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# Impact of Explicit Instruction Using Culturally Relevant Texts in Reading on Student Confidence

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IMPACT OF EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION USING CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEXTS IN READING ON  
STUDENT CONFIDENCE

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my children, Morgan, Jordan, and Taylor, who have endured the highs and lows of every moment of this journey with me. It is also dedicated to all of my students, who have taught me more than any class ever could. I dedicate it to my parents who both insisted that I always do my very best. And finally, it is dedicated to all those who encouraged me to change the educational system and its practices to benefit us all.

## ABSTRACT

This paper describes an action research question focused on how explicit instruction in reading, coupled with culturally responsive teaching, can affect the confidence levels of African-American male ninth graders regarding their reading comprehension abilities. The research question seeks to illustrate the benefits of using explicit instruction in the context of materials seen as relevant by the student to unpack each step of the reading comprehension process thereby engaging students who otherwise view reading as a streamlined, passive process; it also uses teacher modeling to show how to increase reading comprehension. Also, classroom instruction on the secondary level makes use of statewide textbook adoptions and ancillary materials, and packaged English 1 End-of-Course preparation materials. Rather than explicitly teaching the skills of reading comprehension with engaging texts, teachers use racially biased, privileged White, middle class texts to present the steps of reading without modeling. The instruction necessary to navigate the texts are withheld from students who then experience challenges that result in lower confidence levels and disengagement from the curriculum. Focusing on confidence levels allows this study to provide direct and compelling evidence that teachers should make changes moving from implicit to explicit instruction while engaging students in reading and writing material that is meaningful and culturally relevant to them. The paper concludes with an evaluation of ethical considerations that may arise during the study.

*Keywords: assessment, explicit instruction, reading comprehension, student confidence*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Reading is fundamental, and culturally relevant explicit direct instruction is the great equalizer because in a society where status is confirmed and conferred through educational attainment, the use of texts that reflect and celebrate the diversity of the student population should be the minimum starting point for all reading curricula. Culturally relevant explicit instruction means teaching a skill that is explained systematically, teaching both why it is needed and when it is used and making use of texts that reflect the interests and diversity of the students (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, Tarver, & Jungjohann, 2006). Key terms are concise, specific, clearly stated, and directly related to the objective. For the students who have not had the most appropriate reading comprehension instruction, culturally relevant explicit instruction demystifies the reading process and makes it accessible and engaging (Vaughn et al., 2008). Though culturally relevant explicit instruction is not the only type of instruction, its effectiveness is proven and compelling and essential if educators are to fulfill the promise made to ensure schools that value and privilege all the cultures that exist within it. Its use of scaffolding, clarity, and support and structure benefits everyone involved in the learning process (Archer & Hughes, 2011) if the reading material and topics involved matter to the student as a reader.

For African-American males in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, however, the texts that are used to deliver reading instruction are often disengaging and uninviting while privileging

unfamiliar backgrounds and experiences as being better than these students' own (McMillan, 2003). Just as it was important for the young African-American boy to touch President Barack Obama's hair to see that they come from similar heritages, it is equally as important that curriculum and instruction include texts and teaching that validate the worth and reflect the experiences of African-American male students who find themselves fighting to see positive images of themselves and each other reflected both in and out the education setting. Too often, educators deem this group of students incapable of high levels of achievement rather than facing that the curriculum they continue to choose to use is not structured to be effective. It also lacks the cultural relevancy to students thereby not appearing inviting enough for the students to want to interact with the texts or teachers.

#### Positionality of the Researcher

My son is one of those students and a chief reason why I sought to enhance and transform my teaching practices for him and other African-American male students. These students too often find themselves sitting in English classes reading *Romeo and Juliet*, while ignoring the culturally relevant and rich texts that are readily available. My son is an avid reader of video game strategy manuals, technical books on woodworking, and all texts that are soccer related. He regularly looks up the lyrics of songs he really enjoys and even points out the intricate and detailed ways that hip-hop artists craft their messages in their songs. His favorite rapper is Tupac, in whom he found a kindred soul with lyrics about wanting to appear unfeeling while at the same time acknowledging the burden of feeling too much because of being an African-American male. Tupac's poem,

“The Rose that Grew from Concrete,” finds its origins in the teenage woes of Romeo and Juliet and in Plato’s logical discourse in the Law of Identity.

Had my son’s teachers taken the time to find a way to value his interests with culturally relevant explicit reading instruction and curriculum, they would have found him an eager learner. Instead, he complained of reading about dragons, hobbits, and animals, all of which held little interest for him. He protested this limiting and disengaging curriculum the only way he knew how; he refused to read and complete the work. Time and again, when I compared what I saw him read on his own with what he was required to read in class, the chasm was indeed vast. He and his friends shared Bluford series novels, an urban high school fictional series that featured characters that were more like my son and his friends than those in the novels they were reading like *Hatchet* and *Lord of the Flies*. I examined my teaching practices and found that, in a way, I was protesting as well, choosing to supplement my required readings with sports pages, automobile specifications, and hip-hop lyrics to teach the skills needed to improve reading comprehension. The goal of any educator should be to teach the skill, and the onus is on the teacher to do so. Equity in education means teachers provide texts that are engaging, relevant, and affirming for students from a variety of backgrounds. Educators are to open the doors to opportunity, not to remain the gatekeepers of limitations.

The goal of this action research study was to explore what impact, if any, explicit instruction, along with culturally responsive teaching, would have on the self-confidence of ninth grade African-American males in their reading ability, as opposed to more traditional direct instruction using a commercially packaged curriculum which presents

skill in isolation from texts relevant to students. This research sought to investigate and determine which reading strategies and texts provide the best support to develop proficiency in reading comprehension for African-American males in a freshman English class. The literature review provides the history and background of the effectiveness of explicit instruction along with the role of culturally responsive teaching materials in successfully teaching reading skills. Also, it will provide an overview of current methods of reading instruction and explore the ways teachers can refine current instruction curricula to include explicit modeling and cultural relevance. It will also include factors that may prohibit or prevent explicit teaching with culturally responsive texts while explaining how to remove these presumed barriers. A focus in the literature on student confidence in reading comprehension and ability in the classroom—as opposed to achievement on assessment—will allow the study to provide direct and compelling evidence for modifications in curriculum and instruction.

The Education Accountability Act of 1998 marked the beginning of South Carolina’s decision to establish a benchmarking process for school accountability. This process was implemented through uniform statewide standardized testing in English/language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies. The new tests affected students in grades three through eight. For students enrolled in English 1, Algebra 1, Biology, and U.S. History, an End of Course Examination Program (EOCEP) was adopted requiring students to take an End of Course (EOC) examination worth 20% of their final grade. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDOE) evaluation of school and district effectiveness in implementing the standardized curriculum was based

on student achievement on these performance-based assessments. The department aggregates the data from the scores on the assessments and assigns each school a letter grade ranging from A to F, like a school report card.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 added penalties for schools receiving poor report card grades as a result of testing. Failure to have all students score at least minimum proficiency on the tests could result in a school being placed on improvement plans, identified as needing technical assistance, and subjected to corrective action such as a takeover of operations by the state's board of education. Avoidance of these adverse measures prompted schools to do whatever was necessary to ensure that students could pass these standardized tests, which led them to abandon the goal of equity for all and a focus on achievement for some.

Rather than attend to what would be engaging and affirming for students, curriculum bent towards the privileged canon that would continue to keep in place the boundaries already established with the use of hidden curriculum. Schools adopted problematic essentialist curricula centered on achieving passing grades on standardized tests by incorporating national and state standards called the Common Core of Statewide Standards, or "Common Core," as means to keep European and white American literary, historical, and cultural narratives privileged over others (Bennett, 1992). There was also a renewed push to institute and propagate American nationalism in order to restore America's place as a global leader (Bidwell, 2014). The need for students to pass the tests and earn their schools a passing grade resulted in a standardized test-driven model of learning known as "teaching to the test" (Popham, 2012). This approach does little more

than reinforce existing educational inequalities that stymie student confidence and continue to confer and confirm status to those from privileged cultural backgrounds. Dating back to the times of Horace Mann, education was and remains a means of social control (Ross, 1906; Spring, 2000).

The school culture had become one in which, according to former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, “what gets measured gets done” (Guilfoyle, 2006, p. 8). This kind of sentiment gives educators pause and cause for concern. The goal of education is to prepare students to function in society as informed citizens; it is not to turn the classroom into a factory that only rewards students who can pass the test and leaves little opportunities for those who do not test well. Moreover, one test score should not be the final measure of what a student has mastered. Moving away from mastery of reading comprehension in all settings, teachers focused on standardized test settings and began to shape curricula around superficial material to ensure all the standards identified on testing blueprints had been presented before testing. Focusing on test blueprinting would prove counterintuitive and ineffective. Popham (1999) found that:

Such general descriptions of what's tested often permit assumptions of teaching-testing alignments that are way off the mark. And such mismatches, recognized or not, will often lead to spurious conclusions about the effectiveness of education in a given setting if students' scores on standardized achievement tests are used as the indicator of educational effectiveness (p. 11).

Reading engagement problems present themselves as false negatives, or red flags, when students run into difficulties reading “cold texts,” or unfamiliar material. But in reality,

these problems are often less about comprehension abilities than the student having little interest in the text, seeing little relevance, and finding nothing engaging enough to continue reading.

Standardized testing, according to No Child Left Behind policy and the United States Department of Education, insists that the use of cold texts offers an accurate measurement of reading comprehension mastery and reflects a teacher's effectiveness in implementing instruction. This position is antithetical to the notion that skills and concepts should be taught using texts that students can engage with using prior knowledge to make connections, analyze, and search for central ideas or themes. A text in which the student finds little or no connection to their cultural identities and experiences is inherently biased in the favor of the white students for whom the texts have familiar cultural signifiers and reference points. Cultural capital creates an opportunity gap, then, based on whether the subject of a cold text is familiar to students of various backgrounds. A story about yachting, for instance, privileges the students who have knowledge of sailing or boats over those students who have no exposure to those subjects, and thus no schema with which to work contextually (Popham, 2012, Wayman & Stringfield, 2006).

When relying on standardized testing data for evaluation of student mastery, teachers must adjust quickly and strategically to introduce, teach, and assess reading comprehension. When students appear to lack reading comprehension skills, there often exist disconnections of learner to subject, or omission of the many types of textual literacies that students bring from their homes and communities (Kinloch, 2007; Long,

Volk, Baines & Tisdale, 2013). Even though opportunity gaps exist because of this discounting of students' home and cultural literacies, the continued focus on standardized tests of achievement is well known to have a negative impact on students' confidence and their performance in the next grade level or assessment. More alarming is that students continue to be maligned within curricula that privilege white students over students of color through the use of an essentialist Western literary canon. Rather than using culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies to address these inequities, too many teachers have ignored how students' funds of knowledge or home literacies can foster interdependency and an exchange of resources within a community that can be transferred to academic environments (Gonzales, Moll, & Amati, 2005; Greenberg, 1989; Velez & Greenberg, 1992). Teachers may also seek to avoid negative evaluations and decide to focus their efforts on students more likely to pass the tests to offset the scores of those students who may not pass. This focus is a disservice to the diverse groups of students harmed by an educational system designed not to uplift but to continue to oppress through "literacy tests" that harken back to Jim Crow era voter suppression (Dickerson, 2007; Gabbard, 2003; Kohn, 2000). Reading is taught primarily in ELA classes, but students require these skills to perform well in all content areas. Standardized testing aside, it is educational malpractice to let a student sit through another year of English 1 simply because they were not on grade level the first day.

Instead of having access to a variety of instructional methods and strategies to show relevance, foster understanding, and facilitate mastery of the material, students and teachers have been forced to rely on test-taking strategies to pass the tests, at the expense

of actually learning reading comprehension skills. Students do not get a chance to grasp the material covered and apply that knowledge in a standardized test scenario. According to Ediger (2011), curricula have been adapted to match “testing procedures [that] are highly prescriptive with their accompanying objectives which dictates what is taught. The learning activities and assessment procedures are aligned with the objectives” (p. 131). In the following chapters, the author provides: (a) background on the problem, (b) the need for the study, (c) the rationale for the study, (d) goals of the study, (e) a conceptual framework, (f) action research methodology appropriateness, (g) study design, and (h) data collection, along with analysis and conclusion.

#### Statement of the Problem and Goals of the Study

Teachers must research on their own and collaboratively to embrace and fulfill their obligation to preparing students to read and comprehend a variety of texts, and they must also deliver instruction that is culturally relevant and responsive. Moreover, there are few plans available that give detailed interventions for teachers to help students read on grade level. The study seeks to understand the impact that culturally relevant explicit instruction in reading can have on student confidence in reading comprehension, specifically among African-American male ninth graders.

#### Research Question

One research question guided the study:

1. What impact, if any, did students feel explicit instruction in reading using culturally relevant texts have on increasing their confidence in their reading comprehension abilities? (Quantitative/Qualitative)

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research project was to examine the impact of culturally relevant explicit reading instruction on the confidence of students in their reading comprehension when reading. In addition, it examined whether increased reading comprehension skills would have a positive secondary effect on student achievement on standardized tests. This study yielded data that can guide teachers in refining instruction and presenting culturally relevant and engaging curriculum to promote higher levels of achievement because educators entering the field take on the responsibility for paying a debt owed to students in the pursuit of to provide the best educational experiences for them to succeed as they do when given the best opportunity to do so. It will also highlight the need for teachers to use culturally relevant teaching to engage and provide equity for the diverse populations of students in today's classrooms.

Standardized testing is a concern because of the overwhelming and negative impact on students being tested with a curriculum that is designed to promote white cultural through texts while ignoring all others. This situation is rooted in racist history dating back to the 1960s when the New Orleans board instituted an achievement test to prevent their neighborhood schools from desegregating. A set of academic standards renders a framework, but as Dana and Yendol-Hoppy (2014) noted, teachers can make "decisions regarding how to get their students where they need to go" (p. 22). The goal of public education should be to reconstruct a society that firmly insists on and spreads equity and opportunity to all of our citizens; but simply a low mark on a culturally biased End of Course test will adversely impact the futures of countless students who are

deemed underachievers and whose schools are punished by federal education policy for low test scores.

Teachers should reflect on whether their current practices and beliefs are meeting the needs of students in addition to satisfying the requirements of the district, state, and national mandates. Reading comprehension is a fundamental core skill, essential to nearly every class these students will take. African-American and Hispanic students, along with students from other non-white cultural backgrounds, are not adequately supported by the educational system because teachers cannot or do not employ the best culturally relevant strategies that maximize and capitalize on students' strengths and interests.

Disengagement with text due to its marginalization of one's existence is not a failing on the part of the student, but a lack of commitment to providing equity in educational experiences that will give preference to voices long excluded from the classroom. It falls to teachers, then, to provide reading instruction that allows students of color to see themselves reflected in the texts and allows them to showcase the strengths they have gained from the diversity, resilience, and richness of their communities' cultures and traditions through textual studies and examinations. Practicality and logic dictate that students need to receive intentional, explicit, systematic, and direct instruction that centers on reading, but it must include a pedagogical stance that is keen not just to supplant the canon, but to illuminate the vast range of extant writing and ideas. These diverse texts are relevant in the lives of students of color, but curriculum writers have purposefully excluded them as a means of controlling the master canon and maintaining the status quo.

