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Achieving literacy excellence through: identifying and utilizing high yield strategies

Ashley Hardison

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

ACHIEVING LITERACY EXCELLENCE THROUGH: IDENTIFYING AND UTILIZING HIGH YIELD STRATEGIES

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by

Ashley Hardison

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Linda Purrington, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Ashley Hardison

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Linda Purrington, Ed.D., Chairperson

Cynthia Dollins, Ed.D.

JoAnn MillsBuffer, Ed.D.

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for his unconditional love and strength as he stood by me, held my hand, and walked me through this process. Although there were various obstacles that arose, he continued to remind me that "I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me." I dedicate my dissertation work to the memory of my father John Hardison. His continual love and words of wisdom will forever remain in my heart. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving mother Angela Hardison and cousins Isaac and Linda Beck, whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears. My brother John has never left my side and continues to encourage me to achieve my dreams.

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VITA

EDUCATION

Pepperdine University **2017**
Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership,
Administration and Policy

Sierra Nevada College **2015**
Teaching English as a Second Language,
(TESL) Endorsement

University of Nevada Las-Vegas **2010**
Masters in Educational Leadership
K-12 Administrative Credential

University of Nevada Las-Vegas **2007**
Bachelor in Science
Elementary Education
Special Education

Oakland Community College **2003**
Associates Degree in Liberal Arts

CREDENTIALS

Teaching English as a Second Language **2015**
State of Nevada Teacher Endorsement

School Administration (K-12) **2010**
State of Nevada School Administration Endorsement

Elementary Education (K-8) **2007**
State of Nevada Teacher Endorsements

Special Education (K-12) Generalist **2007**
State of Nevada Teacher Endorsement

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Special Education Instructional Facilitator **2016**
Clark County School District

K-5 Response to Intervention Lead Teacher and Dyslexia Liaison **2015-2016**
Clark County School District

District-wide Instructional Coach **2015-2016**
Clark County School District

Special Education/ Resource Room and Self Contained Teacher **2009-2014**
Clark County School District

3rd-4th Grade Teacher **2008--2009**
Nevada Public Charter School

Special Education Teacher K-6 **2007 2008**
Nevada Public Charter School

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to delve into the literacy instructional strategies of selected high-performing K-2 teachers in a Clark County, Nevada school district. The study assessed the efficacy of teachers using five core literacy components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension for student achievement. High performing teachers were defined as consistently demonstrating student performance gains of 25% in at least one of the five core literacy components over a 3-year period. The research question for this study was: What instructional strategies are used by selected high-performing K-2 teachers who work with diverse populations that have demonstrated a minimum gain of 25% in reading as measured by AIMSweb to develop (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension?

The study used a qualitative method of data collection and analysis through in-depth teacher interviews, classroom observations, and district-wide data analysis. Interviews were open-ended and observations involved six teachers during their classroom literacy instructional time. Checklists were used to facilitate data collection during observations. Classroom pictures, teachers' lesson plans, and AIMSweb data were used to support results.

The findings revealed that the most successful literacy strategies for teaching the five components of literacy were: phonemic awareness (word manipulation, word play, and word sort), phonics (word study, sound/spelling, and decoding/encoding), fluency (choral reading, repeated timed reading, partner/student-adult reading, and reading connected text with corrective feedback), vocabulary (explicit instruction on word meaning/independent word learning, direct instruction on new vocabulary, and context clues), and comprehension (predicting, inferring, making connections, using graphic organizers, and activating/building on prior knowledge). In

addition, study conclusions revealed that the most successful strategies for teaching K-2 literacy included teacher collaboration and planning; strategic use of individual, small, and whole grouping; and integrating technology.

Several recommendations emerged from the study. Teachers need to be given ongoing professional development and resources for teaching the five component specific literacy strategies. Time needs to consistently be allotted for teachers to collaborate and plan for literacy instruction. Exploring diverse student populations, and their literacy acquisition needs, is vital to the education of youth. Placing emphasis on differentiated instruction, study replication, and analyzing literacy strategies and acquisition practices using varied methodologies will improve educational outcomes.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Every child deserves the opportunity to become a proficient reader. Literacy involves more than the ability to read or write; it also includes the capacity to speak, listen, and use language effectively. Literacy is a foundational skill that paves the way to higher-level learning; it is the building block for success in school and success throughout life in today's world (Trilling & Fadel, 2012). According to Tompkins (2010), literacy can be defined as "the ability to use reading and writing for a variety of tasks at school and outside of school" (p. 2). Teaching children to become highly proficient readers should be a crucial objective of all of those in education and is central to school district improvement efforts throughout the nation. Effective literacy programs are designed to give all students the opportunity to learn to read and write as a means to gain access to a higher quality of life and contribute to the wider community both socially and economically.

However, only through identifying and utilizing high yield strategies can all children have the opportunity to become proficient readers. For instance, an average low-income 12th grader generally has the same reading level as an eighth-grade middle-class student (Carreón & Rau, 2014). Some ways in which to address the problem of poor literacy in the U.S. is to ensure that early literacy instruction and the specific strategies being implemented are being aligned in an effective manner in order to prevent future reading difficulties (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2008; Literacy Project Foundation, 2015). While there remains a significant struggle to achieve overall literacy today, some schools and districts have garnered positive results. As seen in the example of a Nevada school district and discussed in more depth in the following pages, effective techniques can be instituted to foster literacy achievement for all students. This study examined the role of literacy in the global information age, literacy in the United States today, the possible

causes for illiteracy in the U.S., literacy reforms within the last couple decades, instructional strategies for encouraging literacy, effective professional development that can be fostered to encourage literacy, and Nevada's efforts to combat illiteracy in one school district.

Background

In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) released the report *A Nation at Risk*, which stated, "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (p. 113). The report provided the impetus for public education in the United States to prepare youth for work and responsible citizenship, forge a common culture within an ethnically diverse country, and reduce inequalities for the common good of the nation (Present, 2010). While in the past, the lack of ability to read and use printed materials was seen primarily as an individual problem, with implications for a person's job opportunities and educational goals, the times have changed. Literacy achievement is increasingly being viewed as a national and international problem (Tompkins, 2010). For example, lack of education has been understood to contribute to higher substance abuse rates, more incarceration, and greater poverty rates throughout the U.S. Lack of education has also had a significant impact on the role of the United States as an economic world power (Present, 2010).

Despite the national concern associated with a lack of reading proficiency, new threats now exist. Today the United States is struggling to remain economically dominant in a time when mathematics and reading test scores are not especially competitive globally (Mathis, 2003). The U.S. is not ranking competitively on international standardized exams (Freestone, Thompson, & Williams, 2006) and students today have a reduced capacity to compete globally (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School

Officers, 2010). These conditions undermine a student's ability to achieve a high quality of life and contribute to the economic and technological wellbeing of the U.S. at both the national and international levels. One study, the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)—a cyclical, large-scale study of adult skills, and life experiences focusing on education and employment—has its own definition of literacy. The study, developed and organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), broadly defined literacy as "understanding, evaluating, using, and engaging with written text to participate in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Goodman, Finnegan, Mohadjer, Krenzke, & Hogan, 2013, p. 6). PIAAC results are reported as scores on a scale from 0–500. In 2013, average scores on the PIAAC literacy scale for adults age 16-65 ranged from 250 in Italy to 296 in Japan. The U.S. average score was 270. Compared with the U.S. average score, average scores in 12 countries were higher; in five countries they were lower, and in five countries they were not significantly different (Goodman et al., 2013).

Through the PIAAC scale, five proficiency levels for literacy have also been identified. On a scale ranging from level 1 through level 4/5, only 12% of U.S. adults aged 16-65 performed at the highest proficiency level (4/5) on the PIAAC literacy scale. At the adult level, seven countries performed considerably higher than the U.S. These consisted of Japan, Finland, the Netherlands, Australia, Sweden, Norway, and Canada. The U.S. PIAAC score was also lower in 11 countries (Denmark, Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, France, Ireland, Republic of Korea, Slovak Republic, Cyprus, Spain, and Italy), and not significantly different in four countries (England and Northern Ireland-United Kingdom, Flanders-Belgium, Estonia, and Germany; Goodman et al., 2013). Clearly, the United States is not the leader in literacy performance that it once was, and illiteracy has become a serious problem.

Promising Literacy Reform Efforts in Nevada

Across Nevada's diverse educational landscape, with fluctuating enrollment and ethnic, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity in multiple areas, many children are reading and writing unacceptably poorly. In 2006, the Nevada Department of Education Nevada State Literacy Team (NSLT) determined there was a need to develop a long-term strategic plan to effectively apply for the Reading First grant, which would help institute better literacy programs. After the development of the state's long-term plan and receiving grant funding, NSLT developed goals to help foster and establish a high level of literacy for all students through partnerships with school districts, families, and communities (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). As a result, statewide efforts to improve literacy in K-12 were launched, and district accountability became a focus for improvement. In an effort to eliminate bureaucratic layers, the district has developed a tighter focus and promoted targeted assistance to elementary schools. Clark County School District (CCSD) schools are organized into 16 performance zones, including a new, rural school performance zone. An Assistant Chief Student Achievement Officer supervises each performance zone. The restructuring of the district allows each zone to tighten its educational focus and improve educational support for the schools.

Zone 10 in Clark County Nevada is engaged in literacy reform and the results have been promising in 11 elementary schools. In 2014, two schools in Performance Zone 10 received five stars, with a proficiency reading rate of 84% and greater, followed by three schools that received four stars, with a proficiency reading rate of 73% and greater. Six elementary schools received three stars, with a proficiency reading rate of 64% and greater (Nevada School Performance Framework [NSPF], n.d.). This positive performance is particularly notable when compared to the low literacy performance ranking of Nevada overall as compared to other states. According

to the 2013-2014 state-by-state comparison of literacy rates, Nevada students ranked near the bottom, with only 71.5% of students graduating from high school with acceptable literacy levels ("Clark County School District," n.d.). Studying the promising performance in Zone 10 might provide important insights for other zones in Nevada that also desire to improve student literacy performance. In order to fully understand the reform efforts in Zone 10, it is important to know about the greater context for reform in Nevada.

Problem Statement

Literacy is key to a student's ability to learn and succeed in school and beyond. Current findings suggest that the U.S. is no longer a leader in literacy performance as compared to other industrialized nations, which is directly linked to early childhood literacy efforts. The nation's apparent underperformance has been attributed to students who struggled as readers in elementary school and do not master early literacy skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension; however, young children have the capacity to build early literacy skills in preschool (Skibbe, Connor, Morrison, & Jewkes, 2011). Underperformance has sparked a number of large-scale reforms including No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the Reading First Initiative, and currently the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The key to improved performance is effective instructional practice and use of the five core components of literacy, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension, as introduced by the National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel (US), National Institute of Child Health, & Human Development (US) [NRP], 2000). These components need to be addressed so instructional practices can prevent future reading difficulties in elementary school (Literacy Project Foundation, 2015). It is necessary to identify and study districts and schools that are demonstrating successful literacy strategies that foster improvement

in kindergarten through second grade students' literacy performances in order to provide insight as to what approaches work and might be replicated by other districts and schools. The CCSD, operating within Performance Zone 10 in Nevada, is demonstrating the use of strategies that are contributing to elevating the literacy performance of students in Nevada. What have not been fully explored, however, are the instructional strategies of K-2 teachers whose students are performing well. Therefore, the need and opportunity existed to further explore instructional practices being used today, and how teachers in other parts of the United States can incorporate the five core components of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension into their curriculums for student success. In identifying practices that might be replicated in other districts and schools that desire to improve their students' literacy rates, an analysis of effective approaches to improve literacy was deemed essential.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the literacy instructional strategies of selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD in Nevada as related to the five core literacy components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. High performing teachers were defined as those teachers who have consistently demonstrated student performance gains of 25% in at least one of the five core literacy component areas over a 3-year period. A qualitative, multiple case study methodology was used in this study. This study involved face-to-face interviews with five K-2 high-performing teachers at three different schools, observing these teachers during their classroom literacy instructional time, and a review of pertinent records and artifacts.

Importance of the Study

Public education needs high-performing models to replicate in order to close the literacy achievement gap. The outcome of this multiple case study investigation may be useful to schools that are similar to those in the study, with diverse and at-risk student populations. The goal is to sustain student literacy growth in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension. The research conducted here has the potential to be useful in developing new action steps for Nevada's Department of Literacy and the development of CCSD's performance zone literacy coaches, in addition to helping facilitate literacy instruction in classrooms all across the nation. This study explored the five essential components of effective reading instruction strategies. The policy recommendations that resulted from this study may serve as research-based models for other schools with similar educational challenges.

Knowledge of research-based teaching practices that are effective in promoting effective literacy practices could also benefit teacher preparation programs, teacher trainers, elementary school programs, and others who have the role of providing professional literacy instruction to primary education teachers (Gibson Consulting Group, 2011). Elementary teachers can benefit from being able to focus on and implement the identified strategies. Ultimately, the children in grades K-2 may benefit, as they stand to gain the needed receptive and expressive language development skills to be successful not only in school, but throughout their lives, in addition to developing the ability to compete at the international level. The outcomes of this study can be utilized to plan appropriate literacy instructional practices and activities for K-2 students and teachers.

Research has shown that learning to read is a lengthy process that begins early in life. Given the importance identified in the literature for children to approach school with a

motivation to learn, and with teachers promoting the acquisition of prerequisite language and early literacy skills, teachers can play a vital role in literacy success (Morris et al., 2013). In CCSD and elsewhere, the diverse student population has had the opportunity to explore the five essential components of effective reading practices (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension; Learning Point Associates, 2004). The effective instructional practices in literacy for students in grades K-2 identified in this study provide instructional strategies teachers can use to overcome any challenges posed by the new CCSS, enabling them to become more effective by learning to work within these mandates.

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The growth required in conjunction with the proportion of students who attain their specific state standards of academic proficiency (Glenn Commission, 2000).

AIMSweb. A universal screening, progress monitoring, and data management system that supports Response to Intervention (RTI) and tiered instruction (AIMSweb, 2014).

Common Core State Standards (CCSS). A set of high quality academic expectations in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics that define the knowledge and skills all students should master by the end of each grade level in order to be on track for success in college and career (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Comprehension. The act of intentionally and actively understanding what one is reading, before, during, and after a particular piece of writing (Tompkins, 2010).

Fluency. "The capacity to read text accurately and quickly" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 4).

Instructional practice. "The applications that drive effective and efficient classroom instruction" (Literacy Project Foundation, 2015, para. 2).

Literacy. "The ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 4).

Phonemes. "The smallest units of sound that change the meanings of spoken words" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 6).

Phonemic awareness. "The ability to hear and identify individual sounds—or phonemes—in spoken words" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 6).

Social constructivism. A sociological theory of knowledge that applies the general philosophical constructivism into social settings, wherein groups construct knowledge for one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sociolinguistics. The study of language in relation to social factors, including differences of regional, class, and occupational dialect, as well as gender differences and bilingualism (Heo, Han, Koch, & Aydin, 2011).

Theory of cognitive development. A comprehensive theory focusing on the nature and development of human intelligence (Heo et al., 2011).

Zone of proximal development. "The distance between a child's actual developmental level and his or her potential developmental level that can be reached with scaffolding by the teacher or classmates" (Tompkins, 2010, p. 488).

Framework

Children who read well in grades K-2 comprehend and acquire greater information and knowledge in numerous domains (Thompson & Shamberger, 2012). Children's literacy has become a significant topic of research and policy-making (Callaghan & Madeleine, 2012). In response to this trend, the research outlined here was based on two theoretical areas: social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and its association with sociolinguistic theory, and the components of effective reading instruction (Learning Point Associates, 2004; NRP, 2000).

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism is an educational theory with pedagogical connections to both cognitive constructivism and sociolinguistics (Heo et al., 2011). Heo et al. (2011) also posited that social constructivism shares a number of epistemological philosophies with cognitive constructivism, within the study of early childhood education. Social constructivism, within instructional settings, arose in response to anxiety regarding the function of teachers' in the classroom. According to Vygotsky, social constructivism distinguishes between the significance of the partnership between the instructor and student, and the relationship between students and their peers, given that social communication is viewed as the principal resource for children to acquire new knowledge (Heo et al., 2011). In turn, ways of acquiring new knowledge connect the theory of social constructivism to Vygotsky's sociolinguistic theory, both of which contribute to student achievement in literacy.

Sociolinguistic theory (Vygotsky, 1978) is also connected to the social constructivist theory relating to this research. Vygotsky's (1978) theory suggests that student interactions with teachers and peers are important to learning complex tasks. Given that literacy learning involves complex tasks, the researcher determined that teachers and their interactions with students during literacy instruction would be the focus for this study. Vygotsky's work has been instrumental in

the development of this study, as he posited that verbal communication helps to arrange thoughts, and that students use verbal communication to gain knowledge, as well as to correspond and distribute experiences with others. Accepting that students utilize language for social purposes permits teachers to prepare instructional activities that integrate a collective component, such as allowing students to work in small groups, discuss the selected literature they are reading, or share their writing with classmates. Vygotsky additionally suggested that students could accomplish more complex tasks when collaborating with an adult, versus working independently (Heo et al., 2011). Vygotsky's theory suggests that student interactions with teachers and peers are important to learning complex tasks. Given that literacy learning involves complex tasks, the researcher determined that teachers and their interactions with students during literacy instruction would be the focus of this study.

The second theoretical construct is the five components of effective reading instruction. These components focus on the consistently successful approach called "systematic and explicit instruction" (NRP, 2000, p. 1). The NRP (2000) report's data analysis made clear that the successful teaching of reading addresses five critical areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. These components were incorporated into NCLB and the Reading First Initiative as vital components of effective reading instruction, and they are important both historically and currently to meeting the literacy needs of K-2 learners. There are numerous approaches to providing instruction on these five elements. These strategies fluctuate in terms of how much direct support and direction (or guidance) teachers offer as their students acquire new skills. With regard to this study, the five core literacy components provided a frame for organizing and describing strategies utilized by classroom teacher to develop K-2 student literacy.

Research Question

The following research question guided this multiple case study: What instructional strategies are used by selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD who work with diverse populations that have demonstrated a minimum gain of 25% in reading as measured by AIMSweb to develop (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to two schools and six K-2 classrooms in a single school district in Nevada's CCSD. Teachers who participated in this study must have taught diverse student populations in grades K-2 for more than 5 years. In addition, their students must have demonstrated literacy performance gains of 25% or greater in one of the five areas of reading, as measured by AIMSweb. Classroom practices considered included whole group instruction, small group instruction, and teacher expectations for student learning. This study consisted of classroom observations during reading instruction and one-on-one interviews with five K-2 high-performing teachers at each of the three schools. A review of pertinent records related to reading instruction was also conducted.

Limitations

This study had three notable limitations. The first limitation was the number of elementary schools within the specified performance zone that had been awarded a star performance rating of three or greater, where a rating of five stars is the highest, indicating the most effective teaching strategies. At the time of this study, 12 schools had been awarded a star performance rating of three or higher. A second limitation was the number of K-2 teachers in the selected performance zone who worked with diverse populations and who had demonstrated a

minimum gain of 25% in one of the five areas of reading for 3 consecutive years, as measured by AIMSweb. Twenty teachers met these criteria for participation in this study, although they may not have been fully representative of all high-performing K-2 teachers in the district. Furthermore, classroom observations were limited in number and duration; therefore, they may not have adequately captured all literacy instructional strategies and management practices utilized by high performing K-2 literacy teachers in the district. Lastly, this research focused on public schools. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to private or charter schools.

Assumptions

Six assumptions are the foundation of this work. First, it was assumed that the core components of teaching reading are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. A second assumption was that the performance data available from CCSD were accurate and valid. A third assumption was that the growth in K-2 students' reading performance under study was due to literacy instructional practices of the classroom teachers working at that time. A fourth assumption was that the school community, staff, administration, and ethnic make-up are not representational of the entire educational community at large as there is variance in race and gender throughout the district. A fifth assumption was that teachers' interactions with students are key to learning literacy. Finally, the last assumption was that the educational instructors who agreed to participate in the study did not alter their instructional practices during formal research observations.

Summary

While there remains a significant struggle to achieve overall literacy in the United States today, some schools and districts have achieved positive results. As seen in the example of one Nevada school district, effective techniques can be instituted to foster literacy achievement for

all students. Chapter 1 discussed the role of literacy in the global information age, touching on literacy in the United States today, as well as the possible causes for illiteracy in the U.S. Information about literacy reforms within the last couple decades, the need for sound instructional strategies for encouraging literacy, and effective professional development were all discussed in this chapter. Through original research relating to Nevada's literacy efforts, educators can adopt effective literacy methods in their classrooms.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore and describe the literacy instructional practices of selected high-performing K-2 teachers in Nevada's CCSD. The comprehensive literature review presents a synthesis of related historical, theoretical, and empirical research. Chapter 2 provides a more in-depth description of the conceptual framework. Chapter 2 also provides a historical context for the study, and addresses approaches to reading instruction in both whole groups and small group. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the study. The methodology section of Chapter 3 focuses on the researcher's subjectivity and qualitative case study methodology. It also includes data collection systems and analysis. Chapter 4 focuses on the research findings that were presented during various classroom observations and teacher interviews. Chapter 5 ultimately discusses the study findings, and gives recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literacy is crucial to a student's ability to learn and succeed in school and into adulthood. Beginning in the 1990s and over the following 30 years or so, Reyhner (2008) noted that roughly 40% of America's fourth graders ranked in the *below basic* category of literacy, whereas approximately 5% ranked in the *advanced* category at the other end of the spectrum. In 2006, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) also found that in achievement-level scores in reading, 68% of eighth graders and 68% of fourth graders scored at or below the basic level of reading achievement and an average low-income 12th grader generally has the same reading level as an eighth grade middle-class student (Carreón & Rau, 2014). This underperformance has been attributed to students who struggled as readers in elementary school have not mastered early literacy skills—including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension—despite having the capacity to build early literacy skills in preschool (Skibbe et al., 2011). The alignment of early literacy instruction and appropriate strategies for preventing future reading difficulties in elementary school and beyond are needed (Literacy Project Foundation, 2015).

Preliminary analysis of reading instruction in elementary schools suggests that an emphasis on literacy strategies focusing on reading for ideas, information, and concepts is required to succeed in literacy acquisition. There is a need to identify and put into practice successful literacy strategies that foster improvement in kindergarten through second grade. The gap in the literature surrounding this phenomenon called for more study. A review of the literature suggested that specific instructional strategies can guide teachers in responding to students' literacy needs. The opportunity existed to investigate and describe the literacy

instructional strategies of high-performing K-2 teachers in CCSD who have demonstrated continual literacy growth in a variety of students.

This chapter encompasses a review of the literature organized into eight major sections, concluding with a chapter summary. The first section offers a more in-depth description of the theoretical framework that was introduced in Chapter 1. The second section addresses the historical background of literacy in the U.S. The third section presents literacy statistics in the U.S., the fourth section discusses the need for early literacy achievement, and the fifth section addresses the possible causes of illiteracy in the United States. The sixth section addresses literacy reform in the United States, the seventh section evaluates instructional strategies for encouraging literacy, and the eighth section reviews literacy improvement efforts in Nevada. The eight major sections address the need for highly effective instructional practices related to the literacy development of K-2 students.

Theoretical Framework

The two theories used in this study were social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and its association with sociolinguistic theory, as well as the aspects of effective reading instruction (Learning Point Associates, 2004; NRP, 2000). According to Vygotsky (1978), social constructivism is an educational method with pedagogical connections to cognitive constructivism and sociolinguistics (Heo et al., 2011). As children who read well in grades K-2 comprehend and obtain greater information and knowledge in various domains (Thompson & Shamberger, 2012), examining children's literacy through Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (including sociolinguistic theory) as well as through the components of effective reading instruction (NRP, 2000) was deemed relevant to this study.

Heo et al. (2011) also posited that social constructivism shares a number of epistemological philosophies with cognitive constructivism within the study of early childhood education. Social constructivism within instructional settings arose in response to anxiety regarding teachers' function in the classroom (Callaghan & Madeleine, 2012). According to Vygotsky (1978), social constructivism emphasizes the significance of the partnership between the instructor and student and the relationship between students and their peers, given that social communication is viewed as the principal resource for children to acquire new knowledge. In turn, the idea of social partnership and communication connects the theory of social constructivism to Vygotsky's sociolinguistic theory, all of which contribute to student achievement in literacy. Sociolinguistic theory was also used because it emphasizes the influence of social interaction and language on learning (Heo et al., 2011).

Vygotsky's (1978) work affords teachers the awareness and acceptance of the notion that students utilize language for social purposes. Use of this theory permits teachers to prepare instructional activities that integrate a collective component, such as allowing students to work in small groups, discuss the selected literature they are reading, or share their writing with classmates (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Vygotsky additionally suggested that students could accomplish more complex tasks when collaborating with an adult, versus working independently (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Heo et al., 2011). Typically, this is achieved through the role teachers play in student instruction. This model of teaching suggests that it is important for formal instruction to be paced so that students receive the right assistance, at the correct stage, when they need it. Students must arrive at a developmental stage at which they can accommodate and assimilate information of a given level of sophistication; this zone is referred to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978). In contrast, social constructivists do not view

learning as occurring in stages. Instead, they describe a constant reinterpretation, a constant reweaving of the "web of meaning" (Heo et al., 2011, p. 738), as a way to describe the experience of learning. In this manner, individuals consciously create new social practices to meet human needs, and to adapt to and transform their environments.

Vygotsky (1978) has also suggested that children acquire little additional knowledge by performing known activities. Rather, they learn by performing tasks at their "actual developmental level or by attempting tasks that are too difficult or beyond their zone of proximal development" (Tompkins, 2010, p. 12). Vygotsky further emphasized the significance of the teacher's role in crafting children's learning, indicating that they gain knowledge by executing tasks that allow them to *stretch* within their language acquisition zone.

Vygotsky's theory of the ZDP has helped clarify how children assimilate knowledge during communication with adults (Tompkins, 2010). Prior to children entering elementary school, they receive access to daily language d through their encounters with their community. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that children utilize both "self-talk and inner speech to guide their learning" (p. 65). Vygotsky concluded that verbal communication is a device used for deliberate growth, and that children's egocentric language gradually assumes personal speech through the act of conversing with themselves mentally rather than orally (Tompkins, 2010).

Although several forms of modeling, scaffolding, and instructional direction by instructors emerge as important, engagement in meaningful practice is critical, thus aligning the development of language acquisition to Vygotsky's ZPD. Scaffolding is the intentional, strategic support provided by teachers that allows children to complete a task they could not accomplish independently (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Heo et al., 2011). To scaffold appropriately, teachers determine what kind of help and how much of that help or information is needed for each child

to respond correctly to the task and to internalize the skills needed for independent performance later on. Frequently, the notion of the ZPD presupposes a relationship in which a more proficient individual and a less proficient individual work together, such that the less proficient individual becomes autonomously more skilled at a task that that initially needed to be accomplished with assistance. Consequently, the social constructivist theory is supported by Vygotsky's principles, which posit that including culture in the conversation about children's literacy achievement is important (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). The fundamental creed of this theory is that: (a) children construct knowledge within a socially-mediated cultural context; (b) language is a key component in children's appropriation of knowledge; (c) knowledge is constructed most effectively when adults *scaffold*, or support, children's development; and (d) children acquire knowledge with the assistance of an adult or more experienced peer within a continuum of behavior called the ZPD (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

Children reared in homes and communities in which adults model literacy skills through speaking, reading, and writing practices learn literacy schemas and practices (Heo et al., 2011). A child's language maturity and literacy progression is reflected his/her surroundings. The connection linking the social environment and literacy development was founded robustly on language acquisition. Children can obtain a higher level of knowledge through scaffolding by linking the social environment to learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Children are not submissive learners; they rebuild language as they discover and apply it, making it their own.

The second theoretical construct used was that of the five components of effective reading instruction. These components focus on the consistently successful approach called "systematic and explicit instruction" (NRP, 2000, p. 3). The NRP (2000) report's data analysis made clear that the successful teaching of reading addresses five critical areas: phonemic

awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. These components were incorporated into NCLB and the Reading First Initiative as vital components of effective reading instruction. All five of these components are important to meeting the literacy needs of K-2 learners both historically and currently. The numerous approaches to providing instruction on these five elements fluctuate in terms of how much direct support and direction (or guidance) teachers should offer as their students acquire new skills.

These frameworks can be utilized to demonstrate how to use a particular skill, how to accomplish a particular task, how openly and directly teachers clarify new skills, and whether the skills are presented in a thoughtful sequence (NRP, 2000). In examining teaching practices that promote the development of literacy through social constructivism, effective reading instruction, and effective literacy practices, this multi-theoretical foundation provided a framework from which to understand how children learn to engage fully with language.

Historical Background

As noted in Chapter 1, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released the report *A Nation at Risk* in the spring of 1983, which addressed the nation's weakening educational foundation. The report provided the push behind public education in the United States to prepare youths for work and responsible citizenship, forge a common culture within an ethnically diverse country, and reduce inequalities for the common good of the nation (Present, 2010). Today, literacy achievement is viewed as a national and international problem, with the national issue of low levels of literacy being related to higher substance abuse rates, more incarceration, and greater poverty rates throughout the U.S. Lack of education has had a significant impact on the role of the United States as an economic world power (Present, 2010; Tompkins, 2010).

On an international level, dangers now exist that were never before considered. Currently, the U.S. is lagging in mathematics and reading test scores, and the country is struggling to remain economically dominant (Present, 2010). The U.S. is not ranking competitively on international standardized exams (Freestone et al., 2006) and students today have a reduced capacity to compete globally (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Conditions such as these undermine a student's ability to achieve a high quality of life and contribute to the economic and technological well-being of the U.S. at both the national and international levels. As introduced in Chapter 1, the PIAAC is a cyclical, large-scale study of adult skills and life experiences that focuses on education and employment levels internationally. The PIAAC broadly defines literacy as "understanding, evaluating, using, and engaging with written text to participate in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Goodman et al., 2013, p. 6). PIAAC results are reported as scores on a scale from 0–500. In 2013, average scores on the PIAAC literacy scale for adults age 16-65 ranged from 250 in Italy to 296 in Japan. The U.S. average score was 270. Compared with the U.S. average score, average scores in 12 countries were higher; in five countries they were lower, and in five countries they were not significantly different. The scale uses the proficiency levels 1 through 4/5 to assess literacy, and only 12% of U.S. adults aged 16 to 65 performed at the highest proficiency level (4/5) on the PIAAC literacy scale in 2013 (Goodman et al., 2013).

The percentage of adults performing at this level was higher in seven countries than in the U.S. (Japan, Finland, Netherlands, Australia, Sweden, Norway, and Canada). It was lower in 11 countries (Denmark, Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, France, Ireland, Republic of Korea, Slovak Republic, Cyprus, Spain, and Italy), and not significantly different in four countries

(England and Northern Ireland-United Kingdom, Flanders-Belgium, Estonia, and Germany; Goodman et al., 2013). The U.S. is clearly not the leader in literacy performance that it once was, and illiteracy has become a very serious problem.

Literacy statistics in the U.S. Based on an assessment of adult literacy in the United States performed by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy in 2009 (NAAL), 30 million literate adults aged 16 and older ranked below basic in terms of literacy. Seven million were found to have performed very poorly on the simple questions intended to test basic functional English, 11 million were found to be non-literate, and another four million adults had results that were not used in the assessment due to their inability to even take the test (Baer, Kutner, Sabatini, & White, 2009). As noted by Goodman et al. (2013):

- Illiteracy has become such a serious problem in the U.S. that 44 million adults are now unable to read a simple story to their children.
- Fifty percent of adults cannot read a book written at an eighth grade level.
- Forty-five million are functionally illiterate and read below a fifth grade level.
- Forty-four percent of American adults do not read a book in a year.
- Six out of 10 households do not buy a single book in a year.

These statistics affect U.S. society significantly. According to the Literacy Project Foundation (2015), "Approximately 50% of Americans read so poorly that they are unable to perform simple tasks such as reading prescription drug labels" (p. 3). The research has also found that every year one-third of all public high school students do not graduate with their classes. Even more revealing is that out of this percentage, one-half of African Americans, Latinos, and Native American students fail to graduate with their high school classes (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). Research by Carreón and Rau (2014) shows that

achieving reading proficiency by the end of fourth grade is a strong predictor of high school graduation. In light of this research and current graduation rates, the need to examine methods of literacy instruction at the elementary level in the United States is more important than ever.

The need for early literacy achievement. According to the NAEP, little had been documented regarding reading achievement between the years of 1991 and 2005, especially the achievement of students in the fourth grade: the level identified as the point at which basic reading skills should be solidified. Beginning in the 1990s and over the following 30 years or so, Reyhner (2008) noted that roughly 40% of America's fourth graders ranked in the *below basic* category, whereas approximately 5% ranked in the *advanced* category at the other end of the spectrum. The NAEP has also noted that in achievement-level scores in reading, 68% of eighth graders and 68% of fourth graders scored at or below the basic level of reading achievement in 2006 (Carreón & Rau, 2014). In the U.S. today, an intolerably large number of children continue to fail at reading (Callaghan & Madeleine, 2012).

Possible causes for illiteracy in the United States. The main causes for the decline in adult literacy stems from a number of factors. The main considerations are a larger and more diverse student population, including growing numbers of English learners, funding issues, testing inefficiencies, and lack of effective professional development (Baer et al., 2009). All of these issues influence reading acquisition in the U.S. and are further addressed subsequently.

Higher population levels and non-native English speakers. One of the reasons that literacy in the U.S. is in decline can be evaluated from a population growth perspective. School enrollment has continued to rise over the years, creating a higher proportion of the population that is composed of a variety of different learners (Goodman et al., 2013). These learners consist of literate children, illiterate children, special needs children, gifted children, and others as well.

Nevertheless, the largest proportion of students struggling with literacy is made up of non-native English speakers (Pasquarella, Gottardo, & Grant, 2012).

The United States is a complex mosaic of cultures and ethnicities, and the diversity of the U.S. has increased by striking proportions in recent years. Increasing diversity can be seen, as well as heard. Today, some 32 million individuals in the United States speak a language other than English. These languages range from Spanish and Chinese to Yupik and Mon-Khmer (Spring, 2009). In many public school systems, the influx of immigrating families is a relatively recent phenomenon. Some systems "are ill-equipped to serve their growing numbers of children from non-English-speaking homes" (Lesaux, 2012, p. 74). Consequently, policymakers are increasing their focus on schools, districts, policies, and teachers to find ways in which to accommodate all students (Lesaux, 2012).

***Funding as a limitation*.** The research has supported the notion that when a school's performance is low, often seen in poor test scores, it indicates that the school is unable to afford to invest in the curriculum and training needed to create environments to encourage reading among young learners (Murnane, 2007). The U.S. government places significant pressure on schools and school districts at all levels to perform well on standardized tests, as put forth by the CCSS. As such, there is a breakdown in the communication among schools, districts, and governmental funding agencies, which makes collaboration on all fronts more challenging. The byproduct of all of this is that the school has "to overcome as they try to integrate these various services at the school level" (Gibson Consulting Group, 2011, p. 20).

***Testing issues*.** Typically, public schools have used large-group standardized, nationally normed tests to evaluate student learning. "The focus is on results and the results are often poor" (Magruder, Hayslip, Espinosa, & Matera, 2013, p. 9). Buly (2005) advocated for the need for

classroom-based assessments that can best assess students' reading abilities. When student reading capabilities are evaluated using large-scale standardized tests, such tests fail to capture all aspects of a student's knowledge base, learning style, and learning capacity. Bully contended that the push to increase students' reading abilities and assess learning outcomes should be aimed at the classroom level.

In one particular study, Hirsch (2007) asserted that in order for struggling students to perform better in school, they must be able to connect well with the school curriculum. The study in particular addressed that standardized reading tests are not sensitive enough measures of adequate progress in school, especially at the lower levels. Hirsch (2007) continued to indicate that standardized reading tests "are designed to measure general reading ability from a sampling of subject matter that may not correspond directly to the schooling that has been provided during the year" (p. 15). Consequently, students are not tested on what they have actually learned, and the tests tend to be impractical in general. As an example, some questions have multiple correct answers and the student must select all the correct answers, making the test more challenging. If this new trend of standardized testing continues, it further supports the urgent need to help students develop better reading skills. Meier and Wood (2004) also stressed that applying one single test score to measure the success of all students and their schools contributes to the decline in the quality of education in the U.S. as a whole.

Due to cultural differences and limited access to resources, many underprivileged and non-native English-speaking learners struggle the most on these tests and scores rarely capture their actual breadth of knowledge (Buly, 2005; Magruder et al., 2013). There is a lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity toward many non-English speaking students, those with disabilities, or those who are disadvantaged in some other way (Perso, 2012).

Such students often require critical information surrounding instruction that is missed in both teaching to the test and quantifying the results (Perso, 2012). On the part of educators and the U.S. educational system as a whole, this must be corrected or at least worked around, as teachers and curricula are not well equipped to teach in today's diverse classrooms (Lesaux, 2012). While there has been some verification that using standardized testing does contribute to gains in reading (Hirsch, 2007), teachers should be given a framework that can inform their instruction and curricular decisions more accurately (Buly, 2005). Teachers need to be exposed to additional resources, the appropriate training, and a new skill set to encourage and develop students from all backgrounds, rather than having to simply *teach to the test*.

***Lack of effective professional development for teachers*.** One of the leading causes of a lack of efficient professional development in teachers is their reluctance to improve teaching strategies (Lucilio, 2009). Often this is a result of the pressure to ensure that students perform well on standardized tests, rather than engage with the material for long-term comprehension. School districts and teachers are expected to make AYP based on NCLB (Simpson, 2006). Educators are responsible for ensuring that their students make progress and school officials are responsible for rigorous instruction that results in higher levels of student achievement. To change instruction effectively, teachers must receive adequate professional development that grants them the knowledge and skills to influence student performance positively (Fischer & Hamer, 2010).

However, teachers often lack the motivation to participate in professional development, unless they are required to do so (Lucilio, 2009). In response, educational leaders have required teachers to earn credits in order to maintain their teaching certificates, which are to be acquired through professional development. Teachers have traditionally had the liberty to choose in which

professional development training courses they want to participate, outside of the school, and at times that appropriately accommodate their full schedules (Carreòn & Rau, 2014). Researchers Stegelin, Cecconi, and Pintus (2015) and Smith (2016) have found that the new restrictions create problems because professional development is no longer student achievement focused, at the behest of the teacher, or at times and places chosen by teachers. To complicate the situation further, professional development is now a mandate in order for teachers to maintain employment. As such, professional development has been criticized for being ineffective (Fischer & Hamer, 2010; Klein & Riordan, 2009; Murphy, Torff, & Sessions, 2016; Petula & McDonald, 2009).

Professional development should aim to change instruction in the classroom by supplying teachers with innovative knowledge and skills that will advance student performance, as well as the time to complete their training (Carreòn & Rau, 2014). Teachers must be given the appropriate tools to impact student achievement positively. It is therefore essential to provide effective, ongoing professional development focused on innovative instructional strategies, at times and in places that fit teachers' needs. Professional development training must also be perceived as relevant to the classroom, the information taught must be implementable, and the tools used must be those that both the educator and students find useful.

Literacy reform in the United States beginning in the late 1990s. Several large-scale reforms have been attempted in the U.S. over the last 20 years including NCLB, the Reading First Initiative, and currently the CCSS. However, the Reading Report Panel was not a reform in itself but rather an ongoing forum for policymaking discussion, prompted the following several reforms of education.

***No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation*.** Teaching children to read is the most critical educational priority in the United States today. In an attempt to foster this, NCLB was established on January 23, 2001, and was signed into law on January 8, 2002 (Tompkins, 2010). NCLB recognized that there were major gaps in standardized public school test scores, on-time high school graduation, and higher education preparedness. In reaction to these problems, the mission of NCLB was to bring all children into proficiency (in reading and math) by 2014 (Present, 2010). When NCLB was passed in congress, it was intended to provide support for English language learners (as well as all other students), increase focus on student performance accountability, and prompt investigation of various educational institutions that were not meeting the required performance goals set by states and federal governments. In response to these NCLB performance mandates, the series of high-stakes testing strategies seen today were developed (Spring, 2009). Nevertheless, literacy is still not what it should be in the U.S., and, as noted previously, teaching to the test may not be the best method of garnering higher levels of proficiency in reading.

***National Reading Panel (NRP) report and the reading first initiative*.** In previous attempts to foster national reading proficiency, policy assessment groups were formed, such as the U.S. NRP. The NRP announced its research results regarding literacy education on April 13, 2000 in a report and video titled *Teaching Children to Read*. The panel's report highlighted the importance of the five effective components of literacy (a) alphabetic, (b) fluency, (c) comprehension, (d) teacher education and reading instruction, and (e) technology and reading instruction. The NRP findings formed the basis of a federal literacy policy that was then used to develop the Reading First program, the purpose of which was to ensure that all children in the U.S. learn to read well by the end of fourth grade.

With the publication of the NRP report, a significant number of federal dollars were made available to fund new reading programs. Reading First became the approved federal program for reading instruction in classrooms across the nation (Planty et al., 2009). In excess of $21 million dollars were budgeted to fund states' initiatives to ensure every child was reading by third grade. The Reading First Initiative was:

> Built upon the findings first introduced in the NRP Report by investing in scientifically-based reading instruction programs in the early grades and ensuring that more children would receive effective reading instruction and the help they needed before they fell too far behind. (Green, 2012, p. 28)

The Reading First Initiative to use scientifically-based reading instruction was first defined in the Reading Excellence Act of 1998 as a precursor to present day literacy mandates (Comber, 2014; Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003).

Although legislation has focused on many of the efforts discussed here, reading acquisition continues to be a problem in the United States. Through trial and error, it has become apparent that certain aspects of some of the reforms have made a difference; nevertheless, many have not. A number of instructional strategies have been implemented at different times to promote literacy in children in U.S. public schools. Some of these are addressed subsequently, including one that has shown great success in certain urban districts, especially in one Nevada school district, which was the focus of this study.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS). As part of the new legislation, the year 2010 marked the adoption of CCSS by 45 states. A nationwide focus to prepare students for college and career readiness through consistent ELA and Math standards was instituted. The objective of the CCSS was to ensure that a rigorous set of standards be identified and utilized in the learning

environment (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

With the goal of preparing students for the future, the CCSS standards were also developed to provide parents, students, and teachers a clear understanding of what is expected of students by identifying the specific learning outcomes necessary for a student to be college and career ready. Governmental policymakers also determined that there was a need to address the irregular standards that had resulted from contradictory expectations among schools, districts, and states, and that left numerous students unprepared for college or work (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

One issue that prompted the implementation of CCSS was that some students transfer from one school to another throughout their educational careers, and some will even transfer many times. In the event that students (including those students with disabilities) move or transfer within the same state, they are often held to similar content standards. However, when students transfer from one state to another, they are educated and assessed on different content standards, where they display different levels of achievement based on the specific standards set forth by that state. National regulation was needed to mitigate this problem, and the CCSS became a federal mandate (Thurlow & Kopriva, 2015). The construction of the CCSS was driven by the educational assessment that 21st century students must function within a complex society. As such, the CCSS standards have also been instituted to help provide a consistent and clear framework, both nationally and internationally focused, on what students must know in order to compete in the evolving global economy.

However, many researchers and research institutions disagree with the common educational format of the CCSS. For example, the 2012 Brown Center Report predicted that:

> Based on an empirical analysis of the effects of state standards that the CCSS will have little to no impact on student achievement. Supporters of the Common Core argue that strong, effective implementation of the standards will sweep away such skepticism by producing lasting, significant gains in student learning. So far, based on early innings of a long ballgame--there are no signs of such an impressive accomplishment. (Loveless, 2012, p. 4)

Based on the aforementioned information, certain liabilities could be associated with these standards (Loveless, 2012), and some of the greatest challenges to literacy achievement may emerge as a result of using this method of implementing reading achievement for all students. As the CCSS are probably going to play a significant role in public education for quite some time, there needs to be a measure of awareness surrounding how to navigate these standards, while also meeting the needs of all students at the classroom level.

Instructional Strategies for Developing and Encouraging Literacy

Reading is an extraordinarily complex cognitive process. Although many individuals frequently think of reading as one singular act, through brain-imaging techniques such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), research has shown that our brains engage in a number of simultaneous processes each time we sit down to read (Hempenstall, 2006). This is useful to know when attempting to develop an effective learning strategy, and infers that learning to read should be approached holistically (Weaver, 2002).

