

A Comparative Case Study of Factors Distinguishing Between High and Low-Performance on Reading Achievement in Elementary Rural Appalachian Schools

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This qualitative comparative case study identified factors that distinguish between high and low-performance on reading achievement in elementary rural Appalachian schools. This study determined the most effective instructional reading strategies, as well as other influential factors, implemented by school districts in the rural Appalachia area with similar student demographics and economic disadvantages. Data were collected through interview questions to assess the staffs' perceptions of their school's instructional program, leadership strategies, and teaching methods. Observations of classrooms during reading instruction also were conducted to identify instructional strategies being used. Results indicate high teacher morale, teacher efficacy, supportive leadership, meaningful professional development, and instructional strategies such as: explicit small group instruction, uninterrupted time spent on reading instruction, and inclusion of literacy centers are all variables that discriminate between these high and low performing schools.

Introduction

A major function at the elementary school level is teaching children how to read. Research provides evidence that specific early literacy concepts can predict young students' later reading achievement (DeBruinParecki, 2004; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Strickland & Shanahan, 2004). If children do not acquire basic reading skills in their elementary school years, their future educational and occupational performance could be

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severely affected. According to the National Right to Read Foundation (2007), forty-two million American adults cannot read; fifty million are unable to read at a higher level than is expected of a fourth or fifth grader. The National Institute for Literacy (2007) reported that forty-three percent of those whose literacy skills are the lowest live in poverty.

Reading is a skill that has often been taken for granted by many different stakeholders (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). However, after the federal government passed a law to hold school districts accountable for student reading levels, schools began paying closer attention to their reading scores and feeling the pressure of the NCLB Act, which called for 100% of students reading at a proficient level by 2014. Effective reading ability provides students with the weapons to combat the ever increasing demands of the world and to perform higher on any test (Reading First, 2007).

Previous research has not typically examined high-performing, high-poverty schools in Appalachia or other rural areas. This study examines critical factors that may contribute to a student's achievement in rural Appalachia such as: within-school support and leadership, professional development, data-based decision making, and effective instructional strategies in the classroom.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe factors distinguishing between high and low-performing elementary rural Appalachian schools on reading achievement. In particular, this qualitative comparative case study compared instructional reading strategies, as well as other variables that distinguish between two schools with similar student demographics and economic disadvantages in a rural Appalachia area.

This particular study was developed to assess the following question: What factors differ in rural Appalachian elementary schools that are high and low-achieving in reading? The study examined critical factors that previous research has identified as influencing a student's reading achievement, predominantly in studies of urban contexts.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was selected for this study. The researcher gathered data through observations and interviews. The primary research question for the study, "What factors differ in rural Appalachian elementary schools that are high and low-achieving in reading?" drove the choice to utilize the case study method.

In this study, the lead author gained access to both sites by obtaining permission from the school administrators. The sources of data for the study were observations, transcripts from interviews, and document analysis. The observations took place during each grade level's reading instruction. Interviews were conducted with one classroom teacher per grade level (K-3) and the principal at each site. Each school's website, as well as their Kentucky State School Report Card, was utilized to review demographic data and state end of year test scores.

Sample

Criteria for selection of the two school sites for this research included the following decision rules:

1. Each elementary school is located in an Appalachian county in Kentucky;
2. The schools serve a high poverty student population; both have over fifty percent of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch;
3. The ethnicity of students tested in both schools is one hundred percent Caucasian;
4. The student to teacher ratio for each school is fifteen to one;
5. Both schools were recipients of the Reading First grant; and
6. One school had to be high performing and the other low performing based on data collected under Kentucky's state accountability model.

School A, ARC Elementary (ARC and Bohman Elementary are pseudonyms used in this study) had 95.24% of their third grade students score proficient or distinguished on the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT) for reading in 2009 and 100% in 2010. The school's attendance rate during 2009-2010 was 95.1%, and their grade retention rate was 0%. ARC Elementary has met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) every year. The mission statement of the ARC Elementary School is... "to provide all students with the BEST respectful academic, social, and emotional learning experiences and environment where every student experiences SUCCESS ON THE ROAD TO PROFICIENCY."

