The Children Left Behind: An Evaluation of a Reading Intervention Program for Upper Elementary Students

Tahira DuPree Chase
St. John Fisher College

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The Children Left Behind: An Evaluation of a Reading Intervention Program for Upper Elementary Students

Abstract
The landmark NCLB (2001) has directed great attention and increased awareness of early literacy instruction. Still, less attention has been paid to older students who struggle to read. School districts must identify best practices and strategies to remediate students who struggle to read. The purpose of this 30-week mixed methods research was to examine the effectiveness of a reading intervention program, My Sidewalks, to improve pre-adolescent students’ reading skills and improve their positive attitudes toward academic and recreational reading. Reading skills were measured using the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation. Students’ positive attitudes were measured using the Elementary Reading Assessment Survey. Each measurement instrument was administered in the Fall of 2010 and Spring of 2011. This action research took place in a small-sized urban school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State. Using stratified random sampling, the 49 purposive participants were Grade 5 struggling readers who received reading intervention services during the 2010-2011 school year. Consequent of the 30-week implementation of My Sidewalks, participants demonstrated statistically significant gains at p < .001 in sentence comprehension, passage comprehension, and vocabulary. Participants showed practical significant gains at p = .10 in listening comprehension. Moreover, students demonstrated statistically significant improvement in their positive attitudes toward recreational reading, while a slight improvement was noted in academic reading. The practical significance of this study will lead to broader investigation and evaluation of reading intervention programs and best practices that address the struggling readers dilemma among older students.

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The Children Left Behind: An Evaluation of a Reading Intervention Program for Upper Elementary Students

By

Tahira DuPree Chase

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
Ronald D. Valenti, Ph.D.

Committee Member
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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

August 2011
Dedication

There are many people who made the completion of my doctoral work possible. First, I wish to thank my son, Chandler (6) and daughter, Schylar (9) for their patience, understanding and unconditional love during the 28-month dissertation journey. Whether it was to help me staple an article together or simply ask,” Mommy, are you finished with your homework yet?”… there was not a moment that passed where I did not feel like the luckiest mom on Earth to have two very patient and understanding children. Chandler and Schylar, you now have your mommy back!

Next, I wish to thank my parents, Mr. Bobby DuPree and Mrs. Dorothy DuPree for their unconditional love, support and admiration. They did not hesitate to help care for my children while I spent time in class or at the library. This doctoral work would not have been possible had it not been for their support and belief in me.

I also wish to thank my husband, Craig for his selflessness, love and support at home. His encouraging words will not be forgotten.

This research is also dedicated to the children of this nation who have been silenced by illiteracy. This work is not complete until we win the war on illiteracy—especially in underserved communities.
Biographical Sketch

Tahira DuPree Chase is currently the Director for Curriculum and Instruction in the Mount Vernon City School District. Mrs. DuPree Chase attended Norfolk State University, Norfolk, Virginia, from 1990 to 1994 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in the area of Mass Communications in 1994, with *cum laude* distinction. She attended the City University of New York from 1995 to 1997 and graduated with a Master of Arts degree in the area of Secondary English Education in 1997, with *magna cum laude* distinction. Ms. DuPree Chase furthered her studies at Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, New York, from 2000 to 2002 and graduated with distinction with a Master of Science degree in the area of School Administration and Supervision in 2002.

Mrs. DuPree Chase came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2009 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mrs. DuPree Chase pursued her research in the effectiveness of a reading intervention program for pre-adolescent students under the direction of Dr. Ronald D. Valenti and Dr. Welton L. Sawyer and received the Ed.D. degree in August 2011.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank God for allowing me the opportunity to accomplish this task. Only He knows what I have endured during this journey; yet, He provided me with the strength (and energy) to forge ahead.

I extend my deepest appreciation to the members who served on my dissertation committee for sharing their time, insight and expertise. Dr. Ronald D. Valenti, my dissertation chair, shared his invaluable expertise in leadership, statistics and was a constant source of encouragement and support during every step of this journey. My committee member, Dr. Welton L. Sawyer, has given generously of his time, encouragement and honest feedback to make this important work possible. Both members of the committee brought a perspective that encouraged me to think in complex ways, to push the envelope a bit and dig below the surface to capture the very essence of this work. For this, I am grateful.

I wish to acknowledge the seven (7) reading teachers and forty-nine (49) wonderful students who willingly participated in this study. Through them, I learned several invaluable lessons about resiliency, patience and the power of flexibility. The reading teachers never hesitated to take on additional paperwork and conduct extra duties just so I may complete this research in a timely manner. Their contribution to this study will not be forgotten.

A team of expert researchers at Pearson Education served as a source of guidance, and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the fantastic Marcy Baughmann and
Mary Ehmann for their resourcefulness, advisement and support with statistics. I also wish to thank Mr. Scott Boozan for capturing the expert teaching to support this work. Additionally, I wish to thank Dr. Jeanne Paratore and Dr. Edward Kammeneui for their willingness to provide guidance and advisement—what an honor to have leading experts in the field of literacy research to call upon for all the right answers.

Last, but certainly not least, I am forever indebted to my dynamic executive mentor, Mrs. Elizabeth Bassford. Mrs. Bassford was indeed “the wind beneath my wings” from the very beginning of this journey. Mrs. Bassford’s deep passion for literacy development within the underserved populations actually steered this work. It was indeed an honor to have experienced her guidance, expertise and well-wishes throughout this journey. We have so much more work to do together—now that I have gained an enriched understanding of our nation’s literacy crisis. I look forward to my continued work with Mrs. Bassford.

I wish to acknowledge the fantastic friends who offered encouraging text messages, much-needed humorous emails and accepted my late night phone calls. Your uplifting words helped tremendously.
Abstract

The landmark NCLB (2001) has directed great attention and increased awareness of early literacy instruction. Still, less attention has been paid to older students who struggle to read. School districts must identify best practices and strategies to remediate students who struggle to read.

The purpose of this 30-week mixed methods research was to examine the effectiveness of a reading intervention program, My Sidewalks, to improve pre-adolescent students’ reading skills and improve their positive attitudes toward academic and recreational reading. Reading skills were measured using the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation. Students’ positive attitudes were measured using the Elementary Reading Assessment Survey. Each measurement instrument was administered in the Fall of 2010 and Spring of 2011. This action research took place in a small-sized urban school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State. Using stratified random sampling, the 49 purposive participants were Grade 5 struggling readers who received reading intervention services during the 2010-2011 school year.

Consequential of the 30-week implementation of My Sidewalks, participants demonstrated statistically significant gains at $p < .001$ in sentence comprehension, passage comprehension, and vocabulary. Participants showed practical significant gains at $p = .10$ in listening comprehension. Moreover, students demonstrated statistically significant improvement in their positive attitudes toward recreational reading, while a slight improvement was noted in academic reading.
The practical significance of this study will lead to broader investigation and evaluation of reading intervention programs and best practices that address the struggling readers dilemma among older students.
# Table of Contents

Dedication ......................................................................................................................... ii

Biographical Sketch ......................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................. iv

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. vi

Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. viii

List of Tables ...................................................................................................................... xi

List of Figures ................................................................................................................... xiii

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................... 1

  Problem Statement ........................................................................................................... 4

  Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................... 5

  Significance of Study .................................................................................................... 7

  Background for the Study .............................................................................................. 9

  Purpose .......................................................................................................................... 10

  Research Questions .................................................................................................... 10

  Definitions of Terms .................................................................................................... 11

  Summary of Remaining Chapters ................................................................................ 14

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ....................................................................................... 16

  The Term Struggling Reader ........................................................................................ 16

  Characteristics of Upper Elementary or Pre-Adolescent Struggling Reader .......... 17

