

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN TEACHER PRACTICES
IN SELECT NORTH CAROLINA MIDDLE SCHOOLS MAKING
ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables	5
List of Figures	6
List of Abbreviations	7
Abstract	8
Chapter One	10
Introduction.....	10
Purpose.....	13
Research Questions.....	16
Potential Significance	18
Definitions.....	19
Chapter Two.....	20
Legislation for Students with Disabilities.....	21
Criteria of a Research Based Reading Strategy	25
Reading Strategies and Programs	27
Fidelity	33
Gaps in Knowledge Base.....	34
Chapter Three.....	36
Overall Approach and Rationale.....	36
Population Selection	37
Instrumentation	41
Focus Group.....	43
Data Analysis Procedures	44
Management Plan.....	45
Chapter Four	47
Introduction.....	47
Organization of Data Analysis.....	47
Demographics of Community.....	49
Presentation of Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents	50
Focus Group Results	67
Analysis of Data.....	74
Summary	78
Chapter Five.....	80
Introduction.....	80
Summary of Study	80
Findings.....	82
Conclusions.....	83
Implications.....	85
Limitations	87
Future Research	88
Summary.....	90
References.....	91
Appendices.....	103
Appendix A: Definitions.....	103

Appendix B: EC Director's Survey	107
Appendix C: Principal's Survey	114
Appendix D: EC Teacher's Survey.....	120
Appendix E: Focus Group Questions	127
Appendix F: Sample Letter To Superintendent	128
Appendix G: Sample Letter to EC Director.....	130
Appendix H: Sample Letter to Principal.....	132
Appendix I: Sample Letter to EC Teacher.....	134
Appendix J: Sample Letter for Focus Group	136

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Rural NC Middle Schools Making AYP in Reading, SWD, 2005-2009	37
2. Rural NC Middle Schools Student Enrollment for 2005-2009, When the Schools Made AYP with the SWD subgroup.....	40
3. Reading Proficient Percentages of the Students with Disabilities Subgroup in Rural NC Middle Schools Making AYP in Reading, 2005-2009	40
4. Top Five Reading Programs and Strategies.....	64
5. Frequently Used Study Strategies Used with SLD Students	66
6. Top Three Additional EC Teacher Strategy Responses	67

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Conceptual Framework.....	17

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AR.....	Accelerated Reader
ATS.....	Academic Teaching Strategies
AYP.....	Adequate Yearly Progress
CI.....	Confidence Interval
EC.....	Exceptional Children
ESEA.....	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
EVAAS.....	Education Value Added Assessment System
FAPE.....	Free Appropriate Public Education
IDEA.....	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IDEIA.....	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act
IEP.....	Individual Education Plan
KWL.....	Know-Want to Know-Learned
LEA.....	Local Education Agency
LST.....	Linguistic Skills Training
NCLB.....	No Child Left Behind
PALS.....	Peer Assisted Learning Strategies
RtI.....	Response to Intervention
SH.....	Safe Harbor
SLD.....	Specific Learning Disabled
SRA.....	Science Reading Associates
SRI.....	Scholastic Reading Inventory
SWD.....	Students with Disabilities

ABSTRACT

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN TEACHER PRACTICES
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Rural, middle schools in North Carolina have struggled with the Students with Disabilities subgroup in making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed. Consequences could be dire for a school and principal with a subgroup of these children who were unable to show growth each year toward total proficiency in reading by 2014. School children have been given the choice to attend other schools in the district and as a result whole school staff could be replaced. This study sought solutions in a reading program and strategies that could help the students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) become proficient at grade level reading. A survey instrument was given to Exceptional Children's (EC) directors, principals, and EC teachers and a focus group discussion was conducted with EC teachers in seven rural school systems in North Carolina who had been successful with making AYP for five years, 2005-2009. Results indicated that one particular reading program or strategy did make a difference, Direct Instruction. Data from the focus group discussion further indicated that these schools were using multiple reading programs and strategies plus quality staff development, whole school reform, creative scheduling, and a

supportive principal to make the difference with the children identified as SLD, in the Students with Disabilities subgroup, as they strove for proficiency.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) (2001) legislation initiated a great race for accountability in public school systems across the United States. Under the Act, schools must meet proficiency standards in reading and mathematics by the 2013-2014 school years. These standards include a 95% student participation rate in the state assessments in these two subjects. The state was responsible for setting gradual benchmark goals for the state to reach as the deadline approaches. For example, in North Carolina from 2005 to 2007, the reading goal was to achieve 76.7% proficiency (North Carolina Public Schools, 2006). In the school year 2007-2008, the reading proficiency goal was to increase to 84.4%, but a re-norming of the End of Grade Reading Test sent the percent proficient down to 43.2% (North Carolina Public Schools, 2008). The State Board of Education made this change to reflect the higher achievement standards set for the new reading assessments administered in the spring of 2008. A similar change was made to accommodate the new mathematics assessments in 2006. Furthermore, the state set these new targets to reflect the greater challenge of the new achievement levels it had established. In order to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress standard (North Carolina Public Schools, 2006), each school must *have met* or *exceeded* the proficiency goal. Finally, the school, overall, must have also made progress in the average daily attendance rate.

The purpose of *No Child Left Behind* has been to ensure that all children are included in assessments, of a school in reading and mathematics. In other words, every

child has the right to receive a quality education and be evaluated to see if the instruction he/she received was adequate in order for them to demonstrate proficiency in these subjects by 2014. To make sure all demographic groups have been represented, the Act specifically designated that certain groups be represented. These groups, termed subgroups, were to be the same for all schools and states. For example, there are groups for the students who are economically disadvantaged, Native American, Hispanic, multiracial, students with disabilities, school as a whole, limited English proficient, black, white, and Asian (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d., para. 5). Each state, however, was allowed to decide how many members a school should have in each group in order to be accountable for that group. For example, in North Carolina, each subgroup must have at least forty students. North Carolina has not been alone in this designation of forty students. However, “22 states now require subgroups to include at least 40 students before they are used to calculate AYP, with states such as Oklahoma, West Virginia and Wisconsin requiring at least 50 students” (Olson, 2005, para. 11).

However, controversy has been coming to light concerning the minimum number of students set by states for subgroup accountability and for ensuring that students were participating and counted. For example, with 50 students in its subgroup, West Virginia included 715 schools in its accountability ratings in 2005 (Olson, 2005, para. 16). “But only 146 of these, or 20%, had to meet subgroup targets for the students with disabilities” (Olson, 2005, para. 16). It seemed that schools had found a loophole for the students with disabilities subgroup by keeping the number in the subgroup high enough to avoid the subgroup all the way around. Another similar example occurred in California. “Of the 9,188 California schools that had to reach school wide targets to make AYP this year,

only 699 had to meet math and reading targets for the special education subgroup, or fewer than 8% of schools” (Olson, 2005, para.17). Merit seemed to exist for the idea that “By using a tool to try to improve the reliability of the system, states have inadvertently negatively affected the validity of the system by leaving so many kids out” (Olson, 2005, para. 31). In other words, the pressure has been so great to achieve AYP that states are now trying to beat the system.

Consequences for a school in North Carolina that does not meet or exceed the AYP goal are varied according to the grade levels of the school, whether it receives Title 1 funds, and how many consecutive years it has failed to meet the goal. For example, beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, any North Carolina school that failed to make the AYP goal for two years, and received federal Title 1 monies, entered School Improvement status and was required to offer school choice to its students. If this was the case, the school was required to inform parents of the status and give them the option of taking their children to other schools that the district had selected. Transportation costs were paid for by the district. Furthermore, a school already in School Improvement status for two years, and beginning the third year, was required to offer tutoring services to economically disadvantaged students who chose not to transfer under school choice. In this third year of Improvement Status, a school was required to take further actions, such as “replacing the school staff, implementing a new curriculum, or changing the school’s internal organization structure” (North Carolina Public Schools: Title I Facts, 2008). If a school entered Improvement Status for the fourth year, it had to formulate a plan for restructuring the school. In the fifth year, a school had to put the restructuring plan into place. Non-Title 1 schools that did not make AYP did not receive any of the

aforementioned sanctions. What these schools were required to do was to change their School Improvement Plans to indicate how they would improve their school (North Carolina Public Schools: Title I Facts, 2008). All schools, under NCLB, were to have highly qualified teachers, were to report their testing results to parents, and were required to strive to meet AYP which includes all subgroups.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine any commonalities in the programs or strategies used with learning disabled students in the Students with Disabilities (SWD) subgroup in rural North Carolina middle schools that made AYP in reading, in 2005-2009.

Examination of the information from the Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. used for this determination revealed severe differences between rural and urban counties. These differences, in addition to their location, affected the schools. “The smaller communities of rural schools often [would] have a limited local tax base to fund their local schools” (Hodge & Krumm, 2009, p. 20). “In 2003-2004, public rural schools relied more on state funding and less on local sources than urban public schools, received a lower percentage of their revenue from federal sources than city schools, and spent more per student than public schools in other locales” (Hodge & Krumm, 2009, p. 20). Schools have had to make tough money management decisions that deal with specialized program options, school choice options, and amounts and quality of staff development (Kossar, Mitchem & Ludlow, 2006, p. 13) “Rural school districts [also] have a history of chronic shortages in special education staff, struggles with recruitment and retention

efforts, and difficulty supplying FAPE [Free Appropriate Public Education] to students with disabilities (Hodge & Krumm, 2009, p. 21).

Another challenging barrier for middle schools has been the SWD subgroup. Students who constitute this subgroup exhibit a wide range of disabilities and exceptionalities for learning. This subgroup faces extraordinary circumstances and challenges even though being held to the same standards as students without disabilities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) charged states to provide “challenging academic content standards and challenging student achievement standards [which] shall be the same academic standards that the State applies to all schools and children in the State” (ESEA, 1111, b, 1, 1965). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2001) further required all students who had disabilities to take district wide assessments or alternate assessments if the students were not able to participate in grade level assessments (IDEA, 612,a, 16, A, 2001). The appropriate accommodations and assessments have to be provided to the students, and it is the job of the Individualized Education Plan Team to make the decision as to which accommodations would benefit the student. “Including students with disabilities in accountability systems has resulted in parents, teachers, and administrators paying more attention to grade-level standards and ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and an opportunity to learn grade-level content” (No Child Left Behind, 2007, p. 11). These students were often excluded from testing in the past, and they, as a group, went along without being noticed in the accountability of the school. Student services were lacking, and little attention was paid to their programming (No Child Left Behind, 2007, p. 11). The scores of the whole subgroup counted for AYP. Although this study was interested

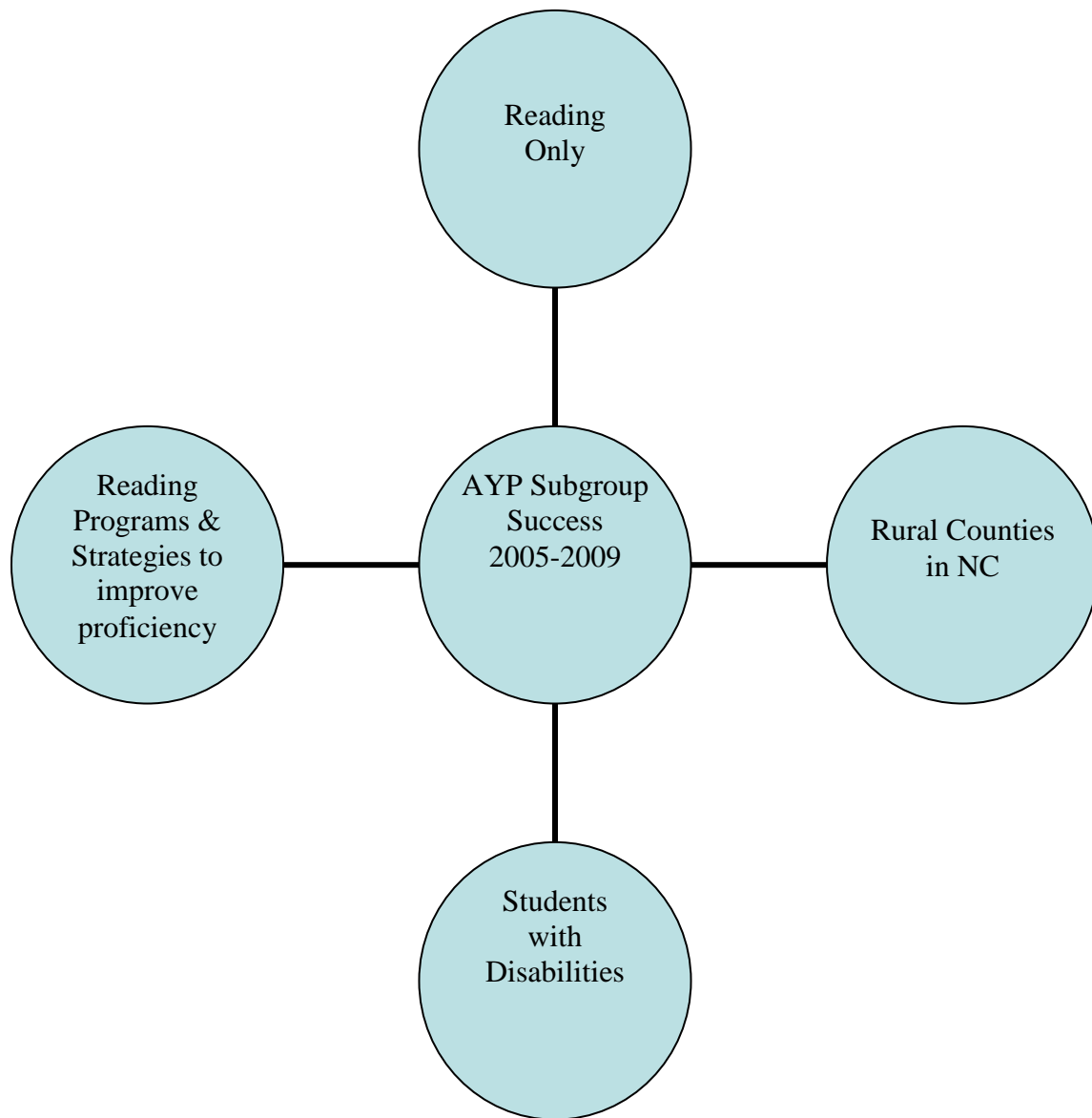
only in the progress of the SLD students, the progress of the whole subgroup had to be taken into consideration. Investigations into the classroom and the teachers of SLD students may yield information as to their progress towards proficiency. Meeting the progress requirement with this particular SWD subgroup, however, “may prove to be the most challenging barrier to reaching AYP targets” (Nagle, Yunker, & Malmgren, 2006, p.25).

A troubling realization has been that the number of children having problems with learning has increased dramatically in recent years. “The number of children identified as learning disabled in our schools had increased dramatically from 1975 when PL 94-142 was passed to the current divisions of IDEA (2001) in 1997/2004. When learning disabled “was first allowable as a special education category, it accounted for about 22% of kids in schools. That number has risen dramatically so that it is 50% of all kids in schools” (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2007). In North Carolina, a specific learning disability means “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the impaired ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia” (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008, p. 6). This designation does not include those students with learning problems as a result of mental retardation, vision or hearing loss, or a disadvantage such as cultural or economic (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008, p. 6). In order to determine eligibility as an Exceptional Child, as termed in North Carolina, a specific learning disabled student has to have a discrepancy in a number of

required screenings and evaluations such as visual, hearing, educational, and psychological evaluation. (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008, p. 102). Through these types of screenings, the student has to “demonstrate inadequate achievement for their age or to meet State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas: Oral expression, Listening comprehension, Written expression, Basic reading skills, Reading fluency skills, Reading comprehension, Mathematics calculation, and Mathematical problem solving (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008, p . 103). The discrepancy has to be “between achievement and measured ability of at least 15 points” (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2008, p. 103).

Research Questions

1. Are there any commonalities among programs or strategies used with students with learning disabilities in rural North Carolina Middle Schools within a Students with Disabilities subgroup which made AYP?
2. What is the frequency of use of specific strategies or programs in North Carolina middle schools with SLD students in the Students with Disabilities subgroup?
3. In rural schools where the SWD subgroup was proficient in reading and the school made AYP, what are the perceptions of the teachers of students with specific learning disabilities regarding the effect of specific strategies or programs on reading performance?

*Figure 1***Conceptual Framework**

Note. The purpose of this study is illustrated in this conceptual framework design. The goal of middle schools in North Carolina is to strive to achieve reading proficiency with the SWD subgroup. Rural schools systems are having an especially difficult time accomplishing this goal due mainly to economic barriers which face these small systems. This purpose of this study is to seek out reading programs and strategies that are being used by rural middle schools in North Carolina that have been successful with meeting AYP with the SWD subgroup by examining the nine middle schools that have consistently been successful from 2005-2009.

Potential Significance

This study contributed to the literature by identifying the reading strategies and programs used with the students who were identified as specific learning disabled within the SWD subgroup. It also expanded the knowledge base on the commonalities in reading programs or strategies used successfully in schools.

The central focus for the conceptual framework (See figure 1) for this study was the specific learning disabled students within the AYP subgroup SWD. Assuming that the success of the students in the SWD subgroup in reading was the paramount concern for faculty in middle schools in North Carolina, administrators, EC directors, and teachers were under pressure to bring this subgroup to proficiency standards. The various programs and strategies school systems were using are producing a wide range of results for these standards.