School B (Bohman Elementary) had 57.69% of their third grade students score proficient or distinguished on the KCCT in reading in 2009 and 53.7% in 2010. Bohman Elementary's attendance rate for 2009-10 was 92.7%, and their retention rate was 0.9%. This school did not meet the requirements for AYP in reading for the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. The school status in 2010-11, as a result of not making AYP for two years, was School Improvement – Year 1. The consequences were to notify parents, implement school choice, and write or revise the school improvement plan. Bohman Elementary's mission statement states: "We, the staff, students, and parents, do believe in the following: Our teachers will always teach all students to do the best of their ability, our students will always do their very best, our parents will always help all students to do their very best, and our school will always be a great place to learn."

Participants

The participants in this study included the principal at each school and one teacher from each grade level (K-3). Due to the small size of each school, there was only one teacher per grade level observed and interviewed at each site. The average years of teaching experience at ARC Elementary was 9.5 years, and at Bohman Elementary, the average was 11.2 years experience. Both schools reported 100% of classes taught by teachers who participated in content-focused professional development. Neither of the schools had teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Standards nor with a doctoral degree. At ARC Elementary, 27.3% of all teachers had a bachelor's degree, 36.4% had received a master's degree, and 36.4% had acquired a Rank 1 (those holding regular certificates and who have a master's degree in a subject field approved by the Education Professional Standards Board or equivalent

continuing education and who have earned thirty semester hours of approved graduate work or equivalent continuing education; or those teachers who have met the requirements for Rank II and earned initial certification of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards). Bohman Elementary reported 30% of all teachers held a bachelor's degree, 60% had received master's degrees, and only 10% had acquired a Rank 1.

Data Collection

The lead author gained access to both sites by obtaining permission from the school administrator. The purpose of the study, the type and number of participants required, and the time frame of the study were explained via email. Data collection methods utilized included observations, interviews, and document analysis. The data collection process began by reviewing the information on each school's website, as well as accessing each school's report card from the Kentucky Department of Education website. Multi-method data collection strategies increased validity in the investigation and facilitated triangulation.

Observations

The observations took place during each grade level's reading instruction and lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes each. To help ensure validity in the observations, the researcher used the standard Reading First Observation forms, which were also used by school, district, and state coaches, along with field notes at the bottom. These forms are checklists based on the five Reading First components for effective instructional practices as identified by the National Reading Panel. The components observed were phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency during whole group, small group, and centers. Each form had a place to fill in observer name, school name, teacher name, date, and class/grade level observed. See Appendices A, B, and C for the elements included in the observation checklists.

Interviews

Interviews were an additional method of data collection. The general interview guide approach was used in order to collect the same information from each interviewee. This also allowed the interviewer to modify the order and wording of the questions, as well as, an opportunity to clarify statements and probe for additional information. According to Patton (2002), in an interview guide, "...the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area and enables the interviewer to explore, probe, and ask questions that elucidate and illuminate that particular subject...and to establish a conversational style" (p. 343). Interviews were chosen in addition to observations in order to obtain more information about the "why" behind the instruction of the teachers. This also allowed teachers to share their perspectives about various factors and how these factors have influenced their teaching practices. The principal at each site also was interviewed using some of the same questions. A few modifications were made to the questions regarding their leadership role.

The interviews were conducted during planning periods or whenever someone was available to cover a participating teacher's classroom. The interviews lasted approximately fifteen to thirty minutes and were conducted in the teacher's classroom or in a private office

outside of their classroom. The principal interviews were conducted in their offices. With consent of all participants, interviews were tape recorded for later transcription and analysis. Field notes also were made during the conversation. As recommended by Patton (2002), notes consisted primarily of key phrases, lists of points made by the respondent with key terms, and words shown in quotation marks to capture the interviewee's own language. The interview questions were developed in order to glean information about the teachers experience levels, feelings about their instruction prior to and after Reading First implementation (if they were there during initial implementation), professional development, and how well they felt supported by the administration. All questions were designed to inform the research question, "What factors differ in rural Appalachian elementary schools that are high and low-achieving in reading?" The interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

As noted above, multiple sources of data and methods of collection were used including interviews, observations, and analysis of documents such as school report cards. Using a variety of methods helped the researcher understand the proposed inquiry as well as provided reliability and validity to the study (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

Observation Analysis and Synthesis

After collectively reviewing the observation data, it was organized onto a spreadsheet in order to interpret and compare the findings from each classroom at both schools. The top of each column was coded using numbers to identify the teachers observed (T1=Teacher 1). Next, the findings were analyzed to identify and compare consistencies and/or inconsistencies between policies and practices being used in each classroom at both schools.