  Types of Struggling Pre-Adolescent Readers ............................................................... 20
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Effect</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fourth-Grade Slump</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers’ Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Intervention for Pre-Adolescent Students</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction for Struggling Readers</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Aspect of Reading</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interactions in the Process of Learning to Read</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Sidewalks Foundational Research</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Context</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Participants (Purposive)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity vs. Confidentiality</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments Used in Data Collection</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Analysis</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and Documenting Project Activities</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Results</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis and Findings</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>District Student Demographics by Ethnicity ((n = 8,726))</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School A ((n = 550))</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School B ((n = 497))</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School C ((n = 366))</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5</td>
<td>Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School D ((n = 365))</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.6</td>
<td>Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School E ((n = 357))</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.7</td>
<td>Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School F ((n = 319))</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.8</td>
<td>Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School G ((n = 315))</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.9</td>
<td>Demographic Profile of Participants ((n = 49))</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.10</td>
<td>Data Collection Method</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Comprehension Growth ((n = 49))</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Vocabulary Growth ((n = 49))</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Total Test Score ((n = 49))</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Listening Comprehension Growth</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td>ERAS Data Fall 2010 to Spring 2011: Academic Reading ((n = 49))</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6</td>
<td>ERAS Data Fall to Spring: Recreational Reading ((n = 49))</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.7</td>
<td>ERAS Mean Gain by Gender: Recreational Reading ((n = 49))</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Process for Admission into Title I Reading Services</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>Grade Equivalent Comprehension</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2</td>
<td>Grade Equivalent Vocabulary</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.3</td>
<td>Grade Equivalent Listening</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Elementary school classroom teachers are increasingly expected to play a crucial role in contributing to the improvement of student reading skills. It is believed that using one core, scientifically based reading program for 90–120 minutes daily would meet the diverse needs of all elementary children (Torgesen and Hudson, 2006). Furthermore, many educators think of reading as a skill that is taught once and for all in the first few years of school (Ruddell and Unrau, 2004). Then students are expected to apply what is learned in the first few years to obtain information and make meaning with text. This would be the case if all students enter school as a kindergartner with the prerequisite skills for pre-literacy. Such prerequisites include concepts of print and knowledge of alphabetic sound and expression. Most educators would agree that many students, more specifically those in urban school districts, enter kindergarten ill-prepared to learn the basics of reading. This puts this unique population of students at an early disadvantage (Tatum, 2004). Far too often, this population of students is not remediated properly and early enough to correct their deficiencies. Many of these students continue to transition from grade to grade without the basic foundations for reading, and their reading skills—or lack thereof—are unnoticed or undetected until they enter the third or fourth grade.

Upper elementary teachers, more specifically Grades 4–6, often notice a puzzling phenomenon: Students who were categorized as proficient readers in the early elementary grades often seem overwhelmed by upper elementary reading tasks (Lubliner, 2004). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Stullich et al., 2007),
39% of fourth graders read below the basic level. Such literacy problems get worse as students advance through school and are exposed to progressively more complex concepts and courses.

Reading is the vehicle for acquiring knowledge in the upper-grade elementary classroom. It is a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following: the development and maintenance of a motivation to read, the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print, sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension, the ability to read fluently, the ability to decode unfamiliar words and the skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes and speech sounds are connected to print (International Reading Association, 2004). When children enter upper elementary grades unable to read proficiently, their academic performance rapidly spirals downward. In most cases, a member of this unique population is typically deemed a struggling reader. Struggling readers are students who read significantly below their current grade level (U.S. Department of Education 2007). Without intensive intervention, struggling readers in the upper elementary grades are likely to experience frustration and failure as they move into middle and high school (Allington, 2007).

There is no single cause of reading problems. The ability that correlates most highly with literacy achievements is language development (Chapman, 2003). What a child knows about written language when he or she enters school is the best predictor of success in learning to read (Tatum, 2004). Nagy and Anderson (2002) found a large discrepancy between the amounts of words skilled readers, average readers, and poor readers were exposed to in text. The volume of vocabulary exposure contributed to the
“rich get richer” and the “poor get poorer” philosophy (Stanovich, 1986). The children who read often had larger vocabularies and the richness of their vocabulary contributed to greater reading success. On the other hand, children with inadequate vocabulary read slowly and had less exposure to text, thus inhibiting future growth in reading ability. Reading is hindered by a combination of lack of practice, deficient decoding skills, exposure to materials outside of the instructional level, less involvement in reading activities and less skill (Tatum, 2004).

Struggling readers often are placed in low-achievement classes. Allington and Walmsley (2007) stated that children placed in low-achievement groups are “far more likely to: (a) leave school before graduating; (b) fail a grade; (c) be placed in special education; (d) become a teenage parent; (e) commit a juvenile criminal offense; and (f) remain less than fully literate (p. 2). This is especially the case for children in urban school districts (Tatum, 2004).

Struggling readers, regardless of the grade level, need intensive intervention instruction. Research shows that students will make significant progress if a reading intervention program is systematic, enhances motivation, and provides explicit intensive instruction that is tailored to the students’ instructional level (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2006). Intensive intervention involves reading instruction outside of the daily 90–120 minutes core reading block. Intervention instruction focuses on the five tenets of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension, thus providing a balanced reading diet. Additionally, research suggests that an intensive intervention program must use progress monitoring and assessments to ensure that students acquire critical skills for successful reading (Chard et al., 2006).
**Problem Statement**

Reading is the key that unlocks success in school. Students who have experienced failure in the foundational years often become angry and frustrated, disengaged and disillusioned about themselves and their ability to succeed (Tatum, 2004). Success with reading can turn around negative attitudes and self-esteem, and help students attain success in all other academic areas including math, science and social studies (Tatum, 2007).

In a 2008 cohort analysis of the reading proficiency data in a small-sized urban school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State, it was clear that there was a precipitous decrease in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading fluency beyond Grade 3. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) created by Joetta Beaver (1988) as well as the New York State English Language Arts Examination (New York State Education Department, 2007) indicated that upper elementary students in this small-sized urban school district continue to experience this decrease throughout their tenure in elementary school. There was a greater decrease in reading ability noted as students enter secondary school.

In order for this small-sized urban school district to remain competitive with neighboring school districts and prepare students for the 21st-century college coursework and workforce, the district must make bold changes in how instruction is delivered to the most reading-deficient students. This district must identify the best practices and strategies to remediate pre-adolescent students who struggle to read.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective is a way of looking at the world; the assumption people have about what is important and what makes the world work (Yin, 2003). In terms of research, the theoretical perspective thus helps the researcher determine what to include and what to exclude in a given study (Yin, 2003). In other words, a theoretical perspective enables the researcher to have a focus when collecting and analyzing data.

Definition and history of the works of Vygotsky. Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky was born in Russia in 1896. Vygotsky was not trained in science but received a law degree from Moscow University. While at the university, he studied literature and linguistics. In order to grasp Vygotsky’s theory, it is necessary to understand the political environment of that time. Vygotsky began to work in psychology shortly following the Russian Revolution, where Marxism replaced the rule of the czar. The new philosophy of the Marxist emphasized socialism. During this time, individuals were expected to sacrifice their personal goals and achievements for the improvement of the larger society. Sharing and cooperation were encouraged, and the success of any individual was seen as a reflecting the success of the culture. Marxists also placed a strong emphasis on history and the belief that any culture could be understood only through examination of the ideas and events that had shaped it.

Studying a range of human development theories constructed by various Russian and Western psychologists, Vygotsky found that such theories did not account for the effect of social interaction and the influence of culture transmission (Wink & Putney, 2002). This was developed into the major theme of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework: social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky
incorporates these elements in his model of human development, in what has been called a *sociocultural* approach (Berk & Winsler, 2005). For Vygotsky, the individual’s development is a result of his or culture. According to Vygotsky (1978), “development” applies mainly to mental development, such as thought, language, and reasoning process. Such abilities develop through social interactions with others.

