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Reading Matters : A Case Study of a Community Volunteer Tutoring Program

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READING MATTERS:

A CASE STUDY OF A COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER TUTORING PROGRAM

by

Leslie Clayberger Haynes

Dissertation submitted to
The Graduate College
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Approved by

Dr. Barbara Nicholson, Committee Chairperson
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Abstract

READING MATTERS:
A CASE STUDY OF A COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER TUTORING PROGRAM

by

Leslie Clayberger Haynes

The objective of this qualitative research was to study through a phenomenological approach *Reading Matters*, a community volunteer reading program to determine if students are demonstrating improvement, to uncover the characteristics of the program and the tutoring techniques used by volunteers, and to create a potential model by which administrators can design volunteer tutoring programs for other schools. One coordinator, one principal, eight classroom teachers, three volunteers, and five students participated in the study. Conclusions drawn indicate that the volunteer tutoring program was successful for the students not only for academic results but also for the mentoring relationship that the tutoring sessions created.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Aaron, who wanted to be married to a doctor.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my son, Gabe, who came on board long after the process began and didn't have a voice in the matter, but never complained.

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My family, for their love and encouragement.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In the early days of the United States, literacy meant that you could

sign your name. Fifty years ago, literacy meant having at least a sixth-

grade education. Today, with a rapidly advancing technological society, a

much higher standard of literacy is required. Some argue that a 12th-grade

reading level is necessary to get by. (Bishop, 1991, p.2)

For the student, learning to read is perhaps the most important skill one can

acquire (Kirk, 1999; Reitzhammer, 1990). Learning to read may help prevent a future of

failure and poverty (Wasik, 1997), as students who do not learn to read as expected suffer

from feelings of helplessness (Kos, 1991), low self-esteem (Kos; Shanahan & Barr,

1995), and become greater discipline problems in school (Shanahan & Barr). They do

not perform as well in other subject areas (Shanahan & Barr) and are less likely to

complete a high school education (Morris, Shaw, & Perney, 1990; Reitzhammer;

Shanahan & Barr).

For the school administrator, a student's failure to read well also translates to

failure to perform well on high-stakes tests, and the current trend is to label schools by

these test scores (Townsend, 2002). With President George Bush's No Child Left Behind

Act of 2001, the distribution of more school funding decisions to the local levels (Bailey,

2002; No Child Left Behind, 2002) comes with increased accountability for student

achievement (Bailey), as well as the option for parents to relocate their children to

schools where test scores and student achievement are higher (No Child Left Behind).

Unfortunately, funds are rarely available to increase staffing so that students will have additional opportunities to increase achievement.

One solution to this problem is the utilization of volunteers to assist children in learning to read. Former President Bill Clinton enacted his America Reads Challenge Act in 1997, asking that by the year 2000, one million volunteers start working with children in our schools to help them read (Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Borman, Rachuba, Hewes, Boulay, & Kaplan, 2001; Fry, 1998; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001). Volunteer tutors are entering our schools and schools are embracing the opportunity to utilize these individuals to increase reading achievement, but there is little evidence to confirm the effectiveness of such programs (Borman et al.; Ellis, Small-McGinley, & Hart, 1998; Wasik, 1997).

Using volunteers is not effortless (Worthy & Hoffman, 1999). Volunteers may not commit to the task and turnover may be high (Baker, Gersten, & Keating, 2000). Volunteers may become intimidated by technical terms of teaching (Criscuolo, 1985). Without preparation, newcomers to a classroom can unintentionally disrupt schedules and confuse rather than assist students (Worthy & Hoffman). In schools where materials are scarce, teachers may be reluctant to share their supplies and books with volunteers (Criscuolo). Additionally, teachers must closely supervise volunteers working with children (Fox & Wright, 1997).

Ellis et al. (1998) observed that a need exists for more qualitative studies to examine volunteer tutoring programs. In response to that observation, the subject of this study is *Reading Matters*, a community volunteer reading program at a small, rural elementary school. The purpose of the research is to determine, through a

phenomenological analysis consistent with Ellis' recommendation, what qualities such a program possesses, whether the students who participated achieved improved reading results, and how a school administrator may establish a potential volunteer reading program in the local school.

Background

One of the greatest challenges facing public school administrators is the challenge to create suitable student educational opportunities from limited resources. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind, 2002), an increased responsibility to decide the direction of federal funds has been handed to state and local leaders (Bailey, 2002; No Child Left Behind). With such freedom, however, come greatly increased expectations for accountability for student learning (Bailey).

School reform efforts have occurred throughout the history of education (Defur, 2002), but the recent reform efforts sweeping United States schools are centering on accountability for student learning (Townsend, 2002) with an emphasis on learning to read. It has been suggested that accountability for learning is the most important issue at stake (Townsend), and President Bush has placed accountability at the center of his No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 with more difficult educational standards (No Child Left Behind, 2002) ladled atop the already challenging curricular requirements facing administrators. Unfortunately, lawmakers often do not consider the financial cost of implementing tougher educational standards (Winans, 2002), and little money is set aside to meet the goals of the new measures of student achievement. If schools cannot afford

the materials or professional positions necessary to provide the appropriate instruction to students, then their reading education is jeopardized.

For this reason, administrators must seek and encourage their staffs to develop low- or no-cost educational programs that would assist students in increasing their reading achievement. Given that funds are generally not available to employ supplementary professional or paraprofessional staff to work with students in addition to providing regular and remedial instruction, and that training such as that which is used in Reading Recovery® is costly (Knapp & Winsor, 1998), programs utilizing volunteers have become popular. Perhaps the best known is former President Bill Clinton's 1997 America Reads Challenge Act, which called for one million volunteer tutors to enter schools by 2000 to assist students who are struggling to read (Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Borman et al., 2001; Fry, 1998; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001). Since then, many tutoring programs have been implemented in schools (Wasik, 1997), and schools recognize the need for and will eagerly accept volunteer tutors (Ballantine, 1999; Morris et al., 1990).

Although few studies exist that document success rates of volunteer reading programs (Borman et al., 2001; Ellis et al., 1998; Wasik, 1997), some researchers have found volunteer tutoring programs to be effective (Haisley, Tell, & Andrews, 1981; Romatowski, Trepanier-Street, & Peterson, 1993). Some volunteer tutoring programs utilize the small-group model, but one-to-one reading instruction is often the best way to increase student achievement (Elbaum, Vaughn, Tejero Hughes, & Watson Moody, 2000). Moreover, the mentoring provided by adult tutors can be vital to the development of young readers (Baker, Gersten, & Keating, 2000), as well as beneficial to the adult tutors (Baker et al.; Children's Aid Society, 1994; Russell & Ford, 1983).

Reading Matters, a volunteer tutoring reading program at a small, rural elementary school which is the focus of this study, was developed and implemented by the school's Title I Reading Specialist. The program offers a 30-minute one-to-one tutoring session once each week between a volunteer trained by the Reading Specialist in tutoring strategies and a student who is in need of additional instructional assistance in reading. Since the school is located in a rural area and transportation is an issue, the tutoring session is held during the school day, usually in the Title I classroom, but sometimes in the computer room or other classrooms. Students are selected for this program based upon the previous year's SAT-9 test scores, Slosson Oral Reading Test scores collected at the beginning of the current school year, and teacher recommendation. The Slosson Oral Reading Test is administered again at the close of the program to determine whether the student has progressed and, if so, the extent to which that progress has occurred.

The Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT) was selected for use as the pretest and posttest in *Reading Matters* due to its ease of administration and scoring, familiarity of administration and history of use within the county in which the elementary school is located. In the past, the county had required the SORT to be administered to all elementary students at the beginning and end of each school year. While the county no longer requires the test, it is still often used because it is a rapid assessment of student ability that provides a raw score, grade equivalent and age equivalent scores, and students are not required to be absent from their regular classrooms for long periods of time in order to be tested. Students taking the test are asked to decode several word lists that become increasingly difficult until the student can decode no more words. From the

words read, a score is created, which helps the teacher to determine the level at which the student is capable of decoding words.

The Reading Specialist who introduced *Reading Matters* to the elementary school initially researched community volunteer reading programs as a method of maximizing the time that could be spent reading one-on-one with children in an environment lacking multiple supplemental professional personnel. In a situation in which administrators must account for numbers of students receiving instruction from the salaried professionals, the principal could not justify the use of a professional position solely for further individual reading instruction, as the Reading Specialist was already being utilized for three hours daily for Reading Recovery® instruction. With significant numbers of students in need of supplemental reading instruction, additional assistance became necessary and the Reading Specialist introduced *Reading Matters* to her principal and colleagues. Prior to this study, the program had been utilized at the school for five years.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine, using strategies which are consistent with phenomenological research, *Reading Matters* to uncover the characteristics and techniques that comprise the program, and to determine whether students increased their reading achievement through participation in the program. If positive, the findings from this research can provide a potential example by which a school administrator can design a community volunteer reading program for the local school.

Conclusion

With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind, 2002), school administrators have become more accountable for student achievement than ever before (Bailey, 2002) and that accountability is being measured by scores on high-stakes tests, federally mandated annually for students in grades three through eight for math and reading (West Virginia Education Association, 2003). Since schools are now evaluated almost solely by their students' scores (Townsend, 2002), lack of evidence of student achievement can lead to a decrease in funding and parents' relocating their children to schools perceived to demonstrate higher achievement (No Child Left Behind). With limited funding available to provide additional education opportunities for children, school administrators must look to alternative sources for assistance.

Volunteer tutoring reading programs are a low- or no-cost method of providing additional instruction to lower-achieving students. While the use of volunteers is not effortless (Worthy & Hoffman, 1999), a carefully planned program, complete with training and support for the volunteers, can greatly increase the likelihood for increased student achievement in reading. The purpose of this study was to examine *Reading Matters* to determine whether students experienced increased achievement, to learn the characteristics of the program and the tutoring techniques utilized by the volunteers, and to explore a potential model through which school administrators can improve reading comprehension and phonemic awareness by designing their own community volunteer reading programs.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine *Reading Matters*, a community volunteer reading program in a small, rural elementary school through a phenomenological investigation proceeding from a post-positivist orientation. The intent was to determine whether students demonstrated an increase in achievement, to uncover the program characteristics and techniques, and to use *Reading Matters* as a potential example by which school administrators can pattern their own volunteer tutoring programs. The following questions were addressed in this study:

1. What were the elements of the *Reading Matters* program that allowed it to function in the elementary school?

2. What comprised the training of community volunteers in the *Reading Matters* program in the elementary school?

3. What were the tutoring activities utilized by community volunteers in the *Reading Matters* program in the elementary school?

4. What were the perceptions of the Reading Specialist who coordinated the community volunteer reading program in the elementary school as they related to improvements in student reading ability?

5. What were the perceptions of the volunteers in the community volunteer reading program in the elementary school as they related to improvements in student reading ability?

6. What were the perceptions of the classroom teachers of the student participants in the community volunteer reading program in the elementary school as they related to improvements in student reading ability?

7.   Did student participants in the community volunteer reading program achieve scores on SORT-Rs that were congruent with the perceptions of those interviewed as to program success or lack thereof?

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following operational definitions were used:

1.   teacher – a state certified educational professional employed in a classroom teaching or resource capacity, whose student(s) participated in the *Reading Matters* program;

1.   participating student – a child attending the elementary school targeted for this study and who received instruction in the *Reading Matters* program;

2.   volunteer – an individual who provided instruction in the *Reading Matters* program designed to increase reading achievement;

3.   sites – the locations within the elementary school in which instruction through the *Reading Matters* program was provided;

4.   school – the public educational institution offering the *Reading Matters* program which was the focus of this study;

5.   training – the pre-service meetings necessary to introduce volunteers to effective reading strategies comprising the *Reading Matters* program; and

6.   strategies – those methods utilized at each site to provide reading instruction in the *Reading Matters* program.

Significance of the Study

Learning to read is likely the most important ability a student can acquire (Kirk, 1999; Reitzhammer, 1990), as reading creates a foundation for better performance in

other subject areas (Shanahan & Barr, 1995). Those students who do not learn to read as expected are less likely to complete high school (Morris et al., 1990; Reitzhammer; Shanahan & Barr). With increased expectations for accountability for student success (Bailey, 2002) and limited funding for increased educational opportunities, school administrators are faced with finding alternative methods to provide lower-achieving students with additional instruction.

Community volunteer reading tutoring programs can be an answer to this dilemma. By using volunteer programs, principals can arrange for additional reading instruction for students, curriculum specialists can offer alternative methods to delivering supplemental reading instruction, and superintendents can increase services to students in need without the cost of additional personnel. Little time is needed to train volunteers (Ballantine, 1999) and no additional salary is required to fund the volunteers, as they are donating their time and skills to the school. With coordination and supervision, volunteers can help students increase their reading achievement, perform better on high-stakes tests, and progress in their education. School administrators can use results derived from this study to determine whether the design and implementation of a community volunteer tutoring program can benefit their own schools.

Limitations of the Study

1. Classroom teachers may have had an inflated expectation regarding gains in achievement of participating students, and may have perceived that those students achieved greater success than they actually demonstrated.

2. *Reading Matters* served a limited number of students who may not have been entirely representative of the broader population of tutored students.

3.   Students in the study may remain at-risk for future reading-related difficulties.

4.   Increased reading achievement that is measured by the Slosson Oral Reading

Test may be a result of intellectual maturation of the student from the time of

the pretest to the time of the posttest.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Background

School reform efforts have occurred throughout the history of education (Defur, 2002), but the recent reform efforts sweeping United States schools are centering on accountability for student learning (Townsend, 2002). The rhetoric surrounding the restructuring of our schools suggests that accountability for learning is the most important issue at stake (Townsend). Unfortunately, lawmakers are increasing the standards by which schools are judged without considering the financial cost of implementing the new standards (Winans, 2002).