Interview Analysis and Synthesis

The process of data analysis for the interviews began with a verbatim transcription of each interview followed with line by line coding. The concept of line by line coding requires the researcher to take every line of the document and assign a code to each line. Charmaz (2006) noted that this type of coding works especially well for interview data. The participants' responses to each question from ARC Elementary were compared to the responses from the participant's at Bohman Elementary. Each interview was analyzed inductively to identify patterns and relationships in order to see if categorical themes emerged. If categories were formed, the data were reviewed deductively to determine if the categories were supported by the overall data set.

Limitations of the Study

In doing the qualitative research of this case study, there were limitations to consider. Case studies are limited to describing particular phenomena rather than predicting future behavior (Merriam, 1998). According to Yin (2003), these studies, "...are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 10). One can hardly design a single study that takes into account all persons, places, and periods to which one hopes the findings

will generalize. This qualitative comparative case study identified factors that distinguish between high and low-performing on reading achievement in elementary rural Appalachian schools.

One limitation was the small sample size. Specifically, the researcher interviewed and observed only one teacher per grade level (K-3) at each school for this particular study. Another obvious limitation was time constraints. Classroom teachers have a limited amount of time during the day in which they are willing to give up to participate. The interviews were conducted during planning times or during a time that the teacher could be covered by another staff member. Other limitations may include that this was not a longitudinal study and the teachers' ability to reflect accurately about professional development sessions they may have received in the past. These limitations are not, however, significant enough to render the benefits of the research findings unworthy.

Results

The findings of this study are organized into sections based on the overall research question and common themes that emerged from observations and interviews. The most prominent findings are summarized below.

Teacher Morale

When schools have teachers with high morale, they also have a higher probability of having students with high morale; teacher morale has a direct impact on student achievement (Keeler & Andrews, 1963; Whitaker et al., 2000). In this study, it was evident from data collected during observations and interviews that teachers at ARC Elementary had high morale. Many activities, rewards, and celebrations were in place to recognize student and teacher achievement. Teachers expressed that their school was a happy place to be and that everyone has a positive attitude. One teacher went as far as comparing them to a big happy family. Another teacher stated:

I think the morale of the building is great. I think we've all got the positive attitude. We know what our goal is, to have high test scores. That's what we work toward, and we're all willing to work together. I think we have a great, great staff.

The principal at ARC Elementary noted that she feels a healthy school culture and work ethics are the two most influential factors in the academic success of her school. As a result of working where there is a positive school culture and good work ethics, teachers and the principal at ARC Elementary reported high morale.

In contrast, teachers at Bohman Elementary were hesitant and put more thought into the questions that focused on morale during their interviews. While, most teachers expressed that the morale of the building was good overall, their responses appeared guarded. One teacher was more specific by explaining that some days it is good and some days it is bad. There are a couple of celebrations for students that take place during the school year; however, there is nothing in place to celebrate or boost teacher morale. Many teachers noted that there just was not enough time or they were too busy. Two of the teachers reported that there was little done for teachers and felt that more could be done. The principal at Bohman

Elementary stated that the teachers at her school were hard-working and credited them as being the most influential factor to the student's success at her school.

Studer (2008) reported that it is the role of the administrator to create a culture where the staff believes that their work environment is unlike any other. The goal of the school leader is to promote the type of school climate that will foster excitement and commitment to the improvement of the school. Studer (2008) discovered that when employees develop a purpose for their work and perceive it as meaningful, increased performance within the organization results. The principal at ARC Elementary creates opportunities to motivate her staff and support them in achieving their goals. Data revealed that teachers at ARC Elementary felt valued and inspired by their principal. In analyzing the data from Bohman Elementary, however, this type of support and motivation was not clear.