Questions in a survey to each EC director, administrator, and teacher within selected counties that made AYP between 2005-2009 sought answers into the selection, implementation, and monitoring of programs and strategies used in these North Carolina middle schools with specific learning disabled students. This was important to know because, according to Mellard and Johnson (2008) ,“without [the] assurances that instruction has been delivered as intended, that screening and progress monitoring tools have been administered with fidelity, and that related interventions have been provided consistent with the research base, the ability to support student learning will be compromised” (Mellard & Johnson, p. 131).

Definitions

For the best results in this study, the definitions were taken from the North Carolina Public Schools website which would be the most familiar source for North Carolina educators to locate a definition for any questions asked in this study. These definitions have been included so that there was an understanding of how they should be interpreted in this research. In most cases, the terms were defined as they were interpreted by the State of North Carolina and used by North Carolina teachers (See Appendix A).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Recognizing and understanding the printed word is an important means of communicating, informing and sharing ideas for everyone. It has been said that “understanding and learning from text is at the heart of reading” (Kim, Vaughn, Klingler, Woodruff, Reutebuch, & Kouzekanani, 2006). “As such, reading comprehension is, arguably, the most important academic skill learned in school” (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997, p. 197). In a study by Bryant, Linan-Thompson, Ugel, Hamff & Hougen (2001), a middle school teacher said, “I expect students to be able to read when they come to me in sixth grade” (p. 251). Unfortunately, not all children enter the sixth grade prepared with the skills necessary to handle grade level reading material. Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, and Willows (2001) classified these children with reading problems into two categories. One category included the children with higher cognitive abilities than reading level who became poor readers. The second category of problems included children with both low cognitive abilities and low reading level (p. 398). Problems with reading success were a given with these children.

According to Gersten, Fuchs, Williams and Baker (2001), a student with a learning disability will “experience unexpected failure to learn, and most states have adopted an approach to identification whereby a discrepancy between intellectual capacity and academic achievement constitutes evidence of a learning disability” (p. 280). Welsh (2007) stated that 80% - 90% of children who were referred for the special education programs were referred for reading problems (p. 116). Vaughn, Sharon, Linan-Thompson and Sylvia (2003) distinguished special education from regular education for learning disabled students by saying that special education was “more explicit, intensive,

and supportive” (p. 142). The service delivery method, however, was not defined, and it varied from school to school and from state to state.

For this reason, Deshler (2005) stated that in serving students with learning disabilities, field educators must be willing to address all aspects of students with learning disabilities. In Deshler’s research, these students struggled with the curriculum they faced in the classroom. Middle school students who are learning disabled have limited time left before they face the challenges of more difficult curriculum as they advance to each grade. “In other words, a key factor affecting learning is both the amount of time in instruction and how effectively each instructional moment is used to engage students in activities that contribute to their learning” (p.123). The solution, according to Deshler, is intensity during instruction and this has been “achieved by progressive pacing, frequent question-answer interactions, and frequent activities that require [d] a physical response, (e.g. pointing, writing, raising hands, repeating)” (p. 123).

Legislation for Students with Disabilities

To help regulate the services for children with SLD, the federal government has intervened with various legislations with first the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965. This insured an education for all regardless of ability or financial situation. Ten years later, (1975) Public Law 94-142 was enacted. This law required the public schools who accepted federal funding to provide equal access to an education for children with physical and mental disabilities, and that education also had to be free and appropriate. Schools could no longer pick and choose which students with disabilities they accepted to educate. Furthermore, it further gave parents the rights to challenge plans the school could make for their individual child’s education. Passage of the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, (IDEA) guaranteed that students with disabilities would receive extra help to level the playing field in the classroom and the school by “identifying specific accommodations and curriculum modifications to ensure student involvement with and progress in the general education curriculum” (Soukup, Wehmeyer, Bashinski, Bovaird, 2007, p. 101). When amendments were made to this act (IDEA, 2001), it “required that students with disabilities participate in state and local assessments and that results be reported; the *IDEA* did not require that the results be factored into accountability indexes” (Malmgren, McLaughlin, & Nolet, 2005, p.86). These led to the development of alternate assessments that vary from state to state. “Alternate assessments at that time were quite ill defined and diverse in both focus and format; needless to say, the empirical support for them was and continues to be debatable” (Yovanoff & Tindal, 2007, p.185). Improvements in standardizing assessments became more regulated with the reauthorization of *ESEA* in 2001, now known as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). This act put accountability for the education of children with special needs back on the individual schools. In order to determine whether a school was to be held accountable for AYP, the schools must have had a subgroup of members in different categories, and the number required varied by state. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) specified that each state develop a formula for the number of students to be in each subgroup of students and that number be a reliable representation of each group (NCLB Act 2002). For example, if, as is in North Carolina, there were forty students classified as students with disabilities (SWD), then they constituted a subgroup. Other subgroups in a school could be economically disadvantaged, blacks, whites, American-Indian, etc. The important part of this was that

the subgroup, as a group, must make progress on state tests as a group. This caused turmoil in schools across the country because progress on state tests was measured in what the act termed as *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*. “Reactions to the accountability provisions of NCLB suggest that many schools and school districts believe that improving the performance of students with disabilities may prove to be the most challenging barrier to reaching *AYP* targets” (Nagle, Yunker, Malmgren, 2006, p.29). In a 2003 *Washington Post* article, Michael Fletcher interviewed Mike Ward, the state schools superintendent, about North Carolina’s progress with NCLB. “North Carolina has made some of the best academic progress in the nation” (para. 15). “It is counterintuitive that in a state that has done this, that 60 percent of the schools can’t meet the federal standard [NCLB]” (para. 15).

In order to meet the needs of the SWD subgroup, *NCLB* mandated that “federal grantees use their funds on evidence-based strategies, putting educational research in an unprecedented spotlight” (Browder and Cooper-Duffy, 2003, p.158). Schools were trying different programs and research based strategies, and some were making gains while some were repeatedly failing to make growth.

Humphreys’ (2002) approach was directly linked to middle school reading instruction. His solution was a basic common sense idea. Typically, middle school teacher licensure has been subject directed. Teachers generally have only one or two subject areas on which they focus and become certified to teach. Teachers are certified in English language arts, math, science, and social studies, and these make up a typical core academic block. Humphreys stated that many states were trying to correct this problem with reading by making a clear distinction between English Language Arts and reading

by developing a curriculum unique to each subject. “They have revised their language arts standards, which had previously integrated middle school reading into English, thereby forcing it to compete with grammar, listening, speaking, spelling, and writing” (p.755). For success, “reading course descriptions should focus on instruction in such areas as word recognition skills, vocabulary building, comprehension, fluency, reading and comprehending a variety of genres and materials, determining the literal and inferential meanings of text, making predictions, elaborating on meaning using prior knowledge, applying knowledge of story structure to analyze and interpret selections, study skills, and independent reading” (p. 755).

In a study by Gersten, Fuchs, Williams and Baker (2001), researchers found that “when compared with students without learning disabilities, students with learning disabilities have limited background knowledge for reading most texts” (p. 286). “Knowledge gaps in history, geography, and science interfere with how well students with learning disabilities understand the material they are expected to understand” (p.286). Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003) suggested that parental involvement could help with this problem. The idea was centered on a team approach, with the teachers knowing the curriculum and the parents knowing their children. “Parents can offer insight into how to build on the student’s ability by finding ways to document progress on state standards” (p. 159). Of course, this all stems from parents being willing to be active in their child’s education.

Criteria of a Research Based Reading Strategy

No Child Left Behind set the standard for quality reading interventions to be scientifically based research. “To say that an instructional program or practice is grounded in scientifically based research means there is reliable evidence that the program or practice works” (U.S. Department of Education, n. d., p. 18). The U. S. Department of Education has a framework for how to evaluate whether or not a program or intervention meets the criteria of being scientifically- based. It stresses the importance of both quality research and the right quantity of studies for there to be legitimate results. The Department of Education has established an easy three step process. First, “the study should clearly describe (i) the intervention, including who administered it, who received it, and what it cost, (ii) how the intervention differed from what the control group received; and (iii) the logic of how the intervention is supposed to affect outcomes” (U. S. Department of Education, n.d., p.17). Key questions included in this step ask about validity, comprised random assignments, and correct the reporting of data. Second, “if the intervention is not supported by ‘strong’ evidence, is it nevertheless supported by ‘possible’ evidence of effectiveness?” (U. S. Department of Education, n.d., p. 17). Key questions here asked if the groups studied were closely matched, included by choice non-participating members, and were members selected at random. Third, “if the intervention is backed by neither ‘strong’ nor ‘positive’ evidence, one may conclude that it is not supported by meaningful evidence of effectiveness” (U. S. Department of Education, n. d., p. 17).

Several concerns of many researchers while in this process of implementing a program or strategy, were preparedness, duration and evaluation. The reading strategy

had to be well thought through and researched for effectiveness before being implemented. Vaughn & Linan-Thompson (2003) agreed a well implemented program was the best way to maximize student outcomes. Lyons & Moats (1997) reported, however, that many of the strategies used with students were implemented for only a short time period. “Consequently, when limited effects of a method or intervention are reported, it is not clear whether the limited efficacy is due to the intervention itself or to the fact that it was employed for a duration that was too short to promote long-term change, no matter how robust the intervention” (p.581). Antoniou & Souvignier (2007) gave support to this idea in their research and went on to support that reading interventions extended over a long period of time are more effective. Lyon & Moats (1997) stated that a balanced and complete approach for an intervention was necessary. It is possible for teachers to focus on one component of a program and to ignore the other parts and eventually cause harm to the whole program outcome. “Balance is one of the most important principles of instruction to emerge from reading research yet intervention students continue to overemphasize one component to the detriment of others” (p. 581). In order to prevent this from happening, Lyon and Moats, (1997) suggested “... monitoring and observation procedures that can provide information about teacher style and teacher-student interactions, no matter what intervention approach or method is being studied” (p. 582). Other suggestions have been a sound organizational format of lesson planning, constructive feedback, thoughtful selection of reading material, and sound delivery and implementation of a program.

Vaughn & Linan-Thompson (2003) said attention should also be focused on the teacher-student ratio when a reading intervention was tried. “Lower teacher-student

ratios allow for increased teacher-student interactions, individualization of instruction, student on-task behavior, and teacher monitoring and feedback” (p. 143). “For reading instruction, group size is particularly relevant for several reasons: smaller group sizes are associated with improved outcomes; the range of reading abilities represented in general education classrooms may be from three to five grade levels, and smaller groups reduce variability of instructional needs of students; group size affects the amount and quality of oral language used among English language learners; reading instruction can be tailored to students’ individual needs” (p. 143).

Reading Strategies and Programs

In numerous recent studies, researchers have tried a strategy in isolation to see if it, alone, made a difference in reading achievement. For example, in a study completed by Antoniou and Souvignier (2007), the researchers attempted to claim that students who “self-regulated” (p.43) and who would take responsibility for their own reading could make significant gains in reading achievement. Boekaerts (1999) defined self-regulation as “being able to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes which can be transferred from one learning context to another and from learning situations in which this information has been acquired to a leisure and work context” (p. 446).

Antoniou and Souvignier (2007) developed an intervention process whereby students attacked each piece of reading to develop their understanding through a series of steps. First, students were “text detectives” and answered the essential questions of *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where*. Second, students used their own personal prior knowledge to make a connection with the story. Third, students were to “clarify text difficulties” and make a list of vocabulary words they didn’t understand. Fourth, students would

summarize the piece to check for comprehension. Finally, students would review a checklist that would help them understand the process but also have a visual reminder for the next time they began a new reading. The end result of this study was positive and yielded long range gains for the students “in reading comprehension, reading-strategy knowledge and reading self-efficacy” (p. 51).

In an earlier study, “repeated reading” (p. 253) was promoted by Therrien (2004) as a strategy to improve reading. It was defined as “a supplemental reading program that consists of re-reading a short and meaningful passage until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached” (p. 253). Results from this study did reveal a moderate gain in fluency, but agreed that other components should be included for better results (p. 257).

Samuels (1997) also did a study on repeated readings. In his study, the “method consists of re-reading a short, meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached” (p. 377). The student might struggle with the first reading, but according to Samuels, after each subsequent reading, the “decoding barrier” (p. 378) was gradually overcome. Usually the student read the passage with the teacher first and then returned to his/her seat for the second reading. The third attempt was completed again with the teacher and, compared with the first attempt, resulting in “reading speed, and number of word recognition errors on a graph” (p. 377). The validity of this strategy was, however, called into question in a study by Gertsen, Fuchs, Williams and Baker, (2001). These researchers questioned how students would have done with reading passages that had not been practiced.

Another study (Calhoun, 2005) examined peer-mediated instruction to see if it benefitted middle school students and increased their reading skills. Through two skill

programs, Linguistics Skills Training (LST) and Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS), many skills were introduced. “LST directly teaches phonetics, phonology, morphology, and English orthography” (p. 427). “The PALS program incorporates three essential reading activities, Partner Reading, Paragraph Shrinking, and Prediction Relay” (p. 427). The results were positive for improvement in word recognition and reading comprehension. “The small group sizes, immediate feedback, and increased student practice” (p. 430) seemed to make a difference for these students. Technology was included in a fourth strategy (Kim, Vaughn, Jannette, Woodruff, Reutebuch and Kouzekanani, 2006). The program called *Collaborative Strategic Reading* provided an individualized learning pace, choices in learning paths and reading passages, and reading level options” (p. 237). Students had immediate feedback and teachers had access to progress reports through data that was organized in different formats. Results of the study did yield positive outcomes for students with disabilities in reading comprehension but some teachers did struggle with the technology.

In a much earlier meta-analysis (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes and Moody, 2000) one-on-one tutoring was analyzed as making a possible difference in the reading achievement of at-risk students. In the meta-analysis, the authors compared one-to-one tutoring by an adult with specialized training to a similar program, *Reading Recovery*, and also with students in small group instruction (p. 613). The study measured the amount of time that was spent with the students and how intense each tutoring session was with the student. Although the meta-analysis would not endorse *Reading Recovery* because of inaccuracies in the implementation and maintenance of the program, the results of this study suggested that help from an adult in a one-on-one study did make a

significant difference for students in reading achievement in standardized reading tests (p. 617).

Effective reading instruction also played into the success of a student's ability to be successful with reading. Welsch (2007) reported that there were two types of categories of skills that will lead to fluency. According to Welsch they are "academic teaching strategies (ATS) and instructional planning" (p. 116). The strategies in the category of ATS included "repeated reading, guidance and feedback, reading time, and reinforcement" (p.116). The strategies in the category of instructional planning "determine what is to be taught and when it is taught"(p.116). The success was in matching the passage's level of difficulty to the student's ability.

According to Shippen, Houchins, Steventon, and Sartor (2005) a program that has a long history of success with students with disabilities and older readers is Direct Instruction. This type of instruction "calls for the design of an educational system that adjusts the curriculum and instruction around each student's performance so that every student experiences a high rate of success while adhering to fixed standards of achievement" (Kim & Alexrod, 2005). It is "based on the behavioral approach to learning and promotes mastery of meaningful reading through explicit teacher direction in homogeneous groups" (Shippen, Houchins, Calhoon, Furlow, & Sartor, 2006). Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) described the program as including "explicit, skill based, teacher-directed instruction on individual reading skills and use of phonetically regular, predictable texts to promote application of newly acquired skills" (p. 200). Kim and Axelrod (2005), added that Direct Instruction is often used in schools to identify the weaknesses in basic skills and then the curriculum is adjusted through interdisciplinary

units (p. 114). For Kim and Axelrod (2005), emphasis was placed on individual needs and student mastery of the skills (p. 114).

In a recent study by Endress, Weston, Marchand-Martella and Martella (2007), researchers introduced a new program. “Phono-Graphix is a linguistically-based program that builds upon the primacy of sound knowledge in the process of reading development” (p. 4). In this program “letter forms are taught in conjunction with sounds but not in terms of letter names” (p. 4). What is important to remember here is that the letters do not make the sounds themselves, but they represented the sounds, according to Endress et. al (2007). The *Phono-Graphix* program was leveled into “Basic Code”, “Sound Pictures”, and “Advanced Code”. The program began with students arranging tiles to form small words. Next, games like Bingo, story reading, and spelling activities were introduced. The third level then brings in the blends of letters and sounds with consonant digraphs and phonographs. Endress et. al reported that “evaluation suggested that instruction that is explicit, structured, and targets core skills, such as phonemic awareness, segmenting, and blending, holds much promise in remediating reading deficits for students with disabilities of various ages” (p. 18).

The work by Sitzmann, Hightree, Moritz and Elton (2002) appeared to be an extensive collection of reading strategies and interventions. In this manual, entitled *Response to Intervention*, “RtI” models, school psychologists had inventoried the strategies that were available for educators, as directed through *NCLB*. However, there are no judgments given about the effectiveness of these strategies or programs in this work. They are categorized by levels of how involved the strategy is and how much time the student spends on the intervention each week. Under the moderate and intensive

interventions heading were such scripted programs as *Reading Mastery*, *Corrective Reading* and *QuickReads*. *Reading Mastery* was an elementary school program that helped students with strategies to better transition from simply decoding to comprehension. The *Corrective Reading* program's range was from early childhood to adulthood. With this program, there were "four levels for decoding plus four for comprehension that address the varied reading deficits and skill levels found among older students" (p. 25). According to the National Institute for Literacy's 2nd Workshop on Adolescent Literacy: Practice Models for Adolescent Literacy Success in 2002, *Corrective Reading* when "implemented consistently by well-trained teachers, the growth rate in reading increases to two or three grade equivalents in one year, making it possible for many students to catch up in 1 year of instruction" (p. 12). *QuickReads*, by Pearson Learning, worked on fluency through high interest nonfiction readings that utilized vocabulary that helped students in social studies and science.