The second aspect of Vygotsky’s theory is the idea that the potential for cognitive development is limited to a certain time span that he calls the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978). Zone of proximal development refers to the gap between what a given child can achieve alone, their potential development as determined by independent problem solving, and what they can achieve through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Justice & Pullen, 2004). The full development during the zone of proximal development depends upon full social interaction, and the more the child takes advantages of an adult’s assistance, the broader its zone of proximal development.

**Vygotsky and the struggling reader.** The works of Lev Vygotsky (1978) provide a framework from which to view struggling readers. Vygotsky’s constructivist perspective provides insight to the manner in which struggling readers can be supported in their literacy development. Rather than concepts and learning being handed to the students, the learner constructs his or her own understanding by drawing on prior experiences through “active construction rather than passive acquisition” (Lenters, 2006). The teacher acts as a mediator in a flexible role to share and construct understanding through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher provides support through scaffolding in a process called semiotic flexibility, referring to the “adult’s shifts in
speech that provide responses or directives to the child” (Berk & Winsler, 2005). Reading instruction is conducted as a series of building blocks, each subsequent block adding to the previous block of background knowledge. The teacher continually assesses the reader while adjusting instruction to meet the developmental needs of the reader.

Vygotsky (1978) stated that learning must be matched to the child’s developmental level. The developmental age was once defined as a child’s mental age as determined by standardized tests. Vygotsky’s theory of zone of proximal development identified learning as the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development through problem solving under the guidance of a capable adult.

In order to be in the child’s zone of proximal development, the activity must be too difficult for the child to perform independently but possible to perform with the support of an adult. In terms of the struggling reader, this theory advocates exposing children to concepts that require the assistance of others in an effort to steer them toward independence and mastery of a skill (Justice & Pullen, 2004). Moreover, the struggling reader must have the opportunity to read text within their instructional level (Allington, 2007). The Vygotskian approach “advocates responsiveness to children’s current capacities yet aims to move development forward” (Berk & Winsler, 2005, p. 150).

**Significance of Study**

Every school day in America, 3,000 students drop out of school—the majority of them poor readers and enrolled in urban schools (Fleishman, 2007). According to the Michael Kamil (2005), one key factor for dropping out of school is reading achievement level. Students with below grade level reading skills are twice as likely to drop out of
school as those who can read on or above grade level. Moreover, pre-adolescent illiteracy has profound economic and social consequences. According to a 2007 report of the Coalition of Juvenile Justice (2007), the nation spends over $250 billion in lost earnings and taxes because of America’s dropout rate. Competition for low-skill jobs from low-wage countries is swiftly reducing the number of employment opportunities for the nation’s high school dropouts. More astounding, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice reports that 82% of prison inmates are high school dropouts, and a very high proportion of this population cannot read.

The landmark No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has directed attention and increased funding at both the federal and state level toward improving early literacy (Kamil, 2005). Still, little attention has been paid to the upper elementary, middle, and high school students who cannot read. Moreover, very few researchers have studied the cause and offered practical solutions to this growing problem of literacy among pre-adolescent students in urban school districts. This unique population of students is often faced with social challenges that impede their ability to succeed in school (Tatum, 2007).

The practical significance of this study will lead to broader investigation and evaluation of reading intervention programs and best practices that address the struggling readers dilemma among pre-adolescent students. The study, indeed, has local and national implications for curriculum and program restructuring, leadership development and training with specificity, and development for pre-adolescent students who are at risk for academic failure. Ultimately, this will lead to reading improvement and development. Leaders at all levels, including federal and local government, business and community must make literacy a priority for pre-adolescent students as it is for younger ones. With
this, the research study intends to bring increased awareness of this national crisis, more specifically an awareness within the participating urban school district—located in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State. Such an awareness will assist in the appropriate designation of funding for varied programs with proven results to close the achievement gap. With an increased awareness and proven results at the local level, teachers who teach literacy to pre-adolescent students should be provided more support and funding for their own professional growth.

**Background for the Study**

In 2008, the small-sized urban school district’s 11 elementary schools adopted a scientifically based thematic reading program for Grades K through 6. The reading program, *Reading Street* (Pearson Education), is a new program designed to help teachers build readers through motivating and engaging literature, research-based instruction, and a wealth of teaching tools. Moreover, within the reading program are offerings for strategic intervention lessons specifically designed for classroom teachers. In many classrooms throughout the district, this strategic intervention component of the core reading program does not address the most prominent needs of the struggling reader. Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) claim, that “when curriculum comes straight out of a textbook, we have the assurance that we’ve covered the necessary material. But this assurance is misleading, if not false” (p. 90). Often the reading standard curriculum and instruction are not designed to meet the individual needs of students (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). This unique group of students requires a different setting for delivery of instruction and a unique focus on specific foundational literacy skills. The *Reading Street* program is accompanied by an intensive intervention extension, *My Sidewalks* (Pearson).
This program, *My Sidewalks*, is intended to meet the needs of children who require intensive intervention in phonological awareness, letter names, letter sounds, word reading, spelling, and simple-sentence reading. *My Sidewalks* is distinctly designed for small-group instruction. Small-group instruction consists of 5–6 students at one sitting. This delivery of instruction must be executed by an interventionist, namely a New York State certified reading specialist, for 35–40 minutes daily.

**Purpose**

Based on the urgency to address the immediate needs and deficiencies of struggling readers in urban communities throughout the United States, the purpose of this mixed-methods research was to examine the effectiveness of a district-adopted reading intervention program (*My Sidewalks*) to improve pre-adolescent students’ reading skills and improve their positive attitudes toward academic and recreational reading. Reading skills were measured by the New York State Department of Education English Language Arts Examination (NYSED ELA), Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE). Students’ positive attitudes toward reading academic and recreational texts were measured by the Elementary Reading Assessment (ERAS).

**Research Questions**

The mixed-methods study answered the following four research questions:

1. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program prove successful in improving the reading skills Grade 5 struggling readers as measured by GRADE Assessment Forms A and B using the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE, Grade Equivalent (GE), and Growth Scale Value (GSV))?
2. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program accelerate Grade 5 struggling readers to read on grade level as measured by GRADE GE score?

3. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading academic texts?

4. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention Program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading recreational texts?

According to Cottrell and McKenzie (2005), a hypotheses is not needed when the research study focuses on one group. In the case of this research, the study focused on Grade 5 students who demonstrated reading difficulties. In a descriptive study, the four research questions replace hypotheses.

**Definitions of Terms**

To ensure clarity throughout this study, the following terms will appear in this research document:

*Academic Reading*—reading relating to that which is done in the academic environment or relating to tasks accomplished in the academic environment (McKenna & Kear, 1990).

*Foundational skills*—which refer to skills that form the prepared ground or base on which the structure of reading rests (International Reading Association, 2004).

*Fidelity in literacy*—strict following of protocols of the program’s design without modifications made by school district or program administer (Paratore, 2007).

*Instructional level*—the ability to read text with 85–90% accuracy (Chard et al., 2006).

*Interventionist*—one who provides or implements interventions as prescribed by the participant’s needs (Chard et al., 2006)
Motivation—the individual’s personal goals, values and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes and outcomes of reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Society for Adolescent Medicine, 2005).

Phonemes—the meaning of a letter or digraph, the “mouth move” signaled by the letter. It is the vocal gestures from which words are constructed, when they are found in their natural context—spoken words (Duke & Pressley, 2005).

Phonological awareness—refers to an individual’s awareness of the sounds structure, or phonological structure, of a spoken word (Chard et al., 2006).

Reading comprehension—the process of constructing meaning from text (Neufeld, 2005).

Reading fluency—encompasses the speed or rate of reading, as well as the ability to read materials with expression (International Reading Association, 2004).