High-stakes tests worth 20% of the final grade for English appear in the first year of high school for students. Data show that student performance in their first year of high school is an accurate predictor of whether they will complete high school or drop out due to academic difficulties. Addressing sterile, weak instruction immediately and thoroughly could positively affect these students, their scores, their achievement levels, and their likelihood of feeling a measure of success from having mastered skills that previously eluded them. When a student does not glean information from a text due to disinterest and lack of relevancy, they encounter difficulty when completing tasks like analysis, summarization, or evaluation. Moreover, incomplete reading instruction can lead to problems in other subjects that rely on written instruction.

When we measure achievement by the ability to complete a task using a text, scores will suffer if the texts are irrelevant, unengaging, and created with hidden curriculum rather than the use of the reading strategies themselves. The student may incorrectly arrive at a text's meaning and respond using that flawed interpretation as a basis for task completion. This confusion leads to incorrect responses through off-target interpretations and analyses. If a student cannot gather meaning from the text, their answer will be haphazardly chosen as well, resulting in an incorrect response. Reading is a cognitive process. Reading comprehension mastery is observed by educators through the type of responses students give. Phrased another way, Imbarlina asserted that: "Strategies for reading secondary texts are not explicitly taught through the high school curriculum. Most teachers at the secondary level identify themselves as content teachers,

experts in educating students on the content of their discipline, not reading teachers who help students access the content through content literacy skills” (2014, p. 14).

Standardized testing may evolve but will likely not be eliminated as the public insists on measuring achievement (Popham, 2012). Students, parents, and teachers must find ways to prepare students for life after school, while at the same time preparing them for the critical testing during their school careers. After secondary education, students will encounter some form of testing for understanding. Testing may occur through employment applications or admissions forms. Educators need to examine current teaching practices to investigate whether they present the information students need in a way that minimizes misinterpretation, and translates to a variety of contexts, such as standardized testing. Educators should also seek to provide instruction that is equitable for all students.

Education professionals give new names to instructional cycles every few years, but educators can categorize them all as direct instruction, guided practice, or independent practice. Which of these parts of the instructional cycle, if modified for maximum effect, will yield the most impact and translate to higher academic achievement? Eilers (2006) stated, “In order for students to become effective readers they need explicit instruction in specific reading comprehension strategies that may be applied to everything they read” (p. 14). The problem is that this practice does not always take place at the elementary or middle school levels.

Reflective educators can meet the urgent need to improve instructional delivery of content to students in their classrooms. My educational philosophy and framework blend

a social reconstructionist perspective with a practical, contextualist design. I believe that using a mix of effective pedagogies, employing thoroughly researched curriculum principles, using culturally appropriate teaching materials, and implementing differentiated instructional methods will lead to an educational experience that benefits all learners. As social reconstructionist Schramm-Pate (2015) posited, schools themselves can be used as agents of change in society. When schools develop a culture that insists teachers provide students with the proper tools to master the content in the way that they need, learning will increase, test scores will improve, and society will begin to change for the better.

At the start of the 2016-2017 school year, educators in South Carolina began a new evaluation process. The cycle of “plan-do-act-reflect” requires teachers to become reflective practitioners, developing plans that will establish a baseline of achievement. They must research, implement, and document the results of these strategies to raise the achievement of student mastery. Teachers must show what amounts to an action research cycle, suggested by Boudett, City, & Murnane (2013), that encourages teachers to “review the information available and ask themselves and one another three key questions: ‘What do you see?’; ‘What do you make of it?’; ‘What will you do about it?’” The current practice of item analysis simply reviews the questions that many of the students answered incorrectly, but it does not consider possible reasons for the incorrect responses. Another practice is running grade-distribution spreadsheets that indicates how many students passed or failed an assessment, but again, this tactic does not provide detail or data about the possible reasons for the incorrect answers.

## Methodology

This research study used culturally relevant explicit instructional practices identified by the National Council for Teachers of English as most effective in reading instruction. The seven strategies identified as foundational and crucial to improved reading comprehension are activating, inferring, monitoring-clarifying, questioning, searching-selecting, summarizing, and visualizing-organizing. The study also used the English 1 End Of Course (EOC) developed by my state, along with nationally administered reading comprehension tests, to establish baselines measurements of reading comprehension in the participants.

The high school in which I teach is a Title 1 school, identified as such by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) due to failing test scores and a high poverty rate among the student population. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDOE) has also designated it as a “School On Watch” because of student achievement and growth. As an English 1 teacher and curriculum, I observed firsthand what problems low reading comprehension skills can cause. I hoped to transform teaching practices and reading instruction efficacy by researching the correlation between the appearance and absence of culturally relevant explicit reading comprehension instruction in current adopted curricula. I also hoped to create opportunities to share gained knowledge through common planning with colleagues in both the school and the district. Teachers should not operate in vacuums and must speak out against practices that harm students by not attending to their needs, acknowledging value in their home and community literacies and identities, and working to remove instruction that has proven to be systematically

racist and dehumanizing in the name of preserving the traditional curriculum or canons, which is code for White middle class value, ideal, and history.

### Action Research

I chose to be a participative action researcher to conduct this study. By completing graduate course work at the University of South Carolina in the field of reading instruction, I gained insight in recognizing how students could seem to exhibit the inability to read on grade level and how to address this by delivering instruction that created equal and essential opportunity for all students to experience achievement through effective, culturally relevant, and equitable teaching practices. The first course, EDRD 600, centered on reading foundations for learners. The next course, EDRD 715, focused on instructional strategies in reading. The third course was EDRD 730, which focused on teaching reading and writing across content areas. I took the face-to-face classes, which was a more solid schema for learning about reading, rather than the SCDOE's professional development course, which hired instructional coaches or funded an online option with no classroom interaction. After a review of the syllabus and assignment listing along with instructional work load levels, it was apparent that on-campus, instructor-led courses with approximately twelve students were much more thorough in comparison with the online classes, which contained cohorts of about 30 teachers. Many secondary English teachers will lack formal training in reading instruction whether online or on campus, as it will not become a requirement for obtaining a teaching degree or certification in South Carolina until 2020.

### Brief Outline of Methods

The study used a mixed methods sequential explanatory research methodology, and quantitative and qualitative data in a five-cycle collection phase. Quantitative data was obtained through reading comprehension assessments and diagnostic instruments. It helped establish a baseline and data set that yielded a number value on developments that appeared after intervention.

The baseline and growth were established through the administration of Renaissance Learning's *Star Reader* pretest and posttest. All students enrolled in public school in South Carolina in grades K-12 take a commercially developed and packaged pretest within the first two weeks of school. This pretest gave a presumed accurate understanding of a student's reading ability at the start of the study. It is problematic in and of itself, as it follows a similar format and uses similar texts as standardized tests, which are inherently biased against students of color (Au, 2016; Ford & Helms, 2012).

This assessment is meant to indicate what instructional level students can successfully comprehend, as well as what their growth levels should be at the end of 180 days of uninterrupted instruction. The assessment is also created, sold, and distributed by the state's textbook publishing company. The higher the number of students whose pretests indicate they need remediation, the more intervention packages that are purchased from the company for these students. There is, therefore, an inherent benefit in designing a flawed and biased test that will increase profits at the expense of non-privileged students. This again is an aim and intentional system to continue to limit the flourishing of students not of White middle class America.

The students also took the first of three benchmark assessments sold and marketed

by independent educational company TE-21 as Assessments, Interventions, and Training. TE21, Inc. offers benchmark assessments aligned to College and Career Ready Standards and other racially biased standardized tests that act as gatekeepers to higher education like the American College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The questions are drawn from 28 key instructional standards and indicators from the South Carolina Career and College Readiness English 1 standards. They supposedly gauge student ability to determine a central idea or theme, analyze character and plot development, and generate contextual meaning of new vocabulary both connotatively and denotatively. However, this is a problem because the texts used are canonical and disengaging, nor are they culturally relevant. Students then take the posttest, which is identical in standard selection but uses different canonical texts, at the end of the third nine-week grading period of the year. All the students in my home district English 1 classes take three district-created common formative assessments during the first nine weeks. This instrument yielded data that reflected a student's potential mastery, near mastery, or failure of mastery for each academic standard that appeared on the English 1 EOC exam. Students also took a Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory on the second day of school, the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of school, the 45<sup>th</sup> day of school, and the 135<sup>th</sup> day of school. This instrument used a five-point rating scale to assess which reading strategies students use (global, problem solving, and support) when reading academically. This provided an understanding of how students approached reading texts and navigated material that was new or challenging in its complexity.

Qualitative data was provided through the Burke Reading Interview (BRI), teacher observation, individual reading conferences, and group interviews. The BRI assessed a student's beliefs about what reading is, how reading works, and how they view themselves as readers. Self-efficacy and perception about the ability to complete a task is crucial to tracking and increasing the confidence levels of students before and after reading intervention.

On-site members of the administration team and district personnel conducted teacher observations of all teachers of English 1 in my district, which was intended to ensure fidelity to district curriculum and evaluate teaching effectiveness. The observation also included a component about clarity of instruction and student response to instruction. This observation process helped counter the bias I would be expected to encounter in analyzing my own instructional skills.

Reading conferences were another method of data collection and provided a one-on-one environment for students to discuss reading instruction in their previous classes, their families' reading habits, and their own understanding of how reading impacts their academic achievement. The group interviews provided students the opportunity to offer commentary about what type of reading instruction occurred in other classes, and what happened when students of different ability levels were grouped into one unit for projects or inquiries. The qualitative data helped triangulate the analysis of instruction and performance and allowed participants to provide input about the process and results. There was an additional survey for students with scores identified as exceeding or failing to meet growth targets, which provided insight on how helpful different aspects of the

intervention were for them. The focus group helped minimize bias. A complete data analysis was then performed to detail implications, dispel misconceptions, and provide recommendations.

According to Creswell, the most compelling reason to use mixed methods is that using both qualitative and quantitative data provides a better understanding of research problems than employing either one alone (2007). Use of the sequential explanatory design provided triangulation of data between quantitative results of the three types of reading comprehension assessments and the qualitative data gathered through participant responses to the instruction. Relying solely on quantitative results can yield an improper inference due to researcher bias. Obtaining validation from the student surveys, interviews, and individual conferences can help me consider factors that may not have otherwise been evident.

Quantitative data provided a snapshot of the before and after treatments; qualitative data provided details and specifics. Mixed methods research allowed quantitative data that measure growth to be merged with qualitative data that give participants a voice to either validate or refute the my hypothesis and interpretations. With any research, reliance upon one type of data can narrow the window of analysis and leave out many variables that could further elucidate the reliability, validity, and credibility of the data and its implications and conclusions.

## Limitations or Potential Weaknesses of the Study

The methodology of participatory action research did have its limitations, as I had to deviate from the standard district curriculum and replace it with culturally relevant materials (McGarvey, 2007; Tetui, 2017). The focus of this study was on identifying the problem, taking steps to solve it, and then pushing for the solution to be introduced more broadly to correct systemic social and racial injustice. At any point, the district curriculum or state department specialists could insist that I adhered to prescribed texts and materials, stopping me from going any further. Another limitation was the difficulty of duplicating my process and determining what was reproducible, versus what was inherent only to my situation.

This study was conducted with the students enrolled in my English 1 class, which limited the ability to generalize about how these interventions might work in another setting. Other factors, such as the my relationship with students, student motivation, and my specialized knowledge in reading instruction might have affected the data. After giving an in-depth view of the research problem, the study used several instruments to provide quantitative and qualitative data for analysis, produced results from the intervention among a specific set of students, and made recommendations that may translate only to students in similar high schools. A larger study would not be considered generalizable from the qualitative data. An action research study and its results are not meant to be applied to other schools, although its conclusions and broader implications might be transferred to other similar settings.

My role as a reflective educator and participant researcher gave me the impetus to make changes that benefitted my students. I also had the support of school and district level administration. As a teacher leader, my role is to pilot changes and document the process to help others who may be interested in making changes to their own instruction. My perspective as an educator evaluator compelled me to share my research and encourage others to become reflective educators while the stakes are not as high as they will become once the Student Learning Outcome implementation is completed. As a member of the community in which I taught, I took the urgency to heart that something had to be done in order to give my students an equitable, culturally relevant and affirming educational experience.

#### Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 provides background information on the topic, justification for the study, the theories grounding the study, a brief outline of methods, and the accompanying research questions. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature in three major areas: (a) standardized testing and student achievement; (b) reading instruction; and (c) explicit instruction. Chapter 3 describes the setting, research design, and the methods used in this action research study. Chapter 4 will give a detailed mixed method analysis of the data from the study. Chapter 5 will inform the reader about the conclusions of the study with suggestions for action, proposals for future study, and implications for the school.

#### Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms are essential in being introduced and defined in order to aid in understanding the language and ideas presented in this study.

Culturally Relevant Teaching – According to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), culturally relevant teaching is “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) - According to the USDOE, “The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the principal federal law affecting K-12 education.” It sets the standard and framework for federal regulation of public education institutions.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) - According to the USDOE, “The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is the 2001 reauthorization of the ESEA that requires the states to set standards for student performance and teacher quality. The law establishes accountability for results and improves the inclusiveness and fairness of American education.”

Education Accountability Act - According to the SCDOE, the Education Accountability Act of 1998 of South Carolina “established statewide academic achievement standards and assessments of those standards for schools, to provide annual report cards for schools with a performance indicator system, to require districts to establish local accountability systems, to provide specified resources to improve student performance and teacher and staff development assistance and to provide oversight of the above provisions.”

Every Student Succeeds Act - According to the USDOE, “The Every Student Succeeds Act is the reauthorization of the ESEA act that negates the NCLB act; it transfers accountability systems from the federal level to state oversight, lowers the number of tests required to measure student achievement, encourages implementation of evidence-

based practices to improve student achievement, and requires report of disaggregated data of groups of children to provide information about the achievement of vulnerable subgroups within student populations.” This act does not evaluate actual teaching practices resulting in student scores.

Read to Succeed Act - According to the SCDOE, the Read to Succeed Act, or South Carolina Act 284, “ensures that students who are unable to read and comprehend on grade level will be identified as early as possible and be provided with targeted support from all classroom teachers. Read to Succeed requires that all educators have the knowledge and skills they need to assess and address student reading problems effectively.” Every certified staff personnel must take at least one class centered on the importance reading.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) - As defined by the USDOE, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), “refers to the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what American students know and can do in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, geography, civics, and the arts.”

Common Core - As defined by the USDOE, “The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English Language Arts. These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live.”

Reading - Kucer (2006) defined reading as a “complex and purposeful sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning with text.”

Direct Instruction - As defined by the USDOE, direct instruction is “instructional approaches that are structured, sequenced, and led by teachers, and/or the presentation of academic content to students by teachers, such as in a lecture or demonstration.

Comprehension Strategies - As defined by the USDOE, comprehension strategies are “routines and procedures that readers use to help them make sense of texts.

Comprehension strategy instruction can also include specific teacher activities that have been demonstrated to improve student comprehension of texts. Asking students questions and using graphic organizers are examples of such strategies.”

Explicit Instruction - As defined by the USDOE, explicit instruction is “instruction where teachers model and explain the specific strategies being taught and provide feedback on student use of the strategies.”

Learning Standards - As defined by the USDOE, learning standards are “concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education. Learning standards describe educational objectives—i.e., what students should have learned by the end of a course, grade level, or grade span.”

