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# Implications of Small Group Instruction for Overage Secondary Students' Academic Performance

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Orlando Ledyard

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

Implications of Small Group Instruction for Overage Secondary Students'

Academic Performance

by

Orlando K. Ledyard

MEd, Auburn University Montgomery, 1997

BS, Jacksonville State University, 1991

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

July 2017

## Abstract

In a secondary school in a southeastern state a large number of overage students who are at least 2 grade levels behind where they should be in academic terms, have struggled with academic performance and have often dropped out of school. Educational researchers have found that the implementation of instructional interventions is important in meeting the learning needs of these students. The purpose of this bounded case study was to determine educators' perspectives of possible intervention strategies to improve the academic performance of overage students in grades 9 and 10 at the school.

Constructivism was used as the conceptual framework. The research questions were focused on what teachers, counselors, and administrators viewed as the best possible intervention for improving the academic performance of overage students at the school. Interviews were conducted with 4 classroom teachers, 2 counselors, and 2 administrators who had worked with overage students at the school. Interview data were coded and analyzed for common themes. Participants identified small group instruction as the best possible instructional intervention to support constructivist learning for overage students. Using study findings, a policy white paper was created for local school officials and administrators, which included the recommendation that small group instruction be used for overage students along monitoring student progress by a school leadership team. Implementation of the recommendations may help overage students at the study site improve their critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision making skills which may result in positive social change as they experience academic success and become productive members of the school and larger surrounding community.

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## Dedication

This doctoral journey is dedicated to my loving mother, Rosetta Ledyard, outstanding father, David Ledyard, and wonderful daughter, Asia Ledyard. Each of these persons has been an inspiration in my life and my reason for achieving this monumental goal. I would like to thank each one of them for their specific role in my life.

I would like to thank my mother for her loving care, comfort, and support, and for encouraging me to pursue a doctorate. I would like to thank my father for telling me all my life, “Always do your best at whatever you do.” His support goes unknown for he is the one who said, “Son, if you don’t want to do any hard work, stay in school.” I would like to thank my daughter for being the apple of my eye. She reminds me of who I am and says, “Daddy, you are always working.” I give credit to mom, dad, and daughter for why I chose to achieve the highest educational degree possible.

This dedication means I am truly attached to the messages given to me as a child and adult. I will continue to represent the core values instilled in me by my parents and dedicate myself to helping others.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God for giving me the patience, guidance, and strength to preserve and meet the requirements of this doctoral program. This doctoral journey has been challenging, and time consuming. Yet, it has been a rewarding process. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to pursue this degree which was encouraged by my mother, Rosetta Ledyard. I would also like to acknowledge “my biggest fan,” Denise Hampton, who continued to support me throughout this process.

My doctoral journey would not have been completed without the direction of my chair, Dr. Robert McClure. I am grateful for his knowledge and experience as it was beneficial in directing me to meet the approval in all phases of this study. I am also thankful for Dr. Valerie Schultz, Dr. Mary Arneson, and Dr. Karen Hunt, my committee members, who made this research project possible and who approved my study. A special thanks to Walden University for allowing me the opportunity to be accepted in the doctoral program. Finally, I would like to thank my editor, Dr. Linda Jarosz, who was instrumental in proofing each section of my study. I can truly say that I am “Finished at Last”.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

In this project study, I examined the perspectives of four teachers', two counselors', and two administrators' to determine the best possible intervention strategies for improving student achievement of overage students at a secondary school located in central Alabama. According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE, 2013), overage students are students who are at least two grades behind and who are at risk of dropping out of high school. According to the USDE, 2.6% of Whites, 3.8% of Hispanics, and 5.5% of Blacks in U.S. schools are two or more grade levels behind. Researchers have found that these students are often disruptive in school (Shin & Ryan, 2017). They have identified behavior issues affecting overage students ranging from defiance and bullying to acts of criminal mischief (Pierce, Nordress, Epstein, & Cullman, 2016). These behavioral issues are risk factors for poor school outcomes, including poor academic performance, absenteeism, suspension, and dropping out of school (Means, 2015). Students with behavioral issues are considered bad students who disrupt the learning process in a school (Barbarin & Crawford, 2006)

At the study site, teachers have reported that overage students exhibit behaviors including disrespect, disobedience, harassment, profanity, gambling, and truancy while in school. They often submit office referrals for infractions and violations committed by these students. The office discipline report (ODR) for the district in which the study site was located shows a high level of disciplinary actions among the selected group of students. In November 2013, 125 infractions for overage students in Grades 9 and 10

compared to 33 infractions for students in Grades 11 and 12. The overage students in Grades 9 and 10 ranged from 17 to 19 years old. Infractions in the ODR list included defiance, harassment, fighting, truancy, and disobedience. As a result of these offenses, students received out-of-school or in-school suspension. Administrators also notified parents and law enforcement officials.

Students who are overage may find it difficult to decide whether to stay in school or drop out. They may have decided not to complete graduation requirements due to poor academic performance or their behavior in school (Dozick & DeLuca, 2005). Low academic performance indicates that students struggle with learning concepts in a subject area (Sharkey, Schwartz, Ellen, & Lacoë, 2014). It may also be viewed as failing a course by not meeting the requirements for promotion to the next grade level (Sharkey et al., 2014).

Overage students who struggle with the decision to continue their academic careers often face responsibilities to help their families by working; they may also, feel socially misplaced, and embarrassed due to their age (Ormond, 2010). Dozick and DeLuca (2005) found that students who delay at least 1 year, due to these many circumstances, are 64% less likely to complete high school than those who enroll immediately in school. Dropping out of school poses concerns for both individual and society. A drop out may have educational deficiencies and have a difficult time finding a successful career (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010).

Closing the achievement gap between overage students and their peers may help decrease the retention rate at the school under study. Most states that favor retention for

underachieving students have identified the issue of overage students as something that needs to be addressed to improve retention rates (Anekwe, 2010). Implementing intervention strategies to improve student achievement among overage students is an opportunity for academic success.

Yet, closing the achievement gap among overage students is a challenge. Robertson (2014) noted that overage students need programs to help them catch up to and graduate with their peers. The chance to catch up and graduate may provide opportunities to close the achievement gap with overage students.

### **The Local Problem**

The problem at the local secondary school was the failure of many students to meet academic progress because of behavior issues, and absence from school causing them to become behind grade level, or overage. Teachers at the school reported that many students did not meet academic requirements because they did not report to class or they came to school late. Not meeting academic requirements often leads students to drop out of school (Wang & Fredrick's, 2014). MacIver (2012) also noted that absenteeism, suspension, and course failure contribute to student behavioral issues. Poor academic performance, behavior issues, and/or absenteeism from school can result in students being retained and falling in the overage category.

### **Rationale**

This study was conducted at a secondary school in a district in the U.S. state of Alabama with an enrollment in excess of 25,000 students. This secondary school has an enrollment of 2,300 students and a staff of over 150 employees. The participants (four

teachers, two counselors, and two administrators) were purposely selected. According to the State Department of Education (2012), this school has not met adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the past 7 years. Under the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002), educational agencies are held accountable for meeting AYP and showing they have met or exceeded the academic standards required for successful schools. However, states are allowed to set their own proficiency levels for AYP (Genao, 2013). This raises several questions concerning accuracy of scores reported by each state after assessment is complete.

According to the Alabama State Department of Education School Profile Report (2009), average daily attendance was 93.1% compared to 95.8% and 96.9% system wide. The average daily attendance for overage students was 73.7% compared to the other students in the district (SDE, 2011).

The intent of this study was to examine teachers', counselors', and administrators' perceptions about intervention strategies that might help to improve academic achievement of overage students at the school under study. A case study design was used to determine the best interventions for successfully addressing the local problem. I conducted interviews with participants to reveal recurring themes.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Behavior:* A student who has been placed more than three times in-school or out-of-school suspension during the academic year. (Leff, 2009)

*Drop out:* Students leaving a school or group for practical reasons such as lack of family support or academic failure (Keon, 2007).

*Overage:* Students who are at least two grade levels behind where they should be in academic terms (USDE, 2013).

*Promotion:* The movement of students who have met or exceeded the requirements for passing grades to the next grade level; students move from one grade level to the next by earning a score of 60 or above in their required course work (USDE, 2013).

*Retention:* Students retaking of courses which they did not earn a score of 60 and above. Students who have not met the requirements for passing their grade level and who have failed are retained (USDE, 2013).

*Student achievement:* Students' demonstration of satisfactory progress in their academic course work and meeting proficiency of 80 or above on test scores (SCPS, 2010).

### **Significance of the Study**

I conducted this investigation in order to provide school personnel with a deeper understanding of overage students and the issues they face. I also wanted to solicit participants' perspectives on intervention strategies they might use to help these students. A deeper understanding of the problems associated with overage students could help teachers develop more effective interventions aimed at helping these students achieve academically (Gann, Ferro, Umbreit, & Liaupsin, 2014).

Overage students often do not perform well on standardized tests in math, reading, and writing (Tamim & Grant, 2013). Lack of academic success may lead to

difficulties in finding employment or a career or to criminal behavior (Wilson et al., 2016). The results of this research study yield further information about why overage students at the study site drop out of school. Results may benefit school board and city officials by enhancing their knowledge of overage students and how they might help these students be more successful academically, have better lives, and become productive members of society. As such, the findings may have a direct impact on student achievement at the school under study. Administrators may be better able to assess and understand school culture, attendance, and student performance in their schools.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching question for this study was, What is the best possible intervention for improving achievement of overage students at the target school? To address this overarching question, I sought to answer two sub-questions.

RQ1. What do teachers, counselors and administrators suggest as the best approach for improving academic performance of overage students in the target school?

RQ2. What do teachers, counselors and administrators suggest as the best approach for improving student engagement of overage students in the target school?

### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this study was to determine the best possible intervention strategies to improve student achievement of overage students at a local secondary school. The problem in the local secondary school is that many overage students fail to



meet academic progress, guidelines. This group of students has failed to meet the promotion requirements needed to move to the next grade level. I examined intervention strategies suggested by teachers, counselors, and administrators to improve academic achievement involving overage students' academic achievement. I used Walden University Library to locate articles for the literature review. Google Scholar, ERIC, and Education Research Complete databases were to locate information on overage students, behavioral issues, and student achievement.

### **Conceptual Framework**

I drew from constructivism and social development theory for my conceptual framework. The constructivist learning approach is based on the idea that knowledge is developed as a result of active interaction among individuals (Cridland et al., 2016). The constructivist theory for active learning is a process where learners acquire new information within their mental framework (Scott-Janda & Karakok, 2016). According to Tatli (2011), a constructivist learning environment promotes active participation because students construct their own knowledge by actively thinking, doing, and interacting with their peers in the classroom. In the process of active learning, the teacher takes on the role of facilitator. The teacher must engage in the students' learning process to discover what students already know, what they need to know, and what they need to learn (Frymier & Houser, 2016).

The constructivist view in building knowledge to develop cognitive skills in children relies on several influences. Researchers examined culture, racial, and socioeconomic settings from classrooms and homes. Some findings revealed that children

needed models in order to learn verbal and writing skills (Frymier & Houser, 2016). It was also observed that children needed support from their families (Wei, Alvarez, Ku, & Lioa, 2011).

Piaget (1989) had a strong influence on childhood education. His research found that children's interaction with the world was to acquire knowledge. According to the theorist, such interaction allowed children to change and recognize their own knowledge (Barrouillet, 2015). Piaget also mentioned that learning occurs when children become engaged with their peers and adults in a social setting. His research led to the development of curricular programs that were student-centered and which focused on language development, decision-making, problem-solving, self-discipline, goal setting, and evaluating one's own activities with teachers and peers (Barrouillet, 2015).

Teachers using the constructivist approach strive to provide learning opportunities so that they may help students build their own understanding of concepts and skills. According to Garrett (2013), teacher-led activities that build students' knowledge include meaningful active participation and critical thinking. Activities can consist of demonstrations, group work, hands-on activities, or project-based learning (Frymier & Houser, 2016). Communication and social interaction are key for students to develop such understanding. Social interaction associated with constructivism allows students to participate in classroom activities to build cognitive skills they already possess (Piaget, 1989). In addition, social interaction can increase student engagement for understanding the content of lessons. The learning experience will become more meaningful and not teacher oriented.

The second theory in my conceptual framework was social development theory. According to Vygotsky (1978), the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition believed that community plays a role in making meaning. Vygotsky asserted that higher mental functions in children were present through interaction within the social environment. For example, children's memory is linked to cultural experiences. Activities such as learning note-taking to aid memory, tying knots in a string to remember, or repeating names of people. Vygotsky saw this as an intelligence tool for children who used basic mental functions. Therefore, cognitive skills of children are considered socio-culturally acquired.

Like Piaget (1989), Vygotsky (1978) believed that children are curious and actively involved in their own learning and the discovery of understanding new schema. The difference in the two researchers was that Vygotsky emphasized social contribution to develop, where Piaget emphasized learning taking place where children build their own cognitive development. Vygotsky also referred to development of social interaction through modeling behaviors. The child could learn or look to understand actions of parents and teachers to gain information to evaluate their own performance (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's theory of social development is a key element in the foundation of family structure.

The dynamics of the two approaches will be to gain a deeper understanding of how children related knowledge and develop cognitive skills as they engage in learning opportunities. The theoretical approaches form the framework for a focus on the student's strengths and weaknesses academically so an interpretation and analysis for intervention

strategies are determined. Also, a focus on how children grow on their own to develop their cognitive skills from social development is instrumental in the learning process. The participants in this study could benefit from professional development opportunities to assist them with using the constructivist approach and social development skills to meet the needs of overage students.

### **Family Structure and Student Outcomes**

Patterns of family structure have changes in the United States. The most recognizable change in family structure is children growing up in single-parent families (Parke, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), 27% of American children under the age of 18 lived with one parent in 2007. Children who live with a single parent, no parent, or single father are at a greater risk of becoming behavior problems in school (Ryan, Markawitz, & Cleassens, 2015).

Changes in family structure predict poorer outcomes for behavior in middle childhood (Cooper, Osborne, Beck, & McLanahan, 2011). Parents who are married and the divorce cause changes in the family structure. This leads to households having single-parent families and siblings being the caregivers for each other. The development and environmental conditions also play a role in family structure and well-being of the child. Socio-economic status has an effect on academic performance and behavior and play a role in student's falling behind in school or being retained (Battin, Newcomb, & Abbott, 2000). These characteristics play a role in student's issues with falling behind in school or being retained (Battin, Newcomb, & Abbott, 2000).

## **Student Misbehavior in the Classroom**

Students receive knowledge and skills needed to function in society in the classroom (Anekwe, 2011). The teacher's instruction is a vital part of the educational process, and children's skills are developed from their hours in the classroom, instructional practices, and curriculum support (Early, 2007). The continuous process of learning will enhance student engagement. An effective strategy to manage class involves preparation, planning, procedures, and rules (Landrum, Scott, & Lingo, 2011).

Students who bring complicated issues to school are prone to have behavioral issues leading to out-of-school suspension. Research has identified students who are suspended from school to be unproductive and are associated with many negative issues including behavior problems, missed instruction, and being arrested (Theriot, Craun, & Dupper, 2010). Students are also exposed to violent and unpredictable issues in society which contributes to misbehavior in school. Misbehavior that defies authority disrupts the learning process. Some of these misbehaviors may include tardiness, skipping or walking out of class, excessive talking, and disrespect for others (Glock, 2016).

Students who misbehave distract teachers from teaching lessons, resulting in a decline in instruction and a focus on behavior rather than instruction because the teacher must deal with discipline issues. When teachers collaborate on ways to manage misbehavior in class learning may increase (Jones, 2011).

Wagner (2011) presented evidence that behavior issues may lead to disruption of day-to-day operation of the school. Further, Wagner found that students are affected emotionally when they do not meet the requirements for promotion. Researchers say

students who display a lack of interest in school began to become a huge discipline problem. This reaction places overage students at-risk of dropping out of high school. Another study revealed overage students may also result to bullying and harassment of other students who are different than they are (Kousholt & Fisker, 2015).

Responding to misbehavior is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching. Most experienced teachers make mistakes when dealing with the behavior of overage students (Kousholt & Fisker, 2015). No matter how careful teachers are with teaching positive behavior students will still sometimes misbehave. Students who continue to misbehave may often present a challenge in the classroom.