Reading intervention—series of practices, strategies and methodologies used to address significant reading deficiencies (Chard et al., 2006).

Recreational Reading—reading that is selected by student; often referred to as leisurely reading (McKenna & Kear, 1990).

Self-Efficacy—“Self-efficacy is the personal belief that students have about their ability to succeed at a particular task” (McCabe & Margolis, 2001, p.45).

Small-sized urban school district—that which has less than 10,000 students, located in an urban area; high poverty as measured by NYSED Free or Reduced Lunch rates; cultural diversity as measured by NYSED; Limited English Proficiency as measured by NYSED; defined as “High Need” as prescribed by NYSED (New York State Education Department, 2011).
Struggling reader—student who reads two or more years below their current grade level (Stullich, Eisner, & McCrary, 2007).

Urban School District—that which is located in an urban area/community (Russo, 2011)

Vocabulary—the number of different words recognized and understood in silent Reading (Chapman, 2003).

**An additional definition: scripted reading intervention program.** Though in the field of literacy the term *scripted reading* is commonly used, one of the challenges for this study was that there is not a unified definition of *scripted reading intervention program*. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, P. D. Pearson’s (personal communication, May 21, 2007) definition for a scripted program will be used:

It has become commonplace over the past decade to use the term scripted curriculum to describe a program that has these components: (a) a very specific set of directions for teachers to follow in enacting the lessons, (b) a pacing guide that prescribes precisely when teachers will teach what lessons, and (c) monitors who visit classrooms to ensure compliance with pacing guides and lesson plans.

In my view, teacher editions have not really changed in the past 20 years; they have always told teachers, “Do X, do Y, do Z”! In earlier times, teachers simply chose not to follow the manuals very closely. So I believe that it is really the pacing and monitoring that is responsible what we call scripted programs.

It is important to note, as Pearson did, that it is precisely the monitoring and pacing of these programs that delineates them from basal text curricula. Because scripted programs do not allow the teachers the flexibility to pace their own instruction, and modification must be done through approval from an outside source, often the program publisher or
school administration, the dynamics of a scripted classroom are necessarily different from that of a more traditional one where the teacher is in charge of instructional decision-making. In a scripted environment, this is exactly what the developers do not want to happen. According to the website for one well-known scripted intervention program, Direct Instruction, “The popular valuing of teacher creativity and autonomy as high priorities must give way to a willingness to follow certain carefully prescribed instructional practices” (as cited in Radosh, 2004). Furthermore, during a 2004 interview, Siegfried Engelmann, author of both Direct Instruction and Corrective Reading (programs typically used for middle school reading intervention) went on to be more explicit about the role of teacher decision-making in the classroom: “We don’t give a damn what the teacher thinks, what the teacher feels. . . . On the teachers’ own time they can hate it. We don’t care as long as they do it.” (Radosh, 2004).

**Summary of Remaining Chapters**

The remainder of this document is organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to RTI and the elementary school. It defines the struggling reader, both generally and in terms of the upper elementary or pre-adolescent reader. Research on types of struggling readers is identified and theories and practices relevant to reading and RTI are examined. Chapter 3 defines the methodology employed for the study, including the context of the research, purpose of the study, research participants, delimitations, instruments used in data collection, and procedures for data collection and analysis. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4. Major findings relevant to research questions and data analyses are presented. Implications, limitations, and
recommendations for practice and future studies are discussed in Chapter 5, which ends with the author’s conclusions.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The review of literature will examine the current research about pre-adolescent students who struggle with reading. This chapter is organized around five major sections. The literature review will include: (a) the characteristics of upper elementary struggling readers; (b) the cycle and stages of reading development for those who struggle; (c) the factors that can contribute to the motivation, engagement and attitudes of struggling readers; (d) the reading intervention program design; (e) and recommendations for curriculum and instruction for struggling pre-adolescent readers.

The Term Struggling Reader

Students who struggle with reading have been associated with different labels: learning disabled, reading disabled, minimally literate, illiterate, at risk, poor readers, low-achieving readers, slow readers, reluctant readers, delayed readers, backward readers and struggling readers (Braunger & Lewis, 1998, Fang, 2005; O’Brien, 1998, Stringer, 2003). Slavin and Madden (1989) described at-risk students as those who are in danger of failing to complete their education with an adequate level of skills. After the term struggling was used recently in work sponsored by the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA), the term “struggling reader appears to be the preferred term among reading professionals for pre-adolescent and adolescents who are unable to keep up with the reading demands of the school curriculum” (Alvermann, 2001, p. 679).
**Characteristics of Upper Elementary or Pre-Adolescent Struggling Reader**

Traditionally, struggling readers have been viewed as low achievers, inept, unresponsive, lazy, obstinate, and lacking in intellect (O’Brien, 2001). Additionally, they are seen as lacking such cognitive competencies as reading comprehension, study skills, word recognition, and reading fluency, which have been the defining attributes of struggling readers (Vacca & Vacca, 2005). Recently, the notion of struggling readers has expanded to include those individuals who are disengaged from literacy (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000). Guthrie and Davis (2003) stated that struggling readers tend to be notably unmotivated. Usually, these students lack confidence in their reading capability, their ability to read or to improve their reading skills. Guthrie and Davis further suggest that struggling pre-adolescent readers are usually extrinsically motivated rather than intrinsically motivated. These students read for grades and meeting teachers’ requirements, instead of enjoying reading, seeking satisfaction of their curiosity or enjoying the challenge of a complex plot.

The academic demands on students at the upper elementary level assume they are able to read to access learning (Allington, 2007). The work load requires students to read and comprehend efficiently and effectively both in and outside the classroom in order to meet academic course requirements (Fisher, 2001). Students who struggle with reading have difficulties in all subject areas since accessing curricula depends heavily on being able to read volumes of information with understanding in a timely manner (Whitehurst, 2007).

Reading is the gateway skill to academic success. There are approximately 9 million 4th through 12th graders in America whose chances for academic success are
dismal because they are unable to read and comprehend classroom materials (Kamil, 2009). When reading is associated with frustration and failure, it is avoided and does not improve (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003). Struggling readers do not experience success, but rather frustration and do almost anything to circumvent being repeatedly confronted with experiences involving reading—which are equated with defeat (Leone, 2007). They are excluded from the naturally occurring cycle of reading rehearsal and progress in learning. If a student does not experience success through reading, they tend to dodge it and thereby are not exposed to the inherent benefits reading yields (Stanovich, 2003).

Pre-adolescent students who are confident about their reading abilities immerse themselves in literature, thus strengthening their reading skills. On the other hand, students who lack confidence tend to avoid literacy activities. Due to avoidance behavior, these students engage in reading less frequently, which lends to skill deterioration (Lenters, 2006). Reeves (2004) found students in her case study decreased reading in upper elementary and middle school. This lack of exposure with text added to students’ reading complications and failures.

Even institutions of higher learning are seeing the effects of accumulated education deficits in reading and writing skills of students (Pitts, White & Harrison, 2007). Some students who successfully earned their high school diploma with aspirations of continuing their education are ill-equipped in reading and writing for the academic challenges at the post-secondary level and are required to take remedial or developmental courses.

Reading is the portal to personal, social, professional, and academic accomplishment. Reading levels can predict whether or not a person will graduate from
high school and the level of jobs for which they will be qualified (Grosso de León, 2002). According to Dr. George Farkas (2003), reading performance in elementary grades is a strong predictor of academic success in high school. Many adolescent students are below basic in reading or not proficient, thus putting their future at risk.

Reading failure is an epidemic. It affects entire communities. Academic failure affects people at the emotional and societal levels as well as impacts public health costs. Low reading levels reveal lost human potential and lack of self-esteem, both are essential elements for success (Wendorf, 2007). Every major public concern has a higher incidence of reading failure attached to it—from juvenile delinquency to teen pregnancy to failure to graduate (Tallal, 2007).