Scaffolding - As defined by the USDOE, scaffolding is a “variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process.”

Standardized Test - As defined by the USDOE, a “standardized test is any form of test that requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from common bank of questions, in the same way, and that is scored in a ‘standard’ or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students.”

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review will center on reading comprehension as a process, high stakes testing, best instructional practices to support readers, culturally responsive teaching, and student confidence. To accomplish the necessary instructional refinement for increasing student confidence in reading comprehension ability, the problem must be explored and an understanding of the urgent need to address it must be established. Poor reading comprehension as a result of lack of engagement or relevance is an issue that affects almost every aspect of a student's academic career (Beers & Probst, 2017; Guthrie, Lutz & Ho, 2013; Fisher, 2004). Inability to understand or relate to a text used during instruction becomes a barrier that limits achievement (Daniels, 2012). Students cannot perform tasks adequately if they cannot nor wish to understand or engage with the texts they are using (Kissau, 2013; Lupo, 2018). This disconnection between text and task translates to poor performance in regular classes and results in the eventual placement of students into lower-tracked classes that often use materials below grade level (Tatum, 2012; Wigfield, 2016). While this may seem like a logical solution, it is, in fact, malpractice. The goal of reading education is to show students how to read and understand material that is appropriate and engaging for them (Cisco, 2012; Novotny, 2011).

Once schools place students in lower-tracked classes, there is minimal opportunity for them to receive the rich instruction that prepares them to become productive citizens after exiting the public school system (Oakes, 1985; Boutte, 1992). Students should not have to overcome obstacles put in place by discriminatory testing systems and curricula; so, first and foremost, reflective educators need to begin recognizing the existence of oppressive systems and work to change them (Tatum, 2012). Secondly, educators need to work from the assumption that students of color and students from low-income communities have the same intellectual capabilities as their peers.

Moreover, they may have an even greater depth and breadth of understanding, as they must become fluent in communicating both within their communities and navigating the complexities and barriers presented by white-dominated society. Constant translation and code-switching, or using vernacular common to community among friends from speaking a more formalized accepted way outside of the community, are required for African Americans and other people of color to gain any traction in environments that privilege European-American cultural and social norms. However, texts on Standardized Testing for Assessment in Reading, (STAR) assessments are often so disconnected from these students' schemas that educators need to help them see how they can use their expertise when transacting with unfamiliar texts. As an answer to the call for more equitable educational practices and accountability, stakeholders in the educational system have approached solving the "achievement gap" with a scientific response in recent years (Ravitch, 2014). Their solution was to standardize and privatize instruction to ensure students fully understand concepts and demonstrate growth. The problem with this

response is that it continued to be inherently racist and culturally biased, perpetuating an assumed “achievement gap” that is called more appropriately an “opportunity gap” because of the barriers preventing all citizens from enjoying the same privileges as middle class white Americans (Kozol, 2006).

Along with testing, educational standards or “objectives” were created for each content area in deference to the idea of scientifically controlling curricula and maximizing instructional time by pushing so-called “classical” texts, which guaranteed that what is considered “standard knowledge” was, in reality, only standard for middle class white Americans (Bennett, 1992). To measure the effectiveness of this approach, the educational community created tests that would assess how much students had learned. Schools moved away from progressive, perennial, and social reconstructionist curricula and embraced essentialist curricula that centered on standardized student and teacher testing. All of this culminated into a standardized test-driven model of learning known as “teaching to the test” (Popham, 2006).

### Reading Comprehension

This study used the mixed method design and employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis for assessing a problem in practice—namely, declining test scores in current secondary English classrooms. It is of utmost importance to find other studies that can inform and make recommendations about the types of evidence that will yield objective, clear, and thorough analysis (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachern, 2015). A literature review is necessary for at least two reasons: research-based evaluation of the problem and recommendation for improvement. There is a variety

of research and trade materials for strengthening instruction in reading comprehension at the elementary levels. However, there is a dearth of it in secondary fields especially chronicling the successes when culturally relevant explicit instruction is used because there is a small but growing number of educators who feel a responsibility and call to do so.

Teachers should reference the United States Department of Education's practice guides to identify and evaluate common threads of successes, limitations, and weaknesses, because they are created from a variety of sources grounded in research that uses information from many different studies (Kamil, 2006). These guides make suggestions for improving specific aspects of teaching and provide starting points for addressing problems in practice. These guides are not seeking to complete a rigid, formal meta-analysis but are merely serving as a conduit to find the most compelling evidence from previous work done by experts in the field and ranking the treatments in order of strong to weak (Ramnarine, 2004). These practice guides help orient research practitioners in understanding what methods work (Kingerey, 2000), and are designed to be comprehensive resources that present information in the context of specific problems across studies and then relate it in a hierarchal manner for clarity regarding the treatments and results (Guthrie & McCann, 1997). The purpose is to identify best practices.

### High Stakes Testing

Numerous studies have shown that poor reading comprehension skills negatively impact student achievement (Clark, Kirschner, & Sweller, 2012). Moreover, lower student achievement according to the High Stakes Testing model, which is a reformation

of the Sorting Model, has been shown to limit career and educational opportunities after K-12 school (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Day & Newburger, 2002; Spring, 2015). As a result, NCLB and the Education Accountability Acts have put schools under pressure to teach as many skills and cover as much content as possible in an environment that is mindful of the end game: high student achievement on standardized testing. There is little argument that standardized testing, its relationship to student achievement, and its effect on school effectiveness rating affect students, schools, and school districts.

All students in grades three through eight are tested annually in language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science. At these grade levels, the overall standardized testing achievement average in each subject affects the school directly, but the score does not impact individual student grades. At the secondary level, however, an EOC Examination accounts for 20% of a student's final grade in English 1. Students who do not perform well on this test, therefore, run the risk of failing and having to repeat the course. Research has identified reasons students do poorly on the test, but has not made definitive recommendations on how to correct the skill deficiency other than to bolster the reading comprehension of students who perform at lower levels.

Comprehension is a multilayer process. It is a synthesis of understanding formed when students read, listen, or view new information (Tyner, 2012). Comprehension is not taught to be a secondary skill, but to drive students to gain understanding every time they read. It is both the process and the product. Contrary to a limited understanding of comprehension as being a single aspect of reading, comprehension is actually the convergence of a number of reading processes working together to create understanding

(Tyner, 2012). Research on methods of delivery of reading instruction suggests that clear and obvious instruction is more effective than more obtuse types of instruction like discovery (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013).

Curriculum writers and schools have not insisted on making the necessary changes to instruction for many reasons. It seems that the goal in education is no longer to teach comprehension. Instead, the focus is now on passing all tests mandated by the state and federal governments. Fear of failing to meet these benchmarks for achievement and pressure to produce students who perform well is prevalent. Failure brings tough consequences for districts and schools that are found to be failing when students do not perform at or above grade level on commercially produced and contracted standardized achievement tests (Guilfoyle, 2006). These tests are designed to be given in multiple states rather than adapted for each state. Failure to raise test scores after five consecutive years can result in schools and districts being taken over by outside entities, as well as allowing students to enroll in other schools at the home district's expense (Ravitch, 2014; Kozol, 1992; Spring, 2018).

Extensive research has exposed these tests' limitations for accurately measuring student performance. Given that the objective of a national test is to match up with every state's curriculum for maximum distribution and sales, there is bound to be material on the test that is not covered. Conversely, there will be material covered in classes that is not on the test. When testing started to become the national measuring stick for school effectiveness, there were mismatches among tests, curricula, and instruction that led to inaccurate results regarding student ability (Popham, 1999). The dilemma became

whether educators were teaching students to think critically and chose the best answer after reading through dense material and understanding the questions and responses, or simply teaching students to guess the correct answer. Students with poor reading comprehension skills may have a harder time grasping the text itself, as well as the questions and most accurate answers.

For such a wide scope of curriculum, guessing on about 25 percent of the questions could yield disastrous results if there is nothing in place to guide student thinking. After reviewing scores, curricula focus on reteaching the specific skills on which the student scored poorly, which runs the risk that the skill will not even appear on the next test and there will appear to be no improvement. Research has found that most tests used under NCLB are unable to detect improvement because of the way they are constructed and graded (Popham, 2006). The standardized testing required by NCLB does provide the benefit of preventing schools and districts from covering up existing false presentations of achievement gaps as opposed to poor instruction by helping to identify whether the most vulnerable among a school's population are receiving quality instruction. (Guilfoyle, 2006). Scores should be used for comparison to show growth, but not to evaluate effectiveness of instruction. There has been no significant data justifying reliance upon these scores for evaluation (Popham, 2014).

Researchers have pinpointed the causes of the problems that students have with reading comprehension and teachers' inability to adjust instruction to correct these issues (Allington, 2011; Harvey, 2016). At its core, reading is decoding material presented in a print format. Comprehension is making meaning from what one reads. Both affect how

students will perform on a standardized test, understand tasks presented on the test, and understand the material presented for analysis on the test. Within reading, there are several components that work together to make one a proficient reader. The five subsets of skills within the framework of reading instruction are: (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension (Allington, 2012; Bui & Fagan, 2013; Jago, 2016). The first four, working together, manifest as comprehension. Teaching mastery of the other skills without ensuring that it leads to comprehension does not adequately comprise reading instruction because the four skills work together to decode material and find meaning in it. Reading without seeking to understand a text negates the reading itself (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Students may recognize the words in print because they can decode the letters, but this is not a guarantee that they understand what message the text is trying to convey. Consequently, they will not be able to engage in activities that rely on comprehension (Hattie, 2012). This situation occurs when teachers do not provide instruction in an intentional, explicit, and systematic format. They leave up to chance whether the students will be able to infer or decipher what they read. Reading comprehension proficiency is defined as recognizing words and being able to understand the meaning and intent of what the words are expressing through context and semantics (Torgesen et al., 2007).

#### Explicit Instruction

Teachers focus on teaching a variety of concepts and skills depending upon the age group of the students and the course material they teach. Decoding is taught as decoding no matter the texts used to teach it. Reading is a cognitive process, and mastery

is observed through student responses. Imbarlina (2014) asserted that as students move through school, there is less instruction in how to read and comprehend increasingly difficult texts. As students move up through grades, teachers become less responsible for the instruction of the content and more focused on the content itself. Teachers at the high school level, then, view themselves as teaching the content, not as teachers of reading (Ericson, 2001).

Students who do not learn how to deploy the skills necessary to perform well on a high-stakes standardized test will fail the test. Thus, the tests will continue their initial function of oppression because many of the tests were designed to fail students and keep oppressive systems in place (Byrd, 2016; Tatum, 2011; Popham, 2012). Rather than address their inability to understand the tests, students learn to mask their confusion by guessing answers, hiding their misunderstanding, and disengaging from the process. Because the tests are designed in this manner, students are left out of classroom discussions, their confidence declines, and they become less able to learn from any material presented to them (Tyner, 2012).

To ensure this does not occur, it is incumbent upon teachers to discern what skills can be translated from students' prior knowledge and teach students to apply that same critical thinking skill set to other texts. They must then explicitly teach the skills that translate to better performance on standardized testing. Some teachers believe they are giving clear and direct instruction when in fact they are not and too many assume that students have the foundational knowledge to fill in gaps in direct instruction. Madeline Hunter's research determined that a key factor in student understanding was explicit and

direct instruction that featured modeling like think aloud questions, visualizing, and activating prior knowledge about a text through a series of questions like “What do I already know about this? Where have I heard this before? What does it sound like?” and then answering the questions they pose. Rather than attribute the lack of acceptable performance to a need to adjust instructional practices, teachers tend to believe it is the student’s failure or inability to grasp the skill or practice it independently until mastered (Hunter, M & Hunter, R, 2004). To bridge the gaps adolescents have in reading comprehension and understand how to correct deficiencies in reading instruction, one of the five most impactful recommendations from a guide created by the Institute of Education Sciences is for secondary school teachers to provide intentional, scaffolded, and clear instruction on reading comprehension (Kamil, 2006).

A review of current practices suggests that if educators do not use culturally relevant explicit instruction, then relying on assessments to measure mastery is problematic and illogical. Poor student achievement may not be the fault of the student, and assuming that test results reflect actual understanding and ability may be misguided (Popham, 2014). In other words, the inferences made from test scores may not accurately reflect students’ understanding and mastery of the material if the instruction was not of adequate quality. It is incumbent upon educators to do the best they can to instruct students in the most beneficial, effective, and productive manner. As Allington (2002) insisted, schools need to develop curricula that make reading instruction consistent and recursive in support and remediation, if necessary, from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Research suggests that substandard instruction for adolescents in reading comprehension is a problem because the supposed inability to read cold texts, which usually have little to no relevance to students of color, at even the most basic level leads students to drop out of school in backlash of the treatment as unable, which negatively impacts not only the students themselves, but also the society that will have to care for them because of its refusal to do right by them (Boling & Evans, 2008). Research has also shown that retaining students in the same grade if they read below grade level is more likely to exacerbate the problem rather than remedy it because teachers continue to fail to offer remedial instruction, causing these students to fall even further behind their peers. These students are four times more likely to drop out than students who are reading on or above grade level (Allington & Cunningham, 2002). It is less harmful to keep students with their cohort even if they do not receive remedial instruction. Moreover, the practice of routing students into less rigorous classes compounds the problem because the environment is often uninspiring and causes students to disengage from instruction altogether, leading to failure (Allington, 2012).

Unfortunately, schools still employ tracking as an instructional model even though it results in negative achievement levels. This practice has been used to relegate certain groups to lower positions in society and continues to keep those groups from rising above the challenges that made them ill-prepared for school in the first place (Allington & Cunningham, 2002). Teachers in the primary and upper grades have some training in reading instruction, but secondary teachers typically receive training primarily in their subject area (Ericson, 2001). There is a more narrowed focus in working with

getting students to perform higher order thinking skilled work. Upper grades students receive little instruction with culturally relevant explicit instruction in comprehension strategies to understand the material with which they want to work and with material with which systemic racist structures insist they must work.

The problem of ignoring the wealth of knowledge students bring to school is compounded when curricula are so limited that there is no inclusion of culturally relevant texts that speak to students' wide range of ability, familial education backgrounds, language proficiency, learning disabilities, and motivation levels (Ericson, 2001). The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000), which was convened to address dismal reading comprehension scores on standardized tests, found that the lack of explicit instruction led to students being unable to comprehend what they read because they were not taught the strategies to do so. In a report by the National Reading Panel, classrooms where texts were higher in Lexile complexity and length, which means readability ease based upon vocabulary expectation and sentence density, there was no instruction in how to read, and no explicit instruction of strategies to understand the text that was covered in 600 minutes (Ness, 2007, p. 229).

Unfortunately, research that directly points to the need for teachers to consistently use culturally relevant explicit instruction to improve reading comprehension across all content areas is often dismissed or ignored. Even though significant evidence that it yields positive results in the classroom and on standardized tests, some educators are slow to adopt them (Clark, Kirschner, & Sweller, 2012). Culturally relevant explicit direct instruction is often misinterpreted as highly rigid, unimaginative, and cumbersome.

However, when those skills are modeled for the students and all questions are answered, students are more successful than if they are just told what to do and left to their own devices (Hunter, 2011). Students must be given a keystone to navigate new skills introduced that are presented in strict pacing guides that rely on students not having misconceptions that need to be clarified in the first place.