Even President Bush has centered accountability at the heart of his No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 with more difficult educational standards (No Child Left Behind, 2002) ladled atop the already challenging curricular requirements facing administrators. Unfortunately, lawmakers often do not consider the financial cost of implementing tougher educational standards (Winans, 2002), and little money is set aside to meet the goals of the new measures of student achievement.

The outcome of this effect can be crippling for administrators. Schools are being characterized by test scores (Townsend, 2002) and are facing potentially steep accountability costs. School performance on standardized tests influences revenue from property taxes and other economic development in a region (Defur, 2002; Sack, 2002), as families are generally reluctant to settle where schools are considered inadequate. The possible ramifications of low test scores coupled with insufficient financial support for additional remediation programming recommended in educational reform campaigns

have led to the belief that accountability for student achievement must be expanded to encompass not only the students, but also teachers, schools, districts, and state agencies (Defur).

Research has indicated that learning to read builds the foundation for all other aspects of learning (Cook & Shumer, 1998; Kirk, 1999; Knapp & Winsor, 1998; Kos, 1991; Morris et al., 1990; Reitzhammer, 1990; Shanahan & Barr, 1995; Wasik, 1997). Early reading failure is one of the main reasons cited for future academic failure (Knapp & Winsor; Reitzhammer; Shanahan & Barr) and other types of difficulty in life, such as poverty (Wasik), low self-esteem, and disciplinary difficulties (Kos; Shanahan & Barr). According to Kirk (1999), learning to read means learning to survive.

A decrease in funding could have a direct impact on the quality of reading instruction that students receive. If schools cannot afford the materials or professional positions necessary to provide the appropriate instruction to students, then their reading education is necessarily jeopardized. Principals in particular, as site coordinators for their schools, must stretch every dollar so that students are afforded as many opportunities as possible to maintain an adequate level of educational achievement.

For this reason, administrators must seek and encourage their staffs to develop low-cost or no-cost educational programs that would assist students in increasing their reading achievement. Given that funds are generally not available to employ supplementary professional or paraprofessional staff to work with students in addition to providing regular and remedial instruction, programs utilizing volunteers have become popular. Since the initialization of the America Reads Challenge Act in 1997, many tutoring programs have been implemented in schools (Wasik, 1997), and schools have

begun to recognize the need for and will eagerly accept volunteer tutors (Ballantine, 1999; Morris et al., 1990).

There are benefits to utilizing volunteers within schools. According to Ellis et al. (1998, p. 150), "All children need supportive interaction with caring adults to learn and grow." Brendtro and Long (1995) observed that children who feel secure attachment to adults learn competence and self-management, and Russell and Ford (1983) found that tutoring helps to build positive self-images in students. While using volunteers is not effortless due to the need to prepare volunteers for their task, volunteers typically have good intentions and are interested in assisting in classrooms (Worthy & Hoffman, 1999). Additionally, one-to-one instruction can be personalized to meet the specific needs of individual students, which is essential in learning (Cooledge &Wurster, 1985), and volunteer tutoring programs extend services to students who might not otherwise receive the additional assistance (Criscuolo, 1985).

A review of the literature addressing volunteer reading programs has uncovered a great deal of detail pertaining to such programs, many of which shared similar characteristics. Along with the name and location of the program, the literature often included a description of any existing program coordinator, student pretesting and posttesting, volunteer training, information about the volunteers, the sizes of the populations served, and the length of the program.

The Coordinator

Descriptions of volunteer tutoring programs designed to increase reading achievement often had similar characteristics. To begin with, a coordinator who is usually a certified teacher, (Fox & Wright, 1997; Wasik, 1997), a reading specialist

(Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Wasik), or a graduate student (Brathwaite, 2002; Knapp & Winsor, 1998; Wasik) supervised the program. Some programs, however, relied on researchers, physicians (Wasik), or a person or persons utilized specifically for the program (Baker et al., 2000; Criscuolo, 1985; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Wasik).

Often the coordinator of a volunteer reading program was a reading specialist or certified teacher. In the Red Clay Consolidated School District in Wilmington, Delaware, a certified reading specialist supervised the tutors (Blunt & Gordon, 1998). The *Howard Street Tutoring Program* in Chicago, Illinois, utilized a reading specialist who trained the tutors, observed them, provided feedback, and developed lessons for the students. Another reading specialist in Dade County, Florida, worked with tutors of the *School Volunteer Development Project* on skills that they would use during tutoring sessions. The *Intergenerational Reading Program* used in Boston (Massachusetts) Public Schools employed a certified teacher as the coordinator to schedule and train volunteers. The *Hillard Elementary School Tutoring Program* in Houston, Texas, required teachers to train parents to volunteer in the program. *Help One Student to Succeed (HOSTS)*, a program employed nation-wide, also used a certified teacher to train volunteer tutors. (Wasik, 1997).

Graduate students have also served as volunteer tutoring program directors. At Bennington Elementary School and Third Avenue School in the southeastern United States, three graduate students teamed up to study the reading apprenticeship method through a volunteer tutoring program (Knapp & Winsor, 1998). *Book Buddies*, a program developed at the University of Virginia by two reading researchers, has been used nation-wide and is managed by graduate reading education students, who train and

supervise the volunteers (Wasik, 1997). *A Way with Words*, in Missouri, not only used

graduate students as site coordinators, but also employed them as part of its team of tutors

(Brathwaite, 2002).

Literature showed that researchers, physicians, and people utilized specifically for

the volunteer reading program have been among those who served as coordinators for

volunteer reading programs. A researcher at Temple University coordinated *Reading*

Together, a volunteer reading program designed to encourage a community to help itself.

Reach Out and Read, developed at Boston City Hospital, was designed and implemented

by physicians. The *Cabrini-Green Tutoring Program* in Chicago relied on a special

coordinator to train and consult with volunteers (Wasik, 1997), while the New Haven

Public School District hired a full-time Director and assistant to direct its *New Haven*

Volunteer Tutoring Program (Criscuolo, 1985). *Book Buddies in the Bronx* employed a

tutor training coordinator who supervised sessions, created materials, and conducted

long-range planning for the program (Meier & Invernizzi, 2001). Regardless of who it

may be, a common thread among volunteer tutoring programs was that a coordinator was

involved in the training and management of the program.

Pretesting, Posttesting, and Placement

Pretesting and posttesting often occurred in volunteer tutoring programs to try to

determine whether the reading tutoring was effective for that student. The forms of tests

used could be almost any kind of reading test, including Running Records (Worthy &

Hoffman, 1999), Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) (Borman et al., 2001),

Gilmore Oral Reading Test (Criscuolo, 1985), Gates MacGinitie Reading Tests (Fox &

Wright, 1997), Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (Knapp & Winsor, 1998),

interest inventories and book reviews (Romatowski et al., 1993), and other reading and spelling batteries (Wasik, 1997). Teacher recommendations could also be used in lieu of pretesting and posttesting to place students in a volunteer reading tutoring program (Baker et al., 2000; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Wasik).

In some programs formal testing was conducted to determine whether a volunteer reading program might be beneficial to a student. The *New Haven Volunteer Reading Program* utilized the Gilmore Oral Reading Test Forms C and D along with an informal interest inventory (Criscuolo, 1985). Another program administered the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests in conjunction with teacher judgment to determine student placement in a volunteer reading program (Fox & Wright, 1997). Bennington Elementary School and Third Avenue School relied upon the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, and an oral reading sample when considering potential students (Knapp & Winsor, 1998). The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, 4th Edition, Level 10, Form B coupled with the eligibility for free or reduced lunch served as the placement test for Teach Baltimore (Borman et al., 2001).

In other volunteer tutoring programs, more informal testing determined student placement in the program. Kindergarten screening tests served as the pretesting in the *Early Identification and Intervention Program* in Cincinnati, Ohio (Stark, 2001) and *Book Buddies in the Bronx* (Meier & Invernizzi, 2001). The *Howard Street Tutoring Program* depended upon reading and spelling batteries as forms of testing, while *Book Buddies* opted to examine each student's alphabet knowledge, concept of word knowledge, phoneme/grapheme knowledge, and word recognition (Wasik, 1997). The

Beyond Fundraising Program administered Running Records to students to determine reading ability (Worthy & Hoffman, 1999). *A Way with Words*, implemented in the Columbia (Missouri) Public Schools, assessed remedial reading scores as a placement method (Brathwaite, 2002) and the *Saturday Reading Club*, implemented in a large midwestern city, examined interest inventories and book interviews (Romatowski et al., 1993).

Some programs, however, relied primarily upon teacher judgment when placing students in the program. In Oregon's *Start Making a Reader Today (SMART)*, classroom teachers identified potential participants (Baker et al., 2000). *Reading One-One*, based in the Richardson (Texas) Independent School District, asked teachers to select students for participation in the program (Wasik, 1997). Whether the testing for the volunteer tutoring program was formal or informal, however, most volunteer reading tutoring programs addressed relied upon some sort of testing to determine individual students' needs to participate.

The Tutors

The actual volunteers used in volunteer tutoring reading programs offered a multitude of perspectives and experiences. Although high student achievement is linked directly to parental involvement (Ballantine, 1999; Chapman & Ferris, 1988; Elbaum et al., 2000), even when a child's parents are not available, other adult mentors are valuable because they can consider the individual needs of their students and not expect that all students will learn at the same pace (Cooledge & Wurster, 1985; Ellis et al., 1998). Volunteers could be parents (Morris, 1995; Stark, 2001; Wasik, 1997; Worthy & Hoffman, 1999), teachers (Morris), high school students (Criscuolo, 1985; Wasik),

college students (Borman et al., 2001; Brathwaite, 2002; Criscuolo; Romatowski, et al., 1993; Solo, 1999; Wasik), employees of a business (Baker et al., 2000; Criscuolo), retired community members (Baker et al., 2000; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Solo, 1999; Stark; Wasik), and younger community members (Baker; Fox & Wright, 1997; Stark; Wasik). Reading program volunteers offered a wide variety of backgrounds.

Many volunteer tutoring programs utilized only one type of tutor. Community women, ages 29-76, were trained as tutors in a program implemented in a rural community (Fox & Wright, 1997). Retired Senior Volunteer Project participants, mostly aged 55 or older, donated their time as tutors to *Book Buddies in the Bronx* (Meier & Invernizzi, 2001). The *Intergenerational Reading Program* of Boston, Massachusetts, also employed senior citizens as volunteer tutors. The *School Volunteer Development Project* of Dade County, Florida, and *Book Buddies* in Virginia relied upon community members to tutor students. Physicians provided the counseling/tutoring for the *Reach Out and Read* program at Boston City Hospital. AmeriCorps volunteers in Simpson County, Kentucky, provided regular tutoring to local students participating in the *SLICE* program because the students were at risk for reading failure (Wasik, 1997). At Palm Cove Elementary School in Florida, the *Beyond Fundraising Program* received the tutoring services of parents (Worthy & Hoffman, 1999). *A Way with Words* of Columbia Pacific Schools, *Saturday Reading Club*, and *Teach Baltimore* asked college students to serve as tutors (Borman et al., 2001; Brathwaite, 2002; Romatowski, et al., 1993).

Some volunteer tutoring programs utilized more than one type of tutor. The program implemented at Graham and Parks Alternative Public School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, employed Harvard University students and retired grandparent-models

(Solo, 1999). *New Haven's Volunteer Tutoring Program* received tutoring assistance from city employees and high school and college students (Criscuolo, 1985). Community members and business employees constituted the make-up of the volunteers for *Start Making a Reader Today* (Baker et al., 2000). The *Early Identification and Intervention Program* relied upon parents, grandparents, older students, and community members to tutor participating students (Stark, 2001). The *Howard Street Tutoring Program* utilized college students, suburban mothers, and retirees as tutors (Wasik, 1997), and teachers and parents worked together to tutor students for the *Frayser Elementary School Family Literacy Program* (Morris, 1995). Volunteer reading tutoring programs could decide internally the type or types of tutors they wanted to utilize.

Training

Once the volunteers committed to the program, it was typical that some form of training was provided before the volunteers work with children. While most volunteer reading programs provided training primarily addressing tutoring strategies and what should constitute the focus of a tutoring session (Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Criscuolo, 1985; Fox & Wright, 1997; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Romatowski et al., 1993; Stark, 2001; Wasik, 1997; Worthy & Hoffman, 1999), some programs presented additional information, such as orientation to the school (Baker et al., 2000; Wasik), strategies to encourage children to watch less television (Wasik), and approaches to encourage greater parental involvement (Borman et al., 2001).

Since the purpose of most volunteer tutoring programs was to increase reading achievement, many volunteer tutoring programs provided training that taught volunteers what should constitute the focus of a tutoring session, as well as which strategies to

employ during the session (Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Criscuolo, 1985; Fox & Wright, 1997; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Romatowski et al., 1993; Stark, 2001; Wasik, 1997; Worthy & Hoffman, 1999). *New Haven's Volunteer Tutoring Program's* training sessions focused on word recognition, comprehension techniques, language development, positive reading attitudes, and effective use of materials (Criscuolo). The *Early ID Program* trained its volunteers to follow a structured set of activities to increase skills, and students could advance only when skills were mastered (Stark). *Book Buddies in the Bronx* required tutors to attend a formal three-day training, where tutors learned to work with lesson plans, and preview books and word study materials (Meier & Invernizzi). The *Howard Street Tutoring Program* provided training manuals and tutoring materials to volunteers, and a reading specialist modeled tutoring sessions. The *School Volunteer Development Project* trained tutors in tutoring skills and in the use of multimedia materials (Wasik). These tutoring programs created training that would guide the volunteers throughout their session.