Pre-adolescent students who struggle to read represent all social and ethnic groups. However, certain populations have significantly higher percentages of students reading below grade level. Such populations include: African-American and Hispanics, English as a Second Language, students living in families with incomes below the poverty level and students who are identified as Special Education learners (Kamil, 2005). These students’ reading deficiencies are becoming increasingly more apparent with the new accountability mandates of NCLB, which require detailed reporting of school achievement levels broken out by gender, race, ethnicity, income and special needs (The President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002).

Mastery of basic reading skills brings a sense of personal victory. Confidence in the ability to read promotes a desire to engage in reading. Increased reading activities provide exposure to ideas and vocabulary, and continue to raise interest while learning
simultaneously occurs. When the experience of learning to read is a positive one and is associated with accomplishment, reading is enjoyable and practiced voluntarily.

**Types of Struggling Pre-Adolescent Readers**

Moore, Alvermann and Hinchman (2000) conclude that the term *struggling* can refer to students with clinically diagnosed reading disabilities as well as those who are unmotivated, in remediation, disenchanted or generally unsuccessful in school literacy tasks. Far too often, many who struggle with reading are not identified and addressed until after Grade 3 or even later. Gillet, Temple and Crawford (2004) differentiated among three types of struggling readers: nonreaders, disenchanted readers, and remedial readers. Nonreaders lack even the most basic reading skills and strategies as a result of limited vocabulary and a lack of word attack skills. Teachers or peers’ reading aloud might enable this population of readers to comprehend.

Disenchanted readers are unmotivated or unwilling to read, often as a result of negative experiences associated with the social or behavioral elements of schooling or extreme emotional distress due to family or personal problems. These students are the most difficult to understand, assess and affect positively because they often resist assessment procedures (Gillet et al., 2004).

Remedial readers, who may possess limited word attack skills and recognize sight words, have great difficulty reading and understanding grade-level texts. These readers might perform at a minimal level on multiple-choice tests but probably experiences great difficulty in tasks that call for higher level though processes such ad comparisons, finding the main ideas and forming inferences. Gillet et al. (2004) found that pre-adolescents who read below grade level suffer not only academically, but socially as well. Such
problems can lead to disruptive behavior and an increased likelihood of dropping out of school.

Many students living in poverty fail in school due to lack of critical resources in their lives (Braunger & Lewis, 2008). Though many of them have the literacy in their families that reflects their community and culture, these students have rare access to books and other print materials; to various childhood experiences that would build their literacy skills; to school-based literacy activities that pertain to their lives outside of school and/or to a variety of rich oral language interactions. These limitations impact their school performance negatively when learning to read. However, these students can succeed when appropriate instruction is provided (Allington, 2006).

Students with special needs are most commonly labeled “Learning Disabled” or “Reading Disabled.” Many struggling readers have been given these labels in school, and are often referred to special education programs. In these programs, they receive significantly less reading instruction than their peers who are better readers (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). Historically, these students have been thought to have an intrinsic deficit (Braunger & Lewis, 2003). Spear-Swerling and Sternbery (2004) state, however, that “there is currently little educational basis for differentiating school-labeled children with Reading Disability from other kinds of peer readers” (p. 4).

Currently, students who speak English as a non-native language are at schools in all areas of the United States. Moss and Puma (2005) found that English language learners (ELLs) receive lower grades and score significantly below their peers on standardized tests of reading. Many teachers assume they have lower academic abilities.
As a result, these students are 1.5 times more likely to drop out of school than native speakers (Cardena, Robledo & Waggoner, 2006).

Miller and Endo (2004) stated that ELLs face a variety of struggles in the classroom. They identified these struggles as *language shock* when exposed to new language, *self-identification* (between their home language and culture and those if their new home), *cultural load* in understanding the new culture, *cognitive load* in understanding the content of their courses usually due to lack of the English language ability, and the struggle with pedagogy and curriculum, especially when the ELL is not familiar with the pedagogical style of the new culture. Other researchers have added that ELLs also struggle emotionally when they do not fit in with their peers (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000).

The combination of these struggles has made many ELLs struggling readers. Reading is a language ability and a sociocultural practice (Bloom & Katz, 2004; Gillet et al., 2004). Peregoy and Boyle (2001) pointed out that compared to native English speakers, ELLs bring different resources to the reading process. The most critical differences are second language proficiency and background knowledge pertinent to the text being read. These limitations affect reading comprehension and cause the reading process to be lower and more arduous. Researchers have found that English vocabulary is a primary determinant of reading comprehension for ELLs (Garcia & Keresztes-Nagy, 2003).

**Matthew Effect**

A monumental study regarding struggling readers emerged from the research of Keith Stanovich (1986). Stanovich claimed that poor readers continue to decline in their
reading abilities while proficient readers continue to develop. He named this phenomenon the Matthew effect. In the Matthew effect, the poor become poorer and the rich become richer. This concept is based on a scripture verse found in the New Testament Bible. The verse, Matthew 25:29 stated “for everyone who has will be given more, and he will have abundance. Whoever does not have, even what has will be taken from him” (New International Version).

Pre-adolescents who are confident about their reading abilities continue to immerse themselves in literature, thus strengthening their reading skills. Pre-adolescents who lack confidence, avoid literacy activities. Due to avoidance behavior, these students engage in reading less frequently, which leads to little practice and skill deterioration. Stanovich (1986) discovered the perception children have about themselves as a reader influenced whether they pursued or avoided literacy experiences.

**The Fourth-Grade Slump**

For more than 50 years, school administrators and teachers have been keenly aware of the significant achievement gap between students of low-income and middle-income families. Regardless of the assessment used to indicate reading performance, this achievement gap becomes more evident by fourth grade and increases as children get older. Chall (1996) locates this shift at Stage 2 to Stage 3 of Stages of Reading Development or, also known as, learning to read to reading to learn. Although some children transition smoothly to fourth grade, many others struggle with content area material.

Throughout the United States, the fourth-grade slump is a major issue and requires much discussion and fact-finding sessions among educators. If the issue is not
addressed properly, this phenomenon can negatively impact students’ learning as they progress through the grades (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009).

As children enter upper elementary school grades, they are expected to comprehend large amounts of expository/informational text and related vocabulary across the curriculum. For the most part, in the primary grades, these children were immersed mostly in narrative/storybook text (Sanacore, 2006). This type of text is far different from the structure and content of expository/informational text. Within the expository/informational text, students are expected to engage in discourse that is presented as sequence of events; comparison and contrast; problem and solution; and cause and effect (Meyer and Freedle, 1999; Moss, 2004; Sanacore, 2002).

Allington (2006) believes another potential cause of the fourth-grade slump is the difficulty children encounter when they attempt to select reading materials that interest them. When children read materials that interest them, they are more apt to read often; to increase their awareness of content-specific concepts, text structure and general word knowledge; to improve their fluency, vocabulary, phonics, writing, grammar and spelling; to become competent and confident reading more challenging materials; and to continue reading as a lifetime activity (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1998; Dahl & Scharer, 2000; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Unfortunately, what students are interested in reading is often unavailable in the classroom and school library (Sanacore, 2006). Exacerbating the problem of having poor access to books is the issue of having less school time for actual reading. Reading for pleasure at school is looked upon as a frill because high-stakes test preparation has become priority. This is especially the case in urban schools (Lazar, 2004).
Readers’ Self-Efficacy

McCabe and Margolis (2001) defined self-efficacy as “the personal belief that students have about their ability to succeed at a particular task” (p.45). Self-efficacy beliefs are “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Bandura (1997) distinguished confidence and self-efficacy by stating that “confidence is a nondescript term that refers to strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what the certainty is about. Perceived self-efficacy refers to belief in one’s agentive capabilities, that one produce given levels of attainment” (p. 382). Johnson, Freedman and Thomas (2007) suggested there are four main elements to the reader’s self-efficacy “(a) confidence, (b) reading independence, (c) metacognitive awareness and (d) reading stamina” (p. 4).