Even more alarming, research has shown that any instruction other than explicit instruction can diminish student achievement, based on data from 70 studies on the use of partially guided instruction (Clark, Kirschner, & Sweller, 2012). Students who were underserved and under-supported in earlier grades were certain to fall even further behind when other inferior strategies are employed because they needed solid, systematic, and explicit instruction. Students taught with the partial-guidance method, for example, performed significantly lower on tests after instruction than they did before receiving any instruction (Harvey & Daniels, 2015).

Systemic neglect regarding solid instruction in reading comprehension in American public schools has led to a generation of students whose reading skills are now so undeveloped that it will take more than explicit instruction in a general education setting to help them achieve some measure of success (Kamil et al., 2008). Because these students received instruction that was only minimally adequate, they experience gaps between their reading comprehension skills and their grade-level content. Scaffolding materials and instruction must be implemented, and support will need to extend past the current typical school day. This type of instruction must also be carried out by an actual reading teacher, possibly even a specialist (Kamil et al., 2008). Reading specialists are

experts in assessing and improving the reading abilities of students who may be struggling to read at grade level (Kamil et al., 2008). The interventions that specialists provide are intensive and targeted. Specialists can also monitor the students' progress and spend time remediating challenges rather than floundering about wondering what to do as an untrained classroom teacher might (Litt, Martin, & Place, 2015).

Even so, most struggling readers can find support in the general education classroom when teachers have sufficient training in reading skills and strategies and know how to teach them clearly, systematically, and explicitly, leaving no room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding. There are programs, such as the Universal Design for Learning, for example, that are structured specifically for use in classrooms with struggling readers. Other programs exist to help teachers select the most useful reading strategy, and there are elective courses constructed on the principles of targeted interventions that can supplement the instruction students receive in the general education classroom. All of these interventions are optional.

Gains can also be made in reading comprehension with targeted intervention that identifies a student's weaknesses and develops an intentional instructional response (Mathes et al., 2008). The formal name of this protocol is Response to Intervention (RTI), which is a four-tier system currently in use in many schools. General classroom instruction is Tier 1; Tier 2 is appropriate for students who need additional support that can be given in small groups within the class; Tier 3 requires a comprehensive evaluation and intensive intervention to address more severe skill misunderstanding; and Tier 4 is specialized education as guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA) of 2004. RTI cannot take the place of specialized instruction administered by teachers who have received training and certification. Specialized instruction is necessary to clear up misunderstanding or to provide remediation at Tiers 2 and 3. Longitudinal studies support the suggestion that intervention can provide more enriching and engaging instruction for readers in secondary schools (Solis, Miciak, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2014). The data are limited, as they only come from elementary and middle schools, but conclusions can be extrapolated and applied to at least the first few years of high school (Solis, et al., 2014). Interventions should be systematically introduced and explicitly taught to students, and serve as complementary instruction (Vaughn et al., 2008).

#### Performance Outcomes

The scores from the 2007 NAEP eighth-grade reading test revealed that 69% of the eighth graders tested were reading at a level below proficient for their grade (Kamil et al., 2008). The tests also revealed that over a quarter of the students read below the basic level, indicating an inability to read or learn from texts on their grade level.

Unfortunately, as these students move on to high school, their overall lack of reading comprehension renders them woefully unprepared not only for academics, but for life after school when they will encounter texts without the safety net of the classroom. As a result, there is considerable urgency to implement procedures to stop the decline in reading comprehension from elementary to middle school, and to begin reversing these trends before students enter high school. Despite awareness among educators and educational institutions that students leave grade school unable to read and their ability to continue learning on grade level therefore dwindles, few policies or procedures have been

put in place to address the problem. Insisting that instruction be culturally relevant and free students to see themselves in the content is left up to teachers often considered renegades, radicalized, or problematic rather than true educators embodying the ideals and practices to promote equitable education for all.

In the context of theorizing why students struggled on secondary levels, Rickenrode and Walsh (2013) surveyed the type of emphasis placed on the science of teaching reading in high school classes and use of commercially produced teaching material. They found, “only 111 programs (18%) address all five of the essential components and, therefore, provide adequate instruction in the science of reading to prospective elementary teachers” (p. 33). Reading instruction becomes less a part of formal instruction after elementary school, which is counterproductive because the texts that students encounter are above grade level, making it almost impossible for students reading at or below grade level to engage and learn (Allington, 2012). Students who are reading at or below grade level are being denied access to an engaging education. Rickenrode and Walsh also noted, “Even when presented with clear scientific evidence, some professional practitioners—be they doctors in hospitals, instructors in teacher preparation programs, or teachers themselves—may resist changes to practice because their personal experience indicates that what they are doing is effective” (p. 35).

When the Common Core State Standards were released in 2010, they appeared to be a clarion call for rigor and were wholeheartedly adopted by 46 states and the District of Columbia. They provided a framework for students and teachers to interact with engaging activities, thought-provoking questions, and complex texts that would elicit

thinking on a deeper level (Harvey & Daniels, 2015). Quite the opposite occurred. The texts chosen became gatekeepers for educational attainment as they were several grades above level, and the activities were constructed on the assumption that the reader understood what was expressed explicitly and implicitly in the texts. This proved to be the cause of an even wider divide between student ability and the standardized tests used to assess mastery, evaluate the effectiveness of their teachers' methods, and measure the appropriateness of the curriculum materials (Harvey & Daniels, 2015). There was a disconnect between the methods used to train teachers in teacher preparation programs and the type of instruction needed to ensure students could achieve the type of mastery that would deem them, their teachers, and their schools successful (Harvey & Daniels, 2015).

With the advent of high-stakes standardized testing that does not measure improvement, teachers are buckling under pressure to cover content quickly, train students to overcome testing fears, transfer the high stakes of testing into classroom drills, and still meet the needs of every child (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Research has shown that the “final challenge is the negative impact of the transition to secondary school, especially the increasing presence of high-stakes exams and more transmission-oriented forms of instruction, on achievement, academic motivation, and engagement for some students” (Benner & Graham, 2009; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

## Culturally Responsive Teaching

Current teacher preparation programs reflect the need for educators to embrace Culturally Responsive Teaching to value and empower students by highlighting the strengths and literacies with which they arrive to school (Asante, 2017; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Empowerment reduces prejudice, eliminates sexism, and equalizes educational opportunities. When students' cultural literacies are excluded, many are ill equipped to transfer their reading comprehension skills and strategies or feel that it is not their responsibility to do so (Banks, 1993). Researchers found that many teachers were unable or unwilling to use culturally responsive teaching—an approach that originates in critical race theory—to teach reading comprehension to struggling students, instead clinging to Eurocentric educational content to maintain a social hierarchy that has remained unchanged for decades in America (Kunjufu, 1998; Ogbu, 1988). The pacing guides and standards are reflections of what is widely known and presented in White American middle-class households and has the desired and intended effect on the educational opportunities of people of color—to thwart them (Delpit, 1995). Insisting on Culturally Responsive teaching in classrooms is no different from what is being done for the Anglo student; it is merely the inclusion of texts and knowledges that are common to that community (Boutte, 2015). Baines, Tisdale, & Long (2015) assert,

“As we navigate the world of standards and pacing guides, concerns about rigid standardization and the imposition of scripted programs are real. Not the least of these concerns is that standards often represent a form of ongoing colonization requiring teachers to hold students to Eurocentric norms. However, while we

work to change these norms, our students cannot wait so we fully implement culturally relevant teaching while simultaneously taking action for change"

Studies have shown that rather than utilize texts from students' homes and communities, teachers merely substituted easier canonical texts for complex ones. Other teachers referred students to specialized reading teachers rather than address the inequity and bias that existed in their classrooms. And others, unfortunately, seemed to refuse to acknowledge that the difficulty even existed and attributed it to a lack of student motivation (Hill & Boutte, 2006; Kunjufu, 1985). Schools added to the problem by creating special classes that claim to be for remediation or intervention, but are staffed with teachers or aides who lack the specialized knowledge necessary to bridge the gap by delivering culturally relevant explicit instruction in reading comprehension (Litt, Martin, & Place, 2015).

There has been some research that can help illuminate what teachers believe about the need for explicit culturally responsive teaching to bolster acknowledgement of knowledge brought with students to school and the transference of their own literacies when working with newer texts to increase student confidence and their abilities to navigate these barrier texts (Hale, 2001). Increasing student confidence in reading comprehension abilities will also raise student standardized test scores because students believe they can complete the task because they are already adroit at navigating communication within and outside of their homes and neighborhoods (Delpit, 1995; Tatum, 2012). The research in this area is primarily authored by teachers who agree that the solution is culturally responsive, systematic, and explicit instruction.

Teachers' inability, trepidation, or unwillingness to employ the use of Culturally Responsive Teaching is a barrier that is unlikely be removed unless action is taken. Research shows that teachers are aware that students performed better when given clear instruction on strategies and their use (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Although it is unethical not to use best practices in instruction, teachers in one study felt stymied and isolated when they attempted to work with other teachers and share responsibility for this instruction. They were often told it was not worth the time or that it was not their responsibility to teach reading in high school, even though they were well aware that students were floundering (Ness, 2007).

Even when teachers are willing to use these strategies in their classroom, there is another level of complexity added when including students who need additional support that cannot be provided in the general education classroom setting. Most cooperative teachers in one study centered around using professional development to identify what was lacking in reading instruction, it was made clear that what could be consider the most effective type of teaching in reading comprehension instruction that could benefit all students and translates to success across content areas was explicit instruction (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Information from the Alabama Reading Initiative showed that even though teachers were able to employ strategies to help students pick the right answer, their scores still indicated an inability to really grasp the material and answer the questions at a deeper level (Bacevich & Salinger, 2006).

## Possible Research Based Solutions

Research clearly indicates the need for explicit instruction to increase reading comprehension, which will result in higher achievement in the classroom and on standardized tests. Because adolescents must read across content areas and for multiple tasks, however, teachers will need to put in place a solid foundation of reading skills and strategies for students to use as they move up in grade and text complexity (Kamil et al., 2008). Students will need the ability to take in new information from the texts and transfer that information in ways that they can share with their teachers and classmates. Although there is no direct evidence of a relationship between reading achievement and grades in content-area courses, and logical inference can be made that one exists (Kamil et al., 2008). Moreover, there is evidence that poor reading comprehension increases the likelihood of failure in content-area classes because students will be unable to understand the class texts or make meaning from them. Additionally, when reading comprehension skills are poor, test score data and research show that until the comprehension skills are improved, content-area achievement will be thwarted (Kamil et al., 2008).

The 2010 American College Testing report showed that 69% of all graduating high school students are ready for college and careers (Gutchewsky & Curran, 2012). Students weak in reading comprehension need instruction that will help them understand the texts in different content areas. Teachers who are accustomed to focusing only on teaching the content ensure students will not perform well in their classes or on the standardized tests used to measure student achievement and educator efficacy. To avoid this situation, educators need to take part in professional development that teaches them

how to deliver culturally relevant explicit reading instruction that makes use of their content-area texts and texts that students find interesting and engaging (Gutchewsky & Curran, 2012). Strategy instruction is nonexistent in secondary classrooms, as teachers focus on what students learn and not how they learn (Meo, 2008). Previous comprehensive research by Kamil et al. (2008) has been largely ignored, and the culturally relevant explicit instruction students need to understand the increasingly difficult texts they encounter in more complex content area textbooks is largely missing, even though it is crucial for student academic achievement (Ness, 2007). This is in large part due to teachers not attending to the educational debt that the current systems owe to students.

There is also a sense of urgency for immediate implementation of culturally relevant explicit instruction in reading comprehension for students in middle and high school because students are failing standardized tests designed to ensure they are receiving quality instruction (Ness, 2007). Students not reading on grade level by third grade are more likely to struggle in high school. Students who continue to read below grade level tend to fail more of their classes, and students who fail numerous classes in high school are at a higher risk for dropping out.

To fill the void of engagement and relevance to learners, some schools have introduced new texts that are more diverse and require higher order thinking skills. Secondary education has avoided adjusting curricula, instead incorporating reading comprehension strategies and skill instruction by focusing on content and insisting students should have already been taught how to read. This is counterintuitive to ensuring

students can comprehend the more difficult texts they will encounter, which are vastly different than the materials with which they were taught to read. Schools and their staff can make the task easier by using current research to guide them in developing plans and curricula that meet the needs of the students first, before seeking to satisfy the requirements of the tests. It is not enough to leave the teaching of reading to elementary schools. Lai, Wilson, McNaughton, and Hsiao (2014) noted that a change has come about in educational practices as a result of observing “that improving early literacy is not an inoculation to future literacy success, which has led to an increase in interventions to improve literacy in the secondary grades” (p. 305). Once schools follow the suggestions made by current research urging more attention to reading comprehension, students will become more proficient readers and test scores will be higher (Ness, 2007).

Most teachers automatically use various strategies they have learned over the years as they read new content without being aware that they must incorporate these strategies into their own teaching and adopt equitable practices. Guidance in culturally relevant explicit instruction and culturally responsive teaching through the use of texts like Hip-Hop Pedagogy will benefit all teachers. Secondary school teachers may be resistant because they believe teaching reading comprehension is the responsibility of a reading teacher and the use of culturally diverse texts is antithetical to the privilege Eurocentric canon (Kamil et al., 2008).

Under the pressure of high-stakes testing and the fear of becoming a failing school, teachers may feel they should focus on covering as much of the content that may appear on the standardized tests as they can for the students who can read rather than

spending time teaching reading. Teachers should be introduced to research that illustrates the relationship between increased student confidence and its impact on comprehension and higher test scores. Teachers unfamiliar with reading instruction may need to be reassured often and supported by reading teachers until that increased reading comprehension translates to higher test scores and classroom engagement (Kamil et al., 2008).

Teachers should be urged to review the research showing that the time invested in culturally relevant explicit instruction will pay off in the long term. Students will be more confident in their ability to learn from source material. After all, the goal of reading is to comprehend (Allington, 2012). English teachers in secondary schools, however, do not view themselves as capable of or interested in teaching reading because they are teaching appreciation of literature rather than reading strategies (Ericson, 2001).

Although secondary teachers rarely collaborate on ways to address poor reading comprehension skills, they frequently spend time in faculty meetings complaining about having poor or struggling readers. This may be in part due to the long-held belief that a content area teacher, particularly secondary school English teachers, are responsible for teaching the content rather than how to read (Ericson, 2001). Additionally, teachers are unlikely to seek out new strategies when they are burdened with teaching students how to pass standardized tests that impact the student, teacher, and school. Teachers typically have an additional ten days of employment on their teaching contracts that requires the educator to participate some sort of professional education like district workshops or graduate level college courses with the goal to improve teaching practices. Districts work

with school leaders and curriculum writers to ascertain strengths and weaknesses and then design teacher work day learning experiences centered on improving teaching practices. Lai, Wilson, McNaughton, and Hsiao (2013) noted that their research “suggests that [when] district led educational professional learning community workshops were used in schools, that there was some increase in teachers’ content literacy pedagogical content knowledge (albeit variable), and that students reported greater levels of culturally relevant explicit literacy teaching and vocabulary instruction” (p. 330). Students found their experiences were being affirmed and valued.

School administrators need to grow culturally relevant literacy programs within their schools and identify ways to sustain them if they expect teachers to learn how to deliver culturally relevant explicit instruction and feel confident enough to address any challenges that may result from students needing more intervention than they are able to provide in their classrooms.