A scripted program left out of the *Response to Intervention* is *Language!* by Sopris West, 2007. "The curriculum is a comprehensive, integrated literacy approach, systematically and explicitly teaching phonological, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension skills" (National Institute for Literacy, 2002). Although one of the latest programs introduced, it was often criticized because of its cost, multiple components, and the time consumed in the levels of progression to complete the program.

Fidelity

Aside from the various reading strategies and research based programs that exist and are being tried among middle school educators, such as the ones listed in this review, there are factors concerning the implementation of these programs and the accessibility of

these programs to students. The procedures for ensuring programs are being utilized as intended can be tested in what educators call fidelity checks. In other words, “researchers must be able to state that their interventions were implemented as planned or intended and were not modified or otherwise changed substantially by those responsible for implementing the treatment” (Gresham, MacMillan, Beebe-Frankenberger, and Bocian, 2000). Practices that should be included in a fidelity check would “link interventions to improved outcomes; definitively describe operations, techniques, and components; clearly define responsibilities of specific persons; create a data system for measuring operations, techniques, and components; create a system for feedback and decision making; create accountability measures for non-compliance” (NRCLD, 2006).

“It is probable that the ineffectiveness of many instructional or behavioral interventions designed in a consultation context is due to the poor integrity of these interventions (i. e., deviations from a treatment or instructional protocol)” (Gresham, MacMillan, Beebe-Frankenberger, and Bocian, 2000). According to Noell and Witt (1999), little is known about how effectively teachers implement interventions as prescribed (p.30).

As important as the fidelity of programs, is the integrity and fidelity for the inclusion of this SWD subgroup’s performance, reform initiatives to meet the challenges of NCLB, student participation in the programs, and intentional exclusion of special education students to skew reading achievement results in state testing. This possible exclusion was referred to in a recent study (Nagle, Yunker, and Malmgren, 2006), which suggested that students should be encouraged to participate in state and local assessments. As reported by a state level educator, “We underestimate the ability of children with disabilities[;] generally . . . we want to force people to reconsider their

expectations and then get on with allowing children to have opportunities they haven't had before" (p. 33). This same study acknowledged that several states had flexible requirements for state testing that mixed up the combination of assessments students would take to show progress. In some states new assessments were added to give more students opportunities. In other systems, student accommodations and how these might affect assessment scores were a concern. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) team's role became crucial here in helping with the decisions regarding appropriate assessments which were important to states in this study. Still many states responded that ". . . there has been this culture out in the schools and amongst teachers who identify a student as special education and say, 'They don't take test [s]'" (p.33). All in all, states were concerned in how NCLB would impact their states and the reputation of their academic status because they struggled with this subgroup. There seemed to be an element of panic in the responses of the participants in regard to how they might improve their programs to meet the demands of NCLB.

Gap in Knowledge Base

"With an estimated 25 to 30 percent of U. S. school children attending schools in rural areas, examining policies and practices that support learning of all students is critical in evaluating the overall effects of these reforms" (Nagle et al, 2006, p. 3). The work by Sitzmann, Hightree, Moritz and Elton(2002) provided an extensive collection of reading strategies and interventions that represent the Response to Intervention movement. Here, researchers introduced the strategies and programs to teachers and had them identified in tiered levels for student to progress through until success was achieved.

This collection included several of the programs and strategies discussed in this current dissertation.

“In 2004, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; P. L. 108-446) allowed for a student’s response to research-based intervention to be part of the process for identifying students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) (Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008, p. 10). “IDEIA allows for continued poor response to validated instruction as a means for documenting that a student’s disability may require specialized services to produce appropriate learning outcomes” (Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008, p. 10). The purpose of this dissertation was to add to the existing knowledge in details about which specific strategies and programs have been successful with students who are learning disabled in North Carolina middle schools which have experienced success with making AYP.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Overall Approach and Rationale

The design of this study utilized mixed methods research principles. A study of type is defined “as the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more states in the process of research” (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, Creswell, 2005, p. 224). This study was a descriptive study because it observes objects, persons, and relationships as they appear while experimental studies seek to change outcomes by manipulating the subjects through changes, interventions, etc. (Hopkins, 2000) . This study was retrospective because it focused on conditions in the past as the subjects experienced them and were affected. The data were gathered retrospectively at only one time point, making the participants involved an historical cohort (Hopkins, 2000).

Qualitative methods were also utilized within this study through a focus group discussion. Focus group discussions give the researcher more meaningful data from a particular group of people responding to a particular topic. “They are increasingly viewed as a valid research method, especially when a researcher is interested in ‘filling in between the lines’, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of issues” (Whitney, 2005, p. 4). Focus groups differ from group interviews in that the questions are more focused for the information needed for a particular study and the participants are more carefully selected (Whitney, 2005). The richest data from this focus group discussion comes from the discussion that develops as the participants interacted and shared (Whitney, 2005).

Population Selection

The population selected for this study was the school personnel in North Carolina rural school systems which have middle schools that have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading for the school years 2005-2009 in the Students with Disabilities subgroup. Within this subgroup, the students who were identified as SLD and their teachers were the referent group for surveys and for the following focus group questions. To determine which schools were to be analyzed, data were obtained for all sixth-eighth grade middle schools in North Carolina that had been classified as rural by the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. To check for trends, school data were studied for the 2004-05 through 2008-09 school years. If the school had met AYP, with the SWD subgroup, which included the SLD students in reading for all five years, they were selected to be studied. Nine schools met these criteria and are coded letters A-I to ensure anonymity. These letters will represent each school throughout the study (See Table 1).

Table 1.
Rural NC Middle Schools Making AYP in Reading, SWD, 2005-2009

Schools	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
B	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
C	CI	CI	Y	CI	Y
D	Y	CI	CI	CI	Y
E	CI	CI	CI	CI	Y
F	Opt. 1	SH	Y	Y	Y
G	Opt. 1	SH	CI	Y	Y
H	Opt. 1	SH	CI	CI	CI
I	SH	SH	SH	Y	Y

Note. Each school included in the survey is identified under the Schools column by a letter representing that school. This letter is consistently used throughout the study as an identifier for the school. Under the columns with the two year span are the results of each school in meeting the AYP requirements. Codes represent how each school met AYP for that particular school year. The codes are defined in the Appendix. The codes represent the following: *Y*, Yes, the school made AYP; *CI*, the school met AYP by the Confidence Interval; *SH*, the school met AYP by safe harbor; *Opt. 1*, the school made AYP through this special option as provided through the NC Department of Public Instruction.

Data analysis from the table revealed only two schools had made AYP all five years without utilizing the Confidence Interval, Safe Harbor or Option 1 provision. The other seven schools met AYP in this particular subgroup but needed to utilize the safeguards of the Safe Harbor, the Confidence Interval, or Option 1 (See Appendix).

Two counties were represented by their middle schools twice in the table, schools *C* and *I* and schools *F* and *H*.

Again, in a North Carolina school, under *No Child Left Behind* (2001) Students with Disabilities is a targeted group that must meet proficiency in reading and math by the 2013-2014 school year. When the number of students identified as an exceptional child in a school reaches 40 members, the school recognizes them as a SWD subgroup and the school falls under the sanctions of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and must meet Adequate Yearly Progress in reading and math. A subgroup does not have a maximum number. In Table 2, the schools included in this study are listed and identified again by letters that represent their identity. School data are shown from each year beginning with 2004-2005 and ending with 2008-2009. The total population is listed first followed by the number of students within the SWD subgroup. Although the school enrollment did vary, the number of exceptional children does stay relatively uniform with only slight variance (see Table 2).

Keeping in mind that the number of students under the school years reflected in Table 2 represent the SWD subgroup as coded per school, a comparison can be made to the reading proficiency percent shown in Table 3. For example, in 2004-2005, School A had 68 students in the SWD subgroup (data from Table 2). These students are also shown in Table 3, under school A, because it was their scores that generated the 90.2% proficient in reading. Further analysis of Table 3 shows that in 2007-08 the reading proficiency percentages dropped dramatically due to the North Carolina Reading End of Grade test being re-normed. The State Board of Education made these changes regarding testing. The affect this had on the schools was significant because it drastically dropped their proficiency percentage to an average of 33 points. This was statewide and the schools included in this study did continue to meet the requirements of Adequate Yearly Progress. Looking further into Table 3, the highest proficiency percentage at grade level on the table, in all years, was school A, with 90.2% in 2004-2005. The lowest proficiency percentage on the table, in all years, before the drop in 2007-08, belonged to school I with 61.0%, and they went up to 67.5% the next year.

Rural middle schools in North Carolina, with only grades sixth through eighth, were chosen for this study because they are the group that consistently struggles the most to meet the challenges of NCLB and AYP. One difference is that at the middle school level, in grades sixth through eighth, the school is responsible for each grade's test results for NCLB. Elementary schools are only responsible for testing results for NCLB in grade five. The elementary school's attendance in grades three through five impact NCLB but not the requirement of test results for each grade three through five. (North

Table 2.

Rural NC Middle Schools Student Enrollment for 2005-2009,
When the Schools Made AYP with the SWD Subgroup.

Schools	2004-2005 POP	2005-2006 POP	2006-2007 POP	2007-2008 POP	2008-2009 POP
A	859/68	967/75	1052/79	1121//89	1043/78
B	1445/91	1712/125	1650/127	1106/91	1437/105
C	603/86	576/87	566/89	611/96	669/97
D	705/70	758/61	772/61	809/59	778/52
E	688/114	938/113	761/108	819/108	852/105
F	510/76	481/69	482/63	452/56	454/58
G	783/90	789/94	809/88	808/92	834/108
H	579/84	548/73	544/75	536/79	564/82
I	709/89	701/89	655/87	681/80	650/80

Note. In the population (POP) column, the larger number is the enrollment of the total population of students. The smaller number is the number of students included in Students with Disabilities subgroup.

Table 3.

Reading Proficient Percentages of the Students with Disabilities Subgroup in Rural NC Middle Schools Making AYP in Reading, 2005-2009.

Schools	2004-2005 % Reading	2005-2006 % Reading	2006-2007 % Reading	2007-2008 % Reading	2008-2009 % Reading
A	90.2	82.9	81.8	44.6	69.2
B	81.1	85.6	87.1	52.9	79.4
C	80.8	73.8	83.7	38.7	50.6
D	76.9	72.2	73.2	39.3	50.0
E	72.8	70.9	70.3	35.9	45.5
F	66.7	73.4	83.9	52.9	71.7
G	64.7	71.4	70.1	55.4	56.7
H	62.3	73.5	72.6	38.9	41.6
I	61.0	67.5	78.8	48.7	67.9

Note. In the table, % Reading, represents the percent of Student with Disabilities that was proficient at grade level in reading during that particular school year. The population of students changes year to year.

Carolina Public Schools, 2006). The subgroup within rural schools that consistently seemed to be the hardest to achieve AYP success is Students with Disabilities (Malmgren, McLaughlin, and Nolet, 2005). This includes all students with many different classifications of disabilities. The subgroup's success must be viewed as the whole, even though this study was most concerned with the impact of strategies and programs for the students with SLD. At the middle school level, grades six, seven, and eight counted into the composite score for North Carolina ABC Accountability Model and counted as membership for the AYP subgroups.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this study included a survey and focus group questions. The survey was used to retrieve basic information from the nine school systems through questions related to the reading instruction and composition of classrooms for the learning disabled. "Survey research can be used to examine topics such as the attitudes of general education teachers toward inclusion, the amount of time special educators devote to paperwork, and the types of reading interventions used in resource rooms" (Cook & Cook, 2008). Cook and Cook went on to say that surveys were also a good means of determining evidence-based practices used in the classroom (Cook & Cook, 2008). Because of the timeliness of educational research, scholars have recently focused their attention on making survey data more reliable and surveys a more valid research tool (Desimone, Smith, & Frisvold, 2010).

Surveys and focus group questions were written as the researcher read peer-reviewed research on reading strategies or programs, best practices for reading teachers, best practices for the instruction of exceptional children, and the role of the principal and

Exceptional Children's director with reading instruction. These questions were beta tested by three EC teachers, three principals and two EC directors to check for clarity and validity of questions. Although outside of the selected population of schools, these individuals work in systems similar to those included in the study. All school systems used for this beta test were rural. Recommendations and affirmations were made by these respondents as a result of the beta test to help clarify any unclear questions. A good recommendation about the different roles EC directors have before coming to the role as a director came from an EC director. According to the respondent, many directors had a background in speech pathology, school psychology, and therapy. Another helpful recommendation came from an EC teacher who suggested that two questions be changed to clarify whether the classroom setting was an inclusion setting with a team teacher or a pullout setting where IEP goal instruction was delivered. The questions in the surveys that related to this information were changed to reflect these suggestions.

Survey questions were developed by the researcher as the researcher read scholarly journals in preparation for this study. A survey was mailed to the EC director of each particular school system (see Appendix B), and the principal (See Appendix C) at each of the nine selected schools. The principal at each school was asked to complete a survey and to select an EC teacher who taught SLD students to respond to an EC teacher specific survey (See Appendix D). Surveys were coded by number for the different respondents: 1- EC director, 2 -principal, 3- EC teacher. Surveys were also coded to tell which surveys came from each school using alphabet letters A – I. This coding insured anonymity for the responding schools in the analysis of results. Questions on the surveys

were multiple choices in which the participant selected a response from the choices provided.

Focus Group

When EC teachers received the initial survey, attached was a request for participation in a focus group discussion. Three EC teachers agreed to participate. The focus group was used to probe for more information from the EC teachers to gain their unique perspective into reading strategy and program success at their schools and at instructional issues with the EC classroom and individual student needs (See Appendix E). The seven questions for the focus group came from the literature read by the researcher. Focus groups are an important tool for researchers to delve deeper into the mindset of the group being studied (Langer, 2001). With a focus group, in a brief amount of time, a large amount of data could be gathered from a group of people. According to Whitney, the focus group could serve as a principal source of data that can stand alone as a quality source or as a means to add information to surveys (Whitney, 2005). The focus group discussion for this study was conducted through a webinar utilizing the WEBEX website (www.webex.com). Participating teachers could call a phone number or log-in on the website to join the discussion. On the webinar screen, discussion questions were visible and teachers could ask or type questions in return. The focus group was held on September 2, 2010 and the discussion lasted for 43 minutes. The discussion was recorded and transcribed for use in this study.

Data Analysis Procedures

In this sequential explanatory design, the quantitative data are collected and then the qualitative data. The data as a whole is weighted unequally because the quantitative

data was retrieved first. The qualitative data is used to corroborate, refute and augment the survey data (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, Creswell, 2005, p. 229).

“Specifically, quantitative and qualitative methods could be combined to use results from one method to elaborate on results from the other method (complementarity), use results from one method to help develop or inform the other method, recast results from one method to questions or results from the other method (initiation), and extend the breadth or range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components (expansion)” (Hanson, et al, 2005, p. 226).

Once the surveys were returned and the focus group discussion held, according to the type of respondent, the data analysis process began. First, the data from the surveys were tabulated by each question. Surveys from all principals, EC directors, and EC teachers were recorded and analyzed for trends within their respective groups. The school letter was used in the tabulation process to represent each individual school. In the two counties that contained two middle schools, the responses were compared to see the similarities or differences in the delivery and composition of reading instruction between two schools within the same county. The responses for each question in the survey were also compared among similar respondents in the same role. For example, all participants were asked how long a class period was during the day. Responses by the EC teacher, the principal and the EC director for that county were compared to see if the answer was the same or different. The research wanted to know if, for example, the EC director knew how long the class period was at the selected school. This might infer that the EC director was or was not aware of what was occurring in the school. Responses for

all the EC teachers were also compared to see how the length of the class period varied from each school.

Secondly, the focus group discussion data was analyzed by each open ended question in which the three focus group participants responded. The focus group discussion was transcribed to remove the possibility of participants' responses being misinterpreted. After analyzing both types of data, separately, the results were integrated in order to answer the three research questions in this study.

Management Plan

During the first week in June, 2010, Western Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission to proceed with this study. One provision remained in the IRB process and this was that as each school system's superintendent granted permission, this researcher would forward the signed permission form to the Education Leadership's representative on the IRB Board for approval. As each letter came in during the months of June and July, 2010, surveys were sent to the selected principals of the selected schools and the EC directors of the school systems. The principals were asked to select an EC teacher who worked specifically with specific learning disabled students to complete a survey from the teacher's perspective. During this time, numerous attempts by phone and mail were made to gain responses from participants in this study. By the middle of August, the surveys were returned to the researcher. Several participants did require additional response time due to the late start of the school year by many school systems across the state due to fluctuating school start dates. The data from the surveys were then analyzed by tabulating the responses from each question on the survey by participant. Using the letter codes which represented the

individual schools, comparisons could be made to see, for example, all responses with school *C* because they were marked with the school letter in all three categories of participants. The latter part of August was spent tabulating the results and reporting the findings in a written form. These findings were followed by synthesis and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

Descriptive statistics are simply describing what the data show and what has occurred within the data. Since the targeted population is so small all participants can be included. They can be surveyed or interviewed. The results represent only what these nine middle schools experienced and did to be successful with the SWD subgroup in AYP from 2005-2009.