Other tutoring programs focused less on the initial training on strategies and more on school and program orientation (Baker et al., 2000; Wasik, 1997). *Start Making a Reader Today* experienced a high volunteer turnover and realized that intensive training would not be cost-effective. Instead of repeated and ongoing intense training sessions addressing strategies, volunteers were introduced to the basics of tutoring and shown the materials they might use, along with being given an overview of general school policies. Although this approach was not typical for most volunteer tutoring programs, *Start Making a Reader Today* deemed it appropriate and necessary for its program (Baker et

al.). While the volunteer reading program remains focused on increasing reading achievement, other useful avenues of training can be explored.

The Population of Students Served

The sizes of the populations being served in volunteer reading programs varied. Programs could be for smaller groups (Knapp & Winsor, 1998; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Wasik, 1997), school-wide (Morris, 1995; Wasik), district-wide (Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Brathwaite, 2002; Solo, 1999; Stark, 2001; Wasik), or larger (Baker et al., 2000; Wasik). Knapp and Winsor prescreened 25 students for their study in Georgia, finally selecting nine students with whom to work. *Book Buddies in the Bronx* served select first-grade children from one elementary school (Meier & Invernizzi). Students at-risk for reading failure were chosen for tutoring at Frayser Elementary School in Memphis (Morris). Red Clay Consolidated School District adopted the *HOSTS* program so that individual schools within its district could benefit from the format provided (Blunt and Gordon). The *Early ID Program* served kindergarten and first-grade students throughout a school district near Cincinnati, Ohio (Stark). *Start Making a Reader Today* was conceived and developed by former Oregon governor Neil Goldschmidt and implemented at elementary schools throughout the state (Baker et al.). Volunteer tutoring programs have served both small and large populations of students.

The Grade Levels of Students Served

The grade levels most commonly addressed were kindergarten through sixth grade (Baker et al., 2000; Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Brathwaite, 2002; Criscuolo, 1985; Fox & Wright, 1997; Knapp & Winsor, 1998; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Morris, 1995; Stark, 2001; Wasik, 1997), but occasionally middle schools and high schools utilized volunteer

tutoring reading programs as well (Criscuolo). Two community volunteer tutoring programs, the *Early ID Program* and *SLICE*, served kindergarten and first grade students (Stark; Wasik), while other programs focused solely on first grade students (Fox & Wright; Meier & Invernizzi; Wasik). Volunteers for *Start Making a Reader Today* tutored kindergarten through second grade students (Baker et al.). *Reading One-One* addressed the needs of first through third grade students (Wasik), while tutors at Bennington Elementary and Third Avenue School (Knapp & Winsor), as well as those of the *Howard Street Tutoring Program* (Wasik), concentrated on second and third grade students. The *School Volunteer Development Project* assisted second through sixth grade students (Wasik). The Red Clay Consolidated School District was one of many school districts that utilized *HOSTS* or other volunteer programs for students throughout the elementary level (Blunt & Gordon; Brathwaite; Wasik). The *New Haven Volunteer Tutoring Program* served students in elementary school, middle school, and high school (Criscuolo). Volunteer tutoring programs have served students at the elementary level as well as those in middle and high school.

Do the Programs Last?

In addition to the populations served and the sizes of the volunteer reading programs, the duration and continuation of the programs differed as well. Some programs continued for at least an entire school year (Baker et al., 2000; Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Brathwaite, 2002; Criscuolo, 1985; Fox & Wright, 1997; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Morris et al., 1995; Stark, 2001; Wasik, 1997), while others were shorter (Borman et al., 2001; Knapp & Winsor, 1998; Worthy & Hoffman, 1999), especially if they were implemented for research purposes (Borman et al.; Knapp & Winsor). *Beyond*

Fundraising delivered its tutoring program in six weeks (Worthy & Hoffman) and *Teach Baltimore* tutored over the course of eight weeks during the summer (Borman et al.), while Knapp and Winsor conducted a tutoring program for 10 weeks for research purposes. *Book Buddies* in the Bronx (Meier & Invernizzi), *Frayser Elementary School Family Literacy Program* (Morris et al.), and another tutoring program (Fox & Wright) utilized tutors for one school year. *Book Buddies* (Wasik), the *New Haven Volunteer Tutoring Program* (Criscuolo), *Howard Street Tutoring Program* (Wasik), HOSTS (Blunt & Gordon), the *Early ID Program* (Stark), *A Way With Words* (Brathwaite), and *Start Making a Reader Today* (Baker et al.) served students throughout the entire school year for multiple years. Community volunteer tutoring programs varied in duration from a few weeks to several continuous years.

Assessment

Some programs were considered by the coordinators or participants to be beneficial to the students, either through specific pretesting and postesting results (Borman et al., 2001; Criscuolo, 1985; Fox & Wright, 1997; Knapp & Winsor, 1998; Meier & Invernizzi, 2001; Romatowski et al., 1993; Stark, 2001) or simply through perception of increased student achievement (Baker et al., 2000; Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Brathwaite, 2002; Solo, 1999). In determining that its program was beneficial to its students, *New Haven's Volunteer Tutoring Program* employed the Gilmore Oral Reading Tests Forms C and D as its pretest and posttest (Criscuolo), while the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests Levels R and 1 were utilized by another program in a rural area to determine that its students experienced increased reading achievement (Fox & Wright). Bennington Elementary and Third Avenue School concluded that their volunteer reading

program benefited their students by comparing Kaufman Test of Educational

Achievement scores (Knapp & Winsor), *Book Buddies in the Bronx* evaluated the

effectiveness of its program based upon the Wide Range Achievement Test 3 and reading

in context (Meier & Invernizzi), and *Early ID* compared preintervention and

postintervention kindergarten screenings prior to deeming its program successful (Stark).

Saturday Reading Club administered an interest inventory for its pretest and another

interest inventory with an added book inventory for its posttest (Romatowski et al.),

while *Teach Baltimore* utilized the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, 4th Ed. (Borman

et al.).

Some programs, however, simply perceived that the program provided a benefit

to participating students (Baker et al., 2000; Blunt & Gordon, 1998; Brathwaite, 2002;

Solo, 1999). In one study, Solo explained, "In an urban school where 35 percent of our

students are in special education, our scores on standardized tests match those of more

affluent suburban schools" (p. 50). The Red Clay Consolidated School District relied on

previous success with *HOSTS* to help their students (Blunt & Gordon), while *Start

Making a Reader Today* recognized that even though their program did assist students in

increasing their reading achievement at the time, those same students remained at-risk for

future reading-related difficulties (Baker et al.). In these programs, increased student

achievement was perceived, yet not documented.

In other programs, no formal assessment was used and documentation of any

benefit to the students cannot be determined (Wasik, 1997). *Reading Together* harbors

"no systematic, formal evaluation of this program" (Wasik, p. 6) and *Read*Write*Now*,

SLICE, the *Cabrini-Green Tutoring Program*, *Hillard Elementary School Tutoring*

Program, and *Growing Together* did not specify any results derived from a program assessment (Wasik). Such lack of evidence of increased reading achievement creates a situation in which it is difficult to determine whether the programs assisted the students in learning to read.

While a review of the literature addressing community volunteer reading programs provided information regarding program names and locations, program sizes and lengths, the presence of a coordinator, pretesting and posttesting, specific details about the volunteers, volunteer training, the duration or recurrence of the program, and the benefit to students, a variety of information describing specific tutoring strategies employed by volunteers was unavailable. Additionally, there is a scarcity of information directly addressing increased student achievement and specific gains a participating student may achieve. It was the intent of this study to add to the current base of knowledge pertaining to community volunteer reading programs the characteristics of such a program as well as the precise strategies that tutors may use, while using pretesting and posttesting to help determine program success.

Chapter Three

Methods and Methodology

Learning to read builds the foundation for all other aspects of learning (Cook & Shumer, 1998; Kirk, 1999; Knapp & Winsor, 1998; Kos, 1991; Morris et al., 1990; Reitzhammer, 1990; Shanahan & Barr, 1995; Wasik, 1997). Research has demonstrated that learning to read is possibly the most important skill students can acquire (Kirk; Reitzhammer) and that students who do not read well do not perform as well in other subject areas (Shanahan & Barr). Schools are being held accountable for learning (Townsend, 2002) and are expected to demonstrate reading achievement through increases in scores on high-stakes test or risk loss of resources if achievement cannot be demonstrated (No Child Left Behind, 2002). Lawmakers, however, often do not consider the financial cost of tougher educational standards (Winans, 2002) and administrators must create increased educational opportunities for students even without the necessary funding for increased professional personnel. For this reason, alternative methods of delivering reading instruction must be explored.

Current interest in community volunteer reading programs developed from recognizing the need for low-cost or no-cost reading programs for students, while acknowledging the potential benefits of involving community members in schools. After conducting a thorough review of the literature on community volunteer tutoring programs, it was determined that further information on the characteristics of community volunteer reading programs, strategies thought to be effective by tutors, and whether students were demonstrating an increase in reading achievement would constitute a useful contribution to existing research on the subject. This study will be most useful to

teachers and administrators, as it will offer detail concerning a community volunteer reading program and the possibility that such a program can assist students with increased reading achievement, while providing a potential example by which teachers and administrators can create a community volunteer reading program within their own schools.

Reading Matters was examined using phenomenological methods of data collection proceeding from a post-positivist orientation in the interest of providing administrators with potentially useful information concerning this community volunteer reading program. *Reading Matters* has been implemented for the five years prior to this study at a small, rural elementary school, and an investigation into its characteristics and techniques can serve as a guide to creating potential volunteer reading programs in other schools. The researcher interviewed the school principal, teachers of participating students from the current year and previous years, the program coordinator, and volunteers to gain insight into their perceptions of the program. Parents of participating students were asked to participate in interviews as well, but declined. Additionally, the students' SORT-R pretest and posttest scores were examined to determine whether the students' achievement was congruent with the perceptions of the tutors and teachers.

Methodology

Isaac Newton developed the basic model of the Enlightenment world in his 1687 *Principia Mathematica*, which suggested that the entire universe is governed by only a few indisputable mathematical laws, the primary one being gravity. Newton's theory that the universe operated according to "natural," rational laws laid the groundwork for centuries of reliance on the scientific model as the appropriate, and indeed the only,

method for research. Reason or rational thought was the central belief of Enlightenment

philosophy, and anything which could not be explained through reason or rational

thought was dismissed as less important. Thus, the subjective world of emotions, morals,

ethics, i.e., the nonrational, because they could not be explained rationally, were seen as

less significant and were relegated to the realm of philosophy.

Newton's scientific model, which claimed that one could develop an idea, submit

it to an objective test, and thereby determine its validity, was a model grounded in binary

thinking. Something either was or was not true; it either could be examined, evaluated

and explained, or it could not.

 "The seductiveness of this kind of thinking, also referred to as logical

positivism, isn't difficult to grasp. In a world where frequent and dramatic

change is the norm, there's comfort in a philosophy that promises stability

and 'truth.' The idea of coherence and order is appealing in an

environment of incoherence and disorder (B. L. Nicholson, personal

communication, January 15, 2002)."

As a discipline, educational administration has not been immune to the influence

of logical positivism. In fact, during what Murphy (1995) described as the behaviorist

era, educational administration was deeply committed to bringing some scholarly "rigor"

to the field by adopting the research methods of the sciences. If a piece of research

lacked the trappings of "reliability" or "validity" as they are construed by the quantitative

researcher, it was routinely dismissed as either uninformed or insignificant.

The obvious problem with this narrow approach to research is that it necessarily

limits what kinds of phenomena can be studied. Complex social phenomena cannot

always be reduced to identifiable variables and multiple regression analyses. Griffiths

(1995) pointed out that while quantitative researchers occasionally attempt to bend such

phenomena around their methods, they are rarely successful: "The trouble is that virtually

all researchers have a limited repertoire of theories (often only one), and they bend the

problem to fit their theory" (p. 303). These theoretical frameworks tend to conform to

logical positivist philosophy and to assume a privileged position grounded in that

conformity.

As Griffiths (1995, p. 304) pointed out, however, most paradigms are "fall[ing]

from grace not because they're wrong but because they're boring." The more

contemporary approaches to research in the post-positivist tradition, therefore, are more

malleable and easier to apply to complex phenomena. By adopting a vocabulary which

views approaches to research as strategies of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994),

orientations (Tesch, 1990) or even genres (Wolcott, 1992) rather than theoretical

frameworks, the researcher has more flexibility than is afforded by committing to an

explicit theoretical stance, the dimensions of which may limit possibilities for broadening

the investigation as it unfolds.

Rodgers (1997) agreed, noting that qualitative research, descriptive studies, and

physiologic studies typically will not have a theoretical framework. This study, and

hence this section, will utilize the vocabulary consistent with the post-positivist tradition

in descriptive studies, and will clarify the phenomenological method as a strategy of

inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Griffiths (1995, p. 300) stated that, "organizations and organizational behavior are

complex phenomena and should be studied from a number of points of view." Among

the more comprehensive methods for studying such phenomena is the application of a qualitative approach, which relies on rich descriptions using words and photographs, among other sources of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

Creswell (1998, p. 15) defined qualitative research as " . . . an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting."

Qualitative study relies on meticulous descriptions of events or subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2000), and data are collected in the form of words and photographs, rather than relying on numbers (Bogdan & Biklen). In a qualitative account, the situation should be so well described that the reader has the sense of actually being present during the fieldwork (Stake, 1995). The process begins with an open-ended approach, which narrows as the study progresses and themes become apparent (Bogdan & Biklen; Johnson & Christensen).

The strategy of inquiry utilized in this study is the phenomenological approach as conceived by Merleau-Ponty, widely regarded as the prominent thinker in the field. It is a three-step process requiring description, reduction and interpretation. Each step informs the next in a progressive fashion to produce what Lanigan (1988) calls "a systemic completeness" (p. 173).