Once teachers realize the connection between their insufficient instruction and low test results, they will clamor for professional development that will show them the strategies, explain the skills, and model for them how to deploy the strategies in their own classrooms (Swiderski, 2011). After practicing with their peers, teachers should develop the confidence to introduce these skills to students, who will benefit greatly from them. Test results will improve, and teachers will find the confidence to collaborate with others to learn about and introduce new strategies to increase comprehension for their students (Swiderski, 2011).

Quite a few commercially produced reading programs actually lack the content and lessons that allow a teacher to instruct students with cultural relevance and explicitness. These programs negatively affect students' comprehension ability because they are not rooted in research but are more concerned with profit yield (Popham, 1999). They also do not provide opportunity for authentic engagement with texts through scaffolding support that makes use of current research-based suggestions for achievement. They are a recycled version of the lower level text-and-question-pair instruction set with a variation on the types of questions asked. There are few textbook programs that are solidly designed around explicit instruction. Reading instruction must be explicit. It must be systematic. It must provide students with the mental tools to read a variety of texts and strategies to understand those texts (McEwan-Adkins, 2004). Educational breakthroughs occur when teachers draw from lesson planning that is intentional and systematically uses instruction that is explicit, clear, and direct (McEwan-Adkins, 2004). Explicit reading instruction is vital as it leverages equity and opportunity to provide curriculum that will better attune to the needs of a diverse body of students.

As Behrmann and Souvignier (2013) explained, "Educational research has revealed that students usually benefit from explicit teacher explanations of how, when, and why to apply a specific reading strategy (e.g., Paris et al. 1984) before students try to autonomously apply the right strategy at the right time" (p. 1032). Direct instruction with explanation is a necessary component in any reading comprehension program because it provides the basis from which other strategies can be taught and used by the students. If there is any ambiguity, students may make mistakes that will need to be discovered and

corrected. Those mistakes may not be revealed until after the high-stakes standardized test results come back (McEwan-Adkins, 2004). Explicit instruction is helping students see the steps of the strategy and the “why” of its use, along with the types of text for which it should be used. It does not leave anything open for interpretation (McEwan-Adkins, 2004).

In addition to modeling skills, culturally relevant explicit instruction is whole group instruction that honors the diversity and strength of each student. Teacher and student communication in the classroom should lead to practice in the group. Group work, guided by the teacher, offers the opportunity for independent work with texts specifically chosen for that purpose. The teacher should be nearby to clarify misunderstandings and answer questions as the students work independently (Harvey & Daniels, 2015). When researchers directed teachers to explicitly teach students comprehension strategies, students experienced positive feedback that helped increase confidence (Harvey & Daniels, 2015). Teaching a comprehension strategy is not simple and requires a well thought out plan that intentionally selects scaffolding, texts, and strategies (Allington, 2002).

All reading is active rather than passive (Allington, 2012; Johnson, 2017; Riley, 2015). It is educational malpractice to ignore the studies that demonstrate higher levels of achievement and mastery for students who have been explicitly instructed in reading comprehension strategies. Cunningham paraphrased the mismatch of pedagogical awareness with practice by asserting, “without rich subject matter knowledge, teachers cannot follow the NRP [National Reading Panel] recommendations, nor can they

effectively teach many of their students, who require systematic and explicit instruction to break the alphabetic code and become independent readers” (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998, p. 419). Additionally, explicit teaching has been shown to benefit struggling readers along with poor and basic readers. Readers who are advanced or proficient should be monitored for opportunities for improvement as well, but they are the only types of readers who benefit from partially guided or discovery models of learning (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009; Nokes & Dole, 2004; Marzano, 1998).

Differentiation can meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. Recent studies have demonstrated the enormous impact of high-quality classroom instruction. Allington (2012) referred to studies by Ferguson (1999) and Snow, et al. (1991) that showed the quality of the instruction students received proved to be a better predictor for student achievement than outside influencers. Moreover, the same research found that teacher quality was more of a factor in student success than parenting or socioeconomic status. , effective educators employ all components of the explicit instruction cycle when seeking to increase student comprehension skills through presentation, application, and implementation (Mathes et al., 2008). Conscientious teachers plan each step of the explicit instruction process, anticipating students’ needs by using the available data about student reading levels ensuring their chosen texts will be engaging. The teacher must clearly explain what skill the reading strategy will support, along with explaining what types of reading and texts the strategy is most appropriate. The teacher and students engage in conversations that increase the likelihood that students feel comfortable enough

to ask for clarification or more explanation to ensure that they understand how to use the strategy (Eggen & Kauchak, 1988). The teacher will then move to guided practice, allowing students to try the strategies out while providing feedback and support.

Once students are comfortable, the teacher guides them to independent practice, carefully monitoring the room to ensure no students mask misunderstanding by not participating and any mistakes are corrected immediately to prevent further difficulties in reading comprehension. Explaining that reading strategies are related to cognitive strategies will also help students learn to transfer the skill across subjects. Research shows that deliberate cognitive-structure use results in greater achievement gains (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Using multiple strategies for reading and metacognition will result in greater confidence for struggling readers, who should feel they are prepared and equipped to read a text and gain knowledge from it (Allington, 2012). Cognitive strategies and reading comprehension strategies are best explicitly taught and not left to discovery as some aspects of education can be (Eggen & Kauchak, 1998).

Research reviewed by the NRP reiterated that reading to understand is the goal of comprehension and is an active process that requires an interactive reader and text transaction (200). Comprehension instruction includes teacher use of explicit instruction in comprehension strategies and guidance for all types of text (Kamil, 2008). The NRP emphasized the belief that comprehension can be improved through explicitly teaching a combination of reading strategies (Allington, 2012.).

Comprehension can be best described as invisible mental processes, which explains possible reasons why engaging deeply with a text can be daunting (Litt, Martin,

& Place, 2015). Educational leaders may mistakenly believe that all children learn to make “mental movies” from their reading. This attitude has proven to produce failing standardized test scores and contribute to student dropout in response to lower levels of academic success.

Explicit instruction can slow declining achievement scores because it provides visible demonstration for students on how to read with comprehension. If students are to be successful then explicit instruction and support must be ongoing (Mathes et al., 2008). Explicit instruction leaves little room for misunderstanding, and students are less likely to make errors than when given information via a partial guidance or discovery instructional method (Clark, Kirschner, & Sweller, 2012). For adolescent African American male students who struggle in reading, explicit strategy instruction increases comprehension because it provides support for reading complex material (Tatum, 2005).

#### Student Confidence in Reading Comprehension Ability

Reaching diverse learners who are also struggling readers through direct instruction is suggested because it has shown positive results by supporting culturally and linguistically diverse students with added structure that aids learning (Eggen & Kauchak, 1988). Direct instruction is rooted in social cognitive theory, which is imitation through observation. Explicit instruction makes use of this powerful learning cycle using teacher modeling and demonstration of each step in the learning and skill application (Eggen & Kauchak, 1988).

Ideal and effective literacy instruction in the classroom is explicit and clear (Ness, 2016). It should take place in an environment where students feel comfortable

because the teacher will be modeling strategies and directly guiding instruction (Tyner, 2012). When the foundational skills exist, remediation of a few steps, like phonics instruction, may be skipped, and explicit instruction in how to make the words work together to make meaning may be all that is needed (Chall, 2009; Tyner, 2012). Moreover, teachers should be taught what explicit instruction is and its relationship with bolstering student confidence.

Teachers demonstrate to students how the reading process works with the same texts they will use for instruction as a means to develop prior knowledge and explicitly teach skills (Tovani, 2000). The student shares in the work of gaining comprehension. Teachers can consult trade books, journal articles, and professionally published guides to learn about the research behind the use of explicit instruction and the type of results it yields. The recommendation of the Institute of Educational Sciences Guide for explicit instruction and inclusion of Culturally Responsive Teaching is supported by research. The findings used to order the strategies from strong to weak were based on studies that were robust in their design and implementation, along with the generalization of the strategies' use with multiple texts and application prospects for implementation of those practices across school variety and diversity. The guide also detailed the process of direct and explicit information (Kamil et al., 2008). In addition to classroom teachers versed in teaching skills and strategies, adding reading teachers who measure comprehension can help assess a struggling reader's needs and deliver explicit instruction through demonstration during intensive collaboration with the students (Tovani, 2000). The components of reading instruction condense neatly into a three-principle approach in

which explicit strategy instruction is the chief component in conjunction with ample reading time and response to reading time (Palincar & Klen, 1991; Guthries & Davis, 2003; Tyner, 2012). The culturally relevancy of materials and teaching is vital and essential to dismantle unfair and limiting educational experiences for students of color.

## Conclusion

Along with many other states, South Carolina has begun to make significant changes to initial teacher licensure and recertification that incorporate the requirement of teachers to be familiar with reading instruction. In addition, South Carolina has withdrawn from the Common Core State Standards and adopted its own set, South Carolina College and Career Readiness Standards. Governor Nikki Haley also proposed and championed the 2013-2014 Bill 516, or the Read to Succeed Act, which sought to increase the number of students able to read on grade level. All K-12 teachers, administrators, and school psychologists must take classes to aid them in becoming more knowledgeable about the process of literacy and how to assist students with their reading comprehension abilities. Students will receive increased literacy support, and those students identified as struggling or in need of remediation will receive additional help. The plan fails to require that currently licensed secondary teachers become as proficient in reading instruction as their colleagues teaching in elementary schools, however. Students in primary grades will hopefully benefit from the increased awareness and focus on reading comprehension, but students in the upper grades will continue to experience difficulties. Teachers who seek initial certification in the state, however, must have 12 hours of reading instruction before becoming licensed at all levels.

In addition to state changes, there has been some action on the federal level. NCLB was replaced on December 10, 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act, which has been touted as an answer to the call to reduce standardized testing and increase focus on improving education for all students. Again, this is another initiative that recognizes reading comprehension as a chief contributor to student success or failure.

## CHAPTER 3

### ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction and Overview

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature demonstrated that poor reading comprehension skills negatively affect student achievement on standardized tests. There is little argument that standardized testing, its relationship to student achievement, and its impact on school effectiveness ratings affects the students, schools, and districts.

Research has identified reasons students do poorly on tests, but it has not made recommendations on how to address and correct this problem other than to bolster the reading comprehension of students who perform at lower levels.

This mixed methods study sought to ascertain what possible impact culturally relevant explicit instruction may have on student academic achievement. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design is one in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected sequentially, analyzed separately, and then merged. There were five phases of sequential quantitative and qualitative data collection. This method of data combination complements each data set with information that can address weaknesses or reiterate patterns identified by me. The quantitative data provided numerical information to allow for observation and thematic patterns. The qualitative data helped explore multiple contexts and perspectives of the participants that minimized misinterpretation of respondent bias. One of the chief features of mixed methods research is its allowance for higher levels of confidence regarding hypothesis testing and analysis.

Numerical and text data combinations helped provide a more robust data set to create a more complete understanding of emergent themes through observed data, respondent validation, and participant correlation. This aided in the pragmatic scope of theory that sought to find what strategies work in bolstering reading comprehension.

In the first month of the school year, the first phase was the collection of qualitative data gathered through Burke Reading Inventories that ascertained participant feelings about themselves as readers, their previous reading comprehension instruction, and their efficacy in performing tasks that require reading comprehension skill use. An initial baseline assessment of reading comprehension confidence levels and reading comprehension strategy awareness followed the first phase, using the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory and a teacher-created survey gauging student confidence in their ability to comprehend what they read. Qualitative data were then collected through teacher observation, student journals, group interviews, and individual reading conferences. This took place before the end of the first quarter, which was the 45<sup>th</sup> day of instruction.

The second phase of collection was comprised of quantitative data from a teacher-created survey gauging reading comprehension confidence that was administered after a district benchmark. The survey assessed and yielded the percentage of questions that students answered correctly on a formative assessment. The assessment was followed by group interviews and student journals for qualitative data purposes to determine how well students felt they performed, their feelings of efficacy in reading comprehension, and how it may have impacted their achievement. This phase was repeated in the winter and

in the spring during the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) and Benchmark Assessment windows. This use of a variety of measurements also allowed me to reduce the overreliance of one data set over another.

The final phase of data collection came after students took the English 1 EOC exam. Confidence level survey responses were compared to students' initial view of themselves as readers and their views of instruction usefulness. Group interviews, student surveys, and individual conferences provided data to explore such situations as growth on assessments, instructional reading level, and perceptions of how students view themselves as readers. It also allowed me to explore outliers arising from lower and higher levels of achievement.

The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to triangulate the results, provide respondent validation, and encourage democratic participation (Torrance, 2012). The study utilized a participatory action research approach to investigate the traditional curriculum implementation without attending to the needs of the students who may benefit from a scaffolding of skill instruction before being able to absorb any new information meaningfully. It also viewed the research through transformative, pragmatic, and social reconstructionist lenses. This type of research mirrors the evaluate, research, act, and revise planning instructional model that many school districts have adopted. Teachers are the first to notice an issue in the delivery and reception of instruction and instructional practices and can make targeted and intentional refinements almost immediately after research possible solutions.

Inside participatory practice and individual research is the most effective way educators can use their knowledge as a reflective educator about their practices and classroom. The first phase employed deductive reasoning to identify variables, draw conclusions, and generate and test hypotheses to answer the research questions. The second phase used inductive reasoning to make observations from the data, note patterns, and generate and compare hypotheses to bolster the overall understandings of the educational phenomenon investigated. The third phase used descriptive analysis and inferential statistics pulled from the quantitative and qualitative data collection. This phase used a mixed methods analysis that triangulated the data to establish trustworthiness, verify data, and account for inherent bias.

This chapter further details why action research was chosen as the methodology; describes the study design, context, participation recruitment and selection; and details the plan of intervention and evolution of the study. The chapter also gives details about data collection and analysis, and ends with a discussion of action research principles and how the study design reflected them.

I chose to use mixed methods design for this study because it provided a fuller picture of the research questions and the data used to answer those questions. Qualitative data about how students describe their reading comprehension ability provided a baseline to compare their descriptions before and after culturally relevant explicit reading instruction was introduced and implemented.

Gauging how confident students felt about their reading comprehension abilities before and after the intervention, along with which aspects of the intervention they felt helped them most, would be crucial in informing future studies. Quantitative data were gathered to examine any impact on standardized test scores both before and after the interventions.

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of culturally relevant explicit instruction in reading on student confidence. The following research question guided this qualitative data aspect of this study:

1. What impact, if any, do students feel explicit instruction in reading had on increasing their confidence in their reading comprehension abilities?

(Quantitative)

The research objective was to yield data about the impact of culturally relevant explicit reading instruction on student confidence in reading ability. Performing well on standardized testing is a concern because of its use to confer and confirm status, but addressing the overwhelmingly long-term negative impact on students who lack solid reading comprehension skills due to poor instruction is more pressing.

#### Action Research Design

This study utilized a mixed method sequential explanatory strategy (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In this approach, data were collected in three consecutive phases. Quantitative and qualitative methods were integrated during the interpretation phase. Qualitative data pulled from student surveys measuring feelings of self-efficacy and perception of reading comprehension knowledge provided support for interpretation of

the quantitative data. The quantitative data were drawn from student achievement scores on district-designed and administered benchmarks and common formative assessments used to determine readiness and predict achievement on the English 1 EOC. According to Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, and Rupert (2007), “Mixed methods designs can provide pragmatic advantages when exploring complex research questions.”