Johnson et al. (2007) further asserted that a student with positive self-efficacy will demonstrate stamina in the literacy process. Moreover, the student will demonstrate perseverance and pacing when a task becomes difficult or last longer than expected. Walker (2003) claimed “teachers can lead students to experience positive self-efficacy” during tasks and that self-efficacy enhancement can increase motivation and achievement (p. 173). Ruddell and Unrau (2004) claimed a student with higher self-efficacy will demonstrate higher motivation, work longer, and essentially work harder than a student with low self-efficacy. Therefore, higher self-efficacy is reciprocal to reading success (Henk & Melnick, 2002).

Some researchers focused on the lack of validation of students in schools due to the “devaluation of students’ literacy discourses” in school (Cavazos-Kottke, 2005;
Jackson & Cooper, 2007; Williams, 2004). Jackson and Cooper (2007) emphasized that too often pre-adolescents have lost their self-efficacy because their experiences and literacies were not valued in the school. Other researchers attributed a decrease in self-efficacy to students’ experiences with failure. McKenna and Stahl (2003) stated “our attitudes towards reading are shaped by each and every reading experience” (p. 204). When students encounter a task of extreme difficulty, they often sense frustration and futility (Jinks & Lorsbach, 2003). The consequences of a poor reader struggling with text are low achievement and learned helplessness (Vacca & Vacca, 2005).

Motivation

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) defined *reading motivation* as “the individual’s personal goals, values and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes and outcomes of reading” (p. 405). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) stated that low self-efficacy may be related to motivational problems. Guthrie and Davis (2003) discovered motivation is a factor that declines as children progress through school. They compared reading motivation of students in Grades 3, 5, and 8 in social studies classes in the state of Maryland. The majority of the 3rd graders responded positively. By Grade 5 the responses grew negative. By Grade 8, the majority of responses were negative. The questionnaire assessed attitude towards engagement in reading, autonomy support, reading instruction, and interesting texts. The numbers collected in this study indicated a declining trend of motivation as students progressed through school.

Literacy Intervention for Pre-Adolescent Students

When school districts are faced with exorbitant numbers of students failing in reading as shown by district and state assessments and graduation rates, a decision must
be made to address the literacy needs of these students. A search for the “magic bullet” ensues, facilitated by federal guidelines (NCLB, 2001) stating that reading programs selected by school districts must be based on research. There are several strong reading programs available to choose from that fit this criterion. Such programs address needs specific to common deficits of adolescent poor readers. What follows is a look at some of the components research tells us are vital when remediating weak reading skills at the pre-adolescent stage. Such necessary skills include, but limited to: solid understanding of sound-letter association, increasing fluency and word recognition, building vocabulary knowledge and improving integration of text information through reading and writing (Chall, 1996).

Historically, emphasis on early literacy development has been the focus of reading initiatives and funding, but emergent readers represent only the initial stage of growth toward full literacy. Students need a continuum of support throughout their school career to fully develop the breadth and depth of reading skills to engage richly in academia, seeking and preparing for careers and recreation and leisure (Alexander, 2005; Grosso de León, 2002). People today have to read and write more than any other time in history in order to perform their jobs, live independently, participate in society, and manage the vast amounts of information that inundates society each day (Alexander, 2005). The ability to read well is crucial.

**Curriculum and Instruction for Struggling Readers**

The National Reading Panel (2002), in its report to Congress, identified five areas found to be critical to reading instruction. These five components are essential to the
development of strong reading skills and key to a rigorous literacy instruction curriculum. They are: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes (sounds) in spoken language. Phonics is the relationship between graphemes (letters) and phonemes. A firm foundation in phonemic awareness is necessary to build and increase reading skills in order to move towards reading competence. Explicit instruction is imperative when teaching students basic level skills (Swanson, 2009). Even older students must first be adept at recognizing individual sounds within words and master understanding and utility of the alphabetic principle.

Reading fluency refers to reading with speed, accuracy and proper expression (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). It is a prerequisite to reading comprehension. Students who develop automaticity are allowed the capacity to focus on reading comprehension (Moats, 2006). For the purpose of this research, automaticity is defined as fluent processing of information that requires little effort or attention with regard to word recognition (Harris & Hodge, 1995). Effective fluency instruction is systematic and explicit. Two effective instructional approaches to address fluency development are guided oral reading and independent silent reading (National Reading Panel, 2002). Guided oral reading is also called repeated reading. It is often done in pairs with students reading sight words, phrases, sentences and passages for timed periods to one another. Feedback is provided regarding words read per minute and errors. Independent silent reading includes all formal efforts to increase the amount of time students engage in recreational reading at an independent level.
Comprehension is the combination of knowledge of words and reasoning in reading. This is also referred as intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader (Durkin, 2003). Vocabulary refers to the meaning of individual words. Each is essential to becoming an effective reader. Decoding skills must be addressed in reading instruction in order for students to successfully confront new vocabulary in different content areas. With practice, both guided and independent, students can develop proficiency in rapid, accurate and fluent word decoding that will empower them when encountering words that do not preexist in their vocabulary.

In the upper grades, students are expected to read fluently and accurately so that they can comprehend text. Despite any reading difficulties a student may have, the expectation is that students will be able to decode fluently and comprehend material with challenging content (McCray et al., 2001). Older students who struggle to read tend to dislike reading and to read infrequently (Moats, 2001). As a result of reading less, this type of student experiences further regression in reading as well as vocabulary and background knowledge (Stanovich, 1986). Students who should read 10,000,000 words during the school year may only read as few as 100,000 words (Moats, 2001).

Intervention teachers can assume that most upper elementary struggling readers have needs in the area of reading comprehension. McCray (2001) tells us that students may lack one or more of the following: (a) effective strategies to help them understand, organize, and remember information; (b) adequate knowledge of word meaning; (c) the ability to read fluently enough to understand and remember what they are reading; (d) the ability to accurately decode the words; and (f) interest or motivation to read.
In order to understand individual pre-adolescent needs, the source of the struggle needs to be identified.

Several researchers have recommended instructional practices for struggling readers (Allington 2002; Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Chard et al., 2006; Duke & Pressley, 2005; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Johnson et al., 2007; Vacca & Vacca 2005). Many supplemental and intervention programs have been developed and implemented to help struggling readers. Unfortunately, too often, the instructor relies on skills worksheets and rote memorization for learning and remediation (Allington, 2007).

Appropriate instruction for this unique population of students must be intensive and prescriptive, based on student’s needs and stage of literacy development. Planned intervention instruction is responsive and diagnostic-driven (Klenk & Kirby, 2002). Guthrie and Davis (2003) stated that instructional practices for pre-adolescent struggling readers should include learning and realistic goals; real-world interactions; interesting text; strategy instruction; praise; evaluation; and teacher involvement. Similar to Vygotskian theory, an effective interventionist knows what skills their students need, their developmental reading level and what skills their students need next (Ruetzel & Cooter, 2007). Chard et al. (2006) claimed explicit strategy instruction is necessary for struggling readers. Struggling readers often lack strategies necessary to learn effectively with and from the text. Teachers must teach the struggling reader by scaffolding instruction so the readers become confident and competent in the application of strategies within the text. As students learn and apply reading strategies effectively they gain
confidence in their abilities and therefore increase their view of themselves as competent in reading (Vacca & Vacca, 2005).