- The descriptive phase involves a careful reading of or "listening to" the data without any preconceived categories. The objective at this stage of the analysis is to allow for "the widest possible number" of broad themes to emerge (Nelson, 1989, p. 232).

- The second step, reduction, extracts from the emerging themes those which can be seen as representative. The aim of reduction, as explained by Cooks and Descutner (1994), is "articulat[ing] ... a pattern of experience" expressed through the essential elements of the phenomenon under investigation (p. 255).

- Phenomenological interpretation, then, requires the examination of the primary themes which emerge to discern those which effectively make explicit (in this case the efficacy of volunteer tutoring programs in reading instruction for elementary children) what had formerly been implicit (the perception that low- or no-cost tutoring is necessarily beneficial).

The phenomenological process, then, can be seen as one in which the whole, examined in the description phase, is reduced to its constitutive themes, which are then recombined and re-examined to establish a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Nicholson & Leary, 2001, p. 204).

This study of *Reading Matters* is a case study, which, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), is an exhaustive examination of a single setting, subject, or event. The design of a case study is represented by a funnel, with the beginning of the study representing the wide end of the funnel, with a number of options and possibilities. As the study takes shape and a focus develops, the funnel tapers to the narrow point, where themes are evident and conclusions are reached (Bogdan & Biklen).

Creswell (1998) defined a case as a program, event, activity, or individuals, and a case study as, "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context"

(p. 61). Creswell's "bounded system" is confined by boundaries of time and place (p. 61), just as this study of *Reading Matters* is confined within the 2002-2003 school year and within its location in a small, rural elementary school. Creswell further explained that the context of a case involves situating that case within its natural setting, such as the school and classroom in which the program takes place, and his definition of an instrumental case study is appropriate as well, as this study of *Reading Matters* demonstrated that the program has been used as a means to a particular end: increasing reading achievement through utilization of volunteer reading programs (p. 62).

This investigation of *Reading Matters* involved a qualitative study of the program with found data offered in the form of the volunteer handbook and Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT-R) pre-test and post-test scores that were used to triangulate data acquired from interviews with tutors, teachers, the coordinator, and the school principal. The study thoroughly described the characteristics of the program, the volunteers, the strategies, and the perceptions of those affected, including the principal, coordinator, teachers of participating students from the current year and previous years, and volunteer tutors. The researcher's document analysis of the training manual and documentation of previous years of programming, observations, and interview transcriptions comprised the field notes. Additionally, comparison sets of SORT-R scores were collected anonymously from the participating students at the onset of the program as well as at the conclusion. Student names were removed from these pre-test and post-test scores, which were then delivered to the researcher for coding, analysis and comparison to determine the degree, if any, to which students experienced increased reading achievement and to verify that the scores were congruent with the perceptions of the teachers and tutors in

regard to program success, or lack thereof. An analysis of data from field notes occurred throughout the study.

Method

To conduct this study, the researcher attended 42 *Reading Matters* tutoring sessions at the close of the 2002-2003 school year and at the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, gaining familiarity through immersion in the program in order to better comprehend the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 220). Observations were as silent and unobtrusive as possible, involving the collection of detailed written notes of the sessions, including tutoring strategies employed, interactions between the tutors and students, details regarding the tutoring environment, and other facets that emerged to influence the program, such as attendance and time spent on-task. Adhering to the assertion of the need for multiple sources of data (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln), all tutors were interviewed, as well as the principal, classroom teachers of participating students from the current year and previous years, and the program coordinator in order to gain information about their perspectives of the program. Preliminary interview questions are included in Appendix D to the final document and, since these are questions for semi-structured interviews, other questions did arise during the fieldwork that were explored more fully and inserted into remaining interviews. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study by eliminating identifying characteristics from field notes.

Consent to conduct this study was secured in writing from the county superintendent, school principal, program coordinator, tutors, classroom teachers, and parents of participating students, as well as the Institutional Review Board of Marshall

University (see Appendices). Identifying characteristics of participants are not provided in this document to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, and the delivery of anonymous pre-test and post-test scores by the program coordinator has ensured student confidentiality.

Creswell (1998) stated that in a qualitative study, the researcher must make an extra effort toward confirming the study's results. To ensure the validity of the results of the study, interviewees were asked to read field notes (Creswell) and the researcher's understandings were checked through a constant comparison of multiple sources of data about each theme, such as multiple interviews and observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and the comparison of pre-test and post-test SORT-R scores. This triangulation confirmed the validity of the information collected from the study.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1998), "…the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection (p. 162)." Merriam continued to explain that the researcher knows she has collected enough data when there is an exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories of analysis, emergence of regularities, and the sense that new information received is quite removed from the core of the study. Additionally, "...the final report of a qualitative study will look different from the final report of a conventional research design (Merriam, p. 152)."

Patton (1990), explained that qualitative analysis is difficult because responses "are neither systematic nor standardized" (p. 24), but that the open-ended nature of the responses allows us to understand the world as it has been seen by the respondents.

Patton (1990) further clarified that observation data must have depth and detail because the purpose of the analysis is to take the reader into the setting that was observed.

Throughout the fieldwork, which concluded in November 2003, the data collected from the study were sorted, coded, and organized in preparation for interpreting and reporting the results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Adhering to the philosophy of Miles and Huberman, who emphasized that coding, which as they describe it is another term for analysis, should be done as the data are collected, not at the end of the study, data collected were analyzed as the study progressed. Field notes were regularly analyzed and themes and other common elements, such as characteristics of the tutoring program, tutoring strategies, and indications of increased student reading achievement, were sought. Those themes have served as a foundation for a program description from which administrators can create their own community volunteer reading programs. In writing the results of the study, the general characteristics of the volunteer tutoring program have been described completely, but the greatest detail has been given to the tutoring methods used by the volunteers and the results of interviews. A comparison of the students' SORT-R pre-test and post-test scores has been included in this analysis.

Validity and Reliability

Patton (1990) stated, "The validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher" (p. 11). Patton further explained that that the researcher is the instrument of data collection in qualitative research (1990).

Merriam (1995) argued that the entire notion of reliability "in and of itself is problematic. That is, studying people and human behavior is not the same as studying inanimate matter. Human behavior is never static" (p. 55). Furthermore, Merriam asserted, qualitative researchers are not trying to establish precedents where reliability is essential, but that qualitative researchers instead seek to understand the world from the perspectives of those in it, and whether the results of a study are consistent with the data collected (1995).

Reading Matters, a community volunteer reading program at a local elementary school, was the focus of this qualitative study. Results of the research have been analyzed to determine whether students attained increased reading achievement and whether the program can serve as an example by which administrators can create a financially feasible program that may assist students experiencing reading difficulties.

Chapter Four

Reading Matters

In the fall of 1998, the Reading Specialist at a small, rural elementary school had two problems: she needed a continuous project that would benefit the entire school and replace her annual evaluations by her supervisor, and she needed to find additional low- or no-cost reading assistance for students who were not reading on grade level but were not being served by the school's Title I staff, which was already being utilized to its capacity. Explained the Reading Specialist, "It was a school suggestion made by the county to come up with a project during my third year of teaching. In lieu of evaluations, I could create a project for the benefit of the entire school. [Assisting low-achieving students] seemed to be an area of our greatest need, judging from test scores and speaking with teachers." After attending several staff development workshops and seminars on community volunteer reading programs, the Reading Specialist gathered her newfound knowledge and coordinated *Reading Matters*, which became the community volunteer reading program at the small, rural elementary school.

At the onset of each school year the Reading Specialist, who was also the program coordinator, spoke with teachers regarding students who were struggling with reading skills and asked for recommendations of students to join *Reading Matters*. After compiling a list of low-achieving students, the coordinator then assessed those students' scores from the standardized tests taken the previous spring and developed a priority list of greatest needs. The parents of those students were then contacted for written permission for their children to join the program. This step eliminated many students from receiving the additional assistance, as the parents often did not extend permission.

Sometimes this was because the parents did not want their children separated from regular classroom activities for the purpose of receiving additional tutoring for fear that such a separation would embarrass the child. Often, though, as one classroom teacher explained, it was because, "The parents were low-achievers themselves, and do not place a high value on academic success, mostly because they had such unfortunate experiences with their own schooling." Another teacher agreed, adding, "The parents generally don't mean to refuse additional assistance for their children. They just had undesirable experiences themselves with teachers and schools, and they don't want to be involved in any way."

After the student list was compiled, the program coordinator approached community members and asked for their participation in the program. Since the community was small and rural, familiarity existed between many community members and the coordinator, which made it easier for the coordinator to approach them. The coordinator was able to speak with prospective tutors at the school, at the local general store and at the Grange, which shared a parking area with the school. Once, according to the school principal, the coordinator "…didn't have enough volunteers and on a Wednesday she said, 'I need to go over to the Grange today. I'm going over there to see if people can help with my *Reading Matters* program.'" Continuing, the principal explained, "The Grange is full of people from this community that we've known for years and years. She went over there and signed up three or four people that year to help with *Reading Matters* and some of them are continuing."

Once community members were enlisted, the coordinator scheduled the initial training, which concentrated on early literacy strategies and helped the volunteers to gain

familiarity with the school. The training was held in the Title I classroom and the coordinator, who was also the school's Title I Reading Specialist, conducted the event. Tutoring strategies were explained and other useful tools, such as the Fry Readability Chart and reading interest inventory, were provided.

After the initial training meeting, tutors' schedules and students' schedules were compared and assignments were created. Tutoring sessions were scheduled for thirty minutes once each week and generally occurred in the Title I classroom under the supervision of the coordinator, although some sessions took place in the computer lab under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Tutors were not permitted to work with students in places that could not be directly supervised by one of the school's certified teachers.

Tutors were provided with access to any materials available in the school, whether those materials were located in the Title I classroom, the regular classrooms, or the computer lab. Materials used included basal reading series and Accelerated Reader books, chalkboards, chalk, paper, pens, pencils, crayons, markers, markerboards, computers, and computer software. If a tutor requested supplies that were not readily available, the coordinator ensured that those supplies were obtained.

In order to make certain that *Reading Matters* progressed smoothly, monthly "check-in" meetings were held to evaluate progress and tutors were encouraged to request support at any time. The coordinator provided feedback to the tutors regularly and an amicable, friendly atmosphere was maintained, with frequent conversations between and among the coordinator, principal, and school secretary before and after tutoring sessions, regarding any topic from student performance to the weather to that

night's dinner menu. Beyond the academic business of reading tutoring, the participants of *Reading Matters* genuinely cared about one another and showed interest in each other's lives. Explained one volunteer, "We see each other out and about and we've known each other's families for ages."

While the monthly meetings were held to provide the volunteers and coordinator with an opportunity to discuss the students' progress, at the mid-year point, in January, another training workshop was held, replete with refreshments. At this workshop, the volunteers were encouraged to share strategies that had been effective during their sessions. New materials were shared and the coordinator reminded volunteers of the supplies available to them. The coordinator also used this time to review the suggested strategies in the event that a tutor sought a different strategy to either supplement or supplant the strategy he or she was currently using.

At the end of the school year, the volunteers were honored at the school awards assembly and gratitude was shown by the school for the hours they have worked with students. The volunteers were given a small gift of appreciation and a certificate for assisting the school in reaching low-achieving students. Often a reception was held in the Title I classroom, with refreshments served.

Research Method

This study of *Reading Matters* was conducted in a small, rural elementary school during the spring, summer, and fall of 2003. Participants included one coordinator, one principal, eight classroom teachers, three volunteers, and five students. Parents were asked to participate in interviews but declined, although permission was granted by the parents to observe their children and examine SORT-R scores.

At the onset of the field research, documents relating to *Reading Matters*, such as records of previous years' programs, personal notations taken by the coordinator in relation to the program, and the volunteer handbook, were collected and examined. These documents provided a foundation for the observations and interviews.

Observations occurred during 40 tutoring sessions of 30 minutes each and two tutoring sessions of less than 30 minutes. "We chose 30-minute blocks because that amount of time seemed to give the students enough time to focus on their tutoring, but did not cut terribly into the regular classroom time," the coordinator explained. The tutoring sessions that lasted less than 30 minutes were due to the children's attendance at special school-wide programs. In addition to the observations, 13 preliminary and, when necessary, follow-up interviews transpired in person between the researcher and the principal, coordinator, classroom teachers, and volunteers. While most of the interviews occurred in one-to-one settings between the researcher and participant, paired interviews and group interviews did occur in the follow-up interviews. Interview participants confirmed the accuracy of the interviews through clarification of answers and reviewing of interview transcripts.

Throughout the course of the fieldwork, collected documents were analyzed and themes relating to the research questions emerged. As themes materialized, they were coded under the research question to which they pertained and significant themes, which were those which appeared most frequently in interview responses and observations, were examined more closely. Those key themes provided the answers to the research questions.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine *Reading Matters* through a phenomenological investigation proceeding from a post-positivist orientation. The intent was to determine whether students demonstrated an increase in achievement, to uncover the program characteristics and techniques, and to examine *Reading Matters* as a potential example by which school administrators can pattern their own community volunteer reading programs.

To select themes, the researcher analyzed field notes, documents, and interviews throughout the fieldwork, seeking common ideas. Themes that appeared frequently were considered significant themes, while themes that did not appear frequently but added to the body of knowledge were considered less significant themes, although worthy of mention. Because of the small number of participants, interview transcripts were coded by hand rather than sorted via a software program.

Seven research questions were asked and will be addressed sequentially in this section. Research questions were answered primarily from the observations, with the exception of RQ2, which was answered from document analysis, interviews, and observations; RQ3, which was answered from interviews and observations; and RQ7, which was answered from a document analysis.

RQ1: What were the elements of the Reading Matters program that allowed it to function in an elementary school?

Two principal themes dominated participants' responses to this question. These themes were the ability to have flexible scheduling and the young age of the students involved.