A number of approaches aim to promote literacy in children. According to Frith (2012), metacognitive approaches to learning are being encouraged by their teachers and peers. Metacognitive approaches are based on the tenet that a learner's thoughts largely affect his/her learning abilities and capabilities. Educators are using strategies such as modeling, the

appropriate use of pace and clarity, the use of non-linguistic cues, varied instruction, and comprehension checking as well (Blackwell, 2013). However, none of these has been as successful as using the five characteristics that are documented as having promoted reading proficiency at the elementary school level: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension. These five factors work together to create a comprehensive reading experience. As children learn to read, they must develop skills in all five of these areas in order to become successful readers (Gunning, 2013).

Becoming a fluent reader and writer is a cumulative process that begins prior to formal reading instruction in the early elementary grades. Teachers who use these core components of teaching reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension) effectively make a difference in a child's reading achievement, as well as in their motivation to read (Gunning, 2013). Researchers must identify and study districts/schools that are focusing on literacy reform and demonstrating positive results in order to better understand how teachers actually operationalize the five core components in classroom practice.

A number of instructional strategies encourage literacy in children. One intervention, the Reading First Initiative, provided direction on several key elements that were believed to make up a significant portion of creating an effective reading program when other programs seemed to fail. In a setting where reading is viewed as the constructive process of creating meaning that involves the reader, the text, and the purpose within social and cultural contents, the reader moves through the four stages of reading: pre-reading, reading, responding, and exploring (Tompkins, 2010).

In another study described by the NRP report, the initial stage in literacy development for children appears to begin in the emergent reader's stage, also known as the pre-reading stage.

These findings have been correlated with those of other studies, which reveal that children beginning in the emergent reader's stage need enriching and enjoyable experiences with books, especially with picture books (Gunning, 2013). Once he/she has established some type of connection between a child and book, the student is ready to begin developing the skill of focusing attention on letter-sound relationships, granted that the child is ready to engage with printed material. While emerging and transitioning from the emergent reader's stage, children must have obtained the ability to connect the letter-sound relationship in order to move into the early reader's stage, also known as the reading stage. During this stage, children are able to utilize several pre-reading strategies to predict a word, often using pictures to confirm predictions. They can discuss the background of the story to better understand the actions in the story and the message the story carries, look for clues about the story, and learn how to read for meaning (Tompkins, 2010).

The next stage presented in the study indicates that children move from the early reader's stage into a developing reader, formally identified as a transitional reader. The transitional reader, also known as the responding reader, is a child who is reading various texts at a fluent rate. As the research has indicated, children in this stage of literacy development are developing their comprehension strategies and utilizing the skills of shared characters, settings, and events that will help support their reading development. Essentially, during this stage, students typically have one to four strategies to use while reading to help them identify most words, while continuing to help with understanding increasingly more difficult text. The final stage through which a child moves as a developing reader is known as the applying stage, or the fluent reader stage (Tompkins, 2010). According to Tompkins (2010), readers who apply their understandings

of the material and apply their knowledge of text and of how text works can begin reading independently.

In their book on learning reading skills, Morrow and Gambrell (2011) supported the idea that teachers should focus on students' competence by facilitating activities that use various strategies that integrate the cueing systems in what has been termed the early reader's stage. Each of the four previously discussed stages of reading, as well as the corroborating support from Morrow and Gambrell's study, are important observations about some of the methods by which to create effective reading programs for early readers. However, the successful integration of these skills is perhaps best facilitated through the use of the five elements deemed to be essential components of effective reading (Gunning, 2013).

Despite all of the research available on literacy strategies for young children, none of these has been as successful as using the five aforementioned characteristics recognized to promote reading proficiency at the elementary school level: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension (Gunning, 2013). These five factors work together to create a comprehensive reading experience. As children learn to read, they must develop skills in all five of these areas in order to become successful readers.

Essential Components of Effective Reading

The question of how to keep up with current standards and analyze the most recent research has prompted the development of the essential components of an effective reading program (Learning Point Associates, 2004). According to recent research put out by the Learning Point Associates (2004), "An effective reading program will utilize valid and reliable assessments that help teachers know what skills students have acquired, which students are experiencing difficulty, and how much progress students have made" (para. 2). Although the

Reading First Initiative was designed to help eligible schools and districts select and implement K-2 reading programs that were based on scientific research (Tompkins, 2010), NCLB emphasized, “Closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students” (Learning Point Associates, 2004, para. 7). Thus, using the major components of an effective reading program essentially infers that every reading program must contain scientifically-based reading research programs that contain explicit and systematic instruction in the five key areas for early reading instruction in grades K-2 (Gunning, 2013). In coming to understand the five components of an effective reading program, as defined by the Learning Point Association, one must focus on the five elements as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

The Essential Components of Effective Reading Instruction

Component	Definition	Findings
Phonemic Awareness	The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds, or phonemes, of spoken words.	Can be taught and it helps children to learn to read and spell. Children who enter school with little phonemic awareness experience less success in learning to read.
Phonics	The ability to understand and detect the predictable relationship between phonemes, the sounds of spoken language, and graphemes, the letters and spelling that represent those sounds in written language.	Phonics can be taught and is most effective when introduced early to children who are having difficulty learning to read. Systematic and explicit instruction in phonics is better than non-systematic or no instruction.
Vocabulary Development	The ability to store information about the meanings and pronunciations of words necessary for communication. The four types of vocabulary are (a) listening, (b) speaking, (c) reading, and (d) writing.	The four types of vocabulary can be taught. Children learn the meanings of many words through everyday experiences with language.

(continued)

Component	Definition	Findings
Reading Fluency	The ability to read text quickly and accurately.	Reading fluency and overall reading achievement can be improved by using repeated readings and monitored oral reading. There is no research evidence that instructional time spent on silent, independent reading improves reading fluency.
Reading Comprehension	The ability to read for understanding, to remember what has been read, and to communicate what has been read.	Reading comprehension can be improved by explicit instruction that assists the reader to use specific comprehension strategies.

Note. Adapted from *A Closer Look at the Five Essential Components of Effective Reading Instruction*, by Learning Point Associates, 2004, retrieved from https://education.ucf.edu/mirc/Research/Closer%20Look.pdf. Copyright 2004 by the authors.

The Five Essential Components

Teachers of reading have one essential objective: to prepare children to be self-governing, deliberate readers in real life (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004). The five essential components described subsequently help teachers attain effective reading instruction by providing research-based instructional strategies for teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and all aspects of comprehension. The subsequent empirical literature was geared toward teaching diverse learners in grades K-2.

Phonemic awareness. The first component of reading is phonemic awareness, which is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words (Honig, Diamond, & Gutlohn, 2000). Phonemic awareness emphasizes paying attention to speech, given that speech consists of a sequential series of phonemes that, when used in conjunction, form words, leading to meaningful communication. Phonemes form the smallest units of sound and are crucial to the effective development of the sound structure in all languages

(Anthony & Lonigan, 2004). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers have a fundamental understanding of the relevance of phonemic awareness.

A body of research supports the importance of teaching phonemic awareness skills to developing readers (Shankweiler & Fowler, 2004), since the ability to isolate, blend, and segment individual sounds in words is a necessary skill for all beginning readers. Ultimately, the goal of phonemic awareness is to have students manipulate phonemes in spoken words: for example, blending sounds to form a word (/s/ /a/ /t/ = sat) or segmenting words into phonemes (camp = /c/ /a/ /m/ /p/; Armbruster, Lehr, Osborn, Adler, 2001). The earlier the student masters this skill, the higher the probability that the student will begin to decode words in isolation and/or text in a timely manner.

One way children become phonemically aware is through chants, rhymes, and word play activities (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). There are different levels of phonological awareness within words: syllables, onsets and rhymes, and sounds. Recognizing these components has important implications for supporting students' development of phonological awareness (Gunning, 2013). Children who have the ability to look inside words for syllables, rhymes, and individual sounds when reading and spelling are practicing phonological awareness. The Phonemic Awareness Chart (See Appendix A) outlines some of the most important strategies and research relating to developing phonemic awareness.

Phonics. Phonics are another essential tool for literacy achievement and a primary component of reading. Phonics can be described as the "predictable relationships between phonemes and graphemes" (Tompkins, 2010, p. 146). Understanding phonics and the purpose of phonics instruction requires the instructor to think about the way in which written language came into being (Learning Point Associates, 2004). Regarding the use of phonics through spoken

language, oral language needs to have existed prior to written communication. The primary emergence of spoken language led to the invention of various alphabets throughout humanity's history. A primary use of learning formal phonics is in teaching children to use letter-sound correspondences to identify unfamiliar words (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). Whereas phonemic awareness focuses on the ability to isolate, blend, and segment individual sounds into words, phonics more specifically requires teaching students to decode unfamiliar words effectively in a systematic, explicit, and sequential manner (Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011).

One study by Washburn et al. (2011) pointed out that:

> The English language is an alphabetic language with a deep orthography and does not always share the one-to-one phoneme/grapheme (e.g., sound and symbol) correspondence like other alphabetic languages (i.e., Spanish, Italian) who display a more transparent orthography. English contains irregular words that require students to master the English orthography and morphology in order to effectively decode words. (p. 24)

Plainly, phonics is much more than simply decoding words. Decoding language involves the ability to analyze and understand phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences, and discourse. The implication is that students will fare much better in later grades if teachers clearly teach all of these areas to students in the early grades.

Finally, the research indicates that the programs geared toward phonics instruction are most effective when they are either *systemic*, meaning that "the plan of instruction includes a carefully selected set of letter-sound relationships that are organized into a logical sequence [to create words]" (Suggate, 2014, p. 87), or *explicit*, meaning that "the programs provide teachers with precise directions for the teaching of these relationships" (p. 87). The latter analyzes the letter-sound relationships in previously learned words (Armbruster et al., 2001).

Along these lines, Armbruster et al. (2001) has added an additional component, that of analogy-based phonics. In this context, young students learn to use segments of word families as a means to identify words with which they are unfamiliar, but have similar parts. The example given is of the word *frustrate*. Armbruster explained how beginning readers use their knowledge of the parts of the word (such as *rust* and *ate*) to piece together and successfully pronounce the word frustrate. There are many ways to learn and apply phonics to the learning process, many of which have been very effective. The Phonics Strategies Chart (See Appendix B) shows the variety of tools offered and research conducted surrounding the use of phonics in developing literacy among young children.

Vocabulary. The third identified component of reading is vocabular***y,*** which is "knowing the meaning of words that influences comprehension, because it is difficult to understand when the words being read do not make sense" (Tompkins, 2010, p. 146). The term *vocabulary* refers to words we need to know to communicate effectively with others. There are four types of vocabulary: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and speaking vocabularies are sometimes referred to collectively as *oral vocabulary* (Tompkins, 2010). Vocabulary is critically important in word recognition. Young readers use the pronunciation and meanings of words in their oral vocabulary to help them recognize words they see in print. When children sound out an unfamiliar word, they use the trial pronunciation they have created to search their oral vocabulary. If they find a match and it makes sense in the sentence, they resume reading. If the word is not in their oral vocabulary, they will have a difficult time recognizing that word in print, even if they are able to produce an accurate pronunciation by decoding (Klein & Riordan, 2009). Vocabulary can also be developed in different ways. Students can learn it indirectly when they "engage daily in oral language, listen to adults read to them, and read extensively on their own"

(Hiebert & Kamil, 2005, p. 23) or directly when they are "explicitly taught both individual words and word-learning strategies" (p. 23). Although both practices are beneficial, for the sake of this study, the focus is on explicit instructional strategies.

Different studies offer varying ways to understand how vocabulary can be learned (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Graves et al., 2014; Hiebert & Kamil, 2005; Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). One study assessed the effects of vocabulary instruction using both repetition and interaction. The repetition portion used repeated readings of a story and practice with definitions, and the interactive portion featured a number of practices in varying contexts, as well as the active processing of words. The findings showed greater vocabulary retention for those students who received the repetition instruction (McKeown & Beck, 2014).

Another approach is Selecting Words for Instruction from Texts (SWIT), developed and implemented for a vocabulary instruction research project. The researchers ultimately found that the best words to use for instruction fell within four different categories: essential, valuable, accessible, and imported. The results showed that being able to choose the correct tool for instruction, based on the categorizing of word types using SWIT, enabled teachers to teach each type of vocabulary to a wide array of students (Graves et al., 2014). Some of the research available also suggests that vocabulary instruction can be broken down into three tiers of words:

- Tier 1: In this type of vocabulary instruction, the focus is on functional words, that is, providing students with common labels (e.g., desk, restroom, auditorium). The premise is to provide words that English language learner students require when interacting in school, home, and community settings.
- Tier 2: This type of vocabulary instruction focuses on teaching words that are meaningful to the story/text, that are unfamiliar, that cannot be taught by only

demonstrating an illustration, and that students will likely use in the future (e.g., astonished, impressed, hibernate).

- Tier 3: Here, vocabulary instruction involves teaching words related to a specific field/domain (e.g., medicine, astronomy, engineering). Tier 3 words are words not often discussed or seen in narrative text, but are more likely to appear in expository text. Tier 3 vocabulary instruction involves words pertinent to a specific field or profession (Beck et al., 2013).

Researchers have most commonly found that Tier 2 instruction is the most useful for students in K-2. By this time, most students have a good grasp on many of the functional words presented in Tier I instruction, and the type of vocabulary taught in Tier 3 is often presented at higher educational levels (Beck et al., 2013). Lastly, semantics, understanding word meanings and relationships, is also important because students need to understand how certain words relate to one another. For instance, students benefit from knowing several different meanings of words, and how words can be linked together by context (Vaughn, & Swanson, 2015). The Vocabulary Strategies Chart (See Appendix C) presents the findings associated with various strategies of teaching vocabulary to young learners.

Learning vocabulary is essential for word recognition. Young readers use their vocabulary to help them understand, recognize, and relate to the words they see in print (Klein & Riordan, 2009). As noted earlier, vocabulary can be developed in different ways, and students can build their vocabulary either indirectly or directly (i.e., explicitly; Hiebert & Kamil, 2005). With the intent to promote and expose teachers to the various strategies explicit instruction affords, the research and techniques presented here serve the purpose of promoting effective reading habits in young readers.

Fluency. The fourth identified component of reading is fluency, which is defined as "reading smoothly, quickly, and with expression" (Tompkins, 2010, p. 146). Prior to newer reading initiatives, fluency was assumed to mean rapid word recognition that freed up space in the reader's working memory for use in comprehending the message of the text. That is, fluent readers needed to put less effort into word recognition, and have more space available for comprehension. Later studies of fluency conducted by Rasinski, Blachowicz, and Lems (2012) expanded this understanding by clarifying that fluency can also involve grouping words within a sentence into phrases that make what is read easier to comprehend. Grouping words into meaningful phrases and reading with expression helps the reader understand the text by making what is being read resemble natural speech. Therefore, it is now understood that fluency entails both recognizing the words in a text rapidly and accurately and using phrasing and emphasis in a way that makes what is read sound like spoken language.

One aspect of fluency that has been found in the research is that the earlier age at which a child learns to decode words accurately, the greater the chance that the student will be on target with reading in consecutive grade levels. Having strong decoding skills and an effective fluency level increases reading outcomes (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). If students can achieve the ability to read text with automaticity, "a standard that is reached and attained once time, effort, and activities have been devoted toward mastery of a skill" (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015, p. 15), then they can read the majority of all words effortlessly, accurately, and fluently. The Fluency Strategies Chart (See Appendix D) presents many of the principal strategies used to increase the fluency of young readers.

Fluency is important when addressing how children learn to become proficient and efficient readers. In the field of education today, fluency means recognizing words in a text

rapidly and accurately, as well as using phrasing and emphasis in a way that makes what is read sound like naturally spoken language (Rasinski et al., 2012). In using any one, or many—as is often recommended—of the strategies presented to gain fluency, automaticity can be achieved and the student can benefit from being able to read most words with ease (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015).

Comprehension. The fifth and final identified component of reading is reading comprehension, which is the "process of constructing meaning using both the author's text and the reader's background knowledge for a specific purpose" (Tompkins, 2010, p. 146). Comprehension involves constructing meaning that is reasonable and accurate by connecting that which has been read to what the reader already knows. Once that information has been thoroughly processed, integrated, and understood by the reader, it can be said that reading comprehension has taken place (Tompkins, 2010). As the final goal of reading instruction, comprehension, cannot be gained without having mastered or at least included the other core components of learning how to read: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. The components can also benefit reader comprehension when aspects such as a reader's prior knowledge of content and the ability to access information are intact (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). While at times deemed easy to do, the teaching of reading comprehension must incorporate a "systematic teaching of vocabulary words to optimize student gains" (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015, p. 18). Perhaps even more important, gaining proficiency in reading comprehension skills also includes teaching the structure of the text being read, developing appropriate questions based on the text being read, and teaching Tier 2 vocabulary words (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015).

Having done significant work in this area, Vaughn and Swanson (2015) suggested using "*who, what, where, when, and why* questions if the text is narrative, versus using *compare and contrast*, *cause and effect*, and *Know What and Learn* strategies if the text is expository" (p. 13). Through the use of either one of these strategies, it is possible for young readers to increase their reading skills. Finally, another important component of developing full reading comprehension is content knowledge. As noted by Vaughn and Swanson (2015):

> Content knowledge can be defined as the level of understanding regarding a given topic. Simply stated, students who have acquired content knowledge can more easily make sense of words and have an easier time giving meaning to text inferences. This phenomenon is further underscored during text reading since good readers make inferences based on prior knowledge. To substantiate this point, reading comprehension depends on a reader having knowledge of words, knowledge of content, and the ability to make inferences to make sense of what is being read. (p. 22)

Along with all of the other information about reading comprehension strategies presented previously, the Comprehension Strategies Chart (See Appendix E) gives further in depth information about strategies used to foster reading comprehension in beginning readers.

Mastering the fifth and final identified component of reading, reading comprehension, requires including the other four core components of learning how to read, especially vocabulary. To be successful in this skill, readers must also have prior knowledge of content and the skills to access information, which can be met frequently by incorporating the other four components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency. Teaching text structure, developing appropriate questions, and teaching Tier 2 vocabulary words are also useful in developing students' reading comprehension (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015).

Literacy Improvements in Nevada

The educational landscape of Nevada is as diverse as its geography. Of the 17 county school districts, only three are designated as *urban*: Carson City (State Capital), Clark (Las Vegas metropolitan area), and Washoe (Reno-Sparks metropolitan area). Three school districts are designated as *rural* (Douglas, Story, Mineral), and the remaining 11 are designated as *urban.* In recent years, some areas experienced rapid growth, whereas some smaller districts lost enrollment. The student population is ethnically, racially, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). These factors, along with numerous others, are a challenge to promoting Nevada's education and literacy levels.

In Nevada today, many children are reading and writing at markedly low levels, and Nevada Department of Education determined in 2006 that the Nevada Department of Education NSLT needed to develop a long-term strategic plan to ameliorate the problem. In an effort to correct this deficit in education, the state was required to apply for the Reading First grant, which would help institute better literacy programs. In the successful development of the state's long-term plan and through grant funding, NSLT was instituted to help foster and establish a high level of literacy for all students by partnering with school districts, families, and communities (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). In this manner, statewide efforts to improve literacy in K-12 began, and district accountability became the focus of improvement. The county and school district examined in this study, CCSD, is composed of schools organized into 16 performance zones, including a new rural school performance zone. The district was restructured to allow each zone to increase its educational focus and improve educational support for the schools through the supervision of an assistant Chief Student Achievement Officer.

In an assessment of CCSD, the Gibson Consulting Group (2011) asserted that there is a strong belief that students can learn effectively and remain current with recent practices, tools, and learning methodologies. The district also believes that:

> Access to quality reading instruction for all children and a system of early prevention, intervention, and instructional supports are essential to meeting the full range of students' needs from early childhood through high school graduation. (Gibson Consulting Group, 2011, p. 23)

Collaboration at all levels, from administrators to parents, must occur if children are to experience a robust education that will grant them educational readiness by graduation (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). The Nevada State Comprehensive Literacy Plan (NSLP) requires that all Nevada school districts formulate and implement a local literacy plan that generally align with the NSLP. As such, the district's literacy plan is based on the three following goals:

- Expect and implement high-quality literacy instruction, which aligns to the CCSS for all teachers and administrators.
- Establish a standardized district wide assessment program in literacy.
- Increase collaboration with stakeholders to promote student achievement in literacy. (Gibson Consulting Group, 2011).

Results from the NSPF (n.d.) included a variety of other non-test score indicators (i.e., attendance, climate survey results, performance of English language learners, and performance of students on individualized educational plans). It is useful for educators to use the results to learn how to achieve literacy more quickly, information from the NSPF is being used to guide the utilization of district resources, and to provide training to schools most in need.

CCSD is made up of 15 geographic zones, adopted by the NSPF as a performance system for ranking the district's schools based on levels of student literacy performance. The NSPF is composed of several performance indicators, each of which is worth a certain number of predetermined points. After an evaluation, the district releases results from the NSPF, assigning a star rating to each elementary, middle, and high school. School ratings range from a low designation of one star to the high five star ranking. According to the 2014-2015 NSPF one third of all schools (105 of 327 schools, or 32%) achieved a 4-Star or 5-Star rank in 2013, when 3-Star ratings were included the numbers became seven out of ten (227 of 327 schools, or 69%; NSPF, n.d.).

Literacy Reform in Zone 10

The focus of this study, Clark County's Zone 10 in Nevada, is now engaged in literacy reform and the results have been promising in 11 elementary schools. In 2014, two schools in Performance Zone 10 gained five stars with a proficiency reading rate of 84% and greater. These schools were followed by three other schools achieving four stars, yielding a proficiency reading rate of 73% or higher. Finally, six other schools in this zone have achieved three stars, with a proficiency reading rate of 64% and greater (NSPF, n.d.). These positive statistics are especially noteworthy given that Nevada ranks low in literacy in relation to many other states. According to the 2013-2014 state-by-state comparison of literacy rates, Nevada students ranked near the bottom, with only 71.5% of students graduating from high school with acceptable literacy levels ("Clark County School District," n.d.).

To fully understand the promising reform efforts in Zone 10, it is important to study successful literacy strategies that foster improvement in kindergarten through second grade students' literacy performance. Positive results in a sea of educational struggle call for more

formal study to understand which strategies are most needed in the classroom. The teachers selected for this research consisted of high-performing K-2 teachers in schools with a rating of three stars or higher located in CCSD's performance zones. The selected schools have all improved student performance in at least one of the five literacy areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Gibson Consulting Group, 2011). A review of the literature suggests that specific instructional strategies can guide teachers in responding to students' literacy needs. Therefore, the opportunity existed to investigate and describe the literacy instructional strategies of high-performing K-2 teachers in CCSD. The strategies used by these teachers have contributed to the continual literacy growth of a variety of students. Results of this study can be used to replicate these specific practices in other areas to enhance the literacy achievement of all students.

Summary

As noted earlier, reading is a multifaceted cognitive process. As such, many different approaches have been fostered to promote literacy in children. Metacognitive approaches based on the theory that a learner's thoughts largely affect his/her learning abilities and capabilities have been implemented, as well as modeling, the use of pace and clarity, the use of non-linguistic cues, varied instruction, and comprehension checking (Blackwell, 2013; Frith, 2012; Tompkins, 2010). The Reading First Initiative has provided direction on several key elements, and moving through the four stages of reading (pre-reading, reading, responding, and exploring) has also played a role in teaching literacy. Other studies done by the NRP have aided in the quest to teach children to read (Tompkins, 2010.)

Nevertheless, it appears that the successful integration of these skills is perhaps best facilitated through the use of the five essential components of effective reading. No single

strategy has been as successful in promoting student literacy development as using phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension. These five factors work together to create a comprehensive reading experience, helping children become successful readers. Teachers who use scientifically-based reading programs based on these core components to teach make a difference in students' reading achievement (Gunning, 2013). Using these strategies can play a role in closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, most frequently seen between minority and non-minority students (Learning Point Associates, 2004).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore and describe the literacy instructional strategies of selected high-performing K-2 teachers in CCSD in Nevada. High performing teachers are those teachers who have consistently demonstrated student performance gains of 25% in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension over a 3-year period, according to the standard-based norms calculated by AIMSweb (2014). In this study, the researcher examined the research question in one purposively selected South Nevada Performance Zone that has a high diverse student population, includes a large number of low-socioeconomic status families, and has been identified as the third lowest performing performance zone within the school district.

Research Question

The following research question guided this multiple case study: What instructional strategies are used by selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD who work with diverse populations that have demonstrated a minimum gain of 25% in reading as measured by AIMSweb to develop (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension?

Research Design

A qualitative case study design was utilized for this study and involved observations, interviews, and a review of appropriate records. The case study design allowed the researcher to observe multiple classroom teachers during their literacy block, ranging from grades K-2. During observation, the researcher obtained various sources of data and information from different teaching contexts, which were explored further in a follow-up interview with the classroom teachers. Teachers' self-reported practices may have differed from their actual practices observed

in the classroom. The data collection methods of interviews and observations provided robust data that could be coded, analyzed, compared, and interpreted to gain a better understanding of what literacy and teaching practices and/or strategies are used in promoting K-2 literacy development for children who are below reading level. Additional data that was examined included the teachers' lesson plans, and any other data presented that was found appropriate for use. Creswell (2013) defined a qualitative approach as:

> An inquiry method that is instrumental in exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. In order to learn and understand a particular phenomenon, the inquirer must ask participants broad, general questions that collect detailed views of the participants in the form of words or images, thus analyzing the information for description of themes. (p. 142)

A multiple case study design enabled the researcher to explore the differences between cases, as the goal of a multiple case study is to replicate the findings across cases (Yin, 2014).

Design Credibility

In a multiple case study, it is critical to ensure the validity of the data collection methods (Creswell, 2013; Morse & Richards, 2013). According to Yin (2014), a case study involves research questions that ask *why* and *how*, which were consistent with the research question formulated for this study. A case study research design was also deemed appropriate given the multiple perspectives to be used (Stake, 2013). Analyzing multiple questions and collecting perceptual data was also consistent with using teachers as participants, in addition to an analysis of the literature. Creswell (2013) outlined eight primary strategies for achieving accuracy of the findings and validation of the design. This study employed six of the recommended eight strategies. First, the researcher built trust and learned the culture for the purposes of the

interviews and classroom observations, as she has an ongoing presence in the sites. The researcher has had a previous professional relationship with two schools used in this study, so she has already built trust and learned the culture within these two settings. Second, in line with the purpose and research question explored in this study, a case study research design was deemed the most appropriate. Triangulation of data occurred; data from interviews, observations, and artifact reviews were compared and corroborated. Finally, accurate coding and analysis of the data occurred to reveal emerging themes.

Setting

This multiple case study took place in a Southern Nevada school district. The schools selected for this study are located within the CCSD in Nevada. CCSD is the fifth largest school district in the United States and currently contains 13 performance zones. The specific classrooms are located in Performance Zone 10 of CCSD. Of the 13 performance zones located throughout CCSD, Performance Zone 10 was selected specifically for the following reasons: the demographics of the children in the program, the current NSPF scores of the chosen schools, and teacher qualifications ("Clark County School District," n.d.). Nearly 80% of the students within the selected scores are ELLs, and approximately 90% of the teachers assigned to grades K-2 have at least a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and are deemed highly qualified. Additionally, the school demographics in the two selected schools closely mirror those of the other elementary schools located within the selected performance zone given the unique set of demographics and resources evident in this particular performance zone.

The two elementary schools used in this study were Nate Mack Elementary School (NM) and Walter Bracken STEAM Academy (WB), also an elementary school. While both schools are elementary, there are some differences between them. For example, NM is a public PK, KG-

5 school, whereas WB is a public Magnet PK, KG-5. For NM, the racial breakdown of the student population consisted during the 2015-2016 school year of 4.4% Asian, 27.1% Hispanic, 7.7% African American, 47.1% White, and 10.8% of two or more races as seen in Table 2. The percentage of students in the free or discounted lunch program was 38.7. The student to teacher ratio was 16.5 to 1, and the school had 613 students at the time of the study. At WB, the racial breakdown of the student population consisted of 7.4% Asian, 54.1% Hispanic, 17.6% African American, 17.6% White, and 7.4% of two or more races as seen in Table 2. The percentage of students in the free or discounted lunch was 54.3. The student to teacher ratio was 17.5 to 1, and the school had 527 students at the time of the study. NM help a 4-Star rating and WB had a 5-Star rating (NSPF, n.d.).

Table 2

Student Demographic Per School

Name	Asian	Hispanic	African American	White	Two or More	2014-2015 Star Rating
NM	4.4%	27.1%	7.7%	47.1%	10.8%	4
WB	7.4%	54.1%	17.6%	17.6%	7.4%	5

Note. Adapted from "Clark," by Nevada School Performance Framework (n.d.), retrieved from http://nspf.doe.nv.gov/District/SchoolList/02?data=sPSEY3CfepVPskupSJ66tROlD6mo%252fhDUSn3rZBtlhHlvfVwIL1CeQQb9k%252ffVbEhQxim2rwI9CXC7QP92mJqpJq4T83GWE2gQ. Copyright 2017 by the authors.

Literacy efforts in CCSD. With over "300,000 students, 35,000 employees, 336 schools, and an annual budget of $5.2 billion" ("Clark County School District: Overview," n.d., para. 1), the state of Nevada includes 20 school districts; CCSD is the fifth-largest school district in the nation. CCSD serves all of Southern Nevada, including the cities of Las Vegas, Henderson, North Las Vegas, Boulder City, and Mesquite, as well as the rural areas of Laughlin, Blue Diamond, Logandale, Bunkerville, Goodsprings, Indian Springs, Mount Charleston, Moapa, Searchlight, and Sandy Valley. CCSD is divided into seven regions and 13 geographic zones. In

addition to the general education schools (K-12 public schools), it also operates 25 alternative schools and programs. The district has limited involvement with charter schools and, with the exception of providing some bus service, does not have any involvement with private schools located within the county.

Once the long-term plan for literacy improvement was published by the Nevada State Literacy Department, CCSD administrators and teachers faced great pressure to comply with the high bar that was established. The Nevada State Council on Learning Standards for the ELA and other state reviews required academic results. Elementary school districts challenged teachers to improve their literacy education capabilities as well as skills in multiple subjects essential for elementary teaching accreditation. Most elementary school districts developed different procedures for teaching literacy skills to students; however, the new teachers were very unfamiliar with certain methodologies and philosophies.

This study focused specifically on Southern Nevada's largest school district: Clark County School District (CCSD). CCSD was selected for study due to its 200% increase in the student population from 1998 to 2008 (Chang et al., 2012). Findings from the *Enrollment, Outcomes, and Opportunities Report* ("Clark County School District," n.d.) stated that in 2011, only 42% of CCSD's kindergarten through third-grade students met the CCSS requirements. The researchers conducting the study asserted that educators and practicing teachers ought to increase their pedagogical knowledge and abilities to increase literacy. This can involve increasing skills and knowledge of curriculum materials, assessment, and instructional strategies evaluations. Therefore, the teachers at YJSD should desire to learn the necessary techniques and knowledge to implement many methods as a means to help their students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds build vital literacy skills.

Educational programs at local elementary schools in YJSD have created restrictions for teachers created by the limits posed by the Nevada state certification requirements and their requirement of 6 or more credits hours of coursework in literacy (divided between content and theory strategies for elementary teacher undergraduate programs). It should be noted that colleges in Nevada are required to supply the needed courses in other areas of learning, and the rigorous requirements for literacy teaching have been eliminated from the general course requirements, unless teachers are pursuing certification specifically as a literacy teacher (Nevada Department of Education, 2011).

Nevada school performance framework scores. NCLB required that all children reach proficiency in reading and math by 2014. The performance indicators in 2012 were: growth measure of achievement, status measure of achievement, reductions in achievement gaps, and other indicators. While encompassing the four performance indicators, the NSPF index scores provide:

> A composite of several performance indicators, thus creating each indicator worth a predetermined maximum number of points. Each performance indicator is composed of multiple factors. The index score is the sum of all of these factors that is then measured against the star rating criteria. (Nevada Department of Education, 2011, p. 5)

Star rating. The NSPF index scores are divided into five score ranges that correspond to star ratings, where five is the highest rating. The basis for the five score ranges is formed by the index scores, which are determined using information from the 2013-2014 school years. As such,

> The overall index values for the schools at the 90th percentile then formed the basis for the point range from 5-Star schools. Conversely, the schools among the lowest 5% of schools within the NSPF formed the basis for a 1-Star rating. Continuing in this manner,

> a 4-Star rating represents schools in the 75th to 89th percentile range, a 3-star rating represents schools within the 25th to 74th percentiles and 2-Star schools fall between the 5th and 24th percentiles. (Nevada Department of Education, 2011, p. 8)

Teacher qualifications. The U.S. Department of Education and NCLB of 2001 required all core academic subject teachers be highly qualified (Goodman et al., 2013). As gathered further from analysis of this topic, the term *core academic subject* is defined as: "English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, social studies (history, geography, economics, civics, and government), the arts (music, visual arts, theater), and special education" (Nevada Department of Education, 2011, p. 23). However, in Nevada, "newly hired teachers in eligible, rural school districts who are hired to teach in Title I schools must be highly qualified in at least one subject upon employment at the school" (Nevada Department of Education, 2011, p. 23). Although CCSD provided teachers with some flexibility, it gives teachers 3 years to become highly qualified, and the Nevada High Objective Uniform State Standards of Evaluation (HOUSSE) requirements option could be used to meet the highly qualified teacher requirements (Nevada Department of Education, 2011).

Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The target population for this study consisted of six of the high-performing K-2 teachers in CCSD in Nevada from two elementary schools in Performance Zone 10 that have a star performance rating of 3 or higher and offered 9 months of instruction. High performing teachers are those teachers who have consistently demonstrated student performance gains of 25% in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension over a 3-year period, according to the standard-based norms calculated by AIMSweb. The participants for this study were teachers who have: (a) taught in their current grade for a minimum of 3 years; (b) taught at

their current school for a minimum of 3 years; and (c) demonstrated gains of 25% or higher in a student's literacy growth, as measured by extant data from AIMSweb. The teachers identified for this study had also demonstrated literacy growth within one of the five essential components of literacy and had consistently increased student achievement or consistently held higher successful percentages of student achievement than other teachers within the same district.

The participants were recruited through purposive sampling, as participants who were selected purposively may have had an interest in the study and may have been willing to contribute more relevant and in depth rich data for the study (Yin, 2014). For this study, purposive sampling was based on the following inclusion criteria. The K-2 classroom teacher participants for this study were identified as teachers who had: (a) taught in their current grade for a minimum of 3 years; (b) taught at their current school for a minimum of 3 years; and (c) demonstrated gains of 25% or higher in a student's literacy growth, as measured by extant data from AIMSweb. The teachers identified for this study also demonstrated literacy growth within one of the five essential components of literacy and had consistently increased student achievement or consistently held higher successful percentages of student achievement than other teachers within the same district.

Participants were invited to be a part of the study after looking through multiple years of assessment data to identify the appropriate subjects. Furthermore, recommendations were also requested from informed school personnel for the names of teachers they felt were most effective in the area of literacy instruction in their building. School administrators also identified teachers who were eligible to participate in the study. If the teacher was willing to participate, he/she was contacted informally by the researcher. After exhibiting a willingness to participate and meeting the criteria, participants were notified of their selection by receiving a hard copy letter in their

mailboxes. In accepting the request, the researcher followed up with a phone call to each participant and set up a formal time to meet. At that time, an informed consent document was shared, signed, and collected from teachers who were willing to participate. All participants chosen were able to complete the study.

Human Subjects Considerations

CCSD requires Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board (IRB) conditional approval before granting permission for the study to be conducted; therefore, Pepperdine IRB conditional approval was sought first. Approval was obtained and the researcher sought permission to conduct the study from CCSD local education IRB department, Performance Zone 10 Area Academic Chief, and the site principals or designees from the two schools included in the study.

The researcher developed an informed consent document (See Appendix F) containing all of the information required by IRB for each teacher to review and sign. The researcher completed the human subject investigator education course and the CITI course (See Appendix G) and applied the principles of this course to ensure minimal risks to participants. The minimal risks of participating in this study included (a) time collecting artifacts and participating in individual interviews, and (b) potential discomfort during classroom observations and while being interviewed. Potential benefits to the participants included the opportunity to reflect on classroom strategies related to literacy. This information could be used to inform and document each participant's level of implementation in accordance to the NSPF.

The identity of the schools and participants in this study were protected and known only to the researcher. Pseudonyms were used for the schools and participants. Teachers could have withdrawn from the study at any time without penalty. They also could choose not to respond to

any of the interview questions. The potential risks to the teachers were minimal. Psychologically, teachers might have perceived that their teaching skills were being judged and rated and could potentially be shared with their supervisors, even though confidentially was assured. Teachers might also have potentially experienced an increase in anxiety when they had to reflect honestly on their perceptions about their daily instructional practices, student growth, and how a loss of time participating in the study may have negatively impacted them. Socially, teachers might have felt that they were being compared with other teachers, which might have caused anxiety and discomfort. To minimize participants' discomfort, the researcher never revealed the identity of other research participants or a teacher's instructional strategies, and assured the participants that the study was being conducted for informational gathering purposes only, not as a means to judge teachers or their teaching strategies.

There were no perceived legal, physical, or economic risks to participating in this study. The teacher interviews were scheduled to occur during work time and at their work site, to avoid economic impacts of time and transportation costs, and the researcher attempted to reassure teachers that their time was being well spent. The teachers' interviews took place in adult-sized chairs (as opposed to child-sized chairs) to avoid physical discomfort. At any time during the interview, should a teacher have experienced any discomfort, the researcher was willing to pause to provide a short break and to check to see if the teacher was ready to resume the interview. This same action was applied to observations. Nevertheless, none of these potentialities occurred. A possible benefit of participating in this study was that teachers could receive professional development opportunities in the future to enhance their knowledge and skill based on the results of the study. There was no benefit or direct gain and participants were not remunerated for their participation.

Instrumentation

In this case study, the researcher utilized three data collection instruments to address the research question. The first instrument was a set of interview questions (See Appendix H), which were used during the one-on-one interviews. The data collection tool was an original instrument developed specifically to target teaching strategies used in both small and whole group settings. The second instrument used came in two parts: the Literacy Instructional Observation Strategy Checklist (See Appendix I) and the Indicators of Appropriate Strategies Checklist (See Appendix J), which were both utilized during classroom observation. The third instrument used was an artifact review form (See Appendix K), which supplied AIMSweb data.

Interview instrument. The instruments used to conduct interviews consisted of a tool for the purpose of keeping notes organized. Additionally, an audio recorder was used to capture the interviews verbatim so they could be transcribed. Interviewees were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy and representative responses. Additionally, content experts in literacy and best instructional strategies reviewed the interview questions for content validity. Changes were made based on their feedback. Before interviewing took place, the interview questions were piloted with one teacher from each prospective grade level and teachers in another elementary school in the same geographic area who work with children from similar demographic backgrounds. The purpose of the pilot test was to verify if indeed the interview questions were eliciting the quality and quantity of responses desired in response to the questions. To help ensure that the interview questions targeted whole group and small group literacy instruction, they focused on (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension.

Classroom observation instrument. When observing the classes, the researcher arrived early to each class and remained as unobtrusive as possible to allow teachers to conduct their classes without concern about potential interference. The instrument used to collect data during the observations of the teachers in the classroom was an Instructional Strategies Checklist (See Appendix I). By using the checklist, the researcher's intent was to establish the use of the five essential literacy components through taking notes while in the field. Field notes were used to collect data during the observations of teachers in the classroom; the researcher jotted down observations on the Instructional Strategies Checklist form, as well on the Appropriate Strategies Checklist (See Appendix J). These notes were used to corroborate the findings.

Both forms were used to jot down notes on explicit instruction and discussion of word meanings through the use of a variety of situations, such as various vocabulary independent word learning strategies. The observation form was also used to focus on phonemic awareness to assess whether teachers (K-1) were utilizing and incorporating the manipulation of individual words, syllables, and eventually sounds in words (i.e., "what sounds do you hear in cat?" c//a//t//) phonics, and whether teachers (K-2) were teaching spelling patterns, syllable patterns, and phonetic identification of words. Finally, fluency instruction was assessed by observing choral reading, partner reading, teacher-student paired reading, tape-assisted reading, and reading connected text with corrective feedback.

Artifact review instrument. The artifact review instrument that was used assessed student literacy growth and collected the students' literacy data, providing information on lesson plans, assessment tools, and instructional materials (See Appendix K). Permission was granted by the selected schools for the use of their AIMSweb data that was used to support the data gathered in this study. No licensing or copyright clearance was required for the use of AIMSweb

data. Lastly, the cross-sectional survey and aforementioned instruments were used as intended; no deception was included in the study. An original instrument was created to record the data captured during the review of artifacts.

Instrumentation validity. As mentioned earlier, content experts in literacy and best instructional strategies reviewed the interview questions for content validity. Alaina Crainer, Director of Literacy, and Dr. Danielle Miller, Director of Curriculum and Development, reviewed the three instruments (interview questions, observational data gathering methods, and artifact assessment procedures) to ensure content validity. The instruments were checked for clarity of language, for appropriate number of questions, and to ensure the suitability of the projected time for interview and observation processes. Based on this expert review process, changes in the approach were made.

Data Collection Procedures and Management

The data gathering process focused on three strategies: interviews, classroom observations, and a review of records and artifacts as appropriate. The data collection strategies were implemented in three phases. The interviews took place first, followed by observations of the teachers in the classroom to provide additional detail and depth about the teaching strategies used during direct instruction. Lastly, review of respective records and artifacts occurred during both the interview phase and observation phase to further support the data collected. The data collection procedures and management ensured the teachers' confidentially. The teachers and students' identities were coded using pseudonyms. The documents identifying the pseudonyms were kept in a separate file on a computer that is password protected and to which only the researcher has access. All data collected by the researcher will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed. The data will be destroyed 5 years after completion of this study.

Memoing. During the interview data collection stage of this study, and immediately after each interview, the interview responses were recorded and analyzed through memoing. Memoing is a process by which researchers write down their thoughts, questions, and reflections for later reference and analysis. Additionally, memoing occurred during and after each classroom observation. Memoing was used as both a data collection process and as an early step in the data analysis process. Birks and Mills (2015) contended that a researcher should never discard a memo, no matter how brief or seemingly minute, as every piece of data has the potential to become vitally important as patterns of thought and reflections emerge. Memoing is primarily open-ended and loosely structured, and has been described as being similar to free writing or stream of consciousness writing (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

Interview procedures. The interviews were semi-structured and occurred at the onset of the research, prior to the teacher observations. Each interview was scheduled for 1 hour; although the actual time varied depending on the detail included in the participants' experiences and shared responses. The interviews took place at each teacher's work site, thus eliminating the need for them to travel to another location and serving to minimize time and cost to the teachers. Interviews were done individually and privately, with only the researcher and respective teacher present. Arrangements were made to hold the interviews either in the teacher's classroom, when other children and staff were not present, or in another predetermined location that allowed for privacy.

Initially, selected teachers were interviewed at the onset of the study. The interview instrument (See Appendix L) protocol guided the flow of the interview. At the beginning of the interview, teachers were briefed about the nature and intent of the research study. They were also assured of the confidentiality of the information that they shared, as well as the option of opting

out of the interview and the study at any time. The interview questions were open-ended and as such, could not be answered simply with a yes or no or one-word answer. At times, the interviewer utilized prompts to encourage the teachers to answer questions more thoroughly.

As necessary, a second interview occurred with teachers to follow up on themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interviews and the results gathered from the observations in their classrooms. The second interviews followed a less structured approach, which allowed for any adjustments or corrections based on the interviewees' previous responses. The second interviews were arranged based on the need for additional clarification, and it was also possible for teachers to amend their original responses at this time. Nonetheless, and though participants were willing, there was no need for the researcher to hold a second interview.

Interview data management. The security and confidentiality of the data was maintained through several measures. Within a day after each interview, the audio files of the interview were transcribed by the interviewer and stored in a file on the researcher's personal computer. Additionally, each audio file of the interview as stored electronically with a passcode. Neither the audio files nor the transcriptions had any identifying personal information. The identities of the teachers were coded using pseudonyms. The documents identifying the pseudonyms were kept in a separate file on the computer. Given the importance of emergent thoughts and connections potentially captured in the memos, those handwritten notes were also transcribed electronically and saved in a file on the computer. The process of transcription itself contributed to initial analysis as themes and patterns become apparent.