### Setting

The study was conducted on-site at a suburban high school that has an enrollment of 612 students. For the 2013-2014 academic year, the high school was given a below-average absolute rating and an at-risk rating for growth in terms of meeting the state’s implementation of NCLB standards. These were both declines in both categories from the previous two school years. A school with a rating of below average in the absolute category is in jeopardy of not meeting the standards for progress. A school with an at-risk rating in terms of growth performance fails to meet the standards for progress.

In terms of performance on the 2014 English 1 EOC test at the high school, 51% of students earned a grade of 70 or above. In schools similar to the site school, the average percentage of students attaining a grade of 70 or above was 50.2%. For 2013, the site percentage was 48.9% compared with 51.1% in similar schools. For 2012, the site percentage was 52.3% compared with 48.0% in similar schools. For 2011, the site percentage was 43.2% compared with 48.3% in similar schools.

For the 2014 year, the district in which the school is located had an average percentage of students passing rate of 65.8%. For the 2013 year, the district had an average passing rate of 68.6%. For the 2012 year, the district had an average passing rate

of 62.4. For the 2011 year, the district had an average passing rate of 69.4%. For the 2014 year, the state in which the school is located had an average percentage of students passing rate of 77%.

### Participants

The overarching purpose of this study was to find the pattern, adjust instruction, and implement changes that would affect the sample population in a positive manner. I made use of a pretest and posttest format in order to glean descriptive statistical information. This information is presented in a bar graph format. At the time this study was conducted, I taught 58 students in four sections of English 1. There were 193 students total taking English 1 at the site school. Mertler asserted that educators have access to many results from standardized tests to review, but the obstacle in making suggestions on adjusting instruction more effectively lies in the interpretations of those scores (2014). All students in my English 1 classes were invited to participate in this study; however, only the responses for African-American males were used. I obtained approval from the district prior to the study as well as gained Institutional Review Board approval before the school year began. Informed consent forms were distributed to students and parents on the first day of school in the packet containing contact information forms and the course syllabus. There are generally over 175 students enrolled in English 1 in an average year. The numbers can be greater than the actual cohort due of students taking the course for a second time. All participating students were given the research survey and took part in the group interviews.

The academic achievement of the participant group on the statewide standardized test was divided into *exceeding*, *mastery*, *near mastery*, and *needing support* on the English portions of the previous year's eighth-grade standardized test, which had a pass rate of 54% and a 46% failure rate. Students in the study came from similar socioeconomic situations as the previous year's students according to the published data regarding school designation as high-poverty. All qualified for free lunch and reflected the 99% African-American makeup of the school. I made note of any students who fell outside of the majority, whether by racial or ethnic makeup or socioeconomic status, and included analysis by gender and special education subgroups. There were four students who were of particular interest and note for this study. They responded in full and with greater detail regarding the impact that explicit instruction in reading had on their confidence levels along with their evolving perceptions of themselves as readers. They also reflected the diversity of African American male students' needs, interests, and strengths.

Jack was a 14-year student who had been situated in a self-contained classroom environment from 6<sup>th</sup> until 8<sup>th</sup> grade. For his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, he received instruction in Algebra 1 and English 1 in the general education, college preparatory level classroom with ten hours of special education support recommended weekly. He routinely refused to go to his support class, instead choosing to sit through another of my English classes so that he could understand the information better and ask clarifying questions if needed. On the surface, he appeared to have difficulties in reading comprehension and to be unmotivated. However, working with Jack for two class periods a day and building the

rapport to support what he already knew and scaffold to what he needed to know, I found him to be bright and inquisitive. His passions lie in hip hop dance culture and the history of architecture in the United States. Moreover, he was quite proficient in understanding the manuals for playing highly detailed video games on his gaming console. He participated in track and enjoyed running long distance as it let him allow his mind to go blank and focus on the action of running. Jack began to select books with characters who were like him that were independent, but were also part of a large social circle at times.

Marcus was a 13-year-old high school freshman in my College Preparatory level class with no special education or gifted services, who appeared to be resistant to classroom collaboration and engaging with other readers. Upon discussion with Marcus, he stated, “Nobody I know likes reading the stuff I read so I don’t feel like talking to them.” When I tried to ascertain how he knew that for certain, he admitted that he had never really talked about reading with others. Marcus excelled in his science classes, as he really enjoyed performing science experiments and finding out whether his guesses about what would happen were correct. He preferred to listen to books on tape because he could rest his eyes and just see the images without having to translate them from words into pictures. He also frequently clipped articles from Sports Illustrated that contained infographics about Lebron James and other athletes. He liked the concise way the information was presented and the pictures that showed him the details about the player statistics quickly so that he could “argue his point” about who was better. He did not mind reading, but he preferred the infographic because he could use it to support his arguments with the others in his peer group who did not read as much as he did.

Shawn was a student who attracted my attention on the first day when he announced the only reason he was in an honors-level English 1 class was that he did not argue with teachers and had manners. He scored below the set point range for entry into an honors class, but his teacher recommended that he stay in honors so that he could be around more engaged and dedicated students. Shawn was a student athlete as well as member of the concert band. He enjoyed reciting his favorite hip hop lyrics and identifying the figurative language, word play, or imagery that stood out as excellence in lyrical writings and recitations. Shawn was not confident in his perceived reading ability because he had been told that he was a good test taker but not adept at navigating the classics. He mentioned that his teacher had told him that the true sign of intelligence was the ability to read things like the *Declaration of Independence* and Shakespeare, which he took to mean that he could read but was not particularly literate.

Kevin was also in the English 1 Honors class and had standardized test scores in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile. He did not particularly enjoy reading in school, but he did like having class conversations about the conflicts that the characters faced. He enjoyed *Lord of the Flies* because he was proud that one of the characters, Piggy, had remained true to himself rather than changing his personality to be tougher to fit in with the other boys. Kevin asked me and the media center specialist to help him find books where characters, whether male or female, had managed to triumph over society's constraints and found happiness in their individualities. Kevin believed himself to be a good reader, and had confidence in his reading ability, but he wanted to increase his satisfaction in his reading by choosing materials that were relevant and engaging to him. He felt that schools had

long overlooked the individual needs of “quirky” students for the challenging, life-affirming texts, and provided ones that presented the morals of society and advised students to conform or face suffering. He saw himself as apart from and a piece of his community at the same and felt he was on the fringe because his identity of himself was often challenged by those who conform to societally accepted gender norms.

### Procedures

A qualitative approach is the use of a wide variety of data to explore a hypothesis, and the use of qualitative data from the field to explain them. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (2013) surmised that mixed methods research seeks to represent and predict reality in terms that I and the community of interest will understand. Logico-inductive analysis can provide a detailed assessment of patterns of responses.

The qualitative aspect of the study sought to understand and explore student attitudes about reading, the efficacy of explicit instruction in reading, and student confidence in reading comprehension ability preparedness. Students who are presented with texts that have no relevance or interest to them express their need for better instruction by disengaging from their classes, avoiding assessments that require reading this sterile material, and perform poorly on standardized tests that use the same types of disengaging text types. As a result of these flawed assessments and scores, students do not feel confident about taking assessments or partaking in any process that requires them to read.

Student confidence often plays a part in the amount of effort put forth on assessments. The Tier 1 instruction level, which is the level at which 80% of instruction

is given, does not include explicit reading instruction. Students are reticent to advocate for themselves in the general classroom and are hesitant to let others know that they do not understand what they are reading. Culturally relevant explicit instruction would allow students to engage in the lesson and receive needed remediation to achieve grade-level reading comprehension. All students taking English 1 completed reading attitude surveys, participated in interviews, and kept reflection journals. This allowed me to gather data about student perceptions and attitude.

According to Driscoll (2007), “qualitative data provide a deep understanding of survey responses, and statistical analysis can provide detailed assessment of patterns of responses” (p. 26). This design methodology allows for greater understanding about the answer to the research questions. In addition, how the answer was derived also provided validation or refutation of my interpretation. Qualitative data were provided through the Burke Reading Interviews, teacher observation, individual reading conferences, and group interviews. The BRI provided information on a student’s beliefs about what reading is, how reading works, and how they view themselves as readers. Questions involve: (a) student’s perceptions of themselves as proficient readers, (b) whether they know any good readers, (c) what they consider a good reader to be, and (d) for what purpose they most often read. Self-efficacy and perception of the ability to complete a task is crucial to tracking the confidence levels of students before and after reading intervention. My notes and observations kept track of student time on task when reading difficult passages and made use of a rubric to develop a uniform descriptor covering time on task, use of documented strategies, and documentation of conversations in group

discussions about classroom reading. One on one relationship building conversations were also used to gauge student confidence and comfort level as well as discern interests of the students with regards to texts that they found interesting.

Data included narrative feedback through use of a reader's notebook in which students wrote daily entries about both academic and personal reading experiences. Students also participated in individual and group conversations that took place each Friday and included questions about what students found most difficult about reading, what they liked or disliked about reading, and how they came to form their own identities as readers. These questions were semi-structured and allowed for follow-up questions. I kept a digital recording from which answers were transcribed to be included in the data.

Quantitative data obtained through three reading comprehension assessments provided a baseline and data that yielded a number value on intervention results. All the assessments students took were administered through their personal Digital Learning Environment devices and were automatically scored by the program. I had no access to the assessments prior to administration, nor did I have input on what standards were tested. Scores were available the next day.

The baseline and growth were established through the administration of Renaissance Learning's Star Reader pretest, benchmarking, and post-test. All students in Grades K-12 take the pretest within the first two weeks of school before the start of instruction. This was supposed to give an accurate understanding of a student's reading ability on cold texts at the start of the study though this type of framing of ability is inherently flawed due to the use of the texts and contrarian nature of actual reading

comprehension practice. The students took the first benchmark at the end of the first nine weeks. They took the posttest at the end of the third nine weeks of the year. All students in English 1 took three district-created common formative assessments during the first nine weeks. This instrument yielded data that evaluated a student's progress for each academic standard that appears on the English 1 EOC exam. Students took a Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory on the 2nd day of school, the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of school, the 45<sup>th</sup> day of school, and the 135<sup>th</sup> day of school. This instrument gave information using a five-point rating scale about which reading strategies (global, problem solving, and support) students use when reading.

#### Data analysis

Data were analyzed by open coding. Participants were assigned a unique identifying number written on all data collected. Standardized test scores and confidence level of reading comprehension ability were sorted into achievement level groups:(a) exceeding mastery, (b) mastery, (c) near mastery, and (d) needing remediation. For each grouping, the student scores were sorted into levels of reading ability perception: (a) proficient, (b) average, or (c) below average. Identifiers of gender, special education, and age were noted in the resulting subgrouping. Additional quantitative data were sorted based on responses that rate student perception of readiness for standardized testing into levels of confidence using ordinal levels of measurement on a Likert scale: (a)very confident, (b)confident, (c)somewhat confident, (d) a little confident, and (e) not confident. The qualitative data were in the form of open-ended response surveys, coded interviews, and journals, which were sorted into subgroups.

The qualitative data were sorted on responses that describe student perception of readiness for standardized testing into levels of confidence using student-generated descriptors. The resulting data sets from each sorting and analysis of the quantitative data were then cross-referenced and matched to the qualitative data collected on each student. The qualitative data collected from the group of students who received explicit instruction formed a third data set for analysis. These data were collected through post-test surveys and sorted by responses about which aspect of explicit instruction students found best prepared them for standardized testing. This information was entered into a database program that sorted the data and yielded data sets that addressed the effect of explicit instruction and ranked the strategies taught during explicit instruction on an ordinal scale of measure. Confidentiality of the participants remained intact throughout the process.

### Summary

The data and analysis yielded from this study allowed me to understand the relationship between explicit reading instruction and confidence in reading comprehension. I gave explicit instruction daily on the top three instructional strategies for teaching reading comprehension. These specific high-yield strategies, identified by the Institute of Educational Sciences and the NRP, are activating prior knowledge, using inference skills, and making connections to what is being read. Students who have received explicit instruction can be expected to perform and achieve at a higher level than students who have not received such instruction. The goal is to affect change in the

standard implementation of basic skills taught at the outset of the school year in order to help students maximize their achievement on standardized tests.

#### Evidence of Trustworthiness

This study carefully followed the steps outlined in Chapter 3 to ensure credibility. The multilayered data collection and analysis strategies also provided credibility to this study, and the multiple aspects of the quantitative and qualitative data were checked and kept secure. The pretest and post-test reading comprehension assessment data, quantitative survey results, open-ended responses on the survey, interview transcripts, and the use of responses to surveys through Edmodo which is an educational platform that allows teachers to deliver content and communicate with students to provide a wealth of data that contributed to this study. The interview questions were formed by identifying the aspects of student perceptions most affected by reading comprehension instruction. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to contribute to the credibility of this study. Students were available for member checking after the transcriptions were typed and analyzed. Test data were available for analysis after the school year finished.

The results of this study are not unique to a specific period, and the study has been described completely. The participants were all students in an urban high school and were all on free and reduced-price lunch services, regardless of race, gender, or educational level. The results include rich descriptors that provide evidence for transferability. Participant responses have been described in detail so that transferability can be explored. The ability to create and deliver instruction that is explicit and direct is

easily accessible with the advent of reading courses available through the Read to Succeed legislation. Surveys can also be delivered in a variety of formats.

The strategies described in Chapter 3 were implemented. The journals provided notes that described each step of the data analysis process. Resources and methods were documented. Conversations with experts in the field of reading comprehension education were noted. Repeated use of strategies and instruction gained from my graduate classes in reading instruction proved to be key in maintaining fidelity to best practices of instruction. Collection of data from multiple areas and types contributed to the trustworthiness of this study. Data were triangulated using the pretest and post-test survey results, group interviews, surveys, and participant interviews. The use of statistical software ensured the removal of bias or misinterpretation.

The issue of confirmability was addressed by planning for analysis. I was in contact with reading comprehension mentors and other experts in the field of reading education throughout the study. I was the only person involved in coding the interview transcriptions. Themes were discovered through a close analysis of the interviews, and there was opportunity for follow-up interviews.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The purpose of the action research study is to examine the impact of explicit reading instruction on the reading comprehension of skills of students at the secondary level. Unless there was culturally relevant explicit instruction, these students may not have had adequate reading instruction in earlier grades, leading to gaps in reading comprehension that unfairly limit student opportunity for achievement, particularly on standardized assessments. This study explores whether increased reading comprehension skills leads to a positive secondary effect on standardized test scores. The study will yield data that will assist teachers in addressing remedial gaps in reading comprehension.

#### Research Questions

*Research Question 1:* How, if at all, does explicit instruction in reading impact student confidence in reading comprehension ability?

*Null Hypothesis:* There is no significant difference between the student confidence in reading comprehension ability before and after receiving explicit instruction in reading.

*Alternative Hypothesis:* There is a significant difference between student confidence in reading comprehension ability before and after receiving explicit instruction in reading.

## Findings of the Study

This study took place in an urban high school setting with a total enrollment of 612 students. One challenge this study faced was the availability of eligible students who had received explicit direct instruction with me for at least 85% of the school year. I taught four sections of English 1 to a combined total of 64 students. A total of 11 students were excluded from the study due to attrition: seven moved, two were expelled, and two were absent from one or more of the tests. Data were used from selected students from all four sections of the English 1 classes. The classes included one honors-level course and three college preparatory-level courses. Each section of this course is taught in a similar fashion. The textbook, *Collections* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.; Smaldino, Lowther, & Russell, 2012), and all assignments are the same, although the honors class has higher required levels of rigor and achievement.