In this descriptive study, research questions included:

1. Are there any commonalities among programs or strategies used with students with learning disabilities in rural North Carolina Middle Schools within a Students with Disabilities subgroup which made AYP?
2. What is the frequency of use of specific strategies or programs with North Carolina middle schools with SLD students in the Students with Disabilities subgroup?
3. In rural schools where the SWD subgroup was proficient in reading and the school made AYP, what are the perceptions, of the teachers of students with specific learning disabilities regarding the effect of specific strategies or programs on reading performance?

Organization of Data Analysis

Data were gathered for this research by two methods. A survey was sent to the schools within the seven school systems that were successful with the SWD subgroup in reading with AYP during the period 2005-2009. Within these school districts, the principal and an EC teacher of the identified middle school and the district level

Exceptional Children's director received a survey and were asked to complete and return it. Questions on the survey requested basic background information from the respondent, their experience in their respective roles, and their knowledge of the classroom settings and reading instruction at the middle school in their district.

After the initial twenty questions on the surveys, each group of participants was asked to consider a list of reading programs that were supported by peer-reviewed literature of the last decade. This list was generated from the literature review included in this study. Participants were asked to check if the programs were being used with any students classified as SLD in English Language Arts in the middle school selected for this study. If the strategy or program was used in the school with these students, participants were asked if they were knowledgeable of the program or strategy, had observed the program or strategy, had picked the program or strategy used or were unfamiliar with the program or strategy being used. Following the programs was a list of general study strategies that were to be considered if they had been used with learning disabled students. Again, principals and EC directors had the same opportunities to participate and respond whether they were knowledgeable, had observed, had picked, or were unfamiliar with the program or strategy. EC teachers had the same choices with one additional option: was the program or strategy being used in their classroom weekly.

Included with the survey for the group of EC teachers was a request to participate in a focus group discussion that looked more closely at instructional issues within the EC classroom and EC students' individual needs. Seven planned questions were presented to the participants in a webinar hosted by the researcher. Additional questions were asked by the participants to each other as the discussion progressed. Participants were given

detailed instructions on how to access and participate in the forty – three minute webinar. The responses were recorded and transcribed.

Demographics of Community

The population for this study was school personnel in North Carolina rural school systems that have been successful with AYP in reading for the school years 2005-2009 in the Students with Disabilities subgroup. Seven counties met these criteria. Two of these county school systems were represented twice by having two middle schools successfully achieve AYP. The possible target sample for this study was twenty-five participants. Nine principals, nine EC teachers and seven EC directors were invited to respond. To gain a better perspective of these seven counties, basic demographic information was sought. This included that the average population of each of the seven counties according to the 2004 North Carolina Demographic data, was 107,925. The smallest county represented had a population of 61, 867, and the largest represented had a population of 151,838 (Action for Children: North Carolina, 2004). An estimated population of the seven counties in 2009 showed an increase of 15%.

Economic indicators exist that affect the school systems' ability and the students' parents' ability to fund resources for student learning. For example, the impact of the economy as indicated by the average percentage of children in poverty, in 2003, for the seven counties included in this study, based on \$20,000 for a family of four, was 17.13% (Action for Children North Carolina, 2004). The average percentage of children receiving free and reduced lunch for these same counties, in 2005, was 41.18%. In 2007, the average percentage climbed to 47.44%. This is also reflected with the per pupil expenditure decreasing as the state entered in a time of budgetary crisis. In 2004, the per

pupil expenditure for these seven counties was \$6745.29. In 2008, the per pupil expenditure had decreased to \$5447.29 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008).

Furthermore, school demographics within the seven counties have changed over the past five years. In 2005, the school population average was 830 students for these selected middle schools. However, in 2009, the school population average had dropped to 762 students. The free or reduced lunch percentages, in reflection of the economy, have risen. In 2004, an average of 22% of the students in the seven counties received free or reduced lunch. In 2007, there were 29% of the students who received free or reduced lunch (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). The overall population decreased, but the number of students in need increased.

Presentation of Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents

Within the seven county schools, surveys were sent to the Exceptional Children's director, the principal of the selected middle school, and the Exceptional Children's teacher serving students identified as SLD. Demographic information from these three groups of respondents yielded information about their level of experience with exceptional children, middle school students, and the subject of reading. Pertinent questions were asked about their background and their roles in the respective jobs within the school systems.

In the surveys, under the heading *About You*, all three groups were asked about the highest degree they currently held. For all respondents there were four with doctoral degrees, four with Education Specialist degrees, eleven with Master's degrees, and only two with Bachelor's degrees. The highest degree held by the EC directors and principals

was doctorate. Only one of the five EC directors and three of the nine principals held this degree. Two EC directors and two principals held Education Specialist degrees. Two EC directors, four principals, and five of six EC teachers held Master's degrees. Two EC teachers held Bachelor's degrees.

Each respondent was asked about the years of experience with exceptional children in the classroom he or she had. In the EC classroom setting, EC directors' and principals' responses were similar. The majority of both groups had from zero to five years of experience. Only one EC director of the five and one principal of the nine had from six to ten years of experience, and only one from the EC directors' group of five and the principals' group of nine had over twenty-five years experience. The EC teachers' experience in the EC classroom setting was scattered in every response from zero to over twenty-five years with the exception of the span from six to ten years, which had none.

Further analysis with all respondents revealed that in four school systems, *C*, *D*, *G*, and *B*, all participants had completed and returned surveys in all three responding groups: the EC director, the principal, and the EC teacher. In revisiting this same question about experience in the exceptional children's classroom, two of these four systems, *D* and *G* revealed that both the principal and the EC teacher had more experience than the EC director. In another system, *B*, the EC director and EC teacher had more experience than the principal in the exceptional children's classroom. Years of experience and knowledge gained during that experience might impact the decisions made for reading instruction by whomever is the deciding factor. In system *C*, in all three roles, EC director, principal and EC teacher, all had from zero to five years of experience.

In terms of experience with middle school students, the principals and the EC teachers had various amounts of experience, from zero to twenty-five years. The EC directors, however, had much less experience, with four responding that they had from zero to five years, and one responding he/she had from six to ten years. When comparing the responses to this question and looking for discrepancies, in the four complete school systems *C, D, G, and B*, years of experience fluctuated. For example, school systems, *C* and *G*'s responses were as follows: both the EC director and EC teacher had the least experience with from zero to ten years with middle school students. The principals, in *C* and *G* had the most experience with from sixteen to twenty-five years plus with middle school students. In system *B*, the EC director had from zero to five years of experience, the principal had from six to ten years of experience and the EC teacher had from sixteen to twenty years with middle school students. System *D*'s EC director had from zero to five years of experience, the principal had from eleven to fifteen years, and the EC teacher had over twenty-five years experience. In all four systems, *C, D, G, and B* the principal had more experience with middle school students than the EC director. These results indicate that EC directors are new to their role in exceptional children as a director and have little experience with middle school students.

Finally, all respondents were asked about the amount, in years, of experience each had with the subject area of reading. Responses were scattered. Only one respondent each in the EC director's group *B*, the principals' group *G*, and the EC teachers' group *D* had over twenty-five years of experience, and, ironically, they also represented the four complete school systems where all respondents participated in this study, *C, D, G, & B*, as well. In all other responses, two EC directors had eleven to fifteen years of

experience, and one had twenty-one to twenty-five years experience. With the remaining principals, all had from zero to ten years of experience. The EC teachers ranged from zero to twenty years of experience.

Each respondent was asked about how long he/she had been in his/her respective roles as either an EC director, principal, or the EC teacher. The EC directors had the least amount of experience in their current role. Four of the five directors had from zero to five years of experience. Principals had from six to ten or from eleven to fifteen years experience in their role; only one principal had more with twenty-five years of experience. EC teachers' level of experience was across the board: two teachers had from zero to five years, one from six to ten years, one from eleven to fifteen years, two from sixteen to twenty years, and one with over twenty-five years experience.

From the surveys, under the heading *About Your School*, each respondent was asked how long the class period was at their current school. The EC director was asked to keep in mind the selected school chosen in this study and to respond accordingly. The choices for this question began with forty-five minute classes and increased incrementally to ninety minute classes. Responses were scattered on the EC directors' and principals' surveys. When comparing the surveys received from systems *C, D, G & B*, there were similarities and discrepancies among the respondents. For example, in school system *C*, all three respondents, the EC director, the principal and the EC teacher, agreed the class period lasted ninety minutes. However, in systems *D and G*, the EC directors' stated that classes at the particular middle school selected from their system were fifty-five minutes long. The principals, in *D and G* both replied that classes were sixty-five minutes long and both, *D and G's* EC teacher stated that classes were sixty

minutes long. This inconsistency was replicated with school system *B*. Here the EC director revealed that classes at the middle school selected lasted ninety minutes. The principal responded that classes lasted sixty-five minutes, and the EC teacher reported sixty minute classes. Again, this seems to indicate a disconnect or lack of knowledge between the EC directors and the schools. There was also a discrepancy of five minutes between how long the principals thought class lasted and the how long the EC teachers believed the class period lasted.

Several questions within each survey also asked about classroom logistics, such as the student-teacher ratio per classroom for English/Language Arts students with the SWD included in the population. Three of the five EC directors responded that the ratio was twenty-five students to one teacher. Among the eight principals that answered this question, ratios increased incrementally and ranged from ten students to one teacher to thirty students to one teacher. The majority of the EC teachers responded, however, that the ratio was more like ten to fifteen students to one teacher. Some discrepancies did exist between the EC director, the principal and the EC teacher. For example, in System *B*, the EC director said the ratio with the SWD included was twenty students to one teacher. The principal in *B* responded the ratio was ten students to one teacher, and the EC teacher said fifteen students to one teacher. The EC director and the EC teacher in system *G* agreed that the ratio of students to teacher was fifteen to one. The principal responded that it was thirty to one with the SWD included. The opposite occurred in system *C*. The EC director and the principal agreed that the ratio was fifteen students to one teacher and the EC teacher said the ratio was thirty to one. On the other hand, in system *D*, the EC director, principal and EC teacher all agreed the ratio was ten students to one teacher.

In a classroom with the SWD only in the population, ratios were much smaller. The majority of the EC directors, principals, and EC teachers said the ratio was ten students to one teacher. Some discrepancies existed when comparing the EC director's, the principal's, and the EC teacher's responses within the four counties: *C, D, G and B*. Only system *C*'s and *G*'s responses are noteworthy because there was an unexplained wide discrepancy that might indicate a lack of knowledge or communication. In system *C*, the EC director said the ratio was just ten students to one teacher, the principal said the ratio was twenty-five to one, and the EC teacher said the ratio was fifteen to one. However in *G*, the EC director said a fifteen to one ratio existed, while the EC teacher said the ratio of ten students to one existed. The principal, in *G*, then responded that the ratio was thirty students to one teacher.

With this same classroom setting of only SWD in the population, surveys further asked what would be the student/teacher ratio if an instructional assistant was present in the classroom. The majority of EC directors responded with a fifteen student to one teacher ratio. The principals and the EC teachers, with a majority of three responses each said a ten students to one ratio existed.

In terms of instruction, EC directors, principals, and EC teachers were asked about the dynamics of the reading instruction in their school and the logistics of how reading instruction was delivered. The first survey question, addressed to the EC directors and the principals, asked how many minutes were devoted to English/Language Arts instruction during the day. Four of the five EC directors responded that ninety minutes daily was provided for instruction. For the principals, three selected sixty-five minutes, two selected sixty and ninety minutes, one responded fifty-five minutes and one

didn't respond. EC teachers' surveys asked about the time devoted to English/Language Arts, but also emphasized minutes in this subject with SLD students in mind. Three EC teachers responded that class lasted for sixty minutes and one each responded sixty-five minutes, seventy minutes, ninety minutes and other minutes not listed. Discrepancies did exist between the EC director and the principal in both systems *D* and *B*. Both EC directors stated ninety minutes were provided for instruction in English/Language Arts during the instructional day. The principals in these same two systems, however, stated that only sixty-five minutes of instructional time was provided for English/Language Arts instruction.

For the reading program or strategies currently being used with students who are SLD, EC directors, principals, and EC teachers were asked several questions. The first question asked if the programs and strategies were already in place within the school when they, the principal or the EC teacher, assumed his/her current role.

According to the principals, there was an even split on this question with four of the nine agreeing that the program or strategies were in place when they became principal at this school and they had been in place from between one and three years. Four of the nine principals responded by saying that the particular programs or strategies currently used were not in place when they became the principal of the school and one principal didn't respond. An even split was also the outcome of the EC teachers' responses with four of the seven EC teachers responding that programs and strategies were in place when they became an EC teacher and three of the seven responding that programs and strategies were not in place.

The second question in this same area of programs and strategies was asked in two parts. First, EC directors were asked to respond to who made the initial selection of the current programs and strategies being used in the middle school emphasized in this study. The answer choices for this question were as follows: myself, the curriculum committee, or myself and the middle school staff. Only three of the five EC directors responded to this particular question, and two said that he or she and the middle school staff made the selection together. The other EC director said the curriculum committee made the decision.

Another similar question was also asked just of the EC directors: What process was used for their selection of a viable program or strategy for this middle school? EC directors could choose between the following choices: the EC director researched it, listened to vendor presentations, or heard the testimony from another district concerning the effectiveness of the program. Only four of the five EC directors responded and they said they had researched the programs or strategies themselves.

The question directed toward the principals and the EC teachers asked whether they were involved in the selection process of the reading programs or strategies. Eight of the nine principals responded to this question. Six principals indicated they were involved in the selection process of the reading programs or strategies; two principals responded they were not included. All seven EC teachers responded; four said they had not been included, and three responded they were included in the process. There was an interesting occurrence in system *D*. The EC teacher said she was involved in the process, but the principal was not included. In systems *C*, *B*, and *G*, the opposite

occurred. The principals in all three systems, *C*, *B*, and *G* were included in the selection process, but neither of the EC teachers were involved.

Beyond the selection process, all surveys asked if adequate staff development was provided for the staff with the reading program or strategies for use with the SLD students. Four of the five EC directors indicated that they believed enough staff development was provided. One EC director responded that staff development was in process. All but one responding principal and one EC teacher believed adequate staff development was provided for the staff.

An extension of this question asked the EC director if periodic refreshers with staff development on the current reading program or strategy was provided. All EC directors responded that periodic refreshers had occurred either once a year or twice a year. Principals were asked if with this staff development, their staff felt confident in their abilities in the implementation of this program or strategy, or would the principal prefer to see more staff development opportunities. Here, all principals felt their staff was confident with their abilities to implement the program or strategy with the level of staff development they had received. EC teachers were asked directly if the staff development provided for them in this reading program or strategy for SLD students was adequate. All except one of the nine EC teachers felt adequate staff development had been provided.

In gauging whether the program or strategy was accomplishing growth in reading, all surveys asked several questions. Of the EC directors, surveys asked whether students were assessed to gain an understanding of student progress, and if so, what types of assessments were given. EC directors responded that assessments had been given, and

four of the five EC directors responded that formative assessments were used with students. Three of the five EC directors indicated benchmark assessments were used to measure student progress with students. One of the five EC directors said they had used summative assessments to determine if there was progress with the program or strategy. EC directors were asked how often these assessments occurred, and they indicated that they occurred weekly. EC directors further stated there were fidelity checks on the programs and strategies conducted, and according to only two of the five responding EC directors, these were completed by the curriculum specialist in each system. According to two of the five EC directors, these checks were done every nine weeks, and according to one EC director, they occurred at the end of the semester. Four of the five EC directors indicated that the results were shared with principals.

Principals were also asked if they, as administrators, had conducted fidelity checks on the current reading program or strategy used with SLD students. All principals except one indicated that fidelity checks had been conducted. Four of the nine principals responded that they, in turn, had shared the results of the fidelity checks with the EC director. Also, four of the nine principals revealed that they had not shared the results of the fidelity checks with the EC director and one principal didn't respond either way. To gain more individual progress information on students, principals were asked what types of assessment data EC teachers had shared with them regarding whether the current reading program or strategy was being successful. Principals responded and selected multiple types of assessment data that they received from EC teachers. Seven principals received verbal feedback, eight saw disaggregated data and five principals indicated they held conferences with the EC department.

EC teachers were asked only one question on their survey in regard to fidelity checks being conducted on the reading program or strategy. This question asked if they, the EC teacher had been included in the existing fidelity checks by the administrator or the EC director. Three of the seven EC teachers responded that they had received information about results of fidelity checks from either the EC director or administrator. Four of the seven EC teachers replied that they had not received any information about fidelity checks on the program or strategy in place in their school.

Discrepancies existed in the results from the EC director, the principal and the EC teacher in regard to whether fidelity checks were shared with each other in the process of determining the success of the current reading program or strategy. In system *C*, the EC director indicated that he or she had shared the fidelity check results with the principal and the EC teacher. The principal acknowledged that this did happen but the EC teacher responded that he or she had not had fidelity check results shared. In system *D*, the EC director indicated that fidelity check results were shared but the principal and the EC teacher responded that results were not being shared with them about the fidelity checks.