Classroom observation procedures. The second data collection strategy was observations. Observations in each classroom took place after the initial interviews with the teachers. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher scheduled the subsequent

observation time with the teacher. Each observation lasted approximately 2 hours and included observation of the large group learning time, as well as small group activities. The focus of each observation was the participating teacher who was interviewed previously. The researcher followed a non-participant observational technique to minimize her potential influence on the dynamics of the classroom (Morse & Richards, 2013). Observations were used to verify and support and/or supplement the responses provided by the teachers during the interviews. Field notes were taken as needed, to capture any pertinent information not included on the checklists, and jotted down in the checklist comment section. The researcher conducted all observations.

Data management for classroom observations. As noted in the discussion on managing the interview data, teachers' identities were coded using pseudonyms. The documents identifying the pseudonyms were being kept in a separate file on the computer, along with information gathered for the checklists. Given the importance of emergent thoughts and connections potentially captured in the memos, handwritten notes were also transcribed electronically and saved in a file on the computer. As noted previously, the process of transcription itself contributed to initial analysis as themes and patterns become apparent.

Artifact use procedures. The artifact use procedure consisted of systematically gathering information on general student lesson plans, students' individual learning plans developed by the teacher, group weekly planning forms, professional development training records maintained by the program, and other documents that could provide additional detail regarding the teaching strategies utilized by the teachers. Data management for artifact information was facilitated by using the artifact review form, consisting of lesson plans, assessment tools, and instructional materials (See Appendix K). The AIMSweb data utilized in this study were sorted during both the interview phase and observation phase to further support

the data collected. These artifacts were used in concert with the interview and observation data collected for this study.

Data management for artifact use. To manage the artifact data, all documents and information gathered were kept in separate files on the computer. The identities of the teachers and students were coded using pseudonyms. The documents identifying the pseudonyms were kept in a separate file on the computer. All data collected by the researcher is kept confidential and will not be disclosed. The data will be destroyed 5 years after completion of this study.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The data analysis and reporting of the interviews, observations, and artifacts was conducted through memoing (mostly for use with interview and observation data), artifact gathering, triangulation, and coding, or any combination of these. Further analysis and reporting is addressed in Chapter 4 of this study using emergent themes.

Interviews. To begin, the researcher transcribed the interviews through listening carefully to the interview tapes. Second, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions and the related memoing notes holistically. In the following step, the researcher used open coding of the data to identify the categories of information shared by the respondents (Creswell, 2013). Coding was done by hand through use of a codebook, and interviews with the teachers were analyzed to identify possible themes in the participants' responses. Memoing notes supported the coding, and two experienced coders were invited to code transcripts. The researcher then compared her coding results with other coders' results and negotiated final outcomes.

Observations. For analysis and reporting of the observations, the researcher coded the notes taken, while in the classrooms, on the Observational Checklist Forms (see Appendices I & J). Again, coding was done by hand through use of a codebook, and the observations of the

classroom were analyzed to identify possible themes in the interactions and teaching methods observed. As with the interviews, the researcher then compared all of her coding results to discover emerging themes.

Artifact analysis and reporting. An analysis of the respective records and artifacts co-occurred with an analysis of the interview and observation data to provide additional detail and depth about the teaching strategies during direct instruction, individual learning centers, and small group instruction during reading. Analysis took place by using the cross-sectional survey (via AIMSweb) and an original instrument created to record data captured during the review of artifacts (See Appendix K).

Triangulation. Triangulation was incorporated to make use of the preexisting data and research to analyze methods, investigations, and theories to provide corroborating evidence for this study (Creswell, 2013). Data from interviews, observations, and artifact reviews were compared and corroborated. Finally, accurate coding of the data occurred as an analysis was conducted to reveal emerging themes. A deeper level investigation into the data permitted multifaceted analysis and helped certain themes of classroom literacy instructional practices emerge. More specifically, data reports from the Nevada Department of Education (2017) and the NSPF (n.d.) were examined as a part of the triangulation process used in this study. National reports from the U.S. Department of Education were also used to add credibility to the research being conducted in this study (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). The resulting effect allowed commonalities to emerge in the responses of the teachers and in their observed instructional strategies.

Coding. Given the emergent, dynamic nature of qualitative studies, data analysis was an ongoing process in this research. Creswell (2013) explained that ongoing coding is key to

identifying emerging trends in the data. Open coding was the first step in analyzing the data, consisting of the researcher reviewing the transcribed interviews and memos and identifying categories of information shared by the respondents. Coding was done by hand, rather than using a software program. A codebook with initial categories based on the results of the literature review was developed to aid in the coding process. The interviews with the teachers were coded to identify possible themes in their responses as well. These themes were then analyzed to identify possible subcategories.

The researcher conducted further data analysis through the axial coding process (Creswell, 2013). Axial coding occurs after open coding and explores the "Cs, which identify the causes, consequences, and conditions affecting the categories" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 5). Axial coding is often the core of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). For the observations, field notes and resulting literacy instructional practices from each classroom teacher were analyzed. A table displaying this data was created and is included in Chapter 4. These metrics were then analyzed further to determine which measures were significant as they related to teachers' classroom practices and management.

Positionality

Threats to validity often undermine findings revealed through the analysis of observational data. To ensure validity of collected data and data analysis, the researcher deliberately gathered, analyzed, and interpreted information only through means consistent with an earnest attempt to understand and compare accurately the relevant beliefs, actions, and perspectives of the teachers used in this study. Many features of this study's research design aimed to maximize validity while minimizing researcher bias. For example, member-checking

helped ensure that the results presented were objective and that the study design remained valid throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher's roles in this study were observer, data collector, and data analyzer. In these capacities, the researcher both collected and analyzed the data for thematic content. As a classroom observer, the researcher focused attention on the teaching strategies used by teachers as well as student responses. As an interviewer, the researcher was professional and direct. The interviews were conducted thoroughly but quickly. It was the researcher's goal to remain objective throughout both the data collection and analysis phases of the study. The researcher attempted to record and analyze the data accurately and coded the information relevantly and without bias. Triangulation aided in verifying the accuracy of results obtained. Chapter 4 focuses on the research findings that were yielded during various classroom observations and teacher interviews.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the literacy instructional strategies of selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD in Nevada as related to the five core literacy components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. High performing teachers were defined as those teachers who have consistently demonstrated student performance gains of 25% in at least one of the five core literacy component areas over a 3-year period. The primary research question of this study was: What instructional strategies are used by selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD who work with diverse populations that have demonstrated a minimum gain of 25% in reading as measured by AIMSweb to develop (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension?

This chapter consists of a detailed presentation of findings through interviews, a Literacy Instructional Observation Checklist, a Strategies Checklist, and an artifact review consisting of pictures taken in the classrooms, teachers' lesson plans, and AIMSweb data. The interviews consisted of face-to-face interviews with five K-2 high-performing teachers from two different elementary schools using open-ended questions (See Appendix H). The observations consisted of observing six teachers during their classroom literacy instructional time to gather information about the strategies they use to teach. A Literacy Instructional Observation Checklist (See Appendix I) and a Strategies checklist (See Appendix J) were used to facilitate the data collection and are presented subsequently. The artifact review consisted of assimilating pictures taken in the classrooms, teachers' lesson plans, and AIMSweb data. Triangulation was achieved through the use of interviews, observations, and artifacts and provided robust data that could be coded, analyzed, compared, and interpreted to gain a better understanding of what literacy and

teaching practices and/or strategies are used in promoting K-2 literacy development for children who are below reading level. The findings are first organized by participant. For each participant, the interview findings are presented first, next the observation findings, including the Literacy Observation Checklist, the Strategies Checklist, and associated artifacts. Artifact data using AIMSweb follows, and a summarized triangulation of the data is then presented. The chapter concludes with the collective participant findings and a summary of key findings.

Findings for Kady

Interview findings.

Question 1*: *What type of informal and formal assessments do you use to learn about your students' literacy skills? In response to the first question, Part A, Kady appears to have a diverse number of strategies she and Jen (Kady's Co-Teacher) use to teach their kindergarteners at Nate Mack. In her own words, Kady responded to the types of formal strategies used in the classroom by sharing, "Formal would be Kindergarten Essential Skills, letter name, and letter sound. Another formal would be Phonemic Awareness, Phonological Awareness." Kady also shared that she and Jen use a computer system referred to as ESGI. She noted, "We're using the ESGI. It's just a way to gather information, instead of paper, pencil." Nevertheless, Kady reported that she does prefer the paper and pencil version of an assessment, the Kindergarten Essential Skills, "because I like the paper, pencil aspect of it." She continued on by relating the following:

> And for me, I'm not comfortable just having an electronic version. So like, for me at the beginning when I first assess the kids, I did it paper, pencil, and then I entered it into the ESGI. So, we aligned our ESGI questions to the Essential Skills. So, for example, the

> phonological skills that we assessed in ESGI are the same words that we used for the Essential Skills.

However, it is clear that she uses both paper and pencil method as well as the ESGI computer method to reassess students. Kady shared:

> So, with the ESGI I do like the fact that it's very easy and quick to -- once I got the initial information, it's much easier to reassess using the ESGI, because you can just pull it up on iPad, take two minutes, and the information's downloaded. And it makes it so much faster to generate progress reports that are still specific. And you can generate flashcards based on what the children know. So, the program itself, I definitely see the benefits of it, because it can make things a lot quicker, and more effective, and more efficient.

In response to a question about using AIMSweb, Kady asserted, "I do–at the beginning of the year I'll do the Kindergarten Essential Skills. In January, I'll do the AIMS."

Question 2: How, if at all, does the assessment data gathered inform your instructional planning for the whole group? For some students? For individuals? In exploring Kady's answer to the second interview question she explained:

> So, for small groups–well, I think for whole group it is helpful, because it really helps us focus on what we're going to concentrate on when it comes to–let's take phonological awareness. Like, if I know that my class as a whole cannot generate rhymes, I'm going to make sure that when I'm doing my Heggerty that we always do the rhyming. And once they have the rhyming down, then I'll move onto another skill. So, it gives an idea where we should begin with the awareness instruction, in small groups anyway. I mean, that's how the DRA with–and also with the word wall, the number of high frequency words that they know clearly helped to determine what their instructional level is for reading, so I

> know even what group to put them in. It's directly correlated. What we learn from Essential Skills, including their high frequency words, and how they score on the DRA, determines what group they're in, and what we adjust for those groups instructionally.

In answering a question about Heggerty and McCracken she responded in this way:

> Our school site chose–at the grade level we chose McCracken and Heggerty. But, we're not the only–so, that's site, so it was based on–that was at grade level. But, we do McCracken, Heggerty as a whole group, Read Alouds (based from the Basile Alignment Project lessons) whole group. In small groups we use data from gathered from our various programs such as Imagine Learning, I-ready and Fast Forward that help drive our instruction. During small group time we work on letter identification, high frequency words and reading those words inside of a given text. When it came to the rigorous texts the District provided us with a bucket, just as we have done our personal training and developed specials to identify the importance of students having that rigorous text.

Kady's last response to the interview question showed her commitment to the small group approach when she shared:

> You know, I can tell you that my reading group are based on students' current ability levels that changes every 1 to 2 months. When working with student during small group time, it provides it allows me to focus on their specific areas of deficit[s] within certain literacy areas. Small group times are more effective, because it's much more -- not necessarily focused, but I just feel like it's more effective.

Question 3: What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom? In response to the question, Kady began by clarifying whether the question was directed towards literary instruction. Once this was confirmed, she responded by citing a series

of programs, including the "Daily 5," a program that helps students develop reading and writing skills and facilitates independent learning. In her own words, Kady shared that "students participate in a phonics program every day [and] they [also] participate in the Daily 5 every day. So, that means they're working on writing, word work, reading, and reading to self every day." When asked if she uses explicit phonics as a skill or strategy, Kady replied by saying that "McCracken" was used and went on to explain what McCracken is with the following response:

> McCracken is [where] students are timed or they use a game board. And they are breaking apart Consonant Vowel Consonant (CVC) words based on sound and then blending them back together.
>
> And then, eventually–beginning with CVC–well, it starts out with beginning sounds, but I move pretty quickly to the CVC. And then we'll do–eventually we will end up with some long vowel sounds with some blends. But, for kindergarten we start out with just the easy words. And we hang there for a good while.

Question 4: Which of these strategies do you most attribute to student success with literacy skills? In reflecting on question four, Kady described a number of contributing components, one of which was the literacy framework as a whole. This framework typically consists of the use of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction as students engage in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. She shared the following:

> I would say implementing the components of the literacy framework. The fact that students get–and the fact that they get whole group instruction, then direct small group instruction helps their literacy skills. Then when we add in the complex text instruction in addition to student driven computer based instruction, it truly helps with every piece of instruction and skill, and then they practice that in centers.

Question 5: What structures do you have in place during your literacy block? In response to question five, Kady stated:

> So, there is, like I said, the phonemic awareness, the phonics. We have read-aloud to our students, reading as a class, and during that time we implement the strategies that we've learned within the phonics, and also phonemic awareness, so that we tie it obviously to print. We also share–participate in using close read strategies to help develop their comprehension.

Question 6: What type of materials and texts are used in your classroom to engage students with literacy skills? When responding to the question, Kady shared that in addition to the use of McCracken, Heggerty, and read-alouds, she utilizes a two-part strategy where part one is delivered in the beginning of the school year and part two is introduced in January. She explained:

> So, we use materials at the beginning of the year to get students used to engaging in texts, sharing with a partner, participating in a–listening to a story. And then, about January, we'll teach them close read strategies. So, the district gave us a bucket of rigorous texts - that we used for students to learn to comprehend a text, basically a text with fiction and non-fiction. We use author studies. You know, just those authors that write and enrich in a way that in an enriched format, so that students are learning new vocabulary that they're having to dig deeper in the text.

Question 7: Does the district mandate these materials or do you choose the materials? In exploring Kady's answers to the seventh interview question, Kady's response pointed towards a certain flexibility in being able to choose and utilize materials that have proven to be an effective part of a sound literacy framework. Kady shared:

> So, we've gone out and learned about appropriate books for kindergarten to challenge their reading skills. I just think they're good practices. When they were training us on our literacy framework about–I can never remember time periods, maybe three years ago, maybe it's longer than that, 5 years ago–when we were really going through the literacy framework, and talking about good practices that come with reading instruction, that's where I picked up a lot of my personal information.

Kady also spoke about the benefits of using interactive writing materials and it appears that such materials were originally provided by the district and then "tweaked" by the teacher. Kady stated:

> I'm a big believer in interactive writing. That's where we get to use those phonic skills that we're implicitly teaching, intentionally teaching. And they're using it to create a text as a class. It could be a chart of information. It could be a class book that we're creating. And their interactive writing I think makes huge–for students developing those skills.

Question 8: Think about a student who you recently provided extra support to in the area of literacy. What strategies do you utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult literacy skills? When Kady was asked this question, she spoke of the importance the physical placement of the pupil within the classroom and pointed out a number of important factors to consider when seating them. Her precise words on the subject were as follows:

> A couple of strategies I think are just simple things as far as location. Putting them in the classroom where they can access tools, like an alphabet code. Surrounding them with students that do have high literary skills that can be role models for them. And then, I think just being aware of what they need, and when they're working on independent work, giving them as minimal input as needed, so they can launch themselves. And then

of course, for those students who truly are struggling they're going to be put–be identified as being deficient, and they're going to receive additional support through the RtA process.

Question 9: Please share any artifacts you brought that captures a literacy strategy or data that helps support any decisions to support students' literacy needs. In response to the request to share about this question, the following Artifact Review form was filled out to show which types of artifacts Kady used in her teaching. Of the artifacts listed, Kady noted that she most frequently used class room center boards, early literacy curriculum and resources, and hanging up pictures of student work.

Artifact review.

Table 3

Kady's Artifact Review

Date: November 14-15 2016 December 1, 2016 School: Nate Mack Elementary School	Time: 10:15-12:30pm 9am-10:30 Classroom: A Grade: K
Type of Artifact	Practices
● Lesson plans ● Early literacy curriculum and resources ● Team meeting notes ● Other	● Implementation of evidence-based core curriculum aligned with early literacy skills (Explicit instruction, Blending, Repeated Reading, Choral Reading, etc.)

(continued)

Type of Artifact	Practices
● Pictures of class room centers ● Pictures of student work	● Use of a variety of learning formats/groupings (i.e. whole group, small group, centers, embedded; Whole group phonics, phonemic awareness, small groups and centers, computer based program support, iPad learning activities) ● Adult support that is adapted to students' early literacy needs ● Use of instructional strategies to meet the needs of the whole class, some students, and individuals (i.e., intentional teaching, intensive scaffolding)

Classroom artifacts/pictures. Student center signs are used to state the specific Common Core Learning Objectives to be achieved at this center. These center signs are used to remind the student, but more importantly tell the adult/parent volunteer what the students at this center are focusing on learning utilizing the standards (see Figure 1). It also models as an idea for what the parents can do at home with the student who struggles in this content and/or standard area. Figure 2 offers an example of a specific center station used during class instruction.

Figure 1. Classroom centers.

Figure 2. Writing center.

Figure 3. Early literacy: Alphabet wall that encompasses high-frequency words/word wall.

Figure 4. Some samples of student work.

Literacy instructional observation checklist.

Vocabulary instruction. In the area of vocabulary instruction, Kady was observed using explicit instruction and discussion of word meanings in a variety of situations. She also taught both morphology (the study of the forms of words and how word parts are formed) and etymology (the study of where words come from and how the change over time). Additionally, Kady provided explicit instruction on independent word learning strategies (word parts, context clues, and use of dictionaries) and on several encounters, instructed students directly on new vocabulary. Kady provided a visual picture and simple sentences to introduce new vocabulary words during complex reading time.

Comprehension strategy instruction. In the area of comprehension strategy instruction, Kady was observed activating/building prior knowledge, encouraging student-generated

questions, predicting, inferring, making connections, use of graphic organizers, summarizing, and evaluating and synthesizing. Kady had her students use new texts to make predications while observing pictures. This activity was preceded with an exercise in recalling information using previously used texts. Lastly, and while using the new texts, Kady conducted simple question and answer sessions.

Fluency instruction. In the area of fluency instruction, Kady was observed carrying out choral reading, repeated timed readings, partner reading, student-adult reading, unison reading, tape-assisted reading, reader's theater, reading connected text with corrective feedback and avoidance of Round Robin and/or "Popcorn" reading. As a class, Kady had her students read familiar texts two to three times and subsequently introduced new texts in small groups. In the smaller groups and under Kady's observation, students conducted whisper-reading and were provided corrective feedback when necessary. Prompting and positive verbal praise were also used during small group work, especially when students were having difficulty. Lastly, Kady conducted two additional fluency instructional exercises. One involved listening to a story on a cassette tape within a center, by having the students listen carefully to the book being read aloud and asking the students to try and understand the overall context of the story, even if they did not understand all of the vocabulary being introduced. The second exercise involved the use of iPad stations to listen to and read texts with partners. Both of these exercises familiarized students with listening for understanding and fluency.

Writing instruction. In the area of writing instruction, Kady was observed conducting brainstorming, pre-writing, word processing on the computer, and teacher modeling writing processes. Additionally, Kady used a graphic organizer, provided models of effective writing, and provided writing in response to readings. Kady had her students use a writing center to draw

their ideas about Thanksgiving and subsequently (using a "centers word wall" and picture aides), create books on what they were thankful for. Both the centers word wall and picture aides helped the students in writing simple sentences that were intended to match the pictures.

Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study. In the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and wordy study instruction, Kady was observed implementing the following teaching strategies.

Phonemic awareness instruction (K-1). Kady taught her students the art of manipulating individual words, syllables, and sounds in words (i.e., "What sounds do you hear in cat? c//a//t//").

Kady instructed her students to focus on the letter "L" for one week by using letter identification and letter sound. Subsequently, Kady had the students snap their new word (i.e., using the word "have," students wrote "h," "a," "v," "e" on the word wall).

Phonics instruction (K-2). Kady taught syllable patterns, spelling patterns, and phonetic identification of words. Using small groups, Kady introduced new weekly and un-retained sight words using both familiar and new texts.

Word study (K-2). Kady instructed her students on decoding multi-syllabic words. Kady conducted a review of sight words. Kady used Heggerty with the entire class to teach the following 10 skills: letter naming, rhyming, onset fluency, blending, identifying final and/or medial sounds, segmenting, adding phonemes, deleting phonemes, substituting phonemes, and language awareness.

Content literacy instruction (math, science, and social sciences). In the area of content literacy instruction, Kady assessed students' level of background knowledge and collaborated with them to increase their baseline knowledge. This work included teaching content

vocabulary/concepts, providing explicit instruction on text structure and text/graphic feature, and utilizing graphic organizers. Kady had her students conduct writing center activities and computer-based lessons (i.e., Imagine Learning and i-Ready).

Strategies checklist findings. Kady's use of strategy was satisfactory in all areas. Regarding *efficient use of teacher-directed time*, Kady used her time skillfully, helping students make useful learning connections that were used to build on existing knowledge. Kady also demonstrated competency in employing and developing her students' cognitive abilities. Concerning the provision of *opportunities for student interaction*, Kady was masterful in both working directly with her students as well as in facilitating her students in working as pairs. In the area of *immediate corrective feedback*, Kady was tactful yet deliberate in correcting her students. Regarding *differentiated instruction*, tasks with varying levels of difficulty were introduced based on student level and groups were formed based on student need. Lastly, and concerning *student engagement*, Kady was competent in engaging all of her students and did so in part by effectively structuring the pace of her teaching.

Artifact findings with AIMSweb. This portion of the analysis took place by using the cross-sectional survey using AIMSweb: a universal screening, progress monitoring, and data management system that supports RTI and tiered instruction (AIMSweb, 2014). While not all of the categories of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are presented in Kady's AIMSweb findings, the areas that showed the most growth are shown and discussed.

As seen from Kady's first chart, the NRP (2000) has identified some critical pre-reading skills that should be assessed in Kindergarten and early Grade 1, including Phonemic Awareness,

and elements of Phonics. The ability to fluently identify letters and letter sounds are two indicators of reading ability.

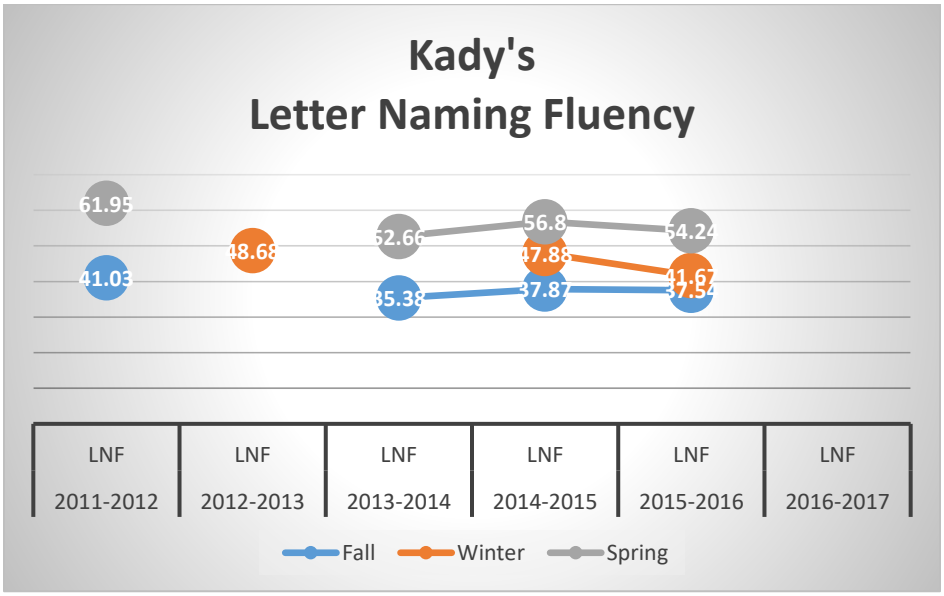


Figure 5. Kady's letter naming fluency.

Summary: Letter naming fluency. For the 2011-2012 Fall data, Kady's classroom average was 41.03 Letter Naming Fluency. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 61.95 Letter Naming Fluency per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 20.92 Letter Naming Fluency per minute growth. Per the 2012-2013 Winter Data, Kady's classroom average was 35.38 Letter Naming Fluency. By the Winter benchmark, the average Letter Naming Fluency was 48.68 Between the Fall and Winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Kady's kindergarten grade class showed a minimum growth of 13.3 Letter Naming Fluency per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 52.66 Letter Naming Fluency per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 17.28 Letter Naming Fluency per minute growth.

In reference to the 2014-2015 Fall data, Kady's classroom average was 37.87 Letter Naming Fluency. By the winter benchmark the average Letter Naming Fluency was 47.88.

Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Kady's kindergarten grade class showed a minimum growth of 10.01 Letter Naming Fluency per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 56.8 Letter Naming Fluency per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was an 18.93-Letter Naming Fluency per minute growth.

Per the 2015-2016 Fall data, Kady's classroom average was 37.54 Letter Naming Fluency. By the winter benchmark, Kady's classroom average was 41.67 in Letter Naming Fluency. Between the fall and winter benchmark her class showed a growth of 4.13. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 52.24 Letter Naming Fluency per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 14.7-Letter Naming Fluency per minute growth.

Regarding Kady's data reporting on phonemes, the small units of speech that correspond to the letters of an alphabetic writing system, the findings are presented in on the following chart. It is important to note that the awareness that language is composed of phonemes is *phonemic awareness*. Per Suggate (2014) and Vaughn and Swanson (2015), the level of awareness a child has about phonemes when they enter school is seen as the strongest determinant of their success level when learning to read.

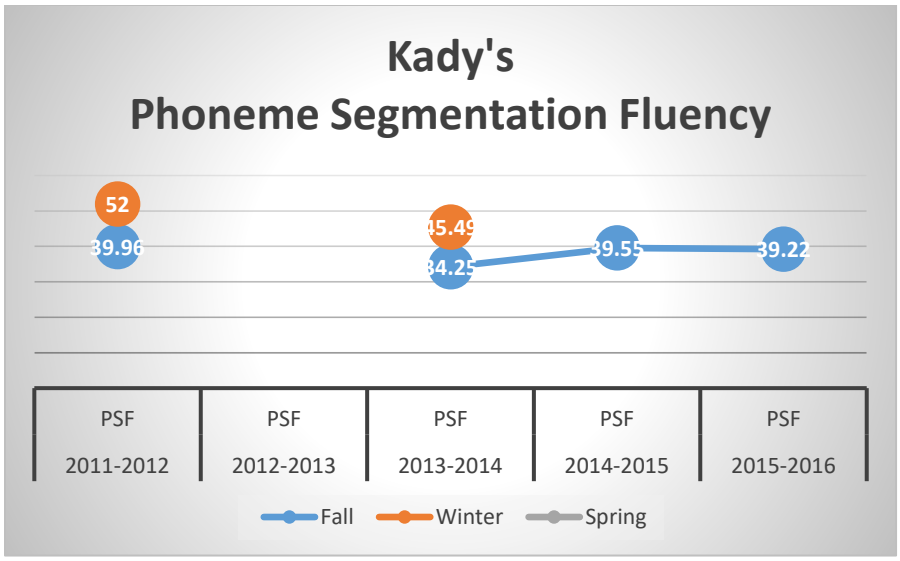


Figure 6. Kady's phoneme segmentation fluency.

The NRP (2000) has also identified some critical pre-reading skills that should be assessed in Kindergarten and early Grade 1, including Phonemic Awareness, and elements of Phonics. The ability to fluently identify letters and letter sounds are two indicators of reading ability.

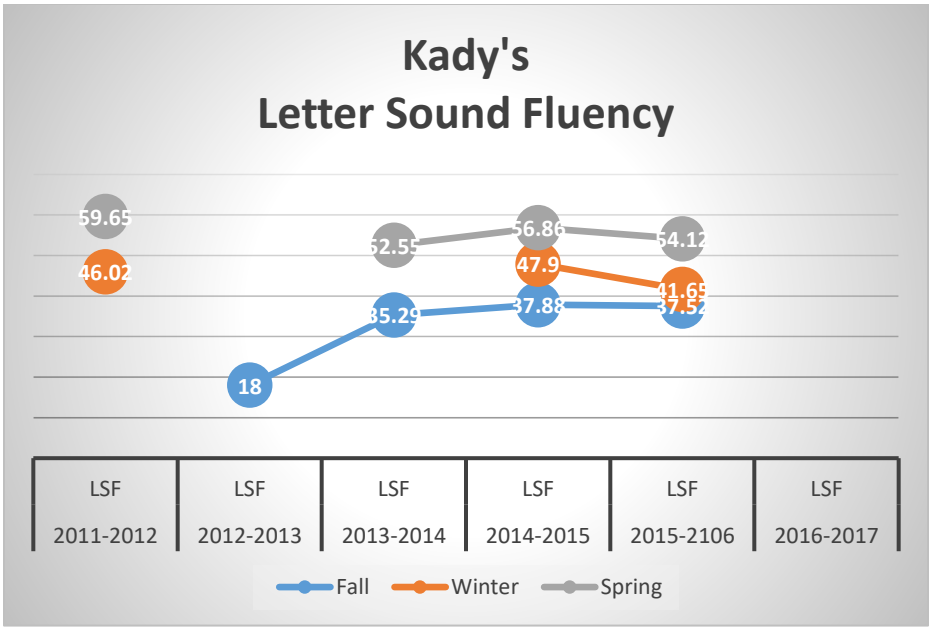


Figure 7. Kady's letter sound fluency.

Summary: Letter sound fluency. In reference to the 2011-2012 Fall data, Kady's classroom average was 18 letter sound fluency. By the winter benchmark Kady's classroom average was 46.02 in letter sound fluency. Between the fall and winter benchmark term the class average was a gain of 28.02. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 59.65 letter sound fluency per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 41.65-letter sound fluency per minute growth.

Per the 2012-2013 Fall data, Kady's classroom average was 35.29 letter sound fluency. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 52.55 letter sound fluency per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 17.26 letter sound fluency per minute growth. For the 2014-2015 Fall data, Kady's classroom average was 37.88 letter sound fluency. By the winter benchmark the average letter sound fluency was 47.9. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Kady's kindergarten grade class showed a minimum growth of 10.02 letter sound fluency per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 56.86 letter sound fluency per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was an 18.98 letter sound fluency per minute growth.

Lastly, the 2015-2016 Fall data, Kady's classroom average was 37.52 letter sound fluency. By the winter benchmark, Kady's classroom average was 41.65 in letter sound fluency. Between the fall and winter benchmark her class showed a growth of 4.13. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 54.12 letter sound fluency per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 16.6 letter sound fluency per minute growth.

Triangulation of data. In reviewing the interview findings, the Literacy Observation Checklist findings, the Strategies Checklist findings, and Artifacts including AIMSweb findings,

all of these tools were integrated to make use of the preexisting and found data for Kady. Data from the interviews, observations, and artifact reviews have been presented and many commonalities exist. An accurate coding of the data occurred as to reveal emerging themes (further discussed in Chapter 5).

An analysis of the respective records and artifacts co-occurred with an analysis of the interview and observation data to provide additional detail and depth about the teaching strategies during direct instruction, individual learning centers, and small group instruction during reading. Further analysis took place by using the cross-sectional survey (via AIMSweb) and an original instrument created to record data captured during the review of artifacts as seen for each teacher.

Overall, the data obtained from the classroom observation notes corroborate the responses gathered from Kady during the interview process. A deeper level of investigation into the data is presented in this multifaceted analysis to facilitate the emergence of classroom literacy instructional practices. More specifically, data reports from the Nevada Department of Education (2017) and the NSPF (n.d.) were also examined as a part of the triangulation process used in this study. National reports from the U.S. Department of Education were also used to add credibility to the research being conducted in this study (Snyder et al., 2016). The resulting effect allowed commonalities to emerge in the responses of the teachers and in their observed instructional strategies, and will be addressed further in the following chapter.

Findings for Jessie

Interview findings.

Question 1A: What type of informal and formal assessments do you use to learn about your students' literacy skills? In response to the first question, Part A, Jessie cited the Reading

Curriculum-Based Measurement, abbreviated as either RCBM or R-CBM, which is a brief, individually administered, standardized test of oral reading for grades K-12. In her own words, Jessie began by saying "I start off with the AIMSweb, RC – I don't know the acronyms" and then elaborated on both the use of RCBM as well as other types of assessments:

> Yes. We do that [RCBM] for the reading fluency, to get the baseline. I also do a teacher assessment which is called Project Life, which tells me where they're currently reading. It has also a test with letter names, letter sounds and I also do a Dolch sight word assessment in the beginning of the year to see what sight words they know. Another assessment I use, which is computer based would be the Star Reading assessment.

When Jessie was questioned as to whether or not she also utilizes Developmental Reading Assessments (abbreviated as DRA and administered individually to assess a child's reading capabilities), she replied with the following comment:

> No, we do not have DRA currently at our school. Project Life is aligned with DRA, but it is not an adopted assessment because it didn't have any data to back up – I don't want to say to back up. Its information backing it up, the school district didn't like it. I also do a Words Our Way assessment to see what letters and sounds and if they know their CBC words, if they know their vowels within words, letters diphthongs, anagrams diphthongs.

In circling back to the use of AIMSweb's RCBM program, the interviewer inquired as to why Jamie's school doesn't use the program for letter name sounds and letter identification. Jessie explained that a more formative and summative approach is used to assess students' abilities and further explained why alternatives to RCBM are used. In this line of thinking, she stated the following:

> No, we were required to use Aims, but at one point, we were asked to use Dibbles, and that was for the letter sound names. I don't know the reason why we don't use letter name sounds, but I guess I do a different assessment to make sure they know their letters and names and their sounds.

Lastly regarding assessment, Jessie spoke of a final program that has proven to be very useful:

> Yes [in response to the use of formative and summative approaches], and we also have another assessment called PALS, I can't remember what the acronym is, but I'll email you if I pull it out and find it. Second grade does it. I think Tulan does it, I don't know if Peachtree does. They kind of do PALS where that does their phonics, concept of word, one to one, letter name sounds, decoding I think.

Question 2: How, if at all, does the assessment data gathered inform your instructional planning for the whole group? For some students? For individuals? Jessie responded by speaking about her belief in working with groups as opposed to interacting with children individually. In her own words, she stated:

> Well, that helps me know my whole group, what level they're on, who is at grade level, above grade level, below. Therefore, then I can drive my instruction. I believe whole group, I drive my instruction on the basic skill that's being taught that day, then I can go ahead and separate them into small groups based on their ability and what the data shows me, to do individualized instruction. Not individualized, but small group instruction so that I can make small groups based on their ability and then find out what skill they know, what skill they don't know and where to help them.

In response to a question about using standards such as the Nevada Academic Content as opposed to using assessments to drive instructional planning, Jessie stated:

> We use the Common Core standards to teach the skill, and then we do take the assessment, which is based off of the Common Core skill standard to assess them. Yes, to drive the whole group instruction to see if they've missed that skill, if they meet that skill, or they don't meet that skill. If they don't meet the skill, that's where you can hit the skill again in smaller groups or independent instruction, individualized instruction, I guess. So, yes, I would say we use the Common Core standards to help align the assessments that help with the instruction. Is that what you said?

Question 3: What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom? In response to this question, Jessie described a number of tactics, some of which involve more than just traditional teaching methods. She offered the subsequent manner explanation:

> I do a lot of tactile, hands on, such as shaving cream, write in the air, touch your partner, write on the table with a whiteboard marker, something that will teach them the same concept, the same standard, but just attaching it a different way. I also do a lot of visual, a lot of auditory, a lot of body movement, a lot of Kagan strategies to help teach that.

With dictation being a part of the initial spelling tests administered to students at the beginning of the school year, Jessie was also questioned about the strategy she uses to dictate sentences to her students. Jessie responded as follows:

> What we learned was they were just memorizing the spelling words when it was spelling work test time, but they weren't able to write the spelling words when they had to apply it to writing. Therefore, we don't weigh the spelling assessment as much as we would the dictation. The dictation comes from sentences made up with using spelling words and the vocab story words for the week. We look for punctuation marks, we look for correct

> spelling, we look for spacing, ending, beginning punctuation marks, and then we weigh that one a little bit more.

In turning to technology's use in the classroom and when questioned about the use of iPads, Jessie confirmed that her school is considered to be a "one to one school for iPads." Additionally, Jessie provided information about a plethora of programs she uses to assist with strategies. In her own words, she explained:

> Right now, we adopted the program Wonders, and Wonders also is computer friendly, so there's also games and activities along with the language component that is on the computer. We just started a new one that's a supplement, which is called i-Ready, that's the one on the computer. I-Ready's for the upper grades. I also pull small lessons from Project Life and small reading groups are reading the book, decoding the book, asking questions about the characters and the setting and what's going to happen next, and then other supplement books to help.

Jessie continued by saying:

> I think it was an option to look at Engage New York ELA. We did do Engage New York math and we kind of liked it, but the kids were missing a lot of the hands on experience and components, so therefore I think we were more leaning to go to Wonders than we were Engage New York, because I think of the online stuff that we were able to get and the students get to be on the computers, which helped us in homework, because then we could assign it for homework and we could assign it for small groups.

Finally, Jessie spoke of the relationship between assessments and strategies and commented on ways in which she believes she can improve her methods:

If they change, it would be to make the student become better. I think my strategies are good where they're at now. To be more successful, maybe I need to spend more time teaching the strategies so they're more proficient than okay I think they've got it; maybe more assessments to make sure they really understand. The Read by Three, I think, will give you a good documentation background. When the child moves on to the next grade, you can see what interventions this child has been given, to see why they're not reading or have they become proficient, are they making growth. I also do fluency, for the whole class I do it. Those that are at grade level and above, I do it every two weeks, and then the ones that are falling behind or struggling, I do their reading fluency assessment every week, and that also helps me drive my instruction for the small groups and to give those kids extra support. I think the Read by Three will help a lot of kids, I think it will make teachers become more accountable in their teaching and their strategies. It's always good to be open minded and see what new strategies you can add that might help the kids because kids are changing, everything's changing.

Question 4: Which of these strategies do you most attribute to student success with literacy skills? Jessie began with the following remark:

I did, I did the phonics awareness. In my smaller groups, I teach more of the phonics; the rhyming, the blending, the sounding out, also the phonics. Then, I also do teach the print concept, finger pointing concept and then rereading and reading fluently and understanding what you read using your pictures. I do send home the books we've already read to the students and their parents to reread to keep practicing that skill and rereading it again. I do send home the Leap Pad books, so they get more exposure to listening to something being read to them, and in the back of their chairs, not only do

> they have the AR books for their book clubs, they also have other books that are on their level from my assessment that I took from the Project Life. Those are books that don't have tests on them, but those are books that they can read at their level, that they can keep practicing reading over and over again either with a partner or by themselves.

When questioned about the nature of the books that are kept in the backs of the students' chairs, Jessie provided the following explanation:

> One bag is their book expo that they get to pick, the other bag is a bag of books that are on their reading level that they get to choose from a bin that I have, so that's kind of their own choice to pick those. The AR are also their own choice, but it's a controlled choice because I know what their level is for the AR, so I tell them they have to read the orange dots, which is 1.0 to 1.6, first grade to first grade, sixth month. The books I send home are pretty much just books at their level, they're not necessarily AR, but they are decodable books, or they are sight word based books to help them build their fluency and their accuracy.

Question 5: What structures do you have in place during your literacy block? In response to question five, Jessie began by asking if the word "structures" was synonymous with "centers." Once this was confirmed, the teacher imparted the following in-depth response:

> When I start the beginning of the school year, I always do everything whole group, so I can start teaching the children how the procedures are going to run for the reading centers during my reading block time. I teach them the areas of where things will be, how to manipulate, how to be responsible with the tools and what expectations I have. After they get the expectations of where the paper goes in the basket, where the whiteboard markers go, where the tools go, how it looks when you're in that group, how it should sound when

you're in that group and when to rotate into stations. Then about October, November, I break them into small groups, which are my Daily 5 guided reading groups. One is word work, where they're working on phonics and spelling words and word tiles, then the second one would be your silent reading, when they're reading their AR books silent to themselves and taking AR quizzes on the iPad. The third group is a listening center where they're on the computer and they're either working on Connect Ed, which is the computer based program affiliated with Wonders or Reading Eggs or Raz Kids, which works on their comprehension/phonics sight words. Another group is called the teacher group where they come with me and we work on their small group instruction, what skill they're missing or what Common Core standard is being taught that week. The last group that alternates two days out of the week is read to someone, read with someone or the writing group. Read with someone is where I give them decodable books and they have to partner read back and forth with each other and help each other sound out words, and then writing would be writing in their journal or something associated with the Common Core standard that we're working on for writing.

When asked how iPads are integrated into the literacy block, Jessie explained:

Multiple ways. Whole group, I use the iPad with a program called Doodle Buddy, where they get to write the spelling words or the sight words or to write the sentence on the iPad versus a whiteboard or a piece of paper. I also use the iPad whole group and in small groups during center rotations to do the AR, Accelerated Reading program where they read a book, take the comprehension quiz on the computer, on the iPad, get their results. There's also free app games on there such as sight words games and building words and reading fluency. So I use it for fluency, hands on writing with the reading,

> comprehension, writing interaction and game interaction. Does that sound like all of them?

In conclusion, Jessie added one final comment about the use of iPads, stating, "You can also read on the iPad, record yourself, and play it back that is a good answer."

Question 6: What type of materials and texts are used in your classroom to engage students with literacy skills? For reasons unknown, the teacher did not provide an answer to question six.

Question 7: Does the district mandate these materials or do you choose the materials? Jessie responded to question seven with the subsequent reply:

> This program, Wonders, was selected by us as teachers first, but I do believe the school district is now looking into it and they would like to maybe mandate it. Journeys is behind, Wonders is more of the skills, so I don't think it's mandated yet, but we are allowed to choose what program we think is going to benefit the kids.

When asked to comment on the use the DRA for kids program, she spoke of her past use of the program and also referenced other programs that she and a colleague used subsequently. Her response exemplified the multitude of materials that are available and the difficulties that often come along with sticking to one or two proven programs. In her own words, she explained:

> We used to have it a long time ago and Katie was like, let's get rid of it. That's when I went from Success for All, to I think she went to Trophies and bought a Basal because Success for All didn't seem to be working as well, then we went to Journeys and we're trying to go back to Journeys because we gave up all our stuff, we're hating Wonders and she was like you guys aren't getting a teacher's guide. One teacher's guide and the rest is online. I said, "Grade level chair can have the teacher's guide."

After covering the use of materials that were used subsequent to DRA, Jessie returned to a discussion about the difficulties she encountered while using the DRA program:

> Renee bought her books online from Tennessee or whatever, she bought them the last month of school and she's like, "Oh my God, Jessie, there was so much in the book that I was mis-teaching to my kids, because when you print it off, it's not in there." It is hard because you're trying to use a Promethean board, but if you don't have the book in front of you, I said to Katie, "Primary people need that book." "I'm not spending money on it." We were like begging and borrowing and I said I'll just photocopy the book for everybody. Then there are some components that you don't need to do, so you kind of pick and choose because you can't do it all.

To conclude the discussion about materials, Jessie spoke of two other programs and the difficulties that come along with using them:

> We tried to go back to Journeys this year and she's like, "Journeys is actually behind," because we were up for renewal. She's like, "No, Journeys is actually behind Wonders." The thing with Wonders is it seems like the tests don't always follow what you taught for that week. It does constantly go over and over skills, but then it's like they're teaching these long vowels that should be taught in second grade, then again, there's that gap between first grade and second grade. There's like a good half year that's missing.

Question 8: Think about a student who you recently provided extra support to in the area of literacy. What strategies do you utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult literacy skills? In response to the eighth question, Jessie stated the following:

> First, I had to get some basic formal assessments on their letters; where they were at with letter sounds, letter names and sight words. Once I found the baseline of where the

> student was, then I knew that during extra time or when I had extra support in my classroom is when that student would be pulled and reviewed and worked with, within a 20 minute time slot. I also have this student come in after school for after school tutoring and working on multiple programs; Imagine Learning, Starfall, Star Reading, AR quizzes and just reading out loud, working on your sight words and just being interactive with them. I also sent home books and iPads and recommended strategies also for the parents to use at home that I'm also using at school, to help them help meet the needs of their child.