Flexible Scheduling

    Reading Matters was designed to address issues that usually arise early in literacy acquisition, such as attention to letter sounds and basic comprehension skills. The program was able to function successfully in an elementary school because it was created in conjunction with the daily functions of that school. For example, in a middle school or high school, students are scheduled into different classes with different teachers throughout the day. If a student is not able to attend his math class one day because he attends a tutorial class, then that student has lost the instruction that would have been provided by his math teacher since such scheduling does not allow the math teacher to return to that student later in the day to provide instruction and the risk of the student's not receiving instruction in another class would be high even if he were to reschedule his math class.

    Elementary school teachers are afforded slightly more flexibility in allowing students to leave their regular classrooms in order to receive additional reading assistance. The first grade teachers worked their students' tutoring sessions around computer lab time and integrated studies such as social studies and health, but did not allow their students to be absent from core subjects such as reading and math. One teacher who allowed her students to be absent one day each week from classroom integrated subjects instruction maintained, "…at my level, because the content areas are so basic, they're easily met," and noted she would work with her students at another time to see that those objectives were met. Another teacher explained, "Since they were gone only once each week, I could catch them up while the other students were working more independently."

The second grade teachers placed a high priority on improving reading skills and allowed their students to attend tutoring during integrated studies and computer lab time because these lessons could be taught during reteaching time or during a portion of recess. Core subjects were not compromised, and the teachers were better able to balance the need for reteaching since the tutorial classes met only once each week. As one second grade teacher stated, "In the higher grades, where there is more content, [pulling students out of classes for tutoring] would be questionable, but in the lower grades, we can work around it." The other second grade teacher added, "They weren't missing classes every day. It was just once a week, and we could work with that."

One of the third grade teachers also was able to coordinate her students' tutoring sessions with computer lab and integrated studies classes, the assignments for which the students could complete on a more independent level at home or later in the day with the teacher. Reasoned the teacher, "They've got to become better readers to even understand those integrated studies-type lessons."   The other third grade teacher was able to schedule her students' tutoring at times when attendance in other classes was not affected. She explained, "I sent them during my reteaching and free reading periods. That way they didn't miss anything."

The school's Learning Disabilities Specialist shared her perspective, adding,

[The scheduling] doesn't intrude on the day. With too much more than

that, than the 30 minutes, you might get into having it interfere or making

it too hard to schedule. With only a half an hour a week, it gives them that

positive boost. It would be nice if we could work it into the day to have it

more often, but for the regular classroom teacher I think the half an hour is easier to work into your schedule.

Age of Students

In addition to scheduling, another element of *Reading Matters* that allowed it to function in an elementary school was the age of the students the program addresses. "I don't think these children feel as self-conscious about receiving extra help as, say, high school kids would feel," explained one teacher. "The children are young enough that they don't get embarrassed at having to leave the classroom and their friends to work with a tutor. In fact, they enjoy it!" Two other teachers shared the additional concern that the program would not be as successful in an upper-grade level school because the volunteers may not feel as comfortable working with older students as they do with younger students. Reasoned one teacher, "They see these children as their own children or perhaps grandchildren. Older kids can sometimes be obnoxious, especially if they're having trouble in school. Younger kids are often more willing to work with someone else."

Another teacher shared her concern that, "When kids get older, they know they're having trouble and they've probably known it for a long time. Trying to get them to keep their pride in check long enough to get help is not easy." "These [elementary level] children probably know they need some additional help, and they just accept that they're expected to get that help," added a teacher. She continued, "The good news is that the kids really like going with their *Reading Matters* volunteers. I've never had to push anyone to go."

RQ2: What comprised the training of community volunteers in the Reading Matters program in an elementary school?

Four elements were identified in response to this research question. The elements were the initial training meeting, volunteer handbook, monthly check-in meetings, and the mid-year supplemental training held in January.

Initial Training

At the onset of the school year, an initial training meeting was held for *Reading Matters* volunteers at the elementary school during a school day, which helped the volunteers to gain familiarity with the school personnel and the daily mechanics of the school. "I try to bring everyone together so that they meet each other and develop a rapport among themselves, too," explained the coordinator. At this initial meeting, which lasted no more than two hours, volunteers were provided with a handbook, which also functioned as a training manual. After reviewing the handbook, the coordinator offered additional tutoring strategies and explained what the tutors may encounter in a tutoring session. She then provided the tutors with access to the educational supplies in her classroom, opening cabinets, closets, and drawers, demonstrating how various materials could be used in a tutoring session. The coordinator made available to the tutors any materials and supplies that she possessed and offered to acquire any additional materials or supplies the tutors may desire. At the close of the training, volunteers were encouraged to ask questions, which were then answered by the coordinator, and refreshments, often in the form of coffee, soda, cookies, fruit, and vegetables, were served while the volunteers became acquainted with one another and their tutoring environment.

When asked for information about her initial training, one volunteer who had worked in the program for two years said, "It was nice because I had a good idea of what I needed to do, but [the coordinator] gave me even more ideas and she has so many things that we can use." Another volunteer shared, "I'm excited about doing this. There are so many things we can do with these children. I feel as though I can really make a difference in these kids' lives. I wish reading class had been so exciting when I was growing up!"

The Volunteer Handbook

The handbook included an overview of the program, confidentiality requirements, any forms that the volunteers may need for instances such as reporting absences or meeting requirements for working in public schools with children, sight word lists, letter recognition activities, reading levels, methods to choosing literature appropriate to the student's ability level, tutoring strategies, activities for sharing books with children, and techniques for praising children. The handbook also included an example of a conversation that the tutor may have with a student participant and a list of questions the tutors could ask the students in order to ensure that the students comprehended the literature. The handbook was carefully explained to the volunteers by the coordinator so that the volunteers would have a working knowledge of the school, school system, and the expectations placed upon them. As one volunteer explained, "This handbook has been so helpful to me. I carry it with me every week."

Monthly Meetings

During the next few months, monthly meeting were held to check student progress and address any concerns that the volunteers had. These meetings were very

brief, often lasting only a few minutes. Volunteers, however, were encouraged to ask

questions or seek any sort of assistance whenever the need presented itself, regardless of

scheduled meetings or trainings.

A first-year volunteer explained, "Those meetings were nice because they gave

me the chance to talk about things that were happening in my sessions that I was either

enjoying a great deal, or things that were troubling me." Another volunteer shared, "I

was having trouble with a little boy and I told [the coordinator] and she pulled him right

into her reading group. I didn't have to keep struggling with him. He was frustrated and

I was frustrated and I didn't feel as though I was doing him any good." Another

volunteer explained, "We didn't even have to wait for the meetings, because [the

coordinator] was always there to answer any questions I had. She was always friendly,

open, and helpful. I never felt as though I were on my own. Communication was always

open." Indeed, the researcher often observed conversations regarding tutoring occurring

between the coordinator and volunteers before and after tutoring sessions.

Mid-Year Supplemental Training

In January, volunteers were invited to a second training meeting. At this meeting,

also held at the school during the school day, volunteers discussed student progress,

reviewed tutoring strategies, shared new ideas and experiences they had had, imparted

difficulties that had been experienced, and were provided with the opportunity to discuss

their tutoring sessions in a positive, supportive forum. No student names were discussed,

although problems were shared and solutions were sought by the group. The coordinator

again showed the materials and supplies she had available and expressed her gratitude to

the volunteers for their assistance to the low-achieving students they served. Again,

refreshments were served as discussion involving the issues ensued. The coordinator reminded the volunteers to address problems as the problems occurred, and restated her availability for any assistance that might be needed.

Explaining the need for this second training meeting, the coordinator stated, "We have excellent volunteers. They do so well with the kids. I just like to remind them of all the resources we have available in case they want to use them." The volunteers agreed that the mid-year training meeting was helpful. As one volunteer said, "I've been working with these children for months now. I had forgotten just how many supplies we had and I could use some new ideas for the children I work with." Another volunteer stated, "[The meeting] gave me an idea for something new I could try with one of my kids who is getting bored with what we've been doing."

RQ3: What were the tutoring activities utilized by community volunteers in the Reading Matters program in an elementary school?

Six elements emerged to answer this research question. These elements were oral reading by students, modeling by volunteers, alternating reading and scaffolding, checking for comprehension and seeking context clues, attending to phonics, and re-reading for fluency.

Oral Reading by Students

Reading Matters tutors employed a variety of strategies in their tutoring sessions. One popular strategy, and the first theme to become prevalent, involved having the student read orally to the volunteer from the classroom basal series. May (1998) asserted that in accordance with the teachings of child psychologists Vygotsky and Piaget, teachers can be expert guides for children, but children are truly their own real teachers.

Barr, Blachowicz, Katz, and Kaufman (2002, p. 73) stated, "By listening to students read contextual selections, you can identify problems that exist in three areas: (1) knowledge of print, (2) integration of knowledge sources, and (3) reading fluency." Gunning (1996) added that learning to read also requires instruction, guidance, and practice. One *Reading Matters* volunteer noted, "When I listen to (my student) read, I can tell where she is having problems, and she can hear them, too." Another volunteer added, "Sometimes I don't know what they are doing wrong and I can't help them unless I can see what's going wrong." In most *Reading Matters* tutoring sessions, the students read aloud to the volunteers, who watched for miscues and assisted the students in working through problems.

One teacher agreed that this was an excellent strategy to use, saying, "These children often don't get the chance to read out loud and to hear themselves read. They don't hear their speech patterns, and they can't figure out what doesn't make sense because they don't hear the words." Another teacher, hearing this comment, interjected, "When they hear themselves read out loud, they can hear their mistakes and they can hear what doesn't make sense. Plus, the volunteers can hear them and figure out what needs to be changed."

Modeling

Another popular tutoring activity and the second theme to emerge was having the volunteers read aloud to the students, modeling the passages for them. According to Gillet and Temple (2000), modeling is demonstrating how a passage should be read. Gunning (1998, p. 275) stated, "Through hearing stories, students develop a schema for

narrative tales. This becomes a kind of structural outline that helps students construct meaning from narrative text. It also aids memory."

"I read to [the students] so that they know how a story should be read and so they can hear the patterns and the words," said one volunteer. She explained that she liked to model more challenging passages before having the students read orally because, "It gives them a hint of what is going to happen and how the words are pronounced." Another volunteer was worried that the students rarely heard an adult reading to them and acknowledged, "At least when I've read a little bit to my student, I know she has had someone read to her today." When a *Reading Matters* volunteer read aloud to a student, she demonstrated the pattern of the written words as well as fluency.

Alternating Reading and Scaffolding

Reading orally with the students and scaffolding were the third theme of activities demonstrated by *Reading Matters* volunteers. In this strategy, the volunteer reads one portion of a passage, modeling vocabulary and rhythm, while the student read another portion. The volunteer and student would take turns reading until the passage had been completed. While the student read, the volunteer offered the student only as much help as was needed, encouraging the student to read independently as much as possible, although calling the student's attention to important points in the text. This strategy is quite effective in helping to develop reading comprehension (Gillet & Temple, 2000).

"We have some really long stories to get through in a single session," explained a volunteer. "When I take turns reading with my students, we kill two birds with one stone. Not only did I get to model how the story should be read, but we were also able to finish it in the half-hour allowed."

Another volunteer offered her own reasoning. "It can be tedious for a student to have to read non-stop for 30 minutes. If she's having trouble to begin with and she isn't a strong reader to start, then it can be agonizing." Taking turns reading, the volunteer continued, will, "lessen her load and still make her feel as though she is accomplishing something." One volunteer explained, "Helping [the students] along a little shows them how to read so they won't be so lost."

Comprehension and Context Clues

The fourth theme to materialize included asking comprehension questions and using context clues to increase fluency. According to Gillet and Temple (2000), focusing on comprehension compels the student to remain alert during reading and visualize the text. Gunning (1996, p. 275) added that questions, "…can be used to develop concepts, build vocabulary, clarify reasoning, redirect cognitive processes, and lead students to higher levels of thinking."

"We've had some fairly strong decoders in this program," the coordinator explained, referring to a student's ability to decipher letter sounds. Sighing, she added, "Unfortunately, they could sound out a word effortlessly, but couldn't tell you what any of it meant." Several teachers agreed that comprehension could be a problem. "If the students aren't understanding what they are reading, they're just as lost as if they couldn't sound out the words," one teacher stated. Another teacher added, "The children really need to understand the meaning of the text."

The volunteers frequently checked for comprehension in their sessions. "As we read, I just ask little questions as we go along, like, 'Why do you think that happened?' and 'Can you tell me what's going on?'" shared one volunteer. Another stated that she

also likes to get to the end of a story and ask the student to retell it because, "It makes them stop and think about what happened and it makes the story more real to them."

Attention to Phonics

The fifth theme to emerge was attending to phonics by drawing a student's attention to either individual letter sounds or clusters of letters, including blends. Gunning (1996) asserted that children's books are an excellent medium through which phonics can be taught. *Reading Matters* volunteers employed a variety of methods through which attention was given to phonics in the literature that was read by their students, including isolating words on a markerboard and drawing out the individual sounds, chunking words so that students could identify familiar groups of letters by their sounds, asking students to identify the beginning sound of a difficult word, and isolating letter clusters for practice. Since the identification of clusters, or blends, is so difficult for children (Gunning), additional emphasis on this activity would assist students in their decoding.

"Especially in the lower grades, we get students who are just struggling with phonics," explained the coordinator. She went on, "If we can get someone to attend to that need in a one-to-one setting, then that becomes so individualized and really helps the students who aren't grasping the phonemics." A classroom teacher agreed, noting, "I don't always get the time to address every issue that comes up, and sometimes I don't see right away that a child is not getting certain letters or sounds, but the volunteers see it and work on it."