Neufeld (2005) suggested comprehension strategies be taught explicitly. Pflaum and Bishop (2004) claimed instructional reading strategies for comprehension are crucial. Strategies such as questioning, self-monitoring, application of prior knowledge, summarizing, interpreting, predicting, and visualizing provide crucial skills for pre-adolescent readers for comprehending text with increasing complexity and a variety of text structures (Lewis, 2007). Along with strategy instruction, researchers commented strategy practice time is necessary for application (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Students must have the opportunity to practice strategy use through engaging reading activities (Pflaum & Bishop, 2004). But Tovani (2004) cautions “teaching strategies for the sake of teaching strategies isn’t the goal. The only reason to teach kids how to be strategic readers is to help them become more thoughtful about reading” (p. 9). Classrooms embodying connection to the real-world learning, self directed activities, direct strategy teaching, and allowance for varied forms of self-expression increase long-term motivations and strategies for reading (Small & Memmo, 2004).

While many intervention programs have been designed to help struggling readers, varying in nature, duration and focus, there is no one program or method that can always meet the needs of all struggling readers. Context is critical in consideration of selecting or designing a reading intervention program. Protheroe (2005) provides some criteria when considering a program for struggling readers: (a) matching the student’s reading level since different stages of growth require different focuses; (b) intensive enough to help poor readers catch up with their grade-level peers as quickly as possible; (c) Grounded in
research; (d) for very poor reader, focusing on developing their phonological skills; and (e) for less impaired readers who can decipher words through sounds, emphasizing fluency and vocabulary development.

Braunger and Lewis (1998) also list the factors that are critical to providing supportive environments for struggling readers:

- Access and opportunity to a wide variety of reading materials, meaningful authentic and at the individual reader’s reading level;
- Motivating readers’ willingness to read and to engage in reading by helping them to see reasons and purposes for reading;
- Providing struggling readers with more time to read in real texts, supported with high-quality instruction;
- Supportive instruction in the “how-to’s” of reading through demonstration, guidance and feedback in how to read;
- Nurturing students’ self-esteem and confidence in their attempts and progress; and
- Setting high expectations for success in a supported environment.

Social Aspect of Reading

Social aspect of reading is gaining more attention—especially since Vygotsky’s social and cultural theories (1978, 1981) are becoming increasingly popular in education. Small group discussions have been found to provide a safe and more intimate environment for all students (Raphael, Kehus & Damphouse, 2001). Students who are shy to speak before the entire class can participate and speak freely. Raphael et al. warn that individual students’ personalities need to be considered in order to make sure their
presence affect the other group members in a positive way. Also, they continue to assert that young pre-adolescents’ emerging interest in the opposite sex sometimes develop increased levels of self-consciousness around one another.

Gillet et al. (2004) state that different social groups value and use reading, writing and language differently. In some social groups, students receive a great deal of encouragement to learn to read; seeing people around them reading and writing, they will naturally want to do these things themselves. Students from these groups find school-based literacy and literacy activities familiar, whereas students from other social groups experience a lack of congruence between their own definitions and uses of language and literacy and those they encounter at school (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). During social interactions, there exist differences in amount, initiation patterns, volume of talk and the use of questions among students from differing cultural backgrounds (Raphael et al., 2001).

Social Interactions in the Process of Learning to Read

It has been agreed by several researchers and educators that social interactions play an essential role in learning to read (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Braunger & Lewis, 1998; Vygotsky, 1986). When students read a book or text, which is a cultural artifact written by others, they bring their own unique background knowledge or prior experiences, using their cultural or historical tool of language. This is also a social, cultural and historic artifact (Wink & Putney, 2002). For many students, learning to read is a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic activity (Christian & Bloome, 2004). With different background knowledge and prior experiences, no two readers glean the same meaning from a text (Rosenblatt, 2004). Students need the opportunity to interact with
peers and adults about what is read and what one does as a reader. Through the social interaction they learn and practice language and literacy knowledge, skills and strategies (Braunger & Lewis, 1998). Reading is thus an interdependent process and individuals become literate persons through social interactions within the classroom, with their family and with members of the individual’s culture. Vygotsky (1986) believed that individuals learn within a group context and that the group is vital to the constructing and transforming of knowledge primarily through language. Fish (1999) describes groups of learners in particular social settings as interpretive communities in which knowledge is created by their members and comes from the community in which the reader resides.

Fieldin, Schoen and Jordan (2003) discuss that the social dimension of reading involves developing a sense of safety in the classroom community and making good use of students’ interests in peer interaction. In order to achieve social competency, the aforementioned researchers argue that students should be able to share confusions about texts with others, share successful processes and approaches to understanding texts with others, participate in small and large group discussions about reading and texts and appreciate alternative points of view. Thus, in this process, students learn from more capable peers depending upon the topic of discussion (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, when students talk with each other about what they are reading, they learn about what they are reading, they learn about books they would like to read, increase their understandings of texts and become a community or readers, which is critical to learning to read (Braunger & Lewis, 1998).
My Sidewalks Foundational Research

Program instructional design. My Sidewalks is a research-based, elementary reading intervention program. The reading intervention program is designed for students who are unable to read and comprehend grade-level content and who are unable to benefit adequately from the strategic intervention that supports their core classroom reading instruction, Reading Street. My Sidewalks is intended for use in Kindergarten through fifth grade. Furthermore, the intensive reading intervention program is designed for use with students with disabilities, including learning disabilities and reading disabilities, English language learners and any student at risk of academic failure.

The program itself focuses on phonological awareness, phonics/word study, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary and spelling. Such priority skills have been defined necessary by the National Reading Panel (2002) for students to attain critical reading skills. Additionally, My Sidewalks addresses other pertinent literacy needs such as engagement, motivation, handwriting and written response.

My Sidewalks provides 30 weeks of instruction that should be used along with a scientifically research-based comprehensive classroom reading program. Strategic and tertiary intervention (My Sidewalks) consists of small group intensive intervention designed to accelerate struggling readers’ acquisition of priority skills. Emphasis, specificity, intensity and progress monitoring are the four pillars of research findings that informed the instructional design of My Sidewalks (Vaughn, Simmons, Paratore, & Juel, 2008).

Each week in My Sidewalks an essential question is introduced to develop one aspect of the unit theme. Each unit theme connects to learning in science and social
studies. Lipson (2003) stresses the importance of teaching with themes to “promote a view teaching and learning as meaningful enterprise” which can provide a framework for students to make connections among text.

Gaskins (2003) states the most progress is made by students when their progress is systemically evaluated. Progress in the priority skills is monitored frequently by utilizing ongoing assessments found on Day 5 each week. Instruction in *My Sidewalks* in fast-paced and delivered to small-groups of students for approximately 30 minutes per day. This intense instruction is intended to promote additional teaching modeling and feedback, more scaffolding, multiple opportunities for practice and more time on task. Teaching through small groups increases the likelihood of student success through student-teacher interactions of individualized instruction and teacher monitoring of student progress (Vaughn et al., 2003). The activities last approximately five to ten minutes and are organized in a carefully planned sequence of skills.

**Word work.** *My Sidewalks* introduces word work to students through practicing phonemic awareness, phonics and working with decodable texts. For the upper elementary program component, phonics skills are taught within the context of decoding multisyllabic words. Word parts and syllable patterns are explicitly taught, vowel sounds are taught with syllables. Word meaning is integrated into every lesson. “An emphasis on multisyllabic word reading is critical because of the number of novel words introduced in intermediate and secondary textbooks and the potential for failing to learn from materials if the words cannot be read. From fifth grade on, students encounter approximately 10,000 words per day that they have never previously encountered in print” (Archer, 2003).
**Vocabulary.** Research indicates vocabulary is best taught and learned through direct, explicit instruction (Ogle, et al., 2002). The vocabulary taught each week, on *My Sidewalks*, reflects the science and social studies concept for the week. “Much of the trouble students have comprehending informational materials relates to the specific vocabulary that communicates major concepts. Students’ active involvement in identifying and learning vocabulary is critical to vocabulary learning and related content learning” (Ogle et al., 2003). McKeown (2004) found rich instruction in vocabulary led to knowledge of word meanings and improved students’ comprehension of stories containing these same words. Concept vocabulary found in the upper elementary component of *My Sidewalks* uses a concept web to build understanding of the meanings and relationships among words in the lesson. A semantic map not only allows students to see the relationship between words allowing students to generate new information and expanding their understanding of central concepts in the content area (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2002). The teacher then addresses decoding the word by modeling the multisyllabic word strategy, guiding students to look for meaningful parts, and then chunking words with no recognizable parts.