There were students in the college preparatory classes who were receiving supplementary special education services through Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 learning plans as a result of a learning disability and as stipulated by the special education department committee. Special education students are mainstreamed and receive instruction for classes with EOC Examinations from a subject teacher rather than a special education teacher. This practice ensures students are instructed in content and task instruction by the subject matter teacher rather than the executive function support and remediation that the special education teacher provides. This also ensures an equitable education for all students in an environment that would be most enriching and instructionally sound than in isolation.

## Demographics

The 25 students involved in this study were first-time freshmen between 14 and 15 years old. They were African American males. The high school was identified as Title 1. The students that attend this cluster of schools are historically underserved and negative affected through poor teacher preparation and teacher attrition, which create opportunity gap. These students are likely to be enrolled in disadvantaged schools as well. This disadvantage can stem from a variety of sources, but the overall effect is that students experience difficulty in obtaining the help needed to be successful in school. According to Allensworth, (2012), students in high-needs schools may have new teachers who are unprepared for the specific needs of their students. These teachers are vulnerable and lack support in working with students who have significant needs that must be addressed before instruction can begin (p. 30). Another issue facing students of this demographic is the performance level of their schools and experience of their teachers. According to NAEP, “In 2015, the average reading score for 4th-grade students in high-poverty schools (205) was lower than the average scores for 4th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (219), mid-low poverty schools (228), and low-poverty schools (241)” (p. 159). These factors add to the false identification of an achievement gap rather than the actual failure of schools to provide quality instruction to all students.

Ethnic and racial minorities have historically performed lower on reading proficiency assessments than their peers because of bias in standardized testing, creating a false achievement gap which is really the result of a gap in opportunity for access to a solid, equitable education. Miller, Duffy, Rohr, Gasparello, & Mercier (2005) asserted

that education preparation programs and school districts have “ignored another kind of gap—the gap between the skills that teachers must have to provide high-quality instruction for disadvantaged students and the preparation that teachers actually receive before they enter the profession” (p. 62). In short, the presumed failure of achievement lies not with the students but with the oppressive institutions surrounding them that work to maintain the status quo and refuse to eliminate the assessments as invalid (Kamenetz, 2015).

In both the qualitative and quantitative portions of this study, all the students volunteered to participate. Students were divided by academic track achievement levels: (a) college preparatory, (b) special education, or (c) gifted and talented (see Tables 1-3). Table 3 indicates numbers of students in college preparatory classes who receive no additional services or support for either remediation or enrichment.

*Table 4.1*

*Participants identified as needing Special Education Services*

<i>Race and Gender</i>	<i>Total Number of Students</i>	<i>Percentage to Total</i>
<i>African American Male</i>	7	28

*Table 4.2*

*Participants identified as eligible for Gifted and Talented services*

<i>Race and Gender</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Percentage to Total</i>
<i>African American Male</i>	6	24

Table 4.3

*Participants identified as College Preparatory with no services*

<i>Race and Gender</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>Percentage to Total</i>
<i>African American Male</i>	12	48

#### Data Analysis

For this mixed methods study, the quantitative data in the form of student confidence surveys were analyzed first and informed the qualitative data that followed. These test data informed the quantitative portion of this study and included a Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) that was administered to students prior to receiving formal instruction.

The historically problematic and highly critiqued Star Reading Assessment pretest (Ripp, 2016) was delivered electronically to all students via the learning management system Renaissance Place on August 22, 2016. One of the most glaring issues of reliability with this test is the follow-up prescriptive computer adaptive program that is sold to schools with any results deemed as not meeting proficiency. Licenses cost \$1,600 per student. Moreover, this test uses a set of questions and selected cold texts that have been proven racially biased (Warren, Yoon & Price, 2014; Knoester & Au, 2017). This pretest consisted of five reading comprehension skill areas to rate level of mastery based on the SCDOE standards and performance indicators for students.

Each standard was combined into an overall measure of comprehension, followed by four performance levels that measure overall reading comprehension skill level. The mastery levels were set as *at or above grade level reading comprehension* with 85% correct responses, *on watch nearing mastery* with 70% to 84% correct responses, *in need of remediation* for less than 55% to 69% correct responses, and *urgent remediation needed* for responding correctly in the range of 0% to 54% of the time. The scores ranged from a low of 103 to a high of 1241. The mean was 668, and the mode was 672.

The students rated their confidence level in reading comprehension at the beginning of the course and the end of the course. Their responses were listed with words (*below average, average, above average, excellent*). The words were then put on a Likert scale to enable analysis of the data, with 1 replacing the word *below average*, 2 replacing *average*, 3 replacing *no change*, 4 replacing *above average*, and 5 replacing *excellent*. An open-ended question was also included on the final survey: “Please discuss how this class has impacted your use of reading comprehension strategies in academic reading.” These responses are included in the qualitative analysis portion of this study.

In the qualitative portion of this study, interviews were conducted with all students, and group interviews were conducted to allow students to give feedback verbally and through a web-based interactive format. The third source of data came from the students’ posts and survey answers on Edmodo after their English 1 EOC examination. The posts included questions about feelings of readiness and preparedness on the exam, the type of reading strategies they felt were the most helpful, and suggestions for follow-up in future reading instruction. Those students scoring outside of

the 60 to 75-point midrange were given additional questions to ascertain an explanation for either their low achievement or their high achievement on the test.

Quantitative data were analyzed using both Microsoft Excel (2016) and Statistical Analysis Software University Edition (9.4) Suites. To test for significant difference in student ratings and their reading comprehension skill levels at the beginning of the school year, a *t*-test for dependent means was performed that compared the difference of the mean of the results of the pre-survey results with the post-survey results of the same group of students. Salkind (2011) explained, “A *t* test for dependent means indicates that a single group of the same subjects is being studied under two conditions” (p. 208). The level of significance was set at .05 and the degree of freedom ( $df = n-1$ ) was 52. After determining the critical value of 1.729, the obtained value was calculated using the results of the entire pretest and post-test survey.

A review of the results provided information significant to overall growth in student perception of themselves as readers, their estimation of self-efficacy in reading academic texts, and their confidence in their ability to translate reading comprehension into academic success in their classes. Comparing their responses before they received reading instruction with their responses after showed there were gains in confidence even though they may not have met the prescribed growth percentile or passed the EOC test. Many of the students viewed themselves as better readers and believed they would understand more in their classes than they had in the past, which would lead to better grades. They reported feeling better about their opportunities to perform well on assessments and thus feel better about their school experiences.

## Interpretation of Results of the Study

This study was conducted to explore the relationship between explicit direct instruction in reading comprehension and the effect it may have on student academic achievement on assessments. Another area for exploration was whether the instruction increased student confidence in reading ability with higher levels of comprehension compared to before the instruction. Students typically avoid completing tasks that they lack the confidence to perform. Increasing self-efficacy in reading comprehension may correlate to more incidences of participation and completion of assignments in class, which would boost grades. Teacher preparation across disciplines has been slow to embrace the teaching of reading as a standalone component of instruction. As a result, students receive their last reading comprehension instruction in the elementary setting with a transition to content-specific instruction in sixth grade. The negative impact of inadequate reading instruction extends well into secondary education and on through higher education. Manarin, Carey, Rathburn, Ryland, & Hutchings (2015) noted “Forty-one percent of faculty members surveyed by the Chronicle of Higher Education felt that students were not well prepared to read and understand difficult material in college; an additional 48 percent felt students were ‘somewhat’ prepared” (p. 1).

Initially, students are exposed to instruction in reading using simple texts with predictable plot and vocabulary. This tactic helps ease students into independent reading by decreasing frustration due to difficulty with fluency, decoding, and comprehension. However, as students advance to higher grades, they receive less support in reading and comprehending the denser and more technical information presented in content-area

textbooks. Students learn to develop ways to decode texts and give the appearance of understanding what they are reading by relying on teacher lectures, study guides, and assessments that ask simple questions. As a result, they are unable to perform well on assessments that demand more critical thinking and transaction with the texts because they cannot fully comprehend and relay what information was revealed or presented.

*Research Question 1:* How, if at all, does explicit instruction in reading impact student confidence of reading comprehension ability?

*Null Hypothesis:* There is no significant difference in student confidence of reading comprehension ability before and after receiving explicit instruction in reading.

*Alternative Hypothesis:* There is significant difference in student confidence of reading comprehension ability before and after receiving explicit instruction in reading.

A *t*-test for dependent mean was administered to determine whether there was a significant difference in the confidence levels of reading comprehension ability from pretest and post-test cycles. Comparing the obtained value (*t* stat) to the critical value (*t* critical) provided the data to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the student confidences in reading comprehension ability for students who received explicit direct instruction. A *t*-test value that is  $<.05$  is noted as having a significant difference. The resulting *t*-test value is .046979; therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Table 4.4

*Student Confidence in Reading Comprehension from Fall to Spring*

	<i>Fall</i>	<i>Spring</i>
	<i>W/O Explicit Instruction</i>	<i>With Explicit Instruction</i>
<i>Mean</i>	68.4262	63.92
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	10.2677	13.0005
<i>t Test Value for</i>	.046979 using two tail, two sample unequal variance formula	

Research Question 1 asked: How, if at all, does explicit instruction in reading impact student confidence in reading comprehension ability? Upon analyzing the results for Research Question 1, I generated a list of possible contributing factors to the significant results of the *t*-test conducted for pretest and posttest. Possible contributing factors (based on literature and past teaching experience) can include: (a) explicit instruction, (b) guided practice, (c) independent practice, (d) tutorial attendance, (e) instructor involvement, and (f) teacher interaction in other content area classes. Therefore, an open-ended-response survey question to be completed at the end of both the pretest and posttest was included to provide more insight. All 53 students who completed the assessments for reading comprehension also completed the survey. Student 1B responded to the open-ended question on the post survey by saying:

“Before taking this class, I was not aware of strategies for reading. Now I feel like I can read with purpose and be more successful at comprehending what I read. I

have strategies to use now rather than to just quit reading when I don't understand what I am reading.”

In addition to student 1B, 24 other students also expressed growth in reading comprehension and strategy awareness. Student 21C had a different focus, and wrote:

I am gifted and talented and already knew how to use the strategies. I think the class was a helpful reminder, but it didn't change how I see myself as a reader because I see myself as a good reader already.

The responses of the open-ended question supplied insight that contributed to the quantitative findings. The results of the quantitative portion of this study indicated that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest survey results of students regarding confidence in reading ability. These results illustrate the need for explicit direct instruction in the general education classroom setting to clarify misunderstandings resulting from poor reading comprehension for all students.

*Research Question 2:* What impact, if any, do students feel explicit instruction in reading had on their achievement on standardized tests and their reading comprehension abilities?

Marcus responded to the open-ended question on the post survey by saying:

“If Ms. Platt had not used texts that I was familiar with and interested in to help me learn new reading strategies, I probably wouldn't have been interested in learning how to do it with those boring stories from the book. I felt like she wanted me to learn for my own sake and not to do good on a test. It made me

want to work hard because I could see she was choosing stuff that was relevant to my life like football and rap lyrics and stuff like that.

The results of the qualitative portion of this mixed methods study answered the second research question. The analysis of the interviews and the posts in the online community, Edmodo, included a search for rich themes and patterns to explain the difference in how explicit instruction in reading comprehension affected student confidence on standardized tests. The questions for the interviews were formed from an analysis of questions from the pretest and post-test survey based on the MARSII and BRI.

*Table 4.5*

*Student Perception of the Impact of Explicit Instruction in Reading on Achievement*

	<i>Confidence in Reading Ability Day 5</i>	<i>Confidence in Reading Ability Day 175</i>
<i>Mean on 6-point Likert Scale</i>	2.869	3.547
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	1.6714	1.62022
<i>t Test Value for</i>	.0364 using two tail, two sample unequal variance formula	

Along with this analysis, which supports the alternative hypothesis that students perceive explicit instruction as having an impact on their confidence in reading ability, the interviews provided information that explained how receiving explicit reading instruction affected student self-efficacy in reading comprehension. Three themes emerged after a close review of the interview transcripts: (a) previous lack of awareness

of reading strategies, (b) ineffective previous reading instruction in class, and (c) gained confidence because of culturally responsive explicit instruction. Forty of the 55 students who were interviewed explained that this was their first experience being given reading instruction that provided a solid foundation to navigate difficult academic texts.

Awareness of reading strategies. Most students felt they had not been exposed to reading strategies, nor had previous teachers explicitly instructed them on how use of these strategies would improve their comprehension. Because reading is a process comprised of many components, students who are unfamiliar with reading strategies tend to abandon difficult texts. Another issue is students' desire to read self-selected texts rather than academic texts. Students reported feeling devalued when teachers dismiss the texts students chose for themselves; moreover, they transferred that to feeling unable to comprehend academic texts and limiting the value of the texts they preferred. Students have the motivation to continue to read through portions of a novel or text that they have chosen to read because they want to gain information. However, because of a lack of teacher modeling of transference of skills, students who must read dense and complex academic texts are reticent to do so.

In secondary classes, students must comprehend texts to transact with them and perform other tasks. The inability to comprehend a text has a negative effect on academic performance. Texts in secondary classes tend to have more multisyllabic words, use technical jargon, and contain more complex sentence structures. These features are not foreign or absent in the texts students already read, like lyrics, magazines, church bulletins, and video game strategy guides. In addition, most of the vocabulary in

academic texts is new to the students because it is designed to privilege one group over another. Curriculum writers include vocabulary that is highly prejudicial and canonically specialized in nature and shaded with multiple meanings and connotations that could only be discerned through outside home experiences (Tatum, 2012). An inability or lack of awareness to deploy a vocabulary strategy when encountering unfamiliar words can cause a student to discontinue reading due to frustration.

When students are made aware of the complexity of the reading process, many feel a sense of relief because they thought that reading was supposed to be an easy task and had been disappointed that it was not so easy for them. Comparing reading comprehension and its levels of skill to tasks students once found difficult alleviates the feelings of hopelessness when students struggle with moving from reading simple elementary school texts to more complex secondary texts.

Previous reading instruction. The ability to engage current research and attend classes that provide teachers with solid connections between theory and practice in reading instruction is key. Classroom teachers have historically dealt with teaching students to show mastery of the text content and application of knowledge gained from it, and the flawed assumption was that students had no problem with reading the content and were not disinterested but disengaged which was a problem of the student and not the teacher. As a result, there has been an unrealized potential in students when they are stuck in classes where the teacher is familiar with the content but does not know how to teach students to navigate and comprehend the content, nor does the teacher include culturally relevant material. Receiving culturally relevant explicit instruction in reading along with

the content to be mastered is ideal and provides students with the support necessary to navigate the texts on their own. One student commented, “I would have quit reading the passage after I didn’t understand it the first time. I know how to go back and figure it out. Now I can understand the main idea and author’s point.” Another student wrote, “A lot of times I couldn’t tell how the passage was set up, so I got lost. Now that I know the structure, I can use the signal words to figure out how it is laid out.” Explicit instruction allowed these students to perform tasks because they had the skills to understand the text. Being aware of reading strategies and knowing how to use them provided a much more enjoyable reading experience for students who had previously read and reread passages with little or no comprehension.