### **Challenging Behavior Among Overage Students**

Classroom management and difficulties with inappropriate student behavior have been factors that contribute to poor academic performance (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011). Managing student's behavior continues to be a challenge for teachers and leads to frustration and loss of instructional time (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2012). In the past years teachers identified talking out of turn, not paying attention, and lack of concentration as challenging behaviors (Wheldell & Merrett, 1988). Today teacher's perception of overage students' challenging behavior affects the classroom environment.

Teachers have identified challenging behaviors such as defiance to authority, disobedience, disrespectful words, and harassment (Landrum et. al, 2011). Landrum et al also indicated attendance as an issue with overage students as prevalent problem in high school. Overage students can be disruptive in the classroom and their actions affect other students and teachers.

Overage students are generally bigger, stronger, and older than their peers and they use their size and strength as intimidating factors to take advantage of other students (Metha, Cornell, Fan, & Gregory, 2013). Bullying is a significant problem that affects one-third of students and leads to acts of violence. School climate is affected which causes overage students to fall behind academically (Sulak, 2016).

There are several forms of bullying which should not be overlooked by school officials (Slonje & Smith, 2011). Acts of bullying include and are not limited to physical, verbal, social, relationship, and cyberbullying (Olweus, 2011). Repeating these acts translate into bullying by overage students and the victims are the ones who suffer. Students become fearful of facing their bully, withdraw from interaction at school, feel rejected and less motivated to complete school assignments (Farrington & Ttofi, 2011). Students who are the aggressor in bullying acts may have experienced problems in their childhood and this is a continuing trend (Moilanen, Shaw, & Maxwell, 2010).

Farrington and Ttofi (2011), mentioned students with an aggressive behavior may continue acts of bullying into adulthood. Swisher and Roetter (2012) revealed that students should be mindful of their actions as adolescents tend to become incarcerated during childhood because of delinquency. Researchers fear that consequences for bullying in schools are not severe enough to stop the activity and prevent students from becoming involved with victims (Swisher & Roetter, 2012).

Although bullying is prevalent in schools, a number of victims are faced with emotional and psychological stress (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2012). Also, aggressive behavior appears to take place with young adults as they develop. This bullying act

generally happens between two individuals who know each other (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2012). Bullying in school demises the character of the individual and may be attributed to social aspects and peer pressure (Aksaray, 2011).

Overage students may be a disruptive force in the classroom. The behavior affects the teachers and classmates which may be hard to understand from the teacher's point of view. An important aspect would be to allow the teacher to discipline overage students so they do not continue to disrupt the learning process. Understanding from the teacher's perspective how to handle challenging behaviors so that inappropriate behavior does not escalate and lead to physical altercations is critical (Zedan, 2012).

### **Academic Failure Among Overage Students**

Academic failure may be the primary reason for students who are overage in high school. Causes for academic failure are varied. Research has provided evidence that academic failure is related to cultural, socioeconomic characteristics, parents, teachers, peers, and relationships among children (Stiefel, Schwartz, & Wiswall, 2015).

Academic failure has made overage students fearful because they feel insulted and fail to work hard to help themselves. Sideridis (2006) argued that "feeling obliged to engage in an activity and to do well was strongly associated with fear; fear of failure and fear of negative evaluations" (p. 12). According to Stiefel et al. (2015), academic failure is based on theories that place the responsibility of failing on the student's cognitive ability, communication style, home environment, and educational influences. Another factor that may be associated with overage students falling behind academically is poverty. Clark (1983) noted that students with low-income families had parents who were



unable to provide positive relationships or financial support for tutoring or summer school. As a result, overage students with low-income parents were not enrolled in summer school to progress academically.

A teacher's interest plays a vital role in the success or failure of overage students (Wodtkey, Harding, & Elwert, 2011). Teachers should commit to making sure they are putting forth their best effort to see that students value their educational experience (Stiefel, Schwartz, & Wiswall, 2015). When students sense a lack of interest or commitment from their teacher, their reaction to class assignments and school is directly affected by the teacher's attitude towards the student's education (Wodtkey, Harding, & Elwert, 2011). As a result, these students may leave school early contributing to the dropout rate.

Academic failure may also be linked to a teacher's perception about a student's academic ability (Ford, 2010). This means their experiences with students provide an opportunity to understand why overage students are not meeting academic requirements. Research has examined the perception of a group of teachers stating the main reasons are family status, lack of interest from students, and student's ability for academic failure (Reynolds, 2010). In conjunction with the teacher's perception, family support and status are two major reasons for academic failure among overage students.

### **Dropout Among Overage Students**

Students who are not prepared for high school face the prospect of repeating a grade or dropping out high school (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics examined data about the graduation rate and high school

dropouts. Eight percent of the 38 million not incarcerated are between the ages of 16 to 24 who are not enrolled in high school had not earned a high school diploma. The dropout rate of high school students continues to increase at a rapid rate (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010). Students without a high school diploma have fewer job prospects and increased the dropout rate among teenagers. Stiefel, Schwartz, & Wiswall (2015) suggested that overage students may experience problems with math and science or core subject areas and drop out of school. These subject areas are important to employers to ensure the prospective employee has some level of competence and the basic skills to function in the workplace.

Dropping out of high school presents overage students with many decisions that will have long-term implications associated with dropouts. Research has indicated that unemployment, relying on public assistance, imprisonment, criminal activity, and being homeless as major issues that students will face (Cohen & Smerdon, 2010). It also suggests that too many students are dropping out of high school too early. Consequently, dropouts will still lack the education and experience needed to function as productive citizens.

Tyler and Loftstrom (2010), reported research has been conducted about the characteristics of overage students who drop out of school, there is minimal information about the causal factors that lead to dropping out of school. The problems that hinder learning include pregnancy, drug abuse, illness, disability, and low self-esteem (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2011). Students transition into adulthood when they become employed to take care of their well-being (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010).

Students who fail to attend school jeopardize their learning opportunities and academic success (White & Kelly, 2010). Tyler and Loftstorm (2010) mentioned absenteeism and discipline as factors contributing to students dropping out of school. A study was also conducted to investigate the highest dropout rate with absenteeism and students being overage by two or more years academically. Absenteeism is a strong indicator for students who dropout (National High School Center, 2010). It is believed once a frequent number of absences occur; students feel they cannot catch up academically (White & Kelly, 2010).

### **Juvenile Delinquency and Criminal Charges Among Overage Students**

Juvenile delinquency is associated with students who become involved in illegal acts. Students who drop out of high school are subject to a life of crime committing acts of robbery, theft, and fraud (Salvatore, Henderson, Hiller, White, & Samuelson, 2010). The criminal charges have a negative effect on home and community where the perpetrators live. The problem that occurs for most teens is falling to peer pressure and gang affiliation as a way to survive (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2011).

Students who drop out of school will decrease the graduation rate of the cohort they are grouped with. Research suggests that many of the dropouts are overage and become their own victim because they lack the necessary skills and qualifications to meet minimum standards to function as a productive citizen (APA, 2010). It is believed that dropouts look for the support of family members, friends, and others as a means of self-worth before delinquency takes place.

Additionally, other factors to consider when juvenile delinquency occurs are

physical abuse of children, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and child neglect (Osgood, 2010). This is an issue that is associated with criminal behavior. Children who have experienced such treatment are subject to develop aggressive behavior or dysfunctional behavior. Juvenile delinquents experience more pressure to avoid negative behavior and making good decisions (Osgood, 2010). Findings would indicate that dropouts also had trouble with academics while they were enrolled in school (Osgood, 2010).

Peer pressure is a social factor that cripples students when they decide to drop out of school. Staff (2011) reported external factors as reasons why students fail to maintain good status in school. The concern with family structure, working long hours, extracurricular activities, and academic challenges force overage student to dropout. Also, their relationship with peers is a common cause aiding to juvenile and criminal charges (Staff, 2011). It is likely that dropouts face criminal charges as they approach adulthood as a result of neglecting their studies while in school.

### **Aggression Among Overage Students**

Aggression may be classified as potential harm caused to another person using physical or mental tactics to gain control of a situation. Research has viewed this type of behavior being more physical than mental (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Physical aggression may be displayed by pushing, kicking, or taking a person's personal property (Olwenus, 2011). An indirect form of aggressive behavior stems from students being excluded socially, usually involving name-calling or gossip (Olwenus, 2011).

Aggression is an important factor to consider as teachers encounter behavior problems with overage students. Overage students should self-regulate their ability

themselves to show that aggression is not an issue for them; however, there are early signs of aggression during childhood (O'Brennan & Leaf, 2010). Aggressive behaviors often leads to other social and emotional behavior problems (Raphael, Pressley, & Mohan, 2010), which create disciplinary issues for school officials. In addition to disciplinary challenges, overage students present teaching challenges in school. According to Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) novice teachers develop a feeling of discomfort and nervousness with aggression. There are challenges with transition from instruction and classroom management. Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) noted that teachers lack or lose confidence as the environment become unruly from acts of aggression.

The local school district retention rate has increased in recent years. The overage for grade creates an environment that is disruptive because of the aggressive behavior of students who have been retained 2 or more years (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). These researchers suggest that aggression affects student achievement in the classroom.

### **Emotional Needs Among Overage Students**

Overage students' emotional needs continue to contribute to problems in school and life (Cross, 2014). Emotionally disturbed students have a greater tendency to drop out of school and contribute to negative social aspect in life (Bowman-Perrott, Herrea, & Murry, 2010). Research has also found that the emotional needs of students are greater than student in the mainstream population (Cross, 2014). Students with emotional needs suffer with issues of depression and are unlikely to receive support in school. Failure to support the social-emotional needs of students may also lead to academic failure

(Whitted, 2011). Whitted also revealed that overage students with social-emotional needs do not receive adequate services to assist the problem of emotions. These students have a tendency to act out beyond control, become disobedient, and defy authority. The negative relationship also suggests poor academic performance among this population (Cross, 2014).

As a scholar practitioner, I examined the problem for this study with four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators to determine the best possible intervention strategies to improve student achievement of overage students. The problem at a local secondary school is student's failure to meet academic progress causing them to be overage. The review of literature of this paper critically analyzes the topic of overage students and a system to support relevance of the literature.

The topic of overage students is something that affects society. There has been some research that connects overage students with dropping out of school which may lead to criminal mischief. When the selected group of students engage in criminal acts they are sometimes jailed and become juveniles (Barbarin & Crawford, 2006). Society is aware that students drop out of school and become victims due to lack of educational skills. Despite the perception of overage students who drop out of school, there is a lack of research that is available on the overage population.

The school districts across the nation have tried different strategies to address issues concerning misbehavior in the classroom, bullying, academic failure, and emotional needs of students. For example, the Positive Behavior Intervention Support approach is being used as a treatment for multiple disciplinary issues (Barbarin &

Crawford, 2006). There is not enough research to determine if the strategy has been effective.

The relevance of this study is important to find strategies that will help decrease the number of drop outs and assist overage students with knowledge and skills needed to function in society. An increase in research on this topic may lead society into thinking the selected group of students are capable of thinking productivity and live a meaningful life. The intent of this study is to implement strategies to help server overage students so they become efficient with lifelong skills.

### **Implications**

The classroom may be the determining factor that propels overage students to a successful academic career. Focusing on the local school problem to implement the best possible intervention at the school at which this project study will take place presents opportunities for extended research. The implications related to family structure, challenging behavior, misbehavior, bullying, academic failure, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, aggression, and emotional needs may result in overage students' lack of knowledge and skills needed for social acceptance and academic success. Future studies may target overage students and collect data on the success of academics within this selected group.

The classroom is the command center in which educators establish clear and high expectations, exhibit leadership, and commit to guiding instruction to increase achievement scores (Mosley, Broyles, & Kaufman, 2014). The current situations for overage students who are two or more grade levels behind do not present an immediate

plan of action to improve their academic success. As a result of this project study, implementation of new intervention strategies may be a possible solution and may increase the success rate of academic achievement of overage students.

Teachers play a critical role in the dynamics of classroom management and moving students forward academically. The data collected show teachers how to overcome barriers of demographics and classroom management strategies of overage students. The data also revealed that teachers will need to implement strategies to ensure that students complete assignments in the classroom and result in improved academic achievement for overage students.

### **Summary**

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge about interventions that focus on the local school problem of overage students. Although there is existing research concerning overage students, few studies of the implementation of intervention strategies to increase student achievement among this selected group are available. The goal of this study is to identify intervention strategies that may improve the academic success of overage students based on the data collection and data analysis. The research questions ask teachers, counselors, and administrators to suggest the best approaches for interventions to improve the academic achievement of overage students in the target school. Section 2 will provide a description of the methodology for this project study. The methodology section will include a description about the participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis process.



## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers, counselors, and administrators' perceptions about interventions strategies to improve the academic performance of overage students at the local secondary school under study. A qualitative case study approach was used to examine the local problem. Case study is an in-depth exploration of specific events, processes, or individuals in a given time or place (Creswell, 2012). This type of design is used to explore situations that have no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 2013). In this study, I focused on an individual group of overage students in a specific high school and the perceptions of teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Quantitative research is empirical methodology that addresses data in numeric form (Arghode, 2012). In quantitative research the purpose is to test a hypothesis and the researcher relies on statistical analysis of data to present findings (Creswell, 2012). In this study, I chose to use a case study approach because statistical analysis is not appropriate for explore intervention strategies for the local problem of overage students. The conceptual framework was the basis for understanding how students develop meaning using their cognitive skills and their social interaction. The benefit of using a case study approach is that I can collect different types of data and gain a deeper understanding about the study's central phenomenon. I used the experiences of the participants to apply instructional strategies to improve the student achievement of overage students in the target school and to design my project.

Other types of case studies such as grounded theory, ethnographic designs, phenomenological research, and narrative designs were not selected because of the means by which the data are collected and because these approaches require prolonged engagement in the field (Gentles et al., 2014). A grounded theory approach is based on developing a theory from a number of individuals who experience an action, interaction, or process (Creswell, 2012). This type of research focuses on participants who have experienced a process, and the development of a theory is used to examine further research (Gentles et al., 2014). It was not my intention to develop a theory to implement intervention strategies for this study. This would imply an explanation of a possible solution to the local problem.

Ethnographic design focuses on studying one group and analyzing cultural beliefs (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). In this type of research patterns of participants who are associated with an entire culture are examined. Participants usually consist of a large group who are involved in interaction over a long period of time. Researchers who use ethnographic design describe the culture values and behaviors (Lodico, et al., 2010). I did not choose this approach because I am not looking for shared patterns of a group's culture.

Phenomenological research design describes the meaning for several individuals' lived experiences (Merriam, 2010). This design focuses on the similarities of all participants as they are studied in a phenomenon. The purpose is to identify the phenomenon through the lived experiences of the participants. This approach was not appropriate as an outcome for this study because I am not examining lived experiences.

Narrative research design focuses on describing ideas of a selected group based on an explanation of the individual's experience (Glesne, 2011). This design is used to tell stories by individuals about a central phenomenon. The lived experiences of individuals are discussed and analyzed by researchers, and written experiences are reported after collecting the data. I did not choose this approach because I am not examining outcomes of individuals' lived experiences.

Case study research design allows researchers to examine issues explored through one or more cases in a bounded system (Creswell, 2012). A case study approach was selected because I can focus on a single case. This type of design uses a product of inquiry for an in-depth explanation (Creswell, 2012). This approach allowed me to conduct an investigation using in-depth interviews that were audio-recorded with the use of a reflective journal to document data, so I could describe a case based on the themes collected from the data.

### **Participants**

I sought to elicit the perspectives of teachers, counselors, and administrators in the target school. I selected teacher participants based on their training and status as highly qualified to provide effective instructional strategies. Teachers have demonstrated the ability to improve and develop knowledge and skills students need to be able to function effectively in society. These teachers also have demonstrated the ability to plan, organize, and manage responsibility. The participants provided suggested intervention strategies that may be implemented to improve academic performance.

Counselors were selected because of their ability to track the progress of overage

students from year-to-year. Counselors are also able to provide assessment, communicate effectively, and use evaluation skills. Counselors have experience working as classroom teachers and understand the process of student advancement. Their experience with diversity can be an asset to understanding interventions needed for student growth.

Administrators were selected because all have worked as teachers, and some as counselors, and because they now serve as instructional leaders. Their well-rounded experience provided in-depth knowledge of interventions and practices needed to improve academic performance of overage students. It is my perspective that administrators are able to offer support, maintain accountability, and encourage innovative strategies for critical thinking and social development.