The last question on the survey which all respondents shared addressed whether or not a literacy coach who helped with this reading program or strategy being implemented with SLD students was in place in the selected school. With the EC directors, three of the five responded that such a person was in place in this selected school. Two EC directors responded that a literacy coach was not present at this selected school. Only two of the responding eight principals stated that a literacy coach was present in the schools, while six said there was not such a person in that role. Seven of the nine responding EC teachers also responded that a literacy coach was not present at

their school. Discrepancies did exist with this question. In system *C* and *G*, both the EC director and the principal acknowledged a literacy coach was employed but the EC teacher answered “no” that a literacy coach was not present. In system *B*, the EC director said the system had a literacy coach but the principal and the EC teacher responded that there wasn’t a literacy coach. This might be indicative of a miscommunication between the EC director and the school in regard to whether a person fulfilled this role in the school or not.

At the end of the surveys, the responses to the remainder of the questions were mixed among the respondents. The EC directors’ final question inquired about the duration of the reading program or strategy in place at the school. Two of the five EC directors said the program or strategy had been in place for three years, and the other directors said two years and one year, respectively. The final question for the principals asked if they had ever felt their job was on the line if the SWD subgroup adversely affected the school making AYP. Four of the nine principals responded that they did believe their job would be in jeopardy and four responded they did not feel their job was on the line due to this subgroup’s performance and one didn’t respond.

The final significant questions for the EC teacher asked if enough time to get the desired results with the SLD students was allotted for the instruction of the reading program or strategy during the school day. Three of the seven responding EC teachers agreed that there was enough time, and four disagreed. The EC teachers were then asked about what types of feedback they received from the SLD students in regard to the reading program or strategy. Five EC teachers received verbal feedback, and five received test data as feedback. One EC teacher marked written and conferencing, as

well, as types of feedback. A question was also asked to the EC teachers about who was responsible for the delivery of the instruction of the reading program or strategy in their classroom. All but one of the seven responding indicated that the EC teacher, herself or himself, was responsible. The remaining EC teacher indicated the instructional assistant was responsible for instruction.

The final question to the EC teachers involved teacher certification and highly qualified requirements. EC teachers were asked what certifications they held, and a checklist was provided. EC teachers held multiple certifications, which enabled them to teach anything in elementary schools. Currently, however, in the middle school or high school setting, however, an EC teacher must have dual certification in another subject area in order to be the teacher of record. For example, a teacher would have to be certified in learning disabled and English Language Arts to be the teacher of record for an EC Language Arts classroom where the EC teacher was solely responsible for the instruction. This is because the HOUSSE portfolio waiver expired in April, 2007. Previously, this waiver had allowed an EC teacher to be teacher of record without the subject area certification. Currently, an EC teacher must take the Praxis exam in the subject area desired to be the teacher of record. This remains true for the other areas of certification, as well. The EC teachers surveyed were certified in Special Ed Adapted Curriculum, which was previously known as severe and profound. The breakdown of other certifications included (2) in EC English, (5) in Learning Disabled, (3) in Mentally Disabled, and (1) in Emotionally Mentally Disabled. Only one EC teacher was certified in Regular Education English and could be the teacher of record. In all the other certification areas, the EC teachers could serve only as an inclusion teacher. In other

words, using a team teaching relationship with a certified teacher in the subject area who serves as the teacher of record.

These questions concluded this part of the surveys for all respondents. What remained was a checklist of reading programs and strategies that was developed through the literature review in this study as possible programs middle schools might have been using with the SLD population in reading. In the checklist, thirteen programs or strategies were listed along with a brief explanation of what each entailed (See Appendix A-C). Participants were asked to check if the programs or strategies were being used with any students classified as SLD in English/ Language Arts in the middle school selected for this study. If the program or strategy was used the school with these students, participants were asked if they were knowledgeable of the program or strategy, had observed the program or strategy, had picked the program or strategy used or were unfamiliar with the program or strategy being used. Following the programs or strategies was a list of general study strategies that were to be considered if they had been used with learning disabled students. Again, principals and EC directors had the same opportunities to say if they were knowledgeable, had observed, had picked or were unfamiliar with the general study strategy. EC teachers had the same choices, but could also indicate if the strategy being was used in their classroom weekly.

With the first half of the chart dealing with the twelve programs or strategies, each group of respondents marked their selections. Results are presented in the following table for the top five programs/strategies identified by all responding groups (See Table 4).

Table 4.

Top Five Reading Programs and Strategies

Reading Program/ Strategy	Used in my class weekly	Knowledgeable of Strategy			Observed Strategy?			Did you Pick Strategy?			Unfamiliar with Strategy		
		<i>T</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>
Direct Instruction	5	1	4	5	1	8	2	1	1	3	0	0	0
Explicit Instruction	4	2	5	3	3	5	1	0	0	3	0	1	1
Language Corrective Reading	3	2	5	4	0	6	1	0	1	2	0	1	0
Word Identification	2	1	5	2	1	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
	1	2	2	1	3	5	0	0	1	1	0	2	3

Note. In this table are the top five programs or strategies as identified by all three groups of survey respondents. Across the heading the letter *D* stands for EC directors, the letter *P* stands for principals, and the letter *T* represents the EC teacher. The number represents the number of respondents who checked that box on the survey instrument. The order of these programs/strategies in the table appear in descending order with the most frequently used as the first program/strategy listed.

As seen from the table above, the top program/strategy used with SLD students was Direct Instruction. Five EC teachers responded that they used Direct Instruction in their classrooms weekly. Eight principals had also observed this program/strategy in their schools. Only one EC director had been the person who had personally selected Direct Instruction for use with the SLD students in the middle school in her/his district. This Direct Instruction approach to reading was based on the mastery of meaningful reading through the direct teacher instruction of basic reading skills.

As an additional area of comparison, two districts were represented twice with selected middle schools in this study. In only one of the districts did both principals respond to the principal survey and mark program/strategies used in the SLD classrooms. In the case of this district the principals had consistently identified the same programs as

in use in their individual schools, except for two differences. In both incidences, Principal *C* was not familiar with a strategy the Principal *I had* checked. These strategies were the Peer Assisted Learning Strategy and Word Identification.

Following this list of reading programs/strategies, all survey respondents were further asked to select specific strategies that were used in the classes with SLD students. The following table shows the outcomes of the strategy chart (See Table 5).

As can be determined from Table 5, the strategy used most frequently in the classroom with SLD are questioning techniques used with the reader's prior knowledge. Here, ten principals and EC teachers indicated that this strategy was in use in SLD classrooms on a weekly basis. Close behind this strategy were the strategies of summarizing the information read in a passage or story and vocabulary instruction to increase sight words. Here, nine principals and EC teachers each acknowledged that these strategies were next in line as important strategies used in classrooms with SLD students. Finally, three other strategies were used in classrooms weekly as indicated by eight principals and EC directors and these were as follows: underlining key events and characters in a story; cooperative learning groups; and graphic organizers to organize story events. Outlining of information read in a passage or story was the least used in the classroom with SLD students with five responses from principals and EC teachers.

EC teachers had an additional selection of seven strategies to consider as assisting in the instruction of SLD students. The top three chosen from EC teachers responding are shown in Table 6. Word Walls were most widely used and here EC teacher use the wall of the classroom to display sight words, vocabulary words, etc. so

Table 5.

Frequently Used Study Strategies Used With SLD Students

General Study Strategies for Reading	Used in my weekly	Knowledgeable of Strategy			Observed Strategy			Did you pick Strategy?		
		<i>P & T</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>P</i>
Questioning Techniques w/ Reader's prior knowledge	10	1	5	3	3	7	2	0	0	3
Summarizing info read in a passage/story	9	1	4	2	3	6	2	0	0	3
Vocabulary Instruction to increase sight words	9	1	6	2	4	6	1	0	0	2
Underlining key events, characters, in a story	8	1	4	3	3	7	2	0	0	2
Cooperative Learning Groups	8	2	5	3	2	8	2	0	1	2
Graphic Organizers to organize story's events	8	1	6	3	3	6	1	0	0	3
Outlining info read in a passage/story	5	2	3	6	2	6	1	0	0	1

Note. The first column in this table represents strategies that might be used in a classroom of SLD students. These appear as included in the survey instrument. Principals and EC teachers were to mark if the strategy was used in class weekly. All other respondents were to mark if the respondent was knowledgeable about the strategy, had observed the strategy, or had picked the strategy. Strategies have been ranked in descending order, according to the responses by the principals and EC teachers.

that students can readily see them every day. Mnemonics are quick, snappy rhymes that represent like a rule in the lesson, a list of items. For example, “fanboys” represent the coordinating conjunctions such as the following: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*. In the Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL) strategy, students fill out a graphic organizer

divided into section for the questions, what do I know?, what do I want to know?, and what did I want to learn?. This approach enables an independent and structured approach to study. It helps students collect, analyze and evaluate material.

Table 6.

Top Three Additional EC Teacher Strategy Responses					
General Study Strategies for Reading	Used in my class weekly	Knowledgeable of Strategy	Observed Strategy	Did you pick strategy	Unfamiliar with strategy
Word Walls	5	4	1	3	0
Mnemonics	4	3	0	2	0
Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL)	4	5	2	3	0

Note. The top three strategies shown above were additional strategies EC teachers could choose from for use with the SLD students.

Focus Group Results

Participating EC teachers in the Focus Group Webinar were identified by the same coding that was used with the surveys throughout the focus group discussion. EC teachers were asked to identify themselves as Teacher A, for example, before responding to a question in the discussion.

The first question for the focus group discussion was: in your opinion, what were the factors as to why their middle school made AYP in reading? Teacher *F* responded first and said that an important factor was the amount of time allowed to focus on reading. “Students had *Read 180* (a Scholastic program), so they had ninety minutes of reading instruction a day” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). She said that in order to

increase reading comprehension “you gotta read, and kids have to be given time to do that” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). Teacher *C* said that for her, the key factor was “collaborating with the regular education teacher” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). She currently has ninety minutes of co-planning with that teacher every day. She has been working with this same teacher now for three years, and they have been able to meet the individual needs of the students and plan lessons together. She responded that, as a team, they “kept progress notes on each student as far as their IEP and just really homed in on the specific skills they needed and we did different activities to meet those skills they were deficit in” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). She went on to say that they identified the deficits through a program called *Study Island* and through individual reading inventories. Teacher *G* said at their school they just worked really hard. She said, “I believe I work in an outstanding school with a lot of people who are dedicated professionals who want the best they could do for kids, regardless if we got extra money or not” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10) through the ABC incentive program from the state.

Question two in the discussion asked: is there was one thing that stood out above all else that you believed made the difference? Teacher *F*, again, began the discussion and said that she didn’t believe there was one thing or one person alone that made the difference. “I think it really takes everyone, and literally the custodians come in and cheer the kids on” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). “And, I do not believe there is one program that is the miracle pill” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). At her school, it is their belief that you use trial and error and see what works. She says, “you have to have many programs, and you try to fit the kids with the program that will help them” (Focus

Group Discussion, 9/2/10). Teacher *C* believed that the structure and organization of the classroom and instruction made the difference for her students. “With the students I have with learning disabilities, they were really able to catch on to the content because we were very structured and organized even with the room and the way we present it” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). Teacher *G* believed it was the amount of remediation they did at the end of the year at her school that made the difference. She also added that students were placed into a reading program, Scholastic’s *Read 180*, according to their scores from the year before.

In reaction to these responses, Teacher *C* asked Teacher *F* for more clarification into the many programs that she referred to in her response. First, Teacher *F* responded that what they do is not part of RTI (Response to Intervention). She described a tier system where students who are significantly below grade level (2nd or 3rd grade level) are referred to the *Hill Center* program (This was a pullout program for EC that was purchased or adopted by this system. It was developed through Durham Public Schools in collaboration with GlaxoSmithKline Foundation). “The next tier, what we consider a tier – if they were two years behind, then they would go into *Read 180*” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). If students were only one or two years behind they would be placed in an inclusion English class or a resource English class. “We are able to plug them into whatever program we feel would best benefit that particular student.” “I think it is real important to have a whole spectrum of services to be able to meet each individual need” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10).

The next planned question for the group was about this one thing or one person mentioned in question #2. Participants were asked if this one thing was done

individually, or was it the effect of a certain program and strategy. All participants felt this question had been covered in the previous discussion.

For the group, question four asked, “What efforts you make in the classroom to address a student’s individual needs?” Teacher *F* began by listing the programs used at her school to assess individual needs. She said they used the assessment feature of *Accelerated Reader* (AR) called *STAR Reading* to assess an individual’s reading level. She also said that her school used the SRA program and information from the Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS). EVAAS is a system used throughout NC schools to make predictions about student success. “EVAAS has been populated with historical LEA test data, and the software program follows the student through all NC schools and offers a precise measurement of student progress over time and a reliable diagnosis of opportunities for growth based on up to five years of data for an individual student, not just one or two points in time (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2010).” She added that the Hill Center provides teachers with graphs and charts of student growth. “You know, it was amazing to me, when they did the IEPs at the end of the year, how much the *STAR Reading* test, the *SRI* (Scholastic Reading Inventory) and the *AR* said about the same thing – how closely they did relate to one another.” “Of course, you wouldn’t want to use just one test, you would want to use several” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10).

For this question, Teacher *C* responded she didn’t use a particular program at the school for her students because she was an inclusion teacher. She did say that because of this inclusion, her students used what the regular education students used and that was

Study Island, *STAR Reading* testing, *Accelerated Reader* and *My Access*, which is another computer based program.

In a similar manner, Teacher *G* responded that at her school, they did the *STAR Reading* program, *AR*, *Read 180*, and full inclusion. More interesting, though, she added that at her school they did benchmark testing three times a year, and this is geared toward the end of grade tests. They also practiced what she called “double dipping”. “In other words, the kids would get an exploratory class in middle school; they would get *Read 180* and they would get resource English/ Language Arts” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). She continued to say that they meet their remediation needs and use all those materials and resources to judge if students are learning content.

This discussion led to a further exchange between the EC teachers in relation to how they schedule all these kids into all those different programs. Teacher *C* commented that at her school, students were pulled out of Social Studies and Science classes for an extra period of resource reading instruction. First, students went to the inclusion English Language Arts class, and then they missed Social Studies and Science class to go to resource class to get extra help. Teacher *C* then asked Teacher *G* how they scheduled students at her school for reading instruction. First, Teacher *G* explained that they were doing inclusion and resource. At her school, students were losing their physical education class to pick up an extra class of reading. She agreed that it was hard to fit it all in during the day. Inclusion had helped, in her opinion, the self esteem of learning disabled students.

Question five in the focus group discussion was to describe the staff development that was beneficial to them as a teacher of learning disabled students. Teachers were then

to add if this staff development was to have met their individual need or the needs of the school staff. Teacher *F* led the discussion and acknowledged that she had training in the *Hill Center* program and that all the English/Language Arts teachers attended this training. All the EC teachers in her county had also gone through the Reading Foundations training, which emphasized how to teach the basics of how to read. Teacher *C* had this same *Reading Foundations* training and added that this training “had given me the basics that I really didn’t get in college” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). Now, she understood how to teach the breaking down of sounds of each of the letters and the syllables of the words. In her county this training was not mandatory, however.

Teacher *G* had gone to a staff development training called “Learning Focus”, which her whole school was required to attend. She said that with this training, she was taught to use differentiated instruction, lots of chunking, and scaffolding. One special thing she learned was to preview vocabulary with her learning disabled students before they began a new lesson. She said this was a self esteem booster because they had been exposed to these words and felt confident with their use. Teacher *G* had also been scheduled to attend the Reading Foundations training now being emphasized by the Department of Public Instruction.

The idea of literacy coaches was once popular in NC middle schools. In past years, and the Department of Public Instruction had funded many such positions throughout the state through a grant to schools. EC teachers were asked if there was a literacy coach in place at their school and if this person helped with the learning disabled students and guided or aided in their instruction. Teachers *F* and *G* responded that they did not have one in place at their school. Teacher *C* said her school did not have a

literacy coach, but did have an instructional coach, and in her capacity, she only worked with and aided the instruction of regular education students. As for a difference between a literacy coach and an instructional coach, the EC teachers said an instructional coach helped more with the development of lesson plans, classroom management, and providing staff development for newly licensed teachers.

The final planned question for the group asked how often the strategies and programs they had checked in the initial survey they completed were used in their classrooms. Teacher *F* said that all were used every day, but individual students might come into contact with only one because exposure depended on the individual needs of the students. Teacher *C* agreed and said that for instance, *Study Island*, a computer based program, was only used once a week because that was the only time her class could use the computer lab. Teacher *G* said that her school used the programs everyday and that they had school wide silent reading everyday for thirty minutes. This sparked a discussion about *Accelerated Reader*, and all three teachers acknowledged that they used *Accelerated Reader* each day as well. Teacher *C* said they also had 30 minutes of silent reading built into her daily schedule.

As the discussion came to an end, teachers came full circle to the topic of scheduling of multiple programs. This was made very difficult due to the time constraints of the school day as students tried to access the programs to possibly increase their reading ability. Teacher *F* explained that someone from her school sat in on all the IEP meetings of the fifth graders and the eighth graders to ensure that IEP needs were met as students were scheduled for the next school year. This one person had a clear understanding of where the student was in their reading journey and what classes needed

to be provided for the next year's instruction. "Transitions are really important to us" (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). Teacher *F* also added that each EC teacher had a rotating instructional assistant who assisted with the *Read 180* program. She was very complimentary of this program. "That was the problem with reading programs, you could never figure out where the gaps were and what they were really missing." "This program is clear cut and straight forward and touches on all the areas that addresses their weaknesses, whatever they might be" (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10).