The principal at ARC Elementary recognized that motivation and celebrating success was critical to boosting teacher morale. Whitaker (1999) found that keeping teachers motivated and enthusiastic about their job is an important task for principals. Similarly, Thompson (1996), author of *Motivating Others*, stated, "The principal is not only responsible for self-motivation, but, more importantly, is held accountable for the motivation of the school staff and even students" (p.3). A true leader is continually lifting up employees participating in their day-to-day grind in order to help them do the best job possible. Thompson (1996) also pointed out, "Principals who are effective 'motivators' create other conditions which satisfy the needs of individuals within the school" (p.5). Principals also celebrate teachers' achievements knowing that school success depends on the hard work of the teachers employed there. One teacher at Bohman made reference to the fact that there was a lack of celebrations and felt that there could be more.

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy has been defined as the extent to which teachers believe they can affect student learning (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). Teacher efficacy relies on convincing teachers to believe in what they do and take ownership of their teaching. Self-efficacy and locus of control must be distinguished, but they work together, because the way in which a person tends to attribute control informs that person's beliefs about their abilities (Bandura, 1997). Generally, those who believe that situations cannot be controlled or changed do not persist as long when a task is difficult, and it becomes easy to relinquish personal investment or responsibility in that situation.

Teachers at ARC Elementary demonstrated a high sense of efficacy and an internal locus of control. Even though they work in an environment with many disadvantages, they were still motivated to change the system and held themselves accountable for finding ways and implementing strategies to make their students successful in reading. In contrast, teachers at Bohman Elementary demonstrated a low sense of efficacy and an external locus of control. All four teachers that were interviewed at Bohman indicated that they felt parental involvement was a factor that affects student's reading achievement. They saw this as something that was out of their control and a factor to blame for low student achievement, as opposed to viewing parents as untapped assets. Teachers with low general teaching efficacy do not feel that teachers in general can make a significant difference in the lives of students, while teachers with low personal teaching efficacy do not feel that they, personally, affect the lives of the students (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

Principal's Perceptions of Teachers

Teachers at the two schools in this study reported contrasting perceptions regarding support from their principal. Each principal used a different approach to offer administrative support. The teachers at ARC Elementary voiced that they felt extremely supported in terms of instructional practices and relationships. The principal at ARC Elementary takes a personal interest in each of her teachers. She makes concentrated efforts to meet with teachers in order to discover their strengths, individual personalities, and instructional needs. Teachers feel that she is behind them 100% and has complete buy-in to whatever they are doing. The principal at ARC Elementary stated that she views her teachers as experts.

The principal at Bohman Elementary took a different approach to administrative support in relation to improving reading instruction for students in grades K-3. She focused her efforts on providing resources that teachers need in order to increase student achievement. Teachers described her as hard-working and a stickler for following the rules. The teachers perceived her as very helpful in reference to discipline and enforcing rules. The principal at Bohman Elementary was very interested in analyzing student data and their achievement. In contrast to the principal at ARC who described her teachers as experts, the principal at Bohman described some of her staff members as teachers who are ready for retirement and resistant to change. She also viewed the newer teachers in the building as lacking maturity and indicated that some of them may not have the sufficient educational background to be in the profession of teaching.

The different views that each principal held about their teachers, in turn, affected their leadership styles and how they interacted with teachers. These interactions had implications for relationships and long term sustainability of school improvement. Principals might be unaware of their personal leadership styles; but in reality, they could be practicing one or more theories in their day to day activities. McGregor (1960) classified leadership as either an authoritarian style (Theory X) or a more egalitarian style (Theory Y). While implementing a Theory Y approach, an administrator nurtures an environment and recognizes that employees have the capability to be high performers, develop and assume responsibility, and be self-motivated.

The principal at ARC Elementary clearly demonstrated a Theory Y approach to leadership. She created an environment in her school that promoted effective communication and trust. Effective principals trust the teachers to do their jobs without constant supervision, and the teachers feel this support and empowerment. Due to the principal at ARC Elementary creating this type of environment, the teachers became self-directed and channeled their efforts toward the achievement of organizational goals including high achievement in Reading.

In contrast, the principal at Bohman Elementary implemented a Theory X approach to leadership. McGregor (1960) contended that a tough or soft approach to managing may be used by embracing Theory X. One who practices a Theory X leadership style may drive their employees at work because they think they are lazy and this is the only way to get things accomplished. They also insist on complete compliance, rigid organizational patterns, and controls based on imposed authority. While the principal at Bohman clearly cares about student achievement and providing her teachers with the resources they need, she lacks close personal relationships and a level of trust with her teachers that is important for strengthening

school culture. This problematic culture stems in part from her Theory X leadership style, which is grounded in and further reinforces the poor views she holds of her teachers.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Principals

The principals' perceptions of their roles in supporting teachers and reading achievement at both schools were very closely related to their teachers' perceptions. The principal at ARC Elementary demonstrated the interpersonal and intrapersonal traits Leithwood and others (2004) suggest are needed to "develop people." She discussed her efforts of working hard to put a schedule in place that allows teachers at her school to teach to their strengths. She added she will do just about anything to get them the resources they need for instruction. Finally, she talked about how she strives to be fair and how much she cares about her staff. She does not expect anything out of them that she would not do herself and stressed how important it is that they know that. While the principal at Bohman Elementary also discussed how important it is for her to provide her staff with the resources they need, she also admitted to being "hard-nosed" and that she accepts no excuses. She stands firm on her belief that all students can learn, and she will accept nothing else. This attitude relates back to the Theory X style approach to leadership where there is less of an emphasis on building relationships.

These findings about school leadership are supported by the research of Studer (2003) who found that personal relationships within business have a profound impact on the sustained improvement of an organization. Studer argued that it was the daily relationships with employees that provided the foundation for motivation in their jobs. Studer found that the way leaders interact with and treat their employees is the primary mechanism by which a leader can improve performance. This emphasis on relationships was characteristic of the ARC principal. However, the Bohman principal was focused on the task with little attention to relationships. In fact, she viewed her staff through a deficit lens, which further diminished relationships with them because the teachers were less interested in having healthy relationships with her as well.

Teacher Professional Development

Despite the eighty hours of professional development that was mandated for teachers during the Reading First grant and the twenty-four hours that teachers are still participating in on a yearly basis, teachers at ARC Elementary and Bohman Elementary could not specifically pinpoint a professional development session that focused on literacy instruction that stood out to be beneficial. The teachers at ARC Elementary noted that the sessions they enjoyed most were the ones that were hands-on and allowed them to make things they could take back to their classrooms and use. One teacher at Bohman Elementary expressed that she felt many of the professional development sessions at their district were "one size fits all" and rarely offered ideas or suggestions that she does not already do.

Organizational change literature, along with experience in general, indicates that innovations can disappear quickly once the impetus for them disappears (Rogers, 1995). While conversations about professional development were not ideal at either school, teachers at ARC Elementary spoke more favorably about their experiences than teachers at Bohman Elementary. For example, one ARC teacher went into great detail that the training she received during Reading First made her realize she was not teaching effectively and enhanced

her instruction. Two of the teachers at Bohman Elementary were newer teachers and had not received the trainings offered during Reading First. However, the teachers that did receive professional development during Reading First did not sustain the practices that were set forth by the grant.

On the contrary, the teachers at ARC Elementary sustained many of the practices after the Reading First grant was over. In particular, they continue to implement differentiated and small group instruction through utilization of personnel across the domains of general education, special education, and entitlement programs. They also continue to apply the information gained through training on the use of instructional materials, programs, strategies, and approaches based on scientifically based reading research. Finally, they have sustained the use of the GRADE and DIBELS assessments and utilize the training they received on how to use screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based reading assessments to identify student difficulties. ARC Elementary sustained these practices as a result of higher student achievement in reading.

Literature reviewed in this study presented a strong argument that teacher professional development plays an important role on student growth. Sousa (2006) found that like students, teachers need brain-based learning experiences that are relevant and challenging and provide opportunities for active participation. In Bohman Elementary's case, there is a significant disconnect between the way the district and the school expects teachers to differentiate instruction to raise student achievement yet provides professional development that is "one size fits all" and not specific to the needs of the students or teachers.

Instructional Practices: Explicit Small Group Instruction, Literacy Centers, and Instructional Time

Another finding in this study is that there are differing approaches to instructional practices for reading in Grades K-3 at each school. Teachers at ARC Elementary meet with small groups of students for explicit differentiated instruction during the literacy block, as well as an additional forty minutes during a supplemental reading time. This small group instruction during the literacy block occurs with groups of three to four students during the literacy center time.

On the contrary, teachers at Bohman Elementary do not meet with small groups of students during their literacy block. The teachers do not implement literacy centers as part of their reading instruction. Instead, they implement a traditional approach to learning using the basal text and whole group instruction as their primary means of instructional practice. However, they do meet with small groups of students during a thirty minute block that occurs at a different time of day where they work with students in tiers one, two, and three where the instruction focuses on the students' needs.

Literature supports that small group instruction is effective because the teaching is focused on precisely what the student needs to learn to move forward (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Tomlinson (2003) centered her instructional theory on the construct of responsive teaching, which asks teachers to tailor their reading instruction to the individual performance level of every student. Centers allow students the opportunity to work independently while the teacher addresses the individual needs of those students who benefit from additional help in a small group setting. Centers offer a chance to reach the needs of diverse learners relative

to readiness, interest, and learning style by including differentiating strategies (Tomlinson, 2001).

The literature reviewed in this study indicated that the most successful school districts spent a longer amount of time in daily reading instruction. Carnahan & Levesque (2005) suggested that schools should provide ninety minutes of protected instructional time and student intervention with supplemental reading. Observational data for this study indicated that the implementation of explicit and differentiated small group instruction practices was a consistent part of the instructional reading lessons at ARC Elementary. Such practices were implemented not only during the uninterrupted literacy block but also during an additional forty minute supplemental reading time every day. However, at Bohman Elementary, explicit and differentiated small group instruction only took place during the thirty minutes of supplemental reading time that occurred outside the literacy block.

Significance of the Study

After applying in 2002 and receiving funding in 2003-2004, 74 Kentucky schools began Reading First implementation during the 2004-2005 school year. Schools across the state began the year by acquiring a baseline score on the required standardized test GRADE, which revealed that only 30.1% of students in grades K-3 in the state scored at the 50th percentile or above. This translates to 5,593 students out of 18,538 reading on or above grade level in the fall of the first year of Reading First. By the end of the fifth year of implementation, Kentucky had 77% of all K-3 students reading at or above proficiency based on GRADE results (Carney, 2010).

At the end of year four, students from eleven schools in Kentucky averaged the 90th percentile or better on GRADE; all eleven of these were rural Appalachian schools. The fact that all eleven schools were rural and Appalachian strongly recommended such schools for study. Previous research has not typically examined high-performing, high-poverty schools in Appalachia or other rural areas. If stakeholders can develop an understanding of what policies and practices characterize these schools, it would inform recommendations that could be replicated in similarly situated schools with historically low performance.

This study examined reading achievement in one high performing and one low performing elementary rural Appalachia school. The central question that drove this research was: What factors differ in rural Appalachian elementary schools that are high and low-achieving in reading? It examined critical factors that may attribute to student achievement in rural Appalachia such as: teacher morale, leadership, professional development, data-based decision making, and effective instructional strategies in the classroom. Results from this study led to the conclusion that high teacher morale, teacher efficacy, supportive leadership, meaningful professional development, and specific instructional strategies are all factors that affect student achievement in reading. The influence of the principal on all variables that emerged is highlighted. More importantly, ARC elementary serves as a case demonstrating that schools can effectively serve students from backgrounds with disadvantages.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this qualitative comparative case study offer particular insight into the types of leadership support and instructional strategies that contribute to student reading

achievement in grades K-3 at two elementary schools in rural Appalachia. Since there is limited research on this topic, the opportunity for further exploration of this topic has strong merit. This study could be replicated in other schools to inform stakeholders regarding factors that increase student reading achievement.

Further research should be done in this area to determine whether or not it would be beneficial for low performing schools to implement specific instructional methods. Further research could also be done comparing other schools which meet AYP and those which consistently fail to meet the standards to determine whether instructional methods and leadership support are different. Comparing other schools in this area could identify different methods and trends in student reading achievement.

Another possible area for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal study of low and high performing schools over time. It would be important to assess the sustained impact that leadership support and the implementation of specific instructional practices such as explicit and differentiated small group instruction have on reading achievement over a given period of time. Principals could document all instructional changes over an extended time while tracking student achievement to determine which strategies are most effective for growth in student reading achievement. Further studies could include comparing urban schools to rural schools in order to compare and contrast the factors affecting reading achievement. Finally, research linking specific teachers in a school to their student's achievement as opposed to an index score based on all teachers, and research quantifying variables in a model (i.e., morale or professional development) to see which ones are the most powerful predictors of student achievement should be conducted.