The participants for this study were purposely selected. Purposeful sampling is the process used to select the desired participants for research about the research topic (Creswell, 2012). The participants in this study were selected at the target school in the local school district. The selected participants consisted of secondary educators who have at least 5 years of teaching experience. The sample included four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators at the target school. The number of participants in case study research depends on the purpose of the research and the criteria for the case (Merriam, 2010). Creswell (2012) also noted that “it is typical in qualitative research to study few individuals” (p. 209). The objective is to capture in-depth information for a detailed explanation for the research. I contacted the participants via email following the approval of Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). In addition to seeking approval from the IRB, I submitted a description of the study and consent forms for

review.

Qualitative research requires an in-depth view of information to gather a deeper understanding about the investigation. According to Aldridge (2014), qualitative research is extensive and involves the use of interviews with participants. I received permission to conduct interviews with the selected participants by developing a consent form according to Walden University's IRB. The potential participants completed the consent form and returned via email. I viewed their responses. I organized those who agreed and those who disagreed to be part of the study. Once participants agreed to be part of the study, they received an email confirmation from me. I developed a rapport with the participants by introducing myself and explaining why I was interested in their perception about this study. Rapport is important in establishing an effective working relationship with participants (Flick, 2014). The establishment of rapport also to be balanced; as much or too little may distort participants' disclosures during interviews (Flick, 2014). I also sought to provide an environment that was trustworthy. The participants mutually agreed with the setting to conduct the interview session to ensure fair and just treatment. A comfortable environment allows the participant to feel at ease and speak freely during the interview process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2010).

The participants were interviewed in one-to-one interview session at a neutral site that was agreed upon by all parties. I asked the participants to meet at their scheduled time and briefed them on the purpose of the study. I began the interview session by asking questions related to the local school problem for this study. I used a list of 10 interview questions specifically outlined for the best possible intervention strategies to

improve student achievement of overage students. The allotted time for each interview session was 30 to 45 minutes.

I received permission from the local school district to conduct research associated with this study and requested a signed letter of approval from the local school officials granting me permission to begin the study. I developed the documents to be completed according to guidelines of Walden University's IRB (approval, #10-13-15-0261833). I contacted the selected participants via email. I explained their role in the study, purpose of the study, and the details of their confidentiality. The participants had three to five business days to respond to the consent form. I also asked them to respond with yes or no if they agreed to participate in the study. I contacted those individuals via email who agreed to participate and arranged a scheduled time for an interview session. The participants provided electronic signatures via email verifying their consent to participate in the study.

Ethical behavior represents a set of moral principles, rules, or standards about the person or profession (Kilic & Aydogan, 2013). In other words, a person should do good and avoid wrong. Several principles associated with research that involve human subjects are essential to protection of individuals (Biggs, 2010). The principles of not doing harm, privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent are issues to which the researcher should pay attention while involved in the research. The principle of not doing harm provides safety during the research process (Langlois, 2011).

I guaranteed privacy and confidentiality for individuals participating in this study. I removed any information that may identify participants' data. I ensured that

participants' information was not given to anyone else. I secured the participants' information in a computer program in my home that stores data and distribute information to participants about how I protected their confidentiality. The names of participants were not being given. They were referred to as T1, C1, and A1. I explained the purpose and procedures of the research. I asked participants to give their informed consent for the study. I explained to participants that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time from this study.

### **Data Collection**

The participants in this study consisted of four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators. I contacted all participants via email and ask if they were interested in participating in this study. Those who agreed to participate received a consent form two days following their agreement. The consent form provided background information about the study, procedures, description of voluntary information, risk and benefits, confidentiality, compensation, contact information, and statement of consent. The participants had three days to return the consent form. The participants who agreed received information via email confirming their scheduled meeting. We agreed on a neutral setting that is comfortable to the participants for the interview. I explained at the meeting the purpose of the study and what participating in this study entails. A list of interview questions that focused on the local problem of overage students was used to collect data (See Appendix B). For this study, I collected data in the form of interviews and a reflective journal. I kept track of data and emerging patterns from the data collected in a reflective journal. The journal allowed me to describe how the research was being

conducted in the study. I also used the journal to ask additional questions and maintain a place to take notes throughout the interview process to provide additional information for data analysis. I used member checking to illuminate any biases.

I interviewed the participants separately. I conducted interviews over a 2-to-4 week period. Each interview with the participants will lasted 30 to 45 minutes to allow participants to speak freely and share ideas in a comfortable setting. I audio recorded the interviews and took notes. I reminded participants that they may take a break if necessary. I also reminded them of their privacy rights and right to withdraw anytime without penalty. When the data have been collected, I compiled and organized the information received from each participant. I kept the data in separate folders locked in a file cabinet at my house, so information can be secured and organized for analysis away from the work environment.

In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is to collect data from human subjects using an instrument (Quinn, Kass, & Thomas, 2013). For this study the instrument consisted of a list of interview questions (See Appendix B). Expressing any expectations and experiences that affect the research is important (Quinn et al., 2013). Researchers need to disclose any relevant information about them, including any biases or assumptions. The researcher also needs to keep accurate notes to reflect on personal interviews, insights into the past, current relationships, and how bracketing takes place. Bracketing refers to the process where the researcher reflects and set aside ideas, experiences, or biases to best understand the problem being studied (Plano, Clark & Creswell, 2012).



My role as the researcher in this study was to select participants, schedule interviews, take notes, audiorecorded, and analyze, data presented by each participant. The participants were purposely selected so I can understand information presented about the case study (Creswell, 2012). Once I received information from the participants, I developed a schedule for interview sessions with appropriate dates and times for each individual. When each interview was complete, I organized the data, coded the responses, and looked for themes and patterns.

I became interested in the local problem of overage students after experiencing a large population of students repeating acts of misbehavior. My passion with the local problem was to examine the participants to determine the best possible intervention strategies to improve student achievement and social skills. I used member checking to ensure accuracy and credibility. I work as an assistant principal in the local school district. I have no authority over the offsite participants. I have never worked with the participants. The participants are employed at a different location in the local school district. The data collection process for this study used interviews to collect information to determine intervention strategies for overage students.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data have been collected, I analyzed the information by reading the interviews and listening to the audio-recorded tape. I re-read the information from the note taking and listen several times to the recording and make notes for later use. I focused on the analysis of the data by reading the research question to ensure the data collected provides sufficient information for analysis. Next, I conducted data analysis by

categorizing the information to identify themes or patterns. According to Creswell (2012) themes and patterns are ideas, concepts, and behaviors that bring meaning to words. I used codes next to words to identify themes or ideas that I find. This helped me organize the data into categories. Then, I identified patterns that were connected within the categories. Patterns that occurred within categories were used to summarize information. Finally, I interpreted the data and presented the findings. I reexamined the research question to determine the important information to be presented to others. I focused on what is important, why it is important, and what can be learned from the data. The presentation of the data may be in narrative or graphic form, using tables or visual images.

To determine accuracy and credibility of findings for this research, I needed to follow all procedures outlined by the IRB. I also needed to use a strategy to validate the findings. In this case study, I used member checks for validity. Validation of research in qualitative research requires the researcher to determine accuracy of findings through member checks (Creswell, 2012). Member checking is the process of sharing the interview draft of findings with the research participant to ensure their own ideas are presented accurately (Mercer, 2010). Member checks also allow participants to clear up any of their responses that may have been misunderstood. Each participant had the opportunity to review the draft of the findings and correct their own data represented in the findings of their interview. The participants were asked if they agreed with the transcribed responses during a one on one meeting. An additional 15 minutes was allotted so the participants had ample time to review their responses. The participants were given

time to clarify any misunderstandings and to ensure accuracy of the data. I used the responses to present themes for this study. Accuracy and credibility is important to the data analysis process (Creswell, 2012).

I addressed discrepant cases by engaging in dialogue with the participants in this study. I realized that each participant's view varied and his or her perspective will not be the same. I disclosed discrepant cases in the data collection and data analysis process. This process allowed me to present valid findings and has a deeper understanding about the study so that results produced are accurate and valid.

To enhance the credibility of this study, triangulation was used to ensure that data were and findings are credible (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), "Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research (p. 259)". Interviewing more than one participant helped with triangulation. A research journal with field notes helped triangulate the data. The participants provided information for this study to be collected and analyzed. According to Creswell (2010), triangulation will increase accuracy and credibility by reviewing the evidence to support the theme.

### **Research Findings**

The research for this project study was conducted by using an interview process with each participant. According to Merriam (2009), interviews are necessary when researchers are examining events that have already happened. The data were tracked by using a journal to take notes and audio record. I started by reading and rereading the data to look for a recurring theme or pattern. I also listen to the audio recordings to ensure the

transcribing of the notes were accurate. The common themes were color coded to detect a dominant pattern among the participants' responses. The responses given by the participants were to address the research questions:

### **Research Question 1**

What do teachers, counselors, and administrators suggest as the best approach to improve academic performance of overage students in the target school?

**Findings Among Teachers.** The teachers at the secondary school in this study revealed that small group instruction, smaller class sizes, and one-to-one intervention would be the best approach to improve academic performance. In addition, T1, T3, T4 believe real-world application and visual aids are critical to the success of academic performance.

T1 mentioned that she tries to keep students intrinsically motivated by giving them constant feedback on success or failure. This teacher also said, "I also give students at least two positive praises per class". This is believed to help students become confident in their abilities. According to Droe (2013), students who receive verbal praise has been examined and found to affect motivation and contributes to success.

T1 suggested the best approach to improving academic performance of overage students is to gain an understanding of personalities, learning styles, academic goals, and create lessons that model real-world application. This will be conducted using small group instruction. T1 said, "Students will be given the opportunity to complete a self-assessment inventory". This is a tool used by students to provided information to their teachers so the teacher understands the students' background. T1 said, "I will revisit

students' goals mid-semester to check progress and then set new goals for the next semester". This is an effort to gain a better understanding of how to help the students improve academic performance. T1 also described how the self-assessment will guide her small group instruction and develop her lesson plans.

T2 in this study suggested peer-grouping and the development of problem-solving as skills needed to participate in small group instruction. This teacher wanted to be able to lead a professional learning community so a collaborative effort is made to improve the selected student's ability to perform at a high level of proficiency. According to Brodie (2013), a professional learning community is intended to produce pedagogical learning by teachers. Teachers will participate on a voluntary basis to determine the best practices to improve student performance.

T2 suggested using instructional strategies that access students' prior knowledge to create new knowledge, modeling, and creating peer groups. The students should be grouped so all groups are able to reach some level of success or growth. T2 believes that students should be allowed opportunities to be successful. T2 said, "A conscience effort should be made to provide learning opportunities that promotes success in the classroom". She believes students will gain confidence as they are able to provide correct responses or they are productive in their role. She stressed the importance of student-centered activities have been proven to work best in her classroom. T2 said, "During team meetings, I share my lessons and activities with my colleagues on small group instruction. I do this so teachers are exposed to another approach to instruction". This

teacher expects her students to actively participate on a daily basis. She believes the experience is most helpful when students are tested.

T3 explained the he makes and attempt to improve academic performance by exploring opportunities to investigate abstract and concrete thinking. The content of the material is presented using age appropriate material to explain the objective of the lesson. T3 said, “Explicit instruction is provided so students can provide feedback on topics and ask questions for understanding”. The teacher stressed his approach to improve academic performance focused on individual and peer grouping. He believes that grouping of students helps the students with interaction and student engagement. He said, “Often times peer grouping helps with learning because students get tired of hearing from the teacher”. He also believes that students can learn from one another.

T4 explained that teachers need to allow students time to brainstorm about different lessons, compare and contrast, and group opportunities to provide practice for critical thinking. The use of open-ended questions in small group settings will allow students to make a connection with the lesson. She placed emphasis in the instrumental strategy of think-pair-share using small group instruction so students can work with their peers. She believed that working with peers gives overage student the opportunity to process information from others like themselves. Teachers want to be instrumental in being creative with instructional practices.

**Findings Among Counselors.** C1 and C2 both agreed that overage students need a smaller setting. They believe a smaller setting is more conducive to learning and has a better controlled environment. It was explained that teachers could provide more

engagement and interaction needed to support learning opportunities. Learning opportunities exist when teachers introduce new task and concepts for a chance to develop a skill (Planas, 2013).

In addition to a smaller group setting, C1 and C2 stressed the importance of implementing a learning path to track academic success for overage students. This process would involve examining the selected population's academic profile, set goals, and provide teachers with the data so the best instructional approach is delivered to meet their individual needs. C1 said, "I strongly recommend small group instruction". Small group instruction provides intense instruction so students have more opportunities to practice and respond (Ledford & Worley, 2013). C1 believes there are more advantages to learning as teachers plan to approach instruction with background information of overage students.

Once students are transition into small groups, teachers may use the technique of scaffolding. When students are to perform or complete a given task by the teacher, scaffolding is gradually taken away (Valkenburg, 2015). This technique allows the responsibility of learning to move from the teacher to the students. C1 said, "This would be beneficial to overage students who struggle with reading and comprehension. Both skills would be needed to function in small group activities; however, it could be the sole basis for building confidence in learning".

The teacher as the facilitator of learning has an opportunity to combine small group instruction and scaffolding. This instructional practice will provide a supportive learning environment for overage students (Valkenburg, 2015). The supportive

environment will allow overage students to ask questions, provide feedback, and support one another with learning opportunities. Teachers should be more engaged in the learning process and share the responsibility of moving students to a higher level of proficiency. C1 mentioned, “The teacher demonstrates the learning first, the class second, and the group completes the activity third”. C1 also said, “This activity can be done individually”.

C2 focused on the fact that these young people would soon become adults. C2 looked at the classroom as the tool needed to develop self-motivating skills in conjunction with small group instruction. C2 believed overage students would develop their own bond because of a smaller group setting. C2 said, “The classroom is used to grow students so they are encouraged to succeed academically”. C2 stressed instructional approaches to be used to create independent judgment would be how teachers use instruction, learning from mistakes, and setting goals.

Developing ways to provide information to students is critical in the learning process. According to Regan (2013), teachers need to organize their class in groups that it requires students to work on independent activities. This will create an environment that all students are not working on the same activity at the same time. C2 said, “This concept of instruction gives students the chance to improve their judgment”. Overage students are then forced to concentrate on the learning objective.

Learning from mistakes also equips student with the capacity to improve their judgment. C1 said, “Teachers should be held accountable for correcting mistakes”. She believes incorrect responses will help teachers develop better lessons and plan for better



instruction. She also said, “Teachers should allow students to revise their paper to improve their writing”. This strategy is also considered to be influential improving students’ judgment.

C1 and C2 both agreed students who strive to reach a goal will show improvement in judgment. Once overage students are group accordingly, teachers should set expectations of the activity. Students should be given a task to complete so they reach their desired goal. C1 said, “Students can become motivated and encouraged to reach a level of success by the teacher. C2 said, “Students should be tested to show their understanding of the assignment”. This strategy can be done by groups or individual assessment to determine if a level of proficiency has been met. This process should be included to fulfill the purpose of small group activities, building peer relationships, and improving judgment of overage students.

**Findings Among Administrators.** A1 believed the best approach to providing instructional practices with overage students is to remain consistent with smaller settings. A1 said, “In his sixteen years as an administrator he has mentored teachers on how to develop instructional strategies that are effective”. He stressed that regardless of the students age, overage students will adhere to structure and order as it relates to small group instruction. A1 further believes students will become more responsive to instruction because of the dynamics of the classroom. He then explained that small settings create opportunities for high-order thinking. A1 finally mentioned the benefit for students who participate in small group settings will develop the listening, sharing, and having respect for a positive classroom environment.

Academic engagement of students may come naturally because students grow and develop as they mature. Teachers also play an important role in engaging students in classroom activities and assignments. According to Wentzel (2015), engaging students in lessons are critical to understanding the objective of what is to be learned from the lesson. A1 said, "Teachers must incorporate activities that are hands-on so overage students are exposed to a variety of ways to learn". He believes the small group setting is an ideal situation to involve student engagement. This skill will engage students in the process of listening and understanding of the proposed activity. Students who take advantage of this skill often engage in a back-and-forth process during conversation (Wentzel, 2015). A1 also explained that the lack of listening can cause a misunderstanding when students are engaged in their lesson.

A2 believes the first step for teachers is to identify what hinders overage students learning. He also suggests the best approach for overage students would utilize a small setting. During the interview session, A2 said there should be a connection with the district's suggested alternative to achieve student's success among this group. He believes that administrators at the school and district level need to make systematic changes to reduce the dropout rate. A2 said, "Making schools more personal by implementing smaller and supportive learning environments will provide meaningful curricula". As a result, A2 stressed the fact that quality teaching enhances the learning process. A collaborative effort among the teachers to improve small group instruction, interventions, and supplemental programs will have a direct impact on student performance.

