with the teachers and identify specific methods of effective literacy instruction that are evident in teachers of elementary, middle, and high school age ranges.
3. Participation Requirements: Participation in this research will include a classroom observation lasting 30 minutes to one hour and a 20-30 minute interview following the observation.
4. Discomforts and Risks: The risks involved in the research are minimal (no greater than the risks involved in daily life experiences) and if you choose to participate, you will not be in any immediate danger of emotional or physical harm while participating in the study.
5. Benefits:
 - a. The benefits to participants include a closer look at their literacy instruction and the strategies they use to increase student achievement.
 - b. The benefits to society include the betterment of literacy instruction for all teachers. Information learned from the study will help all teachers assist students in increasing literacy achievement and reading to learn in all content areas.
6. Duration/Time required from the participant: The time required for participation includes the amount of time to complete the interview conducted by the researcher. The interview will not take more than 20-30 minutes. The observation conducted by the researcher will occur during the regular school day and will not require any additional time from the participant.
7. Statement of Confidentiality: Information and results of the data analysis collected throughout the duration for the study and for 3 years following the completion of the study will be kept secure in a locked filing cabinet draw in the researcher's home office. Information from the study will be maintained at the researcher's home office during the duration of the study. The data collected for the purpose of the study will not be

available to anyone outside of those who are already privy to the data and information through their role and position in the district involved in the study.

8. **Right to Ask Questions:** You have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843.
9. **Voluntary Participation:** You do not have to participate in this research. You may end your participation at any time by telling Melodie Fulcher. You do not have to answer any questions during the interview that you do not want to answer.
10. **Penalty:** There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study. You may decide at any time that you do not wish to participate any further and withdraw from the study without penalty or retribution.
11. **You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study.** If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number **H11183**.

Title of project: Effective Literacy Instruction Strategies Among Teachers in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Grade Ranges

Principal Investigator:

Melodie Fulcher

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Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Michael Moore

Georgia Southern University

mmoore@georgiasouthern.edu

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY TEACHERS

1. What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom?
2. Which of these strategies do you most attribute to student success with literacy skills?
3. What type of materials and texts are used in your classroom to engage students with literacy skills?
4. Are these materials mandated by the district or do you choose the materials?
5. How many opportunities do you provide to learn literacy skills using multi-media materials?
6. What strategies do you utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult texts?
7. What writing strategies do you consider useful during classroom instruction to assist students in connecting reading and writing?
8. How often and to what extent do you encourage student writing in the classroom?
9. How do you engage students with multiple forms of texts (consider reading and writing)?
10. How often do you direct students to engage in dialogue during instructional time?
11. To what extent do you include student lives and experiences during literacy instruction?
12. How do you believe you acknowledge student cultural backgrounds during literacy instruction?
13. What role does current technology trends play in your classroom?

APPENDIX D

READING / LITERACY OBSERATION PROTOCOL

Teacher _____
 Date/Time _____ Grade _____ School _____
 Grouping: (small group / whole group / partner / individual) _____

#1: Word Study (Phonics / PA / Vocabulary)	Comments / Questions / Resources utilized:
Morphology / word segments	Method of vocabulary instruction? (dictionary, context, matching, writing, etc.)
Greek / Latin word study	
Modeling / pre-teaching / direct instruction	
Word origins / word parts / word manipulation	
#2: Fluency	Comments / Questions / Resources utilized:
(in Reading and/or speaking through SLV GPS)	
modeling - read alouds	
new / familiar reading / repeated reading	
choral / group / paired reading / ind.	
#3: Comprehension	Comments / Questions / Resources utilized:
<i>Pre-reading:</i> activate prior knowledge, discussion, introduce key elements of reading, predictions, identify genre, set purpose, pose questions, identify strategies	
<i>During reading:</i> model think aloud, revisit predictions, HOT questioning, key points, monitored st. reading, feedback, silent / oral reading	
<i>Post-reading:</i> discussion, factual questioning, HOT questioning, retell, summarize, critical judgements of text / future questions, discussed connections to other texts	
#4: Writing	Comments / Questions / Resources utilized:
pre - writing / brainstorming / Thinking Maps	
mini-lessons / modeling / 3-day lesson	
rough draft writing / graphic organizer	
editing / revising / modeling editing	
sharing / discussion	
final drafts / technology	
#5: Conventions	Comments / Questions / Resources utilized:
DGP, Language book, GUMS,	Instructional method: (How were conventions taught and integrated?)
written practice / identifying / mentor text	
ind. / whole class / small group	
#6: Assessment / Monitoring	Comments / Questions / Resources utilized:
RPA (Rapid PreAssessment)	
formative (diagnostic; on-going)	
summative (unit, chapt., benchmark)	