Analysis of Data

Research Question 1: Were there any commonalities among programs or strategies used with students with learning disabilities in rural North Carolina Middle Schools with the Students with Disabilities subgroup which made AYP?

From the focus group discussion, with questions two, three, and seven in mind, a re-occurring theme was no *one* common program, or cure-all, existed for use with specific learning disabled students within the Students with Disabilities subgroup which made AYP. There were, however, multiple programs that EC teachers used in their classrooms. As one EC teacher stated, "you have to have many programs, and you try to fit the kids with the program that will help them" (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). Programs mentioned during the discussion and used in the classrooms were *SRA* (Science Reading Associates), *Accelerated Reader*, and *Read 180* (both a Scholastic Reading product). Others mentioned only by one teacher were the *Hill Center* (a Durham County Public School system initiative in conjunction with GlaxoSmithKline) and *Study Island* (a computer based program for standards based assessment and practice). These aforementioned programs were specifically used within the focus group participants'

schools. These purchased programs were not programs included in the survey instrument used with participants nor were they found in the literature review with the exception of *Accelerated Reader*. *Accelerated Reader* was not included in this study because it is not a program requiring teacher instruction but a program for independent reading by the student. The teacher serves as a monitor with this program.

This was not, however, the same conclusion reported by the three groups of participants in the surveys which were returned. From the program or strategy chart which followed the survey questions to each principal, EC director, and EC teacher, Direct Instruction was the most prevalent of the reading program or strategies used in SWD classrooms. Direct Instruction was most commonly used in the schools according to all three groups. “Direct Instruction can be used whereby the teacher models the skills or strategy, uses guided practice with feedback, and uses independent practice to assess how well the student can independently use the skill or strategy” (Boyle, 2008, 4). Direct Instruction means the teacher delivers and guides the students in the skills to be taught (in easy to understand steps) explains why the students need to learn this information, and interacts with the students as they practice (Rupley, Blair, and Nichols, 2009, p. 126).

The next most favored program by the three groups of participants for use in schools was Explicit Instruction. This was close in alignment with the first choice, and according to some researchers, inseparable from it. If considered a partner to Direct Instruction, Explicit Instruction involves the teacher modeling a skill taught to the students such as “talk-alouds and think-alouds”. For example, a teacher would be “modeling or demonstrating a reading skill or cognitive strategy and its use in an actual

reading situation and thinking aloud with students about what the skill is and how it is used” (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009, p. 127).

From the strategies listed after the survey questions and program checklist, the top three general strategies used weekly in EC classrooms with specific learning disabled students were as follows: using questioning techniques with reader’s prior knowledge; summarizing information read in a passage or story; and vocabulary instruction to increase sight words. Principals agreed with how important the questioning technique was but also selected vocabulary instruction as important to increasing sight words.

Research Question 2: What is the frequency of use of specific strategies or programs with North Carolina middle school learning disabled students in the Students with Disabilities subgroup?

According to survey and focus group participants, the frequency of use of the strategies or programs varied between daily use and weekly use. The consensus was that the strategies and programs identified were used weekly. Most strategies or programs, according to the focus group teachers, were used daily, but because of logistics within the school and the schedule, students could access certain programs only once a week. Some students, according to these focus group participants, had two classes each day, an inclusion English /Language Arts and a specialized class on the student’s individual level. These students often had to miss an elective or even a Science or Social Studies class in order to receive the extra help. Teachers agreed it was difficult to fit in all the instruction needed in a day.

Research Question 3: In rural schools where the SWD subgroup were proficient in reading and the school made AYP, what are the perceptions of the teachers of students with specific learning disabilities regarding the effect of specific strategies or programs with reading performance?

Again from the focus group discussion, the perceptions of the EC teachers were that many programs and strategies were needed to meet the individual needs of the students with reading performance. A single program would not be effective for all because all students learn differently. This particular EC teacher said, “We are able to plug them into whatever program we feel would best benefit that particular student” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10). From the focus group discussion, one school system had a level of programs for students according to how far behind they were in reading. With the (*Read 180*) program used in her schools, Teacher *F* said, “This program is clear cut and straight forward and focuses on all the areas that address their weaknesses whatever they might be” (Focus Group Discussion, 9/2/10).

Another perception of the EC focus group participants were that other factors affected the success of the reading strategies or programs with specific learning disabled students. Focus group participants said it wasn’t one person or one specific activity with the reading program or strategy that made the difference. For example, two EC teachers said they had also incorporated thirty minutes of silent reading into the day, and this was important because they had to give the students an opportunity to read. Good staff development also had impacted the specific learning disabled students’ achievement. Two of the three EC teachers in the focus group had been trained with *Reading Foundations*, and this had helped them to teach these students the basics of how to read.

Learning Focus training had helped one focus group participant to differentiate for student needs.

Remediation for student at the end of the year before testing had also had a profound impact on student achievement in reading according to these focus group teachers. These focus group teachers attributed their good End of Grade test scores to the remediation before testing at the end of the year. Assessment programs, such as *STAR Reading*, *Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)*, *Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS)* and *SRA (Science Reading Associates)*, all had been factors in helping to diagnose the deficits a student had in his/her reading. Deficits were then addressed through other programs such as *Read 180*. Making sure this information was passed on to next year's teachers was also important so there would be consistency in learning, and students would not lose ground in a new setting. A key for the specific learning disabled students was also to feel supported by the whole school. According to one teacher in the focus group, everyone had to be on the same page and encourage students, even the custodians and lunchroom staff. The schedule had to accommodate student needs. The administration had to support the teachers and provide opportunities for students to be exposed to the many different programs at their school.

Summary

As Teacher F stated in the focus group discussion, there was not a "miracle pill" available for these struggling readers. "You use trial and error and see what works" (focus group discussion, 9/2/10). Students have individual needs and one program cannot attempt to meet them all. Students need to know teachers care about their progress. A multi-faceted approach was needed, from the administrators to students themselves

feeling confident in their abilities, as they confronted a new reading passage. A team approach was successful when student data were used to provide the program that would address reading deficits, consider appropriate placement in classes, and manage IEP goals. This was accomplished by teachers and staff receiving purposeful staff development, and all being on the same page.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The findings of this study are presented in this final chapter. After a summary of the study and the restating of the research questions, the focus and intent of the literature review were examined. The development of the survey instrument was based on the literature review. The demographics of the selected middle schools and the demographics of the respondents were described. Finally, findings and conclusions were drawn, based on data analysis. Implications, as a result of the findings, were explored and suggestions made for future research.

Summary of the Study

As middle schools in North Carolina struggled to meet the needs of students under NCLB, principals in these same schools sought reading programs and effective strategies to help a group of children become proficient in reading. If this task was successful, the school of these children was awarded AYP status and, therefore, met one of the requirements of NCLB. Few schools in NC were successful with this challenge, perhaps because of the special learning needs of this unique group of children. The purpose of this study was to identify programs or strategies that were successful with the students within the schools that accomplished AYP.

Research questions for this study included whether there were any commonalities among the programs or strategies used with students with disabilities. Secondly, what was the frequency of use of these programs and strategies? And, finally, what were the

perceptions of the teachers of students with specific learning disabilities regarding the effect of specific strategies or programs on reading performance?

The focus of the literature review was to seek out research-based programs and strategies being used with the subgroup, SWD, and especially students who were specific learning disabled in reading. In consulting peer reviewed studies of different reading programs and strategies, a list began to emerge of tested programs available. Some of these were new to the field of reading programs currently being tested in schools while others had been around longer, leaving more resources available to judge effectiveness. Many issues arose while researching and assembling an adequate list, including how these programs were implemented and evaluated for measuring success. Questions arose from these findings and formulated the research questions being asked in this study.

The target population for this study was the rural middle schools in North Carolina, grades sixth - eighth, making AYP with the Students with Disabilities subgroup. To narrow down a small population of middle schools, this study focused on the school systems designated rural by the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. To check for trends, data from AYP were analyzed for the period from 2004-2009. Seven school systems were included and produced nine middle schools that qualified. Permission was granted by each superintendent of the schools systems included in this study before surveys were distributed. Surveys were then sent to the middle school principal, the EC teacher who worked with specific learning disabled, and the EC director of the school system. The middle school principal was asked to identify an EC teacher at the school who met the established criteria and pass along the EC teacher survey. Response rate for the principal survey was 100%. Seventy-one percent

of the EC directors and sixty-six percent of the EC teachers responded. However, only one-third of the EC teachers agreed to participate in the focus group discussion.

Findings

From the results in the survey, there was one particular program / strategy revealed as most successful for the reading struggles of the specific learning disabled students. Data from survey results reported that Direct Instruction was most commonly used. Five EC teachers responded that they used Direct Instruction in their classrooms weekly. Eight principals had also observed this program/strategy in their schools. Direct Instruction and secondly, Explicit Instruction, helped teachers in the delivery of these reading skills. Specific strategies, including using questioning techniques with reader's prior knowledge, summarizing information read in a passage or story, and utilizing vocabulary instruction to increase sight words, were most frequently used by EC teachers of specific learning disabled students.

Data from the focus group discussion also indicated that there were many programs being used by schools to meet the individual needs of these students, including *SRA, Accelerated Reader, STAR Reading, SRI, and Read 180*. These many programs and strategies were offered every day according to survey and focus group EC teachers. Students had multiple opportunities during the day to access these reading programs, sometimes even at the expense of missing another core subject or elective. EC teachers believed that the improvement of reading far outweighed the loss of the core subject, such as Social Studies. With improved reading skills, students could catch up to their peers to regain lost instruction.

EC teachers believed that in conjunction with Direct Instruction, multiple programs could be used with the specific learning disabled students to make progress with reading. These programs were necessary to assess the deficits these students had in reading and then address them individually per student. EC teachers, as stated in the focus group discussion spent hours planning instruction with regular education teachers to adapt instruction and develop appropriate activities to meet the needs of these specific learning disabled students. Specialized staff development had given teachers the knowledge in how to teach students how to read and how to differentiate lessons. EC teachers acknowledged a total school effort was behind these students, supporting and encouraging them as they progressed through the year.

Conclusions

Results from this study indicated that Direct Instruction plus multiple programs/strategies were used to meet the needs of the specific learning disabled students. As with any program being used with students, implementation and fidelity checks are keys to success. Using the same definition of fidelity checks by Gresham, MacMillan, Beebe-Frankenberger, and Bocian (2000), “researchers must be able to state that their interventions were implemented as planned or intended and were not modified or otherwise changed substantially by those responsible for implementing the treatment” (p. 198). Seven of the nine principals in this study verified that they themselves conducted these checks to make sure programs were being implemented. Unfortunately, survey data, also, indicated the fidelity check results were not shared with the majority of the EC teachers. Without this key information, EC teachers would not know if an

instructional adjustment or whole new approach would be needed for students to be successful.

Principals saw three types of assessment data from EC teachers in regard to the success of the current reading program or strategy. These included verbal feedback from students, disaggregated test data, and conferences with the EC Department. From the EC teacher survey, EC teachers responded that they received data from students on program effectiveness from verbal dialogues, written responses, conferencing interviews with students who were participating in the program/strategy. Within the focus group discussion, this was again shared as EC teachers indicated how the frequent progress monitoring of students through the testing offered in the *STAR* and *Read 180* programs helped them know where a student was deficient in basic skills. EC teachers stressed that not just one testing program was efficient in providing data, either; multiply types of assessment gave the whole story of the child's progress. Analyzing and monitoring this data by the EC teachers and the principals were crucial in the success of the program/strategy.

Reading instruction, as described through the focus group discussion, with these multiple programs occurred daily, and in some cases, students could be exposed to as many as three a day. Students, based on focus group discussion evidence, had an inclusion English /Language Arts class, a specialized class such as *Read 180*, and then time with *Accelerated Reader* through the silent reading time built into the daily schedule in schools represented through the focus group discussion. EC teacher surveys indicated that responses were split between there was and there was not enough time allotted for

instruction of this reading program or strategy during the school day to get the results they would like to see with the specific learning disabled students.

EC teachers attributed more than a single reading program to the success of the specific learning disabled students. Whole school effort and support by the staff was believed to have an impact on student success. Creative scheduling that allowed students to have daily multiple exposures to a variety of programs and strategies positively impacted student progress. Quality staff development and teacher preparation through team planning resulted in quality lessons and activities that students had the opportunity to experience. The multiple programs fit the individual needs of the students and were able to assess reading deficits. According to an EC teacher in the focus group discussion, student progress was charted through these programs, and IEPs were adapted to fit an individualized program that was student specific.

Implications

For struggling schools that have yet to achieve AYP consistently with subgroup Students with Disabilities, this study, through the surveys and focus group discussion, revealed key components middle schools could use to change how they deliver instruction to specific learning disabled students.

First, the role of the teacher was crucial to these students making progress in reading. Although the three focus group participants were quick to point out that the teacher alone could not make the difference, teachers did play an important role. EC teachers spoke of how they planned with the regular education teachers daily to provide lessons and adapt activities for the deficits of these students. EC teachers spoke of a commitment to maintain records and progress notes as these students went through one

IEP cycle to another, transitioned from one grade to another and from one school to another. The transition piece of the IEP was a critical tool, and in one school, one EC staff member was responsible for attending all meetings. EC teachers spoke of the multiple programs they used to assess student performance, like the *STAR Reading*, *SRI*, *EVAAS*, and how this information was carried over to a student's IEP. EC teachers spoke of the amount of remediation students received prior to the end of grade test. Finally, EC teachers' spoke of the quality of staff development and how that had helped them learn how to better teach students to read and differentiate.

Secondly, seven of the nine principals, as indicated in their responses in the surveys, supported staff and provided the staff development to meet the needs of the teachers and whole staff so that initiatives were whole school. One principal created whole school reform where even the custodians supported student efforts with words of encouragement. Principals allowed for scheduling changes when it came to making the tough decisions about which class students should bypass in order to provide an opportunity for them to have an additional reading instruction class. Seven of the nine principals took the lead in conducting fidelity checks to see that the programs and strategies in place in their schools were being effective, and they allowed for the desired student outcomes. Four of the nine principals indicated that they met with EC staff to share assessment data on the current reading initiatives in place in the classroom. Finally, principals had to oversee the inclusion model in English/ Language Arts classrooms as seven EC teachers indicated existed and provide opportunities for team-teacher planning.

Finally, as indicated from the current EC directors' surveys, persons holding these positions have little experience in middle school or as an EC director. This might be due

to a high rate of attrition of persons serving as EC director. Four of the five EC directors did indicate that they researched appropriate reading programs/strategies for use with the SLD students. They did respond that adequate staff development had been provided and that periodic refresher courses were offered. Three of the five EC directors did indicate that fidelity checks were conducted, but not one EC director responded that they themselves had performed these checks. Four of the five EC directors did report that results of the fidelity checks were shared with school administrators and EC teachers.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included a more precise knowledge of how long the participants had been in their role at the school selected for this study. EC teachers were asked if the current reading program/strategies were in place when they became a teacher at this school. Four of the seven had said yes, it was in place, and one had replied that it had been in place for two years. Principals were also asked the same question. Four of the nine principals said the programs were already in place when they came and had been in place for from one to three years. Four of the nine principals said the current reading program wasn't in place when they became the administrator and one did not respond. A more definitive answer would have been beneficial in determining the role of the participant from 2005-2009 in impacting student success with the Students with Disabilities subgroup in meeting AYP.

Another limitation was the role of the EC director in how the middle schools achieved success with the Students with Disabilities subgroup. Interviews with these individuals would have yielded more significant information concerning the role of the EC director and the collaboration with the principal and EC teachers. The survey was

weak in inquiring about how the EC director interacted with each group and came to a consensus on which programs or strategies would be best for specific learning disabled students.

Last, there was a weakness in the survey process which involved the principals. Principals were asked to forward a survey to an EC teacher within their school who taught specific learning disabled students. Because this study was in process over a summer break, delivery of this information was slow. Therefore, the researcher struggled to receive this information in a timely fashion. Also, with the principal making the selection, the researcher had no way to contact the EC teacher to remind them to please return the surveys. The researcher was at the mercy of a busy principal over the summer as he/she attempted to prepare the schools for reopening.

Future Research

One area for future research from the study would be in the reading programs themselves. In order for research on a program to be truly effective, a researcher would have to study the same program using the same children over a longer period of time than the typical study of a school year. This thought was due in large part because a student may not make gains of several years in one year with a program. The researcher might be able to predict that a small gain in one year would predict a larger gain over time. In a study by Drame (2010), low achieving students including those in the SWD subgroup have failed to close the achievement gap. For these students it would be unfair to expect them to make more progress than the regular education peers (Drame, 2010, p. 383). Programs not included in many other research studies are often rejected because the duration of the study was too short, or there wasn't an adequate control group established

(Slavin, Cheung , Groff & Lake, 2008). With this said, principals have little time to spend doing lots of research and a new program is often purchased based on a presentation made by a salesman or shown during a workshop. During this researcher's tenure as a teacher and administrator, reading initiatives have almost become faddish. They have been purchased and used for up to three years and when immediate results had not yielded significant growth, materials were gathered and replaced by something new. Fidelity checks were not conducted by the EC Director; nor was research conducted on why the reading initiative failed. Test score improvement, or lack of it, resulted in the frequent changes made in reading programs. Future research could yield valuable information as to why reading programs disappear before good sustained research can bring to light their effectiveness.