A2 talked about key approaches that could lead teachers into an area of differentiated instruction to meet the need of overage students. A2 said, “I would align goals to improve student achievement, create a positive environment, and maintain standards of high achievement”. Teachers would be encouraged to use data to drive instruction during their small group setting. The development of teaching and learning to create small group setting would focus on overage students. Teachers have the opportunity to collaborate and participate in professional development opportunities. A2 agreed that administrators are instrumental in establishing strategies that are implemented school-wide to meet the learning needs of students. According to A2, the implementation of school-wide strategies helps to improve instruction and increased collaboration among the teachers.

A2 described how the use of data from the group of students guided the teachers’ instruction. The data was very specific and targeted the needs of student learning. A2 also said, “Teachers were able to share information with their students which help students understand what was expected of them”. A2 mentioned that teacher should use the data from standardized test scores to group students according to their ability. The test scores identify these students as ready, close, and not ready. Each group is color coded signifying green for ready, yellow for close, and red for not ready. A2 stressed that teachers should drive their instruction in small opportunity to engage in activities that meet the learners’ needs. A2 said, “The data is so valuable because it helps implement strategic lesson plans to target areas of weakness among students”. A2 also said, “It identifies the specific standards that the students did not master”.

**Summary of Findings.** All of the participants agreed that small group instruction or a smaller setting is needed so the selected group of students is successful academically. The teachers revealed that student motivation as key to fostering learning opportunities. T1, T2, and T4 all agreed that accessing students' prior knowledge is helpful with guiding instruction. This strategy will allow teachers to group overage students according to their ability during small group instruction. T3 stressed the importance of constructing knowledge using critical thinking skills. C1 and C2 placed emphasis on developing an academic plan to monitor the progress of overage students. The counselors believed that this step will be critical in moving overage students forward. As a result of working in small groups, the students should be assisted using scaffolding technique and setting obtainable goals. According to Ching (2013), teachers can use this technique for support and monitor the behavior of students in class. Both administrators believe that a smaller setting is the best approach to improve academic performance of overage students. Chetty (2011) noted that smaller class sizes produces favorable results and increases student achievement. Administrators 1 and 2 are instrumental in analyzing and interpreting data to drive instruction so teachers understand what areas of improvement are needed to increase student performance. The administrators said that a collaborative effort among the teachers would strengthen the effort of working towards the same common goal of improving student engagement. According to Fredrickson (2013), research revealed that students achieved more when working in groups.

The answer to this research question is to use small group instruction, smaller settings, and smaller environment to improve academic performance of overage students.

According to Stiefel et al., (2015), small classes have a positive effect on the cognitive skills of students. All participants provided information to form a small community through instruction to provide overage students with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful academically. The participants in this study suggested the best approach as implementing instruction to involve overage students so they can rely on peers, ability, and have fewer distractions in class during small group instruction. The participants also believe that teachers will be able to focus on those specific standards were this population of students did not reach a high level of proficiency and teach to the standards for academic growth.

### **Research Question 2**

What do teachers, counselors, and administrators suggest as the best approach to improve academic engagement of overage students in the target school?

**Findings Among Teachers.** The teachers at the secondary school in this study revealed that students should be introduced to concepts that involve real-world application. Real-world application offers students' concepts that are authentic to produce real-world outcomes (Herrington et al., 2014). They believed this is the best approach due to the age of the students and their academic background. T1, T3, and T4 addressed the fact that once that overage students graduate real-world concepts will be much needed for them.

T1 talked about student engagement as a novelty that is much needed for student success. T1 said, "I have to use age appropriate examples that apply to real-world real-life application to engage students in learning". Student engagement allows students the

opportunity to interact with one another, so there is a connection from peers that develops a sense of trust and belonging (Warren, 2012). T1 further explained that students are able to make a connection when concepts are applied to situations overage students can identify with. Using student engagement to promote learning and interaction among students create a positive learning environment (Warren, 2012). T1 said, “I use examples that are directly associated with careers or jobs”. She said the students need to understand that their education is important and one day they will be looking for employment. T1 feels student engagement is a very important part of academic promotion.

T2 said, “The best approach to student engagement is to use materials that spark the students’ interest”. The students are actively engaged when se use manipulatives that corresponds to the lesson. Students often want to use a hands-on approach oppose to writing all the time. T2 said, “The use of manipulatives gives students a chance to use concrete thinking”. According to Love and Macket (2013), manipulatives provides a tangible concept to aid instruction and provide students with the ability to think critically. This strategy is employed so students are able to apply this skill during assessments.

T3 and T4 suggested that student engagement play a role with academics as well as behavior. T3 said, “When students know they are going to be engaged in activities, they will focus more on the task at hand”. Hu and Liden (2014) mentioned that students who are engaged in the class assignment show growth in their ability. This has transitioned into improved test scores and a positive classroom environment. T4 mentioned the use of technology to increase student engagement. Students have an opportunity to use the smartboard. T4 also said, “Students have an opportunity to lead the

lesson and explain the various steps to solving an equation”. This type of student engagement has led to confidence when completing individual assignments.

**Findings Among Counselors.** C1 talked about the various ways she supports teaches with student engagement. C1 discussed that her role with student engagement include helping understand students, academic advice, listening, and guiding students’ decision making. C1 said, “School counselors can be a valuable source to teachers with student engagement. We are able to look at past scores and provide this information to teachers. It will guide teacher’s lesson planning to include student engagement”. She feels the best approach to student engagement is to get to know the students’ academic profile and develop a plan for academic success. C1 also stressed the importance of knowing the students strengths and weaknesses. C1 one said, “Once this step has taken place, students should be given explicit instructions on how to engage in their lesson”.

C1 strongly feels that schools are instrumental in the academic success of overage students. C1 said, “I take a special interest in students who have failed because I want to see them succeed. Therefore, it is critical to track their academic plan and monitor them”. C1 talked about her role in solving problems that interfere with student engagement. She enjoys collaborating with teachers, students, and parents. She encourages student engagement during her classroom visits and talk to students about career options.

C2 believes the best approach to student engagement is keeping the students connected with learning. She explained that teachers can help overage students feel good about school and why education is valuable. C2 said, “Student engagement is necessary to generate students’ interest. Students engagement has to appeal to the sense of the child

to make a connection”. C2 discussed that connection has to start with a sincere commitment from teachers and focus on meeting the standards being taught. C2 said, “We are responsible for helping overage students reach their potential. Therefore, student engagement has to be part of the teacher’s instructional practice”.

C2 stressed that student can engage in learning by understanding how things work in the real-world. The best approach that teacher might use include videos, visual aids, documentaries, experiments, and modeling. These concepts will provide a visual presentation and overage students will have an opportunity to see the reality of life situations and remain connected to their learning. Myers (2012) noted that students who create their own projects have a higher level of commitment to learning. Teachers can also take an active role with student engagement by role playing, cooperative learning, journals, and goal setting for academic success.

**Findings Among Administrators.** A1 believes that student engagement is enhance through small group instruction. A1 mentioned the inaction between students is the first step on small group instruction that aids student engagement. A1 said, “The teachers materials associated with the lesson will encourage student engagement. As a result of students participating in the activity, this will transpire into learning”. A1 talked about the process of developing and growing students academically. He believes that student engagement comes from a variety of activities that are implemented by the teacher. A1 said, “The teacher is responsible for constructing knowledge and building on the cognitive skills of students”. A1 also said, “When student engagement is effective there should be an increase in test scores”.



A1 believes the best approach to student engagement is to have lessons and activities that are interesting and fun. A1 said, “Learning should be fun to children. They will take a special interest when learning is fun”. A1 mentioned that some of the activities needed to support student engagement should be concepts related to life, games, manipulatives, technology, projects, and modeling. A1 expressed that students are more likely to take ownership when they are directly involved in the lesson.

A2 spoke in the manner that some activities for student engagement should involve movement. A2 said, “When teachers plan their lessons, they should find ways to incorporate movement”. A2 provided the example that students could answer questions by using different colored highlighters. The students would highlight words from the word wall to show the correct responses. Another opportunity would be to let students use their feet to answer questions. Answers would be placed around the room and the students would have to stand by the correct response. A2 said, “Although the movement is minimal, this is a strategy I used when I was teaching to keep the students engaged in the lesson”. Williams and Williams (2012) mentioned that movement in the classroom gave students ownership of a lesson. Research also suggests that students paid more attention and there was an increase in participation when movement was allowed (Williams & Williams, 2012).

A2 believes the best approach to student engagement would involve service or project based learning. A2 said, “This gives students an opportunity to connect with real-world concepts, peer grouping, and build community relations”. According to Warren (2012), service-learning has a positive effect on student achievement and also helps to

develop personal and social outcomes. This approach may be ideal for overage students simply because it will help them build interpersonal skills and character. A2 said, “The students will be able to take what they learned from the field experience and relate it to the classroom”. The students will be actively engaged in the learning process. This concept and skill will help them with classroom lessons and assignments.

**Summary of Findings.** T1, C2, and A2 believe that real-world application is essential for student engagement. Basic literacy skills are beneficial to the success of students as productive citizens (Jonassen, 2011). The belief is that overage students will make a connection from the classroom to real-world to help prepare them for life. These three educators play different roles; however, they are instrumental in teaching, monitoring, and promotion aspect with the students. According to Brozovic and Matz (2009), real-world application help students build social skills and improve problem-solving skills. Real-world application is also believed to be the eye-opener for students who have failed academically. Students who are exposed to real-world assignments perform higher than those students who do not engage in real-world assignments (Karpiak, 2011). This strategy will allow teachers to stress the importance and value of education.

T2, T3, T4, and A1 say student engagement is based on the interest of the students. They believe that students will become more engaged based on the interest they have in the activity. It is critical that teachers plan instruction to meet the needs of students so they are engaged in the learning process.

C1 stressed a role in collaboration as key to student engagement. C1 believes collaborating with students, teachers, and parents will help with student engagement. The thought is to include everyone so the students stay on track with learning and everyone is involved in the learning.

The answer to this research question is to use real-world application, collaboration, and incorporate movement to improve student engagement of overage students. The instructional practice of real-world provides opportunities for students to develop logical reasoning to problem-solve (DeLuca, 2011). The participants believe a variety of activities should be implemented to address student engagement of overage students. The participants suggest instructional practices should appeal to the interest of this population of students and target instructional strategies that overage students can identify with in the classroom. Teacher observations allow for immediate feedback, so real-world skills can be implemented to improve student learning. In addition, the participants agree that this population of students need to be exposed to multiple ways to engage students in learning activities.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

Section 3 includes information about the project for this study. In this section, I address the problem of academic failure among overage students. An explanation of the suggested intervention strategy for improving student performance was given by participants. I used a qualitative, case study, research design. The research question that I sought to answer was, What do teachers, counselors, and administrators suggest as the best approach for improving the academic performance of overage students in the target school? I used interviews to collect data. I organized and categorized the results of these interviews in an effort to identify specific patterns or themes. The data analysis included findings that suggest small group instruction is the best intervention strategy for improving academic performance among overage students. Using study findings, I developed a white paper to convey my recommendations and proposal.

I considered two other approaches to present this information: professional development training and curriculum development training. Professional development was not appropriate because it would have required training of all stakeholders prior to acceptance by local school representatives. Curriculum development was not appropriate for this project because standards were not developed as guides for teachers, college and career ready objectives were not established, or design for advance placement courses were not needed.

I determined that a white paper was the best way to provide school officials at my study site with research-based information that is adequate to meet the individual needs

their of students. The findings revealed a suggested strategy based on the results from the data analysis for this study that may be effective in increasing student achievement. It is important that all stakeholders understand that small group instruction is an intervention that may help the targeted school meet its academic goals. It is important that the leadership team promote small group instruction to gain teacher buy-in and implement the strategy school-wide. I wrote the white paper so that is used to suggest an instructional strategy, so the school's leadership team as well as and district leaders would be aware of an intervention that could be used to improve the academic performance of overage students at the study site.

Pershing (2015) defined a white paper as a persuasive essay that is based on facts and useful information. A white paper is used to provide an explanation for a solution to a problem (Stelzner, 2013). A white paper may be used to introduce new changes in education (Lumby, 2014). It is published to inform readers of a planned strategy to support reform for educational practices. A white paper has an agenda for change and meaning of the suggested strategies to improve the current situation in school. According to Lumby (2014), the changes are related to teaching, leadership, curriculum, and assessment of schools.

I choose to use a white paper approach for this project to expand on what I found in the course of conducting my investigation. The purpose of my project was to identify instructional strategies that were suggested as the best practice to improve student performance of overage students. The white paper provides information about what small group instruction is, why it should be used, how it should be implemented, and what role

teacher's should play in carrying out this instructional practice. It includes an introduction, a list of questions, recommendations, and a conclusion.

### **Review of the Literature**

The literature review for this project study provides an analysis of the local problem and information used to guide the development of the project for this study. The project for this study is a white paper. The suggested strategy from teachers, counselors, and administrators was revealed in the findings described in Section 2. The literature review involves intervention strategies proposed by teachers, counselors, and administrators to improve student performance. In the white paper, I explain why and how the local problem can be addressed based on the data analysis. An intervention strategy to improve student performance of overage students was small group instruction to increase student engagement. I discuss how small group instruction can be used as a research-base strategy, how smaller class sizes affect students learning, and how real-world application helps meet learner's needs. In the literature review, I also present research showing the positive effects that critical thinking and problem-solving skills have on student learning. I used information gleaned from my literature review to develop the project for this study.

I used Education Research Complete, ProQuest Central, EBSCO, and Google Scholar to research articles about my study. The literature review for my white paper project includes information about white paper, small group instruction, smaller class size, real-world application, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. The information presented will be from peer-reviewed journal articles with the past 5 years.

## **White Paper**

The concept of a white paper was to address official government business. A white paper may be used to introduce new changes in education (Lumby, 2014). A white paper is published to set a planned strategy to support reform for educational practices. The information included in this white paper has an agenda and meaning for the suggested strategies to improve the current situation in a school. According to Lumby (2014), the implementation process is associated with teaching, leadership, curriculum, and assessment of schools. The teachers, counselors, and administrators who participated in my study would be directly responsible for implementing the proposed changes. The findings from Section 2 were addressed in the white paper (see Appendix A). After the participants were interviewed, I reviewed the data for analysis to develop the components of a white paper for this study. The development of the white paper project gave me the opportunity to share information with the intended personnel at the local school. The white paper presents information that is beneficial to improving student performance of overage students at the target school.

An explanation in this white paper was provided to share information on small group instruction why it should be implemented. Small group instruction is an instructional strategy used to develop critical thinking skills for problem-solving (Jones, 2013). The white paper for this study presented how to implement small group instruction and the teacher's role in the classroom. The teachers, counselors, and administrator's analysis of the findings were checked for validity by using member checks. Member check is the process used to provide feedback on the participants' findings from the

interview sessions (Merriam, 2009). In this white paper, recommendations were made on how to implement small group instruction for effective use in the classroom.

A white paper is a document used by organizations to share information about a particular service (Mattern, 2013). This white paper expresses a recommended policy for an instructional practice to improve student achievement of overage students. According to Stelzner (2013), a well-developed white paper can have a positive influence on the target audience. The use of this white paper will be beneficial to teachers, counselors, and administrators in the local school district with the purpose of gaining buy-in so the best instructional practice is implemented and recommendations are used from this recommended policy.

A white paper is a report typically utilized by a government to convey information. The writers would use this genre to make a specific choice about a problem. A white paper would address a particular audience to propose a solution to a problem. White papers have become a tool for organizations to sell products as a solution to meet their customer needs (Kantor, 2009). The purpose of a white paper is to advocate the best way to solve a particular problem (Kantor, 2009). Points raised in a white paper may influence the decision-making process for its intended audience.

The reading of literature allowed me to gain a better understanding of a white paper. I learned that there are four types of white paper. White papers may be developed for technical, business benefits, hybrid technical/business benefits, or government. A technical white paper is written to target engineers (Butler, 2015). They are used to describe a process and procedures in detail. This type of white paper is associated with



sales. A business benefit white paper focuses on decision-making in management positions (Butler, 2015). This type of white paper is written to demonstrate businesses would have when they implement solutions to generate leads. A hybrid technical/business benefit white paper is a combination strategy to lead the sales process in decision-making. A government white paper is a document that discusses the implementation of policies (Butler, 2015).