"If [a student] does not know how to take a word apart and can't read that word correctly, he certainly isn't going to understand the rest of the story or be able to read it,"

stated a volunteer. Another volunteer shared, "I once saw a child miss a single word that completely messed up the rest of the story, and I knew we had to work on letter sounds." A volunteer added, "I like to work on sight words with the kids so that they can see certain words and know what those words are without spending a lot of time on them."

Re-reading for Fluency

The sixth and final theme of tutoring activities that were utilized by *Reading Matters* volunteers included re-reading for fluency. Fluency should not be considered so much reading with speed as reading with ease and freedom (May, 1998). Gillet and Temple (2000) explained that comprehension is aided by fluency, which is developed when students reread material. *Reading Matters* volunteers often asked students to reread passages to gain that much-needed fluency.

"Sometimes one of my students stumbles through a story, barely catching the words and not really understanding what it going on," explained one volunteer. "If we can get those words down, if she can figure out what each word is, then we can go back and read it again and focus on meaning. If she can't read fluently, then all aspects of her reading are going to suffer." Another volunteer noted the effectiveness of rereading for fluency, stating, "Once we get all the sounds and words worked out, we go back and get a running start, and it all makes so much better sense to her."

Other Strategies

Other strategies occasionally employed by *Reading Matters* volunteers in their tutoring sessions were pre-reading activities designed to introduce a passage or story; vocabulary review, which focused on either definitions or pronunciations; attention to phonics through matching of rhyming words; use of illustrations to assist with decoding

and comprehension; and pausing to predict the next event in a story. These strategies did not occur often enough to be identified as significant themes, but are included in the strategies utilized by *Reading Matters* volunteers throughout their tutoring sessions. As one volunteer explained, "I don't always do the same thing every time.   It's very instinctive, what these kids need. You have to trust yourself to be able to reach them, and the same method doesn't always work twice."

As a last resort, volunteers sometimes supplied a word when a student simply could not determine the correct word. Gunning (1996) acknowledged that such a strategy was sometimes necessary, especially when the failure to decode the word interfered profoundly with the continuation of reading. In such instances, supplying the word and continuing with the reading was more beneficial than making exhaustive attempts to decode the word at the risk of losing the meaning of the remainder of the text. One volunteer admitted that she supplied words when, "it's a place where they get stuck. They can't move forward until they get that word, and no matter how hard they try, they're just not getting that word."

When asked how they knew which strategy to use with each student, the volunteers had different answers. One volunteer said that the decision was made, "by instinct. Sometimes you had to keep trying until you found something that worked, but mostly you just knew." Another volunteer did not agree, stating, "I did what I was told to do. There was always input. I didn't have to wonder what to do with anyone. [The coordinator] just told me what to do. I liked it because I didn't have to worry that I was doing the wrong thing." Another volunteer explained that her decisions were a balance

between instinct and directive: "If something specific needed to be done, I did it, but mostly I went with my own instinct."

RQ4:   What were the perceptions of the Reading Specialist who coordinated the community volunteer reading program in an elementary school as they related to improvements in student reading ability?

A single theme, centered on general academic improvement, emerged to answer this research question. "I've monitored this program for several years and I believe it is helping the students, not just with their reading, but with their confidence and attitudes," stated the *Reading Matters* coordinator. The coordinator mentioned that it is difficult to gauge the actual direct influence of the program, since the tutors are meeting with the students weekly but the students are also influenced by exposure in their regular classrooms. However, the coordinator explained, the program seemed to work best for students who were borderline, meaning they possessed the ability to complete the requirements of their regular classwork but needed assistance understanding more fully what they were doing. Eventually, without additional assistance, the coordinator feared that these students would fall profoundly behind and require serious interventions, such as resource assistance. She explained, "These are students who can handle a certain amount of their regular classwork, but need just a little extra attention, a little extra assistance to get to where they need to be." Continuing, she said, "Sometimes the kids don't improve as much as we'd like them to improve, but at least they aren't sliding backward and maybe the extra help is preventing them from slipping through the cracks."

When asked for specific examples wherein she had noticed an increase in reading ability, the coordinator shared,

One student comes immediately to mind. He was the kind who liked to hide in class and not participate, and after he had been in the program for a while, he was raising his hand, sharing his thoughts, wanting to read out loud. It was like he came out of his shell. He went from not wanting to be there and not wanting to read, to being excited about reading and feeling like he belonged...There was also another little girl who was very self-conscious about reading. She knew she wasn't doing well, and she knew that everyone knew she wasn't doing well. She had given up. We paired her up with a former teacher and by the end of the first term, she had independently read her first book and she was so excited. She wanted to read that book to everyone, and she was excited about going to the computer lab to get more books. She couldn't wait to read. It had become such a positive experience for her.

Acknowledging, however, that there were students who hadn't shown as much improvement as she had hoped they would, the coordinator said,

I never feel as though a session or a pairing [between a student and a tutor] is a waste. I often think that this program and this attention is more beneficial than we know. I don't want to think about where these students would be if they didn't have the extra attention. Even a small step forward is important.

RQ5:   What were the perceptions of the volunteers in a community volunteer reading program in an elementary school as they related to improvements in student reading ability?

One theme was common in the volunteers' responses. The perceptions of the program's effect on student achievement highlighted their remarks.

Reading Matters volunteers showed great excitement over their experiences tutoring elementary school children. Explained one tutor, a mother of three daughters, "You could just watch them learning to read! You could just watch them go from sounding out and slow reading to, they could just read by the end of the year, and that's a good feeling." After thinking for a moment, the tutor continued, "From sounding out words and going slowly, and missing words every few words, and whoa! By the end of the year, they just seem to progress wonderfully."

Another tutor showed confidence that the students were improving. "I never saw tests or anything like that. I never saw proof, but you could just feel that they were getting better." She continued, "I don't know if I could have kept going if they weren't getting better. I would have felt like I wasn't doing anything, like I wasn't helping them. I was there to help them read. If I didn't help them read, I shouldn't have been there." She shared an experience she had, saying,

> One time my girl walked in and showed me a book she'd picked out from the computer lab. I looked it over and was a little worried because it had some really challenging words in it, but she tackled it like a pro. She stumbled a few times, but caught on quickly. When she was finished, she was just smiling from ear to ear. I felt like that was the reason I was there. That was why I did this.

Another tutor, a former certified teacher who taught reading at an elementary school, fondly shared her experiences with *Reading Matters* tutoring and agreed that the students did seem to improve in their reading ability. "It is frustrating in the beginning," one tutor shared, "because you start out slowly. But then the kids really seem to pick up and you feel like it is making a difference. It is helping them." The tutors, however, refused to take the credit for student success, stating that they did not know how much effect they had on their students' increased achievement. One tutor praised *Reading Matters*, saying, "It's a good thing and I hope it continues."

RQ6: What were the perceptions of the classroom teachers of the student participants in a community volunteer reading program in an elementary school as they related to improvements in student reading ability?

A single theme, similar to that which was identified in RQ5, appeared. Academic improvement dominated responses to this research question.

The regular classroom teachers in this small, rural elementary school verbalized their support of *Reading Matters* and the progress they perceived their students achieving. Explaining the need for additional assistance outside the regular classroom, one teacher asserted, "…if [the students] had a little extra boost, they could go up even higher in reading ability." Another teacher agreed, adding, "Any time that they're going to get an extra dose of help, it's going to benefit them." One third grade teacher clarified, "It really pinpoints people who are having difficulties in vocabulary, word recognition, word attack. When you have someone working with them, especially if you have someone who is trained and knows what to do…, it's a highly beneficial program." One teacher who "watched [the program and potential gains in achievement] closely and

found that it did help" affirmed that, "any time you have an adult working one-one-one with a child, there is bound to be a benefit."

Teachers often described *Reading Matters* as, "an excellent program," and one teacher described the gains her student made by sharing that, "His reading really improved this year, really, and I could see it. I think the one-on-one is so beneficial for the kids." Another teacher considered her two participating students, saying, "Reading the stories I saw some gains, and they kept up, too, and that was good." She continued, "I think they held their own [through the program]. Even though they weren't where they needed to be, they didn't backslide, they didn't struggle. With that extra help they were able to maintain a good B average in reading."

A first grade teacher shared her concern that, without the program, "I don't think they'd be as motivated. I don't think they'd view reading as positively. I feel like they wouldn't be getting that extra practice reading if they didn't have a *Reading Matters* person." Further, she explained, "My students who have *Reading Matters* volunteers are much more positive, are much more interested, not just in their reading, but also in other subjects, too. It really seems to do a lot to really perk them up."

Because of the progress made by the students and because they felt that *Reading Matters* benefited the students, the teachers spoke highly of the program and their support for it. "I never had any students who didn't like [being tutored]," said one teacher. Another teacher added, "I'd like to see [*Reading Matters*] continue, and expand it, if at all possible." A third grade teacher stated, "[The coordinator] had a great idea when she started it. It was a brainchild." "It's a wonderful program. I can't say enough about it. I

hope it continues," stated another teacher. "Anytime you have an adult working one-on-one with a child, there is bound to be a benefit," asserted a first grade teacher.

RQ7: Did student participants in a community volunteer reading program achieve scores on SORT-Rs that were congruent with the perceptions of those interviewed as to program success or lack thereof?

From the document analysis two, a visible improvement in SORT-R scores and no substantial visible improvement in SORT-R scores, emerged to answer this research question. These themes are seemingly contradictory.

According to the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT-R) instructional manual (Slosson, 1994), the SORT-R was developed as a brief screening tool to determine a student's oral reading, or word recognition, level. Its administration directs students to decode from lists of 20 words, which become increasingly difficult as the student continues to decode. The test ends when a student cannot decode a single word from the next consecutive list. A raw score is assigned, from which a grade-level decoding score and an age-equivalent score are determined. Although the test does not address reading comprehension, it is often used by teachers to assess a student's progress throughout the school year (Slosson). The SORT-R is used by the *Reading Matters* coordinator to verify any progress that participating students may have made throughout the school year, and is administered in the fall of each school year as well as in the spring. Its validity is .90 or higher and reliability is .95 or above, depending upon age (Slosson).

Five students participated in the *Reading Matters* program. Four students showed substantial increases of more than a single grade level in their SORT-R scores, while one student did not demonstrate substantial gains in decoding achievement, raising his score by less than one grade level. One student began the school year with a SORT-R grade

equivalent of 3.3 and ended the school year with a grade equivalent of 5.1. Another student began the school year with a grade equivalent of 2.8 and ended the school year with a grade-equivalent of 4.6. The third student began the school year with a grade equivalent of 0.7 and ended the school year with a grade equivalent of 2.5. The fourth student began the school year with a grade equivalent of 0.2 and ended the school year with a grade equivalent of 2.0. The fifth student, who did not demonstrate substantial gains in decoding achievement, began the school year with a grade equivalent of 0.9 and ended the school year with a grade equivalent of 1.7.

Due to the school district's privacy policy and the confidentiality of information regarding individual students, the actual grade level of each student is unknown. Additionally, it is unclear to what extent the students increased their reading achievement due to *Reading Matters* and to what extent the improvement occurred due to natural intellectual maturation or regular classroom experiences. "The program is designed to work in conjunction with the regular classroom, not to supplant it," explained the coordinator. "Our intent is to work as a team to do whatever we can to help the students." One classroom teacher agreed, stating, "I'd like to think that students are improving because of all of the efforts combined." Another teacher said, "One of my students didn't [improve on the SORT-R] as much as I'd wanted them to, but that student didn't backslide, either. There was no loss. That is very good." When asked about the student who did not show significant gains in achievement, the coordinator smiled and replied, "It may not look on paper like (the student) improved, but no gain is insignificant. Every step we move forward is so important."

Ancillary Findings

The following ancillary findings did not emerge as answers to research questions, but surfaced from the interviews as significant and unexpected aspects of *Reading Matters* and are therefore worth noting. The first finding examined the mentoring relationship that the students developed with their tutors and the second finding explored the need for more tutors so that the program could be expanded to serve more students.

Benefit of Mentoring

Beyond academic gains, the participants interviewed shared an unforeseen but valuable benefit of the program: the much-needed mentoring and social interaction that the tutoring environment provides. One teacher noted, "All those kids never get to read with anybody at home. We don't have a whole lot of time to sit and let them read a whole book, or something like that. Some of these kids just don't have anybody to read with." A third grade teacher added, "I think it's really good because the kids know someone really cares about them, and people who usually do the *Reading Matters* are those people who go the extra mile for the kids, and the kids can tell that."

The school's Learning Disabilities Specialist explained the benefit of mentoring further by adding, "The students get such personal attention. They can read with somebody, and get someone to bond with them and be a good role model in reading for them, which is really great. It made them feel like something was important about reading." She went on, "It's always been a good thing for the students. They develop a much better attitude." A first grade teacher stated, "That one-on-one-sit-down-with-an-adult time is so valuable." As one teacher shared, "Many of our kids are not talked with. Even though they're reading, they still get that one-on-one, sit down and read with

another grown-up, that attention. It's wonderful to sit for that half an hour and enjoy that child without any interruptions, without anything else going on."

A first grade teacher noted,

I've had years where the kids don't have someone to read with them at home or they wouldn't have someone to read with at all. This is the one time during the week that you could count on them to go through the story, to hit those vocabulary words, to get ready for the test at the end of the week, that kind of thing. It's really beneficial for those kinds of kids.

The teachers noted that even the social interaction with the volunteer was beneficial for the student. A second grade teacher elaborated,

I have had children who had a really good volunteer and it turned out to be a mentoring-type situation, where maybe they didn't have much of a role model at home, and this wonderful lady who was going to be like their great-aunt or something came in and showed them all this great attention, and they really loved it. One little lady in particular, on holidays her volunteer would bring her a little present, like new tennis shoes, or new hair barrettes, and she really got close to that person on a different level that maybe had nothing to do with reading, but maybe it helped self-esteem, especially if they don't have anything positive at home.