Another area of future research that would benefit the specific learning disabled population involves the role of an effective EC director. According to a study by Wigle and Wilcox (2002), "special education directors play important roles in providing services to students with disabilities." Principals and EC teachers need to know that the EC director is knowledgeable and supports what is occurring in the schools. EC directors have the control of large amounts of funding for schools to help provide resources and personnel to implement programs to aid in the learning of special education students. "If these professional educators do not have appropriate levels of competency in SLD areas, their decisions and actions may very well resulted in outcomes which lower the effectiveness of special education programs and result in serious consequences for students served by those programs" (Wigle & Wilcox, 2002, p. 286). Future research

could have assessed this relationship between an effective EC director and the school itself and how progress was being made with the specific learning disabled students.

Summary

The study showed parallels between nine successful rural middle schools in making AYP in reading with specific learning disabled students and were presented in the results of this study. One EC teacher in the focus group discussion explained that her district was not like the wealthier districts and she had to make ends meet with the resources the district had available. The focus group found value in trying something new when one program had not produced acceptable results. When a student was not making sufficient gains, success was about supporting that student with extra time by being flexible and forgiving in the daily schedule. According to a focus group teacher, success occurred when the entire school supported that student and encouraged him or her to become a better reader. Furthermore, again, according to a focus group EC teacher revolved around remediation. It was also achieved when a principal supported and provided staff development and conducted fidelity checks on the staff who delivered the instruction. One EC teacher responded that her school had found success when the staff worked hard on a daily basis to provide numerous reading opportunities for struggling students. Success in the mind of one EC teacher for these SLD students depended on a whole school effort. Success in this study was measured by educators spending time with these kids to find the right fit for their individual reading needs and using Direct Instruction to teach the basic skills.

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Appendix A

Key Terms From the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Adequate Yearly Progress:	<p>“Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measures the yearly progress of different groups of students, school, district, and state levels against yearly targets in reading/language arts and mathematic schools and districts are especially affected if they do not make AYP”</p> <p>http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.</p>
Confidence Interval:	<p>“Under NCLB, refers to the margin of error applied to Adequate Yearly Progress calculations in North Carolina. For schools that meet a proficiency target goal through application of the confidence interval, actual proficiency percentages are reported with a notation (CI) indicating that the confidence interval was applied”</p> <p>www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.</p>
Economically Disadvantaged:	<p>“Students, in North Carolina, are defined as those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch”</p> <p>www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.</p>
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):	<p>This “is the principal federal law affecting K-12 education. When the ESEA of 1965 was reauthorized and amended in 2001, it was renamed the No Child Left Behind Act. The 2001 reauthorization represented significant changes from the 1994 reauthorization. The law is up for reauthorization in 2007”</p> <p>www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.</p>
End of Grade test (EOG):	<p>These “are North Carolina’s state-developed standardized tests in reading and math designed to assess competencies defined by the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in grades 3-8”</p> <p>www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary</p>

**Individual with Disabilities
Education Act:**

This "is a federal law, reauthorized in 2004, designed to ensure that all students with disabilities have a free and appropriate public education available to them. The law requires all states to develop alternate assessments for students with disabilities for whom the standard statewide assessment program is appropriate even when accommodations are used
www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act
of 2001:**

This" is the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Authorization Act of 1965. The reauthorized law added strict new accountability changes and mandated that every child be taught by a Highly Qualified teacher. The law emphasizes new standards for teachers and new consequences for Title 1 schools that do not meet student achievement standards for two or more consecutive years. The law's major goal is for every school to be proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics by 2013-2014 as measured by state tests"
www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.

Proficient/proficiency:

These "are terms referring to student work that meets the achievement standard set by North Carolina for that grade level"
www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.

Proficiency Targets:

These "are target goals representing the percentage of students in each student at grade level (proficiency) or above in reading/language arts and math assessments. Each student group has the same proficiency target goal. If one student group does not meet the proficiency target goal, the school does not make Adequate Yearly Progress. Proficiency target goals are increased every three years (in 2007-08, 2010-11 and finally in 2013-14) toward the NCLB goal of all students scoring proficient by the end of the 2013-14 school year. The target goal chart is available on the web at
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/nclb/abcayp/overview/>."

Research-based programs:

These programs “are referred to throughout the NCLB legislation regarding student instructional methods, teacher professional development and the delivery of Supplemental Educational Services. NCLB defines the term as research that involves the application of rigorous, systemic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to educational activities and programs”

www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.

Rural Counties:

The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. categorized the counties of North Carolina and this can be found at

www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/rural_county_map.asp

Safe Harbor:

This “is a special provision that allows for consideration of a school’s significant year-to-year improvement, even if it misses the proficiency target. If a student group doesn’t meet the target goal in a given year, the group (and as a result, the school) can still make Adequate Yearly Progress if it reduces the percent of the students below proficient by at least 10 percent from the previous year and the group shows progress on the Other Academic Indicator. Schools can apply this safe harbor analysis to any and all group(s) of students that do not meet the proficiency target goal”

www.dpi.state.nc.us/nclb/glossary.

Subgroup:

“In each public school, there may be up to ten student subgroups who must meet the prescribed targets. These subgroups are: School as a whole (all students); American Indian; Asian; Black; Hispanic; Multi-Racial; White; Economically Disadvantaged (Free and Reduced Lunch); Limited English Proficient, and Students with Disabilities. For AYP calculations, a subgroup must have at least 40 students who have been in membership a full academic year. A full academic year (FAY) is defined as 140 days in membership as of the first day of End-of-Grade (EOG) testing”
<http://abcs.ncpublicschools.org/abcsfiles/aypstat.us.pdf>

Option 1:

The AYP code indicates special NCLB rules that were applied in determining school performance ABCs/AYP 2009 Accountability Report Background Packet. *Public Schools of North Carolina*. State Board of Education. Department of Public Instruction.

Appendix B

Survey 1 – EC directors

Socio-Demographic Profile and Reading Survey

Please answer the following questions. The resulting information will be compiled for use in my study of reading programs/strategies for middle school students. You will not be asked your identity or personal questions in this survey. Refrain from placing your name or school's name in any question to ensure the confidentiality of your responses. You may leave out any question you do not feel comfortable responding to or which does not pertain to your school's setting. Your participation is voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks to you for participating in this study. Participation in this study grants permission for the information to be used in this research. Thank you in advance for your participation in my study.

About You**1. Place a check for the highest degree you currently hold:**

_____ Bachelors _____ Masters _____ Education Specialist _____ Doctorate

2. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher in an exceptional children's classroom setting?

_____ 0-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21-25 _____ 25+

3. How many years of experience do you have working only with middle school students?

_____ 0-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21-25 _____ 25+

4. How many years of experience do you have in the subject area of reading?

_____ 0-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21-25 _____ 25+

5. How many years of experience do you have as an Exceptional Children's Director?

_____ 0-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21-25 _____ 25+

About the School Selected in Your District**6. How long is each class period during the day?**

_____ 30mins. ___ 45 mins. ___ 55 mins. ___ 60 mins. ___ 70 mins. ___ 75mins.

90mins. other

7. What is the student-teacher ratio per classroom for English/Language Arts with Students with disabilities included in the population?

5:1 10:1 15:1 20:1 25:1 30:1

Is this an inclusion class with two teacher team teaching? Yes No

8. What is the student-teacher ratio per classroom for English/Language Arts with Students with Disabilities only in the population?

5:1 10:1 15:1 20:1 25:1 30:1

Is this a pullout classroom for direct instruction of IEP goals? Yes No

9. What is the instructional assistant ratio for classes with only Students with Disabilities in English Language Arts?

1:5 1:10 1:15 1:20

10. How many minutes are devoted only to English/Language Arts during the instructional day?

45 mins. 55 mins. 60 mins. 65 mins. 70 mins. 75mins.

90mins. other

11. Is there a separate class just for reading instruction, everyday?

Yes No

12. Who selected the current reading program or inclusion of particular strategies for the classroom instruction for 6-8 classrooms to improve reading with Learning Disabled students?

Myself Curriculum Committee Myself and Middle School Staff

13. What process was used in the selection of this program or strategies?

Researched It Vendor Presentations Testimony by Another District

14. For the current program or strategies that you are now using in English Language Arts, have you have you provided adequate staff development so that there is an understanding of how to proceed with this strategy in the classroom?

Yes No In process

15. Are there periodic refreshers?

Yes, once a year Yes, twice a year Yes, every other year

16. For this same program, are there assessments to gain an understanding of student progress and which types of assessment are taking place?

Formative Summative Benchmarks

17. How frequently are students assessed?

daily weekly per grading period

18. Are there fidelity checks on the implementation of the program or strategies you are implementing?

Yes No

19. How often are these occurring and who is performing these checks?

3 weeks 6 weeks 9 weeks end of the semester

Central Office Teacher Self-Assessment Curriculum Specialist EC Director

20. Are there follow-up sessions held so that you are aware of the program or strategies successes or problems?

Yes No

21. Are the results of the fidelity checks shared with School Administrators and EC Teachers?

Yes No

22. For the current strategies or program you are using, how long have they been in place as the emphasis of teaching for classroom instruction?

New this year 1 year 2 years 3 years

23. Is there a literacy coach employed, at the middle school in your district, who has helped with this reading program or strategies being used with Learning Disabled students?

Yes No

24. Below are the approved textbook reading adoptions for North Carolina. Please mark the current textbook being used in your school?

Reading – Literature, 6-8

___ 6th – 8th: Discovering Literature: EMC Masterpiece Series Literature and Language Arts

___ 6th – 8th: Elements of Literature: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston

___ 6th – 8th: The Language of Literature: McDougal Littell

___ 6th – 8th: Prentice Hall Literature: NC Penguin Edition

___ Other _____

Reading Program/Strategy Survey Questions For EC Directors				
Instructions: Please read the program/strategy descriptions given below and mark if it is currently being used with any students classified as Learning Disabled (LD) in the English Language Arts classroom.				
Strategy	Knowledgeable of Strategy	Observed Strategy	Did you pick strategy?	Unfamiliar with strategy
Direct Instruction – This is based on the behavioral approach to learning and promotes mastery of meaningful reading through explicit teacher direction in homogeneous groups.				
Corrective Reading – This program offers four levels of decoding plus four for comprehension and they address the varied reading deficits and skill levels found among older students.				
Explicit Instruction – Here emphasis is in processing in small stages for student understanding and achieving active and successful participation by all students.				
Language – a comprehensive integrated literacy approach, systematically and explicitly teaching phonological, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension skills.				
Text Detectives – This strategy emphasizes the importance of identifying the <i>who, what, when and where</i> in a passage. Students are encouraged to use their prior knowledge to add to the understanding of the passage.				
Repeated Readings – a supplemental reading program that consists of re-reading a short and meaningful passage until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached.				
Linguistic Skills Training – This directly teaches phonetics, phonology, morphology, and English orthography.				
Peer Assisted Learning Strategies – incorporates three essential reading activities, Partner Reading, Paragraph Shrinking, and Prediction Relay.				

Quick Reads – Quick Reads by Pearson Learning works on fluency through high interest nonfiction reading that utilizes vocabulary that will help students in social studies and science.				
Partner Reading – Peer-mediated strategy that focuses on building fluency through repeated readings and the modeling of fluent reading.				
Word Identification – This strategy uses mnemonic, DISSECT, to help students remember the steps of the strategy.				
General Study Strategies for Reading	Knowledgeable of Strategy	Observed Strategy	Did you pick strategy?	Unfamiliar with strategy
Underlining key events, characters, in a story				
Summarizing information read in a passage or story				
Outlining information read in a passage or story				
Using Questioning Techniques with reader’s prior knowledge				
Vocabulary Instruction to increase sight words				
Cooperative Learning Groups				
Graphic Organizers to organize story’s events				

Note. The last seven strategies (*) are taken from a survey taken from Nichols, W. D., Rickelman, R. J., Young, C. A., Rupley, W. H (2006). Improving Middle School Professional Development by Examining Middle School Teachers’ Application of Literacy Strategies and Instructional Design. *Reading Psychology: An International Journal*, 28(1), 97-130.

Appendix C

Survey #2 – Principal

Socio-Demographic Profile and Reading Survey

Please answer the following questions. The resulting information will be compiled for use in my study of reading programs/strategies for middle school students. You will not be asked your identity or personal questions in this survey. Refrain from placing your name or school's name in any question to ensure the confidentiality of your responses. You may leave out any question you do not feel comfortable responding to or which does not pertain to your school's setting. Your participation is voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks to you for participating in this study. Participation in this study grants permission for the information to be used in this research. Thank you in advance for your participation in my study.

About You**1. Place a check for the highest degree you currently hold:**

Bachelors Masters Education Specialist Doctorate

2. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher in an exceptional children's classroom setting?

0 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25
 25+

3. How many years of experience do you have working only with middle school students?

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

4. How many years of experience do you have in the subject area of reading?

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

5. How many years of experience do you have as an Administrator?

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

About Your School

6. How long is each class period during the day?

30 mins. 45 mins. 55 mins. 60 mins. 70 mins. 75mins. 90 mins. other

7. What is the student-teacher ratio per classroom for English/Language Arts with Students with disabilities included in the general population?

5:1 10:1 15:1 20:1 25:1 30:1

Is this an inclusion classroom with two teachers team teaching? Yes No

8. What is the student-teacher ratio per classroom for English/Language Arts with Students with Disabilities served in a classroom with only other EC students?

5:1 10:1 15:1 20:1 25:1 30:1

Is this a pullout classroom for direct IEP goal instruction? Yes No

9. What is the instructional assistant ratio for classes with only Students with Disabilities in English Language Arts?

1:5 1:10 1:15 1:20

10. How many minutes are devoted only to English/Language Arts during the instructional day?

45 mins. 55 mins. 60 mins. 65 mins. 70 mins. 75mins. 90mins. other

11. Is there a separate class just for reading instruction, everyday?

Yes No

12. With the current reading program being used with students who are Learning Disabled, was it already in place when you became an administrator at this school?

Yes: It had been for 1 2 3 + years. No

13. With the current reading program/strategies being used with students who are Learning Disabled, were you included in the selection process?

Yes No Not assigned at this school at that time

14. Was adequate staff development provided for your staff for this reading program or strategies for use with Learning Disabled students?

Yes No

15. In your opinion and through your classroom observations, does your staff seem confident in their abilities in the implementation of this program or strategy, or would you prefer to see more staff development opportunities?

Yes No

16. Have you as the administrator conducted fidelity checks on the current reading program or strategies you are using with students who are Learning Disabled?

Yes No

17. Have any results from fidelity checks been shared with you when conducted by the EC Director?

Yes No

18. What types of assessment data do you see from your EC Teachers in regard to the success of the current reading program or strategy?

Verbal Disaggregated Test Data Conferencing with Department

19. Is there a literacy coach employed at your school who has helped with this reading program or strategies being used with Learning Disabled students?

Yes No

20. As an administrator, have you ever felt your job was on the line if the students with disabilities subgroup adversely affected your school's making of AYP?

Yes No

21. . Below are the approved textbook reading adoptions for North Carolina. Please mark the current textbook being used in your school?

Reading – Literature, 6-8

6th – 8th: Discovering Literature: EMC Masterpiece Series Literature and Language Arts

6th – 8th: Elements of Literature: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston

6th – 8th: The Language of Literature: McDougal Littell

6th – 8th: Prentice Hall Literature: NC Penguin Edition

Other _____

Reading Program/Strategy Survey Questions For Principals				
Instructions: Please read the program/strategy descriptions given below and mark if it is currently being used with any students classified as specific learning disabled (SLD) in the English Language Arts classroom.				
Strategy	Knowledgeable of Strategy	Observed Strategy	Did you pick strategy?	Unfamiliar with strategy
Direct Instruction – This is based on the behavioral approach to learning and promotes mastery of meaningful reading through explicit teacher direction in homogeneous groups.				
Corrective Reading – This program offers four levels of decoding plus four for comprehension and they address the varied reading deficits and skill levels found among older students.				
Explicit Instruction – Here emphasis is in processing in small stages for student understanding and achieving active and successful participation by all students.				
Language – a comprehensive integrated literacy approach, systematically and explicitly teaching phonological, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension skills.				
Text Detectives – This strategy emphasizes the importance of identifying the <i>who, what, when and where</i> in a passage. Students are encouraged to use their prior knowledge to add to the understanding of the passage.				