The type of white paper matters because it helps people make decisions based on the intended purpose of the white paper. The decision that will be made is critical to the success of the organization. According to Lumby and Muijs (2014), the white paper's recommendations help reach the target audience. A white paper should be written persuasively so it is effective and reaches the appropriate person to make a rational decision.

I chose to do a white paper to suggest a policy for this project to inform local stakeholders about small group instruction as an instructional strategy to improve academic performance. Lumby and Muijs (2014) noted a white paper responds to the development of highlighted findings that are important to building a connection to a problem. In my white paper, I discussed issues related to the local problem and made recommendations to solve the problem.

White papers are useful for informing personnel about meaningful information to help support change. An important aspect of a white paper is its ability to influence educators to use the recommendations to improve the current situation of an organization. Lumby and Muijus (2014) stated that a white paper should be used as a tool to deliver

information to the appropriate audience. A white paper was the appropriate source used to inform local school officials about my findings and recommendations.

### **Small Group Instruction**

The implementation of small group instruction has been suggested as an approach to improve student performance among overage students. Teachers have been concerned about improving instruction to increase student achievement (Jones, 2013). According to (Jones, 2013), effective small group intervention can reduce the number of struggling readers to less than 5% of the school's population. It was explained the small group instruction should focus on skills that build on learning theories that identify differences in student's ability. Skill centered activities will allow students to construct information which will help develop their cognitive skills (Lane, 2015) and make small group instruction important.

Why is small group instruction important? Research has demonstrated the use and benefits of small group instruction using explicit instruction during intensive lessons. Teachers use differentiated instruction to focus on specific skills needed by children (Morgan, 2014). Teachers may use research-based strategies to develop student's intellectual skills, so they are equipped with the knowledge needed for academic success. To meet the need of students in small groups, teachers plan their practice for student engagement using reading centers, literacy lessons, and hands-on activities to promote critical thinking (Morgan, 2014).

Reading and literacy lessons are implemented with small group instruction to provide a social contact (De Jesus, 2012). This allows the teacher and student an

opportunity to work together closely. The social interaction also plays a critical role in developing the cognitive skills for reading. The aspect of having fewer students invites more questions for students to ask and teachers with more chances to provide feedback. Social interactions and cognitive development is a benefit of small group instruction.

The small group approach to improving student performance enables the teacher to develop plans that meet the need of students. According to Wasik (2008), small group instruction is more effective than whole group instruction. Teachers use differentiated instruction to meet each student's need, plan for instruction based on the student's ability, and respond to students efficiently. Teachers who planned to use small group instruction mentioned that it is easier and effective than whole group instruction (Wasik, 2008). Working with students in a small group helps the teacher recognize the deficiencies of each student.

### **Smaller Class Size**

The relationship of student-teacher class size has a direct impact on student learning. Research has presented information that students learn more and teachers are more effective in smaller classes. The result of having smaller classes produces positive student outcomes and raises the level of academic achievement (Chetty, 2011). Research has also indicated that students in their early years perform better in smaller classes (Fredriksson, 2015). Smaller class sizes are a benefit for both the teacher and students for academic success.

The classroom environment will vary based on the class size. According to Stiefel et al. (2015), class size has an effect on cognitive outcomes. When classes are reduced

there has been an increase in student performance and cognitive ability. The results of analysis contribute to teachers showing more accountability for student learning and the instruction from teachers is easier to follow. The class size is conditionally a way to measure how parents, teachers, and policy makers measure academic success.

Reducing class sizes can be a very popular education policy. According to the research done on class size, Gary-Bobo (2013) mentioned there are still some implications that are unknown. It is critical that policymakers use accurate information to ensure the academic success of students when establishing class size for student-teacher ratio. The success of student learning becomes the focal point in the decision if small classes in our school. Teachers will be able to provide individualized instruction and pay more attention to discipline (Chingo, 2013).

Classroom observation of teachers has also indicated that smaller class sizes give students tailored instruction and achievement increases. Students have a tendency to behave better and pay more attention in smaller settings (Blatchford, 2011). A smaller setting makes it difficult for troublemakers to interrupt lessons because they are not able to hide in a reduced classroom. Smaller class sizes also have a big impact on students when teachers get the support they need from administrators. The administrative support will encourage teachers to be effective in how they teach and how they interact with students.

### **Real-World Application**

Real-world application is used in classrooms to help meet the learning needs of students. Students are exposed to electronic devices that are instrumental in many aspects

of life. According to Owens (2013), electronic devices such as laptops, desk tops, mobile phones and tablets are needed to help all students become college and career ready. The instructional support from the teacher using real-world application will help prepare students for life. Real-world application in the classroom will also play a key role in closing the achievement gap.

The need to develop a real-world application in the classroom will translate to solving problems for students. According to Jonassen (2011), the basic skills of reading and writing are essential to real-world application in preparing students to function in society. The basic skills of reading and writing are necessary even on a low skill job (Jonassen, 2011). Teachers' evaluations and learning experiences provide a key component to students developing real-world skills to enhance student performance for the workplace (Belland, 2013). Many employees may view real-world application as a means to meeting the demand for staffing. There remains a focus on instructional needs to foster learning among the students.

The instructional need for learning real-world application can lead students to be prepared for college and careers. Students need to be highly skilled and competent in their abilities to be productive in the real-world (DeLuca, 2011). Students will be able to meet highly proficient skill by developing literacy skills using project-based learning. As a result of this instructional practice, students become proficient using logical reasoning to solve real-life situations (DeLuca, 2011). As they engage in these practices they develop critical thinking skills that can be applied to real-world applications. A statistical knowledge study was conducted to engage students in real-world assignments. According

to Karpiak (2011), students who were engaged in these assignments scored higher on their exams compared to those students who were not engaged in real-world assignments. The students used in this exercise were able to transfer knowledge with accuracy based on the concepts they were learning in the classroom while refining their critical thinking skills.

Research revealed that it is important to address real-world application in the classroom, so students are equipped with the skills needed to function as learners. It has been emphasized that learning a skill must be developed and appropriate for specific students (Wormeli, 2014). This concept of learning is known as the zone of proximal development and describes the difference between what a learner can do with and without help from a teacher (Vygotsky, 1978). The task given by the teacher is slightly hard for students to do on their own, but simple enough for them to do with assistance. The Zone of Proximal of Development allows us to understand learning (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory of sociocultural learning explains how the intellectual capacity is the result of social and cultural experiences (Moll, 2013). In this process, the teacher and student support one another and work as a team.

When a teacher and student work together, they develop a support base for learning. According to Davis (2010), the contribution to teamwork alluded to when teachers and learners is used in practical learning. Brzovic and Matz (2009) noted that practical learning helps students build real-world application skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills. This gives teachers and students an opportunity to build a system that engages in student learning to help solve problems. This process may also be

described as a means to prepare students for future circumstances that exist in the world. To better understand teacher and student working together as a team, researches have utilized surveys as a tool to examine the effectiveness of teacher-student teamwork. According to Daggett (2008), the teacher-student relationship is needed to ensure students can become successful in the real world. This exclamation has led to new ideas and strategies to improve real-world situations to solve issues in society.

### **Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking was one of the skills identified in this study to help improve the academic performance of overage students. Critical thinking outcomes outline issues from an instructional setting using pedagogical learning (Barth & Michelson, 2013). Using critical thinking can empower students to develop ways to solve problems, which improve their capability to meet requirements in an instructional setting.

Critical thinking is a process used for an effective pedagogy, which is relevant to addressing problems with unknown solutions (Goralnik and Nelson 2014). When teachers address the knowledge and skills concepts in an instructional setting, it does not immediately develop critical thinking skills. The emphasis on developing critical thinking skills include an understanding of how to foster and use scaffolding as techniques to influence learning (Goralink and Nelson, 2014). Scaffolding helps the student connect new situations with situations that are familiar with what is already understood (National Research Council, 2010). Researchers Goralink and Nelson (2014) have mentioned that scaffolding helps students think critically.

Rhodes (2010) stated that critical thinking is the foundation for understanding complex issues. Critical thinking transition into learners practicing analyzing, applying evidence, solving problems, questioning, and identifying information needed to find a solution (Rhodes, 2010). It is a part of the citizenry that works toward achieving sustainable outcomes (Glover et. at., 2012). The understanding of the critical thinking process helps students understand Bloom Taxonomy. Bloom's taxonomy is a process of thinking at different levels. Those levels include remembering, comprehension, evaluation, analysis, and synthesis. It is important for overage students to understand how to think critically, so they can identify with questions and instructions led by the teacher. Students may apply these levels to explain or investigate various outcomes.

Teaching students to understand how to think critically may not be an easy process for teachers. Students are exposed to data so they can interpret and analyze the information that is presented from a critical thinking point of view (Lai, 2011). Students are assigned problems in the classroom to solve for a specific outcome. Cognitive performance is used by students to gain an understanding of the problem. Teachers are instrumental in guiding and directing students to think critical when solving difficult problems. According to Lai (2011), one approach teachers use to build on critical thinking skills is a questioning technique that is designed to trigger key thoughts. These questions usually begin with asking how you know, why this is important, and explain how you arrive at this outcome. Students are given time to think before they can answer the problem.



There are several skills that can be developed by the critical thinking process. Critical thinking leads to making inferences, decision-making, reasoning, logic, and problem solving (Hattie 2012). These skills are also known as higher-order cognitive skills. According to Hattie (2012), critical thinking is used best when questions are clarified, inferences are drawn, and strategies are used to solve the problem. These strategies require skills needed to solve the problem. The ability to investigate, analyze, and interpret data are essential in the critical thinking process. When students can become proficient in this process, they will gain confidence with problem-solving.

### **Problem-Solving**

Teachers are an important part of the learning process that enables students to think critical and solve problems. Problem-solving may be viewed as a way to find a solution to a difficult situation. According to Yavuzer (2012), problem-solving is the process used to solve complex issues. It relates to the use of cognitive processes to understand the complex or difficult situation that is being presented. Therefore, teacher-training programs should be planned to prepare teachers for pedagogical issues so skills can be used in the process.

Problem-solving skills are associated with needs, goals, values, attitudes, and beliefs (Freeman, 2010). This set of skills allows students to use their experience and personal interaction in various situations. Problem solving opportunities in the classroom prompts students to think of new ideas. The challenge is for students to rely on the teachers' instructional strategies so they can apply those skills needed to solve the

problem. Once a solution to the problem has been presented, students involve themselves a peer collaboration to discuss the outcome (Arslan, 2015).

The answer to a problem provides the results or solution to a question. Students are presented with the challenge to solve problems in all of their content areas. According to Arslan (2015), students learn from the support of their teachers understanding the problem-solving process and how it affects student's behavior. Teachers are responsible for developing the student's background knowledge, so there is a connection in the problem-solving process. This learning strategy is part of the student's ability to solve problems.

Students learning to solve problems develop more confidence as they arrive at the correct solution. According to Erdam and Alpass, (2013), problem-solving process is best used by choosing the most effective method that meets the learning objective. Problem-solving is a skill that is learned over a period and usually produces a high level of student performance from good teachers (Izgar, 2008).

Izgar (2008), stressed students who learn problem-solving skills in the classroom are intensive. There is a major emphasis on teaching problem-solving skills related to math and technology. The student's problem solving abilities is constructed from the teachers' confidence and level of expertise (Erdamar & Alpan, 2013). When students have demonstrated they can think critically and solve problems, teachers are credited with teaching the practical skills necessary for functioning in society. The problem-solving aspect of learning has been revealed as a concept linked to academic success among students.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

The literature review provided information concerning small groups, smaller class size, real-world application, critical thinking and problem solving. The information that was reviewed revealed how strategic teachers could be to provide the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to improve student performance. The implementation of the related concepts to improve student performance is effective with highly-trained teachers. According to Kong (2012), highly trained teachers focus on the pedagogies, so students are provided with the insight to achieve at a higher level when they apply the skills they are taught. Kong (2012) mentioned that teachers are most effective when they receive feedback on their instructional practice.

As a result of my data analysis, small group instruction was emphasized in the literature review to provide information about an intervention strategy to improve student performance of overage students. Teachers are encouraged to use small group instruction, so students are introduced to learning opportunities that lead to social interaction. (Ledford, Lane, Elam, & Worley, 2012). The presentation of these findings may influence the target audience to utilize the suggestions provided. The use of white paper will allow the findings to be easily read and understood.

This project study findings will be presented to local administrators, teachers, counselors, and community partners. I developed a white paper to present the local problem, solution, and recommendation of how to implement small group instruction as a strategy to improve student performance of overage students. The next topic will discuss the implementation of the project study.

## **Implementation**

The procedure for distributing the white paper requires me to meet with local school officials at the target school. I will distribute the document to the designated personnel to share information about my findings from the research. My white paper was written according to the specific guidelines which include an introduction, problem, recommendations, conclusion, and references. The goal of the white paper is to make recommendations for a solution to the local problem of the academic failure of overage students. The implementation process will focus on encouraging stakeholders to use the suggested strategy. I hope that the ideas described in the white paper will be used by stakeholders to improve the academic success of overage students.

I will deliver my white paper to the local school officials at the target school. I will meet with the school's principal to schedule a date and time to discuss the findings of my research. I will present a powerpoint presentation to those who attend the meeting. The presentation will present information on small group instruction as the research-base strategy to improve academic performance. The participants in this study will attend professional development sessions to be trained on how to use small group instruction in the classroom.

It is hoped that the school's administrator and the leadership team will make a decision on how to strategically implement strategies in the classroom. A copy of the document will be given to each administrator for their use and intended purpose. A scheduled meeting will take place to present information to teachers and staff during a

faculty meeting. The suggested instructional practice will be presented at a scheduled meeting held with the school's administrator to explain the project's findings.

### **Resources and Existing Supports**

The school's administrator need to plan, direct, and organize the process at the school, so teachers receive information provided in the white paper. The school's administrator will be responsible for contacting staff members to meet for the presentation of the white paper. Once the meeting has been arranged, the administrators support will be needed as a participant to have an understanding of the findings being presented. This presentation will be done at the target school before the academic term. I am hopeful that the target school has the necessary equipment to support this presentation including existing support and resources.

I will be available to assist with the implementation of the project with local school officials. I will encourage all stakeholders to engage in the process so they can speak intelligently about the implementation procedures. My involvement in the process will indicate that I am committing my time to improve student learning.

The use of technical equipment will be important to support learning in the classroom. Technology can be a good tool for students to receive the practice they need to improve reading (Spencer & Smullen, 2014). Teachers typically use computers and smartboards to engage students in learning activities. These types of resources are not a problem to introduce my white paper project in the classroom. In addition, local school officials will be encouraged to attend conferences that facilitate learning using small

group instruction. Attending conferences may be a potential problem depending on the funds that are available for registration and accommodation.

### **Potential Barriers**

There are several barriers that may hinder the presentation of my white paper. The lack of interest is one barrier that could interfere with teacher buy-in to the proposed recommendations in the white paper. The lack of interest could be due to teacher's resistance to change and try new ideas of instructional strategies. An attitude towards change has been connected with employees view on policies, procedures, and curriculum development (Zimmerman, 2010). Unless teachers understand the need for change, their lack of interest will remain the same over the willingness to accept new ideas (Zimmerman, 2010). A teacher who shows a lack of interest presents a barrier because it is easier to remain the same rather than work to develop new skills. Frequent communication from the instructional leader throughout the implementation process will help overcome this barrier. In addition, goals must be redefined, clear expectation must be set, and teachers need to make a commitment and engage in the process.

A second barrier that may interrupt the presentation of my white paper is technical difficulty. The technical difficulty may be viewed as a mechanical issue with an electronic device. My white paper presentation will be planned using a powerpoint presentation to support the delivery of the information. There is a possibility that the equipment could malfunction. When the equipment is not working properly, this will present a barrier for the presentation. I will need to troubleshoot to regain the use of the equipment or find an alternative strategy to present the information. I will ask the

school's technology coordinator to assist me in the event I experience technical difficulty during my presentation. This would add immediate assistance and support of overcoming this barrier.

A third barrier could be a shortage of supplies to complete the final project. A shortage of supplies would delay the final stages of the project's development or presentation to the local school officials. This barrier poses a minor threat for me. I would need to make sure there are adequate supplies on hand, so each stakeholder receives a completed copy of the white paper.