***Question 9: Please share any artifacts you brought that captures a literacy strategy or data that helps support any decisions to support students' literacy needs*.** In response to the request to this share her experience, the following artifact review form was filled out to show which types of artifacts were used by Jessie in her teaching. Out of the artifacts listed, Jessie noted that she most frequently used classroom center boards, early literacy curriculum and resources (See Teacher Lesson Plans on the five areas in Appendix M), classroom library/reading series, and hanging up pictures of student work as seen, subsequently. In her own words, Jessie stated,

> The majority of mine [instructional materials on the walls] are still posters. I've seen some of the figi maps painted on the wall, but the majority of mind are posters because I pull them down, we write on them, and then I put them back up.

Artifact review.

Table 4

Jessie's Artifact Review

Date: December 1, 2016	Time: 11:30-1:30
School: Walter Bracken STEAM Academy	Classroom: A Grade: 1
Type of Artifact	**Practices**
● Lesson plans ● Early literacy curriculum and resources ● Team meeting notes ● Other ● Pictures of class room centers ● Pictures of student work ● Standards Addressed were: L.1.5c; RF.1.2; RF.1.3; RF.1.3g; RL.1.1; RL.1.2; RF.1.4b; W.1.5; RF.1.1; I.1.2	● Implementation of evidence-based core curriculum aligned with early literacy skills (Explicit instruction, Wonders Unit 2 Week 5 Lesson, Blending, Repeated Reading, Choral Reading, etc.) ● Use of a variety of learning formats/groupings (i.e. whole group, small group, centers, embedded; Whole group phonics, phonemic awareness, small groups and centers, computer based program support, iPad learning activities) ● Adult support that is adapted to students' early literacy needs ● Use of instructional strategies to meet the needs of the whole class, some students, and individuals (i.e., intentional teaching, intensive scaffolding)

Classroom artifacts/ pictures.

Figure 8. Student grouping and center rotation schedule for the students.

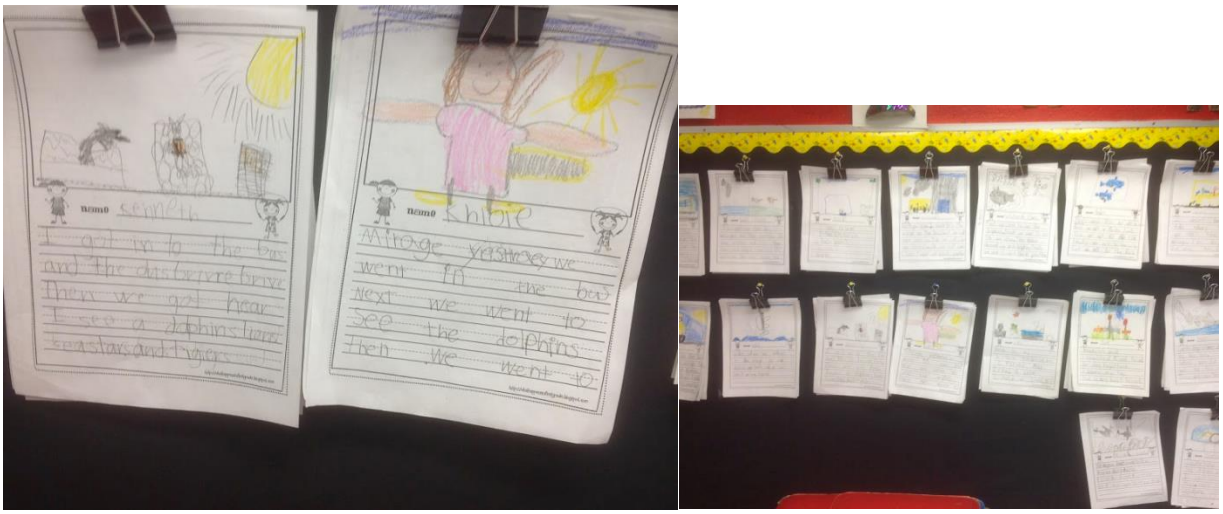


Figure 9. Samples of student work.

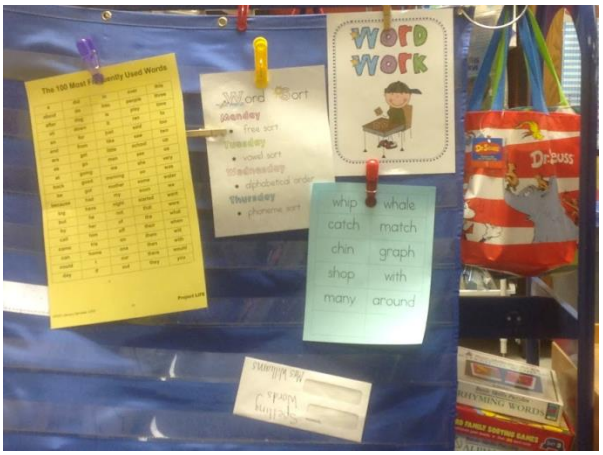


Figure 10. Writing center.

Figure 11. Classroom library/reading series.

Literacy instructional observation checklist.

Vocabulary instruction. In the area of vocabulary instruction, Jessie was observed using explicit instruction and discussion of word meanings and their use in a variety of situations. She also provided explicit instruction on independent word learning strategies (i.e., word parts, context clues, and use of dictionaries). Additionally, Jessie provided instruction on morphology (word parts) and etymology (derivation). Jessie also used Word Work during student centers and lastly, directly taught her students new vocabulary. Jessie modeled how to read new vocabulary using decoding strategies and context clues.

Comprehension strategy instruction. In the area of comprehension strategy instruction, Jessie was observed activating/building prior knowledge, encouraging student-generated

questions, predicting, inferring, making connections, using graphic organizers, summarizing, evaluating, and synthesizing. Jessie used one of her essential questions for the week, "How can you find your way around?" as a forum to work on rereading (comprehension strategy), main topic and key details (comprehension skills), and informational text/nonfiction (genre).

Fluency instruction. In the area of fluency instruction, Jessie was observed using choral reading, repeated timed readings, partner reading, student-adult reading, unison reading, tape-assisted reading, reader's theater, and reading connected text with corrective feedback. Additionally, she taught techniques that did not utilize Round Robin and/or "Popcorn" reading. During centers, students listened to a story on tape and also used the iPad station to listen to texts and read stories with partners. Listening provided opportunities for pronunciation and expression and was especially helpful to ESL students and older students who were struggling with reading. Lastly, Jessie's students completed phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension skills on the computer.

Jessie used a strategy known as "Guide the Reading" where students read nonfiction selections titled "Which Way on the Map?" During the reading, Jessie had the students identify specific words such as "around," "by," "many," "place," and "walk."

Writing instruction. In the area of writing instruction, Jessie was observed teaching the skills of brainstorming, pre-writing, word processing on the computer, using graphic organizers, and writing in response to reading. Additionally, she provided effective writing examples and modeled the writing process. Lastly and during centers, Jessie conducted writing workshops. Jessie used ideas (traits), irregular plural nouns (grammar), and capital letters and periods (mechanics) with her students.

Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study. In the area of writing instruction, Jessie was observed teaching phonemic awareness (K-1) through the use of words, syllables, and sound manipulation (i.e., "What sounds do you hear in cat? c//a//t//"). Jessie also modeled the spelling of story words such as lake, letter, each, people, shows, and town and provided instruction on phoneme segmentation/phoneme addition/phoneme blending (phonological awareness), consonant diagraphs such as ch, tch, wh, and ph (phonics/spelling), inflectional endings such as es (structural analysis), and high frequency words such as around, by, may, place, and walk. Lastly and within centers, Jessie had students work on word sorts, utilizing vocabulary words and high-frequency words of the week.

Jessie taught her students to identify words in which two or more letters were pronounced using one sound. See the previous discussion of consonant diagraphs for examples.

Content literacy instruction (math, science, and social sciences). In the area of content literary instruction, Jessie was observed providing explicit instruction with text structure and text/graphic features and also taught about the use of graphic organizers. Additionally, Jessie worked with students to build their background knowledge (as opposed to assuming their background levels). Lastly, she taught content vocabulary/concepts. Jessie used writing center activities and computer based lessons such as Imagine Learning, and i-Ready to enhance students' content literacy.

Strategies checklist findings. Jessie demonstrated effective used of strategy in all areas observed/assessed. Regarding efficient use of teacher-directed time, Jessie's competence in using class time effectively was evident. Additionally, and similar to the methods of the other teachers, Jessie displayed mastery in tapping into and developing students' cognitive abilities. Lastly, Jessie used the Daily 5 as a tool to enhance the efficiency of teacher-directed time.

Concerning the provision of opportunities for student interaction, Jessie used questioning techniques and Venn diagrams to help her students as they worked in pairs. In the area of immediate corrective feedback, Jessie provided appropriate correction when needed and used decoding and positive reinforcement to enhance her effectiveness. Regarding differentiated instruction, Jessie used external thinking, connections between previous and present learning, and combined-class groups. Lastly, and concerning student engagement, Jessie showed proficiency in her use of group work, appropriate task assignment, and positive reinforcement.

Artifact findings with AIMSweb. Regarding Jessie's data reporting's on nonsense word fluency, the NRP (2000) asserted that the role of Nonsense Word Fluency as a part of phonics practice is a valuable part of decoding practice. Students need to learn to use the letters and their sounds alone to arrive at word pronunciations. Good readers examine every letter and resolve every word (Rasinski et al., 2012). When a word is used in the context of a sentence or picture, then students do not necessarily need to use the letters to do the decoding.

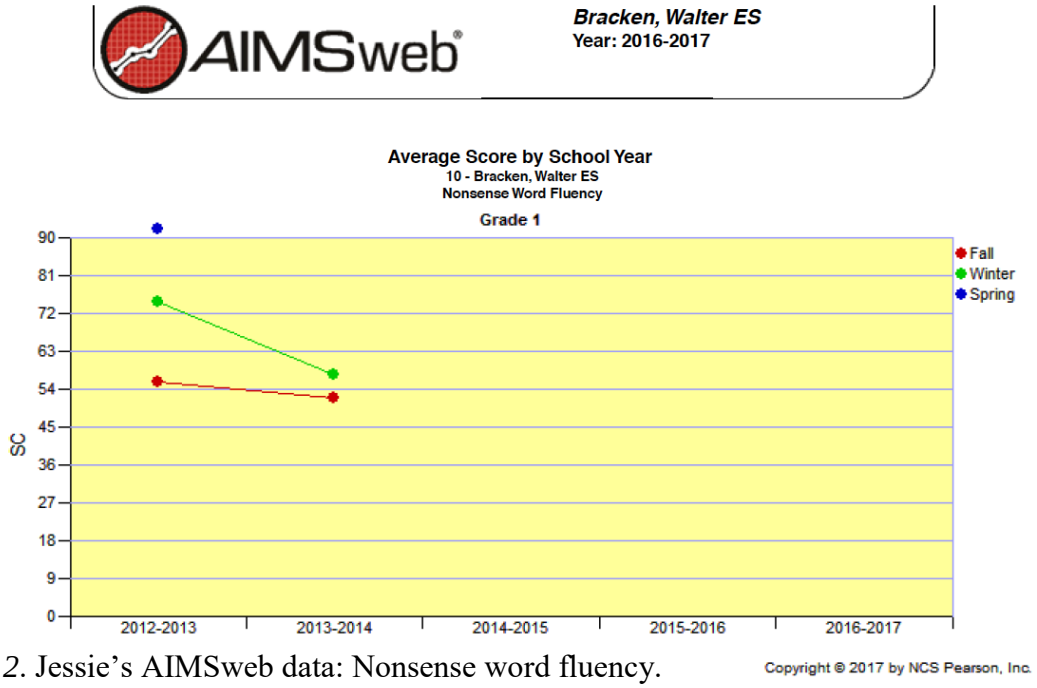


Figure 12. Jessie's AIMSweb data: Nonsense word fluency.

Summary. For the 2012-2013 Fall data, 55% of Jessie's students had decoding skills. By the winter benchmark, 75% of her students could use their learned decoding skills to read and/or identify nonsense words. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2012-2013, Jessie's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 20%. During the spring benchmark, 100% of the students could decode nonsense words. Therefore, from the winter benchmark to the spring benchmark, there was a 25% growth and overall there was a 45% growth from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark in nonsense word fluency.

Regarding the 2013-2014 Fall data, 53% of Jessie's students had decoding skills. By the winter benchmark 55% of her students could use their learned decoding skills to read and/ or identify nonsense words. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Jessie's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 2%. During the spring benchmark, no data appear to be presented. Therefore, the data for the two areas of reading, show if the students made any gains or losses the data from the previous year's teachers would be of value.

In the arena of fluency and by using the oral reading (R-CBM), a 1 minute standardized measure of oral reading of graded passages, accuracy and amount of words read per minute were considered. Jessie's students were assessed individually, and the results are shown subsequently (see Figure 13).

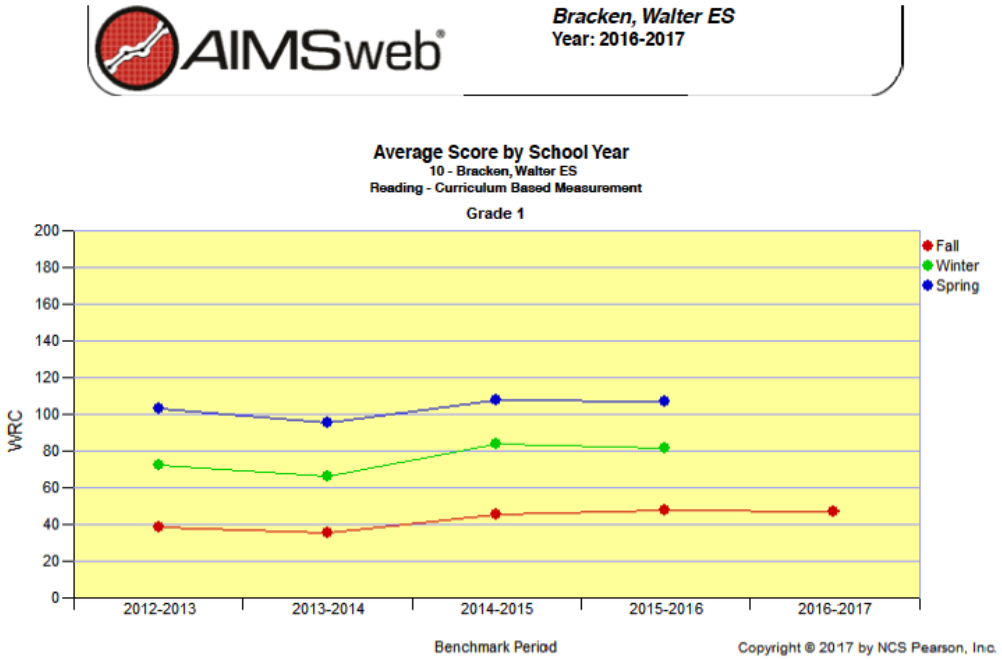


Figure 13. Jessie's AIMSweb data: Reading – curriculum based measurement.

Summary. Per the 2012-2013 Fall data, Jessie's classroom average was 40 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 78. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Jessie's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 38 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark, the classroom average was 101 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 60-word read correctly per minute growth. For the 2013-2014 Fall data, Jessie's classroom average was 38 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 65. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Jessie's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 27 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark, the classroom average was 99 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 61-word read correctly per minute growth.

Regarding the 2014-2015 Fall data, Jessie's classroom average was 50 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 81. Between the fall

and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Jessie's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 31 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 102 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 52-word read correctly per minute growth.

Finally, in assessing the 2015-2016 Fall data, Jessie's classroom average was 65 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark, the average words read correctly was 81. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Jessie's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 16 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 102 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 37-word read correctly per minute growth.

Triangulation of data. In reviewing the interview findings, the Literacy Observation Checklist findings, the Strategies Checklist findings, and Artifacts including AIMSweb findings, all of these tools were integrated to make use of the preexisting and found data for Jessie. Data from the interviews, observations, and artifact reviews have been presented and many commonalities exist. An accurate coding of the data occurred as to reveal emerging themes (further discussed in Chapter 5).

An analysis of the respective records and artifacts co-occurred with an analysis of the interview and observation data to provide additional detail and depth about the teaching strategies during direct instruction, individual learning centers, and small group instruction during reading. Further analysis took place by using the cross-sectional survey (via AIMSweb) and an original instrument created to record data captured during the review of artifacts as seen for each teacher.

Overall, the data obtained from the classroom observation notes corroborate the responses gathered from the teachers during the interview process. A deeper level of investigation into the data is presented in this multifaceted analysis to aid in the emergence of classroom literacy instructional practices emerge. More specifically, data reports from the Nevada Department of Education (2017) and the NSPF (n.d.) were also examined as a part of the triangulation process used in this study. National reports from the U.S. Department of Education were also used to add credibility to the research being conducted in this study (Snyder et al., 2016). The resulting effect allowed commonalities to emerge, in the responses of the teachers and in their observed instructional strategies, and will be addressed further in the following chapter.

Findings for Hanna

Interview findings.

Question 1A: What type of informal and formal assessments do you use to learn about your students' literacy skills? In response to the first question, Part A, Hanna cited a number of formal tools that she uses at different points during the school year. In her own words, she stated:

> We use the AIMSweb. We do the probes for first grade, so we do letter names, letter sounds and the nonsense words. In the fall, we also do our CBM, just to see where they're at. Then, we also use the DRA and the QSI. We do all those assessments, and the kids who are reading, like if you score about a 10 or higher on your DRA, then we use the STAR, just to see what your range is. We don't STAR test everybody at the beginning of the year, because those non-readers, there's really not a point to doing it. It just leads to frustration.

As an alternative to using Standardized Tests for Assessment of Reading (STAR) at the initiation of the school year (which Hanna states often causes unnecessary frustrations for some of the students), Hanna described using a more appropriate time to do the testing, discussing her methods in administering the tests:

> I usually will do it in December, just because parent conferences will come and that's another piece of information to give them. It kind of gives them a range when they're getting library books, and it also helps them know what those dots are on the library books, because we use AR at our school too. It just lets them know they have a range. I don't think you should pigeonhole kids to a particular level, because sometimes their interest is a little bit higher than their reading level, and somebody can read to them or they can look at the pictures. Then too those higher ones, they still like to read some of those easier books too, they want to read for enjoyment. I usually STAR everybody in December. For sure I did seven, I have seven readers.

Hanna continued by explaining that when students are tested with STAR, "either you're high or you're low, there really is no in between." When asked about how STAR and DAR results align with one another, she explained:

> The STAR is like a range, so it gives you a bigger gap, but those ones that are reading, they usually score like a second grade reading level. That's why you don't want to do the lower ones, because they're just guessing, then you don't really have a true score of what they're doing. They might be a really good guesser. So, you have to be careful when you give it. I do know that like at our school, we do STAR a lot because when they go to junior high, they're like wow, you have a lot of STAR tests. Not every school does AR or STAR tests as much as we do.

Question 2: How, if at all, does the assessment data gathered inform your instructional planning for the whole group? For some students? For individuals? In response to the second question, Hanna pointed out that the process for assessing, grouping, and intervening has changed from last year. Where QSI and differentiating instruction (DI; a method of providing different students with different avenues to learning) were utilized previously, DRA scores are now used to group students and also play a role in placing students into appropriate RTI groups (Response to Intervention or RTI refers to frameworks used to promote reading achievement through the use of evidence-based interventions). In her own words, Hanna stated:

> I look at the data, and then that's how I group my kids in their reading groups. We also use that data to form our RTI groups. We used to, as a grade level, use the QSI, and then we'd put them into phonics groups and then we would have like an RTI group, one or two RTI groups, we would have two because JV pulls a group for us, then one of the classroom teachers pulled a group. So, the ones who were low were red, and the AIMSweb were emergent on the QSI, those are the kids that we would look at who would probably be in an RTI group. Then the other kids were grouped by ability for the RTI time. We used to call it DI for Differentiating Instruction time, now they want it RTI time. This year, because they're read by three, we each have a group, and then we look at their DRA scores and we group them by their DRA scores. There's like a low level two, level two, then there's a low level three and a middle level three. We group them that way. So, we do use our data to group for not only RTI time, but in our classroom, we group them that way as well.

Hanna also spoke about the specific materials and teaching points she incorporates when conducting RTIs. She explained as follows:

> Last year, we used the Six program, it was a blue and yellow box in the lit room, but this year, we bought these new phonics books and it's a lesson, so we're using those. I don't know the actual name of it, I can email it to you, because it's a new program that we're doing. The kids that are like in the lower DRA two, we do one lesson a week with them, because we meet for 25 minutes four times a week. We also use a decodable at that time too. So they're getting explicit phonics, reading sentences, and there's some writing, it builds. The kids who are in the DRA three group, they're getting through two lessons a week, so they'll get through more. That's the book that we're reading this year. We had to have a systematic, we couldn't just pull things ourselves, we needed to be consistent within the grade level and we needed to have something that was systematic and sequential. So, we do have a book. It's purple.

Lastly, concerning using data gleaned through assessment to inform instructional planning, Hanna spoke about the challenges of using multiple systems to track data:

> Yes, and then we also have to come up with our student learning SLP, I think it's called. We have to come up with that, so we're going to do a grade level one. It seems that pretty much every grade level is going to do a grade level one. We're working on that plan.

Question 3: What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom? When asked, Hanna cited a myriad of different methods she uses to build her students' abilities, including the Accelerated Reader (AR) computer program and a new a digital literacy program for students called MyOn. In her own words, she explained:

> Reading. We read a lot. I read to them, they read, we do listen to read. I think that hearing good reading and being exposed to books is really important. A good phonics program is really important as well. We've been doing poetry to help work on fluency. We do one

> poem for the whole week, we have like a poetry notebook. The first day, we just read it and then the next day we look for punctuation, the next day we look for sight words. It's interesting, once we start circling all these sight words that they know, they're like oh, I can read this, because look at all the words that you know. We talk about vocabulary, that's a big component. We do reading groups, we have AR. I think AR really helps the kids who are the higher readers because they're able to read. AR changed a little bit last year because there's an 80% passing rate in order to have your points, and so the ones who struggle, it's a success that they are able to lock in. they have to go to the Nate Mack website, they have to find AR, they have to type in their password, they have to type in the book number or the title. So, even though they aren't passing, they're doing so much. They're learning so many other things as well. Just a lot of different things to help them with their reading. We do Daily 5 at our school, that's a really big component. They do word work and they have work on writing. Sometimes I give them things to write about, sometimes they can write about their own things. We have something new this year, it's called MyOn.

Hanna continued by commenting on her students' reaction to MyOn, saying that "they are loving [it]." She also provided some addition information about the new program and touched on the use of yet another (optional) computer-based adaptive learning platform known as Scoot Pad. In her own words, she explained:

> Yes, but MyOn is where they take a little test at the beginning and it levels their book library for them. Then they get to choose books and they listen to them, and then they take a little comprehension test at the end. The assortment of books that are on there, they can't get enough of it. Yes, we don't have iReady this year, we are back to Scoot Pad. I

> just use it as additional homework, because we're not supposed to give them more than 20 minutes of homework a night. They have to read for 15 minutes, they have to do reading logs and they have to do a math paper, practice their sight words. I thought those ones who can get it done quicker, they have the option of doing Scoot Pad as well. A lot of kids don't have computers, so I would hate to make it mandatory, and then those kids who don't have computers struggle. It's available, but it's optional.

Hanna also shared about additional strategies which involve the use of the most commonly-used set of sight words, known as Dolch Sight Words, as well as a website students can use to use to access the Dolch system. She explained:

> Some of the grades, it's mandatory [referring back to the use of the Scoot Pad], but I'm a first-grade teacher, if you can go over your sight words – we use the Dolch Sight Words List**.** There's a website out there and it's called the School Bell, she has them broken up to 11 lists with 20 words on it, really in an organized fashion. So, those are the lists that we use. Every two weeks, they get a new list of words if they pass at 80%. If they don't pass the list at 80%, then they stay on that list again until they are able to pass.

In continuing her discussion about the importance of satisfactorily identifying sight words in order to progress to the next stage, Hanna shared:

> I was before just giving them a new list, but if they're not passing, they really need to be accountable for those words because if you look at like the RCDM, a lot of those are sight words. If they could just get those site words, then the more decodable words, by then they would learn strategies to sound out those words.

Still reflecting on the use of sight words and pointing to both the difficulty and importance in learning them, Hanna stated, "Yes, and you don't want to struggle on those sight words, and a lot

of them you can't even sound out," further adding, "Yes, and we've really been pointing out the irregular ones because those are ones you've just got to know. Like was and what, you can't sound that out, you just have to know it." Hanna wrapped up her response about her use of key instructional strategies with the following discussion:

> I just don't think I have one strategy that I use, I try to use multiple strategies to help them because not everybody takes to one. You kind of have to have a lot of them out there. We do have a cafe board in our room. There's not a lot of strategies up on there, but the ones that are there, I really try to like go back to and reinforce. Really working on checking for understanding, we go back and we ask who and what and where and when. Expand vocabulary, if you find a word that you don't know, an interesting word, share it because other people might want to use that word. Today, we were talking about the word display, because it was in our poem. What does that word, display, mean? It just means to show off, but doesn't display sound like a much better word? Festive was another word. The strategies that are on there, I try to really point out, or when they're reading and they make an error and it didn't make sense, back up and reread. Which strategy did they use? Just really pointing out those different ones so someone might be like I could do that.

Question 4: Which of these strategies do you most attribute to student success with literacy skills? In responding to question number four, Hanna spoke about the need to utilize all available strategies:

> I don't know. I think all, I think they need all of them. There can't be just one strategy, they need to be exposed to lots of things. They need to be able to hear good reading, they need to have lots of good books to read, and they need to have access to books. In my

> class, if you don't have books at home, I send home my books. They cleaned out the lit lab, so we got the books, so we send those home so they can read on their reading log. If there's a book in class that they really like, I let them take it home and read it. I think access to books really helps. If you're not reading, if you're not being read to, how are you going to know? There are those kids that somehow they learn just by what's happening at school, I wasn't one of those.

When asked if she also uses MyOn or other programs, Hanna replied, "Yes, they can do that at home as well. Along with the Scoot Pad, because the Scoot Pad has books on there too." Hanna then expanded a little about the use of the Scoot Pad program:

> I think last year when you were there, certain teachers had it. Nancy had put it out there. First grade didn't choose to have it because we had iReady, and we thought it was just too many programs. You can't have so many programs. The first graders this year, a lot of them did Scoot Pad last year, so they're familiar with it. First graders that moved into second grade, that's probably something new for them.

Question 5: What structures do you have in place during your literacy block?

Following a series of questions relating to the use of strategies, Hanna began her response by referencing the Daily 5 (first mentioned as a response to question number three) and then continued by speaking about additional structures utilized:

> We also have used Literacy Framework, the one that the districts send out. We have our 25 minutes of the foundational skills where we're doing our phonics and our site words. Then we do the 25 minutes of complex text, and we are using the iReady workbooks and the book, just not the iReady program. Then during out reading groups is where we differentiate our instruction. This year, Lori and I are combining our reading groups. So

> our day looks like we have our 25 minutes of the foundational skills, and then between 8:30 and 9:00, we each do three reading groups where we looked at their DRE scores and we combined our kids, because she had one two and fours, and you really can't put a two with a four because the gap is just too big. So I had twos, our twos go every day for reading group and we have a group of threes, a group of fours. This way we're able to get six reading groups done a day, whereas if we were to do it in our own class, we might get three done. Then we come back and we do our complex text, which is our iReady story, then we also do our poetry notebook.

When asked to expand on the practice of combining or sharing students, Hanna commented:

> I think the second grade sisters would share kids for reading group because you can really get a better level for them. Just our kids were so spread out. Like I have four 20 pluses and I think she has two and it's hard to get to those 20s because you're so focused on the lower ones. Now this year we feel like oh, we can get to them twice a week, and then another higher group twice a week. We just started talking about it last week and we started. Last week, we started reading groups, like two weeks ago, so we've just been talking about it like I think this might work. So far, so good.

Additionally, when questioned about whether or not other teachers in her grade level share students, Hanna responded,

> Jamie takes a third grader who's not reading at third grade level. You know, Jamie teaches first grade now, so she takes in other kids. It's hard for the other first grade teachers to do it because they job share.

Lastly, as one final addition regarding the nature of group work, student sharing, and the use of the Daily 5, Hanna explained:

I think this way also it really keeps us on track. She knows we're going to start at 8:30, so whatever you're doing before that, you've got to be done at 8:30. Then every 20 minutes, we do a switch. So, we have one group doing like reading group with the teacher and one group is doing a seat work activity, which is like their phonics paper and something that needs to go along with the story. Then one group is doing a Daily 5 activities. They really only get one Daily 5 a day, so it's more like a Weekly 5. It seems to be working, and I think it will benefit, because they will get pulled every day because there's two of us doing it.

Question 6: What type of materials and texts are used in your classroom to engage students with literacy skills? In responding to the sixth interview question, Hanna explained:

Well, we're using the iReady program this year. We have Making Meaning, which we did at the beginning of the year because our iReady stuff was not here yet. They do have iReady, we have those books and that program that we're using. We have Being a Writer for writing, and we're also going to get the new Lucy Calkins, it's now grade level specific, where in the past she had a K-2 book. Now, it's grade level specific and it's aligned to the Common Core. The iReady is more aligned to the Common Core than the Making Meaning. We use Read Works for the complex text. A lot of times we pull things that we have, our own books that we have, to kind of follow what the iReady is doing. So those are things that we use.

When asked if the complex texts included books provided by the central office, Hanna replied:

Yes, the read aloud projects. We'll be doing Stella Luna next week and the read aloud project for Stella Luna, so we do use those as well. We do use the Exemplar Text with reading. In November, we'll start reading *Little House in the Big Woods*. In January, we

> read *Mr. Popper's Penguins*. We read chapter books to them, depending on the time of the year what books we choose. In the spring, we read *Charlotte's Web*. We try to do like a closed reading with different things, search the internet to try and find something that they can read. Nothing really like every day, nothing really like trophies. We don't have anything like that. With Nancy, she's pretty open to what we do because she trusts our judgment. Lori and I do a lot of planning together, so kind of what she does, I do, what I do, she does. We work together really well.

Additionally, Hanna spoke of the great benefit of being able to work with other teachers such as Lori when attempting to integrate a variety of materials and texts effectively. She stated:

> I think with her [Lori] and I, we both have good strengths and weaknesses. If it's something that she's really good at, I defer to her, or something I'm good at, you know, we defer back and forth to each other. Just collaborate well and bounce ideas off each other well.

Question 7: Does the district mandate these materials or do you choose the materials?

When asked question seven, Hanna began by making distinctions among approved, non-approved, and mandated materials:

> I think everything that we choose is on the approved materials list. I think if we chose something that wasn't approved, Nancy would maybe question it. We don't really have anything that's mandated. Even with the read by three, there's lots of assessments that you can choose to do. We chose AIMSweb and DRA and the QSI, because those are things that we've already been doing. It's not something new, everybody at our school knows how to DRA, everybody knows how to do the QSI and triplicate the data. She

> doesn't tell us you have to use this. I don't think we have anything mandated, I think what we're using is pretty much what's on the list anyway.

Hanna continued by sharing about how different schools use different materials. When questioned about one particular program called Engaged New York, she responded by saying, "We don't use Engaged New York [for reading], is that not approved?" Hanna's response started a chain of questions and answers that clearly evidenced a lack of continuity between school districts and a commonly-found lack of clarity as to which materials are approved and which are not. For example, Hanna shared about another school's use of a developmental, research based reading/language arts program known as Trophies:

> Vandenberg is one of them. They use Trophies. I want to say Glenn Taylor is, but it could just be in the resource room, because a friend of mine texted me and she asked if I had one of the books and I'm like, yes, but who's using that. She's like in her son's special ed class, he's in resource, and he's like not severely mentally challenged, but he's in one of those classes. They're using Trophies. It's interesting that Trophies is still out there. I think that a class that Lori was taking, somebody mentioned that they were using Trophies. It's like what do you mean? That was taken away.

Hanna offered another comment in support of the notion that the school district has failed to provide clear guidelines are illustrated:

> The hard part is that the district hasn't really given us anything, any clear program, and because Common Core came about quickly, there really wasn't anything. You scour the internet and you look for things that say teacher, how do you know that's the right way to ask the question? I remember I took the Ravine Academy class and the instructors are like you're not curriculum writers, your teachers, but it's kind of like they want us to

> write curriculum and they want us to write test questions. How do we know that my test questions are at the same level as like one of your schools?

Challenges such as these make collaboration with teachers in other districts invaluable. Hanna offered the following account of the benefits of reaching out to learn about others' experiences:

> Sometimes it's nice to get together with other people and say, "So, what are you doing?" Dina's at a school that's called Light Elementary, and it's over in Mountain's Edge. Like, what assessments are you guys doing? I want to know what you're doing, because are we doing it right? You don't know. Everybody's doing different things. Even in RPZ 10, schools are doing different things.

As a continuation of recognizing the benefits of collaboration in the face of uncertainty, Hanna was asked if she thought it would be beneficial for everyone (schools within districts and across districts) to use the same materials. Her response was as follows:

> Yes, because you know sometimes you go to those meetings like where you take classes, I think it was like not last year but the year before there was a Framework class. It was three times you had to meet, one time was just on the foundational skills, and one time was about differentiated instruction and one time it was about complex text, and just talking with people, like Addy Roberts, they didn't really have a math program. They were just culling things from Teachers Stay Teachers. They had found something and that's what they were doing. It's like how do you know if that's what's best? You would think that everyone in the same performance zone would have the same materials. I guess that's like dictating what you're supposed to do. Now, with this whole new school plan where every school is going to be their own boss, who knows what's going to happen.

Question 8: Think about a student who you recently provided extra support to in the area of literacy. What strategies do you utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult literacy skills? In reflecting on question eight, Hanna shared that although she hadn't yet started working one-on-one with students, she is planning to provide this service. She explained:

> I haven't started this year because of getting my conferences, but I was talking to a mom just on Monday, and probably starting in November, I'm going to have my little homework club again. It's really funny because I have a little boy who's in second grade this year and he stopped me the first week of school and he's like, "I can come tomorrow and do homework with you, right?" I'm like, "No, Christian, I haven't started it yet." I know I have kids that are in other grades that I have allowed to come. They'll want to come. Anybody who wants to come is more than welcome. Sometimes doing homework at school is a lot easier than doing homework at home. Computers are there if they have Scoot Pad they need to do, or if they want to stay and do an AR test or whatever they need to get done. If they want to just go on MyOn, that's fine too. I have four computers and three iPads, so there's lots of technology available to them. I just offer any kind of support that I can to help them, and also let them know that I care, I'm concerned, I want them to succeed.

When questioned about positive reinforcement students receive when working on their homework within the school environment, Hanna shared how "sometimes parents yell when it's homework time. I'm probably guilty of it with my own child, but not with my school kids." She also elaborated on past methods used to set up after-school homework programs:

> The ones who are struggling, those small reading groups and one-on-one assistance. I know like last year, I would take kids on Mondays and Wednesdays and I called them homework clubs, and I would read with them or do their sight words. Just offer support, because I know when they go home, it's hard for their parents to do homework with them, their parents become frustrated with their homework, and I know what they're doing, so I make a little club to help them. Have parents help them, have parents read with them and go over their sight words with them, just utilize any kind of resource, any kind of person too, that I can to help them just with a little bit more.

Question 9: Please share any artifacts you brought that captures a literacy strategy or data that helps support any decisions to support students' literacy needs. In response to the request to share more fully, the following Artifact Review form was filled out to show which types of artifacts Hanna used in her teaching. Out of the artifacts listed, Hanna noted that she most frequently used classroom center boards, early literacy curriculum and resources, lesson plans (See sample of small group lesson plan in Appendix M), and hanging up pictures of student work (see Table 5).

Artifact review.

Table 5

Hanna's Artifact Review

Date: December 1, 2016	Time: 8am-11:00am 9am-10:30
School: Nate Mack Elementary School	Classroom: A Grade: K 1

(continued)

Type of Artifact	Practices
● Lesson plans ● Early literacy curriculum and resources ● Team meeting notes ● Other ● Pictures of class room centers ● Pictures of student work	● Implementation of evidence-based core curriculum aligned with early literacy skills (Explicit instruction, Reading A-Z Lesson, Blending, Repeated Reading, Choral Reading, etc.) ● Use of a variety of learning formats/groupings (i.e. whole group, small group, centers, embedded; Whole group phonics, phonemic awareness, small groups and centers, computer based program support, iPad learning activities) ● Adult support that is adapted to students' early literacy needs ● Use of instructional strategies to meet the needs of the whole class, some students, and individuals (i.e., intentional teaching, intensive scaffolding)

Classroom artifacts/pictures.

Figure 14. Student grouping and center rotation schedule for the students.

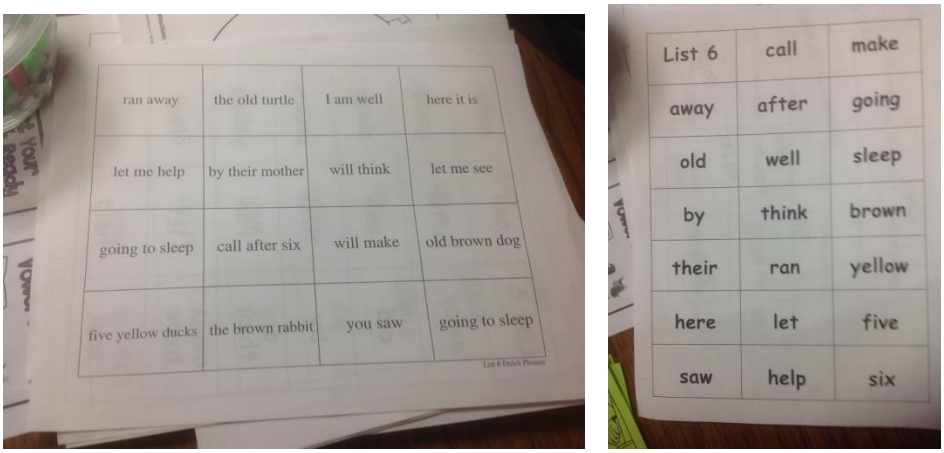


Figure 15. Samples of student work.

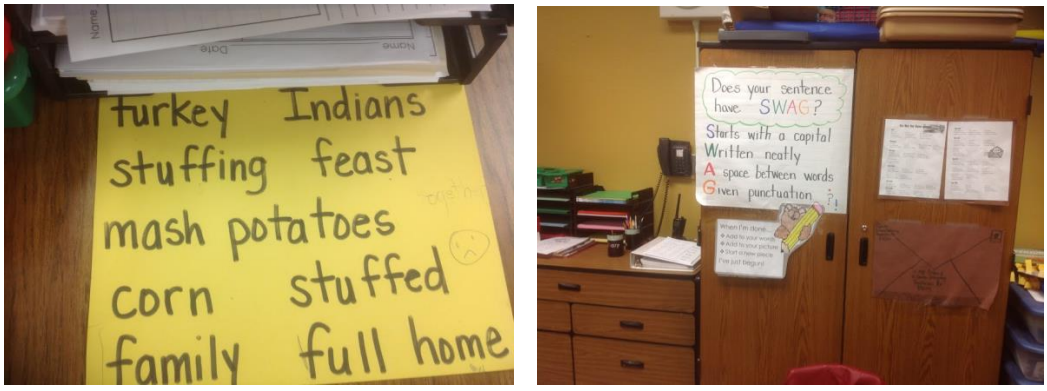


Figure 16. Writing center.

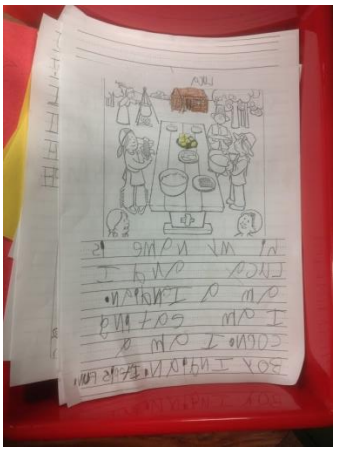


Figure 17. Student work sample.

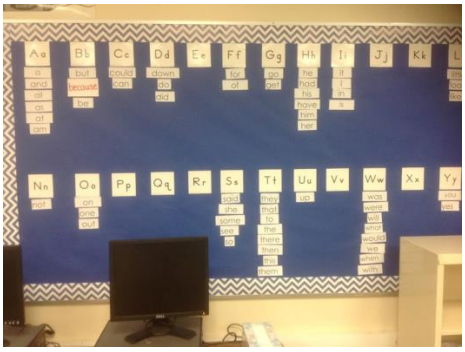
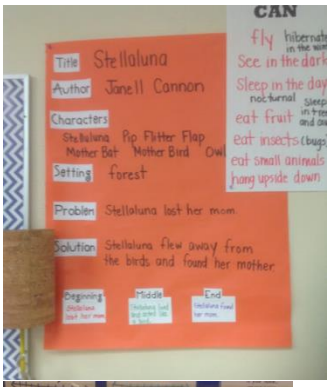
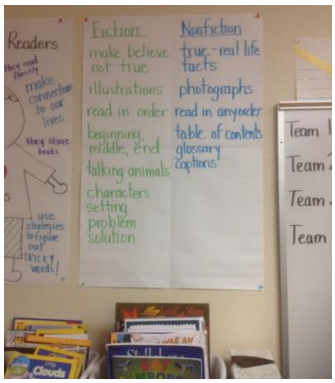
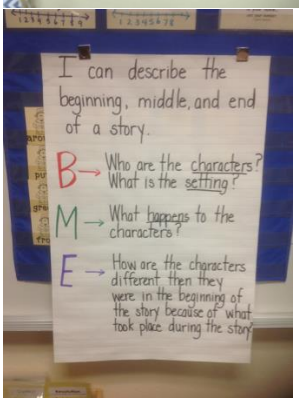


Figure 18. Alphabet wall that encompasses high-frequency words/word wall.







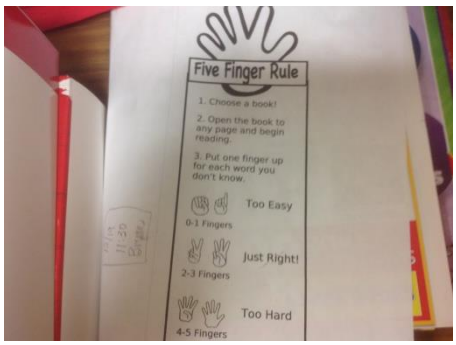


Figure 19. Complex text/story element wall.

Figure 20. Anchor charts.

Literacy instructional observation checklist.

Vocabulary instruction. In the area of vocabulary instruction, Hanna was observed using explicit instruction and discussion on both word meanings and their use in a variety of situations, as well as independent word learning strategies (word parts, context clues, use of dictionaries, etc.). Hanna also instructed her students on morphology (word parts) and etymology (derivation). Lastly, Hanna provided direct instruction on new vocabulary.

Hanna used some of the classroom time to model how to read words using decoding strategies and context clues. This process included having the students reinforce the vocabulary

words by using pictures in books. For example, Hanna told students, “Tell me what you see while looking at the picture on page three.” A typical student response was, “The boy is sitting at the table with his great grandma. The boy is young. The great grandma was young long ago.”

Comprehension strategy instruction. In the area of comprehension strategy instruction, Hanna was observed activating/building prior knowledge, encouraging student-generated questions, predicting, inferring, making connections, using graphic organizers, summarizing, and evaluating and synthesizing. Hanna instructed her students to place sticky notes on specific pages within a pre-chosen text. Students were subsequently asked to pause on the previously-identified pages in order to reflect on what was taking place in the story. Students were also instructed to retell the story in their mind as they progressed through the text. During these readings, Hanna encouraged her students to use additional reading strategies (other than the primary strategy of identifying certain pages on which to pause). Lastly, Hanna had her students create Venn diagrams on the backs of their worksheets in order to compare their own lives with the life of a grandparent, great-grandparent, or friend.

Fluency instruction. In the area of fluency instruction, Hanna was observed conducting choral reading, repeated timed readings, partner reading, student-adult reading, unison reading, tape-assisted reading, reader’s theater, and reading connected text with corrective feedback. Hanna also did not utilize the technic taught avoidance of Round Robin and/or Popcorn reading. Lastly and during centers, Hanna had the students listen to stories on tapes and instructed them to use iPads to listen to texts with a partner.

Hanna used a Guide the Reading strategy, which involved having volunteers point to the first word on a given page in their text and then read words as a group. This process included positive feedback and instructor input as to the importance of reading words from left to right.

Lastly, students pointed to each word as they read them aloud while the other students followed along in their own books.