Another third grade teacher recalled an experience she had, stating,

Sometimes [the tutor and student] would do little crafts that went with the story they were reading. She took a trip to New York and one to Kentucky and brought the kids back little brochures from the area, and

they read through those with her, and the kids received presents at the end

of the school year and for Christmas. I think the girls just connected with

her well.

Another teacher offered the perspective that, "[The students] look forward to

going out. They love it, and [the student] would buy [his tutor] Christmas presents and

she would buy him stuff. I wish everyone could have such an experience. It's kind of

like a big sister thing. It's a great motivator." As a result of developing a friendly

relationship with his tutor, a teacher shared, her student, "really, really got involved in

reading." Another teacher added, "They loved going." "It gave the students individual

attention that I wasn't always able to give them," explained a teacher. Another teacher

added, "There is a whole other attitude that reading is positive when they have a *Reading

Matters* person."

One teacher explained,

> I do know that the one little girl that I was concerned with, who was so
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> painfully shy, she talked with this lady, and to get her to talk with anyone
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> was just wonderful. And to see her, and that she never met anyone's eyes,
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> but smiled when the Reading Matters lady came to get her at the door and
>
> then, at the end of the year, it just gets better. It brought out so much in
>
> her to have that one-on-one. She reached out and talked to someone for
>
> even that little bit of the part of the day.

Another teacher added,

> In one child I think I did see more of a change. It was more like, 'I need
>
> my book because [my tutor] is coming and we're going to read today!'

and the volunteers were regular, but if they were going to be out it was

like, 'She didn't come to get me today and I brought my book!' It was

like an appointment and I guess they did look forward to that and I guess it

did give more intrinsic value to what the kids were doing.

"Just encouraging other children to read affects the whole school," explained one

teacher, "and so does putting that positive spin on reading. Some other adult, and not just

a teacher, thinks reading is important. They can share that, and it's a big thing to them."

She added, "When someone else, someone who isn't a teacher, comes in, the other

students are like, 'When do I get to go with somebody?' The do see that and they get to

feel very special when they get to do that."

Confirming this relationship were the field notes from the researcher's

observations of tutoring sessions, which detailed the rapport shared by the volunteers and

the students. The pairs were often observed laughing together, sharing stories, and

having conversations about non-academic topics, such as fair pigs and television shows.

The children enjoyed sharing their stories with the volunteers and a relaxed, friendly

tutoring atmosphere was evident. By the time the students and tutors entered the room in

which the sessions occurred, conversations were already in progress and it was clear that

the children enjoyed their time spent with the volunteers.

Need for More Tutors

The Reading Matters coordinator openly expressed her greatest problem:

We need to serve more children, but it's hard when you can't get enough

volunteers. If we had more people, we would serve more children, but as

it is, we just can't. Also, this is ironic because the 30-minute time block is

a strength of the program, but the fact that the tutoring lasts only thirty minutes once a week is a weakness. I wish we had more people, and I wish we had more time.

Teachers agreed. One stated, "I wish there were more volunteers so more people could take advantage of it, even children who aren't really low." A second grade teacher affirmed with, "It would be so nice to be able to have more students involved. We need a lot more volunteers." When asked what she felt the program could use for improvement, a third grade teacher firmly responded, "More volunteers!" Another third grade teacher nodded, expressing, "I wish that we had more people who would volunteer to come in." Even the Learning Disabilities Specialist acknowledged the need for more tutors, saying, "If I could get more Reading Matters volunteers signed up for my special education kids, I'd be like, 'Sign them up!'" She furthered her statement with, "The only thing I can think to improve it is to get more volunteers."

Unfortunately, it cannot be determined from year to year which volunteers will remain in the program. As one volunteer explained, "I'll be babysitting next year, as things stand now. Then again, I didn't intend to tutor this year, but [the coordinator] asked me and I couldn't say no. I do enjoy it, but it is a commitment." Another volunteer, a certified teacher, predicted that instead of tutoring she would be substitute teaching during the following school year. "As much as I enjoy [tutoring], I can't say for sure what I'll be doing. I'd like to stay on, but there are other things I'd like to do, too."

"I wish there were a way to get more people interested," said a teacher. "We need this so much. Maybe we could ask our retired teachers or service personnel." The school principal even suggested that administrators who are considering implementing their own community volunteer reading programs should evaluate their resources:

> Where are you going to get your volunteers? Most of the time, both parents work, and I keep telling principals that grandparents are a great, untapped resource. They are wonderful. They have the time. As they get older, they see the value of helping children. The first thing a principal should probably find out is, do they have enough resources to do the program?

While much support exists for Reading Matters and participants place enormous value on the community volunteer reading program, limited resources can create a limited program. More students can obviously be served when more volunteers are available, although the matter of volunteer resources is more a logistical issue than a substantive one. Still, teachers, the principal, and the coordinator would like to see more community volunteers participating in the program in order to bring much needed assistance to students.

Chapter Five

Summary

In this final chapter, a summary of this study will be provided and conclusions that were reached will be explained. Recommendations for further research will be included.

Purpose of the Study

For a student, learning to read is perhaps the most important skill one can acquire (Kirk, 1999; Reitzhammer, 1990). Our government agrees, making schools accountable for student achievement in its No Child Left Behind legislation (No Child Left Behind, 2002), in which President Bush has centered accountability with more difficult educational standards (No Child Left Behind). As the explanation for No Child Left Behind reads, "The first principle of accountability for results involves the creation of standards in each state for what a child should know and learn in reading and math in grades three through eight. With those standards in place, student progress and achievement will be measured according to state tests designed to match those state standards and given to every child, every year" (2002). Unfortunately, that increased accountability has not come with an increase in funding to meet the new standards, and school administrators must create low- or no-cost educational programs that will help their schools meet those standards. For this reason, educational programs that utilize volunteers as tutors have become popular.

The purpose of the research was to determine through qualitative research what qualities such a program possesses, and whether the students who participated achieved improved reading results. The results would, it was hoped, prove useful to school

administrators with an interest in establishing a potential volunteer reading program in their own schools.

Population

The population studied for this research included the students participating in the community volunteer reading program, the program coordinator, the volunteer tutors, the school principal, and the classroom teachers of students participating in the program during either the time the program was studied or during previous years. One of the volunteers had participated in the program for multiple years, while the other volunteers were new to the program.

Research Methods

Reading Matters was examined using phenomenological methods of data collection in the interest of providing administrators with potentially useful information concerning this community volunteer reading program. Qualitative in nature, this study relied on meticulous descriptions of events or subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2000), and data were collected in the form of words, rather than relying on numbers (Bogdan & Biklen). The strategy of inquiry utilized in this study is the phenomenological approach, which is a three-step process requiring description, reduction and interpretation, and proceeds in a progressive fashion to produce what Lanigan (1988) called "a systemic completeness" (p. 173).

A one-shot case study, this research was an exhaustive examination of a single setting, subject, or event (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). At the onset of the study, many possibilities were evident, but as the study progressed, themes emerged and the focus of the research narrowed.

This investigation of *Reading Matters* involved a qualitative study with found data offered in the forms of the volunteer handbook and Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT-R) pre-test and post-test scores that were used to triangulate data acquired from interviews with tutors, teachers, the co-ordinator, and the school principal, and with observations conducted by the researcher. The study described the characteristics of the program, the volunteers, the strategies, and the perceptions of those affected, including the principal, coordinator, teachers of participating students from the current year and previous years, and volunteer tutors.

The researcher's document analysis of the training manual and documentation of previous years of programming, observations, and interview transcriptions comprised the field notes. Additionally, comparison sets of SORT-R scores were collected anonymously from the participating students at the onset of the program as well as at the conclusion. These sets were then delivered to the researcher for coding, analysis and comparison to determine the degree, if any, to which students experienced increased reading achievement and to verify that the scores were congruent with the perceptions of the teachers and tutors in regard to program success, or lack thereof. A continuing analysis of data from field notes occurred throughout study.

To conduct this study, the researcher attended 42 *Reading Matters* tutoring sessions at the close of the 2002-2003 school year and at the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year. All tutors were interviewed, as well as the principal, classroom teachers of participating students from the current year and previous years, and the program coordinator in order to gain information about their perspectives of the program. Found

data, such as the training manual and students' SORT-R scores, were analyzed as part of the triangulation process.

Consent to conduct this study was secured in writing from the county superintendent, school principal, program coordinator, tutors, classroom teachers, and parents of participating students, as well as the Institutional Review Board of Marshall University (see Appendices). Identifying characteristics of participants are not provided in this document to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Throughout the fieldwork, which concluded in November 2003, the data collected from the study were sorted, coded, and organized in preparation for interpreting and reporting the results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Field notes were regularly analyzed and themes and other common elements, such as characteristics of the tutoring program, tutoring strategies, and indications of increased student reading achievement, were sought in order to determine answers to the research questions. All coding and analyses were completed by the researcher by hand rather than via a software program. Finally, a comparison of the students' SORT-R pre-test and post-test scores has been included.

Conclusions

Without funding and in response to the need for increased educational assistance to students and the desire for a project designed to benefit the school, the Reading Specialist in a small, rural, elementary school researched community volunteer tutoring programs and created *Reading Matters*. *Reading Matters* is a community volunteer tutoring program that pairs trained community volunteers with students in academic need

for thirty minutes of reading tutoring each week. The following research questions were developed in order to examine the qualities of that program, whether student achievement in reading resulted from its implementation, and whether *Reading Matters* could serve as an example through which school administrators with an interest in supplemental reading instruction could develop programs for their own schools.

1.   What are the elements of the *Reading Matters* program that allow it to functions in an elementary school?

2.   What comprises the training of community volunteers in the *Reading Matters* program in an elementary school?

3.   What are the tutoring activities utilized by community in the *Reading Matters* program in an elementary school?

4.   What are the perceptions of the reading specialist who coordinated the community volunteer reading program in an elementary school as they relate to improvements in student reading ability?

5.   What are the perceptions of the volunteers in a community volunteer reading program in an elementary school as they relate to improvements in student reading ability?

6.   What are the perceptions of the classroom teachers of the student participants in a community volunteer reading program in an elementary school as they relate to improvements in student reading ability?

7.   Are student participants in a community volunteer reading program achieving scores on Slosson Oral Reading Tests that are congruent with the perceptions of those interviewed as to program success or lack thereof?

Based on the answers to these questions and the ancillary findings, detailed in Chapter Four, the following conclusions may be drawn.

First, the flexibility of scheduling which characterizes the elementary school contributed heavily to the perceived success of the program. Participants interviewed believed that since students receive nearly all of their academic instruction from their classroom teacher, any classwork which was missed could be easily completed at another time. As one second grade teacher stated, "In the higher grades, where there is more content, [pulling students out of classes for tutoring] would be questionable, but in the lower grades, we can work around it." Another teacher added, "They weren't missing classes every day. It was just once a week, and we could work with that."

Second, the ages of the students involved was seen as a critical factor in the program's perceived success. Participants felt that the program was able to function smoothly in an elementary school environment because younger students are more willing to work with tutors and are less self-conscious about needing additional assistance than older students. "I don't think these children feel as self-conscious about receiving extra help as, say, high school kids would feel," explained one teacher. "The children are young enough that they don't get embarrassed at having to leave the classroom and their friends to work with a tutor. In fact, they enjoy it!"

Third, initial training, access to a program handbook, monthly meetings and a mid-year supplemental training session were helpful in familiarizing tutors with the program and in ensuring they felt they were working in a supportive environment. The purpose of the training sessions and written materials was to discuss student progress, review tutoring strategies, share new ideas and experiences the volunteers had had,

impart difficulties that had been experienced, and provide the volunteers with the opportunity to discuss their tutoring sessions in a positive, supportive forum. A volunteer stated, "[The meeting] gave me an idea for something new I could try with one of my kids who is getting bored with what we've been doing."

Fourth, multiple tutoring strategies were seen as a factor in the perceived success of the program. Oral reading by students, modeling by volunteers, alternating reading and scaffolding, checking for comprehension and seeking context clues, attending to phonics, and re-reading for fluency were all employed by the volunteer tutors depending upon the specific needs of the child. Other strategies that did not occur often enough to be considered themes included pre-reading a passage, review of vocabulary, attending to phonics through use of rhyming words, using illustrations to increase comprehension, and predicting the next event in the story. The utilization of a breadth of approaches expanded the likelihood that a strategy could be found to assist each individual child.

Fifth, educators believed that the mentoring relationships that developed between tutors and students were as valuable to students' academic progress as was their improved reading. The coordinator felt that the students were improving in their reading ability, but she also explained that the mentoring from the adult tutor was as highly beneficial to the students as the increase in reading achievement. "I've monitored this program for several years and I believe it is helping the students, not just with their reading, but with their confidence and attitudes," explained the coordinator.

Sixth, participating tutors appreciated both the interpersonal and academic elements of the program. Most established close personal relationships with their students, valuing the time they spent together and even exchanging gifts occasionally.

The tutors were delighted, however, with the students' reading progress. Explained one tutor, a mother of three daughters, "You could just watch them learning to read! You could just watch them go from sounding out and slow reading to, they could just read by the end of the year, and that's a good feeling."

Seventh, while an analysis of participating students' pre- and post-SORT-R scores did not conclusively demonstrate increases for every student in the program, most did show improvements and educators felt that even those whose scores were static had benefited from the program. When asked about the scores that did not show significant gains in achievement, the coordinator responded, "It may not look on paper like (the student) improved, but no gain is insignificant. Every step we move forward is so important."

Finally, the only perceived weakness of the program was the inadequate number of volunteers available to participate. The *Reading Matters* coordinator openly expressed that this was her greatest problem: "We need to serve more children, but it's hard when you can't get enough volunteers. If we had more people, we would serve more children, but as it is, we just can't."