A final barrier that may happen is poor planning on my behalf. Poor planning may lead to an ineffective presentation. According to Walker (2014), poor planning is the main reason projects fail or fail to meet their deadline. It is difficult to have a successful project when planning is not properly done. Lack of planning often leads to problems you do not expect and poor execution. Two reasons people plan poorly is due to not understanding the value of planning and do not know how to plan effectively (Walker, 2014). I will ensure proper planning by meeting with the local school administrator before the scheduled presentation date. I will briefly describe the presentation process by presenting a copy of my white paper and conducting a brief overview of my powerpoint presentation. I will propose an allotted time needed to explain the concept of implementing this project study. I will send an email to the local school administrator to confirm the scheduled date and time of the presentation. The completion of the pre-conference meeting will help overcome the potential of poor planning by the presenter.

Local school officials can overcome all of these barriers by encouraging teachers to be part of the change process, provide technical support, ensure sufficient supplies, and take the time to plan. As a result of preparing to overcome these barriers, an effective process will be in place to support the presentation. The understanding gained from this experience will better prepare me for future studies.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

This doctoral project will be shared with district representatives after this study have been approved by Walden University. I will present the findings of my research at professional development sessions. The presentation of my findings will allow district leaders a chance to collaborate and discuss the implementation of my white paper. I will plan for a forty-five minute presentation and an additional fifteen minutes for questions and answers. I will also arrange a meeting with the local school district's executive directors to discuss the white paper and answer any questions regarding the white paper.

A copy of the white paper will be distributed to all stakeholders using the local school districts' mail system. This system allows employees to mail documents to other school personnel by placing the person's name and organization on the outside of an envelope. The local school district has a mail carrier who delivers and drop-offs mail daily. I will include a description of the study and asked each official to notify me upon receipt of the project study. This process took place within two weeks of completion of this program.

The white paper focuses on implementation of small group instruction to improve student performance of overage students. It also addresses implementation of strategies



and recommendations to local officials on how this research-based strategy has increased student achievement. This document will also be presented to the local school district's technology department for possible placement on the district's webpage allowing it to be accessible to all educators in the district.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

I will be responsible for developing and delivering my project study to district representatives. I will also be responsible for answering questions and assist with the training session during professional development. The training session will involve a demonstration on how to use small group instruction in the classroom. This is important so district representation will have knowledge of what small group instruction look like and how to evaluate this instructional strategy. I will also be available for additional support in the role of observer, evaluator, participant, or presenter.

The local school's administrative team will be responsible for understanding the white paper project so a logical decision can be made with the implementation process in the target school. The local school's principal will engage in the collaborative process to encourage teachers to use small group instruction as a new strategy to improve student performance. The school's principal will also be responsible for implementing this strategy as part of a school-wide movement for instruction.

The role of district representatives will be to attend professional development sessions, so each representative receives information about my white paper. The district representatives will discuss and ask questions on how small group instruction is important to learning opportunities of students. It will be my responsibility to make a

connection to student learning gains using this strategy. District representative will be given two weeks to debrief and provide feedback on this project to determine if it is a tool the district can use to improve the overall growth of student achievement.

The responsibility of teachers will be to attend the professional development sessions at the district level. Teachers will be trained and receive background information on the proposed strategy. Teachers will be responsible for using small group instruction in their classroom. They will monitor students' learning after each grading period to evaluate learning outcomes throughout the academic year. This data will drive instruction and examine the effectiveness of small group instruction.

### **Project Evaluation**

The goal of this white paper was to provide information on the suggested strategies to best improve the academic performance of overage students. Small group instruction was suggested as an approach for teachers to increase learning opportunities among the selected group. An evaluation of the white paper's effectiveness will be provided by all stakeholders involved in this study. A summative evaluation will be used to gain feedback on the white paper. Summative refers to the assessment of participants where the focus is on the outcome of a program (Bennett, 2011). The assessment of this white paper is to gain an understanding so the project meets the goal.

In addition, I will distribute an evaluation form to attendees after my presentation at the professional development session. The form will focus on the effectiveness of the presentation, participants' engagement, activities, and implementation process. The information provided on the form will help determine the next step in the collaboration

process of all stakeholders. The evaluation form will also ask for suggestions on how to improve and increase the interest of all participants.

I will work with local school officials to organize an ongoing professional development session to assist with using small group instruction. Evaluation forms will be collected to review the knowledge and skills of the participants as they engage in the learning process throughout the year. The last 15 minutes of each session will consist of a question and answer session so the participants can express any concerns, issues, or successes with the training process. The participants may also share their experience using this training tool and support of small group instruction.

The goal of the white paper is to encourage local school officials and district representatives to use small group instruction at the school level. The key stakeholders are local school teachers, counselors, administrators, and executive directors. The intention of this white paper is to share information, model lessons of this white paper through professional development, and implement an instructional strategy to improve academic performance of overage students.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The evidence of social change will be demonstrated through an increase in student achievement, teachers buying-in to an established strategy, collaboration among all stakeholders, and professional development. Overage students may benefit from this white paper because small group instruction is a valid research-based strategy that builds cognitive skills, student engagement, and self-confidence (Hill, 2015). The white paper project can assist all representatives with engagement and improving the academic

process. If the recommendations are considered there should be an easy implementation process of small group instruction.

As a result, the implication for social change using the recommendations in my white paper will assist overage students being better prepared to function in society. The knowledge and skills they gain will have an impact on improving the conditions of work, family, life, community, and society. According to McMichael (2016), when these conditions are met students help shape society by being an informed citizen. They can participate in civic duties, seek employment, enroll in college, and adhere to policies and law (McMichael, 2016).

The information presented in this project study provided school officials with researched-base strategies that work. In a larger context, several implications for social change outside the local school district are noted. There could be a push for small group instruction at the state and national levels of education. This method of instruction may be demonstrated at conferences, workshops, and professional development sessions. There could be a greater emphasis placed on small group instruction from the U.S. Department of Education as officials push for College and Career Ready standards. Small group instruction can be then targeted towards overage students providing them with the self-worth needed to improve unhealthy behavior and academics.

### **Conclusion**

Section 3 provided a description of the project study's goals, literature review, implementation, project evaluation, and implication for social change. I created a white paper to show the most effective way to improve student performance of overage

students. The white paper included why to use small group instruction, a description of small group instruction, and how to implement small group instruction into the classroom. The white paper in this study also will be shared with local school officials to assist with the implementation of small group instruction in the local schools. In my white paper, the results of the findings indicated small group instruction as the best approach to improve student learning. Because of this proven instructional strategy, it is recommended that other schools implement small group instruction to improve the academic success of overage students. Section 4 of this project study will discuss reflections about the project.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

In this section, I address how small group instruction can be used to improve student performance of overage students at the secondary school I studied. The purpose of this project study was to determine how to improve the academic performance of overage students. Participants in the study included four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators at a local secondary school. In the interviews, which I conducted, participants revealed that small group instruction was the best possible strategy for the academic success of overage students. The findings from the research led me to develop a white paper to share with local school officials to inform them of current research and provide them with suggestions for improving student learning, particularly for overage students.

I used a qualitative case study approach to explore the local problem related to the academic failure of overage students. A case study design allows researchers to study specific persons, groups, or situations over a period of time (Creswell, 2012). The results of case study research have no specific outcomes they may lead to future studies. I chose to use a case study design because it allowed me to explore the phenomenon of overage students by focusing on a single case. I audiorecorded interviews and used a reflective journal to transcribe participants' responses.

A predominate theme that emerged during the data analysis was that participants viewed small group instruction as the best possible intervention for improving academic performance of overage students. The teachers, counselors, and administrators

interviewed in this study said that smaller class size would reduce distractions and build self-confidence in these students. I used the information revealed in the data analysis to guide the development of my white paper project.

The white paper includes background information about the study, including a discussion of the challenges that overage students face and how educators might implement small group instruction in the classroom. In this white paper, I also address the local problem and the purpose of the paper. There are set of questions which lead to a discussion and implementation phases of small group instruction. Each question includes a description of the implementation process for small group instruction, policy recommendations, and a conclusion.

In this section, I reflect on my thoughts about small group instruction as a strategy for effective instruction. I address how small group instruction can be used to improve student performance of overage students at the secondary school I studied. I also discuss the strengths and limitations of my research, offer recommendations, for further scholarship, and consider the implications of my research.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The results of this project yielded information that is useful not only to teachers, counselors, and administrators in the local school district but also may be valuable at the regional, state and national levels. The results of the research revealed that small group instruction increases the academic performance of students. Thus, the implementation of small group instruction may provide an understanding to improving academic performance of overage students as the project's overall strength. The white paper

provides information on how to use small group instruction to improve academic performance. My overall recommendation is that small group instruction be implemented at all levels of education in Grades k-12, particularly with overage students. The white paper I created provides four additional recommendations to improve student learning.

The first recommendation is to implement a professional learning community to address the school's goals and develop a school-wide instructional plan to use small group instruction in all classes. A professional learning community fosters professional learning in a setting in which educational practitioners use their experience and expertise to meet learners' needs (Gerdes & Jefferson, 2015). The use of a professional learning community as a tool for professional development of teachers is an effective strategy to improve learning, according to Gerdes and Jefferson, (2015). During this study, I realized that teachers were better prepared to provide information for improving instruction. Therefore, I recommended the establishment of a professional learning community among teachers, which I think is an ideal collaborative effort to meet the school's goal for improving academic performance among overage students.

The second recommendation is to provide professional development opportunities for staff training. The training sessions could focus on instructional practices that enhance small group instruction as a tool to improve student learning. Teachers may participate to gain the knowledge and skills they need to implement small group instruction as an intervention in their classroom. School counselors and administrators could also be invited to attend professional development training to develop their knowledge of the instructional strategy recommended for student success. I believe it is important for



school counselors and administrators to understand the use of small group instruction so they are familiar with this practice and are able to monitor student learning.

The third recommendation in the paper is to monitor the instructional practices of teachers to ensure they are engaging students in lessons involving small group instruction. In this white paper, small group instruction is considered the blueprint for driving instruction and improving student performance of overage students. A collaborative effort among teachers, counselors, and administrators can be instrumental to enhancing learning opportunities of overage students. The local school's administrative team can monitor instruction and student growth through formal and informal observations to track students' academic progress. The monitoring of students' academic progress may help teachers identify the deficits of students and provide instructional strategies to develop students' skills for academic success. This recommendation may assist all stakeholders in increasing student achievement.

The final recommendation is to develop a learning path for overage students to track their academic growth. This learning path should be discussed with teachers, students, parents, counselor, and administrators. Frequent communication among stakeholders should be ongoing for collaboration so there is strong support for overage students. The methods of communication could be done through meetings, conference calls, and emails. It is important to rely on formal channels of communication as well as informal communication. The goal is to inform all stakeholders of the student's current status and develop a plan for academic success. I believe a critical piece of academic growth is determining the appropriate assessment tool to measure student's progress. The

implementation of this recommendation could reveal to district leaders an action plan that may be used in other local schools. My white paper should help guide decision-making for local school officials regarding small group instruction. I also developed this white paper with the idea that it would have a positive effect on social change.

### **Project Limitations**

I identified five limitations of this project. The first limitation is one that local school officials may not be willing to implement small group instruction as part of their instructional practice. Teachers, counselors, and administrators may not be willing to accept a proven research strategy because they may have established a routine from which they may not want to deviate. When an effort is made to improve academic performance of students, teachers may end up being blamed. Teachers, counselors, and administrators may be resistant to try new ideas because what they have done worked in the past. The question to be asked should be, “Why do teachers resist trying new ideas?” or “What would make it easier for teachers to try new practices?” According to Knight (2012), educators adopt new ideas that are easier or more powerful also applies to teachers leaving behind old ways of teaching for more effective approaches. This limitation may slow the implementation process of small group instruction in the targeted school.

A second limitation is a lack of funding in the district to schedule trained professionals for professional development sessions. Teachers would have to absent from class time and would need a substitute to cover their classes. Further, those who would be presenting at the professional development sessions would need to be compensated.

Counselors or administrators would not be affected because substitutes are not needed in their absence. Lack of funding may also pose a potential problem if presenters for the professional development session require payment for their services. Lack of funding may limit the project's development into the target school. Other limitation issues related to funding include resources, time, materials, and cooperation of all stakeholders.

The third limitation might involve local school officials not planning properly to implement the recommendation for this study. The school's administrator may object that there is not enough time in the schedule to implement the suggested strategy. There are times when the administrator presents a plan, then the gatekeepers of the schedule claim that the schedule has a conflict which denies the document to be shared with the faculty. One of the most difficult issues with strategic planning involves administrators not using the proper resources in the organization (Ballard, 2013). The distribution of duties and responsibilities should be given to the appropriate personnel regarding their areas of strengths. Ballard (2013) also mentioned that the school's administrator often times rely only on themselves making them feel overwhelmed with responsibilities. The stakeholders at the local school may also become preoccupied with classroom management issues and re-organizing their schedule and may not have time for a new task.

A fourth limitation may involve the purpose of the white paper project and the goals of the school. The school's administrator plays a key role in defining school goals and strategies. Successful implementation of the white paper to improve academic success of overage students in schools that do not have clearly defined goals and

strategies may not occur. Unclear school goals and expectations may also limit the growth and development of teachers, counselors, and administrators. A final limitation relates to the clarity with which I present specific information about the project. I would need to provide clear background information, define the purpose and benefits of the project, and clear direction about how to implement the instructional strategy and the expected outcome of using small group instruction.

### **Recommendations**

To address the issue of academic failure of overage students, data were collected to determine the best possible intervention to improve student performance. The data analysis revealed small group instruction as the instructional strategy for implementation in the classroom. The results from the data collection presented a recurring theme mentioned by the participants in the study. The results of the data collection revealed small group instruction as the best approach to improve academic performance of overage students. Some participants also mentioned that smaller class sizes would be beneficial to improve student learning among overage students. Local school administrators should implement interventions to increase student achievement at their school. Intervention strategies are planned instructional approaches to address deficits of students. When learning deficits have been identified, teachers can plan instruction to meet the learning needs of overage students. The student's grow rate is monitored using assessment tools to determine their academic progress.

Small group instruction is a research-based strategy that had been documented to be successful and raise academic achievement (Lindsay, 2014). I recommend that local

school administrators implement small group instruction as a tool to increase student achievement. To implement the small group learning approach, teachers need to be provided with evidence of student learning to ensure that they will accept the suggested strategy to improve academic performance.

In this study, I focused on collecting information that suggested the best instructional approach to improving the academic performance of average students. I used one-to-one interviews to gain the knowledge needed to share with all stakeholders in my white paper. The participants provided insight into practices that would influence the use of small group instruction in the classroom. The teachers, counselors, and administrators suggestions at the target secondary school also provided me with information concerning class size, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Gaining information from teachers at another local secondary school could provide a different perspective about small group instruction.

My alternative recommendation to help teachers, counselors, and administrators in the local school district identify students in need of intervention and implement evidence-based interventions to promote their learning is Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI was not a part of this study. According to the National Center for Response to Intervention (2012), RTI is a multilevel prevention model used to determine how students respond to instructional strategies. The selected group of students would need to develop their skills in reading comprehension as they participate in small group instruction activities.

The RTI component would provide intensive intervention to help promote the development of reading proficiency. The reading component would be instrumental for using small group instruction to improve the academic performance of overage students. Small group instruction gives students more opportunities to respond. This intervention would also provide additional practice for students to master skills based on their individual progress. RTI supports the planning of instruction that meet the learner's needs.

The implementation of the RTI strategy requires identifying the proficiency levels of the targeted students. Students who struggle with reading would receive substantial support during the initial stage. Teachers would identify their weakness as revealed from their student profile test scores. As students progress with reading comprehension, the support would be gradually taken away. Teachers can check for understanding by implementing a before, during, and after strategy as students are engaged in the learning process. Using RTI as a strategy is a different approach to address the local problem in this study.

I would not suggest altering the implementation of small group instruction. I would plan an alternative strategy to support the learning of small group instruction for this study. I would continue to use professional development opportunities for training of teachers, counselors, and administrators on a continuous basis. In addition, local and state agencies should earmark additional funds to provide resources and materials for professional development sessions.

## Scholarship

Scholarship may be referred to as a fund of knowledge and learning. The scholarly presentation of this program has prepared me to think critically, conduct research, collect and analyze data, and present findings of a local problem at a scholarly level. The program has also developed my skills as a scholar practitioner and researcher and my ability to engage in dialogue with other scholars. It has also strengthened my skills as an administrator to interpret and analyze data and provide successful strategies to colleagues to improve the goals of the school. The scholarship process is also helpful when collaborating with other district leaders.

Throughout my doctoral journey, I learned some of concepts related to scholarly research. The challenge to write in a scholarly tone was a difficult process for me during the first course of this program. I had to complete a writing sample to determine if I would enroll in a writing course to assist me throughout the program. I was successful in meeting the requirements of scholarly writing and credited with a passing score. I learned that scholarly writing demands that I support written material with peer-reviewed, research-based evidence in the field of education. I also learned that scholarly writing should be clear and concise and use primary sources to develop writing samples.