Successfully employing reading strategies helped students decipher texts, increasing their confidence and motivation to complete the tasks. This task completion in turn promotes technological self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) explained that self-efficacy is connected to one’s belief in what they can do with their skills under a variety of circumstances and not just the number of skills acquired.

In reviewing and analyzing data for Research Question 2, it is clear that increased self-efficacy of reading comprehension translates to increased student confidence in reading ability and increases students’ stamina to persevere through difficult portions on texts rather than quitting, which may translate to more test questions answered correctly. Student confidence.

The final theme addressed by Research Question 2 is confidence. Students who saw themselves as readers felt explicit instruction had a positive impact on their test

performance. When students previously had not received instruction, they reported that they had feelings of being unprepared or incapable of understanding the texts, and therefore did not attempt to complete the tasks. Many students commented that seeing a passage of text on an assessment that seemed difficult to read almost always resulted in them skipping the questions associated with that passage. They did not attempt to decipher the text because they felt they lacked the ability to do so. One student remarked, “It looked like a waste of time. I would sit there and try to read it, and after 20 minutes still hadn’t understood it and lost time on other questions.” Still another remarked, “I just skip any set of questions with passages that look long or hard to read.”

In short, students who receive explicit reading instruction in reading adopted a mindset that their inability to comprehend a passage was an opportunity to deploy the multiple reading strategies they learned to work through the comprehension difficulty. The average completion time for the fall testing was approximately 34 minutes. Students bypassed lengthy passages rather than reading them. After learning to work through passages and believing themselves capable of understanding the text, in the spring, students took an average of 72 minutes to complete testing. The fall, winter, and spring tests all contain 50 questions.

## Conclusion

*Research Question 1:* How, if at all, does explicit instruction in reading impact student confidence in reading ability? The quantitative results of this mixed methods study showed that there was a significant difference between the confidence measures before and after explicit reading instruction.

*Research Question 2: What impact, if any, do students feel explicit instruction in reading had on increasing their confidence in their reading comprehension abilities? In the qualitative portion of this study, data were collected regarding student perception. Students were asked how they viewed themselves as readers at each phase of data collection. For a more definitive look at confidence and efficacy and their impact on student achievement, students were asked whether they felt explicit instruction in reading had impacted their achievement on the EOC. Follow-up questions through group interviews also examined whether they felt that they were more confident in their abilities to perform well on tasks that involved reading difficult academic texts.*

These data yielded a rich source that allowed me to draw conclusions and make inferences. Through this analysis, I was able to identify themes that clarified the instruction to address the disconnect between achievement level and confidence. The data also projected impact on future student achievement resulting from increased confidence in their ability to do well with their improved reading comprehension levels.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This mixed methods study sought to determine what impact, if any, explicit instruction in reading may have on student academic achievement on a standardized test. Because student reading ability accounts for a significant proportion of the overall achievement on a standardized test, it can be inferred that lower reading comprehension correlates to lower achievement. Conversely, a student with higher reading ability will be better able to comprehend the texts appearing on standardized tests. Students who have received proper instruction in reading are able to analyze, infer, and evaluate information presented in the text. I explored ways that increasing awareness of reading strategies and processes would enable students to more completely understand the information presented within a text. Theorizing that increased comprehension would lead to better understanding, I anticipated that increased reading comprehension skills would allow students the ability to transact with texts at a higher level and to successfully answer more questions than those students who have not received explicit reading instruction.

Typically, reading instruction ends after elementary schools, as students are expected by that point to have gained the foundational reading skills needed to perform in the middle- and high-school levels. Subsequently, more focus is placed on higher order thinking skills, which require a student to comprehend what messages are being communicated in a text. There is a shift from summarizing a text to critical thinking that

involves analysis of the information presented. Additionally, text complexity and difficulty increase as students begin working with documents written above their grade levels, like the Declaration of Independence, or with technical information presented in encyclopedias, magazines, and newspaper articles. Teachers in upper grades place less emphasis on teaching students the skills and strategies to navigate complicated passages. As a result, students who struggle with reading lose motivation, and their reading confidence is diminished.

The design process followed the action research cycle of planning, implementing, reflecting, and revising based on data. Students' reading comprehension levels were determined, along with their perceptions of their reading abilities and awareness of reading strategies before instruction began. Culturally relevant explicit instruction in reading comprehension was used to address misunderstandings due to poor, disengaging instruction students may have experienced. Benchmark testing and the EOC exam monitored student progress. Finally, students completed surveys and interviews that allowed them to provide input about the impact that explicit instruction had on their achievement, awareness, or strategies, as well as their perception of themselves as readers.

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was chosen to merge quantitative and qualitative data. These data were then analyzed separately and merged to create a narrative to accompany the numerical data to explore and provide observations about what the data might suggest. There were five phases of sequential quantitative and qualitative data collection. This method of data combination complemented each data set

with information that addressed weaknesses or strongly reiterated patterns identified by me. The quantitative data provided numerical information to allow for observation and thematic patterns. The qualitative data helped explore multiple contexts and perspectives among the participants that minimized misinterpretation of respondent feeling.

#### Overview/Summary of the Study

Several themes emerged from the data after the mixed methods analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data was completed. The five phases yield enough baseline, monitoring, refinement, and post-testing data for analysis.

#### Explicit Instruction

Explicit instruction differs from direct instruction in that the teacher models each step of the skill clearly with full explanation of processes. Explicit instruction is the process of showing students what to do, when to do it, and how to do it through modeling and conversation. Direct instruction involves the teacher telling students what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. Explicit instruction requires teachers to anticipate student misconceptions, generate scripts and anchor charts that contain the information of each step of the process, and pose follow-up questions to ascertain student understanding through the lesson.

Explicit instruction unpacks each step of the reading comprehension process, which helps students who believe reading to be a streamlined, passive process. Students benefit from the teacher demonstrating what types of activities students can engage in before they begin, such as predicting a passage's main idea (Hattie, 2016; Lemov, 2016, Fisher & Frey, 2014). Teachers can also model the process of activating prior knowledge

through a modeled think aloud, generating questions, and making connections between known and unknown information. Moving between a scripted lesson and student-teacher conversation, teachers can illustrate how a student can decipher and decode the meanings of unfamiliar words. The conversation between teacher and student allows students to have an active role in the class and to probe the teacher if they continue to encounter difficulties.

Explicit instruction shares a few components with direct instruction, but the systematic planning and active student-teacher interaction integral to explicit instruction differentiates the two. This interaction allows students to gain a full understanding of reading skills, practice the skills with the teacher as partner, and refine their use by talking through the stages of the skills from start to finish. To further assist with complete understanding in reading strategy skill use, teachers model the steps using clear and unambiguous language, avoiding the use of words that may impede a student from fully grasping the concept. Reading comprehension instruction for students who have already faced difficulty must be explicit because the teacher needs to address gaps in knowledge that have been forgotten or were never introduced to the student. The instruction moves from simple to complex in a logical sequence.

#### Standardized Test Achievement and Confidence

Students who feel equipped and prepared to complete a task that uses a text they can understand appear to have more success because they tend to stay on task longer, working through difficulties they encounter. Conversely, when they cannot understand the text, students will opt out of completing the task by skipping questions, haphazardly

guessing, or refusing to complete the task at all. Perception of efficacy in reading instruction is a direct contributor to student motivation in completing said tasks and tests.

Students reported doing better because they felt more prepared as readers. According to Wong, Wiest, & Cusick (2011), a student's sense of their ability to succeed at a task correlates to academic achievement outcomes (p.13). In alignment with Self Determination theory, perceived confidence boosts intrinsic motivation. Students also reported feeling much more satisfied with their scores as true indicators of what they knew and what they needed to work on. The intangible became tangible because they understood the text, which enabled them to answer questions and perform tasks. As they experienced gains, their satisfaction levels increased. Likewise, as their scores increased, their confidence levels did also, creating intrinsic motivation. Even students with modest gains were motivated to do well. This ran counter to the expectation that those students who did not experience high levels of growth might disengage. Two out of the 53 students in the study did disengage. These students also had significant absences from school and did not receive the benefit of the full instructional cycle; however, they were present for all tests.

#### Action Plan

For future work based on this study, consideration should be given to strategies and curricula that differentiate instruction while maintaining the full scope of the targeted learning skills. When differentiation occurs in the classroom, the instruction will necessarily be focused on achievement for one group through monitoring and refining delivery. Many of the current explicit instruction curricula use whole group lessons that

may stifle the progress of higher-achieving students. This is an unintended consequence of seeking to address students needing remediation within the instructional cycle.

Heterogeneous grouping for classes is ideal because it allows students to learn from each other as well as being exposed to higher orders of thinking from their peer interactions and interactions with the teacher. Ideally, most students would be somewhere in the same quartile. This study has shown that grouping students on the third-grade instructional reading level with students reading on the ninth-grade level and above is detrimental to students in the upper levels of reading comprehension abilities. The instruction is either too difficult to understand for the lower-achieving students, or it is not engaging for the upper-achieving students.

There is a need for more thorough examination of grouping students in classes rather than moving them from cohort to cohort without adjustment. Reading levels must be considered when placing students in classes because there is the possibility that teachers will not know how to tailor instruction and juggle conducting small-group instruction within the class, while simultaneously managing the students not receiving the instruction. This study provides evidence to support the directive of South Carolina's Read to Succeed mandate that all educators enroll in reading comprehension classes to learn ways of teaching reading comprehension in all content areas and all grades. Educators can no longer assert that reading instruction should be left up to elementary teachers and English teachers.

## Suggestions for Future Research

An unexpected finding from this study was that students who were already reading at higher levels flattened in achievement. The implication is that heterogeneous groupings in leveled classes like honors and college prep, regardless of ability levels, do have bearing on higher-ability students. Delivering explicit instruction to students who do not need it causes them to become disengaged, creating a negative view of the class work. Using students as teacher aides and group leaders is not a method of explicit instruction. Students may understand the reading process but lack the ability to systematically lead their peers through all the steps. Actual instruction must be come from the expert in the skill, and its dissemination should not be left to chance or discovery.

Instruction that allows for gifted students to move to college-level reading must be developed. It is just as important to attend to the needs of students reading above grade level as it is to attend to those who are reading on or below grade level. Gifted students could benefit from instruction in smaller groups, giving them gradual opportunities to explore more difficult texts. Further studies could explore what types of texts and reading instruction can challenge gifted students.

## Conclusion

This research study suggests that explicit instruction has a positive impact on student confidence in reading comprehension ability that can also have bearing on achievement on standardized tests. It also suggests that increasing a student's confidence in their ability to comprehend what they read is transferable across content areas and

performance tasks. Students reported feeling more prepared and capable of completing the tasks and answering higher-order thinking questions because they were able to derive meaning from the texts they read. This research is vital because students will encounter more complex and technical texts as they move into college or their careers. The positive affect on motivation and efficacy translates to opportunities to help foster a growth mindset and increase determination.

Students are juggling learning new content and tasks. When students flounder at any level in their educational careers, it creates stagnation, lessens the desire to learn, and encourages task avoidance. Reading ability and its impact on a student's feelings of self-esteem are related (Schunk, 2003). Students have learned to mask their deficiencies by opting out of task completion and choosing to fail by default rather than fail by attempt. This is detrimental to the classroom and negatively affects the wellbeing of a globally connected society. The false presentation of an academic achievement gap which places the burden of overcoming a deficit is more appropriately called the opportunity gap because is a direct effect of decades of systemic racial oppression. The opportunity gap has been causing these students to be further harmed more so when the educational community overlooks its own inefficiencies and the tone-deafness of an essentialist curriculum on the needs of students who are not receiving the best instruction support by research and the ideal of equity.

Professionals must begin to reflect on what more they can do to change curricula and systems to aid students in their quests for academic and personal success. Certainly, the implementation of the Read to Succeed program that requires teachers to take a

reading instruction course is a start. However, once educators realize that the one required course for content area teachers, Teaching Reading and Writing Across Content Areas, is simply not enough, it is incumbent upon the profession to learn what works best not just for all students, but particularly for those students who are not benefitting from current practices. It is ethically wrong not to intervene when a current curriculum or teaching practice is allowing many students to fall further behind.

My son is an avid reader. He reads technical manuals about landscaping and gardening. He uses his interests to build machines to improve his life. He reads financial literacy books and biographies of people he finds interesting. He has not picked up a romance novel to my knowledge, nor has he found comfort in reading *Beowulf*. He has read the autobiographies of Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela, as well as Barack Obama. He has subscribed to architectural digest and has made plans to build his own tiny house. All of these interests would have been overlooked by traditional curriculum and teaching.

Reflecting on the success and change in student perception about their capacity for learning and ability to excel has allowed me to become an advocate for professional development that focuses on one of the bedrocks of education and lifetime achievement: reading instruction. Current practices focus on teaching the content, but there must come an adoption and refinement of practices that focus on teaching students how to navigate the content.

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## APPENDIX A:

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you think you are a better reader compared to the type of reader at the start of the school year?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
  
2. Do you feel explicit instruction in reading strategies help you?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
  
3. Do you recall having explicit instruction in reading strategies previously?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
  
4. What was your confidence level in reading school materials (literary and informational texts) at the start of the year? (Very Low, Somewhat Low, Confident, Somewhat Confident, Very Confident).
  - Very Low
  - Somewhat Low
  - Confident
  - Somewhat Confident
  - Very Confident
  
5. What is your confidence level now in reading school materials (literary and informational texts) at the start of the year on a scale of 1 to 5? (Very Low, Somewhat Low, Confident, Somewhat Confident, Very Confident)
  - Very Low
  - Somewhat Low
  - Confident
  - Somewhat Confident
  - Very Confident
  
6. Do you feel it was more the teacher affected your confidence ability and learning?

APPENDIX B:

METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS OF READING STRATEGIES INVENTORY  
(MARSI) VERSION 1.0

Kouider Mokhtari and Carla Reichard © 2002

**DIRECTIONS:** Listed below are statements about what people do when they read academic or school-related materials such as textbooks, library books, etc. Five numbers follow each statement (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and each number means the following:

1 means “I never or almost never do this.” 2 means “I do this only occasionally.” 3 means “I sometimes do this.” (About 50% of the time.) 4 means “I usually do this.” 5 means “I always or almost always do this.”

After reading each statement, circle the number (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that applies to you using the scale provided. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to the statements in this inventory.

TYPE	STRATEGIES	SCALE				
GLOB	1. I have a purpose in mind when I read. I take notes while reading to help me understand what	1	2	3	4	5
SUP	2. I read. I think about what I know to help me understand what	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	3. I read. I preview the text to see what it’s about before reading	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	4. it.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP	5. When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP	6. I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	7. I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB	8. I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I’m reading.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP	9. I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	10. I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB	11. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP	12. I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB	13. I adjust my reading speed according to what I’m	1	2	3	4	5

	reading.					
GLOB	14. I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	1	2	3	4	5
	I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help					
SUP	15. me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB	16. When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	17. I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB	18. I stop from time to time and think about what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	19. I use context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP	20. I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB	21. I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	22. I use typographical aids like bold face and italics to identify key information.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	23. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP	24. I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	25. I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	26. I try to guess what the material is about when I read.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB	27. When text becomes difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
SUP	28. I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
GLOB	29. I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
PROB	30. I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	1	2	3	4	5