Writing instruction. In the area of writing instruction, Hanna was observed instructing on brainstorming, pre-writing, word processing on the computer, teacher-modeled writing processes, the use of organizers, effective writing models, and writing in response to reading. Hanna used the writing center to have her students create Thanksgiving-themed drawings. Following the creation of the drawings, students used wall and picture aides to assist them in writing simple sentences that matched their pictures.

Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study.

Phonemic awareness instruction (K-1). In the area of phonemic awareness (K-1), Hanna was observed teaching the manipulation of individual words, syllables, and sounds in words (i.e., "what sounds do you hear in cat? c//a//t//"). Students focused on the "y" sound as a vowel, and with phonemic awareness being a subset of phonological awareness, Hanna also taught segment phonemes to her students using the following exercise:

- Part 1: Hanna had the students say the word *long*, stretching out the sounds in the word. She then informed her students that there are three sounds in the word. Lastly, Hanna had the students repeat the pronunciation of the word, this time emphasizing each sound in the word (/l/ /o/ /ng/).
- Part 2: Hanna had her students listen to the elongated pronunciation of the work *train* and then asked them to repeat the word while identifying the number of sounds used.
- Part 3: Hanna pronounced the words *fly*, *games*, and *toys* to her students, pausing after each word to allow them to identify the number of sounds within each one.

Phonics instruction (K-2). In the area of phonics, Hanna was observed utilizing family blends. Hanna had her students write the word *fly* on the board and then had them read the word aloud with her. Next, the students were asked to underline the fl blend and Hanna explained how the sounds of the letters are blended together to form the fl sound. Hanna then pointed out how each individual sound in the blend can be heard and had the students orally blend the sounds of the letters together. Following pronunciation, Hanna wrote additional family blends on the board (i.e., bl, cl, fl, gl, pl, and sl), instructed the students to pronounce each blend, and had them write a word (under each blend) that began with that blend (i.e., black, clap, flip, glad, play, slug). Additionally, Hanna had students blend the sounds together while running their fingers under the letters. Lastly, volunteer students circled blends as they were identified.

Content literacy instruction (math, science, and social sciences). In the area of content literacy instruction, Hanna was observed using explicit instruction on text structure and text/graphic features. Additionally, Hanna assessed her students' background knowledge (as opposed to assuming what her students' varying background levels were), taught content vocabulary/concepts, and explained the use of graphic organizers. Hanna used writing center activities and computer based lessons (i.e., Imagine Learning and i-Ready) to enhance content literacy skills.

Strategies checklist findings. Hanna demonstrated a high level of strategy ability in each of the five observed areas. Concerning efficient use of teacher-directed time, Hanna demonstrated her skills by using classroom to help students make useful learning connections: connections subsequently used to build on existing knowledge. Hanna also demonstrated competency in developing students' cognitive abilities in part through the use of student meetings, which outlined both student expectations and student understandings of lesson

objectives. Lastly, Hanna used both the Daily 5 and Dolch sight words to increase the educational benefit of the lesson. Regarding opportunities for student interaction, Hanna used Think Pair Share, questioning techniques, and Venn diagrams to aid students as they worked with their shoulder partners. In the area of immediate corrective feedback, Hanna made corrections only when required and used positive reinforcement and decoding to make her lessons more effective. In consideration of differentiated instruction and similar to the strategies used by Hanna's colleagues, the teacher employed a series of techniques to include class student sharing, external thinking, and assessment of individual student ability, all of which were used to inform decisions on group formation. Finally, and in examining student engagement, Hanna was masterful both in her task-assignment methods as well as her ability to use timely positive reinforcement.

Artifact findings with AIMSweb. Regarding fluency, and through using the oral reading (CBM), a 1-minute standardized measure of oral reading of graded passages, accuracy and amount of words read per minute were considered. Hanna's students were assessed individually, and the results are shown subsequently.

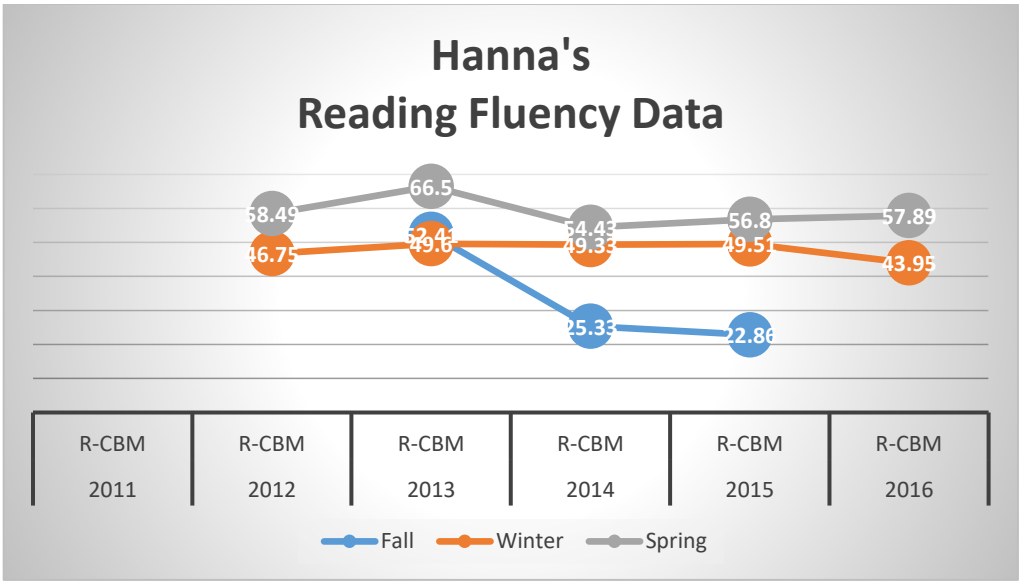


Figure 21. Hanna's reading fluency data.

Summary. Per the 2012-2013 Fall data, Hanna's classroom average was 46.75 words read correctly. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 58.49 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was an 11.74-word read correctly per minute growth. For the 2013-2014 Fall data, Hanna's classroom average was 49.6 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 52.41. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Hanna's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 2.81 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 66.5 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 16.9 word read correctly per minute growth.

In assessing the 2014-2015 Fall data, Hanna's classroom average was 25.33 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 49.33. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Hanna's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 24 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 54.43 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 29.1 word read correctly per minute growth.

For the 2015-2016 Fall data, Hanna's classroom average was 22.86 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 49.51. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Hanna's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 22 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 56.8 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 41-word read correctly per minute growth.

Finally, the 2016-2017 Fall data shows that Hanna's classroom average was 43.95 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 57.89. Between

the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Hanna's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 22 words read correctly per minute. Further evidence of student growth in Hanna's classes can be seen subsequently in the letter name fluency and letter sound fluency charts.

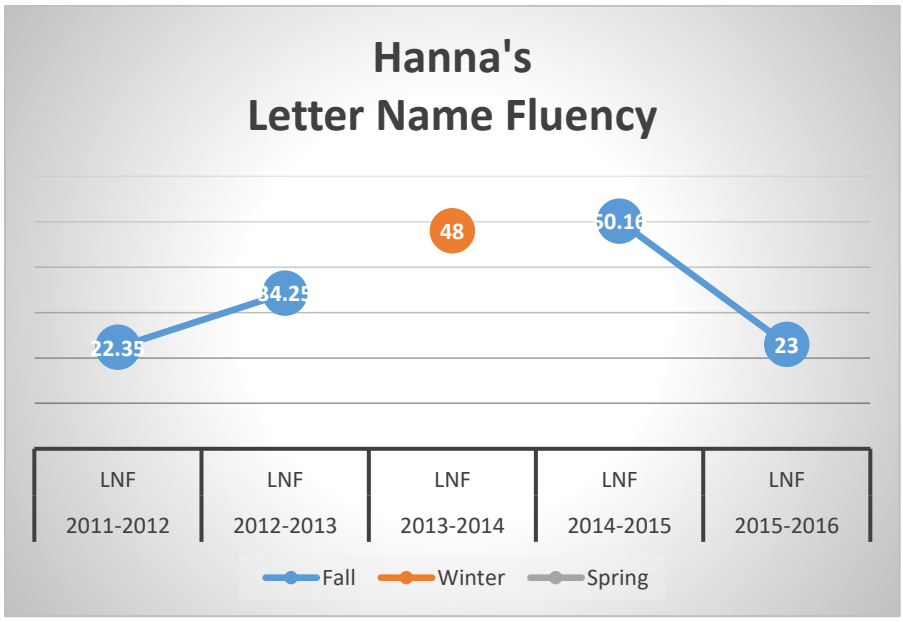


Figure 22. Hanna's letter name fluency data.

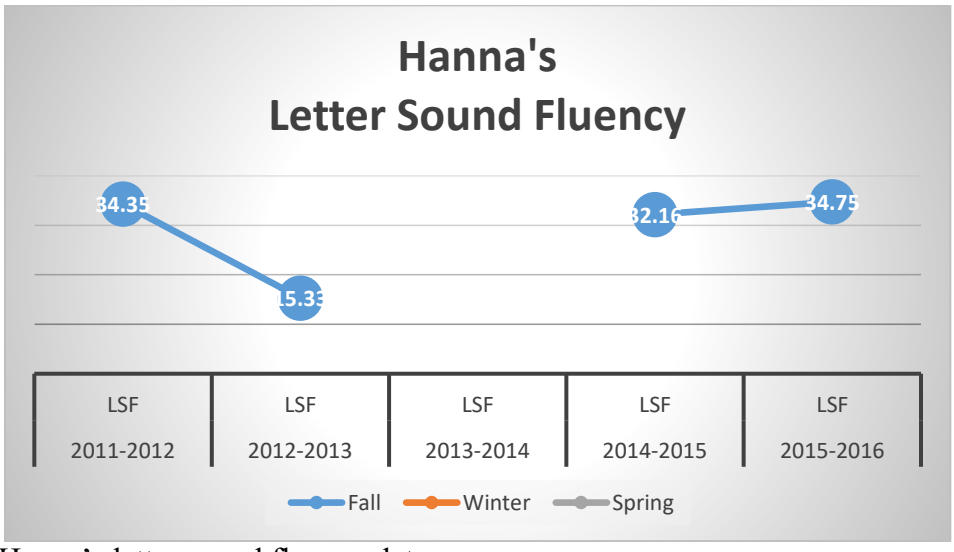


Figure 23. Hanna's letter sound fluency data.

Triangulation of data. In reviewing the interview findings, the Literacy Observation Checklist findings, the Strategies Checklist findings, and Artifacts including AIMSweb findings, all of these tools were integrated to make use of the preexisting and found data for Hanna. Data

from the interviews, observations, and artifact reviews have been presented and many commonalities exist. An accurate coding of the data occurred as to reveal emerging themes (further discussed in Chapter 5).

An analysis of the respective records and artifacts co-occurred with an analysis of the interview and observation data to provide additional detail and depth about the teaching strategies during direct instruction, individual learning centers, and small group instruction during reading. Further analysis took place by using the cross-sectional survey (via AIMSweb) and an original instrument created to record data captured during the review of artifacts as seen for each teacher.

Overall, the data obtained from the classroom observation notes corroborate the responses gathered from the teachers during the interview process. A deeper level of investigation into the data is presented in this multifaceted analysis to aid in the emergence of classroom literacy instructional practices emerge. More specifically, data reports from the Nevada Department of Education (2017) and the NSPF (n.d.) were also examined as a part of the triangulation process used in this study. National reports from the U.S. Department of Education were also used to add credibility to the research being conducted in this study (Snyder et al., 2016). The resulting effect allowed commonalities to emerge, in the responses of the teachers and in their observed instructional strategies, and will be addressed further in the following chapter.

Findings for Alma and Angela

For data relating to Alma and Angela, the information is laid out differently. Alma and Angela not only participated in the same interview, but also share the same classroom. As such,

some of their data is shown here in aggregate form, while portions are separate. As noted, Alma and Angela participated in the same interview; therefore, those data are presented together. The following Artifact Review Forms that coincide with the interview data are separate, yet the Classroom Artifacts/Pictures are presented together. The Literacy Instructional Observation Checklists and the Strategies Checklist findings are presented separately for each teacher. Finally, the Artifact findings through AIMSweb are shown together.

Interview findings.

Question 1A: What type of informal and formal assessments do you use to learn about your students' literacy skills? In response to the question, Angela and Alma cited a number of different ways in which their students are assessed. Angela began with the following explanation:

> Once a semester, we do star reading and star math to assess them. We track everything on Star Reading, we track it on the AIMSweb. We do core phonics on all our kids at the beginning of the year and then all our kids that are below grade level, we do them monthly. So all those records, we use to help drive our instruction for groups for literacy.

Alma subsequently added to the list of assessments by stating, "We do AIMSweb School, we do it three times a year but we also do fluency weekly and we do reading comp- Is it every week? The RCBM, the other one." She continued by elaborating about RCBM (RCBM stands for Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement and is a brief, individually administered, standardized test of oral reading for grades K-12 which is often used for students identified as at risk) by commenting, "in the beginning of the year we do it every week for the first 12 weeks and then after that, it's twice a month." In providing additional data as to the types of assessments used, Angela shared the following:

> So for our reading that we use, we also do cold reads every Friday. There's also a comprehension test they take every Wednesday. We do a vocab test, grammar test that we do for all the skills that we're teaching for that week.

With this notable list of assessments having been covered, use of the STAR program was revisited (STAR stands for Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading and is a website-driven program that tracks data across both boards and grades), The two teachers corrected an earlier reference to the frequency in which the program was administered. Alma explained:

> Because star used to be once a semester and then it went to once every quarter and now they want it once every month. With the exception of—the only months that are exceptions are November and December because there's no-teach November and December we're not here.

Question 2: How, if at all, does the assessment data gathered inform your instructional planning for the whole group? For some students? For individuals? In response to the second interview question, Alma began with the following explanation:

> It allows us to reflect on the data and reteach anything that we may need to and then reassess as needed. It also allows us to differentiate based on their reading levels. So when we're a core group, we're able to differentiate what they're getting.

Angela added to the subject by sharing:

> So like for phonics, I know that my higher kids, I don't need to teach them the phonics skills because they already have that solid base. Whereas my lower group, they need that phonics, core phonics every 6 weeks and I know I need to be teaching the phonics. It allows us to differentiate that way and make sure the kids get what they need and what they don't need.

When asked if and how the newly implemented "Read by Three" program had affected their instructional planning, Alma responded:

> Honestly, for me, I don't feel that it truly has. Only because I think that we hit it so hard before this whole law came into effect that we typically don't have children not where they need to be by the time they leave us. Because we hit those kids- because even though- like now, the big push for RTI is strictly if they're in the 25th percentile across the norms. Well our kids aren't hitting that level, so for our lower kids, I mean they seem low to us and we're still hitting all of those standards. Where they're getting the extra help, they're getting the tutoring, they're getting the companion reading, that sort of thing. So we're working extra with those kids anyway, that I don't feel that it's changed dramatically with us.

Angela then chimed in by saying that for her, the program had done nothing more than "give us more paperwork" and continued by sharing "that's all it is. We're still doing- all the things now, we just have a lot more paperwork for it. It's not anything different than what we're already doing." Alma was in full agreement with her colleague's statements. In concluding the conversation regarding the use of assessments to inform instructional planning, Angela shared, "I just like how we've done away with the whole group, teaching the small group aspect."

Question 3: What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom? When Alma and Angela were questioned**,** their unified and concise response was as follows:

> Well [we] do a lot of it as a small group. So it's small group focus, where the whole group instruction is maybe 10 to 15 minutes at the most. It's based on the small groups of

differentiating instruction based on their needs. We will do across the board for literacy for math, everything.

Question 4: Which of these strategies do you most attribute to student success with literacy skills? In reflecting on question four, Alma and Ashley's responses were slightly different but complementary, both pointing to the specific and intentional use of particular strategies. Alma began by sharing:

> I think small group is the biggest one. Just being for the fact that they are- when they're in small group they're more focused. You can see when they're not doing what they need to, you can see which areas are struggling with and you can bring in more details or more examples or hit it a little harder or longer. Whatever it is that they see. So you're seeing it better versus in a whole group where you don't have a hundred percent engaged at that time.

Angela also offered her sentiments on strategies:

> Well I like the fact that no student can hide behind someone else because they're all at the same level. So the questions and stuff that I'm asking are at their level, so they can't hide behind someone else. They have to participate because there's only four of them sitting in front of me. So there is that engagement that they have to be listening, they have to participating in the group and they're getting more out of it because I'm teaching at to whatever level they're at. So it's not like I'm not just tutoring the middle level and not the high kids or the low kids, I'm teaching at their level, they're getting it. So they get that, "Okay I can respond" and they're not going to sit there and hide.

Question 5: What structures do you have in place during your literacy block? When asked this question, Angela began with the following response:

> I have five reading groups and I'll call a reading group and just based on their skill level, it can be anywhere from 10, 15 minutes to 20 minutes with my lower kids. And while we're working with that, the other kids they're working on their center stuff that we establish, that goes with the skills that they're working on for that week.

Alma presented her understanding of how the literacy structures are used by stating:

> So whether that's technology based or paper based. They are working on the skills that we are supposed be teaching for that month- or that week. So for example, like this week it was, then a series and so the kids that were on technology were doing commas and a series on IXL. The kids that were at their seat doing some paperwork were doing stuff on their vocabulary words from this week or spelling words from this week. So they're working on skills that all goes along with the same standards for that same week

To conclude and in response to whether or not the instructors utilize a literacy framework block, Angela stated, "I think we do our own thing, we're not following their guidelines. We follow what's best for us, not anybody else."

Question 6: What type of materials and texts are used in your classroom to engage students with literacy skills? In response to question six, Angela responded by first saying, "Well for technology-based, we use IXL, we use MyOn. We also use Study Island and all those things." Alma explained, "There's games that come along with our actual reading program as well, that we use. There's phonics games, there's grammar games. Those sorts of things are being used as well for technology." When asked about which specific materials and texts the teachers used for reading, Alma responded by saying that they use "You Do Wonders."

Question 7: Does the district mandate these materials or do you choose the materials? In response to question seven, both Angela and Alma shared, according to Alma's words "We

choose [the materials] based on our kids" using "our site" and also based on "what we have available to us."

When asked if five-star, blue ribbon schools teachers have more autonomy in choosing materials due to their status, Alma responded by saying, "Not all of [the materials used] are on the approved list. For like RTI kind of stuff, that list, they're not all on that list." Angela followed by stating, "But a lot of it is- based on things that we have seen have worked with our kids and the needs that we need." Alma continued by sharing how funding cuts affected the availability of materials. She asserted, "The cost is going up and the money's not there anymore. That plays a big factor on what we have and what we don't, absolutely." Angela agreed and reiterated by sharing how "it's the funds they give us and what we want" and that choices are made based on "the students needs, but it's just trying to find the money to support the programs that we feel we do need." The line of questioning involving materials and texts utilized was concluded with some additional information about autonomy with a clarification regarding the categorization of the teachers' school.

Staring with the subject of autonomy, Alma began by sharing, "I feel like we had a little bit more wiggle room when we were empowerment" (Empowerment refers to a classification of schools in which the critical decisions affecting instruction are made by those most closely involved with the children). Alma continued by stating:

> That's where our decision-making actually came and we actually- that's where as a staff we were coming up and doing things and it was allowed. Then now, it's still site based but it's budget cut now, so that I think, is playing a different role.

In clarifying about the current classification (or category) of the school, Angela commented that "we are a magnet franchise school." Alma followed by stating, "Yes, I think the 'empowerment' [piece] just kind of dropped."

Question 8: Think about a student who you recently provided extra support to in the area of literacy. What strategies do you utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult literacy skills? When asked this question, Angela responded by citing a number of resources that enable her to assist students in need. In her own words she shared:

> This is where we come in to play for our tutoring hours, like they have extra tutoring twice a week. We have extra support that comes into the classroom and they're employing them for that extra literacy block. They're using the Companion Reading and we use peer mentors, so they're getting that more extra support on top of ourselves, to help them come up.

When questioned about what type of people were hired to be peer monitors, Alma replied by saying, "they're CTEs." Angela added to the discussion by pointing out exceptions to this rule, stating "occasionally I'll let some of my high kids do flash cards or something . . . but I usually have- like my girl, she has her big brother, big sister as well."

Question 9: Please share any artifacts you brought that captures a literacy strategy or data that helps support any decisions to support students' literacy needs. In response to the request to share her experience, the following Artifact Review form was filled out to show which types of artifacts Alma and Angela used by in their teaching. Out of the artifacts listed, they most frequently used classroom center boards, early literacy curriculum and resources, and classroom and library reading strategies. Samples of the artifacts can be seen subsequently. The specific standards addressed here for both teachers were:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.2.1.B: Form and use frequently occurring irregular plural nouns (e.g., feet, children, teeth, mice, fish).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.6: Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe.

Alma's artifact review.

Table 6

Alma's Artifact Review

Date: December 1, 2016 School: Walter Bracken STEAM Academy	Time: 11:30-1:30 Classroom: A Grade: K 2
Type of Artifact	Practices
● Lesson plans ● Early literacy curriculum and resources ● Team meeting notes ● Other ● Pictures of classroom centers ● Pictures of student work	● Implementation of evidence-based core curriculum aligned with early literacy skills ● Use of a variety of learning formats/groupings (i.e., whole group, small group, centers, embedded; Whole group phonics, phonemic awareness, small groups and centers, computer based program support, iPad learning activities) ● Adult support that is adapted to students' early literacy needs

(continued)

Type of Artifact	Practices
	● Use of instructional strategies to meet the needs of the whole class, some students, and individuals (i.e., intentional teaching, intensive scaffolding)

Angela's artifact review. Table 7

Angela's Artifact Review

Date: December 1, 2016 School: Walter Long Elementary School	Time: 1:30-3:00 Classroom: B Grade: K 2
Type of Artifact	Practices
● Lesson plans ● Early literacy curriculum and resources ● Team meeting notes ● Other ● Pictures of classroom centers ● Pictures of student work	● Implementation of evidence-based core curriculum aligned with early literacy skills ● Use of a variety of learning formats/groupings ,i.e. whole group, small group, centers, embedded; Whole group phonics, phonemic awareness, small groups and centers, computer based program support, iPad learning activities) ● Adult support that is adapted to students' early literacy needs ● Use of instructional strategies to meet the needs of the whole class, some students, and individuals (i.e., intentional teaching, intensive scaffolding)

Alma and Angela's classroom artifacts/ pictures.

Figure 24. Student grouping and center rotation schedule for the students.

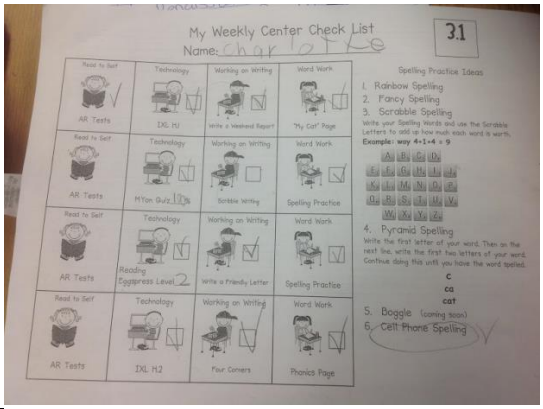


Figure 25. Sample of student work.

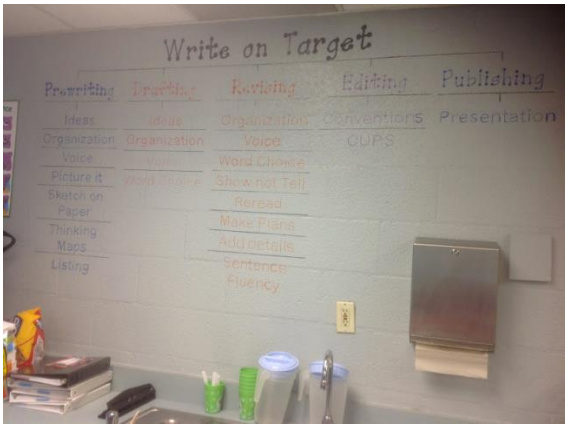
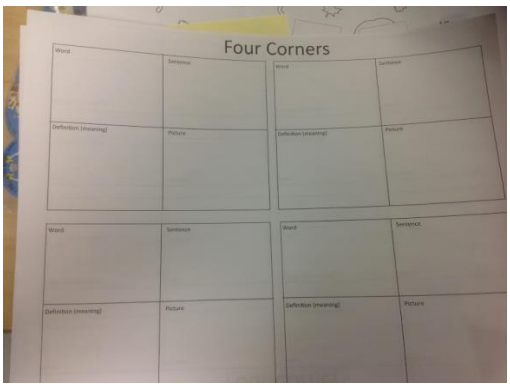


Figure 26. Writing center.



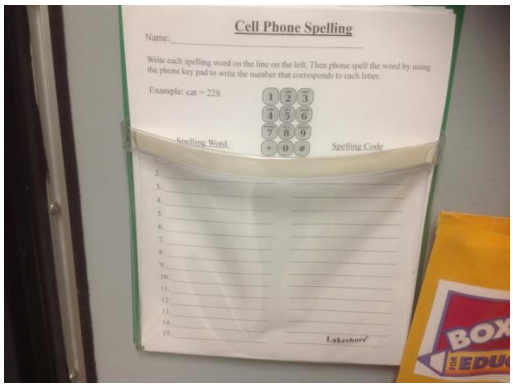


Figure 27. Student work sample.

Figure 28. Classroom library/reading series.

Literacy instructional observation checklist for Alma.

Vocabulary instruction. In the area of vocabulary instruction, Alma was observed providing explicit instruction on word meanings and their use in a variety of situations and also applied independent word learning strategies (word parts, context clues, use of dictionaries, etc.). Additionally, Alma taught morphology (word parts) and etymology (derivation), and directly taught new vocabulary on several occasions. Identical to Alma's colleague (teacher) Angela, Alma also enhanced vocabulary practice by utilizing a Four Corners activity. This strategy involved the use of a four-corner vocabulary chart that helped her students learn new words. Students wrote down words and subsequently defined them. It was evident that students were able to make personal connections during the exercise. Evidence of such connections included the students' drawings, sentences, and explanations of word meaning.

During Alma's small group instruction, she taught verb skills directly by modeling various verb actions. In addition to direct instruction, Alma also used iPad games to enhance the learning experience.

Comprehension strategy instruction. In the area of comprehension strategy instruction, Alma was observed activating/building on prior knowledge, encouraging student-generated questions, predicting, inferring, and making connections. Alma also used graphic organizers, summarizing, evaluating, and synthesizing with her students.

Fluency instruction. In the area of fluency instruction, Alma was observed teaching choral reading, repeated timed reading, partner reading, student-adult reading, unison reading, and tape-assisted reading. Alma also instructed using Reader's Theater and reading connected text while providing corrective feedback. Lastly, Alma taught fluency while not using the technique of Round Robin and/or Popcorn reading.

Writing instruction. In the area of writing instruction, Alma was observed using brainstorming, pre-writing, word processing (on the computer), teacher modeling writing processes, and graphic organizers. Additionally, Alma modeled effective writing and writing in response to reading.

***Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study*.** In the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and wordy study instruction, Alma was observed teaching phonemic awareness (K-1). Alma instructed her students on the manipulation of individual words, syllables, and sounds. For example, she asked the children, "What sounds do you hear in cat? (c//a//t//)."

Content literacy instruction (math, science, and social sciences). In the area of content literacy instruction, Alma was observed providing explicit instruction on text structure and text/graphic features. Additionally, Alma worked on building background knowledge (as

opposed to merely assuming her students' varying background levels), instructed on content vocabulary/concepts, and used graphic organizers to enrich the teaching experience. Alma conducted writing center activities and computer based lessons using Imagine Learning and i-Ready.

Additional observations. As opposed to teaching lessons using a whole-group design and very similar Angela's teaching style, Alma instructed using small groups that were tiered to each individual group's learning level. The amount of time spent and choice of technology used with each group was also based on the group's overall academic level.

Literacy instructional observation checklist for Angela.

Vocabulary instruction. In the area of vocabulary instruction, Angela was observed using explicit instruction and discussion of word meanings and use in a variety of situations as well as independent word learning strategies (word parts, context clues, use of dictionaries, etc.). Additionally, Angela taught morphology (word parts) and etymology (derivation), and provided direct instruction on new vocabulary. Identical to Alma's vocabulary instructional methods, Angela enhanced vocabulary practice by utilizing a Four Corners activity. This strategy involved the use of a four-corner vocabulary chart that helped her students learn new words. Students wrote down words and subsequently defined them. It was evident that students were able to make personal connections during the exercise. Evidence of such connection included the students' drawings, sentences, and explanations of word meanings. Angela used small group instruction to directly teach the skill of using action verbs. iPad games were used to conduct this exercise.

Comprehension strategy instruction. In the area of comprehension strategy instruction, Angela was observed activating/building prior knowledge, encouraging student-generated

questions, predicting, inferring, making connections, using graphic organizers, summarizing, and evaluating and synthesizing.

Fluency instruction. In the area of fluency instruction, Angela was observed using choral reading, repeated timed readings, partner reading, student-adult reading, unison reading, tape-assisted reading, reader's theater, reading connected text with corrective feedback, and avoidance of Round Robin and/or Popcorn reading.

Writing instruction. In the area of writing instruction, Angela was observed teaching brainstorming, pre-writing, and word processing (on the computer). Additionally, Angela modeled the effective writing process and taught her students about graphic organizers.

***Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study*.** In the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and wordy study instruction, Angela was observed teaching phonemic awareness through a demonstration on how to manipulate individual words, syllables and sounds (K-1). Angela asked her students, "What sounds do you hear in cat? (c//a//t//)"

Content literacy instruction (math, science, and social sciences). In the area of content literacy instruction, Angela was observed providing explicit instruction on text structure and text/graphic features. Additionally, Angela was seen building background knowledge on each student (as opposed to assuming the varying background levels possessed by each of the children). Lastly, Angela instructed on the use of graphic organizers and content vocabulary/concepts. Angela used writing center activities and computer based lessons (Imagine Learning and i-Ready) to enhance her instruction.

Additional observations. As opposed to teaching lessons using a whole-group design and similarly to her colleague Alma's teaching methods, Angela instructed using small groups

that were tiered to each individual group's learning level. The amount of time spent and choice of technology used with each group was also based on the group's overall academic level.

Angela also matched lessons with the varying student centers utilized by the students. The particular lesson observed involved the use of interactive reading notebooks (which provide instruction on all second grade reading standards to include literature, and informational and foundational skills) to enhance reading comprehension in the areas of science and math. Lastly, Angela's approach to using interactive notebooks was twofold. First, the notebooks were used as an anchor for reading standards and second, they were provided as a reference to be used throughout the entire academic year.

Strategies checklist findings for Alma and Angela. As with Kady, Hanna, Jessie, and Laurel, Alma and Angela demonstrated a high level of effectiveness concerning strategy use. Concerning the efficient use of teacher-directed time, Alma and Angela used the Daily 5 and a technique which had students identify the nature of the lesson, the reasons for which it was being provided, and what lesson success looked like. In the area of opportunities for student interaction and much like the work of Alma and Angela's colleagues, the two teachers paired up their students and used both Venn diagrams and questioning techniques to make the lesson more meaningful. In the area of immediate corrective feedback, Alma and Angela were both skillful in providing well-timed correction, positive feedback, and encouragement. Regarding differentiated instruction, Alma and Angela capitalized on the opportunity to work with students from another first grade class and by doing so, maximized the benefits of using skill building and external thinking. Lastly, concerning student engagement, Alma and Angela actively engaged their students and facilitated the students' use of self-assessment as a means to learn.

Artifact findings with AIMSweb for Alma and Angela. In the arena of fluency, and through using the Oral Reading (CBM), a 1-minute standardized measure of oral reading of graded passages, accuracy and amount of words read per minute were considered. Alma and Angela's students were assessed individually. The results are shown subsequently.

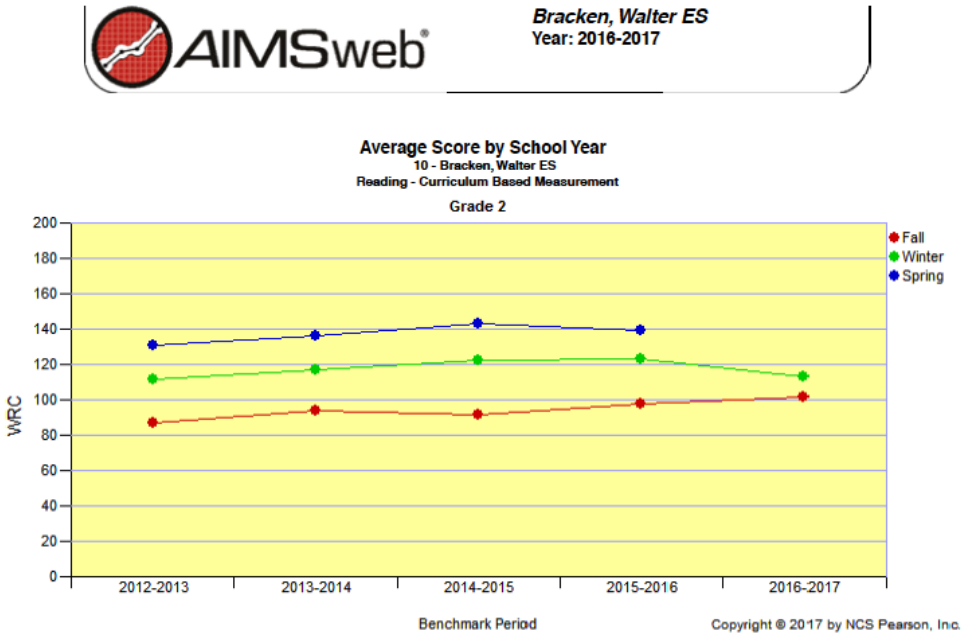


Figure 29. Alma and Angela's AIMSweb data: Reading – curriculum based measurement.

Summary. Regarding the 2012-2013 Fall data, Alma's and Angela's classroom average was 85 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 119. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Alma's and Angela's second grade class showed a minimum growth of 34 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 138 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 53-word read correctly per minute growth.

Per the 2013-2014 Fall data, Alma's and Angela's classroom average was 90 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 119. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Alma's and Angela's second grade class showed a minimum growth of 29 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the

classroom average was 149 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 59-word read correctly per minute growth.

For the 2014-2015 Fall data, Alma's and Angela's classroom average was 85 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 121. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Alma's and Angela's second grade class showed a minimum growth of 36 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 141 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 56-word read correctly per minute growth.

In relationship to 2015-2016 Fall data, Alma's and Angela's classroom average was 99 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 121. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Alma's and Angela's second grade class showed a minimum growth of 22 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 140 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 41-word read correctly per minute growth.

Triangulation of data. In reviewing the interview findings, the Literacy Observation Checklist findings, the Strategies Checklist findings, and Artifacts including AIMSweb findings, all of these tools were integrated to make use of the preexisting and found data for Alma and Angela. Data from the interviews, observations, and artifact reviews have been presented and many commonalities exist. An accurate coding of the data occurred as to reveal emerging themes (further discussed in Chapter 5).

An analysis of the respective records and artifacts co-occurred with an analysis of the interview and observation data to provide additional detail and depth about the teaching strategies during direct instruction, individual learning centers, and small group instruction

during reading. Further analysis took place by using the cross-sectional survey (via AIMSweb) and an original instrument created to record data captured during the review of artifacts as seen for each teacher.

Overall, the data obtained from the classroom observation notes corroborate the responses gathered from the teachers during the interview process. A deeper level of investigation into the data is presented in this multifaceted analysis to aid in the emergence of classroom literacy instructional practices emerge. More specifically, data reports from the Nevada Department of Education (2017) and the NSPF (n.d.) were also examined as a part of the triangulation process used in this study. National reports from the U.S. Department of Education were also used to add credibility to the research being conducted in this study (Snyder et al., 2016). The resulting effect allowed commonalities to emerge in the responses of the teachers and in their observed instructional strategies, and will be addressed further in the following chapter.

Findings for Laurel

Although Laurel did not participate in an interview, her data for the Literacy Instructional Observation Checklist, the Strategies Checklist, and both the classroom and AIMSweb artifact are available and presented here. To begin, the following Artifact Review form was filled out to show which types of artifacts were used by Laurel in her teaching. Out of the artifacts listed, Laurel noted that she most frequently used classroom center boards, anchor charts, early literacy curriculum and resources, and hanging up pictures of student work, as seen subsequently.

Artifact review.

Table 8

Laurel's Artifact Review

Date: December 1, 2016	Time: 8am-11:00am 9am-10:30
School: Nate Mack Elementary School	Classroom: B Grade: 1
Type of Artifact	**Practices**
● Lesson plans ● Early literacy curriculum and resources ● Team meeting notes ● Other ● Pictures of class room centers ● Pictures of student work	● Implementation of evidence-based core curriculum aligned with early literacy skills (Explicit instruction, Reading A-Z Lesson, Blending, Repeated Reading, Choral Reading, etc.) ● Use of a variety of learning formats/groupings (i.e., whole group, small group, centers, embedded; Whole group phonics, phonemic awareness, small groups and centers, computer based program support, iPad learning activities) ● Adult support that is adapted to students' early literacy needs ● Use of instructional strategies to meet the needs of the whole class, some students, and individuals (i.e., intentional teaching, intensive scaffolding)

Classroom artifacts/pictures.

Figure 30. Writing center.

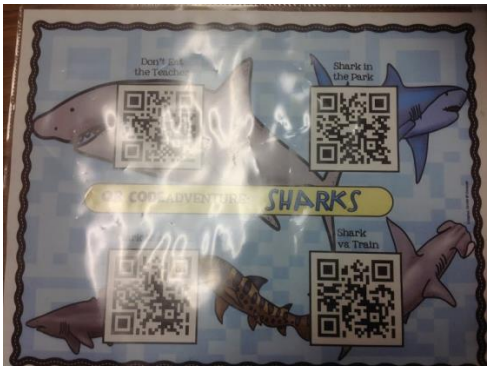


Figure 31. Student centers.

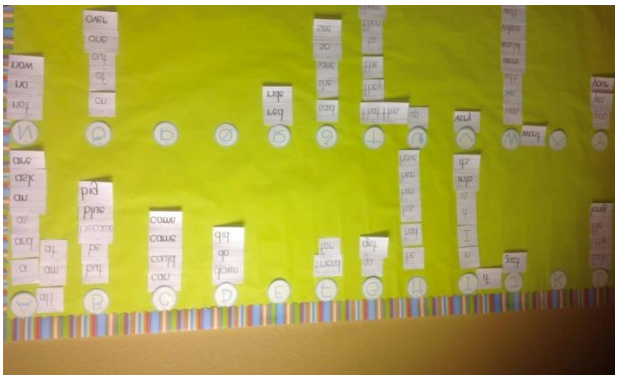


Figure 32. Alphabet wall that encompasses high-frequency words/word wall.

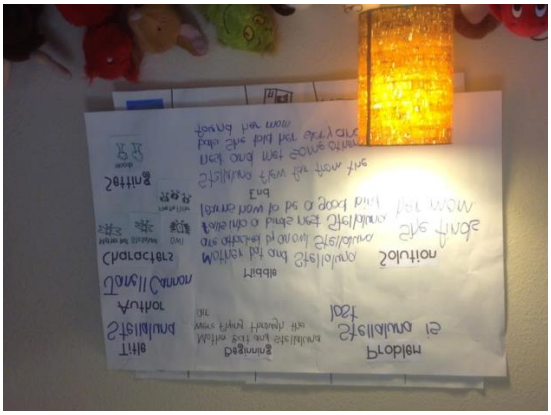
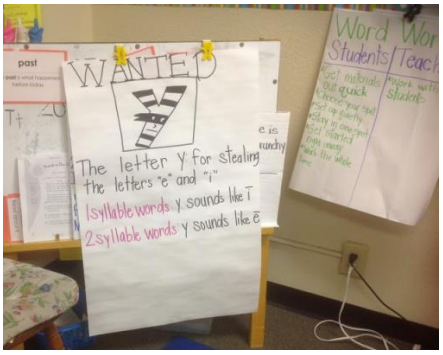
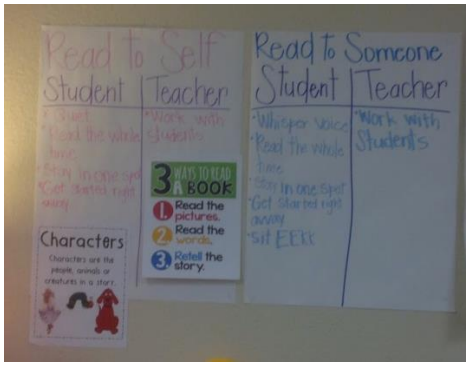


Figure 33. Complex text/story element wall.





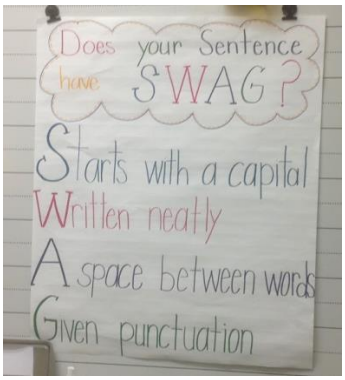
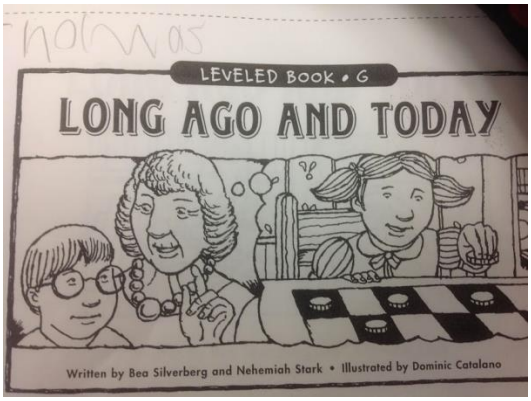
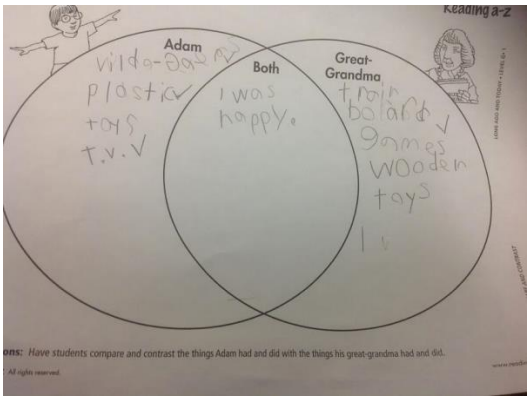


Figure 34. Anchor charts.





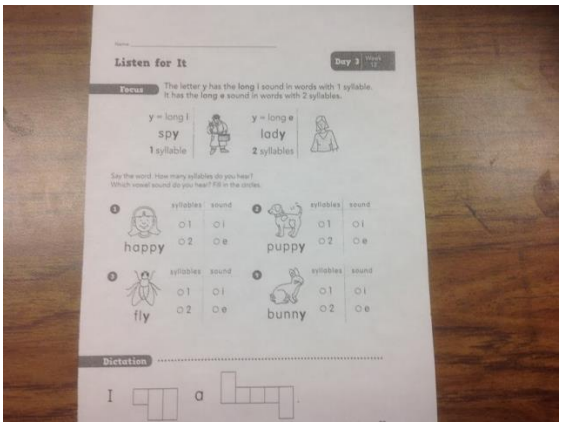


Figure 35. Samples of student work.

Literacy instructional observation checklist.

Vocabulary instruction. In the area of vocabulary instruction, Laurel was observed using explicit instruction and discussion on both word meanings and their use in a variety of situations as well as with independent word learning strategies (word parts, context clues, use of dictionaries, etc.). Laurel also instructed her students on morphology (word parts) and etymology (derivation). Lastly, Laurel provided direct instruction on new vocabulary.

Laurel used some of the classroom time to model how to read words using decoding strategies and context clues. This process included having the students reinforce the vocabulary words by using pictures in books. For example, Laurel stated, “Tell me what you see while looking at the picture on page 3.” A typical student response was, “The boy is sitting at the table with his great grandma. The boy is young. The great grandma was young long ago.”

Comprehension strategy instruction. In the area of comprehension strategy instruction, Laurel was observed activating/building prior knowledge, encouraging student-generated questions, predicting, inferring, making connections, using graphic organizers, summarizing, and evaluating and synthesizing. Additionally, Laurel used student centers to work on text placement with pictures in sequential order while reading familiar texts.

Laurel instructed her students to place sticky notes on specific pages within a pre-chosen text. Students were subsequently asked to pause on the previously-identified pages in order to reflect on what was taking place in the story. Students were also instructed to retell the story in their mind as they progressed through the text. During these readings, Laurel encouraged her students to use additional reading strategies (other than the primary strategy of identifying certain pages to pause on). Lastly, Laurel had her students create Venn diagrams on the back of their worksheets in order to compare their own lives with the life of a grandparent, great-grandparent, or friend.

Fluency instruction. In the area of fluency instruction, Laurel was observed conducting choral reading, repeated timed readings, partner reading, student-adult reading, unison reading, tape-assisted reading, reader's theater, and reading connected text with corrective feedback. Laurel also taught while not using the technique of Round Robin and/or Popcorn reading. Additionally and during centers, Laurel had the students listen to stories on tapes and instructed them to use iPads to listen to texts with a partner. Lastly, Laurel also utilized centers to have her students select and read books with visual supports using QR codes.

Laurel used a guide the reading strategy that involved having volunteers point to the first word on a given page in their text and then reading words as a group. This process included positive feedback and instructor input as to the importance of reading words from left to right.

Lastly, students pointed to each word as they read them aloud while the other students followed along in their own books.

Writing instruction. In the area of writing instruction, Laurel was observed instructing on brainstorming, pre-writing, word processing on the computer, teacher-modeled writing processes, the use of organizers, effective writing models, and writing in response to reading. While using centers, Laurel instructed word work to her students by having them match vowels with pictures.

Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study.

Phonemic awareness instruction (K-1). In the area of phonemic awareness (K-1), Laurel was observed teaching the manipulation of individual words, syllables, and sounds in words (i.e., "What sounds do you hear in cat? c//a//t//"). Student's focused on the "y" sound as a vowel, and phonemic awareness being a subset of phonological awareness, Laurel also taught segment phonemes to her students using the following exercise:

- Part 1: Laurel had the students say the word "long," stretching out the sounds in the word. She then informed her students that there are three sounds in the word. Lastly, Laurel had the students repeat the pronunciation of the word, this time emphasizing each sound in the word (/l/ /o/ /ng/).
- Part 2: Laurel had her students listen to the elongated pronunciation of the work "train" and then asked them to repeat the word while identifying the number of sounds used.
- Part 3: Laurel pronounced the words "fly," "games," and "toys" to her students, pausing after each word to allow them to identify the number of sounds within each one.

Phonics instruction (K-2). In the area of phonics, Laurel was observed utilizing family blends. Laurel had her students write the word "fly*"* on the board and then had them read the word aloud with her. Next, the students were asked to underline the "fl" blend, and Laurel explained how the sounds of the letters are blended together to form the "fl" sound. Laurel then pointed out how each individual sound in the blend can be heard and she had the students orally blend the sounds of the letters together. Following pronunciation, Laurel wrote additional family blends on the board (i.e., "bl," "cl," "fl," "gl," "pl," and "sl"), instructed the students to pronounce each blend, and had them write a word (under each blend) that began with that blend (i.e., black, clap, flip, glad, play, slug). Additionally, Laurel had students blend the sounds together while running their fingers under the letters. Lastly, volunteer students circled blends as they were identified.

All areas (phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study). Laurel used student centers to teach the sorting of one and two syllable words that had "y" sounds in them. Laurel followed the sorting process by having the students self-correct their work.

Content literacy instruction (math, science, and social sciences). In the area of content literacy instruction, Laurel was observed using explicit instruction on text structure and text/graphic features. Additionally, Laurel assessed her students' background knowledge (as opposed to assuming what her students' varying background levels were), taught content vocabulary/concepts, and explained the use of graphic organizers.

Laurel used writing center activities, computer based lessons (i.e., Imagine Learning and i-Ready), and language core card testing to enhance content literacy skills. The core card testing gave students an opportunity to work on the conventions of Standard English, which they did by circling (correct) nouns within sentences.

Strategies checklist findings. Laurel's use of strategies was clearly successful across all areas observed. Concerning efficient use of teacher-directed time, and as consistent with techniques used by other teachers, Laurel demonstrated a high level of skill when interacting directly with her students. Laurel's accurate assessment of the students' cognitive skills (levels) helped her avoid the use of ineffective questioning (probing) and also helped ensure the students' continued class involvement. Regarding opportunities for student interaction, Laurel mirrored the efforts of her colleagues by having students work with their shoulder partners while using Venn diagrams and questioning techniques. Laurel also used think pair share and complex questioning strategies to increase the effectiveness of the learning experience. In the area of immediate corrective feedback, Laurel expertly and tactfully used the apology of a student (an apology made for failing to meet group objectives) to propel her groups toward successful goal completion. Lastly, and concerning both differentiated instruction and student engagement, Laurel was decisive in basing her instruction on her students' varying capacities for growth and in doing so was able to maintain her students' interest.

Artifact findings with AIMSweb. As noted previously, the Oral Reading (CBM) is a 1-minute standardized measure of oral reading of graded passages that are administered to students individually. Accuracy and amount of words read per minute are considered, and Laurel's finding are exhibited and discussed subsequently.

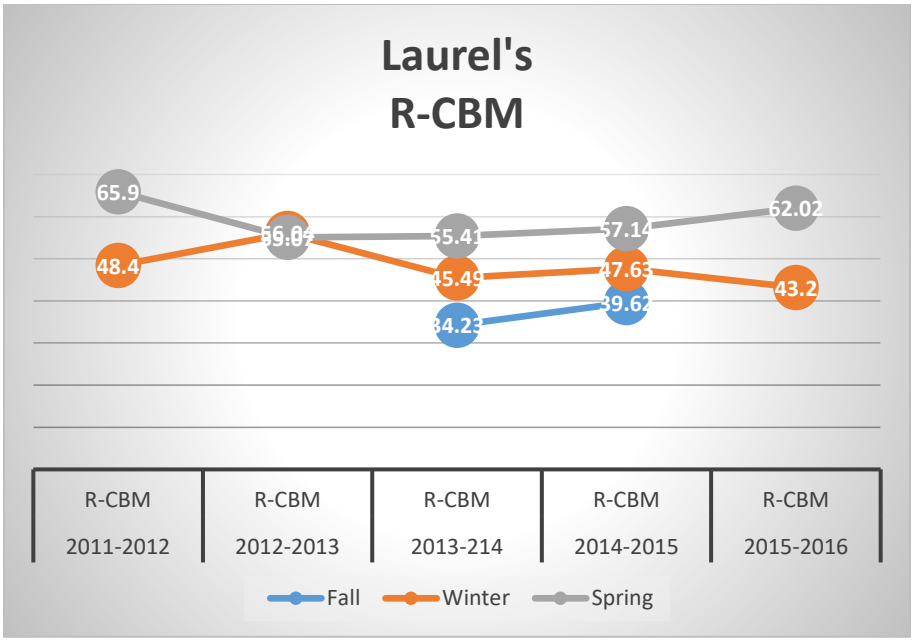


Figure 36. Laurel's Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement (R-CBM.)

Summary. For the 2012-2013 Winter data, Laurel's classroom average was 56.04 words read correctly. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 55.07 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 0.97-word read correctly per minute growth.

In relationship to the 2013-2014 Fall data, Laurel's classroom average was 34.23 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 45.49. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Laurel's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 11.26 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 55.41 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 21.18 word read correctly per minute growth.

Per the 2014-2015 Fall data, Laurel's classroom average was 39.62 words read correctly. By the winter benchmark the average words read correctly was 47.63. Between the fall and winter benchmark of 2013-2014, Laurel's first grade class showed a minimum growth of 8.01 words read correctly per minute. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 57.14

words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 17.52-word read correctly per minute growth.

For the 2015-2016 Winter data, Laurel's classroom average was 43.2 words read correctly. During the spring benchmark the classroom average was 62.02 words read correctly per minute. Therefore, from the fall benchmark to the spring benchmark there was a 18.82-word read correctly per minute growth. For the phoneme data (the small units of speech that correspond to the letters of an alphabetic writing system), a child's level of phonemic awareness on entering school is widely held to be the strongest single determinant of the success that she or he will experience in learning to read. Laurel's data relating to findings phoneme segmentation fluency is presented here in chart form.

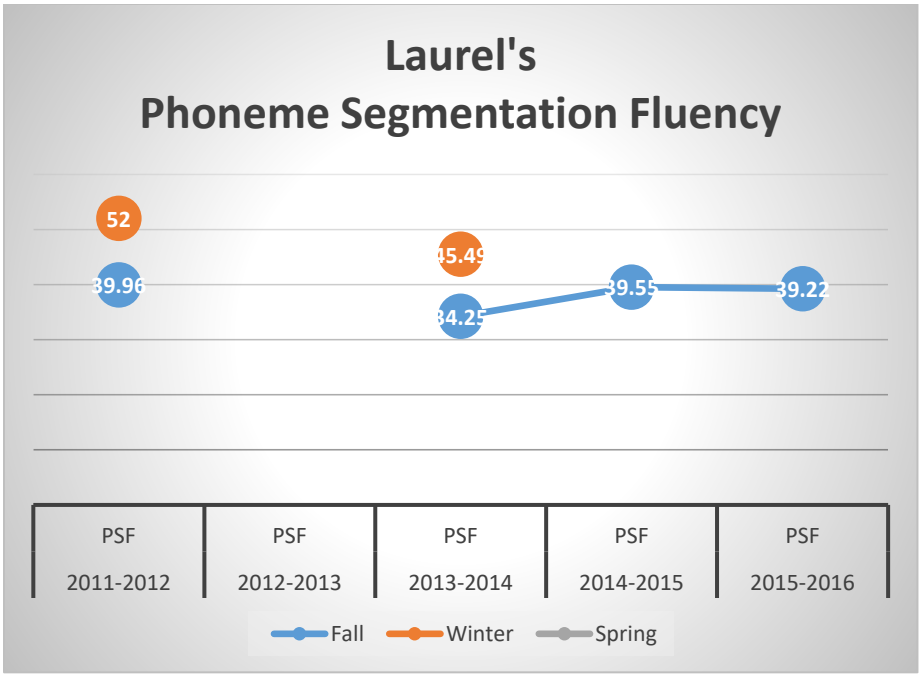


Figure 37. Laurel's phoneme segmentation fluency.

Triangulation of data. In reviewing the interview findings, the Literacy Observation Checklist findings, the Strategies Checklist findings, and Artifacts including AIMSweb findings, all of these tools were integrated to make use of the preexisting and found data. Data from the

interviews, observations, and artifact reviews have been presented and many commonalities exist. An accurate coding of the data occurred as to reveal emerging themes (discussed further in Chapter 5).

An analysis of the respective records and artifacts co-occurred with an analysis of the interview and observation data to provide additional detail and depth about the teaching strategies during direct instruction, individual learning centers, and small group instruction during reading. Further analysis took place by using the cross-sectional survey (via AIMSweb) and an original instrument created to record data captured during the review of artifacts as seen for each teacher.

Overall, the data obtained from the classroom observation notes corroborate the responses gathered from the teachers during the interview process. A deeper level of investigation into the data is presented in this multifaceted analysis to aid in the emergence of classroom literacy instructional practices emerge. More specifically, data reports from the Nevada Department of Education (2017) and the NSPF (n.d.) were also examined as a part of the triangulation process used in this study. National reports from the U.S. Department of Education were also used to add credibility to the research being conducted in this study (Snyder et al., 2016). The resulting effect allowed commonalities to emerge, in the responses of the teachers and in their observed instructional strategies, and will be addressed further in the following chapter.

Collective Participant Findings

Based on data collected from interviews, observations, and artifacts—all of which evidence student academic improvement in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—the following summaries of the six individual teachers' data

were made. Data collected for Kady evidenced her integration and effective use of technology and traditional (pencil and paper) methods to instruct her kindergarten students. Interviews and observations also demonstrated Kady's capacity to use assessment tools, technology, experience, and intuition to tailor her instruction to individual students and or small groups based on academic need. Similarly and as with the majority of Kady's colleagues, the teacher's efforts to avoid a one size fits all technique contributed to positive outcomes for all students.

In the area of use of academic materials, Kady attributed part of her success to the flexibility her school provided her. However, such flexibility did not make the daunting task of sifting through the myriad of available materials and texts any easier, and Kady proved to be very skillful in choosing and integrating worthwhile material. Additionally, Kady's abilities to engage her students and correct them tactfully were shown to add to positive outcomes. Lastly, and concerning quantifiable results verified through data collected from AIMSweb, Kady's students showed significant improvement in the areas of letter naming fluency (from 37.54 to 52.25 words [read] per minute) and letter sound fluency (from 37.52 to 54.12 words [pronounced] per minute). Notable improvements such as these were observed with Kady's colleague Jessie, whose work is summarized next.

As with Kady, Jessie tailored her assessments and strategies effectively, providing a blend of formal and informal techniques to instruct her students. Jessie also shared the same fortune of having a certain amount of flexibility in choosing appropriate materials and texts, and she capitalized on the flexibility to provide the most all-encompassing educational program possible. Additionally, Jessie's success as an educator was evidenced in both her work with the class as a whole as well as her direct interactions with students who required additional assistance.

In terms of student assessment, Jessie, as well as her colleagues, all greatly benefited from effectively gauging their students' varying academic levels. Jessie's skill in this area allowed her to create a dynamic environment and instruction that catered to her students' varying academic levels. Additionally, and to operate as efficiently as possible using assessment data to inform strategy, Jessie skillfully varied class group size to meet her educational benchmarks. AIMSweb data collected on Jessie re consistent with findings made on through interviews and observations. For example, in the area of fluency improvement, Jessie's students achieved a 37-word per minute increase over the course of the academic year. Such marked improvements were also found with teacher Hanna, whose work is reviewed subsequently.

Consistent with the significant fluency literacy improvements observed in Kady's classroom, Hanna's students also received great benefit through her use of assessment, strategy, and materials (texts). AIMSweb data show that Hanna's students increased the number of correct words read per minute by 11.74 over the course of the school year. Instructor observations also showed that such success was connected to a series of factors including the effective timing of assessments, the combining of multiple assessment methods and techniques, utilization of carefully chosen artifacts, and the effective use of technology.

In part and through as shown during Hanna's interview, the instructor also attributed student progress to her ability to carefully navigate through the commonly-found lack of clarity that exists (both with multiple schools within one district as well as in schools across districts) regarding the necessary use of programs, texts, and other teaching materials. Additionally, and as with Alma and Angela (whose findings are examined next), Hanna's use of explicit instruction, group work, feedback, and correction all contributed directly to student improvement throughout the academic year.

As with their coworkers, Alma and Angela were found to be highly skilled, and they did tremendous job of collaborating with one another. From the effective use of assessment and strategy to the purposeful use of texts and materials, the two teachers connected with their students in a meaningful way. As with Hanna, Alma and Angela also made efforts to identify administrative constraints and were shown to prudently find work-arounds (i.e., Alma and Angela found certain programs unhelpful and responsible for creating additional, unnecessary paperwork. As a result, the two worked together in a way the minimized the use of such programs).

In addition to the teachers' capacity to enhance their students' academic abilities through effective assessment, use of materials, and careful choice of programs, observations revealed Alma and Angela's creative use of group work. Such creativity allowed the teachers to divvy up their instruction so that those most in need received assistance, and students who had been deemed as "self-sufficient" were empowered to work under minimal supervision. The instructors' successful use of strategy and creative use of groups led to the remarkable increase of 53 in words (read) per minute from the fall to the spring. Lastly, and consistent with findings related to Laurel (reviewed next), Alma and Angela demonstrated a high level of proficiency in keeping their students engaged and involved.

Observations made regarding Laurel across the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as well as observations conducted on Laurel's use of strategy evidenced a high level of proficiency. As with Laurel's coworkers, the instructor's use of explicit (direct) instruction, purposeful artifacts, effectively timed intervention (use of strategy), and creative teaching methods propelled her students to higher levels of learning.

Lastly, Laurel showed skill in the areas of correction and feedback and similarly to her colleagues, was found to be masterful in keeping her students engaged in the classroom.

Table 9 summarizes the key strategies participants used for each of the five components of literacy and the number of times each strategy was coded and counted.

Table 9.

Key Strategies for Teaching Five Components of Literacy

Strategy	Participant responses
Phonemic Awareness	
Word Manipulation (the manipulation of individual words, syllables, and eventually sounds in words)	6
Word play (blending, substituting, and matching	
using songs, poems, and chants)	5
Word Sort	2
Phonics	
Word Study	5
Sound/ Spelling	4
Decoding and Encoding	6
Fluency	
Choral reading and repeated timed readings	6
Partner reading and student-adult reading	4
Reading connected text with corrective feedback	6
Vocabulary	
Explicit instruction on word meanings/independent word learning	6
Direct instruction on new vocabulary	6
Context Clues	6
Comprehension	
Predicting, inferring, and making connections	6
Use of graphic organizers	6
Activating/building (on) prior knowledge	3

Lastly, collaboration between teachers, the use of Daily 5, and the use of technology were also prevalent. All the teachers used these three strategies to instruct their students effectively.

The Daily 5 program was especially widespread. All six teachers used the Daily 5 as a tool to enhance the efficiency of teacher-directed time. This is evidenced by Hanna who shared:

> We do Daily 5 at our school, that's a really big component. They do word work and they have work on writing. Sometimes I give them things to write about, sometimes they can write about their own things. It seems to be working, and I think it will benefit, because they will get pulled every day because there's two of us doing it.

Kady also supported the use of Daily 5 when explaining that "students participate in a phonics program every day" and "they [also] participate in the Daily 5 every day. So, that means they're working on writing, word work, reading, and reading to self every day."

In relationship to the use of technology, all six of the teachers incorporated the use of technology throughout their literacy lessons either as independent practice, whole group practice, or small group instruction. Jessie confirmed that her school is considered to be a "one to one school for iPads," and further noted that her classroom is now using programs such as Wonders, i-Ready, Scoot Pad, IXL, Study Island, and MyOn. Jessie shared:

> I have four computers and three iPads, so there's lots of technology available to them. I just offer any kind of support that I can to help them, and also let them know that I care, I'm concerned, I want them to succeed.

All six teachers discussed using games, activities, the reading program, phonics games, and grammar games to teach the students using technology.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explore and describe the literacy instructional strategies of selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD in Nevada as related to the five core literacy components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and

comprehension. High performing teachers were defined as those teachers who have consistently demonstrated student performance gains of 25% in at least one of the five core literacy component areas over a 3-year period. The primary research question of this study was: What instructional strategies are used by selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD who work with diverse populations that have demonstrated a minimum gain of 25% in reading as measured by AIMSweb to develop (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension?

This chapter offered a detailed presentation of findings through interviews, the Literacy Instructional Observation Checklist, the Strategies Checklist, and the artifact review, which consisted of pictures taken in the classrooms, teachers' lesson plans, and AIMSweb data. The interview data relayed the findings from the face-to-face interviews with five K-2 high-performing teachers from two different elementary schools using open-ended questions (See Appendix H). The observations consisted of observing six teachers during their classroom literacy instructional time. A Literacy Instructional Observation Checklist (See Appendix I) and a Strategies checklist (See Appendix J) were used to facilitate the data collection and were presented above. The artifact review consisted of assimilating pictures taken in the classrooms, teachers' lesson plans and AIMSweb data. Triangulation done through the use of interviews, observations, and artifacts provided robust data that could be coded, analyzed, compared, and interpreted to gain a better understanding of what literacy and teaching practices and/or strategies are used in promoting K-2 literacy development for children who are below reading level. The findings were first organized by participant. For each participant, the interview findings were presented first, next the observation findings, including the Literacy Observation Checklist, the Strategies Checklist, and associated artifacts. Artifact data using AIMSweb followed, and a

summarized triangulation of the data was then presented. The chapter concluded with the collective participant findings and a summary of key findings. In the following and final chapter, a substantive discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This final chapter is organized into five main sections. The first section includes a restatement of the study problem, the purpose, the research questions, and an overview of the methodology. The second section presents a discussion of key findings. The third section identifies study conclusions. The fourth section describes implications and recommendations for policy, practice, and further research. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary.

Problem

Literacy is key to a student's ability to learn and succeed in school and beyond. Current findings suggest that the U.S. is no longer a leader in literacy performance as compared to other industrialized nations, which is directly linked to early childhood literacy efforts. The nation's apparent underperformance has been attributed to students who struggled as readers in elementary school and do not master early literacy skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension; yet young children have the capacity to build early literacy skills in preschool (Skibbe et al., 2011). Underperformance has sparked a number of large-scale reforms including NCLB, the Reading First Initiative, and currently the CCSS. The key to improved performance is effective instructional practice, and the five core components—literacy, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension—need to be addressed for instructional practice to prevent future reading difficulties in elementary school (Literacy Project Foundation, 2015). Identifying and studying districts and schools that are demonstrating successful literacy strategies that foster improvement in kindergarten through second grade students' literacy performances is needed in order to provide insight as to what approaches work and might be replicated by other districts and schools. The CCSD, operating within Performance Zone 10 in Nevada, is demonstrating the use

of strategies that are helping elevate the literacy performance of students in Nevada. What have not been fully explored, however, are the instructional strategies of K-2 teachers whose students are performing well. Therefore, the need and opportunity existed to further explore instructional practices being used today, and how teachers in other parts of the United States can incorporate the five core components of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension into their curriculums for student success. In identifying practices that might be replicated in other districts and schools that desire to improve their students' literacy rates, an analysis of effective approaches to improve literacy was deemed essential.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the literacy instructional strategies of selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD in Nevada as related to the five core literacy components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. High performing teachers were defined as those teachers who have consistently demonstrated student performance gains of 25% in at least one of the five core literacy component areas over a 3-year period. A qualitative, multiple case study methodology was used in this study. This study involved face-to-face interviews with five K-2 high-performing teachers at three different schools, observing these teachers during their classroom literacy instructional time, and a review of pertinent records and artifacts.

Research Question

The following research question guided this multiple case study: What instructional strategies are used by selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the CCSD who work with diverse populations that have demonstrated a minimum gain of 25% in reading as measured by

AIMSweb to develop (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension?

Methodology

In this study, the researcher examined the research question in one purposively selected South Nevada Performance Zone that has a high diverse student population, includes a large number of low-socioeconomic status families, and has been identified as the third lowest performing performance zone within the school district. The interview data relayed the findings from the face-to-face interviews with five K-2 high-performing teachers from two different elementary schools using open-ended questions (See Appendix H). The observations consisted of observing six teachers during their classroom literacy instructional time. A Literacy Instructional Observation Checklist (See Appendix I) and a Strategies checklist (See Appendix J) were used to facilitate the data collection. The artifact review consisted of assimilating pictures taken in the classrooms, teachers' lesson plans, and AIMSweb data. The following portion of this chapter is used to discuss key findings and how they relate to the literature review conducted in this study.

Discussion of Key Findings

Phonemic awareness strategies. Phonemic awareness is the ability to manipulate individual words, syllables and eventually sounds in words. For example, in defining the sounds used in the word cat, one would identify each letter separately (c//a//t//). In this study, three key strategies for teaching phonemic were evidenced from analyses of individual and group interviews, as well as triangulated data collected via interviews, observations, and artifact/record review. The three strategies were word manipulation, word play, and word sort.

Word manipulation. The first component of reading is phonemic awareness, which is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words (Honig et

al., 2000). In discussing the findings related to word manipulation, all six participants in this study utilized word manipulation to develop student phonemic awareness. Although only five of the six teachers were interviewed, observations, artifacts, and AIMSweb data showed evidence of word manipulation use by all six teachers.

In analyzing the findings presented in Chapter 4 of this study, Kady instructed her students to focus on letter identification, letter sound, and decoding multi-syllabic words. Similarly, Jessie taught phonemic awareness through using word, syllable, and sound manipulation. Frequently, Jessie taught her students consonant diagraphs by identifying words in which two or more letters were pronounced using one sound. Hanna was also observed teaching the manipulation of individual words, syllables, and sounds in words as were Alma, Angela, and Laurel.

Jessie and Hanna were observed teaching phonemic awareness (K-1) through the use of word, syllable, and sound manipulation (e.g., "What sounds do you hear in cat? c//a//t//"). Jessie also modeled the spelling of story words such as lake, letter, each, people, shows, and town and provided instruction on phoneme segmentation/phoneme addition/phoneme blending (phonological awareness), consonant diagraphs such as ch, tch, wh, and ph (phonics/spelling), inflectional endings such as es (structural analysis), and high frequency words such as around, by, may, place, and walk. Lastly and within centers, Jessie, Alma, and Laurel had students work on word sorts, utilizing vocabulary words and high-frequency words of the week.

Word play. Word play—such as blending, substituting, and matching using songs, poems, and chants—was used by five of the six study participants. Kady conducted a review of sight words and focused on teaching the following 10 skills: letter naming, rhyming, onset fluency, blending, identifying final and/or medial sounds, segmenting, adding phonemes,

deleting phonemes, substituting phonemes, and language awareness. Jessie engaged her students in word play by modeling the spelling of story words such as lake, letter, each, people, shows, and town and providing instruction on phoneme segmentation/phoneme addition/phoneme blending, consonant diagraphs, inflectional endings, and high frequency words such as around, by, may, place, and walk. As an example of how word play was used, both Hanna and Laurel had their students say the word long, stretching out the sounds in the word. They then informed the students that there are three sounds in the word. The teachers had the students repeat the pronunciation of the word, this time emphasizing each sound in the word (/l/ /o/ /ng/). Kady instructed her students on decoding multi-syllabic words. Kady conducted a review of sight words. Kady used Heggerty with the entire class to teach the following 10 skills: letter naming, rhyming, onset fluency, blending, identifying final and/or medial sounds, segmenting, adding phonemes, deleting phonemes, substituting phonemes, and language awareness. Finally, in the area of word play, Angela was observed teaching this strategy through a demonstration on how to manipulate individual words, syllables, and sounds (K-1) through games and chants.

Word sort. Word sorts are used to help students recognize the semantic relationships among key concepts. This strategy can be used in two different ways. In a *closed sort*, the teacher provides categories into which students assign the words. In an *open sort*, students group words into categories and create their own labels for each category. Word sorts help students develop a deeper understanding of key concepts. A less used strategy, this technique was implemented by only two teachers, Jessie and Laurel. For Jessie, she had students work on word sorts, utilizing vocabulary words, and high-frequency words of the week. She reported that this was frequently done during within centers each week. Laurel also had students sort words during centers, and the students had to sort one and two-syllable y-sound words into two categories.

After sorting, the student were ask to self-correct their work. On a final note for phonemic awareness, all teachers exhibited the use of the Daily 5 as a strategy in word work. Within centers, Jessie had students work on word sorts, utilizing vocabulary words and high-frequency words of the week. Lastly, Jessie taught her students to identify words in which two or more letters were pronounced using one sound.

Phonemic Awareness Findings and Literature Connection

In this study, three key strategies for teaching phonemic were evidenced from analyses of individual and group interviews, in addition to triangulated data collected via interviews, observations, and artifact/record review. The three strategies were word manipulation, word play, and word sort. The findings related to these phonemic awareness strategies were also supported in the literature.

The importance of teaching phonemic awareness skills was reported to be a necessary skill for all beginning readers (Shankweiler & Fowler, 2004). Gunning (2013) added credibility to the notion that phonemic awareness is a crucial part of students' learning process, and described the different levels of phonological awareness within words: syllables, onsets and rhymes, and sounds. Gunning posed that recognizing these components has important implications for supporting students' literacy development. Furthermore, Gunning found that children who have the ability to look inside words for syllables, rhymes, and individual sounds when reading and spelling are more successful with phonological awareness. The findings from this study correlated with Gunning's assertions.

In regard to the use of specific phonemic awareness strategies such as word manipulation, word play, and word sort, the review of existing literature supports the notion that these strategies were not only utilized by teachers, but also instrumental in improving students' literacy

levels. Regarding word manipulation, Armbruster et al. (2001) wrote that the ultimate goal of phonemic awareness is to have students manipulate phonemes in spoken words. For example, blending sounds to form a word (/s/ /a/ /t/ = sat) or segmenting words into phonemes (camp = /c/ /a/ /m/ /p/). Armbruster added that the earlier the student masters this skill, the higher is the probability that the student will begin to decode words in isolation and/or text in a timely manner. As seen in the findings from the study, all six participants used word manipulation successfully, and in a variety of ways. These findings, and their connection to the what has been found in the literature, supports the assertion that this strategy is one of the best for teaching phonemic awareness to younger students.

Concerning the use of word play strategies, researchers Vaughn and Swanson (2015) found that children become phonemically aware through chants, rhymes, and word play activities such as blending, substituting, and matching using songs and poems. In another longitudinal study conducted with 123 2-5-year-olds, word playing through rhyming was found to play a positive role in teaching children phonemic awareness (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004). For the results of this study, five out of the six teachers showed evidence of using this strategy. Although it was not documented, Alma mostly likely used word play as well given that she and Angela shared a classroom. One of the best ways to show how word play was used effectively is through the following example of the teachers using the song "If You're Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands." By having students sing and by changing the words to:

> If you think you know this word, shout it out! If you think you know this word, shout it out! If you think you know this word, Then tell me what you've heard, If you think you know this word, shout it out!

the teacher had the opportunity to teach a segmented word like /k/ /a/ /t/. Students would then provide the blended word cat. Other examples such as this in the findings and in the literature assessed in this study validate the use of word play as beneficial strategy for teaching phonemic awareness.

Concerning review of literature pertinent to phonemic awareness, the work of Armbruster et al. (2001) illustrated that word sorting is effective in increasing students' phonemic awareness (literacy) levels. The author provided the following word sorting process example as one of a series of methods teachers used to help their students. Students listed terms on 3" x 5" cards (one concept per card). Then, individually or in groups, students sorted the words into categories. Depending on the concepts and students' level of understanding, the sorts were closed or open. This process was modeled for students by thinking aloud as cards were sorted. As students became more proficient at classifying, they were encouraged to complete open sorts and find more than one way to classify the vocabulary terms.

Correspondingly, the findings from the original study conducted here showed at least two of the teachers using similar strategies to teach phonemic awareness. Despite the fact that this was a strategy used less frequently by the teachers in this study, its use was in evidence, and when it was not, the other phonemic awareness strategies were more than sufficient in teaching the students phonemic awareness.

As clear in both the literature and in the findings of this study, the phonemic awareness strategies of word manipulation, word play, and word sort were effectively used by teachers, despite the less obvious use of word sort. Nevertheless, the various forms of word manipulation and word play are very instrumental, perhaps more so than word sort, for teaching phonemic awareness strategies to K-2 students. Finally, assessing the AIMSweb data for all types of

phonemic awareness revealed that phonemic awareness strategies do produce positive results when used to teach elementary school children at the K-2 level. Although the findings for all the teachers in this study pointed to success in the area of phonemic awareness, the results from both Kady and Laurel's efforts in the classroom were the highest out of the teachers regarding the AIMSweb data. Even so, all teachers showed positive results in this area for using phonemic awareness as a literacy strategy.

Phonics strategies. Whereas phonemic awareness focuses on the ability to isolate, blend, and segment individual sounds into words, phonics more specifically requires teaching students to decode unfamiliar words effectively in a systematic, explicit, and sequential manner (Washburn et al., 2011). Phonics is defined as the ability to understand and detect the predictable relationship between phonemes, the sounds of spoken language, and graphemes, the letters and spelling that represent those sounds in written language. Lastly, phonics involves teaching syllable patterns, spelling patterns, phonetic identification of words. In this study, three key strategies for teaching phonics emerged from analyses of individual and group interviews, as well as triangulated data collected via interviews, observations, and artifact/record review. The three strategies—word study, sound/spelling, and decoding and encoding—were utilized by all six teachers.

Word study. Word study is a developmental approach to spelling that is tied directly to reading and writing. The strategy also involves teaching students to decode multi-syllabic words and provides students with opportunities to investigate and understand the patterns in words. In analyzing the findings presented in Chapter 4 of this study, Kady reported using word study through the use of the Daily 5 program every day; such work included writing, word work, reading, and reading to self. Kady also used the McCraken program to provide explicit word

study daily to assist her students with phonics skills. Jesse integrated word study strategies with her students using small groups. Rhyming and blending were just a few of the specific methods used in her small groups and at times, word spelling, word tiles, silent reading, and student AR books were also used to increase phonic capability. Jesse also reported on work done in listening centers where students used Connect Ed, Wonders, Reading Eggs, and Raz Kids programs to enhanced students' comprehension/phonics. Similar to Kady and Jesse, Hanna also employed work-study strategies with RTI groups that were formed based on data from both JV and QSI. To increase the effectiveness of the instruction within the RTI groups, Hanna used the Six Program, which provided explicit phonics and reading sentences during the lessons. Lastly, Angela and Alma reported utilizing word works (core phonics) at various times of the year and at differing intervals based on the students' reading grade level.

Sound/spelling. Sound/spelling is a strategy in which students stretch words out while writing the letters that represent each sound heard. This technique also incorporates the practice of blending, which boosts the students' ability to build words from individual sounds by blending the sounds together in sequence. These important techniques help children identify connections between sounds and letters. In discussing the findings related to sound/spelling, four of the six participants in this study utilized word study to develop student phonic skills.

In analyzing the findings presented in Chapter 4 of this study, Kady's use of sound/spelling included the use of syllable patterns, spelling patterns, and phonetic identification of words. Additionally, and using small groups, Kady introduced new weekly and un-retained sight words using both familiar and new texts. Jessie, Hanna, and Laurel also used sound/spelling strategy through the introduction of family blends. For example, the teachers had students write the word fly on the board and then had them read the word aloud. Next, the

students were asked to underline the fl blend and Laurel explained how the sounds of the letters were blended together to form the fl sound. The teachers then pointed out how each individual sound in the blend can be heard and had the students orally blend the sounds of the letters together. Following pronunciation, the Jessie, Hanna, and Laurel wrote additional family blends on the board (i.e., bl, cl, fl, gl, pl, and sl), instructed the students to pronounce each blend, and had them write a word (under each blend) that began with that blend (i.e., black, clap, flip, glad, play, slug). Additionally, the instructors had students blend the sounds together while running their fingers under the letters and used student centers to teach the sorting of one and two syllable words that had y-sounds in them.

Decoding and encoding. Decoding signifies translating written words into the sounds and meanings of spoken words, and encoding, or spelling, is the reverse process. In discussing the findings related to decoding and encoding, all six of the participants in this study utilized word study to develop student phonics skills.

In analyzing the findings presented in Chapter 4 of this study, Laurel, Jessie, and Hanna used some of the classroom time to model how to read words using decoding strategies and context clues. This process included having the students reinforce the vocabulary words by using pictures in books. For example, Laurel stated, "Tell me what you see while looking at the picture on page 3." A typical student response was, "The boy is sitting at the table with his great grandma. The boy is young. The great grandma was young long ago." Additionally, Laurel, Jessie, Hanna, Alma, and Angela increased their students' capacity to decode by redirecting them to reading errors, having them sound out words, instructing them write the (incorrectly pronounced) word on the table in front of them using dry erase markers, and having them either

segment or blend words out. Lastly, Kady instructed her students on how to decode multi-syllabic words.

Phonics Findings and Literature Connection

In the area of phonics, the three key strategies teachers used were word study, sound/spelling, and decoding and encoding. The findings related to these phonics strategies were supported in the study and in the literature. In reviewing the findings in this study and literature on strategies used to increase students' literacy levels, phonics have been found to be effective. Authors such as Tompkins (2010) and Suggate (2014) have written about the importance of employing phonics strategies to increase student literacy levels and the findings from this study support their assertions. Tompkins referred to phonics as an essential tool for literacy achievement and a primary component of reading and Suggate's study, which assessed the results of 71 intervention-control groups, identified phonics as an effective teaching strategy. Given that the majority of the teachers interviewed and observed in this study used the three components of phonics addressed—word study, sound/spelling, and decoding and encoding—it is clear that these three strategies are effective for teaching students K-2 literacy.

Regarding the use of word study strategies, strategies that help students learn how to decode multi-syllabic words, Armbruster et al. (2001) found that their use is correlated with increased phonics (literacy) levels. Armbruster cited the use of segments of word families as a means to identify words with which students are unfamiliar, but have similar parts to one another. The author used the word *frustrate* as an example and illustrated how beginning readers use their knowledge of the parts of the word (such as *rust* and *ate*) to piece together and correctly pronounce the word. The teachers assessed in this study also used similar strategies to teach their students. In total, five out of the six teachers used word study. Laurel, the teacher did not show

any evidence of using the word study strategy, but this may have due to her not being interviewed. It is possible that she simply did not use this technique on the day of observation.

Concerning the use of phonics sound/spelling strategies, both the findings here and in the literature suggests research that the programs geared toward phonics instruction are most effective when they are either *systemic*, meaning that "the plan of instruction includes a carefully selected set of letter-sound relationships that are organized into a logical sequence [to create words]" (Suggate, 2014, p. 87), or *explicit*, meaning that "the programs provide teachers with precise directions for the teaching of these relationships" (p. 87). The latter analyzes the letter-sound relationships in previously learned words (Armbruster et al., 2001). As seen in the work of Vaughn and Swanson (2015) and supported by the findings of the study, teaching children to use letter-sound correspondences to identify unfamiliar words is one of the primary ways in which formal phonics is used to effectively teach literacy. Although Alma and Angela did not report using this phonics strategy, they did use both word study and decoding/encoding. Despite having interviewed these two teachers together, the depth of information they provided was limited compared to the other teachers. In this manner, they may have failed to mention some strategies. Needless to say, Alma and Angela showed successful literacy gains in their students.

Regarding decoding and encoding, Suggate (2014) found that students fared much better in later grades when teachers used a multitude of decoding techniques such as analyzing and understanding phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences, and discourse in early grades. As was also found by the use of decoding and encoding by all six participants in the study, Washburn et al. (2011) pointed out the importance of learning how to decode words effectively. The author explained that the English language is an alphabetic language with a deep orthography and does not always share the one-to-one phoneme/grapheme (e.g., sound and symbol) correspondence

like other alphabetic languages (i.e., Spanish, Italian) that have a more transparent orthography. Given this inherent difficulty with the English language, the teacher's effective use of decoding (and encoding) strategies is critical. The use demonstrated by all six teachers in this study points to students' ability to decode and encode words successfully.

Noted through a review of the literature and in the findings of this study, the AIMSweb data also showed the most consistent progress in phonics for students in Kady and Jessie's classes. Although the artifact data did show improvement for all students in phonics, Kady and Jessie showed the highest ratings on AIMSweb. Jessie's phonics-based instructional methods, including her use of nonsense word fluency, proved to be the most effective. As such, the AIMSweb data verified the findings that phonics strategies do produce positive results when used to teach elementary school children.

Without question, word study, sound/spelling, and decoding and encoding strategies produce positive outcomes in terms of increasing students' literacy levels. The findings relate to what the interviews and observations have revealed about the use of phonics for instructing students at the K-2 level, despite the unreported use of word study by Laurel and of sound/spelling by Alma and Angela. Given the common use of these strategies, it can be assumed that all three strategies were, used by all six teachers. The strategies used by all six teachers do promote student understanding and academic success. Overall, the findings from the study showed positive results in using phonics to teach K-2 students literacy.

Fluency Strategies Findings and Literature Connection

Regarding fluency strategies, the three key strategies used by teachers were choral reading and repeated timed readings, partner reading and student-adult reading, and reading connected text with corrective feedback. As a whole, the findings related to these fluency

strategies were supported in the study and in the literature as use of the three strategies was apparent in all six teachers.

Up until recently, fluency was assumed to mean rapid word recognition that freed up space in the reader's working memory for use in comprehending the message of the text. That is, fluent readers needed to put less effort into word recognition, and have more space available for comprehension. Later studies of fluency conducted by Rasinski et al. (2012) expanded this understanding by clarifying that fluency can also involve grouping words within a sentence into phrases that make what is read easier to comprehend. Grouping words into meaningful phrases and reading with expression helps the reader understand the text by making what is being read resemble natural speech. Therefore, it is now understood that fluency entails recognizing the words in a text rapidly and accurately *and* using phrasing and emphasis in a way that makes what is read sound like spoken language. Through assessing the findings based on the strategies used by the teachers in this study, this shift in teaching fluency was apparent. As was evidenced by all six teachers in this study, if students can achieve the ability to read text with automaticity, "A standard that is reached and attained once time, effort, and activities have been devoted toward mastery of a skill" (Rasinski et al., 2012, p. 15), then he/she can read the majority of all words effortlessly, accurately, and fluently.

While fluency strategies as a whole contribute to an increase in children's literacy levels. A review of the findings from this study and from the literature, associated with the strategies of choral reading and repeated timed readings, partner reading and student-adult reading, and reading connected text. Which, included corrective feedback, these fluency strategies were specifically used and were effective in helping students become fluent.

All six teachers used the strategies of choral reading and repeated timed readings in their teaching. In the literature, the work of Chou (2013) contributed significantly to understanding precisely how choral reading strategies produce positive outcomes. The author found that reading aloud in unison with a whole class or group of students has been show to help build students' fluency, self-confidence, and motivation. Because students are reading aloud together, students who may ordinarily feel self-conscious or nervous about reading aloud have built-in support. From the observations conducted in the study, this technique was used successfully by the teachers during observation of their classes. In line with Chou (2013), the teachers in this study frequently used a short piece of text (100-150 words) such as a poem, short story, excerpt from a play, a literature piece, or even a social studies or science passage that was read aloud first by the teacher as a demonstration of expressive reading. Following the demonstration the students joined the teacher and read aloud in unison, as in a choir.

Regarding repeated timed readings, the work of Lo, Cooke, and Starling (2011) was found to be relevant. The authors found that repeated interactive read-alouds, a systematic method of reading aloud, allowed teachers to scaffold children's understanding of the book being read, model strategies for making inferences and explanations, and teach vocabulary and concepts. As with Chou (2013), Lo et al. (2011) provided detailed examples of how teachers can employ repeated readings, and use of this technique was seen during classroom observations of the teachers. For example, to teach using this tool, a book was read three times in slightly different ways in order to increase the amount and quality of students' understanding. During the first reading, the teacher introduced the story's problem, made comments, and asked a few key questions. This is accompanied by elaboration on a few key vocabulary words. Next, the teacher used the students' growing comprehension of the story to provide vocabulary explanations and

ask additional questions about the story. Lastly, a third reading of the story was conducted and consisted of a guided reconstruction of the story in which the students recounted what they had learned in their own words. The students who received repeated timed reading instruction in this study, and in the literature, all showed marked improvement in oral reading rates.

In relationship to partner reading and student-adult reading**,** Rasinski et al. (2012) contributed to understanding the significance of the strategy in helping students to become fluent. In the literature, partner reading specifically was described as a research-based fluency strategy used with readers who lack fluency and was conducted by having students read aloud to each other. The strategy was used in this study by four of the six teachers interviewed and observed. Both the findings in this study and in the literature reviewed found that in using partners, more fluent readers can be paired with less fluent readers, or children who read at the same level can be paired to reread a story they have already read. These strategies showed great success in the strategies used by the teachers in the study. In terms of utilizing student-adult reading, this was evident in many areas of instruction and was performed by all six teachers. Although Alma and Angela did not report using this specific strategy for fluency, they did show evidence of using student-adult reading in their classes, which was evident in many of the literacy strategies used throughout this study.

For reading connected text with corrective feedback strategies, the writings of Hiebert and Kamil (2005) and Lo et al. (2011) were relevant to the findings of this study. Hiebert and Kamil found that vocabulary can be developed in different ways to include "engage daily in oral language, listen to adults read to them, and read [ing] extensively on their own" (p. 23). Lo et al. (2011) researched three second-grade students who were at-risk for reading failure. These students participated in a directed repeated reading program that integrated isolated word reading

practice, unison reading, error correction, and performance cueing and feedback procedures. The results of this approach were promising, as all three participants improved their fluency. Similarly, all six of the teachers used in this study showed the same type of success with using reading connected text with corrective feedback strategies to improve the fluency of their K-2 students.

As confirmed by the literature, the fluency strategies of choral reading and repeated timed readings, partner reading and student-adult reading, and reading connected text with corrective feedback were used effectively by the teachers in this study, despite not having evidence of Alma and Angela using partner reading. Finally, assessing the AIMSweb data for all types of fluency revealed that these strategies produce positive results when used to teach elementary school children at the K-2 level. Although the findings for all the teachers in this study pointed to success in the area of fluency, four of the teachers showed especially high ratings on AIMSweb. For the fluency data, Jessie, Hanna, Alma, and Angela's students improved substantially. Through assessment using the Oral Reading (CBM), a 1-minute standardized measure of oral reading of graded passages, accuracy and amount of words read per minute were considered. Hanna's, Alma's, and Angela's students improved significantly. Corroboration among the literature reviewed, the original finding of this study, and the AIMSweb data showed that choral reading and repeated timed readings, partner reading and student-adult reading, and reading connected text with corrective feedback were all effective fluency strategies for increasing students' literacy levels.

Vocabulary Strategies Findings and Literature Connection

In the area of vocabulary as a literacy tool, the three key strategies used by teachers were explicit instruction on word meanings/independent word learning, direct instruction on new

vocabulary, and context clues. The findings in this study, as well as in a review of the literature, showed that the vocabulary strategies assessed were successful for teaching K-2 students literacy. As a whole, vocabulary strategies have been found to be instrumental in increasing students' literacy levels. Klein and Riordan (2009) found that vocabulary is critically important in word recognition, and that young readers use the pronunciation and meanings of words in their oral vocabulary to help them recognize words they see in print. When children sound out an unfamiliar word, they use the trial pronunciation they have created to search their oral vocabulary. If they find a match and it makes sense in the sentence, they resume reading. If the word is not in their oral vocabulary, they will have a difficult time recognizing that word in print, even if they are able to produce an accurate pronunciation by decoding. Through observing the teachers in this study, the students in their classrooms also exhibited these behaviors, as noted by Klein and Riordan (2009). Given this, and all those interviewed shared that using explicit instruction on word meanings/independent word learning, direct instruction on new vocabulary, and context clues strategies successfully helped their students learn vocabulary.

Concerning explicit instruction on word meanings/independent word learning, Hiebert and Kamil (2005) found that while teachers often employ both indirect and explicit instruction, explicit instructional strategies appear more effective. These findings in the literature were also apparent in the results of the study, as all six teachers used explicit instruction strategies in their classrooms. In as far as direct instruction is concerned, and consistent with the work of Hiebert and Kamil (2005), Klein and Riordan (2009) found that learning vocabulary was essential for word recognition and that helped aided students develop vocabularies utilizing both indirect and direct strategies. Furthermore, this study revealed that the teachers, as well as what Klein and

Riordan found, indicated a significant positive relationship between the use of direct instruction and the promoting of effective reading habits in young readers.

Lastly, and regarding the use of context clues**,** the work of Beck et al. (2013) evidenced how students learn to use clues in the text surrounding an unknown word to figure out the meaning. Per Kucan (2012) and in the findings of this study, through the reading of texts, students can write down a vocabulary word, read the word as it is used in the reading, and write down a guess for the meaning of each word. It was apparent in both the classrooms and the literature that the use a context clue strategy is effective when teachers use social studies and the other core subjects to expand one's vocabulary. Lastly, studies conducted by Kaivanpanah and Alavi's (2008), and Jones and Thomas (2006) provided research-based and introspective data that examined the contribution of grammatical knowledge to inferring the meaning of unknown words. In both studies and in the findings of this work, the use of context clues was extremely influential in helping students increase their vocabularies.

In reviewing the literature and the findings of this study regarding the use of vocabulary strategies such as explicit instruction on word meanings/independent word learning, direct instruction on new vocabulary, and context clues, it is evident that these strategies produced positive outcomes in terms of increasing students' literacy levels. The interviews and observations have revealed the success of using vocabulary strategies for instructing students at the K-2 level. Additionally, the AIMSweb data for this area also showed significant gains.

Comprehension Strategies Findings and Literature Connection

In a discussion regarding comprehension approaches, the four key strategies used by teachers were predicting, inferring, and making connections, use of graphic organizers, summarizing, evaluating and synthesizing, and activating/building on prior knowledge. All four

strategies were supported in the study and in the literature. While the first three strategies were used by all six teachers, activating/building (on) prior knowledge was only observed for three of the teachers. Angela, Alma, and Hanna did not exhibit the use of this strategy.

Nevertheless, on a broad scale, the literature and the findings in this study have pointed to the importance of comprehension as part of a sound literacy program. A meta-analysis of the role teachers' play by Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman (2011) found that reading comprehension support showed increased rates of growth in reading. Both Duke et al. (2011) and Vaughn and Swanson (2015) supported the findings in this study that using "systematic teaching of vocabulary words to optimize student gains" (p. 18), when applying comprehension strategies, yielded gains in reading comprehension skills when also teaching the structure of the text being read, developing appropriate questions based on the text being read, and teaching Tier 2 vocabulary words.

Concerning the teachers' use of predicting and inferring strategies to enhance reading comprehension, Vaughn and Swanson (2015) and the results of this study revealed that the use of prediction and inference encouragement were critical components of leading students to a full comprehension of the text presented. Furthermore, it was found that correlations between students' ability to make inferences based on prior knowledge, and their capacity to develop a solid content knowledge base, showing gains in students' comprehension skills. Regarding the use of connection-making strategies, studies by Jones and Thomas (2006) and Mahdavi and Tensfeldt (2013) found that concept definition maps help students understand the essential attributes, qualities, or characteristics of a word's meaning. The use of the maps in the literature and in the findings from this study involved asking questions such as "What is it?," "What broader category can it fit in?," What can you compare it to?," and "What can you contrast it

to?" The use of these questions empowered students to make connections that ultimately contributed to increased comprehension and literacy. All six teachers in this study used predicting and inferring strategies to enhance reading comprehension.

In examining the use of graphic organizers, Sullivan (2015) and all six of the teachers assessed in this study found that the use of this strategy helped students learn the elements of a text or story. By putting certain components in a graphic organizer, students were able to identify story characters, plots, settings, problems, and solutions. Sullivan explained further that teachers can use this strategy to have students carefully learn even the more hidden details in a text. This assertion, as well as the findings of this study, point to the success of using graphic organizers to discuss the elements of any text or story. Frequently, and as was seen in this study, teachers split students into groups and assigned each group a story element, such as character, setting, problem, or solution. Each group was assigned a leader who drew and wrote in the graphic organizer the components of the story they were assigned. Each student then shared with the class the part he/she contributed. Using this strategy was beneficial in teaching K-2 student comprehension in both this study and in the literature associated with this category.

Lastly, and concerning the strategy of activating/building on prior knowledge, Vaughn and Swanson (2015) found that a reader's prior knowledge of content and the ability to access information are paramount in mastering phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary: all central components of comprehension. These findings were also apparent in the teachers assessed in this study, although only three were associated with this strategy. The work of Tompkins (2010) also added to current understanding of the need for activating/building on students' prior knowledge. The author wrote that comprehension involves constructing meaning that is reasonable and accurate by connecting that which has been read to what the reader already

knows. Once the reader has thoroughly processed, integrated, and understood that information, it can be said that reading comprehension has taken place. This was evidenced in the teachers' interviews and observations. Regarding the three teachers who did not show the use of this strategy, Angela, Alma, and Hanna may not have overtly exhibited the use of activating/building on prior knowledge for comprehension. However, the lack of an explicit reference does not indicate the strategy was not used. To the contrary, this is a strategy the teachers could not have avoided while still showing the high levels of literacy attainment their students achieved.

Finally, assessing the AIMSweb data for all types of comprehension strategies revealed positive results when that data is explained and reviewed, then used to teach elementary school children at the K-2 level. Although the findings for all the teachers in this study pointed to success in the area of comprehension, the results through the AIMSweb data were not presented in their entirety given limited time and space. Through a review of literature and the original findings in this study regarding the use of comprehension strategies of predicting and inferring, connection-making, the use of graphic organizers, and activating/building (on) prior knowledge, it is clear that such strategies produce positive outcomes in terms of increasing students' literacy levels.

Social Theory Connection

In this study devoted to assessing why the teaching strategies of six teachers in Southern Nevada's CCSD are successfully teaching literacy to K-2 students, the theories supporting this study must be discussed. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism and associated sociolinguistic theory have both been shown to contribute to student achievement in literacy. These theories, as well as the five core components of literacy—phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension—provide a multi-theoretical framework from which to

understand how children learn to engage fully with language (NRP, 2000). From a collaborative standpoint, social constructivism and the five core components all point to the significance of the partnership between the instructor and student, the relationship between students and their peers, and the way that children feel more supported in literacy acquisition (Heo et al., 2011). Given that that verbal communication helps to arrange thoughts and is a highly social process, teachers in this study were able to foster literacy growth in their students because they emphasized students working in small and large groups, working one on one with peers, and working one on one with teachers.

Social constructivism, the associated sociolinguistic theory, and using the five core components of literacy also provided a backdrop for the teaching strategies in this study by allowing the teachers to model leaning, scaffold, and give direct instruction. The connection linking the social environment and literacy development was founded on a language acquisition approach, which links the social environment to learning as mediated by scaffolding. Vygotsky's ZDP and the scaffolding technique allowed the teachers in this study to determine successfully what kind of help and how much of that help or information was needed for each child to achieve proficiency. Students were able to respond correctly to the task and internalize the skills needed for independent performance (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). If students are in an environment where teachers use scaffolding and construct knowledge within a socially-mediated cultural context, students will engage successful with literacy through those around them. These findings have also been validated in the literature, where it has been found that children raised in homes and communities in which adults model literacy skills through speaking, reading, and writing practices learn literacy schemas and practices (Heo et al., 2011).

Finally, social constructivists strongly emphasize the use of students accessing their prior knowledge. Because social constructivists do not view learning as occurring in stages, they describe a constant reinterpretation, a constant reweaving of the "web of meaning" (Heo et al., 2011, p. 738), as a way to describe the experience of learning. In this way, it has been posited that individuals consciously create new social practices to meet human needs, and to adapt to and transform their environments. In this regard, children are not submissive learners; they rebuild language as they discover and apply it, making it their own. The core tenets of the theoretical framework used in this study are an effective framing mechanism by which to understand the successful literacy result from the K-2 students and teaching strategies explored in this study.

Conclusions

The following four conclusions resulted from this study.

Core component key strategies. The first conclusion of this study is that there are number of key strategies specific to each of five literacy components that are essential and replicable for K-2 student literacy development. Word manipulation, work play, and word sort are key to teaching phonemic awareness. Word study, sound/spelling, decoding, and encoding are key to teaching phonics. Choral reading, repeated timed reading, partner reading, student-adult reading, and reading connected text with corrected feedback are key to developing fluency. Explicit instruction on word meanings/independent word learning, direct instruction on new vocabulary, and context clues are key to teaching vocabulary. Finally, predicting, inferring, making connections, using graphic organizers, summarizing, evaluating, synthesizing, and activating/building upon prior knowledge are key strategies for developing student comprehension. All six of the teachers used in this study actively and effectively supported their students' success by using these five component-specific literacy strategies in a number of

different ways. The use of the aforementioned component-specific strategies as research supported practices as has been verified in studies by Gunning (2013) and through the Literacy Project Foundation (2015). According to Vaughn and Swanson (2015), young students become phonemically aware through chants, rhymes, and word play activities. As there are different levels of phonological awareness within words (syllables, onsets and rhymes, and sounds), recognizing these components has been shown to support students' development of phonological awareness (Gunning, 2013). Based on the literature related to phonics, a primary use of learning formal phonics is in teaching children to use letter-sound correspondences to identify unfamiliar words (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). This practice has been found to be effective. Therefore, teaching students to decode unfamiliar words effectively in a systematic, explicit, and sequential manner is a valid teaching strategy (Washburn et al., 2011).

Readers use vocabulary to help them understand, recognize, and relate to the words they see in print (Klein & Riordan, 2009). As noted in the literature, vocabulary can be developed in different ways, students can build their vocabulary either indirectly or directly, and both types of instruction are beneficial (i.e., explicitly; Hiebert & Kamil, 2005). For fluency, having strong decoding skills and an effective fluency level increases reading outcomes (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). Fluency has been shown to be important when addressing how children learn to become proficient and efficient readers (Rasinski et al., 2012). Finally, gaining proficiency in reading comprehension skills also includes teaching the structure of the text being read, developing appropriate questions based on the text being read, and teaching Tier 2 vocabulary words, all of which are found to be valid strategies in the literature (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). Clearly, the teachers used in this study supported the literacy success of their students using the five

component-specific literacy strategies in many different ways and in line with the findings in the literature.

Teacher collaboration and planning. The second conclusion to result from this study is that teacher collaboration and planning are key to the successful literacy development of K-2 students. Throughout this study, each teacher showed the efficient academic growth of her students given the collaboration with each other and with their students. This growth was also facilitated by having students collaborate with one another in small or large groups. Hanna found collaboration with teachers in other districts invaluable. She noted, "Sometimes it's nice to get together with other people and say, 'So, what are you doing?'" Hanna verified the use of collaboration and planning through the following explanation of her work with Laurel:

> This year, Laurel and I are combining our reading groups. So our day looks like we have our 25 minutes of the foundational skills, and then between 8:30 and 9:00, we each do three reading groups where we looked at their DRE scores and we combined our kids, because she had one two and fours, and you really can't put a two with a four because the gap is just too big. So I had twos, our twos go every day for reading group and we have a group of threes, a group of fours. This way we're able to get six reading groups done a day, whereas if we were to do it in our own class, we might get three done.

Collaboration at all levels, and especially between teachers, must occur if children are to experience a robust education that will grant them educational readiness by graduation (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). The Nevada State Comprehensive Literacy Plan (NSLP) requires that all Nevada school districts formulate and implement a local literacy plan that generally align with the NSLP. One of these crucial planning elements is that of collaboration. The Gibson Consulting Group (2011) noted that increased collaboration with stakeholders was

necessary to promote student achievement in literacy, and all six teachers in this study supported these findings.

The strategic use of individual, small, and whole grouping. The third conclusion to result from the study is that varied instructional grouping strategies are needed to teach literacy to K-2 students successfully. Use of these grouping strategies was evident in the teachers' use of the Daily 5 System as well as through other strategies. Every teacher in the study used a number of grouping strategies in their classrooms. For example, Kady's response to one interview question showed her commitment to the small group approach:

> You know, I can tell you that my reading groups are based on students' current ability levels that changes every 1-2 months. When working with student during small group time, it provides it allows me to focus on their specific areas of deficit[s] within certain literacy areas. Small group times are more effective, because it's much more -- not necessarily focused, but I just feel like it's more effective.

Jessie also shared:

> I believe in whole groups. I drive my instruction on the basic skill that's being taught that day, then I can go ahead and separate them into small groups based on their ability and what the data shows me. So that I can make small groups based on their ability and then find out what skill they know, what skill they don't know and where to help them.

Finally, when Alma and Angela were asked the question, "What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom?" their unified and concise response was as follows:

> Well [we] do a lot of it as a small group. So it's small group focus, where the whole group instruction is maybe 10 to 15 minutes at the most. It's based on the small groups of

> differentiating instruction based on their needs. We will do it across the board for literacy, for math, everything.

Noted in both the original data in the study and in the literature, using groups successfully for literacy instruction has been supported by Mahdavi and Tensfeldt (2013), Suggate (2014), and Sullivan (2015). Use of the Daily 5 and other strategies enables teachers to choose individualized goals, assign strategies, monitor progress, and provide just-in-time instruction to meet the needs of every student. This approach to learning is efficient at targeting the five core components of literacy (Gunning, 2013), and using this model also supports the teacher meeting individual needs through whole-group and small-group instruction, as well as one-on-one conferring. All the teachers in this study shared that using Daily 5 and similar strategies in their classrooms produce productive, highly engaged students who are developing a true love of literacy. These strategic use of grouping tie in very well with the theory of social constructivism in that no child can lean in isolation (Vygotsky, 1978).

Integrating technology. The fourth conclusion to result from the study is that integrating technological practices facilitates the successful literacy development of K-2 students. Again, all six of the teachers incorporated the use of technology throughout their literacy lessons through independent practice, whole group practice, or small group instruction. The schools are now using programs such as Wonders, i-Ready, Scoot Pad, IXL, Study Island, and MyOn. According to Jessie, she has four computers and three iPads in her classroom and simply wants to use these tools and others to see her students succeed. Jessie also confirmed that her school is considered to be a "one to one school for iPads."

Finally, it has been corroborated in the literature that technology is a useful component in fostering literacy. Additionally, in this study, technology emerged as an important tool for

promoting literacy acquisition in students K-2 (Goodman et al., 2013; Skibbe et al., 2011). Yet, as the literature has shown, the U.S. is lagging in mathematics and reading test scores and is not competing well globally (Present, 2010). Some of these findings can be mitigated by professional development, which can enhance instruction in the classroom by supplying teachers with innovative techniques and skills that will advance student performance (Carreòn & Rau, 2014). Giving teachers the appropriate tools to influence student achievement positively can be achieved through the use of technology (Present, 2010). Given the literature and what has been found in the study, all six teachers discussed using games, activities, the reading program, phonics games, and grammar games to teach the students effectively using technology.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from the study support a number of policy and practice recommendations that support all of the findings in this study. Practice recommendations include the use of the five essential components of effective reading practices (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension); teacher collaboration and planning; the strategic use of individual, small, and whole grouping; and integrating technology. Although these recommendations foster best practices when used in conjunction with one another, they may be used individually as well. The CCSD, operating within Performance Zone 10 in Nevada, is demonstrating the use of strategies that are contributing to elevating the literacy performance of students in Nevada. What have not been fully explored, however, are the instructional strategies of K-2 teachers whose students are not performing well. Therefore, the need and opportunity existed to further explore instructional practices being used today, and how teachers in other parts of the United States can incorporate use of these recommendations (Literacy Project Foundation, 2015). In identifying practices that might be replicated in other districts and schools that desire to improve their

students' literacy rates, the five core components; teacher collaboration and planning; the strategic use of individual, small, and whole grouping; and integrating technology need to be addressed for instructional practice to prevent future reading difficulties in elementary school.

The nation's underperformance has been attributed to students who struggled as readers in elementary school and who did not master early literacy skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension (Skibbe et al., 2011). At the policy and practice levels, and through incorporating what is apparent in Nevada's CCSD, students in K-2 can significantly increase their understanding, retention, and use of literacy skills. To prevent future reading difficulties the five core components, the other strategies noted must be taught.

For the strategic use of individual, small, and whole grouping, the results of this study showed that this is a beneficial manner by which to advance literacy in students K-2. The recommended use of the Daily 5 can help teachers choose individualized goals, assign strategies, monitor progress, and provide just-in-time instruction to meet the needs of every student. Group learning strategies are very effective at targeting the five core components of literacy (Gunning, 2013), and using individual, small, and whole group instruction can aid student achievement.

Regarding recommendations for collaboration, this can be quite broad, and policymakers and practitioners have a choice about what to incorporate into their teaching approaches. Nevertheless, using collaboration on all levels is most likely to create positive academic outcomes for students K-2. As reviewed in the work by Vygotsky (1978) the social constructivist theory, its association with sociolinguistic theory, and the components of effective reading instruction (Learning Point Associates, 2004; NRP, 2000) make a solid argument for collaboration between teacher and students, among students and their peers, and between teachers as so often demonstrated in this study. Theories of collaboration can also be expanded to

the district level and beyond to create a robust learning environment for children at the K-2 levels.

Finally, any number of collaborative teaching practices can be effective in promoting teacher preparation programs, teacher trainers, and elementary school programs, and can also extend to other areas where providing professional literacy instruction to primary education teachers and modeling best practices are needed (Gibson Consulting Group, 2011). Collaboration between teachers is especially important, as noted in the findings of this study, as teachers have the advantage of learning from one another and can plan more effective lessons.

As seen in the findings of this study and in reviewing the literature, using appropriate technology in the classroom can further enhance literacy. Technological recommendations such as Wonders, i-Ready, Scoot Pad, IXL, Study Island, and MyOn have been made to increase K-2 student literacy success. All six teachers discussed using games, activities, the reading program, phonics games, and grammar games to teach students using technology. Public education in Nevada and beyond needs high-performing models to replicate in order to close the literacy achievement gap, and professional development toward this goal must be used. The outcome of this multiple case study investigation can be especially useful to schools that are similar to those in the study, with diverse and at-risk student populations. The research conducted here has the potential to help develop new action steps for Nevada's Department of Literacy and the development of CCSD's performance zone literacy coaches, in addition to helping facilitate literacy instruction in classrooms all across the nation.

Recommendations for Further Study

Five recommendations for future research emerged from this study. The order of this list is random and does not indicate a greater level of importance for any topic; all recommendations

for further study are valid, meaningful, and would support K-2 literacy education strategies in all areas.

Recommendation one. The researcher should explore diverse student populations and their needs for acquiring early literacy skills. Research has shown that learning to read is a lengthy process that begins early in life. Given the importance identified in the literature for children to approach school with a motivation to learn, and with teachers promoting the acquisition of prerequisite language and early literacy skills, teachers can play a vital role in literacy success (Morris et al., 2013). In CCSD and elsewhere, the diverse student population has had the opportunity to explore the five essential components of effective reading practices (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension; Learning Point Associates, 2004). The effective instructional practices in literacy for students in grades K-2 identified in this study can serve as a jumping off point to more fully study literacy needs at schools and districts throughout the U.S.

Recommendation two. The researcher should place more emphasis on differentiated instruction to improve literacy outcomes. As noted previously, most public schools have used large-group standardized, nationally normed tests in which to evaluate student learning (Magruder et al., 2013). However, both Buly (2005) and Hirsch (2007) have advocated for using classroom-based assessments and students being able to connect well with class and school curriculum. Generally, standardized reading tests are not sensitive enough measures of adequate progress in school, especially at K-2 levels. Consequently, students are not tested on what they have actually learned, and the tests tend to be impractical and do not align with strategies that could be used with more success in the classroom. Furthermore, cultural differences and limited

access to resources leave many underprivileged, at risk, and/or non-native English-speaking learners failing standardized tests (Buly, 2005; Magruder et al., 2013).

Assessments should correlate with the strategies that promote literacy best in diverse classrooms through differentiated instruction (Lesaux, 2012), and teachers should be given a framework that can inform their instruction and curricular decisions more accurately (Buly, 2005). Although the Reading First Initiative was designed to help eligible schools and districts select and implement K-2 reading programs that were based on scientific research (Tompkins, 2010), assessment and strategies that reflect solid literacy achievement are still lacking. The findings of this study showed that all six teachers do use the Common Core as mandated; nevertheless, this is only one form of assessment used in their classrooms. These teachers frequently assess their students using methods taken from the specific literacy strategy they are teaching, and the results have been highly accurate in assessing student knowledge acquisition. More research must be done on the effects of inaccuracy of standardized testing.

Recommendation three. The researcher should examine a mixed-methods and/or quantitative approach. As noted, this study employed a qualitative multiple case study methodology, which facilitated the capturing of rich detail pertaining to what was obtained in the interviews and observation with teachers. Nevertheless, the sample used in this study was not large. Given this factor, the generalizability may have been limited. In such a situation, using quantitative methodologies could provide a broader and more inclusive data set, allowing for additional extrapolation about the use of literacy strategies.

Recommendation four. The researcher should replicate the study. Although this study was conducted in a full and comprehensive manner, it would be interesting to see if replicating the same study in different areas would provide the same findings and results. For example, in an

area with less diversity in the student population, different socioeconomic conditions, and the different environmental constraints and conditions found from state to state, would the results be parallel with the study conducted here? Furthermore, would replicating the study with different grades, in inclusive/exclusive classrooms, and with any other variety of differences that were not seen in this study garner different findings? These are valid and appropriate questions, and warrant replicating this study under different conditions.

Recommendation five. The researcher should create a longitudinal study that explores the long-term outcomes of students taught using the strategies in this study. Although this study did utilize AIMSweb data over a 3-year span, more information could be beneficial regarding the academic success of students later in life. It would be interesting to determine if the students retained their knowledge, especially in light of a continued focus on teaching the five core literacy components of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, versus the adoption of other approaches.

Summary

This study explored the teaching strategies of six teachers in the CCSD in Southern Nevada to promote literacy acquisition to a diverse group of K-2 learners. This chapter focused specifically on the key findings and the literature, which showed that teaching students using the five core components of literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension); teacher collaboration and planning; the strategic use of individual, small, and whole grouping; and integrating technology are a meaningful and effective way in which to teach literacy. Four conclusions were made from the interviews, observations, and artifact data collected in response to the research question and through exploration of the pertinent literature. The strategies explored in this study are important for encouraging literacy policies and practices

that would benefit teacher preparation programs, teacher trainers, elementary school programs, and others who have the role of providing professional literacy instruction to primary education teachers as well.

The teachers in this study all successfully used the five core components of literacy; teacher collaboration and planning; individual, small, and whole grouping; and integrating technology to foster learning in their K-2 classrooms. The implications for policy and practice were based on using all of these strategies. Furthermore, future studies need to focus on exploring diverse student populations and their needs for acquiring early literacy skills, incorporation of differentiated instruction, approaching the topic from a mixed-methods and/or quantitative approach, replicating the study under different circumstances, and conducting a longitudinal study that explores the long-term outcomes of students taught using the strategies in this study. The findings of this study point to what is needed for young elementary-aged students to gain the needed receptive and expressive language development skills to be successful not only in school, but throughout their lives.

Overall, the data obtained from the classroom observation notes corroborate the responses gathered from the teachers during the interview process. A deeper level of investigation into the data is presented in this multifaceted analysis to aid in the emergence of classroom literacy instructional practices emerge. More specifically, data reports from the Nevada Department of Education (2017) and the NSPF (n.d.) were also examined as a part of the triangulation process used in this study. National reports from the U.S. Department of Education were also used to add credibility to the research being conducted in this study (Snyder et al., 2016).

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APPENDIX A

Phonemic Awareness Chart

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researchers
Identifying Sounds in Word: Sound Match	Given a word, students recognize individual sounds in the word.	"What is the first sound in book (/b/)?" "What is the last sound in book (/k/)? (Honig et al., 2000, p. 148).	This study examined teaching phonemic awareness to Thirty-six children, aged 5 to 6.5 years from four early childhood programs in the area participated in the study.	Honig et al. (2000)
Categorizing and Isolating Sounds in Words:	Given a set of pictures or words, students identify the picture or sound that does not belong.	"How many sounds in up? (Two). Can you say them? (/u/ /p/; Honig et al., 2000, p. 155).		Honig et al. (2000)
Word play – such as blending, substituting, and matching using songs, poems, and chants:	Students practice manipulating phonemes in spoken words, for example through blending and rhyming.	Using the song "*If You're Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands*." Teachers can change the words to: *If you think you know this word, shout it out! If you think you know this word, shout it out! If you think you know this word, Then tell me what you've heard, If you think you know this word, shout it out!* After singing, the teacher says a segmented word like /k/ /a/ /t/ and students provide the blended word "cat."	This study was a longitudinal study consisting of analyzing the results of 123 2- to 5-year-old child in their sensitivity to rhyme as a tool, and it was found to play a positive role on teaching children phonemic awareness. (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004)	Anthony & Lonigan (2004)
Segmenting a Word into Sounds: Elkonin Sound Boxes	Given a whole word, students segment words into individual sounds, or phonemes.	Students break a spoken word into its separate phonemes. There are four sounds in truck: /t/ /r/ /u/ /k/. And place them in their own "boxes."	Manyak (2008) studied the reading strategies in k-3 students in a longitudinal study	Armbruster (2010) Manyak (2008)

APPENDIX B

Phonics Strategies

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
Develop Phonemic Awareness	The student identifies a word that begins or ends with a particular sound.	Students learn to identify the word "cat" for example, based on the sound of the first letter /k/ and the last letter /t/.	In this study, Vaughn and Swanson (2015) provide examples of the knowledge educational research has generated, to meet the specific learning needs of students with disabilities.	Vaughn & Swanson (2015)
Sound/ Spelling	The student isolates a specific phonological sound.	In the word sat, is /a/ the first sound or the middle sound?	In the book *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read: Kindergarten through grade 3*. by Armbruster (2010), the author has compiled the findings from scientifically based research in reading instruction, focusing primarily on the results found on the five areas of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).	Vaughn & Swanson (2015)
Blending	The student blends two, three, or four individual sounds to form a word.	Explicit Phonics: Sound-by-Sound Blending.	Washburn et al.'s 2011 study was to examine elementary school pre-service teachers' knowledge of basic language constructs of early learners, especially those with dyslexia. The findings have contributed to this current study.	Vaughn & Swanson (2015) Washburn et al. (2011)
Decoding and Encoding	The student is afforded a range of activities that practice sound/-spelling patterns.	Students can work with decoding tools such as: counters, sound boxes, and magnetic letters. This is especially helpful when pointed out in reading.	Washburn et al. study (2011)	Washburn et al. (2011)
Automatic Word Recognition	The student is able to decode and read various words in isolation.	Students are given a limited set of sight words (some of which are regularly spelled) and asked to recognize them. The use of board and card games,	As noted in the previous chart, Anthony and Lonigan's 2004 study was a longitudinal and consisted of analyzing the results of 123 2- to 5-year-old children in their sensitivity to rhyme as a tool, and it was found to play a positive role on teaching children phonemic	Anthony & Lonigan (2004) Hook & Jones (2002)

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
		flashcards, word lists,storybooks, and workbooks are also used.	awareness.	
Decodable Text	The student is afforded the opportunity to practice reading and rereading decodable text, which contain previously taught sound and spelling correspondence	Students can work with decoding tools such as: counters, sound boxes, and magnetic letters.	Suggate's (2014) study focused on assessing the results of 71 intervention-control groups from studies reporting posttest and follow-up data for previously established reading interventions. The results were positive for using phonics as a teaching strategy	Suggate (2014)

APPENDIX C

Vocabulary Strategies

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
Concept Definition Map or Word Map	Concept definition maps are organizers that help students understand the essential attributes, qualities, or characteristics of a word's meaning.	-Students learn to describe what the concept is, make comparisons, tell what it is like, and give examples. -One method would be to discuss the questions that a definition should answer: What is it? What broader category can it fit in? What is it like? What are its characteristics? What can you compare it to? What can you contrast it to? What are examples? -When students are familiar with how to use the organizer, then assign a concept word.	In this study by Jones and Thomas (2006) the authors focus on preserving social studies instruction by focusing on the content literacy skills taught in reading and language arts. The authors further describe cross curricular ways to use vocabulary development, writing, and story mapping so that language arts can help bridge the divide between social studies and the other core subjects emphasized in current school reform initiatives.	Jones & Thomas (2006)
Context Clues	Students learn to use clues in the text surrounding an unknown word to figure out the meaning.	-In reading, students can write down a vocabulary word, read the word as it is used in the reading, and write down a guess for the meaning of each word. -Then students can learn more about the meaning of the word through teacher guidance.	Kaivanpanah and Alavi's 2008 study provides research-based and introspective data to examine the contribution of grammatical knowledge to inferring the meaning of unknown words. The findings indicate that syntactic complexity of texts and the level of language proficiency (this study largely focuses on EFL students) influence word-meaning inferencing.	Kaivanpanah & Alavi (2008)
Frayer Model	This graphic organizer requires students to study words or concepts in a relational way. Students define a concept, state its characteristics, and provide examples and non-examples.	-One way to use this model is to 1. Pre-select key vocabulary words and make copies of a graphic organizer. 2. Provide copies of the Frayer Model graphic organizer to students and explain the process. 3. Model the Process: -- Show the Frayer graphic	This study investigated the use of a modified version of the Frayer model as graphic organizer to improve the vocabulary comprehension of Japanese university students. The overall findings suggest the modified Frayer model has potential to help students better understand graph	Sullivan (2015)

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
		organizer to the class and explain each of the sections. -Use a common vocabulary word to demonstrate the various components of the form. -Model the type and quality of desired answers when giving this example. 4. Assign Student Groups -Divide the class into student pairs. Assign each pair one of the key concepts and have them complete the four-square organizer for this concept. Or, assign each student one word to work on alone. 5. Share Ideas Ask students or student pairs to share their conclusions with the entire class. Use these presentations to review the entire list of key concepts. 6. Create Study Helps Make copies of each Frayer graphic organizer so every student has a copy of all key concepts to use for review. OR display completed Frayer graphic organizers on a "Vocabulary Wall" for student reference. (Adapted from Sullivan, 2015)	vocabulary.	
PAVE (Prediction, Association, Verification, Evaluation)	This vocabulary strategy encourages students to predict an unknown word's meaning by using context clues, and to verify it through the use of dictionary. It also asks students to create a personal visual clue to help them remember the definition.	This strategy can be used to: 1. Have the students write the sentence that contains the vocabulary word on the worksheet. 2. Isolate the vocabulary word by having the students write it inside the box on the worksheet. 3. Predict the meaning of the vocabulary word based on the context clues provided. 4. Write one good sentence using the word that demonstrates an understanding of its	This study addressed research question about the impact K-PAVE had on the literacy instruction of kindergarten students. The study found that kindergarten students in schools using K-PAVE as a supplement to the regular literacy instruction performed better than kindergarten students in control schools on the Expressive Vocabulary Test-2 administered at the end of the school year. The study also found that kindergarten students in K-	Goodson, Wolf, Bell, Turner, & Finney (2010), Honig et al. (2000)

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
		meaning. 5. Verify the meaning of the word by looking it up in the dictionary and writing its definition down on the worksheet. 6. Have the students write another good sentence using the vocabulary word based on the verified definition.	PAVE schools performed control schools on the measure of academic knowledge administered at the end of the year (Goodson et al., 2010).	
Three Column Notes	Students use three columns to write a question, write an answer, and give an example to clarify vocabulary words.	One sample Exercise for creating the 3 columns could look like the following: -Write down a question in one column: Ex: What is a holiday? -Write down an answer in the next column. Ex: column Answer: A holiday is a special day when we honor someone or something. -Then give examples: - The Fourth of July - Thanksgiving - Christmas	The study conducted by Hemphill and Tivnan (2008) focused on a sample of several hundred low-income children in 16 urban schools that were implementing literacy interventions, 1st-grade predictors of literacy development were traced over time. Beginning-of-1st-grade letter–word identification and word attack skills were the strongest predictors of reading comprehension at the end of 1st grade. The overall results support an early emphasis on developing meaning skills to prepare low-income children for success in literacy.	Hemphill & Tivnan (2008)
Verbal Visual	The Verbal-Visual Word Association strategy provides a method for students to make personal and visual associations to new words, increasing vocabulary retention.	One manner of using this strategy is to have students fill in boxes by adding the vocabulary word, a definition, a visual representation, and a personal association for the word.	In this study, the authors present a visual-literacy based instructional approach by introducing children and their teachers to works of art in different contexts.to increase their visual and verbal skills, and, ultimately, promote their development as writers. Through making observations of children's verbalizations in a group discussion of a work of art before and during exposure to the program; by examination of story-writing skill development in a pre-posttest control-study design; and by retrospective interview analysis, tracing	Barbot et al. (2013) Vaughn & Swanson (2015)

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
			the underlying thinking processes engaged during a visual-literacy based writing activity, the preliminary results show that visual-literacy practices may facilitate children's development of writing skills regarding vocabulary, narrative structure, and originality. (Barbot, Randi, Tan, Levenson, Friedlaender, & Grigorenko, 2013). facilitate children's development of writing skills regarding vocabulary, narrative structure, and originality. (Barbot, Randi, Tan, Levenson, Friedlaender, & Grigorenko, 2013).	
Word Classification	Students can use an organizer to make connections with new vocabulary words, based on classifying them in a number of different ways.	One way to do an activity on word classification is to find as many words as possible in a reading that can fit into a predetermined box from a designated vocabulary list.	This article by Nichols, Mraz, & Blair (2012) (2012) presents several instructional procedures using research-based vocabulary strategies. Through analysis of the research, this article seeks to provide educators with both a theoretical framework and practical classroom instructional suggestions for teaching vocabulary effectively.	Nichols et al. (2012)
Word Sort	Word sorts are used to help students recognize the semantic relationships among key concepts. This strategy can be used in two different ways. In a "closed sort," the teacher provides categories into which students assign the words. In an "open sort,"	One way to teach word-sorting is to list terms on 3" X 5" cards (one concept per card). Then, have students, individually or in groups, to sort the words into categories. Depending on the concepts and students' level of understanding, the sorts can be "closed" or "open." This process can be modeled for students by "thinking aloud" as cards are sorted. As students become more proficient at classifying, they should be encouraged to complete "open sorts" and to find	This study focuses on students entering school with limited vocabularies. The study has found that children's literature and research-supported activities can accelerate vocabulary acquisition when immersing children in semantic clusters to build knowledge of abstract concepts, and the individual words representing the concepts (Brabham, Buskist, Henderson, Paleologos, & Baugh, 2012).	Brabham et al. (2012).

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
	students group words into categories and create their own labels for each category. Word sorts help students develop a deeper understanding of key concepts.	more than one way to classify the vocabulary terms.		
Read-Alouds	Reading storybooks aloud to children, and explaining what is taking place or certain words, is a vehicle for building oral language and early literacy skills.	By teachers reading text aloud, and explaining words and concepts to students, knowledge can be extended and clarified. In this way, teachers help students make their own connections when they ask for examples of how or where students have heard the word used, or remind them of situations in which they might have encountered a specific word.	In this study, (Biemiller, & Boote, 2006). Emphasizes that teaching vocabulary to primary grade children is essential. Their study focuses on two distinct factors (a) the possible influences on word meaning acquisition during instruction (Study 1), and (b) increasing the percentage and number of word meanings acquired (Study 2). In Study 1, they found that average gains of 12% of word meanings were obtained using repeated reading. Adding word explanations added a 10% gain for a total gain of 22%. Study 2 showed learning gains of 41% of word meanings taught. The overall findings were that read-alouds, along with explanations of word meanings, increased vocabulary growth significantly.	Biemiller & Boote (2006) Vaughn & Swanson (2015)

APPENDIX D

Fluency Strategies

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
Text Talk	The teacher models fluent expressive oral reading for students.	Read-Aloud Method with increased analysis of the reading.	The study by Katz and Carlisle (2009) analyzed the SLAP strategy: S: SAY the unfamiliar word to yourself. L: LOOK for clues in the text to help you get the meaning of that word. A: ASK yourself: "What could the word mean? What word or phrase can I use to show the meaning?" P: PUT the word or phrase in the sentence to check if it makes sense. In using this tool to teach fluency, the SNAP method showed extremely positive outcomes in helping middle-to-upper elementary children with mild-to-moderate language and/or reading difficulties engage in textual analysis during reading, and improved their reading and language skills.	Katz & Carlisle (2009)
Paired Readings or Partner Readings	Paired reading is a research-based fluency strategy used with readers who lack fluency.	-In this strategy, students read aloud to each other. When using partners, more fluent readers can be paired with less fluent readers, or children who read at the same level can be paired to reread a story they have already read. Paired reading can be used with any book, taking turns reading by sentence, paragraph, page or chapter. -One of the most critical aspects of this method however, is establishing a routine and adhering to it.	In this study, the authors gather information (based on the most prominent studies) on what reading fluency is, and how it can best be taught. The research here debunks common misconceptions about fluency, and clarifies and affirms its key role in developing fluency, especially in relationship to ELLs, adolescents, and struggling readers (Rasinski et al., 2012).	Rasinski et al. (2012)

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
Choral Readings	Choral reading is reading aloud in unison with a whole class or group of students. Choral reading helps build students' fluency, self-confidence, and motivation. Because students are reading aloud together, students who may ordinarily feel self-conscious or nervous about reading aloud have built-in support.	-One way to do a choral reading is to choose a short text (100–150 words): a poem, short story, excerpt from a play, a literature piece, or even a social studies or science passage that is fun, interesting, and, ideally, part of your curriculum. -Next, provide a copy of the text to each student and then briefly introduce the text by explaining important content and context features, unfamiliar vocabulary, and relevancy. -Model an expressive reading of the text, to demonstrate confidence, by reading it aloud while the class follows along silently. -Invite students to join you in a choral reading, with everyone reading aloud in unison, as in a choir. Start the students off by counting down "three, two, one."	In this study, four pre-service teachers taught two classes of fourth graders for seven weeks. Each week one picture storybook was chosen for a choral reading and used to teach children reading strategies and to learn English (the class was primarily EFL). The results showed that this was a useful learning aid for them to comprehend stories and improve in English reading fluency.	Chou (2013)
Repeated Readings	Repeated interactive read-alouds, a systematic method of reading aloud, allow teachers to scaffold children's understanding of the book being read, model strategies for making inferences and explanations, and teach vocabulary and concepts.	To teach using this tool, a storybook is read three times in slightly different ways in order to increase the amount and quality of students' critical conversation as they answer carefully crafted questions. During the first reading, teachers introduce the story's problem, insert comments, ask a few key questions, and finally ask a "why" question calling for extended explanation. This is accompanied by elaborations on a few key vocabulary words. --Second read through capitalize on children's growing comprehension of the story by providing enriched vocabulary explanations and asking additional inference and explanation questions. --	This study by Lo et al. (2011) looks at three second-grade students at-risk for reading failure. These students participated in an adult-directed repeated reading program that integrated isolated word reading practice, unison reading, error correction, and performance cueing and feedback procedures. The results showed that the repeated reading program improved all participants' oral reading rates.	Lo et al. (2011)

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
		-Third readings consist of guided reconstruction of the story in which children recount information as well as provide explanations and commentary.		
Readers' Theater	Readers' Theater is a way to involve students in reading aloud. In reader's theater, students "perform" by reading scripts created from grade-level books or stories. The combination of reading practice and performing enhances students' reading skills and confidence.	To use this strategy, choose only scripts that are fun to do with lots of good dialogue. -Begin slowly so students feel comfortable in the performance mode. Provide opportunities for students to practice. Work with small groups, not with the whole class, whenever possible. -Provide instructional support for new vocabulary and for understanding the different characters.	The purpose of this study by Lewis and Feng (2014) was to examine the effects of the use of Readers' Theatre to improve the reading ability of elementary students receiving special education services. Through the use of pre and post oral fluency tests, results indicated that after 6 weeks of intervention, Readers' Theatre positively impacted students' reading fluency rate.	Lewis & Feng (2014)

APPENDIX E

Comprehension Strategies

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
Questioning the Author	The Questioning the Author procedure involves discussion, strategy instruction, and self-explanation. It encourages students to reflect on what the author of a selection is trying to say so as to build a mental representation from that information.	This tool can be used by focusing on a segment of text in which the students respond to teacher questions such as: 1. What is the author trying to say? 2. What does the author mean by this? 3. Why is the author saying this? 4. What is the author getting at?	In a meta-analysis of the role teachers play, by using a number of different strategies, to aid young students in achieving literacy, it was found that direct reading comprehension support showed increased rates of growth in reading (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011).	Duke et al. (2011).
Reciprocal Teaching	Reciprocal Teaching is the name for a teaching procedure that is best described as a dialogue between the teacher and students. "Reciprocal" means simply that each person involved in the dialogue acts in response to the others.	This method first focuses on a segment of a text the group is reading and models asking questions, clarifying difficult words and ideas, summarizing what has been read, and predicting what might come next. Secondly, the teacher turns over the activity to the students, and as the students become more competent, the teacher requires their participation at increasingly more challenging levels.	This study by Mandel, Osana, and Venkatesh, (2013). Evaluated the effects of Adapted Reciprocal Teaching (ART) on the receptive and expressive flight-word vocabulary of 1st-grade students. The data demonstrated that after the instructional intervention, the students in the ART group acquired significantly more target words.	Mandel et al. (2013)
Retelling	Retelling involves having students orally reconstruct a story that they have read. The teacher can use retelling as a way to assess how well students comprehend a story, then use this information to help	At the k-2 level, students should begin the retelling by identifying and retelling the beginning, middle, and end of a story in order. This mostly consists of describing the setting, identifying the	This study by Kucer (2014) investigated what retellings can reveal about the nature of reading comprehension among elementary school readers. A variety of retellings, from a variety of students,	Kucer (2014)

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
	students develop a deeper understanding of what they have read. The teacher uses explicit instruction, explaining why retelling is useful, modeling the procedure, giving students opportunities to practice, and providing feedback.	problem, and explaining the resolution of the problem.	reading a variety of texts, were used to generate comprehension taxonomy. The purpose of the taxonomy was to view the text through the eyes of the re-teller. The taxonomy had seven categories: match, substitution, addition, summary, conflict, omission and rearrangement. After significant study, the study concluded that retelling is a useful tool to increase the reading comprehension of elementary school students.	
Story Maps	A story map is a strategy that uses a graphic organizer to help students learn the elements of a book or story. By identifying story characters, plot, setting, problem and solution, students read carefully to learn the details. There are many different types of story map graphic organizers. The most basic focus on the beginning, middle, and end of the story. More advanced organizers focus more on plot or character traits.	Teachers can use this strategy by reading a story and discussing the story's elements. Typically, teachers split students into groups and assign each group a story element such as: characters, setting, problems, and solutions. Each group is assigned a leader and they draw and write in a circle map the components of the story they are assigned. Each student shares with the class the part they contribute. It is useful to have a rubric to follow to make sure the pictures and writing are from the text. Teachers can post the maps in the classroom and write from those maps for the rest of the week.	In their work, Mahdavi and Tensfeldt (2013) examined a number of peer-reviewed studies that employed experimental or quasi-experimental designs and included children between the ages of five and nine, some of whom had disabilities or were determined to be at-risk for academic failure, were examined. Five categories of reading comprehension strategies (peer learning, self-questioning, story grammar and text structure, story mapping and graphic organizers, and vocabulary development) that have increased the reading comprehension abilities of young students were identified and	Mahdavi & Tensfeldt (2013)

(continued)

Strategy	Description	Example	Research Study	Researcher
			discussed. Students appeared to be most successful when two or more strategies were combined. Instructional choices teachers might make in light of the current research are discussed.	
Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA)	This procedure focuses on reading as a thinking process. Its intent is to teach children to make predictions throughout reading.	This teaching strategy begins before the actual reading in which the teacher asks students to form a purpose for reading and to make predictions about the content of the story to be read. -During reading, the teacher stops students at strategic points in the story to ask students to make additional predictions and to verify, reject, or modify their purposes and predictions. -After reading, the teacher asks students to find and read aloud any part of the text that supports their predictions. Students must use the text to explain their reasoning and to prove the accuracy-or inaccuracy-of their predictions. -Often teachers have students use charts to record their predictions and information from the text that proves the prediction's accuracy	In an analysis of DRTA programs, developed for enhancing creative thinking alongside other thinking and social skills Implementing this program on preschool and school aged children has shown that all aspects of this creative thinking program helps children to develop their creative thinking (Ghaedi, Mahdian, & Fomani, 2015).	Ghaedi et al. (2015)

APPENDIX F

Informed Consent for Classroom Research: Teachers

Achieving Literacy Excellence Through: Identifying and Utilizing High Yield Strategies

Dear Teachers,

My name is Ashley Hardison, and I am currently a student at Pepperdine University in the Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy (ELAP) program. You are invited to participate in a qualitative case study as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy in the Graduate School of education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. For this study I will gather data from nine K-2 classroom teachers in order to explore and describe the literacy instructional strategies as related to the five core literacy components of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Dr. Linda Purrington, Dissertation Committee Chair, will supervise the research.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the literacy instructional strategies of selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the YJSD in Nevada as related to the five core literacy components of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

For this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview where you will be asked a series of questions and asked to share artifacts. You will be given a copy of the interview questions and a list of potential artifacts to bring with two-weeks in advance notice. The entire interview should take you between 60-75 minutes. The interview will take place at an agreed-upon location and will be recorded for accuracy. At any point, you may ask me to turn off the tape or refuse to answer a question. After the recording has been transcribed, the transcription will be shared with you to ensure that I have captured the information accurately. You will then have the opportunity to clarify or elaborate and provide additional artifacts. To ensure confidentiality, the audio recording will be erased once the interview has been transcribed and your identity will remain confidential.