The scholarship required in this program prepared me to think critically as I read various studies presented by researchers. I was able to identify the problem and state the purpose of the study. I also understood how researchers must address research questions to guide the methodology and data collection method. After reading the results of the findings about the problem, I learned that critical analysis may be necessary for future

research to expand on the presented findings. This scholarly portion of this program provided me with insight into how to examine other researcher's work.

The next challenge I faced was participating in an online program. This was the first time I experienced course work using distance learning. The challenge I faced with online courses was not being able to sit in a traditional classroom to ask questions and collaborate with classmates face-to-face. The transition to online learning became more comfortable after completing my second course. I became more confident in using Blackboard and, communicating with my instructors, and classmates. As I continued to grow as a doctoral student, I also developed grasp of the research process. I was able to write a problem statement, develop a research question, state the rationale, conduct the literature review, collect and analyze data, and present findings in a narrative form using a qualitative research approach.

As I completed a literature review to address my research question, I continued to ask myself if I addressing and answering the question. The process of locating articles to support my research required me to investigate multiple articles to gather evidence to support the literature. I learned that the information presented in the literature review has to be credible and reliable. I also needed to achieve data saturation and show studies that were conducted about what I researched. The additional reading of literature allowed me to learn how qualitative research design procedures are aligned.

Another challenge I faced during my doctoral journey was managing time. I found it difficult to work a full-time job and participate in this doctoral program. I began to ask my classmates and instructors what worked best for them when it came to



managing time. The responses I received were extremely helpful with managing my job responsibilities, family, friends, and doctoral classes. My classmates suggested I build a support system and communicate frequently with my instructors. I also received valuable information about replying to discussions three times a week, setting aside time for required readings and scheduling time to complete assignments. I developed a weekly calendar that was beneficial to both my work schedule and class schedule. This schedule was helpful leading into my intensive doctoral course.

Scholarship has allowed me to engage in conversation on an in-depth level with colleagues. This journey has prepared me to understand research and speak intelligently about a particular topic. I can apply the knowledge and skills gained from my research course and use them in the workplace. My research skills have given me the experience to examine and investigate information about specific topics. I am better prepared to discuss with teachers and counselors the insight of proven instructional strategies that work. As I continue to grow and develop as a scholar practitioner, I will share information that is beneficial to both affect and have an effect on social change.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

I understand to meet the demands of a quality project required me to develop a project to address my research question. I was uncertain about a project that was suitable for my research. I decided to ask for ideas about a project that would support my research. My chair suggested that I create a white paper. I began to search for information about a white paper because it was my first time hearing about this type of project. I began to research information about a white paper to understand how to develop one. A

white paper is a document used to share information with an organization (Stelzner, 2013). I looked at various types of white papers and chose the type that was easy to read and understand. I developed a white paper that included an introduction, recommendations, and solution to improve student performance implementing small group instruction.

When I decided to create a white paper, I began to think of my target audience. As I developed my white paper, I included information that would be helpful to local school officials. Condensing my research in a summarized and understandable fashion was a challenge for me. I focused on the critical aspects that guided my research and included specific evidence in my white paper. I did not want to include material in my white paper that my audience would not understand. I began my white paper with background information and the suggested intervention strategy based on the findings from my research. I was able to organize my white paper so readers could follow the information that includes an instructional strategy to improve the academic performance of overage students.

The local school officials will provide feedback to determine if my white paper addressed the questions that meet the needs of overage students. The white paper will be shared with local school officials with the idea that small group instruction will be implemented as an instructional practice at the local school. The effectiveness of recommendations may be evaluated by the school's leadership team or the local school district representatives. The evaluation will also include feedback on the suggested

strategy to improve student learning. My involvement with this white project has enhanced my knowledge and skills on how to develop a white paper.

### **Leadership and Change**

My experience with this study prepared me to think as a change agent and gain a deeper understanding of problems they may exist in the field of education. I have come to understand as a scholar-practitioner that research is a process used to discover answers to important and relevant questions. The information revealed in the research process was used to address the local problem of academic failure of overage students. An intervention strategy was suggested to improve academic performance for student success. The research experience has helped me develop as a change agent to improve problematic issues of concern.

As a leader and change agent, I can direct and organize meetings using current research to support data. The use of primary sources within the past 5 years also helped to bridge the gap between recent studies and future research. The most recent studies provided up-to-date information and helped establish a better understanding of current issues. Research allows the leader to compare, contrast, or examine relationships of the local problem. This effort is valuable in the decision-making process because an analysis can be made to strategically plan for improvement.

My journey as doctoral student has enlightened me to delve into problems beyond my imagination. I found that a group of students who were overage for their grade level remained a constant problem. I was interested to know how overage students' academics affected standardized test scores. I also wanted to know what program or services could

be provided to support overage students to be successful academically. I decided to research this topic to discover findings to implement change at the targeted school in the local school district. The research findings revealed small group instruction as the best approach to improve student performance of overage students.

Also as a leader of change, I developed effective characteristics. In my role as a change agent, I faced the difficult challenge of persuading all stakeholders to use small group instruction as an instructional practice. I am confident that local school officials implemented this instructional strategy as part of school-wide instruction. As a leader, I shared my vision, demonstrated knowledge, and built trusting relationships to emphasize change. I believe these characteristics are essential for successful implementation of change.

I developed the characteristic of using effective communication with my faculty and staff. I believe effective communication is critical to the success of the school. A true leader must be able to express their vision of others. The communication must be clear and concise so that everyone shares the same goals. I also believe to be a leader of change, a great leader takes time to listen and understand others. One way to make sure that others are comfortable is to encourage an open door policy.

Another characteristic I demonstrate is confidence as a leader of change. I believe confidence as a leader is a characteristic that maintains the staff's morale and productivity. A confident leader can help solve problems. Colleagues will take notice of the leadership so everyone in the position must develop faith in themselves to be able to handle any situation. People want a leader to know something about every situation or at

least one who is confident to say they do not. I also believe it is ok to admit a lack of knowledge as long as they have the confidence to find the correct information.

A final characteristic I believe is important for a leader of change is making a commitment. I make an effort to demonstrate a commitment by leading by example and having a good work ethic for the success of the school. The administrative team will always need to keep promises to meet the vision and goals of the school. I also believe when a commitment is made, the commitment to stay true to the task will encourage everyone to work harder and fulfill their roles.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

My development as a scholar-practitioner was a difficult process in the beginning. I was not familiar with American Psychological Association (APA) format, scholarly writing, or the research process. As I continued to read and complete assignments in various courses, my understanding of what being a scholar-practitioner involved became clearer. In the process of developing my skills as a scholar, I realized that opinions do not represent factual evidence for research. As a researcher, I needed to provide scholarly, research-based information within the past 5 years to show support. The foundation of learning research also required the use of primary, peer-reviewed sources. I learned to locate studies that correlated with my research study. The writing of literature was the most challenging aspect of completing the research study. I used information that I believed was most beneficial and invested hundreds of hours to locate significant data to include in the research study. I also gained a better understanding of research by

learning the advantages and disadvantages of the various types of methodology during this doctoral program.

I learned about the different types of research or methodologies during my residency. While I attended the required residency, I obtained information about quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research design. I decided that the qualitative research design was the most approach that was appropriate for this study and best suited for a novice researcher. I relied on the literature provided by Creswell (2012) to further increase my knowledge about qualitative studies. I was able to better understand how the problem, rationale, significance of the study, literature review, data collection, data analysis, and findings are used to complete this research process.

The steps used in this research allowed me the opportunity to discover additional information about small group instruction. According to Ledford et al. (2012), the use of procedures during small group instruction has been effective for 200 participants in previous studies. A direct prompt had a positive effect on the students and their group mates. The results of the research showed an increase in teaching efficiency, instruction, and student learning from small group instruction. Previously I believed that small group instruction had a direct affect only on student achievement.

My effort to research the local problem in this study has developed me as a scholar. I was able to purposively select the participants and obtain their feedback about the best approach to improving the academic success of overage students. The participants I selected included four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators at the local secondary school. The experience I received has prepared me to work as a

scholar and lead others during the research process. My ability to conduct research has advanced to a high level since the beginning of my doctoral journey.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

My education career began 19 years ago. My initial plan as an educator was to be a role model for young men as I provided instructional strategies. In the process of educating all students who were assigned to my class, I also delivered life lessons to help students become well-rounded and educated about life. My students were receptive to the goals and objectives to achieve academic success.

As I continued to grow and develop as a teacher, many of my peers suggested that I become a school administrator. I was honored that my colleagues believed I possessed the skills to become a good administrator. I pondered the idea and used professional development opportunities to test my leadership abilities. I concluded that the opportunity for advancement was favorable and others in the district encouraged me.

When I was promoted to an administrator, I completed a self-evaluation that categorized me as a transformational leader. I agree with this leadership style because it was my desire to grow and develop others in the field of education. Once I have identified leadership qualities in colleagues, I strongly recommend they pursue leadership positions that are available in this district. These leadership skills are beneficial when identifying instructional strategies such as small group instruction to improve the quality of education among overage students.

This doctoral journey has been a long process of will and determination. The courses provided a foundation that led to the research phase of the program. I was able to

build relationships with classmates, instructors, and my chair to be successful as a practitioner. I began the program without any knowledge of what was involved in earning a doctorate. As I continued to read and understand the material related to all concepts, I gained a better understanding and sacrificed much time. I learned to think critically, critique research articles, conduct research, use citations, interpret data, and present findings. I also learned the difference between quantitative and qualitative research. This experience has prepared me to use research practices on my job and for future studies.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

The goal of this project study was to gain information; therefore, I used instructional approaches to help overage students improve academic performances. I was not sure what a project study was during this program. I used this information and shared it with other stakeholders so overage students were supported and able to reach a higher level of proficiency. The information on small group instruction helped with the local problem of academic failure and improved teacher's instructional practice.

In small group instruction, teachers can divide the students into groups to facilitate learning. The groups usually consist of four to five students. The teacher typically works with students on a specific objective. The students in each group are assigned a role to make the learning comes together during the lesson. The use of small group instruction usually takes place after whole group instruction. I am confident that small group instruction will enhance the learning experience of overage students.

The development of a white paper was a new experience for me. I learned that a white paper is used to share information that addresses a problem, suggests solutions and



provides recommendations to solve the problem. I strongly believe that my research findings will be helpful to the local problem of overage students. I learned a lot about small group instruction and will become an advocate for this instructional practice. I expect this information to improve the learning opportunities for others in the local school district.

My experience with this white paper was enlightening. I was able to research detailed information about a white paper and gain an understanding of its purpose, meaning, and objective. I also had the opportunity to summarize all the information from my research to allow local school officials to view the findings. I look forward to their feedback so I will know if my white paper met the expectations of district leaders. I will be available to assist with the implementation and open to any suggestions that local school officials may have to improve this white paper. I believe the critique of this document will help me with future projects and allow me to strengthen my skills.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The results of this project have the potential to affect social change in the school under study. The implementation of small group instruction in the classroom can provide opportunities to foster learning and develop social skills. When students apply these skills, they develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills. The use of these two skills will help minimize academic failure and reduce the dropout rate in the district. The goal is to educate students to become qualified and skilled to enter the workforce and become productive citizens.

The effect of this social adjustment will force students to invest in themselves, which in turn leads to investing in the community and economy. The connection between education and income affects quality of life. Students who are investing in themselves commit to earning an education, so they can provide for themselves (Lleras-Muney, 2015). By becoming successful in school and seeking employment afterward, students contribute to society and the economy. Educated students help reduce the unemployment rate and contribute to a growing economy. This potential impact for social change may be the sole purpose of developing academic skills and involving students in the welfare of this country.

I further envision the effect of social change in the school district when overage students are successful academically. Researchers have revealed that small group instruction effects on behavior because students are engaged in a smaller environment. The implementation of small group instruction may provide teachers, counselors, and administrators with the knowledge needed to increase student achievement school-wide. Teachers will benefit because small group instruction is a proven instructional practice. Counselors will be able to monitor and track overage students throughout the academic program and schedule classes to support students' learning. Administrators will be the change agents in the building to effect the social change.

This project study has allowed me to understand how small group instruction can be strategically used to demonstrate academic growth. I learned how differentiated instruction helps with student engagement, interaction, construction of knowledge, and develop of cognitive skills. The reading of literature provided an in-depth insight into the

specifics of small group instruction. I will be able to present information about small group instruction during faculty and data meetings, and share documentation with all community partners.

This doctoral journey has prepared me to think critically and find sources that solve problems that exist in education. I have learned how to examine a topic, explore the topic, and find information to guide implementation. The most challenging aspect of this journey was time management. This opportunity has provided me with the qualifications needed to advance my career and have an effect on social change.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The implications for this project study will have an effect on the local district. Research on this local problem could continue to implement changes revealed in this study. The implementation process of small group instruction could be devised from a professional learning community. A professional learning community uses a culture of teachers to collaborate and work together to achieve the purpose of learning (Barth, 2013). I recommend forming a professional learning community that gives teachers ownership with the instructional practice to improve academic performance.

Educators who are passionate about their careers and care for students will dedicate themselves to meet the goals of the school and ensure students are successful. Small group instruction for overage students will afford students the opportunity to achieve academic success. The involvement of school administrators and the professional learning community will be essential to increasing student achievement. All stakeholders may benefit from the recommendations and the implementation research-based strategies

that work. This impact should affect all teachers, counselors, and administrators at the target school. The information should also be shared among all local school officials to have a district-wide effect on the students.

This project has led me to address the local problem and find suggestions to improve the success rate of students. Students who are two or more grade levels behind need a support system to help them achieve academically. Future research could also focus on implementing technology as an instrument to engage students in learning using small group instruction. This instructional strategy can be used across the curriculum to guide student learning.

In addition to future research, technology as it related to small group instruction can, such as Compass Learning, can enhance student learning. The purpose of Compass Learning is to build learning through accelerated software intervention. The software helps students with explicit instruction, additional practice, independent practice, and formative assessment (Engels, 2014). Future research is needed to find additional strategies to support small group instruction for overage students. This type of differentiated instruction has helped students gain confidence, build self-confidence, and strive to succeed. I believe the research conducted will be beneficial to help overage students overcome their weaknesses.

### **Conclusion**

The project study focused on finding the best approach to improve the academic performance of overage students. The participants include four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators at the target school. All participants were at the secondary level.

The participants recommended small group instruction as the best approach to help overage students succeed academically. The administrators were instrumental in obtaining teacher and counselor support for the implementation process and in helping them understand the strategic plan.

In this section I discussed my reflections related to this project study. I reflected on the process of becoming a scholar, project development, and the overall method used to complete this task. I was able to identify the project's strength and limitation. The project presented proven strategies that work with teacher instruction. Teachers, with the support of administrators, implemented small group instruction in their classrooms. I organized and analyzed the finding to create a document to share with all stakeholders. I disturbed this information as the evidence to support the implementation of the instructional strategy.

I also reflected on my role as a scholar-practitioner. I was able to identify a problem, review literature, collect and analyze data, and present the findings in a narrative form. As a novice researcher, I also learned that saturation of the literature review provided multiple views on the topic. This allowed me to think critically, examine research in a broader view, and guided me to search for more than one source of information.

My last reflection of this study discussed the implications of social change and future research. I recommended that all stakeholders use small group instruction to assist overage students with learning. The findings from this study were beneficial to teachers, counselors, and administrators. This information may also be expanded to local officials,

so the district is knowledgeable about the local problem. I presented the information at faculty meetings, conferences, and in a document to be shared. Future research should focus on a program to support small group instruction with the implementation of technology to support learning.

This doctoral journey prepared me to gain a deeper understanding of a problem through research practices. I will continue to use research practice to improve issues in the field of education. I will also incorporate research practice where I work. My goal was to find a program or service to move overage students forward. This research project has given me the knowledge and tools needed to make changes and improve student performance of overage students.

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Appendix A: The Project

Small Group Instruction: A Strategy Used to Improve Student Performance

Walden University

A Policy Paper

By

Orlando K. Ledyard

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators to determine the best possible intervention to improve the academic performance of overage students at a local secondary school. The recommendations were derived based on the findings and data analysis of this study. The recommendations were suggested to address the issue of academic failure among overage students. Overage students are those students who have failed to meet the academic requirements set forth by state standards and who are two or more grades behind academically (USDE, 2013). The recommendations focus on the process that may be used to begin the suggested instructional practice to improve academic performance.