Taken together, these conclusions represent the descriptive phase of the three-step phenomenological process explained by Lanigan (1988) in Chapter Three. The second step, reduction, extracts from these descriptions those themes which can be seen as constitutive; those which "articulate … a pattern of experience" expressed through the essential elements of the phenomenon under investigation (Cooks & Descutner, 1994, p. 255). Reduced to its constitutive themes, *Reading Matters is* a low- or no-cost method of enhancing academic services to students experiencing academic difficulties. The

program can be implemented in an elementary school with minimal financial

requirements and has demonstrated, in this study, that it can be effective in increasing

student achievement in reading.

The final step in the phenomenological process is to make explicit what was

implicit in previous accounts (Lanigan, 1988). Cooks and Descutner (1994)

recommended that "a revelatory phrase" from the interviews or something "signified in

the discourse" (p. 260) be identified as a summary of what was found. In this instance,

the most revealing statement came from the *Reading Matters* coordinator, who said,

> The entire process of education is not limited to something that happens
>
> between the school and the student. Quality of education affects everyone
>
> and we're all in this together. We're a small community, and having
>
> everyone work together for the good of the children builds community
>
> pride and gives us all a sense of achievement.

Implications for the Administrator

With President George's Bush's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the current

trend in education is to evaluate schools solely by high-stakes test scores (Townsend,

2002), and a student's failure to read well necessarily influences test performance.

Unfortunately, funds are rarely available for administrators to increase staffing so that

students will have additional opportunities to increase achievement.

Community volunteer tutoring programs such as *Reading Matters* can provide

low-achieving students with additional assistance. The programs do not require funding

and can be accomplished with minimal interference in the child's school day. The

children derive benefit not only from the direct instructional assistance, but also from the mentoring relationship that is developed between the students and tutors.

Recommendation for Further Research

The researcher's findings are confined only to the school that was studied. In order to confirm these findings, more research needs to be conducted on community volunteer tutoring programs. The qualitative nature of the research would enable administrators to determine what approaches may work in their own schools and how to modify community volunteer tutoring programs to be effective in the environments in which they work. While confirmation through replication is not an aim of qualitative research, replicating this *Reading Matters* study in similar schools would provide a greater body of knowledge from which administrators could gain insight into low- or no-cost assistance to students.

Another recommendation is to field test *Reading Matters* in a larger rural school to determine whether the program would be successful in a larger setting. It is understood, however, that this undertaking may be difficult, as a greater student population would require utilization of more volunteers and recruitment of volunteers can be difficult.

It is also recommended that this study be replicated in an urban school. Such a replication would determine whether the sense of community embodied in the program studied herein is an element crucial to the program's success.

The final recommendation is to conduct a longitudinal study to monitor the progress of participating students for several years to determine whether gains they have made are retained. To further this recommendation, focus should be placed on two

groups, students who participated in the program for one year then moved out of the

program and students who participated in the program for multiple years.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Permission from County to Conduct Study

JACKSON COUNTY SCHOOLS

PHONE (304) 372-7300
FAX (304) 372-7312

BOARD OF EDUCATION - OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT

P.O. BOX 770, RIPLEY, WEST VIRGINIA 25271
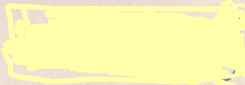
February 5, 2003

Mrs. Leslie Haynes
1751 Oakwood Drive
Charleston, WV 25320

Dear Mrs. Haynes:

I have received your request to do research on the training and strategies utilized by the adult volunteers of Reading Matter at Kenna Elementary School. I have discussed your request to observe the Reading Matters Program and review test data with the principal, Cora Jones, and am granting your request with the condition that no students be identified in your research. As you are aware, student confidentiality is a prime concern in federal and state laws.

You may schedule your visits with Mrs. Jones and may start whenever it is agreeable to her. Should you have any questions, please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Ronald E. Ray
Superintendent

RER/sdr

c   Cora Jones

Appendix B

Permission to Conduct Study from Marshall University Institutional Review Board

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
www.marshall.edu

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board

May 15, 2003

Leslie Clayberger Haynes
1751 Oakwood Drive
Sissonville, West Virginia 25320

Re: IRB Expedited Protocol No. 2077 – Reading Matters: A Case
Study of a Community Volunteer Reading Program

I am granting expedited approval to the above minimal risk study for the period of 1 year in accordance with 45 CFR 46.110.

The purpose of the study is to study a community volunteer reading program to determine if students are demonstrating improvement, to uncover the characteristics of the program and the tutoring techniques used by volunteers, and to create a potential model by which administrators can design volunteer tutoring programs for other schools.

The signed stamped consents are attached as well as the approval form.

Sincerely

Christopher W. LeGrow (5-20-03)

Christopher W. LeGrow, Ph.D.
Marshall University IRB #2 Chairperson

CWL/tjs

2077expeditedirb#25-15-03

Appendix C

Informed Consent Forms Approved by Marshall University Institutional Review Board

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

www.marshall.edu

Graduate College
School of Education & Professional Development
Leadership Studies

April 2003

Dear Principal,

As a doctoral student within the Educational Leadership program at Marshall University Graduate College, I am preparing to gather data for completing my dissertation. My study focuses on *Reading Matters*, the community volunteer reading program in your child's school, and will include observations of tutoring sessions, interviews with administrators, teachers, parents and volunteers concerning the success of the program. I will also be conducting an examination of training materials and Slosson Oral Reading Test scores of participating students, which will be provided to me anonymously. No students' names which would allow for identification will appear on the tests. The purpose of my study is to determine whether students' reading skills are improving and to also create a volunteer tutoring model by which administrators can replicate *Reading Matters* in other schools.

The study has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board, which ensures the protection of all participants in research projects conducted by faculty or students of the University, and by Mr. Ron Ray, Superintendent for Jackson County Schools.

I am requesting your permission to proceed with this research and to interview you regarding your perceptions of *Reading Matters*. Confidentiality of participants will be ensured by the removal of all identifying characteristics, such as names, from my research. Children will be observed but not interviewed, and their SORT scores will be delivered to me by your Reading Specialist after all identifying characteristics have been removed. Participation in my study is voluntary and a participant may decide at any time to withdraw.

If you agree to my conducting this research in your school and to interviewing you, please keep this copy of this letter and sign the attached copy. You may return the signed copy to me in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope, or return it to Kathy Simmons. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you very much.

IRB

Christopher W. LeSure

MAY 15, 2003

Sincerely.

APPROVED

Leslie Clayberger Haynes
(304) 984-0543

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Signature of Principal Indicating Consent

IRB APPROVAL EXPIRES
MAY 15 2004

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

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Graduate College
School of Education & Professional Development
Leadership Studies

April 2003

Dear Teacher,

As a doctoral student within the Educational Leadership program at Marshall University Graduate College, I am preparing to gather data for completing my dissertation. My study focuses on *Reading Matters*, the community volunteer reading program in your child's school, and will include observations of tutoring sessions, interviews with administrators, teachers, parents and volunteers concerning the success of the program. I will also be conducting an examination of training materials and Slosson Oral Reading Test scores of participating students, which will be provided to me anonymously. No students' names which would allow for identification will appear on the tests. The purpose of my study is to determine whether students' reading skills are improving and to also create a volunteer tutoring model by which administrators can replicate *Reading Matters* in other schools.

The study has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board, which ensures the protection of all participants in research projects conducted by faculty or students of the University, and by Mr. Ron Ray, Superintendent for Jackson County Schools.

Since you have a student in your classroom who receives tutoring through *Reading Matters*, I am requesting your permission to interview you regarding your perceptions of the program. Confidentiality of all participants will be ensured by the removal of any identifying characteristics from the study, such as names of tutors, students, teachers, and parents. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may decide at any time to withdraw.

If you are willing to participate in an interview, please keep this copy of this letter and sign the attached copy. You may return the signed copy to me in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope, or return it to Kathy Simmons. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely.

Leslie Clayberger Haynes
(304) 984-0543

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Signature of Teacher Indicating Consent

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IRB
Christopher W. Lithro
MAY 15, 2003

APPROVED

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April 2003

Dear Volunteer,

As a doctoral student within the Educational Leadership program at Marshall University Graduate College, I am preparing to gather data for completing my dissertation. My study focuses on *Reading Matters*, the community volunteer reading program in your child's school, and will include observations of tutoring sessions, interviews with administrators, teachers, parents and volunteers concerning the success of the program. I will also be conducting an examination of training materials and Slosson Oral Reading Test scores of participating students, which will be provided to me anonymously. No students' names which would allow for identification will appear on the tests. The purpose of my study is to determine whether students' reading skills are improving and to also create a volunteer tutoring model by which administrators can replicate *Reading Matters* in other schools.

The study has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board, which ensures the protection of all participants in research projects conducted by faculty or students of the University, and by Mr. Ron Ray, Superintendent for Jackson County Schools.

Since you are a volunteer for *Reading Matters*, I am requesting your permission to observe your tutoring sessions and interview you regarding your perceptions of the program. Confidentiality of all participants will be ensured by the removal of any identifying characteristics from the study, such as names of tutors, students, teachers, and parents. Participation in my study is voluntary and a participant may decide at any time to withdraw.

If you agree to the observation and interview, please keep this copy of this letter and sign the attached copy. You may return the signed copy to me in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope, or return it to Kathy Simmons. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you very much.   IRB

Christopher W. Lethow

MAY 15, 2003

Sincerely.

Leslie Clayberger Haynes **APPROVED**
(304) 984-0543

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Signature of Volunteer Indicating Consent

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April 2003

Dear Parent,

As a doctoral student within the Educational Leadership program at Marshall University Graduate College, I am preparing to gather data for completing my dissertation. My study focuses on *Reading Matters*, the community volunteer reading program in your child's school, and will include observations of tutoring sessions, interviews with administrators, teachers, parents and volunteers concerning the success of the program. I will also be conducting an examination of training materials and Slosson Oral Reading Test scores of participating students, which will be provided to me anonymously. No students' names which would allow for identification will appear on the tests. The purpose of my study is to determine whether students' reading skills are improving and to also create a volunteer tutoring model by which administrators can replicate *Reading Matters* in other schools.

The study has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board, which ensures the protection of all participants in research projects conducted by faculty or students of the University, and by Mr. Ron Ray, Superintendent for Jackson County Schools. The study has also been approved by Mrs. Cora Jones, and by teachers and tutors involved in the program.

Since your child is participating in *Reading Matters*, I am requesting two things. First, I am asking permission to observe your child anonymously during tutoring sessions. I will have no interaction with the child, nor will I be in any way actively involved in the tutoring session. I will be merely an observer. Second, I would like to interview you regarding your perceptions of the program. Confidentiality of all participants will be ensured by the removal of any identifying characteristics from the study, such as names of tutors, students, and parents. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants may decide at any time to withdraw.

If you are willing to allow me permission to observe your child's tutoring session and to interview you, please keep this copy of this letter and sign the attached copy. You may return the signed copy to me in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope, or return it to Kathy Simmons. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you very much.

IRB

Christopher W. tolken
MAY 15, 2003

Sincerely.

APPROVED

Leslie Clayberger Haynes
(304) 984-0543

IRB APPROVAL EXPIRES
MAY 15 2004

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Signature of Parent Indicating Consent

_____
Signature of Student Indicating Assent

Appendix D

Preliminary Interview Questions

Introductory Interview Questions for the Principal:

1.   When did you learn about *Reading Matters*?

2.   How familiar are you with the program?

3.   What are some observations you have made in regard to *Reading Matters*?

4.   What features of *Reading Matters* do you feel would be pertinent to other administrators?

5.   How do you evaluate *Reading Matters*? (For example, is it included in your schoolwide Title I plan?)

Introductory Interview Questions for the Program Coordinator

1.   How did you become interested in community volunteer reading programs?

2.   How would you describe the training required of your tutors?

3.   Do you train your tutors to utilize strategies that aren't being used? If so, what are those strategies?

4.   How do you supervise the tutors?

5.   What are the strengths of the program?

6.   What are the weaknesses of the program?

7.   What materials have you made available to your tutors for use with students? Are these materials being utilized?

8.   What advice would you have for administrators/teachers who are interested in developing their own community volunteer reading programs?

Introductory Interview Questions for the Teachers of Participating Students from the Current Year and Previous Years:

1.   What other educational services are your student receiving?

2.   Are your students absent from any classes while they are tutored? If so, do you feel that the benefit the students are receiving from tutoring outweighs the loss of classroom instruction? Why or why not?

3.   How would you describe the gains (or lack of gains) that your students are making? How does this compare with other students in class who are not receiving *Reading Matters* tutoring?

4.   Is *Reading Matters* reading tutoring helping your student in other subject areas? If so, can you provide more detail?

5.   Have you noticed any attitudinal changes toward reading or other schoolwork in your students since the onset of *Reading Matters*?

6.   How has the current year of *Reading Matters* program delivery compared to previous years?

7.   Do you feel that *Reading Matters* is a benefit to the school? Why or why not?

8.   Are there any changes you would like to see made in *Reading Matters*? If so, what are they?

9.   What are the strengths of the program?

10.   What are the weaknesses of the program?

11.   If you could describe the impact of Reading Matters on your classroom, what would it be?

Introductory Interview Questions for Volunteers:

1. How did you become interested in volunteering for *Reading Matters*?

2. How would you describe your preparation for the tutoring position?

3. What are your favorite aspects of the program?

4. What are your least favorite aspects of the program?

5. Do you use a variety of strategies with students, or is there a basic model that tutors are asked to follow? If you employ different strategies, how do you choose among them?

6. What are the strengths of the program?

7. What are the weaknesses of the program?

8. How would you describe the progress (or lack of progress) that your students are making?

9. What is your educational background?

10. Are there any changes to the program you would like to see? If so, what are those changes?

11. Are you willing to tutor next year? Why or why not?