<p>Repeated Readings – a supplemental reading program that consists of re-reading a short and meaningful passage until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached.</p>				
<p>Linguistic Skills Training – This directly teaches phonetics, phonology, morphology, and English orthography.</p>				
<p>Peer Assisted Learning Strategies – incorporates three essential reading activities, Partner Reading, Paragraph Shrinking, and Prediction Relay.</p>				
<p>Collaborative Strategic Reading – provides individual learning pace, choices in learning paths and reading passages and reading level options.</p>				
<p>RTI – Responsiveness to Instruction (NC title) – provides tiered strategies and interventions for students who are not being successful with reading.</p>				

Quick Reads – Quick Reads by Pearson Learning works on fluency through high interest nonfiction reading that utilizes vocabulary that will help students in social studies and science.					
Partner Reading – Peer-mediated strategy that focuses on building fluency through repeated readings and the modeling of fluent reading.					
Word Identification – This strategy uses mnemonic, DISSECT, to help students remember the steps of the strategy.					
General Study Strategies for Reading	Used in my class weekly?	Knowledgeable of Strategy	Observed Strategy	Did you pick strategy?	Unfamiliar with strategy
Underlining key events, characters, in a story					
Summarizing information read in a passage or story					
Outlining information read in a passage or story					
Using Questioning Techniques with reader’s prior knowledge					
Vocabulary Instruction to increase sight words					
Cooperative Learning Groups					
Graphic Organizers to organize story’s events					
*Venn Diagrams					
*Anticipation Guides					
*Word Walls					
*Mnemonics					
*Questions Answer Relationship (QAR)					
*Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL)					
*Reciprocal Teaching					

Note. The last seven strategies (*) are taken from a survey taken from Nichols, W. D., Rickleman, R. J., Young, C. A., Rupley, W. H (2006). Improving Middle School Professional Development by Examining Middle School Teachers’ Application of Literacy Strategies and Instructional Design. *Reading Psychology: An International Journal*, 28(1), 97-130.

Appendix D

Survey – Exceptional Children’s Teacher

Socio-Demographic Profile and Reading Survey

Please answer the following questions. The resulting information will be compiled for use in my study of reading programs/strategies for middle school students. You will not be asked your identity or personal questions in this survey. Refrain from placing your name or school’s name in any question to ensure the confidentiality of your responses. You may leave out any question you do not feel comfortable responding to or which does not pertain to your school’s setting. Your participation is voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks to you for participating in this study. Participation in this study grants permission for the information to be used in this research. Thank you in advance for your participation in my study.

About You

1. Place a check for the highest degree you currently hold:

Bachelors Masters Education Specialist Doctorate

2. How many years of experience do you have with exceptional children in the classroom setting?

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

3. How many years of experience do you have working only with middle school students?

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

4. How many years of experience do you have in the subject area of reading?

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

5. How many years of experience do you have as an Exceptional Children’s Teacher?

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

About Your School

6. How long is each class period during the day?

30 mins. 45 mins. 55 mins. 60 mins. 70 mins. 75mins.
 90mins. other

7. What is the student-teacher ratio per classroom for English/Language Arts with Students with disabilities included in the population?

5:1 10:1 15:1 20:1 25:1 30:1

Is this an inclusion classroom with two teachers team teaching? Yes No

8. What is the student-teacher ratio per classroom for English/Language Arts with Students with Disabilities only in the population?

5:1 10:1 15:1 20:1 25:1 30:1

Is this a pullout classroom for direct IEP goal instruction? Yes No

9. What is the instructional assistant ratio for classes with only Students with Disabilities in English Language Arts?

1:5 1:10 1:15 1:20

10. How many minutes are devoted only to English/Language Arts during the instructional day for specific learning disabled students?

45 mins. 55 mins. 60 mins. 65 mins. 70 mins. 75mins.
 90mins. other

11. Is there a separate class just for reading instruction, everyday, for specific learning disabled students?

Yes No

12. With the current reading program/strategies being used with Learning Disabled Students, was it already in place when you became an EC Teacher at this school?

Yes: It had been for 1 2 3 years. No

13. With the current reading program/strategies being used with Learning Disabled students, were you included in the selection process?

Yes No

14. Was adequate staff development provided for your staff for this reading program or strategies for use with Learning Disabled students?

Yes No

15. Was adequate staff development provided for you for this reading program or strategies for use with Learning Disabled students?

Yes No

16. While an EC Teacher using this reading program or strategy, have you been included in a fidelity check conducted by either your administrator or EC Director?

Yes No

17. With this reading program or strategy, do you use any system of rewards to encourage students to do their best and improve their reading skills?

Yes No

18. As the EC Teacher, is there enough time allotted for the instruction of this reading program or strategy during the school day to get the results you would like to see with your Learning Disabled students?

Yes No

19. As the EC Teacher, who is responsible for the delivery of the instruction of this strategy or program in your classroom? Check all that apply.

Myself, the EC Teacher Instructional Assistant Volunteers

20. Is there a literacy coach employed at your school who has helped with this reading program or strategies being used with Learning Disabled students?

Yes No

21. What type of feedback do you receive from students who use this reading program or strategies?

Verbal Written Conferencing Test Data

22. Do you hold certification in any of the areas below? Mark all that apply.

Cross categorical Special Ed: General Curriculum Special Ed: Adapted Curriculum

EC English Learning Disabled Mentally Disabled Other

23. Below are the approved textbook reading adoptions for North Carolina. Please mark the current textbook being used in your school?

Reading – Literature, 6-8

6th – 8th: Discovering Literature: EMC Masterpiece Series Literature and Language Arts

6th – 8th: Elements of Literature: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston

6th – 8th: The Language of Literature: McDougal Littell

6th – 8th: Prentice Hall Literature: NC Penguin Edition

Other _____

Reading Program/Strategy Survey Questions For EC Teachers					
Instructions: Please read the program/strategy descriptions given below and mark if it is currently being used with any students classified as Learning Disabled (LD) in the English Language Arts classroom.					
Strategy	Used in my class weekly ?	Knowledgeable of Strategy?	Observed Strategy?	Did you pick strategy?	Unfamiliar with strategy?
Direct Instruction – This is based on the behavioral approach to learning and promotes mastery of meaningful reading through explicit teacher direction in homogeneous groups.					
Corrective Reading – This program offers four levels of decoding plus four for comprehension and they address the varied reading deficits and skill levels found among older students.					
Explicit Instruction – Here emphasis is in processing in small stages for student understanding and achieving active and successful participation by all students.					
Language – a comprehensive integrated literacy approach, systematically and explicitly teaching phonological, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension skills.					
Text Detectives – This strategy emphasizes the importance of identifying the <i>who, what, when and where</i> in a passage. Students are encouraged to use their prior knowledge to add to the understanding of the passage.					

Repeated Readings – a supplemental reading program that consists of re-reading a short and meaningful passage until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached.					
Linguistic Skills Training – This directly teaches phonetics, phonology, morphology, and English orthography.					
Peer Assisted Learning Strategies – incorporates three essential reading activities, Partner Reading, Paragraph Shrinking, and Prediction Relay.					
Collaborative Strategic Reading – provides individual learning pace, choices in learning paths and reading passages and reading level options.					
RTI – Responsiveness to Instruction (NC title) – provides tiered strategies and interventions for students who are not being successful with reading.					
Quick Reads – Quick Reads by Pearson Learning works on fluency through high interest nonfiction reading that utilizes vocabulary that will help students in social studies and science.					
Partner Reading – Peer-mediated strategy that focuses on building fluency through repeated readings and the modeling of fluent reading.					
Word Identification – This strategy uses mnemonic, DISSECT, to help students remember the steps of the strategy.					

General Study Strategies	Used in my class weekly	Knowledgeable of Strategy	Observed Strategy	Did you pick strategy?	Unfamiliar with strategy
Underlining key events, characters, in a story					
Summarizing information read in a passage or story					
Outlining information read in a passage or story					
Using Questioning Techniques with reader's prior knowledge					
Vocabulary Instruction to increase sight words					
Cooperative Learning Groups					
Graphic Organizers to organize story's events					
*Venn Diagrams					
*Anticipation Guides					
*Word Walls					
*Mnemonics					
*Questions Answer Relationship (QAR)					
*Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL)					
*Reciprocal Teaching					

Note. The last seven strategies (*) are taken from a survey taken from Nichols, W. D., Rickleman, R. J., Young, C. A., Rupley, W. H (2006). Improving Middle School Professional Development by Examining Middle School Teachers' Application of Literacy Strategies and Instructional Design. *Reading Psychology: An International Journal*, 28(1), 97-130.

Appendix E

Focus Group Questions – Exceptional Children’s Teacher

1. In your opinion, what are the key factors as to why your middle school has made AYP in reading?

2. Is there one thing that stands out above all else that you believe made the difference?

3. This one thing – did you do it individually in your classroom or is it a program or strategy?

4. What efforts do you make in the classroom to address a student’s individual needs?

5. Describe staff development that has been beneficial to you as a teacher of learning disabled students?

Was this based on your individual needs as a teacher or for the whole school?

6. If there is a literacy coach at your school, how has this coach impacted your teaching of the learning disabled students?

7. With the strategies and programs included in the survey you complete how often are they used by you in the reading classroom with specific learning disabled students?

Appendix F

Sample Permission Letter to Superintendents

Date
Superintendent
Address of County
City, State, Zip

Carolyn T. Franklin
P. O. Box 1092
Mars Hill, NC 28754

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Carolyn Franklin and I am a doctoral student in Western Carolina University's Educational Leadership program. The research for my dissertation focuses on the reading strategies and programs used with North Carolina middle schools who have made AYP from 2004-2009. The middle school in your district met this criteria and your system was chosen because the middle school in your district has made AYP for five consecutive years with the Students With Disabilities subgroup. This is a great accomplishment and I would like to include it in my study.

I would like to send a survey to the EC Director, Principal and one EC Teacher who teaches specific learning disabled students in reading. I have enclosed a sample of the survey for your review. Surveys responses will be anonymous.

Upon completion of the surveys, I would like to form a focus group of the EC Teachers in the selected schools and schedule a conference call to ask further follow-up questions. This call should take approximately 45 minutes and will audio taped and transcribed as a reference in this study. All information will be handled in a confidential manner, and the EC Teacher and your school will be referred to as a number in the study. Participation is voluntary and there are no known risks to your system, school, or staff by participating in this study.

Please fax this letter back to my school, if you grant me permission to send the surveys to your EC Director, Principal and EC Teacher. Please return it by _____.

Please complete the participation form below.

_____ I do grant permission for my school system to participate in this research study using surveys and a focus group discussion.

_____ I do not wish for my school system to participate in the surveys and focus group discussion. I understand that I will not be contacted further in regard to this study.

Statement of Informed Consent

I understand that participation in this research study is voluntary. I understand that my staff may refuse to answer any or all questions asked in the surveys or by the facilitator during the focus group discussion. By giving consent, it is my understanding that the facilitator, Carolyn Franklin, will do everything in her power to protect my system, staff and school's identity. I understand that the focus group discussion will be recorded for use as a reference in this study. I am aware that I may withdraw my system's participation at any time and this will end my participation in this study.*

Signature of the Superintendent

Date

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to consider allowing me to include your middle school in my research.

Carolyn T. Franklin
Madison High School
5740 US Highway 25-70
Marshall, NC 28753
Phone: 828-649-2876
cfranklin@madison.k12.nc.us

Dissertation Chair:
Dr. Jacque Jacobs, Professor
WCU
Killian 250
Cullowhee, NC 28723
Phone: 828-227-3462
jjacobs@email.wcu.edu

Appendix G

Sample Letter to EC Director

Date

Exceptional Children Director
Address of County
City, State, Zip

Carolyn T. Franklin
P. O. Box 1092
Mars Hill, NC 28754

Dear Exceptional Children Director,

My name is Carolyn Franklin and I am a doctoral student in Western Carolina University's Educational Leadership program. The research for my dissertation focuses on the reading strategies and programs used with North Carolina middle schools who have made AYP from 2004-2009. The middle school in your district met this criteria and I would like to include it in my study by asking you to complete a survey. Participation is voluntary and there are no known risks to you or your school system. You may omit any questions or stop at any time.

I have obtained permission from your district's Superintendent to conduct this research.

As the Director of the Exceptional Children Division for your district, take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed survey about the reading strategies and programs used in the middle school. Understanding how difficult it is for learning disabled students to be successful in reading, and knowing which programs and strategies work is why I believe this to be worthy of research. As a former middle school principal, I hope this information will be helpful in the Students with Disabilities subgroup and AYP.

I have enclosed the anonymous survey and return envelope.

If you have any questions, please discuss them with me at this time. However, if you would like to discuss this research at another time, you should contact me at 828-649-3301. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212 or irb@wcu.edu.

I appreciate you taking time from your busy schedule to help with my research.

Carolyn T. Franklin
Madison High School
5740 US Highway 25-70
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Phone: 828-649-2876
cfranklin@madison.k12.nc.us

Dissertation Chair:
Dr. Jacque Jacobs, Professor
WCU
Killian 250
Cullowhee, NC 28723
Phone: 828-227-3462
jjacobs@email.wcu.edu

Appendix H

Sample Permission Letter to Principals

Date

Principal of Middle School

Address of School

City, State, Zip

Carolyn T. Franklin

Madison High School

5740 US Highway 25-70

Marshall, NC 28753

Dear Principal,

My name is Carolyn Franklin and I am a doctoral student in Western Carolina University's Educational Leadership program. The research for my dissertation focuses on the reading strategies and programs used with North Carolina middle schools who have made AYP from 2004-2009. The middle school in your district met this criteria and I would like to include it in my study by asking you to complete a survey. Participation is voluntary and there are no known risks to you or your school system. You may choose to omit any questions you wish or stop at any time.

I have obtained permission from your district's Superintendent to conduct this research.

As the Principal, I would ask you to take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed survey about the reading strategies and programs used in the middle school. Understanding how difficult it is for learning disabled students to be successful in reading, and knowing which programs and strategies work is why I believe this to be worthy of research. As a former middle school principal, I hope this information will be helpful in the Students with Disabilities subgroup and AYP.

I would also like to ask you to pass along the enclosed envelope with a survey enclosed for an EC Teacher who works with specific learning disabled students at your school. Enclosed would be a request for them to complete a survey much like the one you received and possibly participate in a focus group discussion at a date and time to be scheduled. This focus group discussion would be on the phone and last no longer than 45 minutes.

I have enclosed the anonymous survey and return envelope.

If you have any questions, please discuss them with me at this time. However, if you would like to discuss this research at another time, you should contact me at 828-649-3301. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this

study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212 or irb@wcu.edu

I appreciate you taking time from your busy schedule to help with my research.

Carolyn T. Franklin
Madison High School
5740 US Highway 25-70
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cfranklin@madison.k12.nc.us

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Appendix I

Sample Permission Letter to EC Teachers

Date

EC Teacher of Middle School

Address of School

City, State, Zip

Carolyn T. Franklin

Madison High School

5740 US Highway 25/70

Marshall, NC 28753

Dear EC Teacher,

My name is Carolyn Franklin and I am a doctoral student in Western Carolina University's Educational Leadership program. The research for my dissertation focuses on the reading strategies and programs used with North Carolina middle schools who have made AYP from 2004-2009. The middle school in your district met this criteria and I would like to include it in my study by asking you to complete a survey. Participation is voluntary and you may omit any questions you choose.

I have obtained permission from your district's Superintendent to conduct this research.

As an EC Teacher of students who are learning disabled, I would ask you to take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed survey about the reading strategies and programs used in the middle school. Understanding how difficult it is for learning disabled students to be successful in reading, and knowing which programs and strategies work is why I believe this to be worthy of research. As a former middle school principal, I hope this information will be helpful in the Students with Disabilities subgroup and AYP.

Upon the return of the surveys, I would also like to include you in a focus group that would be by conference call with the other EC Teachers selected for this study. This should only take about 45 minutes to complete. Responses would be audio-taped for use in this study, but your identify would not be revealed. A Letter of Informed Consent is attached that addresses the process for the focus group.

I have enclosed the anonymous survey and return envelope.

If you have any questions, please discuss them with me at this time. However, if you would like to discuss this research at another time, you should contact me at 828-649-3301. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review

Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212 or irb@wcu.edu.

I appreciate you taking time from your busy schedule to help with my research.

Carolyn T. Franklin
Madison High School
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Appendix J

Sample Permission Letter to EC Teachers for Focus Group Participation

Date
 EC Teacher of Middle School
 Address of School
 City, State, Zip

Carolyn T. Franklin
 P. O. Box 1092
 Mars Hill, NC 28754

Dear EC Teacher,

Upon the completion of the survey, I am requesting participation in a focus group discussion, through a telephone conference call, to follow up on some of the questions you recently completed. This focus group would include four to five other EC Teachers with experience with specific learning disabled students. The responses from the focus group questions will be audio taped as a reference source in this study. A facilitator will ask participants seven to ten questions and this should last approximately 45 minutes. Your identity will be protected and you will be referred to as a number through the process to maintain confidentiality.

Please complete the participation form below and return it in the envelope provided.

_____ I do wish to participate in this focus group discussion. I will provide a number where I can be reached to set up a date and time for the conference phone call.

_____ I do not wish to participate in this focus group discussion. I understand that I will not be contacted further in regard to this study.

Statement of Informed Consent

I understand that my participation in this focus group discussion is voluntary. I understand that I may refuse to answer any or all questions asked by the facilitator during the focus group discussion. By giving consent, it is my understanding that the facilitator, Carolyn Franklin, will do everything in her power to protect my identity. I understand that the focus group discussion will be recorded for use as a reference in this study. I am aware that I may withdraw from the discussion at any time and this will end my participation in this study.*

 Signature of the Participant

 Date

Contact Phone Numbers: _____

If you have any questions, please discuss them with me at this time. However, if you would like to discuss this research at another time, you should contact me at 828-649-3301. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU's Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212 or irb@wcu.edu.

Thank you for your help and consideration in helping with my study.

Carolyn T. Franklin
Madison High School
5740 US Highway 25-70
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