I took an extensive look at each recommendation, so there would be a thorough understanding of the potential adoption of the recommendations and implementation process of this proposed policy. The review of the findings helps culminate action to be taken to address all stakeholders. As required by board policy, all stakeholders have the right to agree or disagree with the recommendations contained in this policy paper.

This paper provides information for the board to consider for policy adoption designed to improve academic performance. What does that mean? This proposal indicates there is a need to address the issue of academic failure among overage students in the school under study. The local ramifications are significant because the overage population has failed to meet the academic requirements which lead to the possibility of dropping out of school (Cohen & Smerdon, 2010). The results from this study revealed



small group instruction as an instructional practice to provide the learning support needed for academic success.

Overage students may present a bigger problem to society when they drop out of school. The challenges overage students face in society may include poor judgment, lack of education, an increase in crime, a decrease in community relations, and a decline in economic growth. Other problems associated with overage students that may affect society places an interest of concern for parents, families, friends, neighbors, and businesses. A combination of all these factors may be linked to overage students who potentially present a larger problem to society.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative case study approach was chosen to collect and analyze data for this study. Case study provides an in-depth understanding of specific events, processes, or individuals in a given time or place (Creswell, 2012). The purpose was to determine the best possible approach to improve the academic performance of overage students suggested by four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators in the local school district.

A case study approach was most appropriate way to gain a better understanding of the overage problem at the local secondary school. The experiences of the participants were used to help guide the instructional approach suggested to improve the academic performance of overage students. The participants were purposely selected for this study, so I could have a better understanding of this case study (Creswell, 2012). My role as the researcher was to select the participants, interview the participants, collect and analyze

the data for presentation. The findings were summarized to discuss the essential meaning of the data that address the local problem. The results of this study revealed small group instruction as the best possible intervention to support the academic performance of overage students.

A policy was generated to address the local problem of academic failure for overage students. The proposed policy suggests that local school officials and administrators implement the instructional strategy of small group instruction to meet the learning needs of overage students. The issues associated with the current policy do not include a learning path for overage students, professional training for teachers, and understanding data to drive instruction.

The recommendation is to implement small group instruction as an instructional strategy to improve the academic performance of overage students. Rigorous training for teacher development will include all stakeholders, so they understand the components of small group instruction.

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### **Policy Recommendation 1**

The school's leadership team should meet to address students who are overage, poor academic performance, and develop a learning path to meet their academic goals. This is a roundtable discussion that consists of the principal, assistant principal, counselors, literacy coach, and academic interventionist. The selected group of students' profile sheet could be examined to determine their level of proficiency in reading and math. The students should be group according

to their test scores, so remediation is provided to enhance their learning skills in reading and math.

### **Policy Recommendation 2**

The school's leadership team should plan for professional learning opportunities so teachers understand how to plan and use small group instruction as an instructional practice. The initial session should begin with research-based information that focuses on small group instruction as an instructional strategy. Next, a demonstration of how to plan for small group instruction should be explained explicitly to teachers. Then, a demonstration of how to use small group instruction in the classroom should be modeled with teacher participating in the activity. Finally, a review of the professional development training should be addressed with questions and answers to check for understanding.

### **Policy Recommendation 3**

The school's leadership team should prepare for the implementation of small group instruction as an adopted strategy to meet the academic needs of overage students. A timeframe for lesson planning and a target date should be discussed, so teachers have time to prepare. A designated day of the week should be decided on to ensure this instructional practice is being used. The leadership team should conduct formal and informal observations to monitor the effectiveness of small group instruction in the building. A debriefing with the school's leadership team is a critical part of the process to dialogue, provide feedback, and evaluate the

implementation of small group instruction as the instructional practice to improve student learning.

### **Small Group Instruction**

Students who struggle with achieving a high level of proficiency often need help with mastering skills. Small group instruction has been identified as a teaching strategy to help struggling students overcome learning deficits in the classroom. According to Tyner (2013), small group instruction is an instructional strategy used to provide activities to support individual learning needs. Small group instruction may also be viewed as a tool used by teachers to improve academic skills. It is considered a research-based strategy suggested increasing student achievement. A smaller setting has been linked to the promotion of social interaction, self-worth, and self-confidence (Garcia, Regat, & Kaskey, 2011). Research suggests that smaller class sizes are a benefactor for student learning.

Smaller class sizes provide an advantage for teachers to work with students independently. The ratio of the class size creates a relationship that allows the teacher to give immediate attention to specific learning needs. Chetly (2011) noted that teachers are more effective in smaller classes, which improves the proficiency level of students. Teachers also have more opportunities to work one-on-one with students and have better control with discipline (Chingo, 2013). Smaller class sizes may also have a direct effect on students working with real-world situations.

Real-world application addresses student learning needs, so they are equipped with skills needed to function in society (Jonassen, 2011). It is important that students

understand how to read because real-world situations are presented daily. The teachers are critical in this learning process, so students can be prepared for the workforce or attend college. Real-world application associated with individual learning needs prepares students to become successful (Daggett, 2008).

The findings from this study revealed that overage students would benefit from smaller class sizes to improve their learning needs. The participants interviewed suggested small group instruction as an intervention to address the local problem of academic failure. Small group instruction is an instructional strategy used to guide the individual learning needs using research-based strategies (Tyner, 2013).

Research has revealed that students benefit from explicit instruction when engaged in small group instruction. According to Tyner (2013), small group instruction allows teachers to focus on certain skills needed to develop knowledge for many groups of students. It is the teacher's responsibility to plan using research-based strategies that will meet the learner's needs. The teacher's plan should include multiple centers that provide learning opportunities for students to practice reading and hands-on activities that engage them in critical thinking. This is done to promote inquiry and student engagement. According to Amend, Li, and Cramer (2010), active responses increase student engagement and participation.

### **Implementation of Small Group Instruction**

The implementation of small group instruction needs the support of administrators and teacher buy-in. According to Cooper, MacGregor, Smith, and Robinson (2011), it is believed that teachers and administrators drive instructional practices based on the results

of standardized test. It is also believed that test scores from standardized test should drive lesson planning and instructional strategy to increase student achievement. The research-based strategy of small group instruction has been proven to improve academic performance.

The initial step for implementing small group instruction is to conduct a workshop so all stakeholders are engaged in the learning process. The workshop will build on the knowledge and activities of how to use small group instruction in the classroom. Teachers can participate in multiple activities that will improve the outcome of small group work by working with group development, assessment, and student engagement.

The arrangement of small groups is important to the learning process of students. The teachers understand the grouping of students is based on the group size and student's ability. The suggested group size is five students because it provides an opportunity to have a meaningful discussion about the lesson (Ediger, 2012). It gives students a chance to discuss their thinking. A homogenous approach should be used when teachers are forming them. This strategy ensures that students are respected and accepted (Ediger, 2012). The groups may be identified by Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3. Students are divided into groups because the teacher uses differentiated instruction to address the learners' needs. This strategy is also beneficial when skills related activities are used with student centered learning.

Assessment is an important part of implementing small group instruction. According to Williams et al.(2010), assessment provides teachers with information of what the student have learned and what they need to know. When teachers examine the

strengths and weaknesses of student's ability, it helps teachers plan for instruction. Teachers rely on assessment practices throughout the year to enhance learning opportunities during small group instruction (Kosanovaich et al., 2010). Assessment helps the teacher make adjustments to meet the individual learning needs of students.

The engagement of all students in small group instruction provides quality instruction and modeling for teachers (Kosanovich et al., 2010). When students are able to solve their own problems they grow into a level of independence. During the timeframe of small group instruction teachers should scan the room and monitor student engagement while students ask each other questions before they ask the teacher. This is part of the learning process of student engagement so students develop the knowledge and skills needed to collaborate for future learning. The completion of the small group session gives teachers the chance to check with students before, during, and after the activity. Teachers use the time from small group instruction to use for planning and assessment.

### **Cooperative Learning**

Small group instruction may occur in multiple forms to enhance learning skills of individuals. According to Aronson (2013), the form of small group instruction is a Jigsaw model. This is the form of small group instruction when each group in the classroom has a different activity to complete. At the completion of each activity, the teacher uses steps to piece the assignment together so it becomes the one project. This is the most common form of small group instruction used in the classroom. Other forms of small group instruction include Student Team Learning, Group Investigation, and Learning Together

(Aronson, 2013). Kagan (2014) noted these are forms of cooperative learning that are used in all levels of k-12 education. Johnson (2016) mentioned cooperative learning as a process where students work in small groups in an organized manner to complete the assigned task to develop academic and social interaction skills. Through cooperative learning students work as a unit to gain knowledge, so they can apply concepts and skills related to content standards.

### **Conclusion**

The academic failure at the targeted school was the basis of this study. The purpose of this policy paper is to make recommendations to improve the academic performance of overage student using small group instruction based on my research. The use of small group instruction could be beneficial to the growth and development of the selected group of students. The collection of data presented information concerning small group instruction, smaller class sizes, real-world application, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. These skills represent approaches for successful intervention strategies.

Small group instruction should be considered for implementation by the school's leadership team. This team will consist of those individuals who are directly responsible for achieving the school's academic goals. The students will benefit from the instructional practice that is being implemented for academic success. The leadership team will have opportunities to meet and discuss test scores, strategic planning, and academic progress of overage students.



Rigorous training for teacher development is another important piece of successful implementation of small group instruction. Teachers, counselors, and administrators should be held accountable for the intervention practices being administered as planned. All stakeholders should be involved in producing positive outcomes for students. The outcome of the intervention strategy is important in determining successful intervention.

Teachers, counselors, and administrators may face many barriers when implementing small group instruction. The external factor of funding and additional responsibilities is areas of concern that can cause a decline in with the implementation of small group instruction. Teachers may not feel supported during the implementation process and overwhelmed with the responsibility to improve academic performance. The leadership team should work collaboratively, so they make an informed decision with small group instruction process to improve the academic success of overage students.

### **Reflection**

The participants in this study had at least five years of educational experience and met the highly qualified status for educators. The participant's valuable experience was instrumental in this study in the development of the project study and beneficial to the potential academic success of overage students. All participants sacrificed their time and effort to be interviewed and suggest that small group instruction as at the intervention needed to support student learning. A qualitative case study approach was used to address the local problem of academic failure among overage students at the target school.

It is important for teachers, counselors, and administrators at the target school to understand how to use small group instruction effectively. The school's leadership team must believe in this instructional practice, so counselors and teachers buy-in to the implementation process of this strategy. A commitment to this intervention should demonstrate solidarity among the staff and will allow the opportunity for the school to reach their targeted goals. The focus on small group instruction can be used to drive instruction by teachers, monitor overage student's academic path by counselors, and secure administrative support for this approach to the local problem.

The future implications for research should review the local problem of this study, research question, and the results to determine other instructional strategies to improve the academic performance of overage students. One approach for future research may be to compare small group instruction with another proven research-based instructional strategy used to increase student achievement. A second approach for future research may be to incorporate technology with small group instruction to determine if it increases the success rate of overage students. Future studies allow for additional instructional strategies to support the learning needs of overage students.

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# Implications of Small Group Instruction for Overage Secondary Students' Academic Performance

A Policy Paper

## Introduction

- The purpose of this study was to explore four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators with five or more years of educational experience. The data collected was used to determine the best possible intervention to improve the academic performance of overage students at a local secondary school. According to the United States Department of Education (2013), overage students are those students who are behind two or more grades academically.

## Introduction continued

- The problems identified with overage students included misbehavior, out-of-school suspension, and alternative placement. These patterns of behavior have lead to students dropping out of school and falling behind academically. Dropping out of school contributes to a bigger challenge in society.

## Methodology

- A qualitative case study approach was used to collect data for analysis. According to Creswell (2012), a case study provides an in-depth understanding about individuals or a specific event. Four teachers, two counselors, and two administrators were interviewed to address the problem of academic failure of overage students. Data was compiled and transcribed in a reflective journal. The results of the data were analyzed and revealed a recurring pattern or idea for implementation.

## Methodology continued

- The results of the data revealed small group instruction as an instructional strategy to improve academic performance of overage students.

## Literature Review

- The literature in this study focused on the academic failure of overage students include smaller class sizes, real-world application, critical thinking, and problem-solving. According to Chetty (2011), a small class size creates more learning opportunities and increase the level of student achievement. Smaller class sizes has been credited for student's positive behavior, and they pay more attention (Blatchford, 2011).

## Literature Review

- Teachers expose students to real-world application. Real-world application is needed so students can apply what they learned to everyday life. Real-world application will be essential to how students live their lives (Jonassen, 2011). This concept is beneficial in helping students become college and career ready.



## Literature Review

- Critical thinking was also a skill identified with the existing data to improve academic success. Barth and Michelson (2013), noted critical thinking as an important aspect of learning. Barth and Michelson (2013) revealed that the development of critical thinking lead to better decision making and problem-solving skills (Yavuzer, 2012).

## Policy Option

- A policy has been recommended to address the local problem of academic failure in the school under study. The proposed policy suggest that local school officials and administrators implement the instructional strategy of small group instruction to meet the individual learning needs of overage students.

## Policy Advantages

- Increase in test scores
- Improve instructional practice
- Development of cognitive skills
- Development of social learning
- Increase in student engagement
- Decrease in student infractions
- Paying attention in class

## Policy Disadvantages

- Test scores remain the same
- Decrease in test scores
- Lack of professional growth
- Lack of skill development
- Constant behavior problems
- Dropping out of school
- Not paying attention

## Recommendations

- Leadership Team will work collaboratively to identify areas of deficits of overage students. Create a learning path for overage students academic success.
- Provide professional training for teachers so they understand how to use small group instruction in the classroom. Conduct data meetings on a monthly basis and use student data to drive instruction.
- Encourage teacher buy-in through modeling, professional training, and observations. Promote this strategy weekly and obtain feedback from teachers.

## Implementation of Small Group Instruction

- The initial step is to participant in a workshop to gain an understanding of this instructional strategy.
- Conduct a turnaround training at the school so all stakeholders understand how to use small group instruction.
- Disaggregate student data and develop lessons base on the deficits identified.
- Group students according to their learning ability; based on the data.

- Plan lessons to meet the learning needs of students.
- Promote student engagement based on the research-based strategy for instruction.
- Provide for assessment to monitor learning gains and student academic growth.
- Evaluation of lesson and activities to determine the effectiveness of small group instruction.

## Conclusion

- The local secondary school's academic failure among overage students promoted this study. The policy recommendations were suggested to address the local problem of academic failure of overage students. The findings revealed small group instruction as an intervention to help overage students succeed academically. Small group instruction may provide an advantage to overage students growth and development.

## Conclusion continued

- The emphasis on small group instruction has been linked to an increase in critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The school leadership team plays a vital role in promoting the small group instruction so teachers buy-in to this instructional strategy. It is important that teachers are trained properly so they understand how to use small group instruction in the classroom. Teachers should work collaboratively, so they can better plan for instruction, student engagement, and the assessment of student learning.

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### Evaluation Form

<b>Title:</b>	Policy Recommendation
<b>Purpose:</b>	To determine the best instructional strategy to improve the academic performance of overage students.

### Questions

Did the policy paper present adequate information?	
What information in this policy recommendation was most important to you?	
What additional information would you say is needed for this study to implement policy recommendations?	
What is your overall perspective about the policy recommendations?	

<p><b>Evaluation Summary:</b></p>
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<p><b>Recommendation for Future Studies:</b></p>
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### Summative Evaluation Form

<b>Title :</b>	Policy Recommendation
<b>Policy Purpose:</b>	To determine the best instructional strategy to improve the academic performance of overage students.

<b>Policy Recommendations</b>	<b>Area of Concern</b>	<b>Area of Growth</b>	<b>Meets Expectation</b>
<p>___ Policy recommendations plan effectively for student growth.</p> <p>___ Policy recommendations address learning activities.</p> <p>___ Policy recommendations identify students learning needs.</p> <p>___ Policy recommendations has strategic plan for professional growth.</p> <p>___ Policy recommendations suggest instructional strategy for current theory of growth.</p> <p>___ Policy recommendations focus on teacher development.</p>			



<p><input type="checkbox"/> Policy recommendations are aligned with state standards.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Policy recommendations facilitate the implementation process.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Policy recommendations are clear.</p>			
<p><b>Overall Comments:</b></p>			

**Formative Evaluation Form**

The best part of this policy recommendation is:

The worst part of this policy recommendation is:

For me, the content of this policy paper is:

List any other comments about the policy recommendations below: