Spring 2003

A case study of reading education for middle school students with learning disabilities

John Arthur Sargent

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A CASE STUDY OF READING EDUCATION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

John Arthur Sargent, B.A., M.S.

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

May 2003
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

May 24, 2003
Date

We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

John Arthur Sargent entitled A Case Study of Reading Education for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education.

Recommendation concurred in:

Supervisor of Dissertation

Head of Department
Curriculum, Instruction & Leadership

Department

Advisory Committee

Approved:
Director of Graduate Studies

Dean of the College

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate The Achieve Reading Curriculum, a reading curriculum based on whole language principles designed for middle school students with learning disabilities. A qualitative intrinsic case study was conducted using four sixth grade middle school students with learning disabilities as participants. Ethnographic methodology was used to focus on the multifaceted structure of classroom life and to acquire a thorough understanding of the connections between participants and teacher. A teacher as researcher approach facilitated insights on a daily basis due to the interaction between participants and teacher.

Data collection procedures included observations/field notes, teacher journal, student interviews, parent interviews, and student written work. Categories were generated through the constant comparison method with continual refining and analysis.

The participants' reading ability developed as a result of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Data indicated the participants demonstrated their developing reading ability through increasing levels of class involvement, class discussions, novel study, teacher interview results, writing activities, and time on task/reading attending behaviors. The motivation of the participants to read increased due to components of the Achieve Reading Curriculum, an increase in class participation and discussion, and stronger writing and creativity efforts produced by the participants as the study progressed. Parental support was critical to the effective implementation of the program and the
success of the participants. The perceptions parents had of the program and its results, the reading encouragement offered by the parents to the participants and the teacher appreciation were demonstrative of their support.

Data triangulated from parent interviews, student interviews, student written responses, teacher-researcher observations/fieldnotes, and teacher journal suggest the Achieve Reading Curriculum, based on whole language principles, can be effective in developing and improving the reading ability, enhancing the motivation to read, and facilitating parental support and involvement of middle school students with learning disabilities.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to the following individuals who helped me throughout the dissertation process and who provided me with support and encouragement during my doctoral studies.

Special thanks go to Dr. Dale Johnson and Dr. Cay Evans who provided inspiration and advice to me many times over the course of the last four years. I thank my fellow doctoral students whose friendship and support kept me going during many frustrating experiences. Their camaraderie sustained me through some demanding tasks. Heartfelt thanks go to James McCain, a teacher colleague, and Dr. Kay Gandy, who kept providing words of encouragement to me.

To Dr. Kimberly Kimbell-Lopez, my major professor, thank you for continuing to believe in my research approach. Your support and suggestions were very valuable as I completed this dissertation. Thank you committee members-Dr. Pauline Leonard, Dr. Ava Pugh, and Dr. William White for your time and insight as I completed this difficult task. Thank you Dr. Kathryn Matthew for providing advice and encouragement during the prospectus stage.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Kathy, for her unending support over the last four years. Without your help and encouragement I could not have accomplished my journey.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A special education resource teacher’s life is challenging. Capturing a small portion of the challenge is this poem, written by a special educator:

Teachers
Try to fit kids into neat little boxes
With the label “Good Student”
Stamped on top.
But what happens to those kids
Who don’t fit the shape of the box?
When the lid is closed,
Sections burst out,
The box unable to contain its contents.
No matter how hard the struggle
The child just won’t fit!
Which do we throw out
The box
or the child?
(Furst, 1997, p. 1)

This poem provides the premise for this case study. This researcher presumes that traditional approaches used with middle school students with learning disabilities may be damaging to the reading development of these students. This researcher maintains these learning difficulties are made worse by some of the learning tasks involved in learning to read (Moustafa, 1997; Weaver, 1994).

Many times, the middle school student with learning disabilities is considered to be somehow deficient and is referred to as a problem. Weaver (1994) stated that the fault
was in a system that failed to prevent the damage in the first place. Labeling children as a
special needs students by classifying them as learning disabled only makes the problem of
establishing an effective instructional methodology for those children more difficult.
Weaver averred that we must recognize that environment in general and education in
particular play a major part in the initiation, diagnosis, and continuation of such
difficulties.

Weaver (1994) argued that factors located in the environment and factors located
within the individual's neurological background influence and enter into a diagnosis of
learning disabilities. Weaver stated that a person's genetic make-up may result not only
from heredity but also from prenatal conditions, birth trauma, and postnatal injury.
Weaver theorized that a person's neurological functioning and consequent
reading/learning behaviors resulted not only from his or her genetic make-up but also
from how reading was conceptualized, taught and assessed. Finally, Weaver stated that a
person being diagnosed as learning-disabled results not only from his or her overt
reading/learning behaviors and achievement but also from how learning disabilities are
defined. In other words, the concept of learning disabilities reflects an idea of reading and
learning and assessment as much or more than the actual neurological functioning of the
individual.

Many reading programs attempt to teach skills by breaking the skills down into
little bits and pieces that have little meaning for the student. Some researchers have
advocated a phonics-only approach when teaching students with learning disabilities
(Adams, 1990). Too often, students with learning disabilities become frustrated, tune out,
and drop out when confronted with such a curriculum (Moustafa, 1997). Learning to read
is one of the most important tasks a person undertakes in his or her life. Without the
ability to read, the functioning of the individual is severely hampered in the tasks of
everyday living (Weaver, 1994). Coles (2000) purported that the current push towards
phonemic awareness as the chief causal influence in learning to read is a mistake.
Additionally, Coles attacked the burgeoning reliance on skills-based programs as a
panacea in learning to read. The Achieve Reading Curriculum attempts to bridge the gap
by providing a whole language reading program for middle school students with learning
disabilities.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum is based on social constructivist principles.
Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1962) enables the learner to make meaning and
promotes learning through collaboration. The learner engaged in the Achieve Reading
Curriculum is allowed to construct meaning by interacting with self-selected texts in a
social environment. Furthermore, this learner is led by a teacher who acts as a facilitator
and encourages the learner to engage in reading and respond to reading at their
instructional level.

During the first year of teaching students with learning disabilities, this researcher
was confronted with a troubling fact. Often, in one class, reading abilities spanning 12
grades were present. Reaching and teaching these students was this researcher’s
motivation for the development of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. The Achieve
Reading Curriculum was developed as part of this researcher’s doctoral study program. It
emerged from and is based on eight years of classroom experience working with students
with learning disabilities. For the past five years, this researcher has been interested in a
whole language approach to reading instruction for these students and developed this curriculum based on that interest.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum includes student choice and active learning as its primary mission. McCray (2001a) showed support for this in a recent study that surveyed eighth grade students with learning disabilities. McCray's students were asked what they would tell their language arts teacher to do differently. The student responses demonstrated great support for choosing books that they wanted to read, having a large selection of books available to read at many different grade levels, being taught the same way every day, being helped to read individually, and being provided help in decoding words. All of these tasks are included as part of the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

This researcher believes that the teacher is a vital part of the classroom community and has individual ways of constructing knowledge, analyzing students' abilities, deciding on assignments, and collaborating with students. In an environment of social constructivism, this researcher also has certain beliefs and values that need to be explored. Therefore, using a teacher as researcher model of research was appropriate for this intrinsic case study.

Theoretical Model

The theoretical model for this study and the Achieve Reading Curriculum is whole language. Whole language is not a set of static beliefs. It is a dynamic philosophy of education that has nine beliefs common to whole language practitioners (see Figure 1). The Whole Language Umbrella of The National Council of Teachers of English (2002) stated that these nine beliefs formed the core theoretical background of what whole language encompasses.
Holistic Approach to Literacy

Positive View of All Learners

Language is Central to Human Learning

Learning is Easiest Whole to Part

Empowers Learners and Teachers

Learning is Both Personal and Social

Learning Builds on Prior Knowledge

Learning is Both Joyous and Fulfilling

Accepts all Learners and Cultures

Whole Language

Figure 1. Whole Language Beliefs
Weaver (1990) declared that whole language is a system of education that allows teachers to accept children who come from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, Weaver affirmed that students in whole language classes are expected to succeed in reading and writing whole texts and are provided scaffolding for learning skills as they progress. Furthermore, Weaver advocated that whole language teachers work to fit the curriculum to the students.

Weaver, Gillmeister-Krause, and Vento-Zogby (1996) have affirmed whole language is patterned after a constructivist view of learning with particular emphasis on the development of literacy. Weaver et al. averred that whole language has the following key characteristics: (a) Acceptance of all learners, (b) flexibility within structure, (c) a supportive classroom community, (c) expectations for student success as they engage in real reading and writing, (d) skills taught in context of real reading and writing, (e) teacher support for scaffolding and collaboration, and (f) contextualized assessment that emphasizes an individual’s growth as well as their accomplishments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how the Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities. Additionally, this intrinsic case study investigated how the Achieve Reading Curriculum, within a supportive classroom environment, increased the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read. Finally, parental involvement was studied to explain how the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities supported the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. If this curriculum emerged as effective, a new way of viewing reading instruction for students with learning disabilities

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would result. With this new paradigm, the student with learning disabilities could be provided an opportunity to succeed in reading.

Research Questions

1. How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities?

2. Within a supportive classroom atmosphere, how does the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhance the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read?

3. How do the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities support the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum?

Definition of Terms

Achieve Reading Curriculum

The Achieve Reading Curriculum is a curriculum modeled on constructivist and whole language principles, which are explained in the review of literature section. It is designed to teach and explore reading by utilizing books the students choose. Additionally, an analytical approach to phonics instruction is inherent in this framework. Real reading tasks are centered on each learner’s abilities and become a focus of instruction. Few worksheets are present and assessment is guided by a portfolio approach.

Analytical Phonics

Analytical phonics instruction proceeds from whole to parts. In essence, it progresses from whole text, to words, to word parts. It is instruction that occurs after reading takes place (Moustafa, 1997).
**Special Education Student**

A student classified according to Louisiana and Caddo Parish guidelines (2001) as having one or more disabilities. This study addresses students with learning disabilities.

**Learning Disabled**

A student with a disability in receiving, organizing, or expressing information. These children are of average intelligence but have difficulty listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing or doing arithmetic, and this results in a significant discrepancy between ability and achievement (Weaver, 1996).

State of Louisiana and Caddo Parish (2001) guidelines also require that the learning problems of the student must not be due to any of the following factors: (a) lack of educational opportunity, (b) emotional stress in the home, (c) lack of motivation, (d) difficulty adjusting to school, (e) temporary crisis situation, (f) other disabling conditions, (g) cultural differences, (h) environmental deprivation, (i) economic disadvantage, or (j) lack of appropriate instruction. Furthermore, the student must demonstrate evidence of a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability as shown by a difference of at least one standard deviation between the strongest and weakest performance in certain academic areas. The student's strength is defined as no more than one standard deviation below the mean, and the deficit is defined as greater than two standard deviations below the mean. The academic areas considered for this comparison are basic reading, reading comprehension, oral expression, math calculations, math reasoning, listening comprehension, and written expression skills.
Reading Ability

The ability of the reader to construct meaning from a text by the interaction of the visual aspects of the words and text, the letter sound relationships, the context, word meanings and the reader's prior knowledge and experience (Weaver et al., 1996).

Teacher Researcher

A teacher who seeks an answer to a research question by conducting research in his or her classroom setting by keeping anecdotal records, recording classroom conversations, holding conferences with learners, and collecting student artifacts (Dilliard & Bintz, 1996-7; Donahue, Van Tassell, & Patterson, 1996).

Intrinsic Case Study

A case study where there is an inherent interest in the case for its own sake. According to Stake (1995), the interest lies in studying the particulars of the case being examined and not in generalizing the results to other situations.

Whole Language

A learning model and system based on constructivist learning principles. Additionally, it has flexibility within structure where students have choices and take responsibility for their choices. Whole language classrooms encourage a supportive classroom community and it is a place where expectations for success are individualized as students engage in real reading and writing. Skills are taught in context and teachers provide support for learning through collaboration and scaffolding. Assessment occurs in the context of learning and emphasizes an individual's growth and accomplishments (Weaver, 1994).
**Reductionistic Learning Theory**

Reductionistic learning theory is a process by which ideas and concepts are broken into parts in an attempt to understand and deal better with learning the whole (Poplin, 1988).

**Constructivist Learning Theory**

Constructivist learning theory describes the learning process in terms of construction of new knowledge and meanings by the learner within the context of his or her current knowledge. This approach advocates that a complex whole such as human learning cannot be broken into component parts in order to design more effective practice in assessment and instruction (Poplin, 1988).

**Significance of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to determine how the Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities in one classroom located in northwestern Louisiana. Information from this teacher researcher intrinsic case study was useful in determining if this type of approach was effective for middle school students with learning disabilities. This study was a first step in examining an alternative approach to reading instruction for students with learning disabilities. Additionally, this study examined this type of curriculum within the context of a supportive classroom atmosphere and determined how it enhanced the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read. Motivating a student with learning disabilities to engage in reading is a difficult task. Important information on motivating the student with learning disabilities to read was obtained. Vaughn, Moody, and Schunn (1998) established that students with special needs are not supported well in
the typical resource room. If the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhanced the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read, a new paradigm of reading instruction would be enabled.

Parents were an integral part of this curriculum. Each student was required to read for 15 minutes each night with the assistance of a parent or other adult. Examining how parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities supported the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum provided important information on the level of parental support and involvement.

Limitations of the Study

There were three main limitations to this study. First, this was an intrinsic case study and was, therefore, limited to one middle school reading classroom during a period of 12 weeks. The unique interactions of the class and the surrounding environment were also of interest. The interactions of the students in this class might differ from those in other classes. Their motivation, parental involvement, development of a supportive classroom environment, and how their reading ability developed in the Achieve Reading Curriculum might be different in other classes. Therefore, the results of this case study are of limited use in generalizing to other situations. Stake (1995) declared that the purpose of an intrinsic case study was for the reader to generalize from the results to his or her situation. This case study allows the reader to make inferences from the findings to his or her situation and fills an important need among teachers of middle school students with learning disabilities.

Second, this researcher advocates the whole language approach to reading instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities. There are other
approaches to teaching reading to middle school students with learning disabilities (Adams, 1990). The results and conclusions of this intrinsic case study were influenced by this researcher's personal biases regarding the efficacy of this approach.

Third, other limitations resulted from the types of data analysis performed and the role this researcher filled as a teacher researcher. Bias may exist because this researcher wanted the students to achieve success. Details of this researcher's role and data analysis are discussed in Chapter 3.

Despite the limitations of this study, this researcher believes that studying a whole language reading curriculum like Achieve on middle school students with learning disabilities provided valuable information. The results from this study might stimulate new approaches in reading instruction for students with learning disabilities and other students with special needs.

Conclusion

Stake (1995) defined the importance of an intrinsic case study as being the unique value of the case being studied. This case study provided important information regarding a method of reading instruction for students with learning disabilities. Students having difficulty learning to read have been taught using primarily skills based and phonemic awareness programs (Coles, 2000). The Achieve Reading Curriculum is based on whole language reading principles and provides a direct contrast to the curriculum usually recommended for students with learning disabilities. Information obtained from this intrinsic case study provides vital data to those researchers who wish to examine whole language reading methods for students with learning disabilities on a larger scale.
A teacher as researcher case study that examines a reading curriculum based on whole language reading methods is a first step in exploring the efficacy of this approach for students with learning disabilities. Donahue, Van Tassell, and Patterson (1996) stated the teacher researcher is the essential link between classroom practice and the university community. Additionally, Mohr (1996) assumed that teachers at all grade levels and in all different kinds of teaching situations would be conducting research and presenting that information to their colleagues. Mohr deemed teacher researchers as contributors to the knowledge base of the profession and participants as equal partners in the profession. This teacher as researcher qualitative study began the assessment of a reading methodology not previously attempted by the research community for students with learning disabilities.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to provide background and insight into the research questions of this study, this chapter reviews the literature of four specific areas. The first area of review is the concept of whole language reading instruction. This scrutiny serves as background to answer the research questions posed by this researcher in Chapter 1.

The second area is the reading ability of students considered to be learning disabled. This review will directly address the first research question in the study: How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities? Students labeled as learning disabled face tremendous obstacles in learning to read (Weaver, 1994). Examining research claiming to develop their reading ability provides insights into helping them find ways to succeed.

The third area of review is motivational aspects of learning to read for middle school students with learning disabilities and deals with the second research question: Within a supportive classroom learning environment, how does the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhance the motivation of a middle school student with learning disabilities to read? Hootstein (1998) stated that motivating the unmotivated middle school student is challenging.
He affirmed that instruction must be relevant to the needs, concerns, interests, and experiences of the student. Additionally, this instruction should be provided in an interesting manner, be rewarding, and include expectations for student success. Providing such instruction for students with learning disabilities is daunting. Investigating how these students are motivated enables the teacher to empower these students to experience success.

The fourth area of review addresses the third research question: How do the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities support the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum? The importance of the home environment to the academic success of a middle school student with learning disabilities cannot be overstated. Parental involvement is critical to the success these students experience in school (Brooker, 1997). Examining the literature on parental involvement provides clues to understanding this occurrence.

Therefore, this literature review begins by concentrating on what may be a problem in addressing the needs of special education learners. It asks the reader to begin the process of a paradigm shift from a behavioristic/reductionistic way of viewing instruction to a constructivist/whole language approach.

Whole Language Reading Instruction

Whole language reading is an outlook on education, a philosophy of education, a belief system about education. It is an educational theory that is research based (Harste, 1989).
Whole language reading education is a constructivist view of learning with particular emphasis on the development of literacy. Constructivism asserts that human beings develop concepts through their own intellectual interactions and actions with the world. Learning is not viewed as passive, but as an active continuing process. Developing reading skills is easier when learners are presented with authentic reading material (Weaver et al., 1996). In the U.S., the beginning of whole language is traced back to the middle 1970s when Kenneth Goodman and others' insights into reading as a psycholinguistic approach gained recognition (Weaver, 1994). According to Weaver (1990), acceptance of learners meant that all learners were accepted regardless of their cultural or socio-economic background or other characteristics or labels. Likewise, in whole language reading classrooms acceptance of learners also means that whole language reading teachers develop the classroom environment and the curriculum for and with the students, to meet their needs and excite them in learning about what interests them, as well as covering curriculum guidelines.

Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores (1991) concluded that students in whole language reading classes were not kept busy doing readiness activities in preparation for later reading and writing but instead were given the support they needed to read whole texts from the beginning. Whole language reading teachers discovered from their classroom experiences that virtually all children can learn to read whole texts, even those so called special education students who before were sent to self-contained classes or resource rooms.

Reading skills are taught through mini-lessons and conferences, in the context of students' reading. As an example: phonics is taught mainly through discussion and
activities derived from texts the students read and reread with the teacher, and through writing the sounds they hear in words. Skills are taught when students are engaged in real life tasks (Watson, 1989).

Poplin (1988, p. 405) lists 12 basic principles of the constructivist/whole language model of reading education. They include the following points:

1. The whole of the learned experience is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. The interactions of the learned experience transform both the individual's spiral (whole) and the single experience (part).
3. The learner's spiral of knowledge is self-regulating and self-preserving.
4. All people are learners, always actively searching for meaning and constructing new meanings.
5. The best predictor of what and how someone will learn is what they already know.
6. Learning often proceeds from whole to part to whole.
7. Errors are critical to learning.
8. Learners learn best from experiences about what they are passionately interested and involved.
9. The development of accurate forms follows the emergence of function and meaning.
10. Learners learn best from people they trust.
11. Experiences connected to the learner's present knowledge and interests are learned best.
12. Integrity is a primary characteristic of the human mind.

Directly contrasting with this approach is the phonics-based approach that consists of breaking reading into small steps or skills and building the reading ability of a learner one small step at a time (Adams, 1990). Successful reading is first measured as the ability

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to pronounce words isolated from textbooks. Learning proceeds from the part to the whole and reading cannot take place unless the pronunciation of words is mastered.

Reading Ability

Examining the literature related to the development of reading ability for students in whole language classrooms is necessary. Additionally, the literature investigating the development of reading ability in students with learning disabilities needs to be analyzed. This inquiry, first into the development of reading ability for regular education students in whole language classrooms and then into the development of reading ability for students with learning disabilities, is related to the first research question: How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities?

The measurement of student development in reading ability is complicated. Weaver (1994) affirmed that standardized testing does not measure a student's true reading ability. Making meaning is the essential ingredient of a good reader. Evaluating this process cannot be done by a single standardized test. Moreover, measuring the reading achievement of students with learning disabilities is a complex assignment (Weaver, 1994). This researcher has witnessed many students with learning disabilities experience difficulties in pronouncing words, yet understand the central message of the reading assignment they were undertaking.

The instruction received by students with learning disabilities often takes place in the resource room. Vaughn, Moody, and Schumm (1998) described instruction in this setting as inappropriate for these students. Very little attention was paid to the individual needs of the students with learning disabilities despite the legal requirement to do so.
Examining the reading achievement of students with learning disabilities placed in these settings may lead this researcher to false conclusions. Effective instruction should consider the needs of all students (Weaver, 1994). Raising the reading ability of all students is the benchmark for effective reading instruction. Therefore, this researcher will address two areas pertaining to the development of reading ability. First, the development of reading ability in whole language classrooms will be investigated. Next, the development of reading ability in students with learning disabilities will be explored.

**Development of Reading Ability in Whole Language Classrooms**

Students in whole language classrooms seem to develop greater ability to use phonics knowledge more effectively than children in more traditional classrooms where skills are practiced in isolation. In Freepon’s (1991) study, 12 children in two first-grade classrooms that utilized a whole language approach were compared with 12 children in two first-grade classrooms that used a skills based approach. Freepon discovered that the children in the two whole language classrooms had a better sense that reading was constructing meaning with print and were almost twice as successful in sounding out words.

A 1990 study by Stice and Betrand focused on emergent literacy of at-risk students. The study involved 50 primary age students over a two-year period and concluded that students in whole language reading classrooms were more aware of alternative strategies for dealing with problems, such as particular words. Furthermore, the students in whole language classrooms appeared to focus more on meaning and the communicative nature of language. Likewise, the students in whole language classrooms seemed to develop greater independence in both reading and writing.
test scores (Stanford Achievement Test) of students in whole language classrooms were slightly better than the scores of children in traditional classrooms. Students in whole language classrooms seem to develop more strategies for dealing with problems in reading. In the study by Stice and Betrand, students typically developed six strategies for dealing with problem words, while students in skills based classrooms developed only three.

A recent qualitative study (Freepon & McIntyre, 1999) showed that students from a constructivist-based, whole language classroom read far longer than did the students from a skills-based classroom. Additionally, the level of courage, persistence, and application of reading strategies were different. The students from the constructivist-based classroom had greater breadth in knowing what being a reader encompasses and a greater willingness to try. The authors asserted that this difference would not be captured on standardized measures of reading. Additionally, similar results were obtained in relation to classroom oral reading proficiency. A study by Cantrell (1999) on Kentucky’s Educational Reform Act showed that students from classrooms where teachers used a meaning-centered whole language approach achieved higher reading and writing scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, providing evidence that whole language reading education does increase scores on a standardized test.

Daniels and Zemelman (1999) presented conclusive evidence that whole language instruction works. They reviewed more than 60 years of research demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach to beginning reading instruction. The authors discovered that 15 studies validated the comparative effectiveness, at a statistically significant level, of one or another element used in whole language classrooms. Additionally, five studies
showed significantly higher test scores in broader whole language classrooms than in traditional classrooms. One study showed no difference between whole language and traditional classrooms while two smaller case studies demonstrated the effectiveness of whole language models of reading instruction. Daniels and Zemmelman encouraged the opponents of whole language instruction to examine the research and conclude this form of instruction is powerful for the beginning reader.

Development of Reading Ability in Students with Learning Disabilities

Since the early 1990s some prominent researchers have argued for skills-based programs to help struggling and beginning readers learn to read. (Adams, 1990; Stahl, 1992). Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, and Seidenberg (2002) affirmed that beginning and struggling readers were more successful when they received systematic phonics instruction, instruction that was grounded in reductionistic theory building the reader’s ability one skill at a time.

Opposition to whole language instruction. Groff (1998) maintained that a balanced approach to reading instruction incorporating literature is a mistake. Readers prospered only when they received direct, explicit instruction in the phonetic code. Additionally, Groff promoted the idea that phonics taught within the context of reading books was out of touch with the scientific evidence. Frost and Emery (1995) suggested direct instruction in language analysis and the alphabetic code for students having dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Frost and Emery claimed that explicit instruction in the segmenting and blending of sounds would increase reading achievement.

A recent study followed 166 students ranging in age from 7 to 13 years who were diagnosed with developmental reading disability. These students underwent intensive
training in word identification education. This training, when focused on phonological
processing, produced significant outcomes in word identification (Lovett, Steinbach, &
Frijters, 2000).

Phonics instruction programs based on direct instruction methods are often used to
instruct students having difficulty learning to read. One of the problems these programs
may have lies in the view that there are no connecting themes among them and the
different programs may be hampering the learning of the very students they are designed
to help (Stahl, 1998). Stahl asserted that only by the teacher choosing one program to
utilize for the student, could the teacher empower the student to advance in their reading
ability.

A meta-analysis of 272 studies on effective methods to teach reading was
conducted by the National Center for Learning Disabilities (Swanson, 2002). This meta­
analysis examined research conducted over the past 30 years and produced several
findings related to intervention for students with learning disabilities. The most effective
form of teaching children with learning disabilities to read combined components of direct
instruction and strategy instruction. Important components of this combined model
included: (a) sequencing, (b) drill-repetition practice, (c) directed questioning and
responses, (d) control of task difficulty, (e) use of technology, (f) teacher-modeled
problem solving, and (g) small group instruction.

Carroll (2000) asserted the correct method for teaching students with learning
disabilities was straightforward. Incorporating psychological testing into the prerequisites
for successful teaching, Carroll claimed that a teacher need only find the correct
psychological test to diagnose the student's reading difficulties. Once diagnosed, the

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correct method for teaching reading could be identified and the proper corrective reading
instruction then instituted. Carroll stressed that a direct instruction approach was
necessary for the majority of students with learning disabilities.

Hooks and Peach (1993) demonstrated the effectiveness of a synthetic phonics
program for eight middle school youngsters in eighth grade. In this study, all of the
students improved their word recognition skills from 10 to 27% after 12 weeks of
intensive synthetic phonics lessons.

Advocates for whole language instruction. Directly contrasting with the previous
studies is a review of the empirical evidence for phonics instruction by Wyse (2000). Wyse
averred the existence of a weak link between phonics instruction and the research claiming
to support it for struggling readers. Garan (2001) produced a strong critique of various
claims made by researchers advocating a systematic phonics approach for teaching reading
to students with learning disabilities. Garan claimed there is inadequate evidence for the
assertion that systematic phonics instruction produced significant benefits for students
having difficulty learning to read. Furthermore, Garan claimed the impact on spelling
achievement was small for students who were poor spellers.

Lowe and Lowe (1992) discussed the usefulness of whole language reading
instruction for at risk readers. At risk readers were defined as those who exhibit difficulty
with word attack skills, have poor vocabulary attainment, and do not understand what
they read. They discussed the typical reading instruction for at-risk readers which
consisted of workbooks, skill exercises, and less challenging tasks than were given to their
more literate peers. Questioning this approach for at-risk readers, they described the
whole language reading classroom and its practices as being appropriate for a student with learning disabilities and being just what is needed in order to achieve success in reading.

Bartoli and Botel (1988) demonstrated how an obsessive testing of trivia and a skills-oriented curriculum that provided more of the same skills work in which students did not excel were problems in searching for answers to improving reading ability for students with learning disabilities. They contended these approaches frequently isolated students from their peers and from the authentic reading and writing that their peers were doing.

Beringer, Abbott, Zook, Ogier, Lemos-Britton, and Brooksher (1999) argued a whole language approach was effective for increasing reading ability. In this study, a teacher modeling spelling and sound relationships to beginning readers was effective in teaching students to recognize and spell words without explicit phonics rules being taught.

Showers, Joyce, Scanlon, and Schnaubelt (1998) created a reading program based on whole language principles for adolescents who enter high school two or more years below grade level in reading. This program encouraged the reader to choose books he or she was comfortable with and to spend significant amounts of time in independent reading. Their program significantly increased the reading achievement of these at-risk adolescents. At the end of one semester in this program, students had increased more than one year's grade level in reading as measured by the Abbreviated Stanford Achievement Test.

A study by Rankhorn, England, Collins, Lockavitch, and Algozzine (1998) discovered that a whole language reading program that employed age appropriate materials, promoted independence in reading, and used repetition, immediate performance feedback, and a consistent approach increased the grade equivalent score by 9 to 18
months on the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement over a six month period. At the conclusion of the study 31% of the students showed severe reading discrepancies, a 50% drop from the beginning of the program.

Vaughn, et al. (1998) demonstrated that reading instruction in the typical resource room for special education students was problematic. Most of the teachers (11 of 14) in their study used whole group instruction followed by independent seatwork. Additionally, only a few of the teachers provided individualized differential work to complete. In nine classrooms, all students, regardless of ability were asked to read the same book. Ten of the 14 teachers identified whole language as the central approach they used to teach reading. They stated that students were more motivated and enjoyed the skills taught in context in a whole language environment. Only three teachers instructed their students in word decoding skills. The teaching of comprehension strategies was non-existent.

During 41 observations, only one instance of teaching comprehension strategies occurred. Overall, Vaughn et al. (1998) stated that reading instruction in the resource room was a broken promise because of its failure to provide an individualized reading program. Furthermore, the authors asserted other broken promises existed for special education teachers who were guaranteed the time and resources necessary for instructing these students. While these observations are consistent with the notion that whole language instruction was not effective for students with learning disabilities, the whole language procedures observed by Vaughn et al. did not coincide with the procedures advocated by whole language theorists (Weaver, 1994; Weaver, et al., 1996).

Phinney (1988) also questioned the effectiveness of traditional approaches used to instruct students labeled learning disabled. She noted the value of evaluating the individual
processing styles of students and of planning instruction accordingly instead of forcing the students to be in instructional programs that prevent them from using their strengths. Phinney pointed out that instruction is often based on an analysis of language with the assumption that the smaller the visual or phonic unit a student had to deal with, the easier it was to learn. She stated that because of recent research, today's educators know the opposite is true.

Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2000) contended that special education teachers of middle school students nominated as effective teachers of literacy identified with a whole language philosophy that used themes to organize instruction and motivate students by using authentic tasks. However, the more severe the needs of the students, the more direct instruction the students received.

Motivating a Middle School Student with Learning Disabilities to Read

Motivating the middle school student with learning disabilities to read is a daunting task. By the time these students arrive in a special education classroom, they have labeled themselves as failures in reading. They have given up. Reading instruction for them has usually resulted in frustration (McCray, 2001b). Investigating new teaching strategies and methods that might motivate these students to engage in reading is crucial.

Weaver et al. (1996) asserted that whole language instruction encompassing whole to part or analytical phonics instruction method was the boost that many students needed to overcome their reading problems. Therefore, this section of the literature review begins with an exploration of how phonics is taught in the whole language classroom. After studying the teaching of phonics in a whole language classroom, the research covering the needs of middle school students considered at risk for reading failure or with learning disabilities of students and of planning instruction accordingly instead of forcing the students to be in instructional programs that prevent them from using their strengths. Phinney pointed out that instruction is often based on an analysis of language with the assumption that the smaller the visual or phonic unit a student had to deal with, the easier it was to learn. She stated that because of recent research, today's educators know the opposite is true.

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disabilities is probed. Finally, research focusing on middle school student preferences in reading will be examined.

*Teaching Phonics in a Whole Language Classroom*

In a recent study of how phonics is taught in a whole language environment, Dahl and Scharer (2000) demonstrated that phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonemic segmentation instruction consumed more than one third of instructional time. They documented that numerous opportunities existed during the class’s shared reading and writing time for instruction regarding vowel sounds and consonants. The data analysis revealed that teachers taught phonics strategies by giving procedural explanations about how to use the letter-sound concepts they were learning. In all of the classrooms observed, phonics instruction was woven into the daily whole language activities.

Dahl and Scharer (2000) maintained that long writing periods provided opportunities for children to deal with phonics concepts. Receiving help from the teacher and other students was a common occurrence. Additionally, teachers conducted phonics instruction by keeping track of the progress students were making and used various continuing assessments to help plan individual instruction. Writing samples, checklists, reading logs, and running records were used.

Moustafa and Maldonado-Cohen (1999) argued for a whole to part phonics instruction approach. This type of phonetic instruction was often practiced in the whole language reading classroom. Moustafa and Maldonado-Cohen contended that whole-to-part phonics instruction differed from traditional parts-to-whole phonics instruction in several ways. First, it grounded instruction in letter-sound correspondences in meaningful contexts and it built on spoken language instruction they already understood. Additionally,
it taught letter-sound correspondences (onsets, rimes, and syllables) using units of spoken language familiar to children. Moustafa and Maldonado-Cohen averred that this type of instruction is explicit, systematic, and extensive.

Whole language teachers use explicit help in developing phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge and decoding skills (Weaver, 1994). By teaching phonics through reading, minilessons, and writing, whole language reading teachers help students develop phonics knowledge in the context of books they enjoy reading and the stories they enjoy writing (Stahl & Kuhn, 1995).

Students' Needs and Motivation

Meeting the needs of a student will often motivate the student to become immersed in reading (Weaver, 1994). The literature concerning the needs of middle school students labeled at risk for reading failure and those with learning disabilities must be explored. The middle school student at risk for failure in reading often has undiagnosed learning disabilities. In addition, the concerns of both middle school students with disabilities and those without should be investigated in order to determine effective reading methods that will motivate these students to read.

Meeting the needs of middle school students with learning disabilities. A study by Maclnnins and Hemming (1995) linked the needs of students with learning disabilities to a whole language curriculum. Maclnnins and Hemming demonstrated that whole language is based on constructivist principles. It is a curriculum that is student centered because it places the needs of the student as the overriding factor. Students are allowed to take control of their learning and relate it to previous knowledge. The curriculum is language based and empowered the student to become a reader and writer. Each student is allowed
to progress as quickly as their ability allows. Therefore, it is an inclusive curriculum, which does not separate students with learning disabilities into separate rooms for skills-based instruction. The positive feeling each student attains because of this inclusion promoted positive attitudes towards learning. MacInnis and Hemming argued that whole language education encouraged social interaction, which required learners to interact with each other in a supportive environment. A whole to part relationship encouraged learner exploration of the language. Skills were taught when the student needed them in the totality of the language.

Lowe and Lowe (1992) listed items they considered vital for at risk reader success. First, teacher modeling of active engaged reading must be present in the learning environment. Second, students should be provided with choices to read and the responsibility for choosing this material needs to rest with the student. Third, the whole language reading environment must be an engaging, literate environment that promoted literacy. Next, students must be provided with time to read silently. Lowe and Lowe further suggested that an incentive program be developed for promoting this silent reading. Finally, Lowe and Lowe proposed that writing activities take place along side of reading activities because the development of reading and writing activities take place together.

Weaver et al. (1996) viewed the teacher as a mediator and a facilitator to guide and provide support to the learner when necessary. Flexibility is the operative word. Mini lessons were provided when needed to address needed skills and to help learners build the critical skills necessary for success. A whole language curriculum held promise for meeting
the needs of the middle school student with learning disabilities. It expanded the learning opportunities for all students.

Mastroperi, Scruggs, Mohler, Beranek, Spencer, Boon, and Talbot (2001) revealed that middle school students with serious reading difficulties enjoyed tutoring and social interaction more than the traditional classroom environment. The more individualized instruction available through tutoring motivated the student to engage in reading more.

In a recent study of stress for learning disabled middle school students, Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998) reported that students with learning problems described more academic stressors, more peer stressors, and more stressors related to teachers and classroom management. These students reported they had difficulty keeping up with the class work, trouble learning new things, and difficulty following the teacher's directions. Additionally, they had more snags in making new friends, were bothered by older kids more, and more fear of weapons or violence. Students with learning problems differed in their perception of social support. Wenz-Gross and Siperstein affirmed they received less support form their peers but more support from adults. Students with learning problems experienced a poorer adjustment and a lower self-esteem. A whole language reading curriculum built on each learner's strengths rather than weakness may be just the segue the special education or at risk reader needs to become less stressed and therefore more successful in school activities.

Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998) concluded that students with learning problems are a group at risk in middle school. They suggested these students need assistance with managing the academic, developmental, and social demands placed on them. A whole
language reading curriculum provided assistance and motivation for these students. For
the first time, they were free to become readers in their own right (Weaver, 1994).

Widdowson and Dixon (1996) demonstrated the positive effects that teacher
modeling of silent sustained reading has on student silent reading. For both low and
average achieving readers, substantial increases occurred in on-task behavior following the
introduction of concurrent modeling by the teacher. At risk and special needs youngsters
benefited from this form of teacher modeling. In a whole language reading environment
both the teacher and student engage in a learning process together with modeling as an
integral part demonstrated by the teacher. Widdowson and Dixon suggested modeling
behavior by the teacher prompted the at risk reader to read.

In a whole language learning environment, Weaver (1994) listed the following
practices as being especially notable for special education students: (a) special education
students are treated as capable and developing, (b) the learners' strengths are emphasized,
(c) the learners' unique learning abilities and strengths are valued, (d) the students' needs
and interests help guide the development of the curriculum, and (e) assessment is based
less on standardized tests and more on each student's individual growth during the
assessment period. This growth was measured by how well the student progressed
towards goals that were established for him or her during the assessment period. Finally,
the teacher supported the learning of all students, by developing a supportive and self-
esteem enhancing classroom atmosphere. In this atmosphere, the student was able to make
responsible choices and to take responsibility for their work.

Middle school student needs in reading. Hosking and Terberg (1998) have
examined what elements it takes for middle school students to be successful in literacy
programs. Their research focused on a student-centered environment that enabled the learner to be successful. A student-centered environment empowered the learner to make responsible choices and allowed the student to be in control of their learning. The curriculum Hosking and Terberg advocated included many of the types of activities that took place in a whole language reading classroom and were the same activities that promoted the growth and learning of special education students.

Sanacore (2000) argued that promoting the lifetime love of reading should be one of the most important goals in middle school. Sanacore further stated that middle school students should, through pleasurable reading, have the opportunity to apply skills to meaningful contexts, build general and specific knowledge, experience fluency with connected text, and do this in the context of meaningful texts. Sanacore asserted that whole language reading education is being bashed by the proponents of the standards-based initiatives. Furthermore, Sanacore supported middle school as a time of exploration and a time to discover things about the world and the self. Particularly for at risk and special needs youngsters, this period of exploration and self discovery was crucial to their development as a reader.

Rankhorn et al. (1998) reported middle school students in whole language reading classrooms had many opportunities to read independently to choose what they would read. Sometimes, their choices were inhibited by the curriculum. For example, students were able to choose from a number of books, but all of the options had to relate to the American Revolution or to some other topic. Rankhorn et al. stated that students were motivated to read despite the limited selection sometimes available to them. It seemed that even a limited choice encouraged the reluctant reader to take part in reading. The
important point here is that the student was able to choose. Many times the students were free to choose what they wanted to read. Even the least proficient reader was treated as a reader and was expected to read during this time of independent reading.

Student Preferences and Motivation

Reading preferences. In a qualitative study, Swartz and Hendricks (2000) discovered that students with special needs preferred horror stories, mystery stories, and action adventure books in that order. Additionally, R. L. Stine, the author of the Goosebumps series, was selected as the favorite author of five of the students while four others chose Stephen King. Other authors mentioned were: Marc Brown, Matt Christopher, and L. M. Montgomery. Very few students were concerned with the author’s writing style. Approximately one third of the students stated they would select a book based on a favorite character. Also, one third of the students described that the ability to relate to a character was important to them. Fifteen students stated that cover illustrations led them to select certain books. Eighteen students said they read the back of the book summaries before selecting a book. Another important factor in book selection was an appealing title as 14 students stated that this led them to select certain books. Sixteen students liked shorter books because they did not lose interest in the books. Books based on popular movies or television shows were popular as 11 students chose books for this reason. Some of the students (16) selected books based on a friend’s recommendation. Finally, most of the responses indicated that students used a variety of strategies for selecting books. The researchers concluded that students with special needs were not so different and wanted to enjoy the same books as typically developing children.
Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) reported the overwhelming top two preferences for middle school readers were scary stories and cartoons and comics. The availability of the most popular types of materials students read was limited in the typical school. The reasons were wide ranging. When *Goosebumps* was stocked in the library, the books would often remain checked out. Popular magazines disappeared quickly and were not replaced. Some librarians and teachers expressed the view that they wanted the students to read real books. Worthy et al.'s (1999) findings supported the view that there was an ever-increasing gap between students' preferences and materials that schools provided and recommended. The authors stated the best answer in motivating students to read was as simple as encouraging them to follow their interests and providing books that reached those interests in the reading classroom.

A. Cole (1998) asserted that beginner-oriented texts for the emergent and struggling reader during independent reading time may be just the segue that allows that reader to experience success. Reluctant readers in an eighth grade middle school classroom were motivated to read by the freedom of choice inherent in independent reading time. Cole avowed that once this choice was allowed, students' motivation transferred to more traditional types of reading that might take place in a more typical eighth grade class.

Additional research by Harmon (1998) supported this observation in a middle school classroom. Harmon also discussed how vocabulary development improved as a result of having time for independent reading in a literature-based middle school classroom. Harmon asserted that independent reading time exposed the student to an ever-
increasing vocabulary and improved overall vocabulary because the student was exposed
to more and more words as his or her reading improves.

_Reading and sharing_. Horn (2000) concluded that when students were allowed to
freely share literature with their classmates, many unmotivated learners participated in
class discussions. Her “Reader of the Day,” in which selected students gave book talks on
books they read, promoted student interaction with classmates. This interaction
empowered the students to make choices they valued regarding personal reading
selections. Consequently, students were more motivated to read when free choice of
reading material was part of the curriculum.

Cassady (1998) used wordless books as a tool to encourage and motivate reluctant
readers in a middle school classroom. In this study, the teacher led a group of middle
school students in story development by using wordless books as their basis for the story.
This technique motivated the reluctant middle school reader and demonstrated what a
powerful tool wordless books could be in boosting the growth of reluctant readers.

Whole language reading teachers have discovered that perhaps the best way to
develop students’ reading strategies as well as their understanding and appreciation of
literature is through discussion, particularly intensive small group discussion (Weaver,
1994). In these discussion groups everyone can share reactions to the literature, make
connections to their own lives, and discuss literary elements such as characterization,
symbol, theme, main idea, and summary. Group discussion enriched understanding
because the group as a unit constructed meaning. The members of the group discussed the
same book or different ones read by each member.
According to Roskos, Risko, and Vukelich (1998), good conversation and discussion were effective and sound methodologies for the conveyance of ideas. Students need the opportunity to discuss the reading before any true understanding can take place. This discussion made it easier for the students to cognitively process the ideas put forth in the reading and to gain an appreciation of what points the author was trying to make. Students allowed to discuss their reading become more motivated to read.

Worthy (1998) described the use of book talks to motivate reluctant middle school readers. He advised middle school teachers to (a) allow the students to choose the books they read for class, (b) let students talk to their friends about what they like to read, and (c) find some good books and other literary materials for your classroom. Worthy stated that students become motivated to read and discuss if these three suggestions are followed.

Gaskins (1998) concluded that teaching at-risk and delayed readers involved more than just good reading instruction. She avowed several reasons why her students learned to read. First, her students read numerous books and discussed what they read with the teacher and with other students. Second, students were taught about words using implicit phonics. Third, they were taught how to learn and how to use productive strategies across the curriculum in a whole language framework. Finally, the students were taught to take charge of their own personal learning style and motivation.
Parental Involvement

The importance of parental involvement in education is readily apparent. Educators have recognized the vital importance of increasing the level of parental involvement in education in order for students to be successful (Aiex, 1996). The literature of the field contains many books, journal articles and stand-alone reports on the subject of parents’ involvement in their children’s education (Cotton & Mann, 1994).

Students desire their parents to become involved in their education. In a Weekly Reader opinion poll surveying sixth graders, nearly 78% stated a desire for their parents to become more involved in their education (Starks-Martin, 1998). This researcher will first review literature involving ways to impact parental involvement in the reading process. Next, the review will consider methods used in empowering parents as partners in the student’s education.

Impacting Parental Involvement in Helping Students Learn to Read.

Cotton and Mann (1994) asserted there was a substantial amount of parental involvement already taking place at the middle school level. They reported parents were involved in open houses, conferences, dances, and more. One of the goals for educators is to get parents involved on a day-to-day basis, such as being involved in a daily reading activity.

Shumow and Miller (2001) investigated where the parents’ academic involvement took place. Parents’ academic involvement at home was associated negatively with young adolescents’ academic grades and a standardized achievement test score but was associated positively with their school orientation. Parental involvement at school was
associated positively with grades but not with either the standardized test score or school orientation.

Cuckle (1996) demonstrated the value of parents reading to their children at home. In this British study, parents were shown to lack confidence in knowing what to do when they read to their children who were emergent readers. Under the school's guidance, the parents became more involved in reading to their children. Likewise, Worthy and Hoffman (2001) demonstrated the positive effects teachers had on the reading engagement of students when they visited the homes of students and empowered the parents to become actively involved in reading to their children. Worthy and Hoffman claimed the home visits were beneficial because they allowed the teacher to monitor the reading engagement time of his or her students and assist the parents with reading instruction.

Powell-Smith, Stoner, Shinn, and Good (2000) investigated the effects of two parent-reading programs on student's reading achievement. One program used children's literature books and the other used the classroom basal reader. Participants in this study were 36 student-parent pairs assigned randomly to two treatment groups and a control group. This 15-week study comprised five weeks of baseline treatment where the parents were asked to read to their children, five weeks of treatment with the parents reading to the children four times per week, and five weeks of follow up. The tutoring took place four times a week for 20 minutes. The results indicated that neither tutoring program had a significant effect on student reading achievement.
Empowering Parents as Partners in Education

Chandler (1999) discussed the ways secondary English teachers might begin to tap strong reading relationships between parents and high school students. She stated that parents had a strong influence on what their children chose to read and advocated soliciting parents for more information pertaining to their children's reading habits. She suggested designing reading instructional activities in which both parents and students could participate and the inclusion of parents in text choices for reading assignments.

Pong (1997) argued that educators should consider the family structure when looking at the reading achievement of the eighth grade student. She suggested schools had growing numbers of students from single parent families, or stepfamilies, and this trend adversely influenced the student's achievement. She asserted this negative effect on achievement could be reversed when the social relations between parents and teachers were strong.

Thorp (1997) discussed the need for special educators to remove barriers relating to the parents' culture and language proficiency and to encourage parents to participate fully in their children's education. She argued for special educators to take the time to explore parental beliefs and wishes for their child, learn about the culture to build a trusting relationship, respect and value that culture, communicate with parents in many ways when they are from a different culture, make use of casual contacts, and schedule parent-teacher conferences at appropriate times.

While increasing parental involvement has positive effects on all students, McNeal (2001) stated the positive effect of parental involvement on achievement and behavior is greater for students from higher socio-economic (SES) levels. He asserted those students
belonging to a lower SES level obtained less positive effect even when their parents became involved in their education. McNeal affirmed the critical aspect of the parent child relationship seemed to be in the interaction that was fostered and developed.

Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, and Jones (2001) found parents involved themselves in homework because they believed they should be involved, that their involvement would be a positive influence in their child’s life, and perceived that their child’s teachers wanted them to be involved. The critical factor of the teachers wanting the parents to be involved served to spur their children to academic success.

Morris and Kaplan (1994) studied a book talk program designed to improve student reading at one middle school. In this program, students were given a list of 15 books from which to choose. The students signed up for five possible selections in order of their preference. Students were placed into groups according to their preferences, and were given about three weeks to read their books. Parents were invited to the book talks where the students discussed their books. The authors reported that many parents were surprised their children could discuss the assigned books so well and enjoyed the activity immensely.

Parent involvement in reading serves as a mechanism to increase reading interest and ability. Additionally, the parents’ role in the life of the middle school student is critical (Aiex, 1996). Faced with ever increasing demands for student achievement, examining how the parents of students in the Achieve Reading Curriculum support the curriculum will provide important information regarding ways to help develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities.
Summary

This literature review first examined the components of a whole language approach to reading instruction. From the research examined it was determined that its origins are research based, and that the approach primarily relies on a constructivist view of learning that emphasizes active rather than passive learning. Additionally, the 12 basic principles of the whole language/constructivist model as detailed by Poplin (1988) were listed.

Recent research on whole language reading education demonstrated that students in whole language reading classrooms do as well or better on standardized reading tests and subtests. Additionally, research promoting the usefulness of whole language instruction for developing the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities was examined. Some investigators demonstrated that whole language reading instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities increased the reading ability of these students. Literature on the importance of motivation for middle school students with learning disabilities was investigated. Research demonstrating that analytical phonics was taught in a whole language reading classroom was examined.

Research pertaining to motivating the middle school student labeled as at risk and those with learning disabilities was considered. Other studies were discussed that explored the needs of students with learning disabilities and how these needs could be fulfilled by participating in a whole language reading curriculum.

The reading preferences of middle school students with learning disabilities were also explored. The ability to choose books that were interesting was seen as a motivating factor for these students.
The literature on parental involvement in middle school and reading education was explored. Cotton and Mann (1994) asserted there was a substantial amount of parental involvement taking place at the middle school level.

Chapter 3 describes the design of a study that researched the Achieve Reading Curriculum in one middle school classroom for students with learning disabilities. Information about the setting, participants, teacher as researcher, data collection, procedures, and data analysis is included in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine how the Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities. Additionally, this intrinsic case study investigated how the Achieve Reading Curriculum within the context of a supportive classroom environment, motivated middle school students with learning disabilities to read. Finally, how parents supported the Achieve Reading Curriculum was investigated. If this curriculum emerged as effective, it provided support for a new way of viewing reading instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities. Questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities?

2. Within a supportive classroom-learning environment, how does the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhance the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities?

3. How do the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities support the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum?

The methodology explained in this chapter attempted to answer the three research questions. Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the study, listed the research questions,
described the significance and purpose of the study, and listed limitations. Chapter 2 provided information on whole language reading education, development of reading ability, motivation, and parental involvement. This chapter presents the design of the study, including setting, participants, teacher as researcher, procedures, data collection, trustworthiness, and data analysis.

A pilot study this researcher completed in the spring of 2001 served as the basis for this methodology. Data from the pilot study indicated six recurring patterns and themes emerging in the course of a ten-day study: the method and setting the Achieve Reading Curriculum uses, reading engagement behaviors, reading disengagement behaviors, interactions between students and between teacher and students, development of reading skill, and student written responses to the class chart. The pilot study was instrumental in formulating the research questions for this study. Subsequently, this longer study over the course of 12 weeks allowed for more data to be collected and different themes to emerge.

Teacher as Researcher

The use of teacher as researcher approach, a form of action research, is strongly supported in recent methodology literature. A teacher-researcher is a researcher who has engaged in systemic, intentional inquiry to study and better understand his or her classroom (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990). According to Baumann and Duffy (2001), a typical teacher researcher identifies a persistent teaching problem and decides to initiate a classroom study. The teacher researcher reads background literature, including other teacher-research reports if available, and then initiates a qualitative study to examine the classroom problem. Occasionally, a quantitative measure is included if the study warrants.
Baumann and Duffy explained teacher research in regards to several features: (a) teacher researchers have an insider, or emic, perspective, (b) they mix theory and practice while teaching and researching within their classroom worlds, (c) teacher research is pragmatic and goal oriented, and (d) teacher research involves disciplined inquiry.

Braithwaite (1995) maintained that a teacher has extended contact with students and through teacher research was able to answer questions regarding a curriculum or other situations in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers were in a position to observe students in several social and academic situations in the school setting and as a result, may have gained added insight into their classroom study.

Price (2001) argued that teacher research is an important tool in promoting reflective practice and educational change. Price advocated that teacher research has three critical components: (a) reflection and inquiry, (b) learning about the students in your classroom, and (c) social justice and democracy. This researcher believes this case study addresses all three of these components by examining a method of literacy for middle school students with learning disabilities.

Buschman (2001) reasoned that teacher research often provided information that was not readily available in a traditional research project. Buschman contended that traditional research works from the outside to inform teachers inside the classroom by extending what they know. Teacher research works from the inside by expanding what teachers understand. Buschman looked at the way fourth grade students were learning mathematics by interviewing them to discover how they solve different types of problems. The interviewing process provided a more accurate and complete picture of what the students knew and could do.
Calhoun (2002, p. 18) defined teacher research “as continual disciplined inquiry conducted to inform and improve our practice as educators.” Calhoun argued that teacher or action research asks educators to study their practice in the classroom and develop new and better ways of educating students based on the results. Calhoun maintained that teacher research often encountered resistance at first, but then became more widely accepted as the potential for student benefit was realized.

In a recent qualitative case study utilizing teacher research (Goodnough, 2001) multiple intelligence theory was explored in a high school classroom. Goodnough investigated multiple intelligence theory in the context of science education. This ethnographic case study focused on how one teacher interpreted and adapted multiple intelligence theory in the context of science teaching and learning. Triangulation of data was achieved by audio taped interviews, participant observer notes, and teacher journal.

A qualitative case study by Arthur (1999) utilized a teacher as researcher design to explore interactions taking place during a reading apprenticeship designed to facilitate the learning of reading strategies by adolescent students who were struggling in reading. The participants in this case study were two students chosen by the teacher researcher using purposive sampling. Data for the case study consisted of videotapes, student interviews, parent interviews, running records, and journal reflections by the teacher researcher.

Krimerman (2001) asserted that teacher research should be not be viewed in the same way as research in the natural sciences is scrutinized. Krimerman (p. 78) argued for “methodological separatism: the view that inquiries into human activities and social relationships require (at least some) different methods or approaches from those that operate within the natural or physical sciences.” Teacher research is a research
methodology that makes inquiry into human activities and social relationships that take place in the classroom setting. Additionally, Krimermann contended teacher research, as a form of action research, can exist collaboratively with conventional research.

Several books have advocated and described the role of teacher researchers. Donoahue, Van Tassell, and Patterson (1996) provided nine examples of teacher research being used successfully in the classroom. Additionally, Bisplinghoff and Allen (1998) discussed teacher research as it related to and interacted with the university research community. Increasingly, teacher researchers are being viewed as partners in improving the theoretical knowledge base of teaching as well as day-to-day teaching methods.

McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (1996) stated personal teacher development, improved professional practice, a stronger educational institution, and a contribution to society were the reasons for conducting teacher research. Teachers who researched their own classrooms became knowledgeable in the way their students learned, understood how to empower their students' learning, and reflected on ways to improve their teaching and consequently, their students' learning.

Mohr (1996) asserted that teacher researchers would contribute new definitions of what it means to teach. Additionally, Mohr stated that teacher researchers will contribute to the knowledge base of the profession and participate as equal partners in the discourse of the profession. Moreover, Mohr contended that teacher research will reshape the understanding of how children learn and would transform school into learning communities.

A teacher researcher was expected to be an active participant in the class and the research in order to investigate the realities of the participants as they occurred (Kamm,
Kamm (1998) declared that educators improve their teaching practices by researching their own classrooms, studying their own experiences, addressing issues of importance to their classrooms, describing people in action, and examining their own practices.

Atwell (1993) declared that educators who research and write about their own classrooms became effective teachers. These teacher researchers studying their own classrooms understood the learning environment of which they were a part and tailored their instruction for the best possible outcome. Teacher researchers maintained a viewpoint valuing the uniqueness of students and classrooms (Patterson & Shannon, 1993).

McFarland and Stansell (1993) stated teacher researchers, in the process of conducting research in their own classrooms, built theory in authentic settings, gained respect, and expanded learning opportunities for students. As teachers progressed through the research process they delved into the uniqueness of their own classroom setting and developed a true emic or insider perspective into the learning situation in their classroom.

The teacher as researcher approach enables students to become involved as co-researchers. According to Kamm (1998) participants were consulted to check if their perceptions were in alignment with those of the researcher. Teachers asked students to cross check written observations, role play situations for further clarification, and reflect on their own learning and progress. The student in a teacher researcher study was allowed to have a voice and become totally involved as they examined their own learning (Green & Blomme, 1997).
The teacher as researcher approach was well suited for this intrinsic case study. This researcher developed a specific reading curriculum to meet the needs of middle school students with learning disabilities. This intrinsic case study sought to examine this curriculum within the rigors of teacher research. Lincoln (1985, p. 141) believed the researcher “must be in constant interaction with the setting and its inhabitants in order to understand them.”

The use of a teacher as researcher approach was effective in discovering the multiple realities present in a classroom setting. For example, the teacher researcher remained in the setting to be studied and was able to ask questions as well as continually learn what questions to ask (Wolcott, 1988). Ultimately, the teacher researcher determined the questions to ask based on a classroom problem, modified the questions as the study progressed, used preexisting theory to guide the study, and created new theories of teaching, learning, and schooling (Baumann & Duffy, 2001).

Procedure

This section explains the naturalistic paradigm that served as a guide for this intrinsic case study. Additionally, the implementation of the Achieve Reading curriculum over the course of 12 weeks is explained. Finally, the sampling method used in this study is described.

*The Naturalistic Paradigm*

Qualitative studies can be difficult to design in a definitive way before the study is undertaken (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The discovery, insight, and understanding focus on meaning in the context of the case being studied (Stake, 1995). In this intrinsic case study, data were collected through open ended interviews with students and parents, teacher as
researcher observations recorded in a reflective journal, written responses to phonics study, and student responses to reading skill questions. A teacher researcher is allowed to gain insights on a daily low risk basis and is provided with an understanding of the realities of the people involved (Kamm, 1998).

Qualitative data are descriptive in nature, with themes and patterns emerging during the process of data collection. The results are presented qualitatively, using words and descriptions rather than numbers (Furst, 1997).

Implementation of the Achieve Reading Curriculum

The Achieve Reading Curriculum was implemented after the first three weeks of class for the school year 2002-2003. During the first three weeks of school, this researcher secured permission from the student participants, parents, and administration for the conduct of the intrinsic case study. Additionally, the student participants were oriented to the general environment of a whole language reading classroom. When the Achieve Reading Curriculum was implemented, the scope and sequence of lessons contained in Appendix A were followed. Lessons 1 through 60 were completed in this 12 week study.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum consisted of 180 lesson plans. Each lesson consisted of two separate areas that allowed the teacher to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the students. Even though this was a reading curriculum, each lesson emphasized the four language arts: reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The students practiced reading every day by selecting interesting books. Writing practice was achieved by responding to the phonics fun part of the lesson in a creative way using their imaginations. Speaking was utilized by sharing their written responses to the
phonics fun lesson and listening was accomplished by attending to their classmates reading and writing.

The reading lesson plans were divided into two parts: phonics study and mastery reading. Each part of the reading lesson complemented the other. The first part of the reading lesson plan was called phonics study. This section allowed the teacher and the students to have fun with words. To begin this part of the daily reading lesson, the teacher introduced a specific letter cluster for the day that represents a two, three, or more letter combination that is very common in the English language.

After the cluster was introduced, the students used a resource such as a newspaper, dictionary, textbook, or anything deemed appropriate, to search for words that contained the letter combination. Each student selected words from their reference that contained the sound cluster they found interesting and perhaps wanted to discuss more. This searching took no more than five minutes.

Next, the teacher and students developed a class chart of the most interesting words discovered. The teacher discussed various things about each word (e.g., definition, plural form, part of speech, syllables). The number of words depended on the needs on the class. This researcher believed seven to ten words were a suitable number for middle school students with learning disabilities. The teacher was viewed as a professional, and guided the discussion according to the class requirements.

Additionally, for each phonics study section of the reading lesson, a higher level thinking association was suggested for the student to ponder. For example, if the higher level thinking association for the lesson were automobile, any word that the student could use to make a relationship with the word automobile would be accepted. Fender,
headlight, horn, blinker, turn signal, chrome, vinyl, paint, and rust were examples that corresponded to the higher level thinking association of automobile. The students looked for these words while searching for words that contained the letter cluster of the day.

Next, each student was asked to write something relating to the words that were selected for the class chart. Students were encouraged to be creative. Some examples of this included: poems, songs, short stories, and sentences. As the student wrote and used the word correctly, they demonstrated an understanding of the word selected.

The charts created by this activity were left on display in the classroom. The number of charts exhibited was left to this researcher’s discretion. While displayed, the charts served as a review for the words and a ready-made resource that students could use in classroom writing activities.

As the final part of this section of the reading lesson, students selected three to four words and learned how to spell them for the day. After studying them, the student selected a partner and they tested each other. This was not accomplished for a grade in the usual sense, but merely served as a motivational tool for the student.

The second part of the reading lesson was called mastery reading. This section permitted each student to choose the books they enjoyed. The Achieve Reading Curriculum taught the necessary reading skills through books students choose. As the students were reading, this researcher was holding individual or group conferences on a comprehension/skill focus for the day.

In the beginning of the year this researcher needed to focus the students into the 20-30 minutes of mastery reading time. Very few students with special needs were able to read for a sustained 20 minutes at the beginning of the year. As a way of monitoring, each
student was required to keep a reading log each day to record the number of books read.

The phonics, comprehension focus, and association component of the Achieve Reading Curriculum are detailed in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achieve Reading Curriculum Weeks 1 through 3</th>
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<td><strong>Week</strong></td>
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Table 2

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<td><strong>Week</strong></td>
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Table 3

**Achieve Reading Curriculum Weeks 9 through 11**

<table>
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<th>Week</th>
<th>Achieve Curriculum Lessons</th>
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<td>9-11</td>
<td>Lessons 41-45 (five lessons a week)</td>
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</table>

- Phonics – sp, st, sw, scr, squ, thr, spr, shr, sch, tw, ,gn, kn, and wr.
- Comprehension skills -- facts, opinions, point of view, word meaning, and inference.
- Associations – weapons, energy, 2 syllables, movies, crime, aviation, and freedom, taxes, careers, and music.
- Every fifth day was a chart review day.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum utilized a classroom novel study every fourth week. The story was a popular tradebook selected by this researcher. The curriculum focus for weeks 4, 8 and 12 is shown in Table 4. During the weekly novel study, the emphases for the lessons remained open ended and varied with the needs of the class. Oral reading, book talks, Reader’s Theater (where the students read a story as if it were a play), and book reports were just a few of the many activities that took place. The data collections for those weeks were primarily through student interviews, parent interviews, teacher as researcher journal, and observations/fieldnotes.
Table 4

*Achieve Reading Curriculum Weeks 4, 8, and 12.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Achieve Curriculum Lessons</th>
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| 4, 8 | Lessons 16-20 for week 4.  
and Lessons 36-40 for week 8. |
| 12   | Lessons 56-60 for week 12.  
(five lessons a week) |

Novels – *The Hatchet*, *The River*, and *Brian's Return* by Gary Paulsen.

Class activities – oral reading and discussions, book talks, Reader's Theater, and others.

The specific novel used was selected because of the reading needs of the students in the class. The novels used for the novel studies were: (a) *The Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen during week four, (b) *The River* by Gary Paulsen during week eight, and (c) *Brian's Return* by Gary Paulsen during week 12.

**Sampling**

Purposeful sampling strategies were conducted. Patton (1990) defined purposeful sampling as selecting information rich cases for study in depth. Patton stated that purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to understand something about the case being studied without the need to generalize to all such cases. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997), in purposeful sampling, the researcher searched for information-rich key informants, groups, places or events to investigate. Purposeful sampling enables the study of a case to yield insights about the topic.
Concept/theory based sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) was the type of purposeful sampling strategy used in this intrinsic case study because the purpose of the case study was how the Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities. Additionally, this intrinsic case study investigated how the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhanced the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read. Finally, how parents supported the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum was scrutinized.

Concept/theory based sampling selects by utilizing information-rich persons or situations known to experience the concept or to be attempting to implement the concept/theory (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). In this intrinsic case study, the classroom being observed was implementing the Achieve Reading Curriculum for its students and was appropriate for this study.

The study occurred during a 12 week observation and interview period between September 2 and November 22, 2002. Research efforts focused on observations made by this researcher, a teacher journal, reading skill questions posed to the students, parental interviews, and writing samples from the phonics study section of the lesson.

Setting and Participants

Setting

The setting for this case study was a sixth through eighth grade middle school in northwestern Louisiana. The school was part of a district of approximately 43,000 students and 6,000 employees. The school was racially diverse, with an ethnic composition of approximately 55% Caucasian, 44% African American, and 1% other. Enrollment was
approximately 625. Approximately 65% of the students received a free or reduced lunch and 16% of the students were classified as students with special education requirements.

This intrinsic case study took place in a special education classroom. Students were assigned to the classroom because they were not achieving their potential in the regular school environment. The State of Louisiana guidelines were used by the district special education services in assigning students to the special education classroom. All of the students were at least two years below grade level in reading skills.

The classroom provided access to many different kinds of reading material. Included in the room were more than 1,300 books of various types, narrative and expository texts, comic books, dictionaries, thesauruses, drama books, and reading anthologies from five different grade levels (3rd - 8th). These books were arranged in five book locations throughout the room. Several bookcases were on the right sidewall as the student stood in the doorway. Three other bookcases were positioned on the back wall. The rest of the books were placed on the left side of the room. When students decided to choose a book to read, they were able to move about the room and not disturb other students. The teacher's desk was positioned in a corner of the room. Additionally, a teaching assistant's desk was situated in another corner of the room.

When students entered the room, they faced a semi-circular arrangement of 14 desks facing towards the front chalkboard. The desks were arranged to facilitate student movement and student sharing when appropriate. The teacher sat among the students at various locations throughout the reading period depending on the part of the lesson taking place. At the front of the classroom was a green chalkboard. This chalkboard served as a place where the date was written, class announcements were posted, and the daily
objectives were written pursuant to district instructional guidelines. The teacher used the chalkboard for classroom instruction during the phonics study portion of each lesson in the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

Class charts developed during the phonics study of the lesson were displayed around the room. These charts displayed the words discussed during the phonics study portion of the lesson and remained on display for approximately three weeks during which time the students were continuously exposed to the words.

The classroom contained four bulletin boards. Those at the front of the room displayed different reading themes. One in back displayed a patriotic theme. The other display encouraged the students to do their best every day and provided a history of some famous people with learning disabilities.

**Student Participants**

The participants in this case study were four middle school students classified as having learning disabilities by State of Louisiana guidelines. The grade level for the student participants was sixth grade. Students were 12 to 13 years old. The ratio of male to female students receiving special education services in the district was approximately three to one. Therefore, three boys and one girl were selected to be student participants. All students came from middle to lower middle socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, all students were White. This researcher made efforts to select four students that represented diverse ethnic, socio-economic, and intellectual backgrounds. However, due to student instructional assignments by the district special education services, only White students were available for the case study.
Jane. Jane was the only female participant. Jane recently transferred from a Texas school district. She turned 12 years of age three weeks before the study began. Additionally, she was living with her mother, her mother's live-in boyfriend, and a two year old sister. When this researcher initially met Jane she mentioned that she did not think that she was a very good reader. She stated on several occasions that she did not read very much because she could not find books that were easy for her to read. Jane appeared to be very well cared for and to have a concerned mother who wanted Jane to improve her reading ability. When this researcher initially met her mother she declared, “I'll do anything at all to help Jane improve her reading skills.”

Jane's special education record indicated she read approximately three years below grade level and had been receiving services in special-education classrooms in Texas and Louisiana for several years. *The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test Form K* (1989) specified Jane’s overall reading level was 2.5. Additionally, *The STAR Reading Test* (2002) indicated Jane's grade equivalent score as 2.9 and her instructional reading level where she was able to discern at least 80% of the words and comprehend the material as 3.0. Jane’s zone of proximal development for selecting books to achieve optimal growth in reading was calculated by *The STAR Reading Test* to be from 2.6 - 3.6.

This researcher asked Jane if she would like to take part in the case study. She unhesitantly agreed because she told this researcher, “It made me feel special.” She went on to say, “I usually don't feel very special, especially when it comes to reading.”

Bill. Bill was a 12 year-old male participant. He had never been successful in reading. When this researcher first met Bill he declared, “I hate reading. It is so boring. I never read, and I don't think I ever will.” He had been receiving special education services
in a self-contained classroom for the last four years. Bill lived with his parents and younger brother, and both parents expressed a strong desire for Bill to improve his reading skills. Bill was often extremely hesitant to provide his opinion on any subject. When questioned he frequently took several minutes to generate a one word answer. His father implored, “Please help my son learn to read!”

According to Bill’s special-education student record he was currently reading on approximately the first grade level and was classified as a student with learning disabilities. *The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test Form K* (1989) demonstrated Bill’s overall reading level to be 1.4. Moreover, *The STAR Reading Test* (2002) showed Bill’s grade equivalent reading level to be 1.6 and his instructional reading level where he could understand 80% of the words and comprehend the material as 2.0. Bill’s zone of proximal development for optimal growth in reading was determined by *The STAR Reading Test* as 1.4 – 2.4.

Bill was reluctant at first to participate in the case study. However, when this researcher told him he could choose the books that he wanted to read he quickly volunteered to become part of the case.

*Randy.* Randy was a 13 year-old male participant. He was retained in sixth grade due to excessive absences (43) during the previous school year. Additionally, Randy was receiving stimulant medication for control of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Randy lived with his parents and brother. Both parents worked full time to provide a living for Randy and his brother. Additionally, Randy’s mother was taking night classes at the local community college. Randy’s parents were concerned about his motivation to attend school and realized the necessity of regular school attendance. His father stated, “I'm
really concerned about his attendance. I have tried and tried to get him to want to go to school, but he just doesn't want to go.”

According to Randy’s special-education student record he read on grade level and was receiving special education services because he was classified as a student with learning disabilities. The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test Form K (1989) demonstrated Randy’s overall reading level to be 6.3. Additionally, The STAR Reading Test (2002) showed his grade equivalent reading level to be 6.8 and his instructional reading level where he could understand 80% of the words and comprehend the material as 7.3. Randy’s zone of proximal development for optimal growth in reading was calculated by The STAR Reading Test as 6.5 – 8.5.

When this researcher met Randy, this researcher did not think he was the same person described in his student record. He was cheerful, enthusiastic, and answered this researcher’s questions in full and complete sentences. When asked if he would like to be part of this researcher’s study he agreed, “That sounds cool; let’s do it.” He was very surprised when this researcher mentioned that he could choose the books that he wanted to read in reading class and asked, “When do we start?”

James. James was a 12 year-old participant. He lived with his mother, stepfather, brother, and two stepsisters. His mother and stepfather worked full-time to support the family. James had a history, according to his student record, of being a discipline problem. He had been assigned in-school suspension numerous times in the fifth grade. Additionally, he received out-of-school suspension for fighting on three separate occasions. James did not consider himself a good reader. When asked he responded, “I like to read, but the books that are easy for me are baby books and I am embarrassed when I read those.” This

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researcher explained to him the freedom to choose his reading materials that he would have in class. He was amazed because in the past he said, “All we ever did is worksheets.” He avowed his love for *Harry Potter* and pleaded that he be allowed to read those books in class. This researcher assured him he would be able to read those. His mother voiced concern about his lack of progress in reading and wanted to know what she could do to help him.

His special-education student record indicated a reading level of approximately third to fourth grade. *The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test Form K* (1989) indicated James’s overall reading level to be 3.8. Furthermore, *The STAR Reading Test* (2002) demonstrated his grade equivalent reading score to be 3.2 and his instructional reading level where he understood 80% of the words and comprehend the material as 3.3. James’s zone of proximal development for optimal reading growth was calculated by *The STAR Reading Test* as 3.2 – 4.5.

**Instructor Participant**

This researcher began teaching nine years ago after a 20-year career flying bomber airplanes in the United States Air Force. Based on a military background, this researcher believed the teacher was primarily a person who maintained order in the classroom and attempted to push his or her students through a set curriculum.

This researcher’s first assignment was as a resource teacher in a K-5 elementary school in West Texas. The mentor teacher assigned as a guide advocated a synthetic phonics approach to reading instruction using one worksheet after another. This researcher became interested in teaching students to read and began searching for alternative approaches after the students became disinterested in the worksheet approach.
Circumstances required this researcher to relocate to Louisiana and begin teaching middle school students with learning disabilities in the fall of 1997. This researcher’s interest in analytical phonetic approaches and allowing students to choose what they read increased because of similar disinterest in reading with middle school students that occurred in the elementary school setting. As a result, the Achieve Reading Curriculum was developed as a means of developing the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities. This intrinsic case study examined this curriculum using the research method of teacher as researcher.

**Protection of Participants**

Given that this researcher was the researcher as well as the instructor in the classroom studied, the rights of the participants were thoroughly considered. This participation was in no way connected to the grades the students received for the first semester. This researcher emphasized from the first week of class that participation was voluntary and the results of the study would not be evaluated until grades for the first semester had been averaged and recorded. Informed consent was obtained from each participant during the first week of school.

In order to maintain confidentiality of participants and protect their identity, pseudonyms are given for students’ names and the location of the study is not identified. Also, any identifying personal information that does not apply to the Achieve Reading Curriculum, classroom relationships, or school environment is not disclosed in the study. At all times participants maintained the right to request that certain information not be included in the study. Access to field notes and interview transcripts was available only to
this researcher. After the study had been approved all field notes were kept in a secure place for future reference.

One advantage of using the teacher as researcher was that following widespread interaction, students became more relaxed and felt more trust than with an outside researcher because of the natural setting of the classroom environment. As students learned more about me as an individual, became comfortable with this researcher’s teaching style, participated in the day to day activities of the class, they began to develop a positive relationship with this researcher as the teacher and researcher.

Data Collection

*Ethnography*

Ethnographic methods were the primary means to allow for thorough description and interpretation. Ethnography is defined by Wolcott (1988) as a “picture of the ‘way of life’ of some identifiable group of people” (p.188) and its significance is “derived socially… from discerning how ordinary people in particular settings make sense of the experience of their everyday lives” (p. 191). The purpose of educational ethnography is to provide rich, descriptive data about contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings” (Kamm, 1998, p.68).

Ethnographic methods include recording events as they occur in real settings, using a variety of research techniques to acquire data, triangulating data from among sources, using rich descriptions of phenomena, taking information in context and analyzing data throughout the study (Kamm, 1998, p.68). Sources of information for this study were teacher observations/field notes, a teacher/researcher journal, student interviews, student responses to reading questions, parent interviews and students’ written responses to the
phonics study section of the curriculum. Ethnographic methods allowed this researcher to concentrate on the details of classroom activity and become involved in its day-to-day activities.

Ethnographic methods are well suited for use in education because they focus on the perspectives of the people who are doing the teaching and learning (Kamm, 1998, p. 68). Moreover, according to Lu and Horner (1998) ethnography is suited for classrooms where students' experiences are treated as a “lived, complex, and ongoing process” (p. 262). As a process of investigation, ethnographic research can explore the cultural practices and life within a specific classroom community to understand a select grouping of students and teacher in a focused approach. Ethnography is used to “understand what counts as education to members of the group and to describe how this cultural practice is constructed within and across events and patterns of activity that constitute everyday life” (Green & Bloom, 1997, p. 184). In this researcher's study of the Achieve Reading Curriculum these methods allowed me to collect details, provide an accurate depiction of everyday classroom life, make connections between educational theory and practice in a setting for middle school students with learning disabilities, and enhance this researcher's commitment to high quality teaching.

An ethnographic orientation required this researcher to become immersed in the everyday life of the classroom. As a teacher researcher this researcher was required to examine a variety of aspects of everyday life and its interaction with The Achieve Reading Curriculum. Table 5 portrays the data focus, data collection, and research question connection for the data collected throughout the 12 week study.
Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Data Focus</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent interviews</td>
<td>Answers to open ended interview questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews</td>
<td>Answers to reading skill questions and open ended responses</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written responses</td>
<td>Student written response(s) to words, portfolio of work</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations/fieldnotes</td>
<td>Audiotape, written notes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher journal</td>
<td>Teacher reflections</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each week during the study, parent interviews, student interviews, observations/fieldnotes, and teacher as researcher journal were used as the focus for data collection. Parent interviews guided this researcher to determine how they supported the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Student interviews conducted by this researcher, observations, and their written responses to phonics study aided in answering how the Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities, how it enhanced the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read, and how students perceived the support of their parents.
Written responses to the phonics study section of the Achieve Reading Curriculum were collected for all weeks of the study except weeks 4, 8, and 12. During those weeks, the class was conducting a novel study of a book selected from the district grade level reading list. The teacher as researcher journal enhanced the ability to answer all three research questions.

**Timeline of Data Collection**

The overall timeline for data collection is portrayed in Table 6. The observations/fieldnotes, teacher as researcher journal, and the participants' written responses to the phonics study section of the lesson were investigated daily. Student interviews regarding reading skill questions and open ended reading questions were conducted three times per week for each participant and at the beginning and end of the study. Each student participant was interviewed 38 times, three times a week and at the beginning and end of the study. Parental interviews took place on a weekly basis and at the beginning and end of the study. Parents were interviewed by telephone at the beginning of the study and asked to meet this researcher at a time and place convenient to them for the once-a-week interview. Parents were provided with the option of maintaining the telephone interview format and all chose that arrangement. Each parent was interviewed 14 times, once at the beginning and end of the study and once a week during the study itself.
This timeline allowed this researcher to concentrate on the details of classroom activity, capture rich descriptions of events taking place, and gain an insider or emic perspective. Descriptions of the data collected in the observations/fieldnotes, teacher as researcher journal, student and parent interviews, and the written responses to the phonics study of the lesson are presented next.

**Observations/Field Notes**

This researcher closely examined the class to include information on class participation, body language, answers to group discussion questions, and individual and class interactions. Most observations were hand recorded during the class period, and others were recorded at the end of the day. Additionally, this researcher kept an audiotape made during each day’s class.

Stake (1995) asserted observations move the researcher towards a greater understanding of the case. Observing what is important to our understanding of the case is of primary importance. This intrinsic case study sought to examine the Achieve Reading
Curriculum in a classroom setting; therefore observations by the teacher are pertinent to the examination of the case.

These observations included portraits of the participants, reconstruction of dialogue between student and teacher and between students, a description of the physical setting, accounts of particular events, depiction of activities, and the teacher's own interaction with the class (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Additionally, this researcher's observations included personal reflections on ongoing data analysis, ethical dilemmas and conflicts, state of mind, and points of clarification (Bogdan & Biklen).

*Audiotapes.* Audiotapes of student interviews recorded during each class session were used to supplement the written observations and field notes. At the conclusion of each day's lesson the audiotapes were transcribed. Each day's transcript was analyzed in relation to the four student participants and their interactions with the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

*Teacher/Researcher Journal*

This study examined teacher insights in relation to the three research questions, therefore, a daily journal was maintained for the duration of the study to record reflections and perceptions not recorded during the observations and field note compilation. Journal entries included feelings, description of student behavior, and this researcher's perceptions of the class activities. Stake (1995) stated that an intrinsic case study required that more attention be paid to the contexts of the case.

The contexts of this intrinsic case study were the physical setting of the classroom, the cultural aspects of the students, the relationships among the students and among the students and teacher, parental support and influences in reading, the motivation of the
students to pick up a book and read, and the students' reactions with text and words. Keeping a teacher journal allowed this researcher to record the contexts of the case thoroughly.

**Student Interviews**

Student interviews were conducted focusing on the reading skill questions that are contained in Appendix C. Student interviews were conducted daily with several students. Each student in the study was interviewed three times per week. Feedback from the teacher researcher was given to the student during the interview regarding the student’s answers to the reading skill questions asked.

All responses from the students were considered in the data analysis. This researcher not only sought participants’ knowledge and understanding of the reading process but also their other perceptions and beliefs. Open-ended interview questions were used to solicit the interviewee’s experience and behavior, opinions, values, feelings, knowledge, and sensory experiences while engaged in the Achieve Reading Curriculum (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). These interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Stake (1995) averred that others are observing much of what we cannot observe for ourselves. Stake asserted that two principal uses of case study were to acquire the descriptions and interpretations of others. Interviewing students provided the main instrument to capture the multiple realities involved.
Parent Interviews

Parents were interviewed to determine their level of involvement while their child was a student in the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Parents were asked to participate in a telephone interview once a week beginning when the Achieve Reading Curriculum was implemented in the classroom.

According to Stake (1995), a qualitative case study seldom proceeds as a survey with the same questions asked of each interviewee. Each respondent is expected to have unique perspectives and insights to share. Therefore, open-ended questions seeking to determine the realities of the parents were utilized (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Questions focused on parents' experience and behavior in their child's schooling, opinions and values, feelings about their child's success in the Achieve Reading Curriculum, knowledge of the progress their child is making while a student in the Achieve Reading Curriculum, and any other information this researcher or a parent decided would contribute to an understanding of the realities of the participants (Stake).

The following questions are examples of open-ended questions that were asked of parents. Would you describe your level of involvement in your child's reading up to this point? Please describe how you feel when you read with your child. How comfortable are you when you are reading with your child? What is your opinion of your child's success in learning to read? Would you say your child reads about as well as he or she can? What problems does your child experience in reading? What is your opinion on how these can be solved? These questions and others attempted to capture the realities of the parents of students in the sample.
Written Responses to Phonics Study

Students' written responses to the phonics study portion of the lesson were investigated to determine their progress in the Achieve Reading Curriculum. The written paper produced daily by each student as the second part of the lesson in the Achieve Reading Curriculum was collected and studied.

The first part of each lesson in the Achieve Reading Curriculum teaches phonics through letter clusters. Each day students were asked to examine a new letter cluster, find interesting words that contained this letter cluster, participate in the development of a class chart containing words generated by students, and produce a written response to the chart. The written response was open ended and was studied to determine the student's overall effort and correct use of the words selected from the class chart. Students who generated interesting and creative responses in using words were scored higher than those whose attempt fell short of that goal. The ability of the student was considered when making these evaluations. Middle school students with mild learning disabilities were expected to use more words and generate more responses than were students with more severe disabilities. A portfolio of written work was collected for the study period and a comparison of written work was made from student writing samples at the beginning and the end of the study.

The student's written response to the phonics study portion of the lesson served as a tangible manifestation of his or her developing ability to understand and use word knowledge (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Stake (1995) maintained the researcher needs to be open to unexpected clues that may be present in these documents. Additionally, Stake asserted that documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that

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the researcher could not observe directly. The interpretation of the information from the
written responses was corroborated with the observations and interview data from
participants. Interpretation of the written responses for subtle meanings depended on the
social context and other personal data obtained, that is, the student’s cultural background,
relationships with other students, and with the teacher researcher, the school environment,
physical setting of the room, health of the student, and weather influenced the student’s
use of the words.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the study rests on four criteria that validate the naturalist’s
inquiry: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba,
1985). Lincoln and Guba match these terms to the positivist paradigm of internal validity,
external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

The credibility of the study seeks to establish that the inquiry was conducted in
such a manner so that the participants are accurately identified and described. This allows
the inquiry to be credible to the realities of the participants. Methods used in this intrinsic
case study to increase the credibility of the study were prolonged engagement by the
teacher researcher over the course of one 12-week period, triangulation of data, peer
debriefing, and member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Transferability of the findings of this intrinsic case study were provided by the
ethnographic method of providing thick description of the realities of participants. The
sole focus of this study was to understand the realities of this case from the participants’
perspectives. Ultimately, this intrinsic case study provided information for those who will
generalize from this setting to one of their interest. The generalization of these findings to
other settings was enhanced by triangulation of data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Case studies are undertaken to make the case more understandable (Stake, 1995). The reader of this case study will determine whether the information contained in it can be generalized to other cases with which he or she is familiar.

The dependability of this study refers to the positivist idea of reliability. One of the assumptions inherent in qualitative studies is that the social world is always changing. Therefore, any attempt to replicate a qualitative case study is problematic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The confirmability of a qualitative study is aligned with the positivist aspect of objectivity. This intrinsic case study should respond to this researcher’s natural subjectivity (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Attempting to stifle this subjectivity would take away from the qualities of teacher research. The teacher researcher’s insights increased the possibility that the world was accurately portrayed by the interpretations that were reached. The teacher researcher provided controls for bias in this interpretation; these are described in the following section.

Validity

The validity of this design was increased by the use of low inference descriptors, the use of a teacher researcher, the seeking of negative cases or discrepant data, the use of mechanically recorded data, and member checking. A low inference descriptor is a descriptor that records precise, literal, and detailed descriptions of situations and people (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). This researcher avoided the use of words that had multiple meanings depending on the situation. Concrete precise descriptions from field
notes and interviews were sought in order to recreate the perception of the participants and aid in identifying patterns in the data.

This researcher used a daily-recorded journal, and it was a part of the case being studied. My perceptions provided important meanings and explanations of events to aid in category development (Stake, 1995). Negative cases and or discrepant data were actively sought in order to contradict the emerging patterns of data analysis. Actively searching for negative data aided in the modification or refinement of patterns discovered in the data (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997).

Mechanically recorded data were obtained by audio taping student interviews concerning reading skill and other open ended questions. Additionally, this researcher audiotaped certain portions of this researcher’s field notes in order to insure accuracy and comprehensiveness (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997).

Member Checking

Member checking took place within all facets of the study. This researcher continually sought to confirm observations and meanings from student participants through conversations in informal settings (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). Stake (1995) stated that participants in a case played a major role by providing the researcher with critical interpretations and suggestions relating to the data and its sources. Also, they helped triangulate the researcher’s observations and interpretations. In member checking each participant was requested to look at rough drafts of writing where the participant is featured. The participant was asked to review the data for accuracy and provide suggestions for the interpretation.
**Bias**

Researcher bias was reduced by the use of a field log, field journal, and a peer debriefer. This researcher maintained a field log that documented the precise time spent in the field and the places and persons involved. This detailed record was continued throughout the duration of the study (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). The field journal was a continuous record of the decisions made as the study progressed. Personal ideas, comments and suggestions for refinement of the study were included.

The field journal aided in reflective examination of the decisions, personal ideas, and trials encountered by this researcher during the course of the case study. Maiterud (2001) argued that the qualitative researcher reduced bias by a process known as reflexivity. This process enabled the researcher to account for the subjectivity that is inherent in any study. Maiterud maintained the field journal allowed the researcher to keep pace with the effects of his positioning in the research setting. Rather than discounting this effect, the effect is fully explored and accounted for in the final case analysis by the use of the field journal. Maiterud (p.484) stated, “Bias in the sense of undesirable or hidden skewness, is thus accounted for, though not eliminated. Subjectivity arises when the effect of the researcher is ignored.”

Fraser (1997) argued for the importance of reflexivity in qualitative action or teacher research to reduce any possible bias. He maintained that teacher researchers must have the courage to ask uncomfortable questions in the conduct of their study. He stated that teacher researcher reflective questions should be designed to guard against any possible bias they may have and they should work diligently to counter the effects of personal bias in decision making. Furthermore, Fraser advocated teacher research as the
most effective and least threatening strategy when evaluating curriculum innovations when the researcher’s bias is examined through reflective analysis.

The use of purposive sampling further served to reduce bias in this case study. According to Barbour (2001, p. 1116) “Purposive sampling techniques serve as a mechanism to search for outliers which are conventionally discounted in quantitative approaches.” Additionally, Barbour (p.1116) maintained, “Purposive sampling allowed for deviant cases, to illuminate by juxtaposition, those processes and relations that routinely come into play, thereby enabling the exception to the rule.” Therefore, purposive sampling, the sampling utilized in this case study design helped reduce bias by the teacher researcher.

Peer Debriefer

A peer debriefer engaged this researcher in discussion as the study progressed. These discussions focused on this researcher’s preliminary analyses and the next methodological strategies to be employed (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997) The peer debriefer was asked to challenge this researcher’s findings, act as “devil’s advocate” for alternative explanations, and challenge coding categories and themes that appeared to be emerging from the data. The peer debriefer was a qualified doctor of education who had completed a graduate course in qualitative research methods. This researcher met with the peer debriefer once each week for the period of October 2002 through the middle of December 2002.

Triangulation of Data

According to Burke (1997), triangulation of data is cross checking information and conclusions through the use of multiple procedures or sources. When the different
procedures or sources are in agreement you have corroboration. Triangulation of data was achieved by examining the observations/field notes, the teacher/researcher journal, the students' answers to the various reading and open ended questions, parental interviews, and an examination of the writing responses to the phonics study section.

Triangulation of data used to answer each research question is portrayed in Table 7.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Triangulation, Collection, and Research Question Connection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Collected</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations/fieldnotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each week during the study data were triangulated by the use of parent interviews, student interviews, observations/fieldnotes, and teacher journal. Parent interviews guided this researcher to determine how the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities supported the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Student interviews, observations, and students' written responses to phonics study aided in answering how the Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with
learning disabilities, how it enhanced the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read, and how the students perceived the support of their parents. Written responses to the phonics study section of the Achieve Reading Curriculum were collected for all weeks of the study except weeks 4, 8, and 12. During those weeks, the class was conducting a novel study of a book selected from the district grade level reading list. The teacher as researcher journal enhanced the ability to answer all three research questions.

In many instances direct quotes have been used to give the reader added insights into the participants’ interviews, parental interviews, written responses, teacher observations, and teacher journal, and to provide some rationale for the conclusions reached by the researcher. Codes have been used to designate various data sources and scripts from which information has been included. For example, T. J., week 6, p. 4, indicates that the data came from the teacher’s journal, week 6 on page 4. A list of the codes and their explanations is provided in Table 8.
Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent interviews</td>
<td>Answers to open ended questions</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interviews</td>
<td>Answers to reading skill questions</td>
<td>S. I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written responses</td>
<td>Student written responses</td>
<td>W.R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations/fieldnotes</td>
<td>Audiotape, written notes</td>
<td>O.F.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher journal</td>
<td>Teacher perceptions</td>
<td>T.J.</td>
</tr>
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Data Analysis

The Constant Comparison Method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of data analysis was used to determine if certain categories, patterns or themes occurred in the data. As social incidents were recorded, simultaneous comparisons were conducted to discover relationships. According to Lincoln & Guba, the task of categorizing data is to bring together into temporary categories those data bits that apparently relate to the same content. Several resources are useful in the process of category generation: “inferences from the data, emergent research questions, substantive, policy and theoretical issues, imagination, intuition, and previous knowledge” (Dey, 1993, p. 100).

Stake (1995) argued there are two ways that researchers reach new meanings about cases: (a) by directly interpreting the individual and his behavior, and (b) through a compilation of instances of behavior until something can be said about them as a class. Stake asserted that case study relies on both of these methods. Additionally, he claimed
qualitative case study research is highly subjective but necessary because of the complexities of each case. This intrinsic case study helped the researcher to understand the case by directly observing and interpreting the behavior of four participants and by compiling a series of instances to determine if any categories or patterns emerged.

The meaning of a category evolves during the constant comparative analysis, as more and more decisions are made about which bits of data will be assigned to each category (Dey, 1993). The fit between data and categories is one of continuous refinement. Sometimes, patterns will emerge unexpectedly from the analysis (Stake, 1995). During the course of the analysis the criteria for including and excluding data in certain categories becomes more precise. Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Coleman (2000) compared the constant comparative method to a kaleidoscope. Initially, the data are like the colors one sees when viewing into a kaleidoscope. Gradually, and through refinement, the kaleidoscope changes its pattern until a well-defined pattern emerges at the completion of data analysis.

Chenail’s qualitative matrix provided guidance to this researcher using the constant comparative method a blueprint for data analysis (P. Cole, 1994). P. Cole affirmed that Chenail’s qualitative matrix has four main inputs to understanding data using the constant comparative method. First, when trying to make sense of the data as it was being collected, this researcher looked for central tendencies that were occurring. Central tendencies described how the data chunked together into the research participants’ common themes or categories. Next, there were varying ranges of the data within the central tendencies identified by the researcher. Third, the researcher was often presented with expected categories and themes that followed from the researcher’s assumptions and
literature review. Finally, unexpected categories and themes emerged that departed from the researcher's assumptions and literature review.

P. Cole (1994) avowed that when a researcher applied Chenail's qualitative matrix, they have an opportunity to discover the unexpected instead of staying focused only on what is known through literature searches. This researcher used Chenail's qualitative matrix to guide the search for the unexpected during data analysis.

The Qualrus (2002) computer qualitative analysis program supported this researcher in coding and analyzing the qualitative data generated by this study. The Qualrus program included a semantic network which expressed the relationships among codes and provided a visual overview of any evolving theory.

Another powerful feature of the Qualrus (2002) program employs intelligent computational strategies that suggest codes to use based on patterns evolving in the data. The strategies included (a) natural language understanding strategies that recommended codes based on linguistic patterns in the text, (b) expert system scripts embedded in the program as scripts that inferred one code from other codes, (c) case based reasoning to suggest codes based on how similar segments were coded in the past, and (d) machine learning strategies that identified recurring patterns in data and then recommended codes based on those patterns.

Added features of the Qualrus (2002) program involved (a) ways to search for segments of text which had certain Boolean combinations of codes, (b) statistics to summarize certain aspects of the data, (c) refinement tools to examine whether codes need to be refined, and (d) a generalization tool which helped decide whether two or more concepts were really measuring the same thing. Finally, the Qualrus program permitted
this researcher to process audio and written data through the use of the program components described earlier.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the design of the study. Information was provided about the teacher as researcher design, procedures, setting and participants, data collection, and data analysis. The following chapters present actual data and findings from the study. Chapter 4 includes the results and analyses of the study. Chapter 5 provides a general discussion of the main findings of the study and includes implications for further research and instruction on reading methods for middle school students with learning disabilities.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Chapter 4 presents results and analysis of the study. The six sections in this chapter address answers to the three research questions and provide additional information significant to the study.

First, in order to acquaint the reader with a realistic picture of this researcher's teaching environment, this researcher provides a description of a sample day from classroom. A depiction of the two main sections of a daily lesson is offered to enhance the reader's understanding of the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

The next section discusses the main themes of the analysis. These themes are strongly interlaced throughout the data connected to all research questions. The main themes include the participants’ developing reading ability, motivation demonstrating behavior patterns, parental support, and teacher multitasking.

Third, information triangulated from the data is used to answer the first research question. How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities? This section addresses the participants’ class involvement, teacher interview results, students’ writing ability and creativity in the phonics study session of the lesson, time on task, and reading attending behaviors.
Next, information triangulated from the data is used to answer the second research question. Within a supportive classroom learning environment, how does the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhance the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities? This section highlights data concerning the Achieve Reading Curriculum and its components, class participation and discussion, and student writing and creativity efforts.

The fifth section of Chapter 4 answers the third research question. How do the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities support the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum? This section discusses parent perceptions, parent reading encouragement, and parent teacher appreciation.

Throughout each section this researcher presents information relating to each participant. This personal depiction should help the reader gain an understanding of the participants in the case. These personal renderings provide a meaningful view into classroom life and the participants involved in the study.

Contradictory data are discussed in the sixth section of the chapter. Some student avoidance behaviors were present. This section discusses events used by participants to delay and distract themselves and other students from class activities, inadequate writing efforts based on the participant’s ability, and student absences. Also presented is surprising information that emerged when this researcher began to have self doubts about the usefulness of the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

A Typical Lesson

The Achieve Reading Curriculum consisted of 180 lesson plans. Each lesson was composed of two separate areas that allowed this researcher to adjust the curriculum to
the needs of the students. Even though this was a reading curriculum, each lesson emphasized four language arts: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The four participants practiced reading every day by selecting books that were interesting to them. Writing practice was achieved by responding to the phonics study part of the lesson in a creative way using their imaginations. Speaking was utilized by sharing their written responses to the phonics fun lesson, and listening was accomplished by attending to their classmates reading and writing.

The lessons were divided into two parts: phonics study and mastery reading. Each part of the reading lesson complemented the other. The first part of the reading lesson plan was called phonics study. This section allowed the teacher and students to have fun with words. To begin this part of the daily reading lesson, the teacher introduced a specific letter cluster for the day that represented a two, three, or more letter combination that was very common in the English language.

Each lesson during most of the 12 week time frame of the study required the participants, after the cluster was introduced, to use a resource such as a newspaper, dictionary, textbook, or anything deemed appropriate, and search for words that contained a letter combination. Participants selected words from their references that contained the sound cluster they found interesting and wanted to discuss more. This searching normally took no longer than five minutes.

Next, participants and this researcher developed a class chart of the most interesting words discovered. This researcher discussed various things about each word (e.g., definition, plural form, part of speech, syllables). The number of words depended on the needs of the class and varied day by day. This researcher usually selected 10 words for
the class chart because this researcher believed this to be a suitable number for the participants.

Additionally, for each phonics study section of the reading lesson, a higher level thinking association was suggested for the student to consider. For example, one time when the higher level thinking association for the lesson was climate, many of the words volunteered by the participants were words like weather, cold, rain, hurricane, tornado, and sun. Participants could think of these words while searching for words that contained the daily phonetic cluster.

Next, each participant was asked to write something relating to the words that were selected for the class start. Each participant was encouraged to be creative. Examples of creativity that were displayed by participants included poems, songs, short vignettes, and sentences. As a student wrote and used the word correctly, he or she demonstrated an understanding of the word selected.

The final part of this section of the reading lesson required participants to select three or four words from the chart and learn how to spell them for the day. After studying them for several minutes each participant chose a partner with whom to test one another on their words. This was not accomplished for a grade in the usual sense but merely served as a motivational tool for the student.

The second part of the reading lesson was called mastery reading. This section permitted students to choose the books they enjoyed reading. Teacher interviews and discussions took place on a daily basis. As participants were reading, this researcher was holding individual and or group conferences on a comprehension focus for the day. Each participant chose books based on their interests and reading ability. Moreover, participants
chose reading selections with complete freedom. During the initial lessons of the 12 week study participants were not able to read for 20 minutes duration. However, as the case study progressed, participants’ reading time gradually increased to more than 20 minutes each day. As a way of monitoring, each participant was required to keep a reading log each day to record the number of books read.

Every fourth week the reading lessons shifted to a novel study of a book listed in the grade level curriculum guide. In this way, each participant was exposed to grade level reading. During the weekly novel study which took place during weeks four, eight, and 12, the emphases of the daily lesson remained flexible and changed with the needs of the class.

Main Themes

The results of the study can be broken into four main themes:

1. Participants’ reading ability increased as a result of the Achieve Reading curriculum.

2. Participants’ motivation to read increased as a result of the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

3. Parents’ support of the Achieve Reading Curriculum was critical in the effective implementation of the program.

4. Teacher multitasking detracted form the teacher’s instructional time and the attention focused on each participant.

Each of the themes is explained below.
Participants Reading Ability

The first main theme is that participants’ reading ability appeared to increase as a result of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. The increase was evidenced by an increase in their level of class involvement, more accurate responses to questions posed by this researcher during our interviews, an improvement in their writing and creativity during the phonics study section of the lesson, and an increase in their capacity to spend time on classroom activities.

Their level of class involvement increased as the study moved forward. All participants enthusiastically searched for words to use in the chart-making phase of the phonics study lesson. This searching for and discussion of words associated with certain phonetic clusters created excitement on a daily basis. While participants were unsure of class requirements in the first few weeks, over the rest of the study the chart making activity was viewed as a fun endeavor. Participants looked forward to this chart-making so they could learn new and interesting words everyday.

Participants’ level of involvement increased during our periodic class discussions. This researcher encouraged them to have opinions on reading selections and to state those opinions in our class. When the study began, they were not sure what to do in a class discussion and looked for this researcher to supply them with the correct answers. Bill grew in his ability to provide more than a one word answer to a question. By week 11 he was answering this researcher’s questions with responses of two to three sentences in length. Jane, James, and Randy improved their facility to provide complex multi sentence answers to inquiries. By the end of the study, they did so with confidence and were not hesitant to provide this researcher with their opinion on any subject.
The curriculum encouraged participants to engage in grade-level reading through use of our novel study. Novel study allowed participants to read a grade level reading selection from the district curriculum guide. Participants remarked that this was one of the first times they had read a “real” book. Many times during novel studies students took part in lively class discussions. Their ability to participate in these discussions improved as the study progressed.

Throughout the study this researcher asked participants questions on their reading selections. Initially, their responses were short several word answers that were not accurate. Their replies improved and before the study concluded they were providing accurate answers to questions. When they read selections chosen by them, data triangulated from student interviews, teacher-researcher observations/fieldnotes, and a teacher journal demonstrated improvement in their ability to make inferences, analyze characters in the story, make predictions, identify cause and effect, compare and contrast elements of the story, provide details about events, identify the main idea, and justify their opinion.

Another part of the phonics study section of the lesson included a written response to the words generated during our chart making activity. Participants’ ability to choose one or more words from the chart and develop a written, creative response improved as the study evolved. Data triangulated from the participants’ written responses, teacher-researcher observations/fieldnotes, and teacher journal established gradual improvement in writing ability. Initially, participants generated one or two sentences with numerous grammar and spelling errors. Even though their written responses were rough draft quality, this researcher emphasized they should make as few mistakes as possible. Jane,
Randy and James substantially improved their abilities to generate written responses. Bill slightly enhanced his capability to generate the written response.

Participants' time on task improved as the study progressed. Initially, they were unable to read either orally or silently for 20 to 25 minutes at a time. By the study's completion all participants could read for that amount of time.

Deciding if participants' reading ability increased was a formative task. Their increase in reading ability was documented by their increase in the level of class involvement, more participation in class discussions, increased enthusiasm in novel study, more accurate answers to questions, and an increased time on task during reading activities.

Participants' Motivation

The second main theme is the increase in participants' motivation to read as a result of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. This increase in their level of motivation was evidenced by looking at the Achieve Reading Curriculum and its components, their level of class participation and discussion, and their writing and creativity efforts.

Components of the Achieve Reading Curriculum appeared to enhance motivation of participants. The freedom of choice exercised by participants in their book selections, flexible homework requirements, and the fun aspects of chart making were seen as motivating factors.

The level of class participation increased dramatically through the study. Bill, Jane, Randy, and James wanted to take part in class discussions more as they became more confident in their reading abilities. Three of the participants became class leaders in any
discussions that took place. On some occasions this researcher had to ask them not to respond so others in the class could do so.

The length and depth of their writing developed throughout the study. In the beginning, most efforts were weak and showed no creativity. At the conclusion of the study all participants displayed an ability to take a chart word, make a meaningful written response according to their ability levels, and have fewer grammatical and spelling errors than they produced in the beginning.

Participants’ motivation to read increased throughout the study. The effect of the components of the Achieve Reading Curriculum, a greater participation in class discussions, and an enhanced effort in their daily writing exercises confirmed this increase in their motivation to read.

Parental Support

The third main theme is the parents’ support of the Achieve Reading Curriculum, a critical in the effective implementation of the program. Parental perceptions, the behaviors parents used to encourage reading and parental teacher appreciation were the items used to provide evidence for the critical nature of this support.

Parents’ perceptions were critical to gain support of this researcher’s reading program. All parents expressed positive perceptions of improvement in their child’s reading ability. Some articulated concern over the 30 minutes of reading homework required. However, the willingness of the parents to follow the requirements of program and engage in discussions about their child’s reading ability demonstrated the positive perceptions they held.
Parents demonstrated various methods to encourage reading behaviors in their children. All would sit and read for 30 minutes at a time with their child and ask the various questions about the reading selection. Some provided material rewards to motivate and encourage their child. Others bought different kinds of reading selections like comic books, action adventure magazines, and even a video game to encourage their child to read.

The appreciation expressed by parents was overwhelming. On numerous occasions they remarked that this researcher was one of the first teachers ever to contact them about their child's progress in school. Many were amazed at this researcher's level of involvement. Some articulated classroom environment completely changed the way their child viewed school. The positive sentiments they expressed motivated this researcher throughout the study.

Parents' support of this curriculum was critical to its effective implementation. They demonstrated their support by their positive perceptions, their behaviors used to encourage reading, and their appreciation for this researcher's efforts.

Teacher Multitasking

The fourth main theme is that teacher multitasking detracted from the teacher's instructional time and the attention focused on each participant. Time is a precious item in today's classroom environment. Numerous interruptions in the daily classroom routine occurred as a result of extracurricular activities, intercom interruptions, and the many jobs a teacher is asked to fill on a daily basis. These announcements upset the concentration of this researcher's students.
Teachers are required to have many skills. On a daily basis this researcher was required to demonstrate negotiation skills, counseling technique, first-aid ability, understanding, and a sense of humor.

Extracurricular activities like fund-raising, school pictures, athletic events, yearbook fees, and collection of student fees disrupt the normal routine. These interruptions distract the teacher and students from the instructional process.

The capability of the teacher to balance several requirements simultaneously in the performance of instructional duties is a difficult one. Extracurricular activities, the intercom, and the myriad requirements of the job distract from the primary job of instruction.

Development of Reading Ability

This study provided numerous instances where the development of participants’ reading ability could be examined. This section describes data collected from different sources that answers the first research question: How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities? Additionally, a depiction of each participant is given to describe the development of his or her reading ability and personal involvement in the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

Class Involvement

One method the participants utilized to demonstrate their developing reading ability was their involvement in various phases of class activity. This involvement ranged from seeking new and more interesting books to read to playing a part in class discussions whenever they were held. Although class involvement was closely related to the second
research question, different aspects were related to participants' developing reading ability.

*Chart making.* During the first part of each lesson, participants were asked to take part in chart making. Chart making consisted of searching for words that were related to the daily phonetic cluster being discussed in class, volunteering those words when asked by the teacher, and providing an opinion on the different ponderings taking place for each word. Throughout most periods of chart making, each of the four participants would search for words containing the phonetic letter cluster, volunteer those words when asked, and participate eagerly in class discussions concerning each of the words volunteered for the class chart.

For the duration of the case the opportunity to search for words and discuss them created excitement in participants. Every day all participants searched actively for words to use in building a class chart. The average number of words chosen to volunteer for the class chart ranged from 7 to 10.

Some examples of words selected by participants during the initial phase of the curriculum were: *platitudinous, placebo, planetarium, plate tectonics, plasmodium, plainspoken, Pleistocene, heavy metal, and Plymouth Rock.* The phonetic cluster discussed during that lesson was *pl.* The higher level thinking association was *music.* These words were discussed by this researcher as they were volunteered by participants. The words selected for the class chart represented many different sounds within the context of the *pl* cluster. By the end of this particular lesson, all four participants were able to pronounce every word on the chart and understand their most common meaning.
Words selected by participants during Week 6 of the case study were difficult for the struggling reader. Examples included: slobber, sleuth, slot machine, a slave state, sluiceway, slipped, slander, slovenly, and slang. The phonetic cluster for this lesson was *sl* and the higher level thinking association was *messy*. By the time participants took part in this chart making they were accomplished word searchers. They averaged 9 to 14 words to volunteer for this chart-making lesson and pronounced all of them correctly before they were discussed in class. Their enthusiasm in searching for words and discussing those selected did not waver from the initial weeks of the study. An entry from the teacher journal for week 6 reads as follows,

The response to the chart making has been interesting. I think from the actions they demonstrated they really enjoyed this chart making process. All have been enthusiastically volunteering words they are looking for having the distinct letter clusters and or associations that we're studying for each day. In fact, I have asked them to temper their enthusiasm just a little bit. (T. J., week 6 p. 4)

In week 11 participants’ ability to search for and volunteer words for the class chart continued to improve. The phonetic cluster for this lesson was *scr*, a three letter consonant blend. Additionally, the higher level thinking association for the day was *judgment*. Words selected for the class chart were scriptorium, scrumptious, screech, screen test, scrutiny, screened, and impartial. The four participants chose different words to volunteer that demonstrated their developing ability to pronounce words that contained more difficult consonant blends.
Data from teacher interview transcripts revealed this enthusiasm for chart making throughout the study. During the first week Jane responded to chart making with the following comment:

Chart making is a blast. I really like to look up words, discuss them and then write something neat with the words themselves. The spelling that we do is cool too! I only wish most of my other teachers would have done this. We get to select and use the words we want, when we want. Can we do this in every class Mr. Sargent? (S.I., week 1, p.3)

Jane continued her eagerness for chart making by echoing the following during week five of the study:

Mr. Sargent, I want to do this more. I love this stuff! Please let us do this for the entire class! I was able to get all of the words right in my story today and I felt good about it. I bet ya I could get some words that you would not understand either, Mr. Sargent! (S. I., week 5, p. 7)

During week 11 of the study Jane remarked, “I hope we can get to continue doing this stuff. I really like to make the chart and discuss those words like we do” (S. I., week 11, p.5).

The other three participants demonstrated similar excitement by their comments during chart making activities. In the first week of the study, Bill, who usually did not say much remarked, “Choosing words is great. I really like it, even if I don’t like to write” (S. I. week 1, p. 7). His zeal continued to the end. During week 11 he stated, “I want to do this all the time because it’s a lot of fun. I know I can’t write good, but he gives me a chance” (S. I., week 11, p. 10).
Randy showed his appreciation for chart making by saying during week five, “I want to do more than eight words a day. Why can’t we do 12? I think it would help us” (S. I., week 5, p. 6).

During week 11 he mentioned, “I think I’m getting good at this because you let me do something I can do good. It’s fun and it’s easy” (S. I., week 11, p. 17).

James confirmed his fervor for chart making by stating in week two, “I understand this and it’s easy for me to do. I love it because it’s so cool” (S. I., week 2, p. 4). He continued in week six, “The charts are neat and colorful. Keeping them up helps me learn the words and when I need something to write with, the word is on the chart” (S. I., week 6, p. 9). In week 11 he declared, “I just think this is the best way to learn new words. You need to tell the other teachers about it” (S. I., week 11, p. 8).

Throughout the study, participants remained enthusiastic when asked to search for and volunteer words for the class chart. Furthermore, their enthusiasm in sounding out the selected words and understanding what they meant did not decrease as the study progressed. All four participants agreed that discovering new and different words was fun, and all indicated during teacher interviews that they found this part of the curriculum enjoyable, stimulating, and motivating.

Class discussions. According to Vygotsky (1962), learning often takes place in a social environment where the learner constructs meaning based on social interactions. Likewise, class discussions serve as a way of measuring class involvement. The more the learners participate in class discussion, the more they are able to ascertain knowledge from the world surrounding them. Therefore, looking at class discussions and their effect on class involvement is a way of measuring developing reading ability.
Throughout the case study Jane, Randy, and James routinely took part in various class discussions. Bill did not answer questions unless specifically asked. Bill would not provide any answers at the beginning of the study. As the study progressed, when asked a question, his answers grew from one sentence explanations to several sentences. For example, during one lesson at the beginning of the study he was asked the following question: “Why do you think the character chose to act in that way?” (S. 1., week 2, p. 5). His initial response did not provide an answer. When he heard another participant provide an answer to the question he responded by repeating the same answer.

In the 11th week of the study Bill began to supply several sentence explanations to various questions asked by me. He began to understand why it was important to contribute to the class discussion. When asked to provide a fact from a story he was reading he explained, “They’re trying to kill a monster on the ship because the monster is making it dangerous for everyone on board. Only if they can kill this monster will they have removed the danger for the people on the ship” (S. 1., week 11, p. 36).

Jane, Randy, and James, however, responded to questions asked throughout the study. Additionally, they provided answers to word pronunciations encountered during the chart making activity. When asked specific questions about reading selections, they frequently gave answers in broad sentences. Moreover, they contributed background knowledge for the rest of the class during the beginning of each novel study that took place during weeks 4, 8, and 12. Their confidence and breadth of involvement increased as the study progressed.

In the beginning of the study, Jane, Randy, and James also supplied several-word answers to questions this researcher asked. However, as the study proceeded - and after
this researcher demonstrated ways to participate in class discussions - they gave complex, multi-sentence answers to questions. For example, during the first week of the study, this researcher asked Randy his opinion about the amount of survival gear a character was using in a story. His response to me was, “No, I’m not surprised at that” (S. I., week 1, p. 8). In contrast, a response of his in week five was, “This Goosebumps book is awesome. I just don’t believe you let us read what we want and I like that. I hope that I can learn to write like this because I want to make lots of money” (S. I., week 5, p. 11).

During week 11 Randy provided this researcher with a more comprehensive answer to a similar question. When queried about his opinion regarding a particular kind of book, he stated:

I really like horror stories because they stimulate my imagination. I am using the mind picture you told me about to help me remember what this story is all about. I am trying to use cool colors in my mind so I can remember all the neat parts of the book. (S. I., week 11, p. 13)

During the fifth week of the study Jane provided the following opinion on a Tom and Ricky book she was reading:

These books are kinda easy, but for the first time in my life I think I can read them pretty easily. I guess that if I read more of them I should become a better reader, huh? Is that what you’re saying to me? (S. I., week 5, p. 19)

Jane continued to discuss books as the study progressed. In week six she stated, “I want to read these books by Gary Paulsen more. Can you find me some more that I can read? This Voyage of the Frog looks pretty good” (S. I., week 6, p. 7).
During the last week of the study she mentioned the following in responding to a question on *Brian's Return*:

Mr. Sargent, I just don’t think Brian should go back into the woods to live. I mean if he doesn’t feel comfortable he should just take some more time to get adjusted, ya know? What would you do? There’s no way I would do that! (S. I., week 12, p. 8)

James ability to participate in class discussions improved also, although he was willing to share his opinion on many things from the beginning. He provided longer explanations for his opinions as the study progressed. In week 1, he made the following statement when asked a question about a character in a *Goosebumps* book he was reading: “This kid is messed up. I think he should have chosen that door instead” (S. I., week 1, p. 7).

The last week brought the following response from James as he discussed his *Harry Potter* book with this researcher:

I don’t think the author knew what she was writing about. I don’t see Harry as doing that there. I mean, killing the troll, Harry would not kill the troll, and he would kind of like try and become friends with it. (S. I., week 12, p. 31)

*Novel study*. Novel study provided opportunities for all participants to become involved in class activities. Novel study took place during weeks 4, 8, and 12. Jane, Randy, and James responded to novel study with enthusiasm. Often they answered questions this researcher asked the class. During the second novel study Jane took the lead in many discussions on *The River*. When asked a question about what she thought would happen next she responded: “Morning will come and they will wake up and look for food.
They will look for food because they're very hungry. Just like you and me would be hungry in the same situation” (S. I., week 8, p. 26).

Responding to another question about *The River*, she declared:

I would be very terrified if I found myself all alone in the woods and in charge of another human being's life. I do not think I could do it. I just do not know what I would do in that situation, maybe pray a lot! (S. I., week 8, P. 26)

Randy also provided insights in novel study. During one discussion he made the following statement:

There is no way that I could change a diaper on an adult human being, I mean it would totally gross me out, I just don't see how parents do it and I agree with Brian about his reluctance in changing the grown man's diaper. (S. I., week 8, p.17)

During this discussion Randy was the only one to volunteer his opinion about changing a diaper on a human adult and how he just could not do it. The rest of the class sat there and giggled at his answer, but this researcher believes it demonstrated his ability to become involved and lead the rest of the class.

James volunteered during novel study discussions on a regular basis. Often, he would be the first one to respond to questions. When asked to predict the next event in *The River*, he volunteered, “I think that by going down the river they will be able to find help and survive their situation. I believe that if they stayed by the lake they would not be rescued until it was too late” (S. I., week 8, p. 27).

Bill did not volunteer much during any of the novel study interactions. If he was asked a question he took a great deal of time to think of an answer. When he gave an
answer at the beginning of the study it was usually a one or two word response. During week 4 Bill made the following response when asked to predict what would happen next in *The Hatchet*, “I’m not sure. Maybe it will end” (S. I., week 4, p. 12).

In week 8 when replying to a question concerning *The River*, he replied, “Brian is good to help rescue the man” (S. I., week 8, p. 29). Towards the end of the study during the last novel study he was able to generate the following reply, “I think Brian is wrong for going back” (S. I., week 12, p. 3). During week 12 he talked briefly about the main character Brian: “Brian is like me because he likes the outdoors” (S. I., week 12, p. 4). He did not continue this sentence or elaborate more on his answer.

*Teacher Interview Results*

Participants’ ability to respond to various questions concerning their reading improved as the study progressed. In the beginning their answers were short and evasive. As the study progressed, they became more accurate and detailed. Specifically, this researcher asked participants questions about their reading selections that addressed comprehension skills. These skills included making inferences, analyzing characters, making predictions, identifying cause and effect relationships, comparing and contrasting different aspects of their stories, discussing details in their selections, identifying the main idea of certain passages, and differentiating fact from opinion. Initially, participants’ ability to answer accurately questions was not as thorough as their ability to answer the same questions at the end of the study.

*Inferences.* The ability to make deductions or conclusions based on a reading selection is necessary for students to succeed in reading. All of the participants increased their ability to make inferences during the study.
Initially, when Jane was asked a question during mastery reading time she responded with one or two word suggestions. In week 10 she wrote the following response to a teacher question on the *Harry Potter* book she was reading, “Those people will be mean to Harry Potter when he wakes up. Those people know that they're not his real parents and will force him to run away and fly on a broomstick” (W. R., Jane week 10). Another response later that same week indicated, “Hagrid probably keeps the amber liquid in his pocket because he might need it to perform some kind of a function. Maybe he is going to get thirsty or he might give Harry a drink” (W. R., Jane, week 10).

Bill did not demonstrate the ability to make any inferences when the study began. He either failed to respond to questions or waited until someone else supplied the answer for him. During week five he began to display an ability to make inferences on books he was reading. When asked to write a conclusion regarding a fact from *The Hatchet* he wrote: “Brian’s luck changed when he discovered how to make fire” (W. R., Bill, week 5). In week 10 as he was reading a *Harry Potter* book he responded to a question by saying, “Hagrid probably keeps it in his pocket because he might not have a teapot. In this way he can always have some water with him so he will not get thirsty” (S. I., week 10, p. 39). At the end of the study he was drawing conclusions about things in his books and responding to questions with complete sentences.

Randy was able from the beginning to form accurate conclusions based on his reading. His improvement was seen in the length of his answers. In the beginning he typically responded to a question with several words. At the end he responded to inquiries by writing or answering orally several paragraphs at a time. His answer during week 11 of
the study demonstrated his ability to compose complex answers to questions. When asked about a situation in his *Harry Potter* book he wrote the following statement:

_Hagrid probably keeps a squishy package of sausages in his pocket just in case he became famished in his duties. He probably gives them to the owl when he has a long journey or if the owl gets sick. If I was going on such a journey, I would probably consider taking a squishy package of sausages myself just like he did._

(W.R., Randy, week 11)

James improved his ability to make inferences. In the beginning, when asked to draw a conclusion, he would respond with only a sentence. During the last few weeks, however, he responded either orally or in writing with several paragraphs or one long paragraph. In week 10 of the study this researcher asked him to reply in writing why certain things happened in his *Harry Potter* book. He replied:

_They will be mean and lock Harry in a closet. They will make him do all kinds of work for them and they will also try to prevent him from going to school. I think they will go to a place where they will not be able to be found and that is going to be very bad for Harry._ (W.R., James, week 10)

The ability of all participants to improve their inferences increased as the study progressed. This was demonstrated by participants' oral responses and written answers to the questions that this researcher asked on their reading selections.

*Analyzing characters.* Understanding the characters in a story helped the reader to comprehend what was happening in the story. Each participant demonstrated an ability to understand some things about the characters in reading selections he or she was able to read.
Jane demonstrated a capability to understand the characters in her stories from the beginning. During the second week, this researcher asked her to tell about one character that stood out more from the others in the book she was reading. She responded, "The character's name is Benjamin, and he is 13 years old. I believe Benjamin is a nice boy and that he treats everyone fairly in the book. I like Benjamin because he follows the golden rule" (S. I., week 2, p. 19).

Bill took a long time to answer when queried about a character in a story. During week 2 he began to answer in complete sentences. When this researcher asked him about a certain character, he responded, "Nate is a detective and he is sweet on a girl. He is young about my age and his little brother always tags along with him" (S.I., week 2, p. 16). Bill could not provide much more than one or two sentence answers when asked about characters. However, as the study ended work continued on expanding his responses to include more information about the character and specific examples from the story.

Randy provided accurate and complete depictions of characters from the stories he was reading. His answers became longer and more descriptive as the study progressed. In the beginning he told this researcher that he was not used to providing long answers when he described characters. In week 3 of the study he gave the following answer when this researcher asked him to describe a character from his Goosebumps book:

Abigail is a young woman in her 20s or early 30's. I think she looks like my mom, a woman with brown hair and green eyes. I am visualizing her as being somewhat mean and vengeful towards other people in the book. (S. I., week 3, p. 17)

Randy continued to provide excellent character interpretations as the study continued.
James presented character analyses that improved throughout the study. His initial responses were several words to one sentence long and at the end of the study he provided descriptions of characters that approximated a page in length. In week 3 this researcher asked him to describe a character in the Goosebumps book he was reading. He answered, “He is a brave person and he has a chipped tooth. I believe that he is about 11 or 12 years old” (S. I., week 3, p. 7). In week seven he provided the following character description:

The boy is very smart and decisive. He makes accurate decisions based on the little information that he has available to him. I'm not sure if I could make the same decisions that are in his situation. I hope I never get put into that situation. (S. I., week 7, p. 16)

Jane, Randy, and James improved their ability to understand characters in stories they were reading. Their answers became longer and more descriptive in response to this researcher’s questions. Bill improved by being able to provide any answer without hesitating between question and answer.

Making predictions. Closely related to the ability to make inferences is the capacity to make predictions. Throughout the study all participants demonstrated some ability to predict what would happen next in the story. The accuracy of their predictions improved as the study proceeded. Additionally, the length and details given in their answers improved.

Jane showed improvement by moving from one sentence answers to several sentences when she made her predictions. Many times when asked to predict what would happen next she provided a lengthy explanation of her ponderings. Her initial ability to predict was shown by her answer to one of questions during the first day of the case study.
When this researcher asked her to predict what will happen next in her story she responded, “I think he will go deeper into the cave and the kids will get caught by a monster” (S. I., week 2, p. 18). In week seven of the study she answered a similar question by replying:

The next morning will come and they will look for some food. Probably some food that will help them get the energy they need for the job they have to do. I believe the best food in this case will be fish, because, fish are just plain good for you. (S. I., week 7, p. 23)

When this researcher asked her to make a written prediction about her thoughts during *The River* she wrote:

I think of that they are going to make a boat and they're going to try to get Derek to a place because he does not want to leave him in a coma. He will drag Derek to the wood boat to and they will face some dangers as they go down the river. Probably they will run into some big rapids and there will be forced to overcome that. (W.R., Jane, week 8)

Her ability to make accurate predictions improved as the study proceeded. During the last week of the study she confidently predicted whenever this researcher asked her what she thought would happen next and provided reasons for the prediction.

Bill began the study by answering with one or two words when this researcher asked him what he thought. He displayed little confidence in his ability to answer questions. During the third week of the study this researcher asked him to make a prediction about the book he was reading. He replied with one word “firewood” (S. I.,
week 3, p. 17). Moreover, he gave no reason why he chose the word firewood. In week 11 a journal entry this researcher made indicated the following:

Bill made several good predictions about what was going to happen next and he frequently compared the book to the movie. Bill seemed improved greatly in his ability to provide predictions. I was impressed with his ability to answer my questions in complete sentences. (T. J., week 11, p. 19)

Randy displayed an ability to make predictions. He improved his accuracy throughout the study. He began by making predictions that were several sentences long. He finished the study by making predictions, thinking about what he was saying, and correcting it as he stated his response. For example, during week 11 this researcher asked him to make a prediction concerning the *Goosebumps* book he was reading and he responded:

They're going to face many dangers as they enter down a long hallway. The hallway will have many places where monsters and other goblins can come out and get them. They have to be very careful or else there will not make it to where they want to go. (S. I., week 11, p. 45)

James was able to make predictions that were accurate. He improved the length of his responses. When this researcher asked him to make a prediction during week 1 concerning a *Goosebumps* book he responded, "I can't really say for sure if the monster will do that next. I don't think he will" (S. I., week 1, p. 2). In week 8 this researcher asked a similar question regarding a *Harry Potter* book. His answer indicated improvement in making predictions. "I predict that Harry and his friends are going to cast
a bad spell and make some people very angry. Because of this I think there will probably be expelled from the school that they're going to” (S. I., week 8, p. 32).

All participants improved the accuracy of their predictions as the study progressed. Additionally, they improved the length and details provided in their responses.

*Identifying cause and effect.* Identifying reasons why events happened in stories was one of the participants' weakest areas. When questioned about the cause of an event, they began the study unsure of an answer. As the study proceeded, they became more confident in identifying events and their causes.

When this researcher initially asked Jane to describe an event and the reason for the event she exhibited much hesitation. During week 1 this researcher asked her about a situation in the *Goosebumps* book she was reading. She replied, "It happened because Sally said something in the cave about the girl. The cave became upset” (S. I., week 1, p. 9). In week seven she identified a cause and effect in the following way, “Robbie ran away because Eric was being mean. Derek felt sad and got up to go to look for Robbie. He couldn't find him because the bad guys had caught up with Robbie already” (S. I., week 7, p. 31). In the last week of the study she could accurately list five events and their causes from *Brian's Winter*.

Bill exhibited hesitation in answering cause and effect questions. He took several minutes before he composed an answer. In answering this researcher's questions during the first week of the study he could not list specific causes for events. As the study progressed, he became more proficient in providing answers when asked about the causes of certain events. During week 5 he was reading a favorite book on sports and this researcher asked him a question. He answered, “A new kid came and started playing
football and caught the ball and made a touchdown. Once the new kid showed that he could play football he started to have lots of friends” (S. I., week 5, p. 21) During novel study on *The River* in week 8 he completed the following written exercise. When asked to provide two events and their causes he wrote, “They built a raft to float down the river and they hunted for wild berries to get some food” (W.R., Bill, week 8).

Randy was adept at providing answers about cause and effect. In the beginning this researcher asked him for reasons on why things happened. He gave one or two word answers. Later, he provided oral or written responses of several paragraphs to inquiries. During the last week of the study this researcher asked him the reason why one event occurred in the *Goosebumps* book he was reading and he maintained:

Well, the new teacher has a lot of snakes that could cause harm to a lot of people. He is about to become very busy and he is planning to let the snakes go because he wants to scare a lot of people and let some people escape.” (S. I., week 12, p. 13)

James used his imagination to develop reasons why things happened in books he was reading. In week 1 of the study he stated, “There is a kid named Skipper who was going to an orthodontic appointment and he made a building disappear because he did not like the building” (S. I., week 1, p. 3). In the last week of the study, James used his imagination less and facts from the book more as he determined reasons why things happened. He provided the following written response to a question:

The people in the story were very hungry so they decided to go hunting for food to satisfy their hunger. Also, they built a shelter so it would not rain on them that night. They also looked for firewood so they could start a fire to warm themselves. (W. R., James, week 12)
Participants' ability to identify cause and effect improved throughout the study. In the beginning, they were unable to identify most causes of events. At the end of the study, Jane, Randy, and James were confident in their abilities to identify the reasons why things happened in stories they were reading. Although Bill showed some overall improvement, he did not demonstrate the same level of competency the other three participants did.

Comparing and contrasting. The ability to compare and contrast different aspects of the story improved in each participant as the study progressed. During week one, Bill could not provide an answer when asked to compare and contrast something in the story. Jane, Randy, and James provided simple answers to this researcher's early explorations. At the completion of the study all demonstrated an ability to compare and contrast events or characters.

Jane began the study with elementary understanding of comparing and contrasting events in stories she was reading. During the first week this researcher asked her to tell about a character and how she was alike and different from that character. She responded, "His name is Adam. He is different because he is more braver than me. He is different because he is a boy" (S. I., week 1, p. 15). In week 8 she provided the following response:

Maggie, she has blonde hair and is about 13 years of age, she rides horses and likes to do lots of outdoor things just like me. She is different because she is much braver than I would be in that situation I would never have decided to do what she did. I just couldn't, I am not brave enough. (S. I., week 8, p. 25)

Bill continued to have difficulty in answering this researcher's questions. During the first week when this researcher asked him to explain how a character in a story he was reading was just like him he could not provide an answer. In week 8 he wrote the
following when asked to compare himself to Brian in the novel *The River*, “He is about the same age as me and he is a big boy. I think he is brave just like I am. Also, he is very nice to people that he does not know just like me” (W. R., Bill, week 8). The difference between these two responses showed improvement in his ability to answer compare and contrast issues.

Randy could provide competent comparing and contrasting answers to questions posed by this researcher throughout the study. In the final weeks of the study his answers became more complex and lengthy. During the second novel study on *The River* during week eight he provided the following written response when asked to compare himself to the main character:

I am not like Brian and all because he saved the life in the wilderness and I have not done so yet. Additionally, I have never been camping even though I would like to go someday. I think I am like him in this sense, I have the ability to save a life when I would be forced to do so. (W. R., Randy, week 8)

James improved his responses to questions this researcher asked about comparing and contrasting events and characters in stories. In the first week this researcher asked him to tell how a character was like him and not like him. He responded, “Libby is like me because she likes comics, just like I do. She is not like me because she is a girl and I'm a boy” (S. I., week 1, p. 19). In week nine he provided the following response:

Harry is approximately the same age I am. I think he even looks like me based on the movie that I saw. I believe that we're both good at speaking. Harry is English and I am American and we sound different when we speak. (S. I., week 9, p. 16)
Jane, Randy, and James demonstrated improvement in their comparing and contrasting skills as the study progressed. Bill needed a long time to answer these kinds of questions. When he provided the answer it was usually only one or two words long.

*Details.* The ability to distinguish important details in a reading selection aids comprehension. All of the participants improved their skill in distinguishing details in their reading.

Jane could provide details on stories she was reading from the beginning. In week 3 this researcher asked her to furnish five details from the story she was reading and she responded:

Flossie is a fox with a soft brown fur coat. She really thinks that she is a squirrel because of the tail she has. Third, she thinks it is a cat because of his nose. Fourth she goes past a rabbit and thinks that it looks like a rabbit. Finally, every time her grandmother calls her she always says big Mama. (S. I., week 3, p. 12)

Bill struggled to provide five details when asked do so. In the beginning he could give two or three details. At the end he could provide five details in complete sentences. In week 9 this researcher asked him to provide five details and he answered:

First they have been traveling from their home. Second, they have traveled a very long time. Third, they are traveling in a wagon, a very old wagon. Fourth, they are taking a cow and some boxes with them. Finally, Zoe is their daughter (S. I., week 9, p. 11)

Bill improved his ability to provide details from the story he was reading.

Randy was able to provide details for all stories he was reading. The details expanded in scope from the beginning to the end of the study. For example, during week
one, this researcher asked him to list some details. He answered by listing five single
words. During the last week he answered by giving a complete paragraph for each detail.
One example of a detail he listed during the last week of the study is:

I visualize the island and that there on as being a lush and dense tropical island. It
is probably filled with vegetation, all kinds of flowers and trees. I think that there
are probably lots of animals on the island also. (S. I., week 12, p. 18)

James improved his ability to identify details. In the beginning, he provided one or
two word answers when asked to list five details. During week 1 he answered with the
following list, “large, strong, big and fat, ugly, and new” (S. I., week 1, p. 18). In week 5
he provided the following details when asked:

First, Skipper wanted to save one of the super heroes from the big gazelles.
Second, Skipper wanted to pay a visit to the mass butanes and beat him up. Third,
Skipper dissolved in one of the galloping gazelles and I thought he had
supernatural powers. Fourth, everyone started running down the hall. Fifth, the
galloping gazelle disappeared. (S. I., week 5, p. 22)

An entry from this researcher’s journal in week 9 stated, “James answered my
probing questions with very detailed sentences and he was able to provide a complete and
accurate opinion of what was going to happen next in his story” (T.J. week 9, p. 6). James
improved his ability to identify details by lengthening his answers as the study progressed.

All participants improved their ability to identify and provide details when asked
questions regarding their reading selections. In the beginning they provided short answers
to this researcher’s questions and these answers became more lengthy and descriptive as
the study moved forward.
Identifying the main idea. The ability to discern the main idea of a reading passage is important when attempting to understand the story. All four participants demonstrated an ability to identify the main idea when they were reading a story in their zone of proximal development as identified by The STAR Reading Test (2002). When they attempted to read a passage that was difficult for them they were not able to discover the main idea. However, as the study progressed, their response to questions about the main idea lengthened.

Jane could supply the main idea of a passage in her zone of proximal development. When she attempted to read a book of her choosing that was difficult for her, she could not identify the main idea accurately. During week 5 of the study she identified the main idea of one reading passage accurately. She stated, “There was a birthday party for the girls and before the party that went to the mall where a girl stole some earrings” (S. I., week 5, p. 6). During the last week of the study she attempted to read a book written on a ninth grade reading level. Even though this book was not in her zone of proximal development, she could pronounce most of the words. However, she was unable to identify the main idea.

Bill correctly identified the main idea when he was reading books written on the first and second grade reading level. During the novel studies, he needed help to identify the main idea correctly. During week 1 Bill’s response about the main idea concerning a Tom and Ricky book was, “Patches wants to help” (S. I., week 1, p. 7). Patches was the canine character in the story and the main idea of that page was that he wanted to help catch two robbers.
In week 5, Bill accurately identified the main character in the story he was reading as the one who did the wrong deed. Again, he was reading a *Tom and Ricky* book about an oil well mystery. When asked to identify the main idea about the page he was reading he stated, “Tom is trying to find out who is stealing the oil” (S. I., week 5, p. 3).

Randy identified the main idea correctly from the books he read in class. As stated before, Randy could read books written on the sixth grade reading level. He had no difficulty identifying the main idea from the books selected for novel studies. In week 1, when asked to identify the main idea of his reading selection he stated, “Several people are getting lost in a werewolf forest and it is going to be very scary for them” (S. I., week 1, p. 7). During a novel study in week eight on *The River* he responded, “Brian is trying to rescue Derek and knows he must find a way out. He is building the raft in order to float down the river, which is the only way out.” (S. I., week 8, p. 18).

James improved his ability to answer questions about the main idea. During week 1 he provided short answers to this researcher’s questions. By the end of the study he was answering this researcher’s inquiries with multi sentence responses. In week 5, he provided the following answer when asked about the main idea of his reading selection, “Heath has come to warn Harry about something bad will happen to him today. He is very afraid for something that is about happen” (S. I., week 5, p. 14).

During week 1, participants could identify the main idea correctly when reading books written in their zone of proximal development. As they continued to read throughout the study, their responses to main idea questions lengthened and became more complete.
**Justifying their opinion.** All participants were capable of justifying their opinion at the beginning of the study. Learning how to defend their opinion with longer explanations improved as the study progressed.

Jane changed from offering one sentence opinions during the first week of the study to offering multi paragraph opinions during the last week of the study. For example, when asked to state her opinion about a *Harry Potter* book, she answered:

> I just don't see the draw in Harry Potter. To me, it's all about magic and witchcraft and I am not interested in any of those things. I also think that it's more designed for boys. I like books more like *My Louisiana Sky.* (S. I., week 12, p. 16)

Bill began by shrugging his shoulders when asked his opinion of a book. At the end, he answered with the following statement, "*Brian's Return* is a great book because it has adventure, woods, and danger. I think the character Brian was very brave and I like books like this" (S. I., week 12, p. 23).

Randy was not afraid to provide his opinion from the beginning. When questioned about facts from his reading selections he offered detailed lists. His favorite reading selections were *Goosebumps* stories and he was never hesitant to try and interest this researcher in his latest book. During the last week of the study this researcher asked him what he found so fascinating about Goosebumps, and he replied:

> These books are very easy for me to read and I can finish one a weekend. They have lots of danger but no gooey stuff like some of the other scary books I read. They’re easy for me to remember the details and the time goes by quickly when I read them. (S. I., week 12, p. 13)
James's favorite books were *Harry Potter*. As he gained confidence, he began to read those books more often. At the end of the study, he was reading the second *Harry Potter* book and was getting ready to watch the movie when it made its debut. James told this researcher the following, "*Harry Potter* books are interesting to me because of the things that happen to Harry, his friends, and the neat magic they do. I wish that more books were written like *Harry Potter* books" (S. I., week 12, p. 19).

Participants could justify their opinion concerning stories they could comfortably read. They improved their ability throughout the course of the study to state and defend their opinions.

All participants improved their skills to make inferences, analyze characters, make predictions, identify cause and effect, identify details and justify their opinion. Some showed more improvement than others in certain areas, but all participants demonstrated skill advancement.

*Writing Ability and Creativity*

Weaver (1994) argued that reading and writing are closely interrelated. When developing this curriculum this researcher included writing as an integral part of learning to read. The first part of the reading lesson each day was titled phonics study. As part of this process, after the chart making was complete, the participants chose one or more words from the chart and developed a writing sample using those words. During week one, the participants were unsure what to do. This researcher encouraged them to be creative and use the words that we discussed during the chart making session to develop something in writing that was interesting to them. In this way, they would be demonstrating correct use of the words and also gain practice in writing. As the study
neared its completion, the participants gained more confidence in their writing ability and creativity.

\textit{Beginning efforts.} In the first week of the study participants demonstrated sentence writing as a response to this researcher's suggestion they write something with the words generated on the class chart. All informed this researcher they never had the freedom to develop a writing piece on their own. Their initial efforts demonstrated an uncertainty about how to proceed.

Jane displayed an excellent effort during the first day of the study when she produced the following response to the chart words:

\textit{My Frend rote a love note to a boy she liked and the teacher was wathing read it another boy was reading it just has much. But thin the teacher got a holed of it and thruw it away and my frend was very mad the end. (W. R., Jane, week 1)}

This researcher encouraged her to be original, and this demonstrated her creativity.

In the third week of the study Jane produced the following writing in response to the chart word grizzly bear:

\textit{I went to my dad's and we went to Colorado. We sail a big-big grizzly bear we stared to run and the bear was all most got me but it didn't I am so glad that I ran because f I didnen't I would have been dead But me and my dad ran ran untile we sail the cabin and we got in it we had so scared we starred crying. Then when my brother came in and he look like he go chased to but we all got a whey The end. (W. R., Jane, week 3)
Even though this writing sample has some spelling and grammar errors it revealed an ability to create a story and utilize a word discussed in class.

Bill produced a sentence during the initial weeks. His writing effort for the first day was, “I mowe a boy and he news sign language it is herd to Iren he will do mena” (W. R., Bill, week 1). Bill was using the word “sign language” from the chart we generated that first day. In this writing he demonstrated few spelling and grammar skills. However, the use of the word “sign language” is correct. In the third week, using the word griffin from the class chart, he produced the following writing sample, “I saw a griffin in the sek. Cketday it hesa a bran and vary bigthen it ledy in the hedra in the woods” (W. R., Bill, week 3). Again this sample showed numerous spelling and grammar errors, but several sentences were created by his efforts.

Randy created long sentences and paragraphs from the beginning. When this researcher instructed the students to use the words this researcher emphasized their writing should be rough draft quality. This researcher encouraged them to get their thoughts down on paper and try to use words they chose from the class chart correctly. Randy produced long writing pieces in true rough draft fashion. His initial writing effort using the chart words newt, knave, cowcatcher, and head lice was:

My mother just had a baby girl and she bought me a newt around two years old. My sister had hair to her shoulders and one day I came home from school with head lice and I gave it to my sister and my dad started acting like a knave and took his truck with a cow catcher to go look for a head lice kit. (W. R., Randy, week 1)

Throughout the initial portion of the study, he continued to demonstrate the ability to take several words and create an interesting story around them.
James could construct interesting writing from the beginning of the study. His writing grew in length from several sentences to several paragraphs. His initial effort using the chart words *splurge* and *calculator* was, “I just impeach my assistant because she splurge coffee on my paper work and on my calculator I feel bad” (W. R., James, week 1). He produced several sentences and a short vignette using several words. In the third week, using the chart words *presbytery, protuberance, and prairie dog* he created the following, “The presbytery has a prairie dog protuberance that stick out. That causes confusion when people see it every day. Some people bark as they go bye” (W. R., James, week 3).

**Ending efforts.** Participants’ writing lengthened and became more creative as the study neared its completion. The rough draft writing had fewer mistakes in grammar and spelling.

Jane improved her writing by forming longer and more complex sentences. Additionally, her spelling and use of descriptive words improved. A writing sample from the last week of the study using the chart word *threw* validates this:

I was walking to the bus and this boy threw a crinkled piece of paper at me. I picked it up and threw away over the green grass and that boy was mad. He could not have any more paper. Because the bus driver cout him. The bus driver kick him off the bus. (W. R., Jane, week 12)

Jane used the adjectives *crinkled* and *green* to add descriptive words to her writing.

Bill increased his ability to make longer sentences and to develop paragraphs in his writing samples. However, his spelling and grammar skills remained weak. His writing sample from the last week using the chart word *smokescreen* demonstrated this, “In a hesa
I saw a smokescreen it was a four in the sa the big four was faint in the hesa the wema was dry a small beer I saw” (W. R., Bill, week 12). This piece of writing was translated by Bill to mean the following, “In a house I saw a smokescreen nearby. It was four in the morning and the smokescreen was faint to me. It was dry outside and then I saw a small deer appear” (S. I., week 12, p. 42).

Randy continued to produce long writing efforts. His grammar and spelling skills improved slightly throughout the study. He created the following writing sample using the chart word smokescreen during the last week of the study:

One day my friend and I had a war for fun. But we didn't think anyone would get hurt. But someone did so when we were throwing rocks at one another he picked up a small smart bomb and threw it but it was fake and it hit my head. It hurt very bad. So I got mad it didn't talk to him And we threw a smokescreen at each other. Unfortunately the smokescreen didn't last and we became friends again. (W. R., Randy, week 12)

Randy had the capability to produce a writing sample very quickly. Often, he would rush through the writing sample and return to his reading, particularly when he was reading a Harry Potter book.

James improved the length of his writing samples. He also enhanced his spelling and grammar skills. This writing sample from the last week, using the chart word threaten validates this:

I was just sitting here chilling at NorthWood and a grown up just threaten to kill me so I got up and punched him in his stomach. I ran as fast as I could and told my parents to kick his butt. Then my parents went over there and he was gone. Then
my parents spotted their car leaving in the guy that threaten me is in my parents' car. I wouldn't want to be him. (W. R.. James, week 12)

All four participants bettered their ability to produce spontaneous writing using the chart words. The improvement demonstrated was directly related to the skills they brought at the beginning of the study. All gained confidence with the written word.

*Time on Task and Reading Attending Behaviors.*

The ability to spend time on reading either silently or orally is a behavior that most students with learning disabilities do not demonstrate. Therefore, one of the ways this researcher sought to measure the development of their reading ability was by monitoring their capability to spend more time engaged in the reading process. Additionally, behaviors exhibited by participants were important because some of these behaviors increased their capability to spend time on task.

Jane verified from the beginning she liked to read and wanted to improve her reading skills. In each class approximately 25 minutes was set aside for mastery reading time. This researcher encouraged participants to attempt to read for that length of time each day. Jane was able to concentrate on her reading for the entire time from the beginning. My observations from the second week of the study specified the following, "Jane is using all 25 minutes of the reading time today to concentrate on her book. She is following along with her finger and mouthing the words silently as she reads" (O. F., week 2, p. 16). My observations from the sixth week of the study indicate, "Jane is reading with her feet flat on the floor and her eyes totally focused on the book. She has been that way for the last 15 minutes undisturbed by two intercom messages" (O. F., week 6, p. 2). In the last week this researcher's observations showed, "Jane has her book resting on her
forearms and has turned away from a student who was attempting to gain her attention. She is absorbed in her reading selection and has smiled several times as she reads” (O. F., week 12, p. 7).

Jane exhibited several unique reading attending behaviors that seemed to focus her attention on her reading. This researcher noticed these during the first week, and they became more evident as the study progressed. Information from observations during the first weeks of the study showed, “Jane follows along in the book shows she is reading by using her finger to move down the page. Also, she silently mouths the words and as she goes along” (O. F., week 2, p. 16). When Jane was reading books in her zone of proximal development she continued to mouth words as she read. When this researcher asked her why she did this she responded, “Mr. Sargent, I just need to do this. It helps me concentrate on this stuff with everything else going on” (S. I., week 4, p. 5). These reading attending behaviors continued throughout the study.

Data from week 6 observations illustrated the following, “Jane is reading her book with her eyes focused, a pen moving down the middle of the page, and her mouth moving silently” (O. F., week 6, p. 17). The last week of the study produced the following observation, “Jane is mouthing words again and trying to concentrate fully on her reading selection despite some outside distractions” (O. F. week 12, p. 21). Jane appeared to be comforted by silently saying the words as she read and needing some type of object to keep her place in the middle of the page.

Despite Bill’s lack of previous success in reading, he exhibited a good ability to pay attention to class tasking and exhibited several distinctive behaviors in this process. Observations from the second week showed, “Bill moved quickly as we transition to from
phonics study to mastery reading. He grabbed a book and began reading” (O. F., week 2, p. 12). During week five this researcher’s observations indicated, “Bill is focused, both of his feet are flat on the floor, his eyes are following along in the book, and his foot is tapping to the beat of some music” (O. F., week 5, p. 13). Observations from the last week of this researcher’s study showed, “Bill is very focused today. He is sitting up straight in his chair and he has been reading silently for the past 18 minutes” (O. F., week 12, p. 2).

Bill displayed various reading attending behaviors. Information from this researcher’s observations revealed the behaviors he most often used were: eyes following along in his book, foot tapping, drumming his fingers, and resting his chin on his hand. All those behaviors appeared to help Bill concentrate his attention on silent reading during mastery reading time.

From the beginning Randy could concentrate on class requirements when he was reading a book that was interesting to him. My daily observations verified his ability to focus on reading requirements. For example during week 1 this researcher’s data indicated, “Randy is actively engaged in reading a Goosebumps book. It is so quiet in this classroom you could hear a pin drop He appears to be smiling every once in awhile” (O. F., week 1, p. 6).

Randy continued his ability to focus on what this researcher asked him to do as evidenced by one of this researcher’s observations during the last few weeks, “Randy has read just about every Goosebumps book I have in this class. I wish I had some more books to let him read” (O. F., week 10, p. 5). After finishing approximately 25
Goosebumps books in six weeks he turned his attention to the Harry Potter stories and remained focused on silent reading for the rest of the study.

Randy's reading attending behaviors were interesting. Based on this researcher's observations, his dominant behaviors were the following: resting his chin on his forearm, turning his feet to 90 degree angles, facing away from the class, and failing to finish a book before starting a new one.

James demonstrated an ability to remain focused on task. My observations from the first week indicated the following, "James is engaged in reading a story at this time. His eyes are following along on the page and he is tapping his hand" (O. F., week 1, p. 6). In week five data showed, "James is following along nicely in his book and his head is resting on his hand" (O. F., week 5, p. 7). The last week of the study confirmed his ability to spend time on task, "James showed up three minutes before class started today grabbed the book that he was reading and began reading, I was trying to take attendance and he was totally focused on reading" (O. F., week 12, p. 8).

James displayed a variety of reading attending behaviors throughout the study. Some of the behaviors he exhibited, based on their frequency, were as follows: straight posture, resting his head in his hands as he reads, the book lying flat on his reading desk, feet flat on the floor, and a unique capability to concentrate even when numerous class interruptions were occurring (T. J., week 12, p. 16).

This researcher was surprised with the ability of participants to focus their attention on what we were doing in class. This researcher expected some trouble getting them to concentrate on their assignments, but was surprised by their ability to concentrate and focus their attention on what was happening at the moment. Some behaviors seemed
to help them maintain their focus. These behaviors were present from the beginning of the study until the end.

Determining the development of participants' reading ability was a complicated task. Their overall reading ability seemed to improve as demonstrated by their class participation, answers to reading questions, writing efforts and creativity during the phonics study portion of the lesson, and time spent on task along with behaviors exhibited to enhance their ability to focus.

Motivation of the Middle School Student with Learning Disabilities

Enhancing the motivation of the middle school student with learning disabilities is a daunting task. This section describes data collected from different sources that answer the second research question: How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhance the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities? This section highlights data concerning the Achieve Reading Curriculum and its components, class participation and discussion, and student writing and creativity efforts.

Achieve Reading Curriculum

Information collected from participants concerning the parts of the Achieve Reading Curriculum that motivated them to read is the focus of this section. There is no single answer to this question. Several items appeared to enhance participants' motivation to read. Some of the factors identified were the freedom of choice to choose books they wanted to read, the daily homework requirements, and the fun aspects of chart making during phonics study.

Jane mentioned the following positive opinions regarding the Achieve Reading Curriculum during an interview conducted during week 5:
I really like the curriculum because it is much easier and more interesting for me to read books this year. I also get to read the books that I like to read and we learned many new words each week during phonics study. Last year I was told what book had to read and I often didn't like the book that was chosen for me. The chart making helps me to pronounce words much better than I could last year and it is very exciting. Also, I am passing many more accelerated reader tests this year than last year. (S. I., week 5, p. 11)

During the last week Jane made similar statements to this researcher when asked if her opinion had changed. She stated, “I still like to choose the books I read, the fun way we do phonics study and the chart making” (S. I., week 12, p. 16).

My journal contained the following entry for the last week of the study.

Jane has been really concentrating on reading her books. I think she is trying to read books that are somewhat difficult for her in so doing not really understanding what she is trying to read, however she seems to be so motivated because of the freedom of choice. (T. J., week 12, p. 17)

Bill mentioned similar things during interviews with him. During week 5 he declared, “I really like this curriculum because during all of last year I only read 10 books and this year I have already read 15 books, we're just in the ninth week of school. I like reading at home too.” During the same interview Bill went on to say:

In this curriculum I have lots of books to choose from and I can always find a book to read. I really think the books that I am choosing are getting easier for me read. Learning new words during the chart making is cool too! (S. I., week 5, p. 17)
This researcher’s journal from week nine mentioned the following, “Bill is my weakest reader, yet he finds the time to choose a book and begin reading” (T. J., week 9, p. 9).

Randy appreciated the freedom to choose action-adventure, scary, and horror stories whenever he wanted. During the first week he mentioned, “I just love being able to choose the Goosebumps books. Several other teachers never let me read these kinds of books” (S. I., week 1, p. 3). Randy discussed the homework requirements, “My Mom and Dad have been taking the time to help me. Even though my mom works a lot she still finds the time to read with me at night” (S. I., week 1, p. 7). In week 5 Randy talked about the close interaction between the student and teacher in the Achieve Reading Curriculum by saying the following:

My teacher last year did not teach us like you are. She never taught us to visualize things in our mind or how to pick out the main idea, discuss the details, analyzing characters, and then being able to predict what happens next. That thing you said about developing a picture in your mind is real, you know, like going to see a movie. I really like to do that. (S. I., week 5, p. 31)

Randy also stated, “The homework makes me read for 20 minutes a day and I need to do that time to improve my reading ability” (S. I., week 6, p. 14).

James was very willing to provide his opinion on the Achieve Reading Curriculum throughout the study. During week 5 he made the following statement:

It's a really good curriculum because we learn about 100 words a week. We do the words again and again and most of us seem to get the definitions right. Also I just love being able to pick out the books that I read. The charts that we make are full
of bright colors and they help us focus on the words that we're discussing. The response we make to the charts is good because we're learning how to write paragraphs that make sense. I just really like reading this way. (S. I., week 5, p. 27)

An entry from this researcher's journal during week 11 provided the following statement about James and his reading motivation:

James on the other hand loves action-adventure or mystery and magic stories like *Harry Potter* and has no problem with trying to concentrate on those kinds of books. He has become a prolific reader when it comes to those books and he insists on continuing to read *Harry Potter* even when the classroom is noisy and full of distractions. (T. J., week 11, p. 2)

*Class Participation and Discussion*

Participants demonstrated willingness throughout the study to participate in class activities. All expressed an enthusiasm to take part in and become better at what this researcher asked them to do. Measuring the level of their participation was achieved by examining data from the study. Data gathered from observations, journal, and interview transcripts were the primary methods this researcher used to measure their class participation.

Class observations showed many instances where participants seemed motivated to participate in class activities. During the first week of the study this researcher made the following observations:

It is 11:41 a.m. and all four participants today are reading. All of them seem to be reading and engaged. James is trying to read so very well I am very impressed is
the focus for the last 15 minutes and is completely not distracted. Randy volunteered his writing to share with the class today. He took the class lead. (O. F., week 1, p. 3)

A sample of observations during the third week:

Bill has chosen a first grade and accelerated reader book, and action-adventure one. He is totally engaged in reading it. I asked James to read a portion of this book out loud. He read most of a page without any mistakes and the book is written on a sixth grade reading level. He was so proud of himself. Randy is volunteering to read. He gives me an excellent one sentence summary of what he has read today. Jane is paying attention, smiling, eagerly volunteering to answer my questions. (O. F., week 3, p. 6)

As the study continued, similar observations occurred each week. This researcher was impressed with participants' ability to become absorbed with class activities. One sample of an observation from the next to last week of this study is:

The participants arrive in class three minutes early today, before the bell rang. They obtained their reading folders, sat down and began reading without any direction for me. Bill is reading a book today that is 45 pages long. Even though this book is written on a second grade reading level and represents advancement for him. Jane asked my permission to go the library early today to try and find another reading book. She is very interested in My Louisiana Sky. (O. F., week 11, p. 17)

Information from the journal enabled this researcher to reflect on activity that took place during the day and to find importance in those activities. This researcher used the
journal as a mechanism to reflect on thoughts about what was occurring in the classroom. From this reflection process this researcher was able to critically examine the motivation of the participants. A sample of a journal entry from the second week of the study is:

*Randy,* what can I say about Randy? He is a reader who reads at least on sixth grade level. He is soaking up every story I provide for him if it’s associated with action and adventure. He so wants to become an excellent reader. Maybe he is ready for the regular class? *James* appreciates and likes the books you would think a 12 year old boy would like. He enjoys books associated with magic, action adventure, and outdoor themes. He told me that he wants to read all of the *Harry Potter* books by May. *Jane* is so motivated to read. She appreciates all of the books I have in my class and has told me she really likes the freedom of choice I have. (T. J., week 2, p. 11)

These journal entries reflected the student responses during interviews about the freedom of choice and how easy it was to participate in class activities. This researcher’s journal contained the following excerpts from the end of the study:

*James* is a better reader than what his test scores show. He appreciates and likes all kinds of books that would think a 12 year-old boy would like. He enjoys books and appears to be motivated by books associated with magic, adventure stories and other outdoor themes. He is taking upon himself to read all three of the *Harry Potter* books and seems to enjoy himself in doing so. *Jane,* *Bill,* and *Randy* also very appreciative of being able to choose the books they want to read. I really think that *Jane* has adjusted well to picking out books for self and to doing 30 minutes every single night for homework. In fact she is adjusting so well that she
continues to read beyond my expectations per main problem appears to be comprehension and remembering details in which she has read. Bill has become enthralled with *Harry Potter*. He's been able to focus his attention throughout the entire class, something he could not do at the beginning. Again, he answers my question to the best of his ability and seems to be thoroughly enjoying the books that he has chosen to read. All of the participants choose adventure, mystery, or magical books when they select their books during mastery reading time. (T. J., week 12, pp. 13-16)

The transcripts of interviews with Jane, Randy, Bill and James demonstrated enthusiasm for the Achieve Reading Curriculum and a willingness to participate in class discussions. Most of their enthusiasm became apparent after the fifth week of the study.

During week 5 James offered the following about his willingness to take part in the Achieve Reading Curriculum during one of our discussions:

I just love to do this stuff. We are learning about 80 words a week I think, and when we do the words over it helps me to remember them. We can guess about the words and you explain them to us. I just love coming to class every day. Most though, I love being able to pick out the books we read. (S. I., week 5, p. 19)

James gave the following answer when this researcher asked him in week 8 about the class participation and discussion requirements:

The written response and the reading and sharing we do every day is great. You make us want to come to class and we're not afraid to tell you what we think either. In our interviews you always ask us things about books that are interesting to us, not some old nasty book. (S. I., week 8, p. 4)
During week 11 James made the following comment when this researcher asked him for any suggestions on how the Achieve Reading Curriculum could be improved:

Well, Mr. Sargent, you have let us choose our books, talk about our thoughts and generally read what we want. I think it's been great. What look at all the charts on the wall and all the words we've learned? Keep doing it just like this, but let's increase the time for reading to 25 minutes a day. (S. I., week 11, p. 5)

Randy, in response to a question asked during week five stated his eagerness for class participation by saying:

We did not read like this in Mrs. Smith’s classroom last year. All we did was one worksheet after another. And, you know what she hasn’t taught us like you has, you know talking about the main idea, details, characters, and being able to predict what happens next. That thing you said about the three levels of comprehension is really neat. (S. I., week 5, p. 7)

During week 7 Randy made the following comments when asked to tell his opinion about participating in class and discussions:

I still like to do the charts and to pick out our books to read. I’m not sure if we get to read long enough every day. Hopefully they will make the class periods longer next year if this continues. Boy, I hope it does. It’s almost as good as doing Yugi-Oh cards. (S. I., week 7, p. 3)

During week 10, when asked why he liked to participate in class and about discussions Randy replied:
You make it easy for us to talk and I think you like our opinions and words that we say. I think you want us to talk and not just sit here and we get to make up things when we write too. (S. I., week 10, p. 5)

Jane responded in the following way during week 5 when asked what she liked about the class participation and discussion:

This stuff makes me want to come to class because you let us talk about things. I love being able to choose the books we get to read and that first book was cool that we read together. I just like seeing all the words around the classroom and it helps me to remember them too. (S. I., week 5, p. 16)

In week 7 she added the following comments to a question asked about why she liked to participate:

Last year I was told what books to read, and I hated most of them. This year I can read books that I want to, and you don’t say much to me, except when I pick out a book that seems to be too hard for me. (S. I., week 7, p. 3)

In week 11 she made the following statement:

Thanks for letting me choose the books I want. And, thanks for letting me do what I want, I mean to write some different things even though I’m not a very good writer, but I think I’m getting better you know? (S. I., week 11, p. 9)

Bill was the most reserved about class participation and discussion as demonstrated by his comments in week 5, “Talking and discussing stuff makes me nervous, but I guess it is good for me” (S. I., week 5, p. 1). In week 9 he stated, “I just don’t like to talk, but I can talk here when I want” (S. I., week 9 p. 7). And in the last
week he said, "I think I like it here when I talk, at least I’m not scared" (S. I., week 12, p. 3).

The motivation of the four participants is a difficult construct to measure. Nevertheless, observations, teacher journal, and interview transcripts showed that the four participants were enthusiastic about the Achieve Reading Curriculum and that this curriculum seemed to propel them to reading heights they did not attain before.

*Student Writing and Creativity Efforts*

The measurement of student writing and creativity efforts is difficult. Throughout this case study there was an increase in the creativity and writing efforts put forth by all four participants. This effort and creativity was measured by the increasing length of their writings, fewer grammatical errors being made, more coherent stories being produced, and less help being sought from this researcher as they were writing. Data for this section come from writing samples produced by participants during the daily phonics study section of the lesson. As these examples are examined, the reader should remember these samples were rough draft efforts made by the participants.

During the first weeks Jane produced writing samples with grammatical errors and mistakes. As the study progressed, she was able to produce writing samples of approximately the same length, but with improved grammar and spelling. One of her writing samples from the first week was:

I had a boyfriend but I brook up with him becuas he is a cheter and a big sisey find dumb dumb boy so I think he is a dog lover and so he can go out with one of those. (W. R., Jane, week 1)
This sample established some creativity, but she made many grammar errors in sentence structure.

A writing sample she produced during week 4 showed some improvement:

I was waching my brother race and a boy next to him got on my brothers side. The boy tride to nock him doun but he did get disqualify because the man that was whatching him and my brother almost got disqualify. The man at frist thot he went in the biys, but then he saw my brother on the wright side and my brother one the final race. The end. (W. R., Jane, week 4)

This sample demonstrated some improvement in basic sentence structure and her capability to put thoughts together. The theme of the writing sample is about what happened to her the previous weekend when she went to watch her brother race.

Jane continued to improve, particularly in her sentence structure and spelling skills. An example of her writing from the last week follows:

Me and my aunt went skating. And we had so much fun. I was going to skate all night long. I am glad she did not bring her boyfriend. I want to go and see her some day. I think we could have so much fun together. (W. R., Jane week 12)

This sample demonstrated a much improved ability to put sentences together and spell words correctly during her writing efforts.

When the study began Bill could not produce a readable sentence. Also, his sentence structure was weak. A sample he produced from of first week of class was, "I will not be a vies admral I will no be non the aeme" (W. R., Bill, week 1) This effort represented 15 minutes worth of work from him that day.
At the midpoint of the case study, Bill’s writing improved slightly. His efforts produced the following result, “I see sam muck in a dog bet some slush mete in it my feren fall in the muck and slush then he tar at then we satk for wo menes sow he wet heme and brad” (W. R., Bill, week 5). This sample, translated by Bill, reads as follows, “I see Sam stuck with his dog between some slush stuff and in the forest. He fell in the slush and then he started to sink. Two people saw him, went to get him and Brad” (S. I., week 5, p. 29). This sample continued to demonstrate very weak spelling and grammar skills, but his effort lengthened his sample.

During the last week Bill made significant improvements in his writing. The length, spelling and grammar improved.

I saw a flat fish eating a fly and squirrel. I got the flintlock and shote them both.

Jesse cam with a flame thrower and they were sd to the stove. After, we became very full from eating the flatfish. (W. R., Bill, week 12)

Bill demonstrated a capability to put several sentences together and produce writing with fewer mistakes then he did at the beginning of the study.

Randy had the capability to produce long and creative writing efforts from the beginning. He improved his spelling and sentence structure as the study moved forward. One of his efforts from the first week was:

Chester and I were chatting about chiseling something into a piece of wood and when we were done doing that we went and prayed with the chickadees until my dad heart his chestbone then we had to take him to the hospital and the doctor gave hem a chit to tell him when to come back and see him. (W. R., Randy, week 12)
This example demonstrated a good imagination but weak sentence structure. In his first effort he did not use one end punctuation mark.

A writing sample from the middle of the study demonstrated the following effort:

My dad is a play boy and we're going to see Plymouth Rock just to check it out because he is a plain clothesman and something happened that there so were going up before we left my dad turned into a plotter and he plotted how we would get there faster. So we done that and there we lived and as we were leaving he hit a Plymouth Rock. But he didn't notice so we took off and when we got there it was so crowded that we had to plow through everybody just to get to our plane. (W. R., Randy, week 6)

This sample demonstrated better sentence structure, improved spelling skills and the creation of a story.

Randy's writing sample from the last week of the study showed more improvement. He put together his thoughts and produced a writing sample with enhanced sentence structure, improved spelling skills, and better descriptive words:

My friend's mom went to the gym and it worked out on a treadmill. Well, she put it so fast that she fell and bumper head. They took her to the hospital as fast as they could. When she got there she saw monsters all the time. My friend's Dad showed up to be with his wife and tried to comfort her. He became sick and fainted. Before everyone knew it, everybody had to go to the hospital. (W. R. Randy, week 12)

James demonstrated improved writing ability and creativity throughout the case study. He began the case study by producing one or two sentence efforts during his
writing time and finished with producing efforts of several paragraphs that contained improved spelling and sentence structure. A sample from the first week was, “My pedometer said that I walk five miles. I swagger some more” (W. R., James, week 1). An example from the middle of the study confirmed continued progress:

My dad went to Plymouth Rock and there is a planetarium there. My Dad is a Playboy because he has a lot of money. He uses a plotter all the time. My friend and I are placid. My teacher is a plain clothesman. (W. R., James, week 6)

The sample James created during the last week the study continued to show improvement in the length of his writing, spelling and grammar skills, and his ability to create a story:

When I was fishing I got snagged on something. So I tried to pull within but I discovered it was not snagged. There was a snapping turtle on it. I continued fishing and developed another snag. This time there is a projector on the end of my line. I did know what to do. I became flustered and did not see the sniper on the rooftop who was aiming at me. I threw rocks at him and it him in the head. (W. R., James, week 12)

James became more adept at creating stories with the chart words. Additionally, he produced more words spelled correctly as his writing grew longer.

All four participants exhibited a capability to produce longer writing samples, more words spelled correctly, and better sentence structure. In the first few weeks, they could not construct a writing response very effectively. As the study moved forward, they became more adept at doing so and appeared to be more motivated as a result of the freedom they enjoyed to pursue any writing task they wanted, as long as it was related to the words we had discussed as a class during the phonics study section of the lesson.
Parent Support of the Achieve Reading Curriculum

As part of the Achieve Reading Curriculum, participants were required to read at home for a minimum of 30 minutes each day. During that time, parents were asked to read with their children and help in any way they could. Parental support of this curriculum was critical to participants’ success. Data gathered from interviews, observations, and my journal were used to answer the third research question: How do the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities support the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum? In order to answer this question, this researcher examined parental perceptions, parental reading encouragement, and parental teacher appreciation.

Parental Perceptions

Parental perceptions consisted of positive perceptions of improvement as a result of the curriculum and negative notions about the curriculum and its requirements. The perceptions of several parents changed over the course of the study.

Positive perceptions of improvement. Most of the positive parental perceptions of the Achieve Reading Curriculum were a result of parents believing their child was improving his or her reading skills. All the parents wanted their child to improve in reading. They were concerned and committed to do anything that would help their child succeed. The positive views they stated reflected this commitment.

Jane's mother was very concerned about Jane's reading skills. She believed the Achieve Reading Curriculum was a mechanism for Jane to improve her reading ability and she perceived Jane to be making positive improvement. During an interview in the second week of the study, she stated:
I think Jane is having a good time learning to read. She goes in her room and reads for about 30 minutes every night. Then, I asked her questions about the book and try to find out if she understands the story. I guess she understands the story really well. (P. I., week 2, p. 3)

Jane's mother continued her positive perceptions on her daughter's improvement by stating the following during a interview conducted in the fifth week of the study:

I think Jane is getting a lot better in reading; she seems to be having an easier time and pronouncing words. She also understands the books that she is bringing home from school much better. I am very impressed with her desire to read for 30 minutes every night. (P. I., week 5, p. 6)

The positive perceptions of Jane's improvement continued through to the end of the study. Jane's mother remarked during the last week:

I really enjoy reading with Jane every night. When our 30 minutes are up she wants me to read another page. She just doesn't seem to want to stop reading. It is so enjoyable when I sit down with her and we read together. (P. I., week 12, p. 3)

Bill's parents had trouble finding the time to support Bill's improvement in reading. They always seemed to be very busy and not able to dedicate as much time to Bill's reading success as he might require. During the first week of the study his father remarked, "I just don't have the time to sit down and read with Bill. He has to learn to do it himself" (P. I., week 1, p. 2). Despite their reluctance to dedicate the time, they perceived some improvement in Bill's reading ability. As the study progressed, Bill's mother made the following comment:
I am searching for a way to get Bill interested in reading. I understand that reading is a skill that’s necessary for him to master. And, I’m not quite sure how to do it. What am I saying, I think his reading ability is getting a little better, and I wish I could help more. (P. I., week 5, p. 3)

During the last week of the study, her perception of Bill’s developing reading ability changed for the better:

Bill is reading and knowing the answers. I am so very pleased with his progress. I wish I would have been reading with him since the beginning. I do promise to try and continue reading with him on a daily basis. (P. I., week 12, p. 5)

Randy’s parents were concerned with his reading from the beginning. They indicated they both wanted to help Randy improve so he could be placed in a regular classroom setting. His father made the following remark during the first week, “Randy needs to improve his reading ability and I will help you in any way that I can” (P. I., week 1, p. 7). In week five Randy’s mother stated the following:

I think that Randy is doing very well in your class. He seems to like you a lot and your approach to reading. The freedom you allow him to select his books seems to really motivate him. He is reading so much that I had his father build him a bookshelf in his bedroom for him to store all of his books. I must tell you that your interest and enthusiasm has made all the difference in him this year I just have to say that Randy actually looks forward to going to school and I think this enthusiasm stems directly from you and your reading approach. You make him want to go school! (P. I., week 5, p. 11)
Randy's parents continued to state their positive observations about his reading improvement throughout the remainder of the study. When the study concluded Randy and his parents were spending 30 minutes a night in family reading time.

James's parents also expressed positive opinions regarding his improvement in reading. During the first week of the study his mother remarked:

These 30 minutes of reading every day seems to be improving his reading. Just the other day he was able to pronounce a word that his stepbrother could not and his stepbrother is in an advanced class. James was so proud that he could do that. (P. I., week 1, p. 7)

In the last week of the study his mother's comments summed up what she had mentioned in various interviews as the study moved forward:

James just cannot get enough reading. His desire to read has increased significantly since starting a reading program. Before this year, he did not want to pick a book at all and read but now he tells me he reads every single night and I see him do that too. He really wants to read and spends a lot of his free time doing so. I don't even have to ask him any more. (P. I., week 12, p. 9)

Journal entries reflected the parental notions of improvement as well. Data from a journal entry made in the fourth week of the study, “All seem to be in agreement that they enjoyed reading 30 minutes a night with their students. I wonder if it will continue” (T. J., week 4, p. 9). Information from this researcher’s journal in week 7:

I have given the parents questions to ask their children during reading. In general, I think the parents have been very supportive of this curriculum and are doing the best they can to try and empower their children to read and gain understanding.
from reading. All of them have told me they sense an improvement in their child's reading ability. (T. J., week 7, p. 13)

The following entry was made during the last week of the study:

The parents have been very enthusiastic and kind in their compliments to me about this curriculum. All think that I have done wonders with their child. It's amazing to me how a little bit of freedom of choice and trying to get the parents behind a process can do. I only hope that as the study finishes the parents will keep up their involvement and support of their child. (T. J., week 12, p. 8)

Negative notions. Not all of the parents' perceptions were positive. Some negative sentiments were expressed about the amount of time for parent involvement required by the curriculum. While parents seemed to support the curriculum, they did express some misgivings.

The 30 minutes of independent reading required each day generated some negative comments by parents. Jane's mother expressed the following during an interview in week 5, “It's hard for me to find 30 minutes to read with Jane. Do you think that might be too much” (P. I., week 5, p. 11). Randy's parents articulated similar views:

We try as much as we can to sit down with Randy and read. Now that we both have new schedules and my workload is getting more difficult I don't think of we will be able to find a time to read with him for 30 minutes a night. Is there anything else we can do? (P. I., week 5, p. 13)

Randy's mother continued during the last week to express misgivings on the amount of reading required outside of class:

I've tried to read with him but honestly I and my husband are working a lot of
hours and that requires us to focus a lot of time and energy among the other
children when I have done is to read a certain portion of the book and then I will
go back over and read it to see if he has been accurate in answering my questions.
(P. I., week 12, p. 1)

Bill's parents explained their reluctance to read with Bill for 30 minutes a night in
this manner:

We only have time to read with Bill a couple of times each week. I wish I had
more time, I just lead a very busy life and have other children that the demand my
attention also. How can I devote all my attention to just Bill? (P. I., week 9, p. 2)

James's parents reacted in this way during the early part of the case study:
I don't know how I'm going to be able to commit 30 minutes a night to read with
James. My daughter had scoliosis surgery several weeks ago and I am really tied
up and helping her. I just don't have the time to devote to James and his needs
right now. Don't you think 30 minutes a night is a lot to expect a sixth grader to
read? (P. I., week 3, p. 2)

As the study moved forward, James's parents articulated less negative comments towards
the reading requirements.

Information from the teacher journal reflected some of the negative opinions
parents had regarding the curriculum. An entry from week five stated, "One of the main
parental concerns is time. The lack of it to do all the required tasks that they need to do"
(T. J., week 5, p. 16). This researcher's comments continued during the last several weeks
of the study:
I am wondering if the curriculum’s requirement to read 30 minutes a night may be too much. During interviews with the parents, they have expressed to me, the fact 30 minutes is a lot of time and they’re having difficulty finding that amount of time every day to read with their child. (T. J., week 9, p. 4)

The majority of parental comments were positive in support of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Nevertheless, there were concerns that the curriculum required too much out of class reading.

**Parental Reading Encouragement**

All parents encouraged their child to become the best reader he or she could. This reading encouragement was manifested as support of the Achieve Reading Curriculum and was demonstrated by the parents in various ways.

During an interview with Bill’s parents in the fifth week of the study his mother made the following comments:

I am trying to encourage Bill to read as much as he can. I am thrilled that he seems to want to read now. I think the 30 minutes a night of reading will require him to become better and I am encouraging him to do it. (P. I., week 5, p. 7)

Bill’s parents encouraged him to become the best reader he could and told him that one of the ways he would improve was by doing the homework suggested in the curriculum. His mother stated, “I told Bill that your homework required him to read for 30 minutes a night. So outside of Wal-Mart tonight I made him read” (P. I., week 8, P. 9).

Jane’s mom supported her reading by attempting to ask her questions about what she read during the 30 minutes of homework each night. In week 3 of the study she commented:
After Jane has read for 30 minutes I go in there, skim her book and try to ask her questions on her reading to see if she understands the story really well. I also asked her to pronounce words for me to see if she can pronounce words. I help her with any words she is having difficulty with. (P. I., week 3, p. 6)

Jane's mom also mentioned in week 6, "I want my daughter challenged, but not too challenged, so she becomes frustrated, if you know what I mean" (P. I., week 6, p. 5).

Randy's parents also encouraged him to become a better reader through the use of the curriculum. During an interview in week 2 Randy's dad commented, "I like the way he is reading books that he chooses. I am so encouraged because he never did this before. Please let me know how I can help him become a better reader" (P. I., week 2, p. 3). In his comments made during a week 5 interview he demonstrated continued reading support and encouragement:

Even though it's been very difficult for me to read with Randy every night, I want to let you know that I am encouraging him to read to the best of my ability. After working 12 hours I am dog tired, but my son's reading success is very important to me so I am finding ways to interact with him. (P. I., week 5, p. 17)

James parents also encouraged him to become a better reader by supporting the use of the curriculum. During the third week of the study his mother commented:

James and I have been sitting down and reading together. We are reading more than just books, you know magazines, newspapers, and we have even been reading video games that have print in them. I have been encouraging him to pick out accelerated reader books and read those, so we get some points and win some prizes. (P. I., week 3, p. 9)
His mother's enthusiasm continued throughout the study and in the last week she remarked:

James really likes to read and I think he is doing really well. It's hard for me keep all the books he has been reading. I just have to constantly keep going to the store and buying some new ones. He really likes the *Harry Potter* books that you have in the class. I've never seen him really sit down before and read like he has for the past weeks. (P. I., week 12, p. 15)

Entries from this researcher’s journal corroborate his mother's remarks. In the fifth week this researcher made the following entry, “James has the support and encouragement of parents to read with him and his parents are taking the time asking questions even though they have very busy schedules” (T. J., week 5, p. 19).

The data showed that even with their busy schedules and lives, all of the participants’ parents encouraged them in this researcher’s reading curriculum. All were troubled by their child's inability to read on grade level and verified through interviews the encouragement they routinely provided for their child. Furthermore, the reflective journal confirmed this encouragement through this researcher’s perceptions.

*Parental Teacher Appreciation*

The data confirmed a large amount of parent teacher appreciation for this researcher’s efforts. Parents were favorable about this researcher’s involvement with their children. They constantly remarked in interviews about the consideration this researcher was giving their child. They explained that in the past, most teachers had very little communication with them and they appeared to be desperate for information on how to help their child.
Randy's parents explained their thoughts during an interview conducted during week 3:

I just want to tell you that you have made the difference in his life so far this year. He really respects you and looks forward to coming to school everyday. He looks up to you and you're one of the first teachers he has ever had that has taken such an interest in him. (P. I., week 3, p. 16)

They continued to express their support in week six.

Randy's migraines have disappeared. Last year because he did not like school I think, he came home sick just about every other day. You know he was held back because he missed too many days of school. I don't see that happening this year. Not with your reading program. (P. I., week 6, p. 6)

During the last week Randy's dad made the following comments in a parent meeting at school:

Again, I just want to tell you that you have made the difference in his life so far this year, and he looks so forward to coming to school everyday. Again thank you from the bottom of my heart on what you're doing for my son. (P. I., week 12, p. 17)

James' mother expressed an appreciation of this researcher's teaching methods and curriculum by making the following statement during an interview, "I really think James is doing fine and I appreciate your curriculum and your hard work" (P. I., week 4, p. 13). She continued to state her appreciation in an interview that took place during week 11:

I really am thankful for everything that you have done to try and motivate him to read. I know that you have encouraged me to get involved with him and his
reading and I really think that that is making a difference. (P. I., week 11, p. 3)

Jane's mother made the following remarks when questioned during the second week:

It has been very enjoyable for me to sit down every night and read with Jane. I've never seen a curriculum like this. I think that your requirements are very good for me and her. We are forcing ourselves to spend more time together and that is good and that is because of you. An interesting thing happen the other night, Jane did not eat supper she insisted on finishing the book that she was reading, so we had a cold supper in order that Jane could finish her book. (P. I., week 2, p. 13)

In the last week of the study her mother mentioned, “I have really appreciated all the time you have been taking for Jane and really respect you for that. You are the first teacher in her life to do that” (P. I., week 12, p. 21).

Throughout the study Bill’s parents expressed their appreciation for this researcher’s efforts in helping Bill. In week 1 Bill’s mother made the following comments:

You must know that you are the first teacher to take such an interest in Bill He seems really excited to attend school and even though he hates reading he wants me to get him some books so he can read at home (P. I., week 1, p. 16)

She continued her enthusiasm evidenced by the following statement made during week 6, “Bill is improving so much, I just appreciate your hard work with him. Thank you” (P. I., week 6, p. 17). In the last week of the study Bill’s Dad remarked:

Thank you so much for the interest you have shown in my son. I had just about given up on him. Most teachers had also. You and your curriculum are just what he needs to succeed. Thank you and your assistant again. (P. I., week 12, p. 5)
The journal had numerous entries detailing parental appreciation. In the first week of the study this researcher penned the following journal entry, "It's amazing to me the way in which the parents are hungry for any of information to help their child and appreciate any effort I make" (T. J., week 1, p. 7). In the fourth week I noted, "All parents cared deeply about their children and have been responsive to my suggestions and want more from me" (T. J., week 4, p. 8). Finally during the last week of the study this researcher composed:

The parental support and encouragement and appreciation have been outstanding. It's important to me that must reflect this in my analysis. Because without their support and an appreciation their children I must say would not improve their reading skills at all. (T. J., week 12, p. 14)

The appreciation shown to this researcher by the parents was encouraging. Any effort to help them was returned several times over by their continuing involvement with their child in reading.

The data denoted support for the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Information gathered from parent interviews, observations, and reflective thinking expressed in this researcher's journal verified the belief parents supported the use of the curriculum as evidenced by their perceptions, reading encouragement provided to their child, and words of appreciation expressed to this researcher.

Contradictory and Surprising Information

Some data supported contradictory conclusions. An examination of this data is required in order to provide the reader with the ability to make a direct interpretation of the events of this intrinsic case study. Stake (1995) asserted the reader, using events
supplied by the writer through categorical analysis and direct interpretation, makes the decision if information is relevant to his or her situation. Therefore, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the case, this researcher offers data that is contradictory to earlier analyses. This section lists events used by participants to delay and distract themselves and other students from class activities, inadequate writing efforts based on participant’s ability, and student absences.

Additionally, surprising information emerged when this researcher began to have self doubt about the usefulness of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. This self doubt and the reasons behind it are illustrated for the reader to consider.

**Delaying and Distracting Activities**

Behaviors took place attempting to delay or avoid the beginning of reading and writing activities. Additionally, certain participant actions were aimed at distracting other students from these activities. This researcher presents illustrations of these behaviors in order for the reader to determine how they affected the curriculum. Information is presented from the observations, journal, and student interviews to describe this behavior.

Spending a large amount of time to select a book was a frequent way that some participants delayed their reading activities. Observations made during the first several weeks of the study illustrated this:

1. I reminded Jane to choose another book if she was not interested in the book that she was reading. She took a long time, over 10 minutes, at the back of the room to choose a different book (O. F., week 2, p. 9).

2. James is up and trying to change his book again. He hasn't given the book he chose a chance yet I direct him to sit down again (O. F., week 3, p 1).
3. Randy has three different books and he can't decide which one to begin reading. 

I mention that I'll help him if he needs some help (O. F., week 1, p. 7).

Other observations included the typical information on numerous occasions, “I have forgotten that sixth grade students are very young and are very much in need of direction. Today, I suggested to Jane and Randy to get their reading going” (O. F., week 4, p. 9).

Journal activity during the first several weeks reflected these thoughts, “The freedom to choose can be overwhelming for them. Maybe I should make some suggestions for them” (T. J., week 3, p. 4). The journal mirrored these thoughts throughout the study. During week 5 this researcher penned, “The time required for them to select books is rapidly becoming one of the greater issues involved. By the time students have selected a book to read about half of the mastery reading time is gone” (T. J., week 5, p. 16). I continued with these comments in the last week, “The students seemed so rushed today. Maybe it would be easier if I told them what to read” (T. J. week 12, p. 4).

School is a social activity. Sometimes the students were more interested in participating in the social events of the school than reading. Occasionally, this researcher needed to redirect their activities on some occasions. In week 2 this researcher made the following observation, “Randy is bouncing in the hallway and missing his folder. I direct him back to class and instructed him to begin reading” (O.F., week 2, p 5). On several occasions this researcher noted in observations:

Randy did not take his medication today. He is being distracted by everything in the classroom. He has made remarks on the clock ticking, and other students
coughing, and just about everything. He just doesn't seem to be able to settle
down. He's more interested in talking to everyone around. (O. F., week 5, 7, 8)

School situations sometimes overwhelmed the curriculum. In the third week of the
study this researcher’s observations declared the following:

The students rushed in as class began. Jane told me that Rachel was hurt. A
problem occurred during lunch and their play that got out of hand. Several boys
were picking on Rachel tickling her when she was down and I became worried
about it. I asked my aide to check into it. (O. F., week 3, p. 17)

In the first, third, seventh, and ninth weeks I needed to break up some fights
between students that were not in class, but fighting in the hallway outside this
researcher’s room. Observations from the first occurrence were:

When this researcher arrived back to class today I found two students who are not
in my class causing a disruption in the hallway. Harsh words escalated to a fist
fight and I was forced to intervene. I left my aide in charge of the class and did not
return for 30 minutes. (O. F., week 1, p. 18)

During the fourth week of the study a little visitor interrupted the normal
classroom routine as indicated by observations:

Today, during phonics study as we were building the class chart a mouse ran from
my closet. This mouse scampered about one classroom and totally disrupted the
normal routine. Three students screamed, and one ran out of class. It took me a
long time to get the students back on track. (O. F., week 4, p. 20)

Even though these situations did not occur regularly they did distract from the
normal classroom routine and affect students’ ability to read and write. The curriculum

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was not the cause of these distractions. In a sixth grade public school classroom, much activity transpires and any curriculum used should take this into account.

Inadequate Writing Efforts

Participants in this study were sixth grade middle school students with learning disabilities. They brought different capabilities to the class when they began taking part in this curriculum. Their competence in writing was diverse. Bill, the least capable writer, had difficulty constructing a sentence while Randy was able to generate multi paragraph writing attempts with little effort. Jane could produce a paragraph with some spelling and grammar errors while James writing varied based on his moods.

Throughout most of the writing exercises Jane maintained a strong effort. There were occasions when her efforts to do her best work waned. An example from her work in the sixth week was, “I wase welkin to mye friends housee and I sail this man drinen beer and he sailw me loockking at hime and he throw it down” (W. R., Jane, week 6). This example demonstrated numerous spelling errors that she was not making in her normal efforts.

Bill produced several deficient efforts based on his ability. In the second week he wrote, “I hade a grassel carde ande it were brittleds” (W. R., Bill, week 2). Even though this is a sentence, more errors were made in spelling than was characteristic of his ability. Another sample form week 6 revealed sub par efforts, “I see sam muck in a bog athe some slushe mete” (W. R., Bill, week 6).

Randy had the capability to generate multi-paragraph prose on a routine basis. Usually, his writing efforts were well thought out and contained few grammatical and spelling mistakes. Several of his efforts, however, were lacking. His work from the second
week of class was not his usual work, "One day my dad and I went out hunting in his truck that has a big cow catcher on the front" (W. R., Randy, week 2). Another time he produced, "My mom was driving the car to the store and she got lost" (W. R., Randy, week 3). One sentence from a student who was capable of producing much more creative work was a disappointment.

James’ work changed with how he felt that day. Usually, he made a good effort in doing his best, but on occasion, he, too, faltered. A weak effort from the third week of the study was: TJ had a whitetail deer at his house and I done blew its head off" (W. R., James, week 3). Another example from near the end of the study, "A man was playing a slot machine and he was slobbered over it. It be messy" (W. R., James, week 11).

This researcher began to ascertain each participant’s ability from the first few days of class, and was quickly able to determine when he or she was not giving their best effort. Most of their efforts during most of the classes were commensurate with their ability. The examples provided show some exceptions.

**Student Absences**

The number of absences Randy accrued during the case study was alarming. This researcher exhibited concern about his growing number of absences in the observations and teacher journal. Last year, Randy was retained in the sixth grade because of excessive absences and his parents provided assurances that he would attend school on a regular basis this year. However, the data suggest concern as the case study progressed.

In the second week of the study concern over Randy's absences at the start of the school year was shown:
Randy is absent again today. I wonder why. He mentioned to me yesterday that his mother might keep a home because today is 911 the anniversary of the terrorist attack and she is concerned about his safety. He has already been absent three days. (O. F., week 2, p. 11)

This researcher's concern mounted as the study progressed:

It's the fifth week of the study and Randy has been absence for a total of 11 days. If he doesn't watch it he's going to end up being retained again this year. I can't believe he's absent so much, how is he ever going to improve his reading ability? (O.F., week 5, p. 23)

During the last week this researcher made the following observations. “Randy has been absent 17 days this year. His parents while stating their concern do little to back up their statements” (O.F., week 12, p. 31).

The journal mirrored the researcher’s observations during the study. An excerpt from it includes:

Randy is absent again today I am hopeful though that he'll come to school tomorrow. I'm beginning to wonder if Randy's parents are feeding me a bunch of malarkey. They certainly talk a good game. Randy reads on grade level but his parents do not make him come to school and he is the one that suffers. It's the beginning of November and he already has been absent 15 days with very questionable excuses. Will I be forced to fail him because of his absences? (T. J., weeks 9, p. 13)

Concerns over Randy's absences developed as the study progressed. This researcher believed his parents were not strong enough to make him attend school, despite
their maintaining otherwise. The regular attendance of a student is required before that student can gain the most from any program. The other three participants attended school except for a one or two day absence.

*Surprising Information*

Throughout the development of the Achieve Reading Curriculum this researcher continued to refine its methodology. As the case study moved forward this researcher’s doubt grew as to the overall efficacy of this curriculum. This doubt occurred for several reasons. First, the data indicated a tremendous multitasking effort required during normal class activities. Second, this researcher had a nagging concern about direct instruction and its potential benefits for students with learning disabilities.

*Teacher multitasking.* Time is an extremely valuable commodity in today’s classroom environment. Data contained in this researcher’s observations and journal document this. During the first week of the study this researcher made the following observations:

There are so many things to do as a teacher. Right now I am redoing a schedule for my new students. I handed out some forms today that needed to get signed and returned to us. It took over 15 minutes of my class to do this. I have helped four students today get their lockers open. That’s one of the most difficult tasks for sixth grade students to master. (O. F., week 1, p. 16)

Numerous extracurricular tasks remained constant throughout the study as indicated by observations made in the sixth week:

We had our fundraiser rally today. It seems I am responsible to hand out, coordinate, contact parents, and be general manager for this fundraiser. Some
students arrive in my class to pass out some candy from another teacher, Oh Boy!

(O. F., week 6, p. 29)

This researcher was required not only to be a manager of many things but also
assumed the role of counselor. Several distraught students sought advice:

I had a discussion with a female student about her wanting to move back home
with her mother. She asks my opinion and I tell her I want whatever is best for her.
She cries uncontrollably in class and I must send her to the counselor. (O. F., week
7, p. 15)

On another occasion:

A male student asked me which parent he should live with. I told him that both
parents love him and that he should make that decision, not me. I referred him to
the counselor. He had tears in his eyes as he left my class. (O. F., week 8, p. 7)

Again, this researcher was required to perform the role of counselor during the last week
of the study:

One of my students was picked on during lunch today by a group of 10 other boys.
He arrived in class crying and having a very bad time. I escorted him to the
principal’s office where he could tell the administration what happened. (O. F.,
week 12, p. 3)

The intercom announcements interrupted class constantly. These interruptions
usually came at the worst times and made it difficult to teach in such a setting.

Observations reflected this during the first week of the study:

The principal spent time today discussing details over the student uniform policy.
He discussed how to wear the pants and shirt for over 10 minutes. Most of the

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students had turned him off and out by the time he was done. (O. F., week 1, p. 16)

Interruptions continued throughout the entire study. They occurred for many reasons. Some other examples of interruptions based on observations included:

1. Today, a speech therapist interrupted my class over the intercom to inform me that one of my students needed to come to her class and to take a test (O. F. week 3, p. 24).

2. A paraprofessional interrupted my class over the intercom today to retrieve mathematics tests for her teacher. She barged in and looked through my desk without asking (O. F., week 9, p. 37).

3. A regular classroom teacher came into my class few minutes ago and handed out badges of some kind to the five students I have that are in her class. She apologized for the interruption (O. F., week 10, p. 15).

The journal allowed reflection on thoughts about teacher multitasking. This researcher made many entries concerning this requirement. Entries from the beginning weeks of the study demonstrate this. An entry from week 1 revealed these thoughts:

This first part of the day seems to be my only quiet time. A teacher's day is so busy that I wonder if I'm going to be able to find the time for everything I need. I must remember to take care of myself too (T J., week 1, p. 19)

This researcher continued to echo some of these same feelings when composing the following entry during week 4:
My mind seems to wander with everything that I have to do. There's just not enough time in the day. I feel very rushed today not even time to do decent lesson plans. Will I be able to keep up with everything? (T. J., week 4, p. 1)

In the last week of the study, frustration becomes apparent as the study reached its conclusion:

So much to do and so little time for the teachers to creatively plan and implement lessons. All this accountability paperwork is taking all of our time. It reminds me of the Air Force when I was in it. Oh well, I must remember it's for the kids. (T. J., week 12, p. 17)

Direct instruction. This researcher is a teacher who believes in the whole language philosophy of reading education. Many colleagues do not share this belief, especially when it comes to students with learning disabilities. They advocate that direct instruction is the only methodology that works in the classroom. This researcher's data indicated otherwise. However, this researcher still had periods of doubt regarding the most effective teaching methods for students and continually seeks to improve their learning.

Fraser (1997) argued for the importance of reflexivity in qualitative action or teacher research to reduce any possible bias. Fraser maintained that teacher researchers must have the courage to ask uncomfortable questions in the conduct of their study. He stated that reflective questions should be designed to guard against any possible bias they may have and they should work diligently to counter the effects of personal bias in decision making. Furthermore, Fraser advocated teacher research as the most effective and least threatening strategy when evaluating curriculum innovations when the researcher's bias is examined through reflective analysis.
This researcher's reflection evidenced by the teacher journal indicated some doubt regarding the curriculum. This researcher shares this with readers to facilitate an examination of their concerns also. This doubt became apparent during week 5 of the study when this researcher made the following journal entry:

As I look around and my class I am concerned that some of the students are just going through the motions. As I try to write about my four participants I am concerned that they have already become bored with my curriculum and are not attempting to do their best ever day. Even though I am a whole language teacher and I believe strongly in freedom of choice, I am not sure that this is the best way to approach reading anymore for these kiddos with special needs. (T. J., week 5, p. 17)

The doubt seemed to intensify during week 5 because this researcher composed the following entry:

I wonder if I should be giving them specific instructions on what to do. I mean perhaps they're just not used to picking out the books like I am trying to get them to do. I really think that once this curriculum and study are finished I might be better off by using a more direct instruction type curriculum so they can improve their reading together. Maybe I need to use Project Read. (T. J., week 5, p. 11)

In week 12, as this researcher approached the end of the study, the following journal entry was made:

I am worried that I have not exposed the kids to all the different types of reading that they will be tested on. They seem sometimes to be just going through the
motions and I am concerned what will happen when my study is over. (T. J., week 12, p. 5)

The doubt wasn't a bad thing to occur. Only by rethinking what this researcher was doing in the classroom could this researcher become a more effective teacher for these students.

Teacher multitasking and doubt about the effectiveness of the curriculum were part of this intrinsic case study. It is not surprising they occurred. It would be surprising if they had not. They need to be presented in order for readers to draw their own conclusions.

Summary

This chapter discussed data from the study that answered the three research questions:

1. How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities?

2. Within a supportive classroom learning environment, how does the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhance the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities?

3. How do the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities support the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum?

Data indicated that participants demonstrated their developing reading ability through increasing levels of class involvement, class discussions, novel study, teacher interview results, writing activities, and time on task/reading attending behaviors.

Participants displayed an enthusiasm to participate in chart making activities. Throughout the study they were eager to generate the charts of words used during the
phonics study section of the lesson. They constantly searched for and discovered new words.

Class discussions improved over the time frame of the study. As participants became more confident in their ability to provide their opinions and answers in a risk free environment where they were valued as readers they volunteered in class discussions frequently. Novel study was viewed as a means to engage in grade level reading.

Results from the interviews concerning their reading selections indicated an increase in participants' ability to make inferences, analyzing characters, make predictions, identify cause and effect, compare and contrast events, generate details, identify the main idea, and justifying their opinion. Answers to questions were more detailed and accurate as the study moved forward.

The writing produced by participants during the phonics study session of the lesson became longer and more creative with fewer spelling and grammar errors. More creative work was produced by the students as the study continued.

Additionally, participants could attend to reading for longer periods of time. Along with this increase time on task they exhibited certain behaviors that facilitated their attention.

Participants' motivation to read increased as the study continued. Components of the Achieve Reading Curriculum, an increase in class participation and discussion, and stronger writing and creativity efforts provide evidence for this assertion.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum increased participants' motivation to read because the curriculum allowed them to choose the books they wanted to read, had a flexible daily homework requirement, and encouraged creativity during chart making.
Being able to choose their reading selections was a first for the participants. The flexible reading homework that allowed them to read magazines, comic books, or even video games motivated them to take part in out of class reading. Chart making was fun and viewed as motivating by the participants.

Participants began to experience success in reading and participated more in class activities. The success they felt encouraged them to volunteer more often and state their opinions in a risk free environment.

Their writing efforts began to improve as the study progressed. Initially unsure of the requirements, there were afraid and more concerned with making mistakes. Later, they began to produce longer and more creative pieces of writing.

Parental support was critical to the effective implementation of the program and the success of the participants. Parents’ perceptions of the program and its results, the reading encouragement offered by the parents to the participants and the teacher appreciation were demonstrative of their support.

Perceptions ranged from mostly positive support because parents believed the participants were making progress in their reading development to some negative perceptions about the amount of out of class reading required. When parents saw there children improving their reading ability each day they articulated much positive support.

Reading encouragement was demonstrated through the use of certain behaviors. These behaviors ranged from reading every night with their children to asking them questions about their reading selections.

Parents appreciated this researcher’s efforts in helping their children learn to read. They expressed surprise by a continuing contact with them and the seeking of their
opinions. They mentioned that few teachers in the past had taken this much time to coordinate with them. They avowed this researcher’s curriculum was the reason their child was doing well in reading this year.

The four main themes that connected with all the research questions include:

1. Participants’ reading ability increased as a result of the achieve Reading curriculum.
2. Participants’ motivation to read increased as a result of the Achieve Reading Curriculum.
3. Parents’ support of the Achieve Reading Curriculum was critical in the effective implementation of the program.
4. Teacher multitasking detracted from the teacher’s instructional time and the attention focused on each participant.

These themes are important because they provide ideas into the effectiveness of the Achieve Reading Curriculum for middle school students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 5 will link this information with the research incorporating information from other studies with findings from this intrinsic case study. This chapter will examine the ways these findings support the literature review and ways the findings extend the review. Implications will be given for change and suggestions for future research will be addressed.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the study was to determine how the Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities. Additionally, this intrinsic case study investigated whether the Achieve Reading Curriculum, within a supportive classroom environment increased the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read. Finally, parental involvement was studied to decide how the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities supported the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion and implications of the study. As a result of the analysis in Chapter 4, findings from the study are compared with the review of literature in Chapter 2 to show connections between the findings of other researchers and the results of this study. Many of this researcher’s findings support three areas addressed in the literature review: (a) development of reading ability in whole language classrooms, (b) motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities to read, and (c) parental involvement. The analysis extends other research by examining a specific curriculum developed for the middle school student with learning disabilities. Implications for further research are discussed. Suggestions for follow-up to the study are provided.
Research Questions and Discussion

The three research questions that served to guide this intrinsic case study are presented along with a brief answer to each. Next, a table is offered with literature review, support of literature, and extension of literature findings.

How does the Achieve Reading Curriculum develop the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities? The Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities by enhancing their level of class involvement, facilitating their capability to answer reading skill questions, improving their writing ability in response to the phonics study section of the lesson, and improving their ability to spend more time on a reading task. Participants increased their involvement in chart making activities, class discussions, and novel study explorations. Specific reading skills improved were making inferences, analyzing characters, making predictions, identifying cause and effect, comparing and contrasting events, providing details, identifying the main idea, and differentiating fact from opinion. Participants' ability to generate lengthier and more creative writing improved throughout the study. Finally, more attention to a reading task was evident and certain behaviors were associated with this attention.

Within a supportive classroom learning environment, how does the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhance the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities? Motivation of the middle school student with learning disabilities was enhanced by freedom of choice, flexible homework requirements, and fun aspects of chart making during phonics study components of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Additionally, participants' class participation and discussion in class were synergistic to
participate more in class activities. Participant writing and creativity efforts increased throughout the study as evidenced by the length of their writing, a reduction in grammatical errors, and more coherent stories produced. Participants’ motivation to write was enhanced by the freedom they enjoyed to pursue any writing task as long as it was related to the words discussed during the phonics study section of the lesson.

How do the parents of these middle school students with learning disabilities support the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum? Parents developed positive perceptions of their child's improvement in reading ability as a result of the curriculum. Additionally, parents' demonstrated substantial reading encouragement to their child whenever they were involved with the curriculum. All parents tried to motivate their child to become the best reader they could. Finally, parents developed a substantial teacher appreciation for efforts concerning their children.

Chapter 2 developed support for a reading curriculum based on whole language principles for middle school students with learning disabilities, methods utilized to motivate middle school students with learning disabilities, and the importance of parental involvement in reading education. Discussion in this chapter is divided into sections similar to Chapter 2. Each section contains two parts: (a) the ways the findings of this study support aspects of the literature review and (b) the ways in which they extend aspects of the literature review. A table outlining the main ideas is included (Table 9).
### Table 9

**Literature and Research Findings**

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**Development of Reading Ability in Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities**

Whole language is a reading methodology that is effective in increasing the reading ability of students (Weaver, 1994). In a whole language classroom environment, students are engaged with authentic texts and real writing activities in response to those texts (Poplin, 1989). In a 1999 study, Daniels and Zimmelman contended that whole language instruction worked for students because it attended to their needs.

Likewise, the development of reading ability in middle school students with learning disabilities is facilitated by a whole language curriculum. Rankhorn et al. (1998) found a whole language curriculum that employed age appropriate materials promoted independence in reading, immediate performance feedback, and a consistent approach increased the grade equivalent score by 9 to 18 months on the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement over a six month period.

Vaughn et al. (1998) demonstrated that reading instruction in the typical resource room was problematic. Throughout their study, a teacher seldom taught comprehension...
strategies, and the instruction was not individualized to each student as required by the student’s individual education plan. The procedures observed by Vaughn et al. did not coincide with procedures advocated by whole language theorists (Weaver, 1994; Weaver et al., 1996).

This study described how the development of reading ability in middle school students with learning disabilities was facilitated by participants’ class involvement, answers to reading skill questions, writing ability and creativity, and time on task. The results of this study offer a view about a whole language reading curriculum developed specifically for middle school students with learning disabilities.

Participants’ class involvement was demonstrated by their participation in chart making during the phonics study section of the lesson, class discussions occurring throughout the curriculum, and novel-study explorations. Chart making was viewed as a fun, stimulating, hands-on, activity that enabled each participant to respond according to his or her ability to words discussed in class. Enthusiasm for this activity grew as participants gained more experience in the curriculum. Class discussions served as a mechanism for participants to construct meaning based on social interaction.

According to Vygotsky (1962), one way each learner constructs meaning is based on social interactions. This class discussion was vital in enabling each participant to become involved in daily class activity and, therefore, served as a way of measuring developing reading activity. As the case study moved forward, every participant began to take part in class discussions. While some were more active than others, all increased their level of participation in class discussions.
Horn (2000) maintained that sharing of literature motivated the unmotivated learner. In the Achieve Reading Curriculum, novel study provided a chance for participants to respond to a common literature selection. Three of the four participants responded to the novel-study with enthusiasm. They asked and answered questions, gave suggestions, provided summaries, and replied to all of this researcher's questions in a positive way.

A 1998 study by Showers, Joyce, Scanlon, and Schnaubelt demonstrated a reading program based on whole language principles was effective for increasing the reading level of adolescents who enter high school two or more years below reading level. In this intrinsic case study, participants’ ability to answer questions about various reading skills improved as the study progressed. Their responses became more accurate and detailed when asked to make inferences, analyze characters, make predictions, identify cause and effect relationships, compare and contrast different aspects of their stories, discuss details in their selections, identify the main idea of reading passages, and justify their opinion.

Dahl and Scharer (2000) stated that long writing periods provided opportunities for children to deal with phonics concepts. Likewise, the writing responses generated by participants in this study when responding to the phonics-study section of the lesson, improved as the study progressed. Self-confidence in their ability to write was enhanced along with an ability to be more creative in their prose. Initially, their written responses were limited to primarily sentences full of spelling and grammatical errors. At the completion, their writing efforts lengthened and had fewer mistakes in spelling and grammar.
Widdowson and Dixon (1996) suggested that teacher modeling of reading behaviors and the opportunity for students to engage in silent reading motivated low achieving and at-risk students to engage in more on-task behavior or silent reading. Participants’ capability to spend more time on a reading task improved as the study moved forward. Certain behaviors exhibited by participants seemed to increase their ability to remain on task. These behaviors consisted of silently mouthing words, using a finger to keep their place on the page, tapping feet or fingers, sitting straight in a chair, placing a book at different angles to facilitate reading, and resting their heads in their hands.

Motivation of Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

Motivating the middle school student with learning disabilities is an overwhelming assignment. Reading instruction for these students has often resulted in frustration (McCray, 2001b). This researcher decided to develop a curriculum for these students and investigate it in order to provide useful information about motivating these students to engage in reading. The components of this curriculum were based in recent literature.

Moustafa (1997) declared that whole language instruction that encompassed whole-to-part or analytical phonics was the way to motivate many students. Additionally, Dahl and Scharer (2000) established that long writing periods provided ways for students to deal with phonics concepts. Both analytical phonics and written responses were incorporated into the curriculum design.

Maclnnis and Hemming (1995) stated that students in a whole language curriculum were encouraged to take control of their learning, relate it to prior learning, and progress as quickly as their ability allows. The Achieve Reading Curriculum was
developed as an inclusive methodology designed to incorporate authentic reading and
writing activities.

Sanacore (2000) contended middle school students should be developing a lifetime
of love of reading. Only through pleasurable reading opportunities are middle school
students afforded this opportunity to acquire a lifetime love of reading. The Achieve
Reading Curriculum offered the participants an opportunity to develop this reading
appreciation.

The opportunity to make choices in reading selections motivated middle school
students to become readers (Rankhorn et al., 1998). Furthermore, students were
enthusiastic about horror stories, mystery stories, and action-adventure books (Swartz &
Hendricks, 2000). The Achieve Reading Curriculum required students to choose their
reading selections daily and provided books of horror stories, mysteries, and action
adventures from which to choose.

Horn (2000) argued when students were allowed to share literature with their
classmates, many unmotivated readers took part in class discussions. This interaction
allowed students to make choices where they had a personal stake. Additionally, Worthy
(1998) depicted the use of book talks as a method to motivate reluctant middle school
readers. As part of the Achieve Reading Curriculum, participants were required to take
part in class activities and give their impressions about reading selections.

The data in this study depicted how the Achieve Reading Curriculum enhanced the
motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities. Components of the
Achieve Reading Curriculum, class participation requirements, and the writing success
experienced by the participants were viewed as enhancing motivation.
The Achieve Reading Curriculum offered participants a chance to choose books they wanted to read, have flexible daily homework requirements, and engage in a fun chart making exercise during the phonics-study section of the lesson. Participants reported that having the freedom to choose their own books was very motivating to them. They looked forward to reading when they were able to select books, particularly scary, mystery, and action adventure books. *Harry Potter* and *Goosebumps* were favorites to read. Homework required the participants to take part in reading at home for 20 minutes everyday. All mentioned they enjoyed the requirement to read whatever selection they wanted in order to accomplish the daily homework. Chart making was fun and enjoyable. The participants looked forward to this daily activity and benefited from challenging themselves in this process.

Participants demonstrated much willingness and enthusiasm to take part in class activities throughout the study. They offered their opinions about reading selections, engaged each other in class discussions, and propelled themselves to engage in the curriculum more as the study progressed. Their growing enthusiasm for the curriculum was synergistic based on researcher observations and journal data.

Integrating reading and writing was part of the curriculum. When the study began, participants were unable to generate more than a few sentences filled with grammar and spelling mistakes. Given the opportunity to respond in a creative way as long as they utilized one word that was discussed during the phonics-study section of the lesson, their writing prospered. As participants experienced increasing success, their writing efforts lengthened, grew in creativity, and had fewer spelling and grammar mistakes. Even though their writing was rough draft, they showed ability to improve their skills. They were
motivated by the continued success they experienced everyday in the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

Parental Support of the Achieve Reading Curriculum

Educators have long recognized the importance of parental support for students to be successful (Aiex, 1996). Much literature exists explaining the criticality of this parental support (Chandler, 1999; Cotton & Mann, 1997). Cuckle (1996) showed the importance of the parents reading with and to their children at home. This study sought to examine how parents of middle school students with learning disabilities supported the use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Components of the curriculum required the parents to read with their children for 20 to 30 minutes every day providing a means for parents and participants to engage in meaningful reading activities with the aim of improving reading achievement.

Trust building was viewed as vital between special educators and parents in a 1997 study by Thorp. Thorp maintained that special educators must take the time to become involved with parents to improve their students’ success in school. The Achieve Reading Curriculum required trust building to occur between the researcher and the parents of the participants.

Parental support of the Achieve Reading Curriculum was demonstrated by an increase in positive parental perceptions of improvement of their child’s reading ability, an increase in reading encouragement given to their children as the study progressed, and growth in parent-teacher appreciation. This conclusion was based on analyzing the parent interviews, observations, and the researcher’s reflective journal.
The positive parental perceptions about their child's reading improvement resulted from their belief that this reading improvement was related to the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Parents were enthusiastic about the freedom of choice their children enjoyed in book selection. All of them mentioned the motivational aspects this freedom of choice had on their children. All parents appreciated the opportunity to read with their children, although several found the time requirement difficult to fulfill.

Parents wanted their children to become good readers. Routinely, they asked for suggestions to help the participants become better readers. In the beginning parents were frustrated with the inability of their child to read on grade level. As the study moved forward, this researcher encouraged them to participate fully with their child in the daily reading required by the Achieve Reading Curriculum. As parents participated, they encouraged their children more frequently. Parents became impressed with their child's ability to read for 20 to 30 minutes at a time, their improvement in pronouncing words, and their ability to answer questions posed by the parents on the reading selection.

The data established an ever increasing amount of parent teacher appreciation as the study progressed. They regularly mentioned the gratitude they had for this researcher's efforts with their children.

Parents mentioned that they had not been contacted previously by their child's teacher. They were surprised by the researcher's involvement with their child and cherished any effort to help their child learn to read.

Parental support was important to the effective execution of the Achieve Reading Curriculum. Their positive perceptions about their child's reading improvement, increasing
reading encouragement afforded to their children, and growing parent teacher appreciation as the study progressed supported the effective use of the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

Implications

The implications of this intrinsic case study are in four areas. This study has implications for middle school students with learning disabilities, implications for teachers of middle school students with learning disabilities, implications for parents of middle school students with learning disabilities, and implications for teacher as researcher.

Implications for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

The four participants in this intrinsic case study developed and improved their reading ability as a result of this curriculum. Their development and improvement was demonstrated by an increased involvement in class activities, more accurate answers to reading skill questions, lengthier and more creative written responses, and time-on-task behaviors. The Achieve Reading Curriculum was developed based on whole language principles which engaged each participant in authentic reading and writing tasks. A longer study involving quantitative measures should be undertaken to document the causal factors related to this improvement.

Additionally, this curriculum satisfied the needs of each participant by allowing him or her to select reading materials and produce written responses based on their abilities. Participants’ level of commitment to the curriculum differed, and the adaptation required by the curriculum differed for each participant. Some participants were more adept at reading and writing tasks than others when the study began, and these participants demonstrated the most improvement as a result of the curriculum. Studies, both qualitative

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and quantitative, should be conducted to determine if the level of improvement is
dependent on the literacy skill a student possesses when beginning the curriculum.

Participants' motivation to read differed. Engaging an unmotivated middle school
student with learning disabilities to read is daunting. The motivation to take part in the
Achieve Reading Curriculum was enhanced by the components of the curriculum to
include its freedom of choice in reading selection, class participation, and the opportunity
to experience success in writing as a response to reading. Examination of each motivation
enhancer should be accomplished to explore further its effect on middle school students
with learning disabilities.

Parental support for participants was essential to the success they achieved in the
Achieve Reading Curriculum. Ways in which to involve parents in a whole language
curriculum to maximize their child's success ought to be investigated. Students should be
supported by their parents while in school to maximize their potential.

**Implications for Teachers of Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities**

The four participants in this intrinsic case study brought different abilities to the
classroom. Each needed an individualized curriculum to achieve success. The Achieve
Reading Curriculum allowed the program to be individualized according to each
participant's needs.

Flexibility within structure is the key to developing an effective curriculum for
students with special needs. A flexibility that allows the teacher to attend to each student,
while at the same time providing an overall blueprint for the class, is the key for effective
instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities. Studies scrutinizing this
curriculum in a larger sample and over a longer time frame should be conducted to
determine its effectiveness. Additionally, the development of flexible curricula in all
subject areas should be investigated to determine the efficacy of such an approach with
middle school students with learning disabilities.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum is a living curriculum and should be adjusted to
the needs of each class. Adjusting the phonics clusters emphasized during phonics study
might be necessary depending on the reading ability of the students. Additional
investigation with phonics clusters based on reading ability levels might yield data that link
ability levels to more effective phonics clusters for maximum reading improvement.

The critical role regarding the teacher as a facilitator of learning is demonstrated by
the students and teacher in this intrinsic case study. The teacher's role is to motivate,
cajole, interest, and propel students in reading and language arts tasks. The teacher, using
the Achieve Reading Curriculum, must guide middle school students to a willingness to try
and learn, while understanding that learning the critical tasks involved in language arts is a
difficult process for them. Additionally, the teacher serves as a coach motivating the
students to gradually achieve more language arts skills in reading and writing with
progress demonstrated increasingly over the length of the curriculum.

This study examined a sixth grade classroom for middle school students with
learning disabilities. Other teachers should investigate the efficacy of this curriculum in
their teaching environment to determine if it is effective for all students with learning
disabilities. Studies exploring the efficacy of this approach for the K-5 and 9-12 should be
conducted.

Participants were motivated by freely choosing their reading selections. Teachers
should have numerous reading selections at all ability levels in the classroom for students
to choose. Reading should be emphasized in all areas of the school, and teachers should allow students the freedom to make choices when selecting books. Specific time should be set aside in each class for reading books the student select. Studies exploring this type of program should be undertaken with middle school students to determine if reading ability is improved school wide.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum did not integrate technology in the classroom. Exploring the ways that technology could be utilized in a whole language environment is worthwhile. Studies should be conducted concerning how internet access, electronic books, computer testing, and other technological innovations impact and augment the learning of the middle school student with learning disabilities.

Parents can have an enormous impact on the success of their children. Teachers of middle school students with learning disabilities must involve parents in their schooling. Time must be allotted for teachers to interact with parents. Studies should be performed to ascertain the most effective way of providing time for teachers to contact parents and get them involved in their child’s education.

Implications for Parents of Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

Parental support is critical for academic success. The parents of middle school students with learning disabilities must be made aware of the critical nature of their role. Participants in this study responded positively to their parents’ support, reading encouragement, and contacts with the teacher.

Participants’ motivation to read increased when their parents read with them every day. The Achieve Reading Curriculum required each participant to take part in 30 minutes of reading outside class every day. Parents were asked to keep up with their child’s
reading, read with them, and discuss the reading selection together frequently. This interaction influenced participants to complete their outside reading assignments and helped to improve their reading ability. Quantitatively exploring the effects of parents’ reading with their child and the corresponding improvement in reading ability would be worthwhile.

Parents of middle school students with learning disabilities should be involved with every aspect of their child’s schooling. While the individual education plan developed for each student with special needs is a way to involve parents, more must be done by parents to ensure their child’s academic success. Studies to maximize parental involvement should be conducted to determine methods to take advantage of involvement for parents of middle school students with learning disabilities.

**Implications for Teacher as Researcher**

This formal teacher as researcher approach was significant in providing detailed information about the development of reading ability in middle school students with learning disabilities. Interesting data could be obtained from studying different reading classrooms serving such students. Studies should be conducted by different middle school teachers in their classrooms examining this type of reading curriculum.

Each participant was unique in his or her interaction with the curriculum. Every student made important contributions to the study. Using the teacher as researcher approach allowed this researcher to look for the uncommon reactions each had with the curriculum instead of drawing conclusions to a general population.

Classroom research is a strength of teacher as researcher methodology. This researcher was able to study in depth particular issues that arose. Likewise, researching
with teams of teachers in middle school using a teacher as researcher methodology would facilitate an examination of educational practices at that middle school. Data specific to each school would be generated instead of data garnered from general survey instruments.

Teachers could instruct students to use similar teacher as researcher strategies to examine themselves. These students would be empowered with the self knowledge gained and become actively involved in their own learning processes.

Learning might become a true collaboration between the student and teacher. The teacher using teacher as researcher strategies would be continually adjusting and refining the curriculum based on the needs of the class which the students helped determine.

A teacher as researcher has an opportunity to adjust to changes in the classroom environment by the rigorous process involved in studying data. The process of observations, interviews, journaling, and analyzing student work generates much information from which to make decisions. Instead of wondering why some event is occurring, a teacher researcher has raw data available from which to draw conclusions and make adjustments accordingly.
Conclusion

This study investigated how the Achieve Reading Curriculum developed the reading ability of middle school students with learning disabilities. Additionally, methods to enhance the motivation of these students were scrutinized. Next, parental support of this curriculum was investigated. Finally, this study aided this researcher personally and professionally in several ways.

First, this researcher discovered more about teaching methods and the development and improvement of student’s reading ability. He discovered that students’ ability improved and developed from the increasing class involvement they exhibited as they experienced more success in the Achieve Reading Curriculum. He also discovered their answers to various reading skill questions improved as the study progressed. Students’ writing ability began to improve as they came to take more chances with writing during the phonics-study section of the lesson. Finally, they exhibited more time on task in reading as the study moved forward.

As a teacher-researcher, this researcher discovered that teacher research creates better teachers, stronger students, and more effective schools. Critically examining classroom practices and these students enabled him to become a stronger and more effective teacher.

This researcher discovered the importance of enhancing the motivation of middle school students with learning disabilities in the reading process. Frequently, these students tune out and drop out to reading by the time they reach middle school. The development of alternate curricula is important if these students are to succeed.
The Achieve Reading Curriculum, based on whole language principles, serves as a model for teachers interested in developing such a curriculum for their classes. The motivation of this researcher's students was enhanced by the components of the curriculum, the emphasis placed on class participation, and the synergistic effect of incremental success in writing as a response to phonics study and texts.

Parent involvement was crucial to the success achieved by the students in this study. Teachers must make efforts to include parents, particularly those of middle school students with learning disabilities. This contact should emphasize partnership and teamwork to enable the student to be successful.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum resulted in the parents' positive perceptions about their child's reading improvement, increasing levels of reading encouragement by parents to their children as the study moved forward, and a growing level of teacher appreciation throughout the study. Parents and teachers must work together to ensure the success of students and the curriculum required this teamwork.

This researcher is devoted to teaching reading to middle school students with learning disabilities, students often ignored by the regular education establishment. That does not mean they cannot learn and become as successful as students in the regular education environment. The researcher wanted to examine the frustrations these students face through their own eyes and to empower them to become life long learners. Every day the researcher was encouraged by their efforts to succeed at a difficult task. Their improvement and increasing motivation for reading helped this researcher to understand the importance of his efforts.
This study enabled the researcher to learn more about teaching methods in a quest to become the best teacher possible. He was reminded daily about the individuality of each student and the necessity that teacher and student work together to improve reading ability.

The Achieve Reading Curriculum is based on whole language principles. Direct instruction methods were not used. The participants in this case study appeared to develop their reading ability, enhance their motivation, and gain parental support through the Achieve Reading Curriculum.

This intrinsic case study allows readers to make decisions and apply them to their situation based on the results, analysis, implications and conclusions this researcher provides. The reader must judge the applicability of the findings based on the information given and his or her unique situation. No attempt was made to conduct a comparison of teaching methods through this case study.

This researcher believes the results of this study contribute to the broader body of knowledge by examining a unique curriculum based on whole language principles and its impact on the development of reading ability in middle school students with learning disabilities, the ways in which this curriculum enhanced the motivation of these students, and how the parents of these students supported the use of the curriculum. This is a worthwhile curriculum and group to examine.

The results of this study should prove valuable to teachers of students with learning disabilities, parents of these students, administrators of middle schools, school district special education personnel, university professors, and the students with learning disabilities who struggle everyday in learning to read.
The Achieve Reading Curriculum for Middle School At Risk and Special Education Students

John Sargent

June 2002

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The Achieve Reading Curriculum for Middle School At Risk and Special Education Students

The Achieve Reading Curriculum consists of 180 lesson plans. Each lesson consists of two separate areas that allow the teacher to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the students. Even though this is a reading curriculum, each lesson emphasizes the four language arts: reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The students practice reading every day by selecting books interesting to them. Writing practice is achieved by responding to the phonics fun part of the lesson in a creative way using their imaginations. Speaking is utilized by sharing their written responses to the phonics fun lesson and listening is accomplished by attending to their classmates reading and writing.

I will explain each section and the unique structure and flexibility that is present in this curriculum. The time allotted for each section is variable and can be adjusted to meet scheduling demands.

Every fourth week the students read aloud a story selected together by the teacher and students. The story can be a popular tradebook, part of an anthology of short stories, a book of poems, or any other interesting reading selected by the teacher.

Reading Lesson Plans

The reading lesson plans are divided into two parts: phonics study and mastery reading. Each part of the reading lesson complements the other.

Phonics Study - 30 Minutes

The first part of the reading lesson plan is called phonics study. This section allows the teacher and the students to have fun with words. To begin this part of the daily reading
lesson, the teacher introduces a specific letter cluster for the day that represents a two or three or more letter combination that is very common in the English language.

After the cluster is introduced, the students using a resource such as a newspaper, dictionary, textbook, or anything deemed appropriate, search for words that contain the letter combination. Each student selects words from their reference that contain the sound cluster and they find interesting and perhaps want to discuss more. This searching should take no more than five minutes.

Next, the teacher and students develop a class chart of the most interesting words discovered. The teacher discusses various things about each word (definition, plural form, part of speech, syllables, etc.). The number of words depends on the needs on the class. I have discovered seven to ten words to be a suitable number for special education students. The teacher is viewed as a professional, able to guide the discussion according to the class requirements.

Additionally, for each phonics study section of the reading lesson, a higher level thinking association is suggested for the student to ponder. For example, if the higher level thinking association for the lesson were automobile, any word that the student could use to make a relationship with the word automobile would be accepted. Words like fender, headlight, horn, blinker, turn signal, chrome, vinyl, paint, and rust are examples of words that correspond to the higher level thinking association of automobile. The students look for these words while searching for words that contain the letter cluster of the day.

Next, each student is asked to write something relating to the words that were selected for the class chart. Students are encouraged to be creative. Some examples of
this include: poems, songs, short stories, and sentences. As the student writes and uses the word correctly, he or she demonstrates an understanding of the word selected.

The charts created by this activity are left on display in the classroom. Many teachers like the ready-made bulletin board that this provides. The number of charts exhibited is left to teacher discretion. While displayed, the charts serve as a review for the words and a ready-made resource that students can use in classroom writing activities.

As the final part of this section of the reading lesson, students select three to four words and learn how to spell them for the day. After studying them, the student selects a partner and they test each other. This is not accomplished for a grade in the usual sense, but merely serves as a motivational tool for the student.

I allow the students to tally the number of words spelled correctly, either orally or written, and put the number of points at the top of the page. For example, if the student spells the word “achieve” correctly they would earn seven points. One point earned for each letter of the word. Only the words spelled correctly earn points.

If time permits, I allow the students to share their written associations to the chart. This can be either in paired groups or whole class sharing. This curriculum uses every fifth class period as a chart review day. Many activities could be conducted utilizing charts that were prepared on the previous four days.

Some teachers might choose to conduct a “spelling test” for the week using student-selected words from the charts. Students could select eight to ten words on a Thursday from phonics study lessons. They would study those words on Thursday night and the teacher would conduct a “spelling test” on Friday. Remember that the curriculum is designed to adapt to the needs of the students.
Phonics study should be fast paced. During each lesson the teacher is free to spend more or less time on each part of the section as the need of the class dictates. Flexibility is the key.

**Mastery Reading - 30 minutes**

The next part of the reading lesson is called Mastery Reading. This section permits each student to choose the books they enjoy. *Achieve* teaches the necessary reading skills through books students choose. As the students are reading, the teacher is holding individual or group conferences on a comprehension/skill focus for the day.

In the beginning of the year the teacher must focus the students into the 20 - 30 minutes of mastery reading time. Very few special education students can read for a sustained 20 minutes at the beginning of the year. As a way of monitoring, each student is required to keep a reading log each day to record the number of books read.

The final part of this section is sharing or read aloud time. I recommend the teacher allow a sharing of interesting things students have read for that day, or read a book to them to model and reinforce good oral reading.

**Every Fourth Week - Literature Study**

Every fourth week, the class and teacher selects a book or other literature selection to read together. This sharing and reading time enables the teacher to gain a first hand knowledge of the students’ oral reading fluency. Additionally, the class explores the literature selection under the teacher’s careful guidance and together cover concepts that may have been missed in the students’ everyday individual reading selections.
During this literature study week the normal phonics study and mastery reading sections of the lessons are not accomplished. The full attention of the class is on the literature selection being studied as a group.

**Assessment.**

This is a curriculum based on holistic language principles. No formal tests are recommended. The teacher is free to assess his or her students using many items from the curriculum. Such items include but are not limited to: portfolios, daily writings, observations, projects, checklist of skills, informal reading inventories, and self-analysis. I use “reading contract” to arrive at a numerical grade for each week during a marking period. The grade for the marking period is determined by averaging the weekly “reading contract” grades. An example a reading contract is attached.

The teacher is viewed as the person that knows the student the best and is considered to be a professional, willing and able to use all inputs in forming an assessment of a student’s progress.

**The Curriculum**

The procedure to be followed in all of the lessons is the same. While the phonics/spelling emphasis, the other association, the resource used, and the comprehension/skill focus are different each day, the basic structure of the lesson remains the same. All the teacher needs to do is substitute the phonics/spelling emphasis, the other association, the resource used, and the comprehension/skill focus each day.

Every fifth lesson is a chart review day in the phonics fun section and an optional oral practice reading day in the mastery reading section. Once a month (every fourth week) is designated a literature study week.
Suggestions for Further Reading


## Reading Lesson Emphases

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**Reading Lesson Emphases (cont.)**

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<td>LITERATURE</td>
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"Reading Lesson Emphases (cont.)"

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## Reading Lesson Emphases (cont.)

| 161.  | astro | the past | newspapers | summary  |
| 162.  | bio   | geography | newspapers | summary  |
| 163.  | com   | action words | newspapers | summary  |
| 164.  | contra | 3 syllable words | newspapers | summary  |
| 165.  | chart review day | previous charts | oral reading |
| 166.  | inter/intra | current events | newspapers | plot  |
| 167.  | micro/mini | plot | dictionaries | plot  |
| 168.  | multi | prefixes | dictionaries | plot  |
| 169.  | poly | prefixes | dictionaries | plot  |
| 170.  | chart review day | previous charts | oral reading |
| 171.  | re | retro/prefixes | dictionaries | main idea  |
| 172.  | trans | prefixes | dictionaries | main idea  |
| 173.  | y | suffixes | newspapers | main idea  |
| 174.  | able | suffixes | newspapers | main idea  |
| 175.  | chart review day | previous charts | oral reading |
| 176.  | LITERATURE | STUDY | WEEK |
| 177.  | (LESSONS 176-180). |
| 178.  | |
| 179.  | |
| 180.  | |
Study Information for Human Use Committee

Title:
A Case Study of Reading Education for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

Project Directors:
John Sargent

Department:
Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership

Purpose of Study/Project:
The purpose of the study is to qualitatively examine participants' response to the use of a holistic reading curriculum for middle school students with learning disabilities.

Participants:
Approximately four middle school students enrolled at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, Louisiana.

Procedure:
Data for this study will be collected from September 2nd to November 22, 2002. A teacher researcher will conduct a qualitative case study in his classroom by collecting data from his reading class each day for the above period. The Achieve Reading curriculum, a curriculum designed by the researcher, is used on a daily basis for reading instruction in the researcher’s classroom. The students’ response to this curriculum will be analyzed by student interviews, oral responses to reading questions posed by the teacher researcher, students’ written classroom work, and researcher observations of student activity.

Instruments and Measures to Insure Protection of Confidentiality, Anonymity:
All students will participate in class activities; however, only data from students, parents, teachers, principals, and superintendents who have signed consent forms will be used in the analysis. Participants’ names will not be used on any responses or reactions published with the results of this study. The participants’ reflections and responses will be analyzed and the results published and presented without disclosing the name of the school district or using actual participant names.

Risks/Alternatives Treatments:
There are no risks associated with participation in this study.
Benefits/Compensations:
None

Safeguards of Physical and Emotional Well-Being:
Data will not be collected until permission is secured from the Human Use Committee of Louisiana Tech University. Individuals will be given the opportunity to ask questions of the research administrator and to call the project director or the Human Use Review Committee if they have further questions or concerns. The participants may withdraw from the investigation at any time without penalty. The data collected will be kept under lock and key and destroyed after five years.
Permission from Parents

The following is a brief summary of the project in which your child is asked to participate. Please read this information before signing the statement below.

**Title:** A Case Study of Reading Education for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

**Project Directors:**
John A Sargent

**Department:** Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership, Louisiana Tech University

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**Risks/Alternatives Treatments:**
There are no risks associated with participation in this study.

**Benefits/ Compensations:**
None
Confidentiality: The participants' reflections and responses will be analyzed and the results published and presented without disclosing the name of the school district or using actual participant names.

Contact: The principal investigator listed below may be reached to answer any questions you may have about the research, participants' rights, or related matters.

John Sargent 318.929.9300 (H) 318.929.4106 (W)

The Human Use Committee may also be contacted if a problem cannot be discussed with the experimenter:

Dr. Mary Livingston 318-257-4315
Dr. Terry McConathy 318-257-2924
Mrs. Margaret Nolan 318-257-5075

I, ________________________________, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the description of this study and its purposes and methods. I understand that my child's participation in this research is strictly voluntary. Further, I understand that I may withdraw my child's participation at any time or refuse to answer questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely accessible only to the principal investigators, a legally appointed representative, or myself. I have not been requested to waive, nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

______________________________  _______________________
Parent/Guardian Signature        Date

I understand that my classroom work will be used as part of this research study to understand how effective the teacher's reading curriculum is.

______________________________  _______________________
Student Signature                Date
Permission from the Superintendent

I am requesting permission to collect data in your parish at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx in my reading classroom. Your signature is separate from the signatures that must also be obtained from the principal, the students, as well as the parents who wish to allow their child’s participation in the study.

Title:
A Case Study of Reading Education for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

Project Directors:
John Sargent

Department:
Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership, Louisiana Tech University

Purpose of Study/Project:
The purpose of the study is to qualitatively examine participants' response to the use of a holistic reading curriculum for middle school students with learning disabilities.

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Risks/Alternatives Treatments:
There are no risks associated with participation in this study.
Benefits/Compensations:
None

Contact: The principal investigator listed below may be reached to answer any questions you may have about the research, participants' rights, or related matters.

John Sargent 318.929.9300 (H), 318.929.4106 (W)

The Human Use Committee at Louisiana Tech University may also be contacted if a problem cannot be discussed with the experimenter:

Dr. Mary Livingston 318-257-4315
Dr. Terry McConathy 318-257-2924
Mrs. Margaret Nolan 318-257-5075

Confidentiality: The participants' reflections and responses will be analyzed and the results published and presented without disclosing the name of the school district or using actual participant names.

Please let me know if there are any further questions I can answer concerning this project. If you agree to this proposal, then please sign below acknowledging your district's wish to participate.

Thank you,
John Sargent

I, ___________________________________________, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the description of this study and its purposes and methods. I understand that my parish's participation in this research is strictly voluntary. Further, I understand that we may withdraw our participation at any time or refuse to answer questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely accessible only to the principal investigators, a legally appointed representative, or myself. I have not been requested to waive, nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

I also understand that this agreement is separate from the written agreement that must also be obtained from the teachers who agree to participate in the study as well as the parental consent forms that must be obtained.

_________________________________________  ________________________________
Signature                       Date
Permission from the Principal

I am requesting permission to collect data at your school in my reading classroom. Your signature is separate from the signatures that must also be obtained from the superintendent as well as the parents who wish to let their children participate in the study.

Title:
A Case Study of Reading Education for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

Project Directors:
John Sargent

Department:
Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership, Louisiana Tech University.

Purpose of Study/Project:
The purpose of the study is to qualitatively examine participants' response to the use of a holistic reading curriculum for middle school students with learning disabilities.

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John Sargent  318-929-9300 (H), 318-929-4106 (W)

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Please let me know if there are any further questions I can answer concerning this project. If you agree to this proposal, then please sign below acknowledging your district's wish to participate.

Thank you,
John Sargent

I, __________________________________, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the description of this study and its purposes and methods. I understand that my school's participation in this research is strictly voluntary. Further, I understand that we may withdraw our participation at any time or refuse to answer questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely accessible only to the principal investigators, a legally appointed representative, or myself. I have not been requested to waive, nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

I also understand that this agreement is separate from the written agreement that must also be obtained from the teachers who agree to participate in the study as well as the parental consent forms that must be obtained.

____________________________________  __________________________
Signature                                      Date
APPENDIX C

READING SKILL QUESTIONS
Reading Skill Questions

Main Idea

1. In one sentence tell what the whole story is about. Include:
   a. Who is the story about?
   b. What happens to the main character?
   c. When does it happen?
   d. Where does it happen?
   e. Why does it happen?

Sequence

1. Write down five things that happened in your story.
2. Number them by order in which they happened.
3. Write a paragraph putting the five happenings in order.

Predicting Outcomes

1. Based on what you’ve read so far, write down some guesses on what you think will happen next.
2. List the clues that helped you make these guesses.
3. What in your own experience or past reading has been similar to this event?
4. Read on to see if you were correct.

Drawing Conclusions

1. Tell me as much as you can about what kind of person your favorite character is.
2. Tell me some things that he or she did in the story that you liked.
3. Would you like to have this person as a friend? Why or Why not?
**Inference**

1. Before you begin to read this story, read the title and look at the pictures.
   
   a. What do they tell you about the story?

   b. Read the story and when you come to the end of the story, what do you think might happen if the author had continued? Why?

**Facts and Opinions**

1. Please tell me some facts from your story.

2. Please tell me what you think about some of the facts.

3. What did you like or dislike about the main character of the story?

4. Did you like the way the story ended? Why or why not?

5. If you were the author, what might you change about the story?

**Cause and Effect**

1. Describe an important event in your story.

2. Why did this happen?

3. Pick a character from your story and explain one event he or she did. What do you think caused the person to act in this way?

**Compare and Contrast**

1. Choose two characters from the story. Tell me how they are alike and different.

2. Has anything that happened in the story ever happened to you?

3. What did the story you just read have in common with other stories? Think about the setting, plot, characters, and ending.
Author's Purpose

1. Sometimes a story is written to persuade you to do something, entertain you, or inform you. What do you think was the author’s purpose in this story and why?
REFERENCES


Caddo Public Schools Pupil Appraisal Services. (2001). *Specific learning disability-documentation of eligibility staffing* (DES SLD (00/01)). Shreveport LA.


McCray, A. D., (2001). Not all students learn to read by third grade: Middle school students speak out about their reading difficulties. *Journal of Special Education, 35*, 3-17.