You will also be asked to participate in two 30-minute classroom observations with a focus on literacy instructional strategies. I will take field notes based on these classroom observations. Through this data I hope to learn which literacy instructional strategies are utilized to improve student's literacy skills. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used during the data collection and written report. Records will be destroyed after three years upon completion of the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled, and it will not harm your relationship with Clark County School District or your Current School. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, feel free to contact me at [redacted]. For questions about your rights, please call or write linda.purrington@pepperdine.edu at 310-568-5671 or Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Pepperdine University Graduate and Professional Schools IRB, at

judy.ho@pepperdine.edu or (310) 745-8887 for additional questions about your rights as a participant. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Ashley Hardison, Doctoral Candidate

I _____, agree to participate in the research study conducted by Ashley Hardison under the direction of Dr. Linda Purrington.

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX G

Social and Behavioral Research Certificate

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Ashley Hardison (ID: 5185733)
- **Email:** ashley.hardison@pepperdine.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Unit:** Education
- **Phone:** 248-996-4234

- **Curriculum Group:** GSEP Education Division
- **Course Learner Group:** GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** 17751792
- **Completion Date:** 10/28/2015
- **Expiration Date:** 10/26/2020
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 94

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	10/28/15	3/3 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	10/28/15	4/5 (80%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	10/28/15	4/5 (80%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program
Email: citisupport@miami.edu
Phone: 305-243-7970
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT REPORT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Ashley Hardison (ID: 5185733)
- **Email:** ashley.hardison@pepperdine.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Unit:** Education
- **Phone:** 248-996-4234

- **Curriculum Group:** GSEP Education Division
- **Course Learner Group:** GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** 17751792
- **Report Date:** 10/28/2015
- **Current Score**:** 94

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	10/28/15	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	10/28/15	4/5 (80%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	10/28/15	4/5 (80%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

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COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Ashley Hardison (ID: 5185733)
- **Email:** ashley.hardison@pepperdine.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Unit:** Education
- **Phone:** 248-996-4234

- **Curriculum Group:** CITI Conflicts of Interest
- **Course Learner Group:** Conflicts of Interest
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Stage 1

- **Report ID:** 17751790
- **Completion Date:** 10/28/2015
- **Expiration Date:** 10/27/2019
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 80

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
CITI Conflict of Interest Course - Introduction (COI-Basic) (ID: 15177)	10/28/15	No Quiz
Financial Conflicts of Interest: Overview, Investigator Responsibilities, and COI Rules (COI-Basic) (ID: 15070)	10/28/15	5/5 (100%)
Institutional Responsibilities as They Affect Investigators (COI-Basic) (ID: 15072)	10/28/15	3/5 (60%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program
Email: citisupport@miami.edu
Phone: 305-243-7970
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

APPENDIX H

Interview Questions

1) What type of informal and formal assessments do you use to learn about your students' literacy skills?
2) How, if at all, does the assessment data gathered inform your instructional planning for the whole group? For some students? For individuals?
3) What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom?
4) Which of these strategies do you most attribute to student success with literacy skills?
5) What structures do you have in place during your literacy block?
6) What type of materials and texts are used in your classroom to engage students with literacy skills?
7) Does the district mandate these materials or do you choose the materials?
8) Think about a student who you recently provided extra support to in the area of literacy. What strategies do you utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult literacy skills?
9) Please share any artifacts you brought that captures a literacy strategy or data that helps support any decisions to support students' literacy needs.

APPENDIX I

Literacy Instructional Observation Checklist

Literacy Instruction Observation Checklist		Observed	
Area(s) of Instruction	**Features of Effective Instruction (Circle Observed and/or Make Comments)**	**Present**	**Not Present**
Vocabulary	Explicit instruction and discussion of word meanings and use in a variety of situations; morphology (word parts), etymology (derivation). Explicit instruction in independent word learning strategies (word parts, context clues, use of dictionaries, etc.); Several encounters with new vocabulary directly taught by the teacher.		
Comprehension Strategy Instruction	Activating/building prior knowledge, encouraging student-generated questions, predicting, inferring, making connections, use of graphic organizers, summarizing, evaluating and synthesizing.		
Fluency Instruction	Choral reading, repeated timed readings, partner reading, student-adult reading, choral or unison reading, tape-assisted reading, reader's theater, reading connected text with corrective feedback; avoidance of round robin and/or "popcorn" reading.		
Writing	Writing Instruction (brainstorming, pre-writing, etc.); word processing on computer; teacher modeling writing process; use of graphic organizer; providing models from good writing; writing in response to reading		
Phonemic Awareness (K-1) Phonics (K-3) Word Study (3-5)	Phonemic awareness: (K-1) Teaching the manipulation of individual words, syllables and eventually sounds in words, i.e., "what sounds do you hear in cat? c//a//t//); Phonics: (K-2) Teaching syllable patterns, spelling patterns, phonetic identification of words; Word Study: (K-2) Teaching decoding multi-syllabic words		
Content Literacy Instruction (Math, Science, SS, etc.)	Building background knowledge (not merely assuming background that students may not possess); Teaching content vocabulary/concepts; Explicit instruction in text structure and text/graphic features; use of graphic organizers		

APPENDIX J

Indicators of Appropriate Strategies Checklist

Indicators of Appropriate Strategies Checklist			
Efficient Use of Teacher- Directed Time	Students consistently engaged; not waiting for teacher or on other students	Teacher questioning is engaging and does not pursue probing questions when students clearly cannot answer	Majority of class time spent in instruction either whole class or small group or in follow-up practice
Comments/Evidence			
Opportunities for Student Interaction	Teacher-led discussion; not just IRE (Initiate, Response, Evaluate)	Students engage in peer-to-peer interactions	Cooperative Groups
Comments/Evidence			
Immediate Corrective Feedback	Teacher tactfully tells students where the error is	Teacher provides students with correct model when errors are made	Students are allowed/required to practice correct response when appropriate
Comments/Evidence			
Differentiated Instruction	Differentiated content or product based on student need	Additional instruction based on student need	Flexible grouping based on student need
Comments/Evidence			
Student Engagement	Students clearly engaged in discussion or activity as indicated by eye contact, discussion, body language	Majority of students engaged as opposed to only one or two students responding	Pace of instruction appropriate
Comments/Evidence			

APPENDIX K

Artifact Review Form

Date:	**Time:**
School:	**Classroom: A B C D E** **Grade: K 1 2**
Type of Artifact	**Practices**
● Lesson plans ● Early literacy curriculum and resources ● Team meeting notes ● Other	● Implementation of evidence-based core curriculum aligned with early literacy skills ● Use of a variety of learning formats/groupings (i.e. whole group, small group, centers, embedded) ● Adult support that is adapted to students' early literacy needs ● Use of instructional strategies to meet the needs of the whole class, some students, and individuals (i.e. intentional teaching, intensive scaffolding)

APPENDIX L

Interview Protocol

STEP 1: Welcome and Overview of Purpose of Interview and Protocol (2-3 minutes)

"Hi. First of all, thank you for being here to participate in this one-on-one interview. My name is Ashley Hardison and I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine University. I am interested in learning more about what specific instructional strategies you utilize within your daily literacy block. I selected you because you have demonstrated a continual growth of your student's literacy skills."

"The interview today should take between 60-75 minutes. I am going to facilitate the interview and would you mind if I taped the interview? It will help me stay focused on our conversation and it will ensure I have an accurate record of what we discussed. After the transcripts are created from the recording, three additional steps will take place."

"First, I will give individuals who participate in the interview a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy and representativeness."

"Second, I will invite individuals who participated to submit additional artifacts that can help provide additional insight into the questions posed. The individual or I may want to schedule a follow-up conversation over the phone or via email to clarify or elaborate on any of the responses shared at the interview."

"Third, I will erase the audio recording. The typed transcripts will be kept on my computer in a password-protected file for five years. Individuals can decide at any time to discontinue their participation. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have. Shall we get started?"

STEP 2: Teacher Introduction (2-3 minutes)

"Please tell me about your background, experience, and credentials."

STEP 3: Nine Questions Posed to Interviewee (4-5 minutes per question)

1) A- What type of informal and formal assessments do you use to learn about your students' literacy skills?

   B- Please share any artifacts you brought that highlight how you monitor your student's progress in literacy.

2) How, if at all, does the assessment data gathered inform your instructional planning for the whole group? For some students? For individuals?

3) What are the key instructional strategies you practice regularly in your classroom?

4) Which of these strategies do you most attribute to student success with literacy skills?
5) What structures do you have in place during your literacy block?
6) What type of materials and texts are used in your classroom to engage students with literacy skills?
7) Does the district mandate these materials or do you choose the materials?
8) Think about a student who you recently provided extra support to in the area of literacy. What strategies do you utilize in the classroom to assist students who struggle with difficult literacy skills?
9) Please share any artifacts you brought that captures a literacy strategy or data that helps support any decisions to support students' literacy needs. PROMPT (if needed) Can you walk me through the type of data or information you use to plan next steps for your class, some students, and individuals?

STEP 4: Closing Question (3-5 minutes)

"Is there anything you would like share about any literacy strategy you use in your classrooms that I did not ask?"

STEP 5: Thank participants and recap next steps (1-2 minutes)

• After the one-on-one interview, the audio recording will be transcribed.

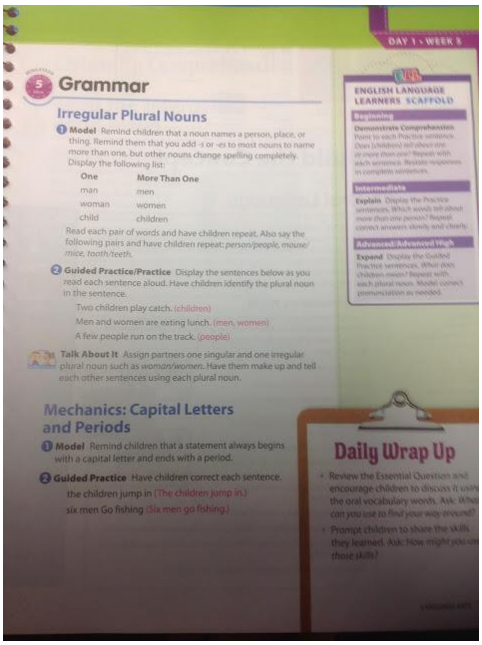
• I will share transcripts to ensure accuracy and representativeness.

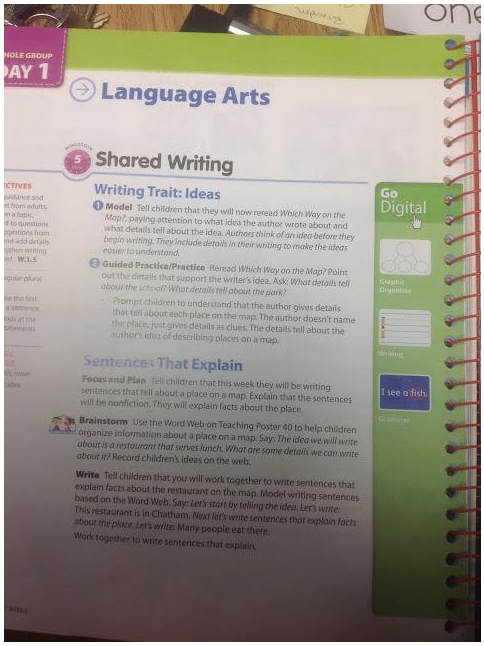
• If needed, focus group members will be contacted via email or phone to elaborate or clarify.

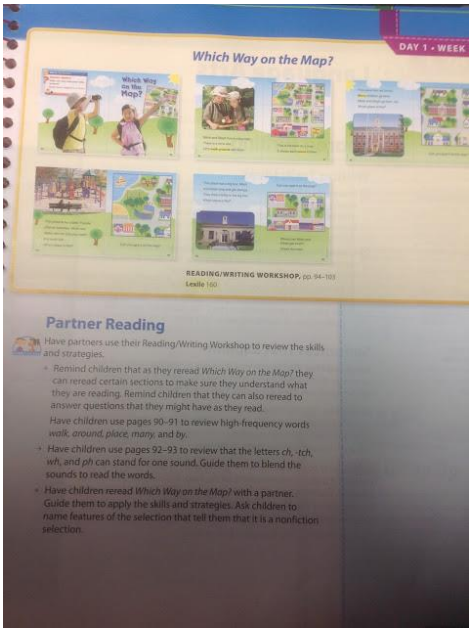
• At the end of the interviews, if individuals have any additional materials or artifacts, I can retrieve them at a later date.

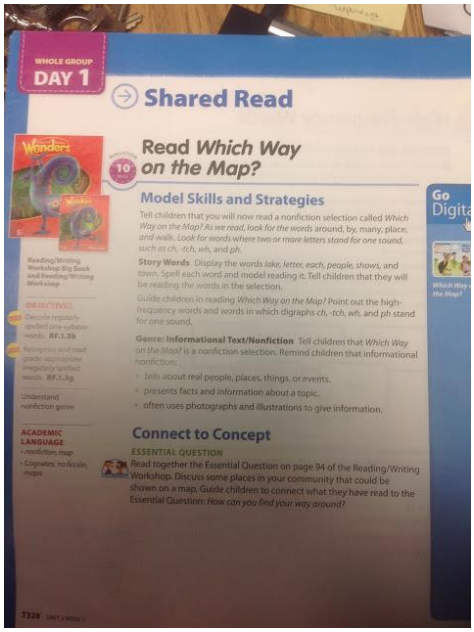
APPENDIX M

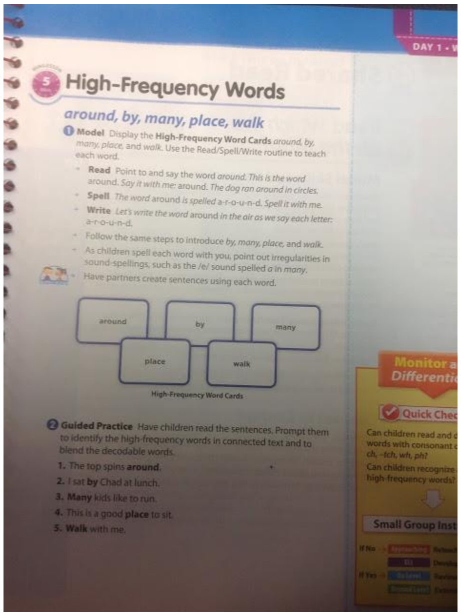
Sample Lesson Plans on the Five Areas











DAY 1 • W

High-Frequency Words

around, by, many, place, walk

1 Model Display the **High-Frequency Word Cards** *around, by, many, place,* and *walk*. Use the Read/Spell/Write routine to teach each word.

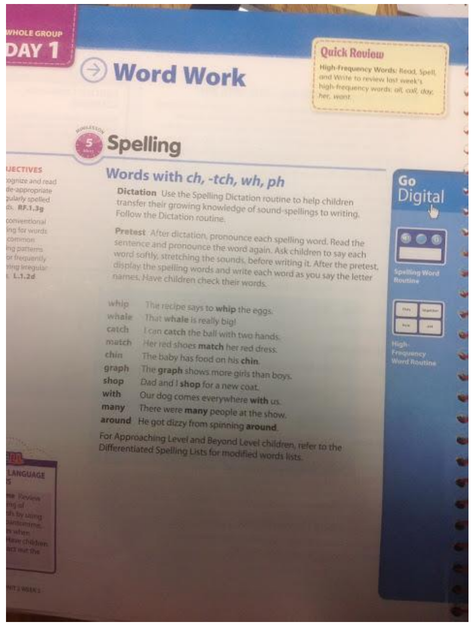
- **Read** Point to and say the word *around. This is the word* around. *Say it with me:* around. *The dog ran around in circles.*
- **Spell** *The word* around *is spelled* a-r-o-u-n-d. *Spell it with me.*
- **Write** *Let's write the word* around *in the air as we say each letter:* a-r-o-u-n-d.
- Follow the same steps to introduce *by, many, place,* and *walk*.
- As children spell each word with you, point out irregularities in sound-spellings, such as the /e/ sound spelled *a* in *many*.
- Have partners create sentences using each word.

around by many place walk

High-Frequency Word Cards

2 Guided Practice Have children read the sentences. Prompt them to identify the high-frequency words in connected text and to blend the decodable words.

1. The top spins **around**.
2. I sat **by** Chad at lunch.
3. **Many** kids like to run.
4. This is a good **place** to sit.
5. **Walk** with me.



WHOLE GROUP DAY 1

Word Work

Quick Review
High-Frequency Words: Read, Spell, and Write to review last week's high-frequency words: *all, call, day, her, want*.

Spelling

Words with ch, -tch, wh, ph

Dictation Use the Spelling Dictation routine to help children transfer their growing knowledge of sound-spellings to writing. Follow the Dictation routine.

Pretest After dictation, pronounce each spelling word. Read the sentence and pronounce the word again. Ask children to say each word softly, stretching the sounds, before writing it. After the pretest, display the spelling words and write each word as you say the letter names. Have children check their words.

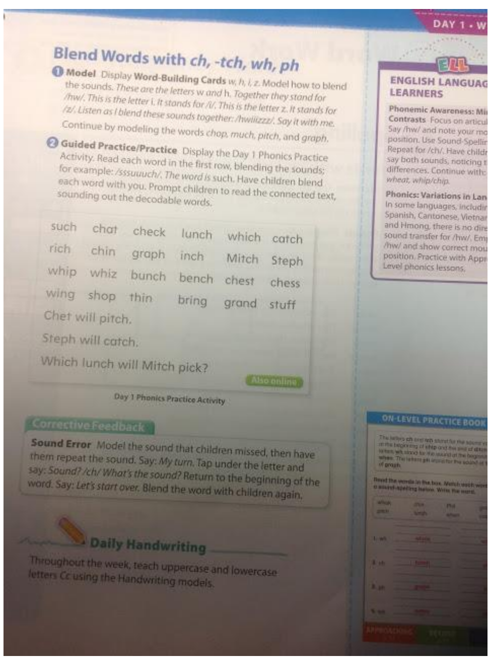
whip	The recipe says to **whip** the eggs.
whale	That **whale** is really big!
catch	I can **catch** the ball with two hands.
match	Her red shoes **match** her red dress.
chin	The baby has food on his **chin**.
graph	The **graph** shows more girls than boys.
shop	Dad and I **shop** for a new coat.
with	Our dog comes everywhere **with** us.
many	There were **many** people at the show.
around	He got dizzy from spinning **around**.

For Approaching Level and Beyond Level children, refer to the Differentiated Spelling Lists for modified words lists.

Go Digital

Spelling Word Routine

High-Frequency Word Routine



DAY 1 • W

Blend Words with ch, -tch, wh, ph

1 Model Display **Word-Building Cards** *w, h, i, z*. Model how to blend the sounds. *These are the letters* w *and* h. *Together they stand for /hw/. This is the letter* i. *It stands for /i/. This is the letter* z. *It stands for /z/. Listen as I blend these sounds together: /hwiiizzz/. Say it with me.* Continue by modeling the words *chop, much, pitch,* and *graph*.

2 Guided Practice/Practice Display the Day 1 Phonics Practice Activity. Read each word in the first row, blending the sounds; for example: */sssuuuch/. The word is* such. Have children blend each word with you. Prompt children to read the connected text, sounding out the decodable words.

such	chat	check	lunch	which	catch
rich	chin	graph	inch	Mitch	Steph
whip	whiz	bunch	bench	chest	chess
wing	shop	thin	bring	grand	stuff

Chet will pitch.

Steph will catch.

Which lunch will Mitch pick?

Also online

Day 1 Phonics Practice Activity

Corrective Feedback

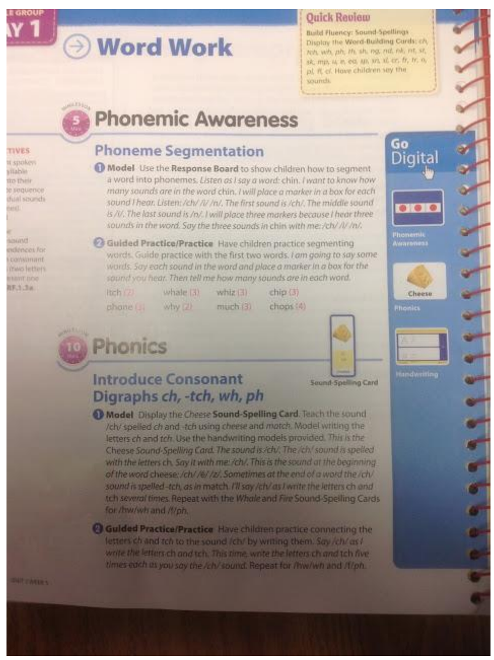
Sound Error Model the sound that children missed, then have them repeat the sound. Say: *My turn.* Tap under the letter and say: *Sound? /ch/ What's the sound?* Return to the beginning of the word. Say: *Let's start over.* Blend the word with children again.

Daily Handwriting

Throughout the week, teach uppercase and lowercase letters *Cc* using the Handwriting models.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

ON-LEVEL PRACTICE BOOK



Word Work

Quick Review
Build Fluency: Sound-Spellings
Display the Word-Building Cards: *ch, tch, wh, ph, th, sh, ng, nd, nk, nt, st, sk, mp, u, e, ea, sp, sn, sl, cr, fr, tr, a, pl, fl, cl*. Have children say the sounds.

Phonemic Awareness

Phoneme Segmentation

1 Model Use the **Response Board** to show children how to segment a word into phonemes. *Listen as I say a word:* chin. *I want to know how many sounds are in the word* chin. *I will place a marker in a box for each sound I hear. Listen: /ch/ /i/ /n/. The first sound is /ch/. The middle sound is /i/. The last sound is /n/. I will place three markers because I hear three sounds in the word. Say the three sounds in* chin *with me: /ch/ /i/ /n/.*

2 Guided Practice/Practice Have children practice segmenting words. Guide practice with the first two words. *I am going to say some words. Say each sound in the word and place a marker in a box for the sound you hear. Then tell me how many sounds are in each word.*

itch (2)	whale (3)	whiz (3)	chip (3)
phone (3)	why (2)	much (3)	chops (4)

Phonics

Introduce Consonant Digraphs ch, -tch, wh, ph

Sound-Spelling Card

1 Model Display the *Cheese* **Sound-Spelling Card**. Teach the sound /ch/ spelled *ch* and *-tch* using *cheese* and *match*. Model writing the letters *ch* and *tch*. Use the handwriting models provided. *This is the* Cheese *Sound-Spelling Card. The sound is /ch/. The /ch/ sound is spelled with the letters* ch. *Say it with me: /ch/. This is the sound at the beginning of the word* cheese: */ch/ /ē/ /z/. Sometimes at the end of a word the /ch/ sound is spelled* -tch, *as in* match. *I'll say /ch/ as I write the letters* ch *and* tch *several times.* Repeat with the *Whale* and *Fire* Sound-Spelling Cards for /hw/*wh* and /f/*ph*.

2 Guided Practice/Practice Have children practice connecting the letters *ch* and *tch* to the sound /ch/ by writing them. *Say /ch/ as I write the letters* ch *and* tch. *This time, write the letters* ch *and* tch *five times each as you say the /ch/ sound.* Repeat for /hw/*wh* and /f/*ph*.

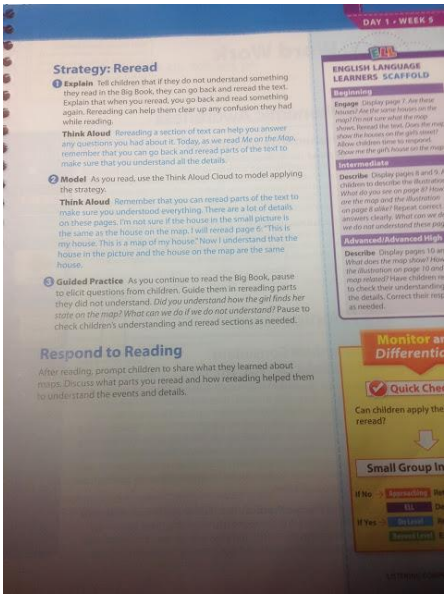
Go Digital

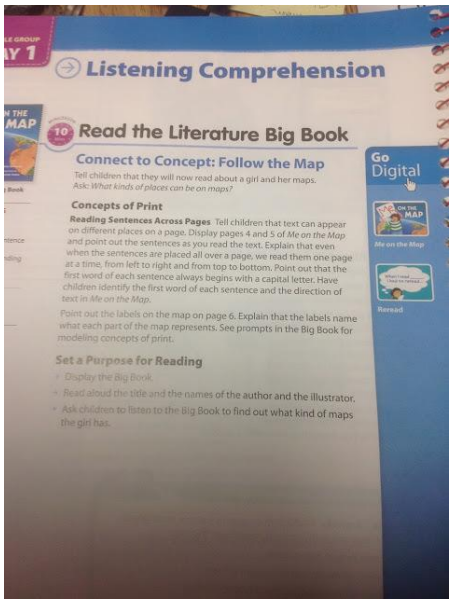
Phonemic Awareness

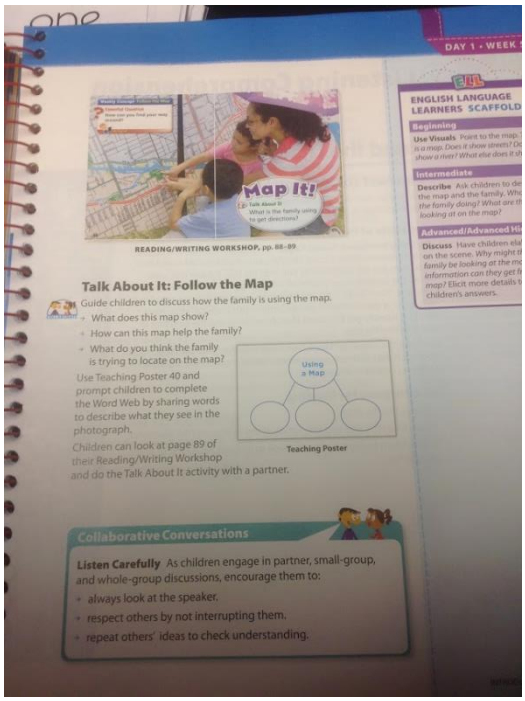
Cheese

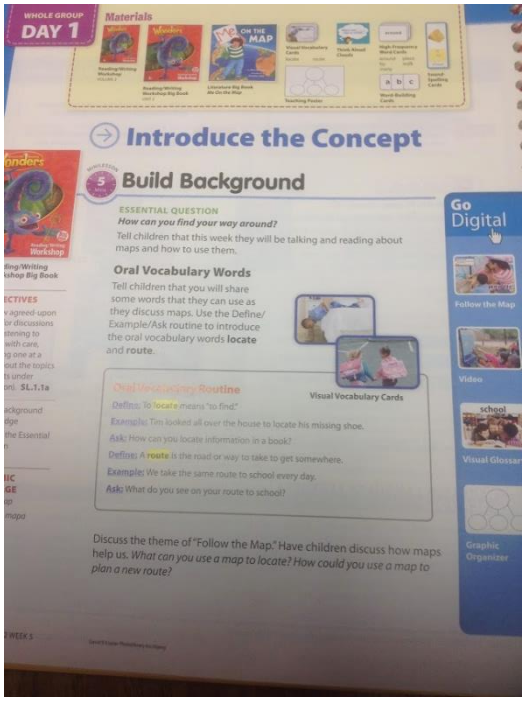
Phonics

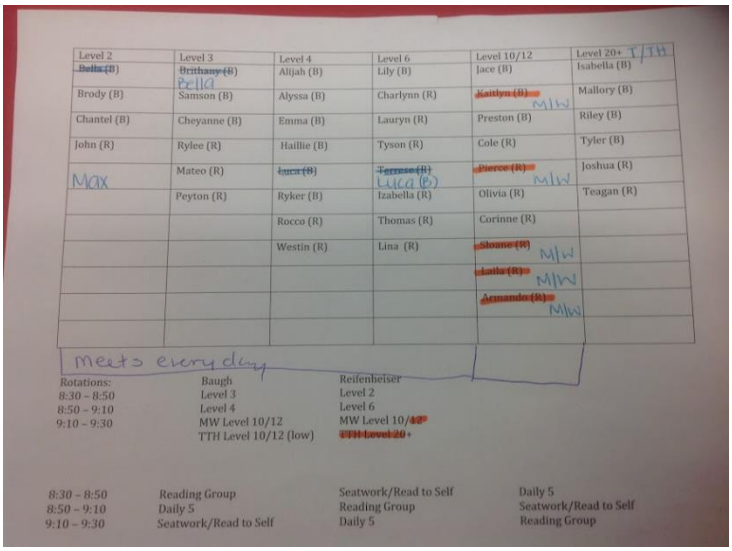
Handwriting


DAY 1 • WEEK 5
Strategy: Reread
Explain Tell children that if they do not understand something they read in the Big Book, they can go back and reread the text. Explain that when you reread, you go back and read something again. Rereading can help them clear up any confusion they had while reading.
Think Aloud Rereading a section of text can help you answer any questions you had about it. Today, as we read Me on the Map, remember that you can go back and reread parts of the text to make sure that you understand all the details.
Model As you read, use the Think Aloud Cloud to model applying the strategy.
Think Aloud Remember that you can reread parts of the text to make sure you understand everything. There are a lot of details on these pages. I'm not sure if the house in the small picture is the same as the house on the map. I will reread page 6: "This is my house. This is a map of my house." Now I understand that the house in the picture and the house on the map are the same house.
Guided Practice As you continue to read the Big Book, pause to elicit questions from children. Guide them in rereading parts they did not understand. Did you understand how the girl finds her state on the map? What can we do if we do not understand? Pause to check children's understanding and reread sections as needed.
Respond to Reading
After reading, prompt children to share what they learned about maps. Discuss what parts you reread and how rereading helped them to understand the events and details.
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS SCAFFOLD
Beginning
Intermediate
Advanced/Advanced High
Monitor a
Differentia
Quick Che
Can children apply the reread?
Small Group In


Listening Comprehension
Read the Literature Big Book
10 MIN
Connect to Concept: Follow the Map
Tell children that they will now read about a girl and her maps.
Ask: What kinds of places can be on maps?
Concepts of Print
Reading Sentences Across Pages Tell children that text can appear on different places on a page. Display pages 4 and 5 of Me on the Map and point out the sentences as you read the text. Explain that even when the sentences are placed all over a page, we read them one page at a time, from left to right and from top to bottom. Point out that the first word of each sentence always begins with a capital letter. Have children identify the first word of each sentence and the direction of text in Me on the Map.
Point out the labels on the map on page 6. Explain that the labels name what each part of the map represents. See prompts in the Big Book for modeling concepts of print.
Set a Purpose for Reading
Display the Big Book.
Read aloud the title and the names of the author and the illustrator.
Ask children to listen to the Big Book to find out what kind of maps the girl has.
Go Digital
Me on the Map
Reread


DAY 1 • WEEK 5
Map It!
READING/WRITING WORKSHOP, pp. 88–89
Talk About It: Follow the Map
Guide children to discuss how the family is using the map.
What does this map show?
How can this map help the family?
What do you think the family is trying to locate on the map?
Use Teaching Poster 40 and prompt children to complete the Word Web by sharing words to describe what they see in the photograph.
Children can look at page 89 of their Reading/Writing Workshop and do the Talk About It activity with a partner.
Using a Map
Teaching Poster
Collaborative Conversations
Listen Carefully As children engage in partner, small-group, and whole-group discussions, encourage them to:
always look at the speaker.
respect others by not interrupting them.
repeat others' ideas to check understanding.
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS SCAFFOLD
Beginning
Use Visuals
Intermediate
Describe
Advanced/Advanced
Discuss


WHOLE GROUP
DAY 1
Materials
Introduce the Concept
Build Background
5 MIN
ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How can you find your way around?
Tell children that this week they will be talking and reading about maps and how to use them.
Oral Vocabulary Words
Tell children that you will share some words that they can use as they discuss maps. Use the Define/Example/Ask routine to introduce the oral vocabulary words locate and route.
Visual Vocabulary Cards
Oral Vocabulary Routine
Define: To locate means "to find."
Example: Tim looked all over the house to locate his missing shoe.
Ask: How can you locate information in a book?
Define: A route is the road or way to take to get somewhere.
Example: We take the same route to school every day.
Ask: What do you see on your route to school?
Discuss the theme of "Follow the Map." Have children discuss how maps help us. What can you use a map to locate? How could you use a map to plan a new route?
Go Digital
Follow the Map
Video
Visual Glossar
Graphic Organizer



Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 6	Level 10/12	Level 20+ I/TH
~~Bella (B)~~	~~Brithany (B)~~ Bella	Alijah (B)	Lily (B)	Jace (B)	Isabella (B)
Brody (B)	Samson (B)	Alyssa (B)	Charlynn (R)	~~Kaitlyn (B)~~ M/W	Mallory (B)
Chantel (B)	Cheyanne (B)	Emma (B)	Lauryn (R)	Preston (B)	Riley (B)
John (R)	Rylee (R)	Haillie (B)	Tyson (R)	Cole (R)	Tyler (B)
Max	Mateo (R)	~~Luca (B)~~	~~Terrese (R)~~ Luca (B)	~~Pierce (R)~~ M/W	Joshua (R)
	Peyton (R)	Ryker (B)	Izabella (R)	Olivia (R)	Teagan (R)
		Rocco (R)	Thomas (R)	Corinne (R)	
		Westin (R)	Lina (R)	~~Sloane (R)~~ M/W	
				~~Laila (R)~~ M/W	
				~~Armando (R)~~ M/W	

Meets every day

Rotations:	Baugh	Reifenheiser
8:30 – 8:50	Level 3	Level 2
8:50 – 9:10	Level 4	Level 6
9:10 – 9:30	MW Level 10/12	MW Level 10/~~12~~
	TTH Level 10/12 (low)	~~TTH Level 20+~~

8:30 – 8:50	Reading Group	Seatwork/Read to Self	Daily 5
8:50 – 9:10	Daily 5	Reading Group	Seatwork/Read to Self
9:10 – 9:30	Seatwork/Read to Self	Daily 5	Reading Group

APPENDIX N

Alignment of Research Question, Specific Interview Questions, and Primary Strategies

Research question	Interview Questions	Primary Strategies
RQ1: What instructional strategies are used by selected high-performing K-2 teachers in the YJSD who work with diverse populations that have demonstrated a minimum gain of 25% in reading as measured by AIMSweb to develop a) phonemic awareness, b) phonics, c) fluency, d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension?	Describe your practices in teaching phonemic awareness?	Word Manipulation, Word play, and Word Sort
	Describe your practices in teaching phonics?	Word Study, Sound/ Spelling, Decoding and Encoding
	Describe your practices in teaching fluency?	Choral reading and repeated timed readings, Partner reading and student-adult reading Reading connected text with corrective feedback
	Describe your practices in introducing and reinforcing new vocabulary?	Explicit instruction on word, meanings/independent word learning Direct instruction on new vocabulary, Context Clues
	Describe your practices in reinforcing comprehension?	Predicting, inferring, and making connections, Use of graphic organizers, Activating/building (on) prior knowledge

APPENDIX O

Research Project Approval: Walter Long Academy

Letter of Acknowledgement of a Research Project at a CCSD Facility

J. Hardison
line University
mal Leadership, Psychology, and Administration Program
onal Review Board
nter Drive Suite 500
geles, CA 90045

: Letter of Acknowledgement of a Research Project at a CCSD Facility

s. Hardison:

ter will acknowledge that I have reviewed a request by Ashley Hardison of Pepperdine ity to conduct a research project entitled, Achieving Literacy Excellence Through: ing and Utilizing High Yield Strategies at Walter Bracken STEM Elementary School.

se researcher has received approval for her project from Pepperdine University Office of e & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board, received approval from the Clark School District (CCSD) Research Review Committee, and upon presentation of the pproval letter to me as site administrator for Walter Bracken STEM Elementary School, gree to allow access for the approved research project.

ve any concerns or need additional information, the project researcher will be contacted ill contact Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at 310-568-5753.

ly,

Kathleen Decker 4/28/16

re of Principal/Division Department Head Date

Kathleen Decker / Principal

me and Title

APPENDIX P

Nate Mack Elementary School

3170 Laurel Avenue Henderson, NV 89014 (702) 799-776(

"Success through Teamwork"

Nancy Heavey
Principal

Kelly Epperson
Assistant Principal

Letter of Acknowledgement of a Research Project at a CCSD Facility

Ashley J. Hardison
Pepperdine University
Educational Leadership, Psychology, and Administration Program
Institutional Review Board
6100 Center Drive Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90045

Subject: Letter of Acknowledgement of a Research Project at a CCSD Facility

Dear Ms. Hardison:

This letter will acknowledge that I have reviewed a request by Ashley Hardison of Pe University to conduct a research project entitled, Achieving Literacy Excellence Thro Identifying and Utilizing High Yield Strategies at Nate Mack Elementary School.

When the researcher has received approval for her project from Pepperdine University Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board, received approval from County School District (CCSD) Research Review Committee, and upon presentation c CCSD approval letter to me as site administrator for Nate Mack Elementary School, I to allow access for the approved research project.

If we have any concerns or need additional information, the project researcher will be or we will contact Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at 310

Sincerely,

Nancy Heavey 4/29/16

Research Project Approval: Nate Mack Elementary School

APPENDIX Q

Letter of Approval from CCSD

ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, RESEARCH,
AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
4212 Eucalyptus Avenue • Las Vegas, Nevada 89121 • (702) 799-1041 • FAX (702) 799-5067

CCSD
CLARK COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT

May 24, 2016

Ms. Ashley Jenkins Hardison
[redacted]

Dear Ms. Hardison:

The Research Review Committee of the Clark County School District has reviewed your request entitled: *Achieving Literacy Excellence Through: Identifying and Utilizing High Yield Strategies & Application #132.* The committee is pleased to inform you that your proposal has been approved with the following provisos:

1. Participation is strictly and solely on a voluntary basis,
2. Provide letter of acceptance from any additional principals who agree to be involved with the study.

This research protocol is approved for a period of one year from the approval date. The expiration of this protocol is 05/23/2017. If the use of human subjects described in the referenced protocol will continue beyond the expiration date, you must provide a letter requesting an extension *one month* prior to the date of expiration. The letter must indicate whether there will be any modifications to the original protocol. If there is any change to the protocol it will be necessary to request additional approval for such change(s) in writing to the Research Review Committee.

Please provide a copy of your research findings to this office upon completion. We look forward to the results. If you have any questions or require assistance please do not hesitate to contact this office at (702) 799-5195 or e-mail at saboke@nv.ccsd.net.

Sincerely,

Kent E. Sabo, Ph.D.
Coordinator III
Department of Accountability & Research
Co-Chair, Research Review Committee

APPENDIX R

IRB Approval

PEPPERDINE

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: April 22, 2016

Protocol Investigator Name: Ashley Hardison

Protocol #: 16-02-199

Project Title: Achieving Literacy Excellence Through: Identifying and Utilizing High Yield Strategies

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Ashley Hardison:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chairperson

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

APPENDIX S

Parental Notification Letter: English

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

PARENTAL NOTIFICATION LETTER

Dear Parent,

My name is Ashley Hardison and I am conducting a research study in your child's class. I am interested in studying the most effective literacy practices, that promotes literacy growth among students.

I will be in your child's class once for one week for about an hour per session. While I'm in the classroom, I will observe the teacher's instructional methods and take notes. I will not record your child's name or any other materials that will identify your child. I may collect writing samples, but I will have the teacher remove your child's name before giving them to me. Your child will not do anything outside of his/her/your normal classroom activities and there is no risk to your child. Your child's participant will not affect his/her grade.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, or if you would like to withdraw your child from the study, please contact me at:

Ashley Hardison
[redacted]

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact:
Dr. Judy Ho, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB)
Pepperdine University
Graduate School Education and Psychology
6100 Center Drive Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90045
Telephone: (310) 568-2305
Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu
Website: www.pepperdine.edu/irb

Sincerely,

Ashley Hardison

APPENDIX T

Parental Notification Letter: Spanish

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

PARENTAL NOTIFICATION LETTER

Estimados Padres,

Mi nombre es Ashley Hardison y estoy realizando un estudio en la clase de su hijo/a. Estoy interesada en estudiar las prácticas más efectivas que promuevan la alfabetización entre los estudiantes.

Yo estaré en la clase de su niño/a una vez en una semana por aproximadamente una hora. Mientras este en el salón, Yo estaré tomado apuntes y observando los métodos instruccionales del maestro. No se registrara el nombre de su niño/a o ningún otro documento que identifique a su niño/a. Puede que se recolecten muestras de escritura. Antes de colectar las muestras la maestra quitara el nombre del estudiante antes de entregármelos. Su niño/a no hará nada fuera de las actividades normales que se hacen dentro del salón de clase y no habrá ningún riesgo a su niño/a. La participación de su niño/a no afectara sus calificaciones.

Si tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud acerca del estudio, o si quisiera retirar a su niño/a de este estudio, por favor póngase en contacto con migo al:

Ashley Hardison
[redacted]

Si tiene preguntas acerca de sus derechos como participante del estudio, por favor llame a:
Dr. Judy Ho, Ph.D
Chair, Graduate & Professional Schools Instructional Review Board (GPS IRB)
Universidad de Pepperdine
Facultad de Educación y Psicología
6100 Center Drive Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90045
Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu
Website: www.pepperdine.edu/irb

Sinceramente,

Ashley Hardison