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**APPENDIX A
OBSERVATION FORM FOR WHOLE GROUP INSTRUCTION**

Whole Group Instruction

Progressing – X

Not seen at time of observation – Leave blank

Not applicable – NA

Components observed:

Phonemic Awareness __ Phonics __ Comprehension __ Vocabulary __ Fluency __

1.	Date:		
	Core materials provide basis for instruction		
	Physical arrangement of the room facilitates student movement/learning		
	Review of previous lesson(s)/activates prior knowledge		
	Direct instruction of skills/strategies		
	Adjusts and extends instruction through scaffolding		
	Use of concrete materials (text, word cards, magnetic letter, etc.)		
	Opportunities for students to practice skills/strategies		
	Opportunities for students to engage in meaningful discussions		
	Effective pacing of instruction to include essential elements of reading instructions		
	Monitor students' understanding and provide positive and corrective feedback		
	Variety of student movement (i.e.. floor, desk/tables, fine/gross motor)		
	Assessment of students' knowledge of skills/strategies		

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX B
OBSERVATION FORM FOR SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

Small group instruction

Progressing – X

Not seen at time of observation – Leave blank

Not applicable – NA

Components observed:

Phonemic Awareness __ Phonics __ Comprehension __ Vocabulary __ Fluency __

2.	Date:		
	Core/Supplemental materials provide basis for instruction		
	Students' text is at their instructional level		
	Before Reading: Provides a thorough book introduction		
	Before Reading: Connections made to previous lesson(s)/activates prior knowledge		
	Before Reading: Review of needed vocabulary		
	Before Reading: Mini-lesson of skill/strategy		
	During Reading: Various reading formats (shared, partner, choral, etc...)		
	During Reading: Students practice fix-up strategies		
	During Reading: Use of various levels of questions		
	During Reading: Monitor students' understanding and provide positive and corrective feedback		
	During Reading: Apply/practice the skill/strategy taught during mini-lesson		
	After Reading: Clarify/Summarize text		
	After Reading: Opportunities for students to engage in meaningful discussions		
	After Reading: Summary of lesson		
	After Reading: Students given opportunity to practice fluency		
	Transition provided for next activity		

Additional comments

APPENDIX C
OBSERVATION FORM FOR LITERACY CENTERS

Literacy Centers

Progressing – X

Not seen at time of observation – Leave blank

Not applicable – NA

Components observed:

Phonemic Awareness __ Phonics __ Comprehension __ Vocabulary __ Fluency __

3.	Date:		
Centers focus on the five essential elements of reading.			
Organizational pattern of centers is evident (Work Board, Center Chart, etc...).			
Materials are organized and accessible to students.			
Centers have clear objectives.			
Students can articulate center objectives.			
Centers include an assessment component (i.e. Literacy Center-students respond to text using story elements graphic organizer).			
Student movement between centers is organized.			
Help system for students is evident.			
Specific location for completed student work (pocket folder, hanging folder, clipboard, etc...).			
Students' behavior follows classroom rules.			

Additional comments:

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How many years in your current position?
3. How would you describe your ties to this community?
4. What factors do you feel affect student's reading achievement at your school?
5. Tell me about some of the instructional practices or activities that you use in reading.
6. What is it like working with your principal?
7. What is or was it like working with your reading coach?
8. Describe how the faculty works together at your school.
9. How many years were you a part of Reading First?
10. Describe your literacy instruction before Reading First.
11. Describe the types of PD you have received focusing on literacy instruction.
12. How did your teaching methods change (if at all) in literacy since Reading First?
 - a. Whole group
 - b. Small group
 - c. Centers
13. Describe how Reading First changed the way you interact with other teachers for literacy (if at all).
14. Describe how your school meets the needs of students in Tiers 2 and 3.
15. What do you think the key factor has been in the success of your scores in K-3?
16. How often is the principal in your classroom observing the literacy block?
17. In what ways do you feel supported by your principal?
18. Do you have a Reading/Literacy Coach in your building?
19. How often is the coach in your classroom?
20. In what ways does your coach support you?
21. How would you describe the morale of the building?
22. Describe ways the school celebrates success and/or boosts morale.