**Background knowledge.** Gaskin (2003) stressed the importance of teachers helping students build more comprehensive background knowledge since students’ understanding of what they read is based on their own experiences and knowledge. The first reading selection every week is nonfiction. Its purpose is to increase students’ background and concept knowledge for the topic of that week’s reading selection. Students’ text comprehension depends on their having some relevant prior knowledge.
Comprehension. Comprehension skills and strategies in the instruction of *My Sidewalks* include the skills that struggling readers: main idea, compare and contrast, sequence and drawing conclusions. According to Morrow (1996) retelling instruction and practice results in comprehension development and sense of story structure in students. Within the upper elementary component of the story, a comprehension skill is taught each week on Day 2. The teacher defines the skill, explains why it is important, models his or her thought process by thinking aloud and provides a graphic organizer to help students practice using the skill. As students read the day’s selection, the teacher guides reading through the use of questions that help students practice using the comprehension skill. “Instruction and practice in summarizing not only improves students’ ability to summarize text, but also their overall comprehension of text content” (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Fluency. Students develop fluency by rereading for fluency and through teacher modeling fluent reading (Samuels, 2002). In *My Sidewalks*, students reread specific selections for fluency practice on Days 1–4. Rereading activities include choral reading, oral reading, paired reading, reading along with the AudioText or Readers’ Theatre. Specifically, on Day 4, the teacher uses the Student Reader selection to model an aspect of fluent reading, such as rate, accuracy, expression, intonation, attention to punctuation or characterization. The students reread chorally for fluency. Samuels (2002) stresses the importance of a student being capable to read a passage with expression as it indicates their level of fluency and that reading orally is an important accomplishment and confidence builder for struggling students.
Conclusion

Much focus and emphasis have been placed on early elementary intervention and addressing the needs of at-risk early readers. Early elementary intervention is key in addressing deficiencies for more structured interaction with text in secondary schools (Chard et al., 2006). Unique to this study is the focus on upper elementary literacy needs and the specific methodologies and strategies to effectively address such challenges for students who struggle with literacy tasks. To this end, in order to educationally support upper elementary readers who struggle, instructional best practices for struggling readers must be strategically implemented to encourage academic growth and increase positive attitudes toward reading, thus improve motivation and increased engagement.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Researchers must consider the complexity of issues surrounding pre-adolescents who struggle with reading. While several studies have explored the perception, attitudes, and behaviors of adolescents and pre-adolescents, not all have focused specifically on the upper elementary students who struggle with reading. Some researchers included a portion of “struggle” with reading (Beers, 1998; Ivey, 1998; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004, Reeves, 2004); however, their foci were not struggling readers but rather pre-adolescents in general which included diverse representation of reading abilities. One problem has been inadequate attention to the struggling reader dilemma among upper elementary students.

Research Context

This program evaluation was conducted using a mixed methods approach. A mixed methods approach has allowed the researcher to explore the impact of the scripted reading program beyond the statistical data. According to Creswell (2002), qualitative research is often used when the researcher wishes to obtain an in-depth understanding of individuals, groups, organizations or communities. Qualitative research will produce descriptive data—and in this case, the observable behavior of the Grade 5 participants enrolled in the Title I reading program. In the case of this action research, the quantitative data has provided concrete information necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of My Sidewalks, a scripted reading intervention program and its ability to improve reading abilities and students’ attitudes toward reading. The quantitative data has measured the
impact of the elements of the reading intervention program. Such elements include sentence comprehension, passage comprehension, vocabulary and listening comprehension. Additional quantitative data measured students’ attitudes toward reading academic and recreational texts.

Much of quantitative research uses deductive reasoning in order to draw conclusions and make generalizations based on gathered data (Patten, 2009). This researcher used the scientific method, for the most part, as a framework for the action research. Such generalizations made about the participants, after analyzing the data, have a broader impact on the struggling reader dilemma.

Through a mixed-methods approach, using quantitative and qualitative data, this study focused on the effectiveness of a scripted reading intervention program. The program itself was implemented by New York State certified reading specialists (also referred to as interventionists) within a small-sized urban school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State over a 30-week period. This school district is located in a small-sized city with the population of over 65,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), there are approximately 24,000 households in this city. The average household size is 3.2 people. 30% of the residents in this city are foreign born; 70% are native, including 55% who were born in New York. Among residents of at least five years old living in this city, 24% speak a language other than English at home. Of those speaking a language other than English at home, 55% speak Spanish and 45% speak another language (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The population of this city is diverse, representing various ethnic and racial backgrounds. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the city is comprised of
predominantly African American or Black (59%), with 28% of the population being White or Caucasian and 10% Hispanic or Latino.

The school district, itself, is comprised of 8,726 students. According to the New York State Education Department Report Card (2010), 47% of the district’s students are eligible for free lunch; 13% qualify for reduced-price lunch; 8% of the student population is categorized as limited English proficient; and 17% students with Disabilities. The ethnicity distribution of this school district is mostly Black or African American. Table 3.1 illustrates the urban school district’s demographic profile.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>6,894</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the 2010 through 2011 school year, the district participated in a school-wide Title I program, which offered supplemental reading intervention for students in Grade K through 10. In the 2010 through 2011 school-wide project, all students—regardless of socioeconomic status—were eligible to be served in the various program offerings. The school district’s 2010 through 2011 Title I reading program, in particular,
served 457 (22% of total population) students, ranging from Grades K through 6, at the elementary level. For the purpose of clarification, the elementary schools within this small-sized urban school district are made up of Grades K through 6—with 7 of the 11 elementary schools participating in the Universal Pre-kindergarten Program. Students were chosen for Title I reading services (reading intervention) based on standardized reading assessment results, as prescribed by the New York State Education Department, and teacher recommendations. Students who scored two or more grade levels below their “on-level” counterparts, as measured by the May 2010 NYSED ELA examination and normed assessments (district prescribed), were mandated to receive Title I reading services during the 2010 through 2011 school year.

Purpose of Study

Based on the urgency to address the immediate needs and deficiencies of struggling readers in urban communities throughout the United States, the purpose of this mixed-methods research was to examine the effectiveness of a district-adopted reading intervention program (My Sidewalks) to improve pre-adolescent students’ reading skills and their attitudes toward reading academic and recreational texts. Reading skills were measured by the NYSED ELA and GRADE. Students’ reading attitudes were measured by the ERAS. The mixed-methods study has answered the following research questions:

1. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program prove successful in improving the reading skills Grade 5 struggling readers as measured by GRADE Assessment Forms A and B using the NCE, GE, and GSV?

2. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program accelerate Grade 5 struggling readers to read on grade level as measured by GRADE GE score?
3. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading academic texts?

4. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention Program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading recreational texts?

**Research Participants (Purposive)**

Historically, this city determined social status based on one’s north or south regional zip code—north sector being more affluent. The various ethnic subgroups, socioeconomic status, and family structure of this mid-sized community are represented in the overall general findings of this study.

For this study, the potential research participants were 49 Grade 5 students who read two grade levels below their “on-level” counterparts. These students participated in a 2010-2011 Title I reading program—*My Sidewalks*—and during that time, received the district-adopted reading intervention program as their treatment to address specific reading deficiencies. The students represented 7 of the district’s 11 elementary schools.

To offer additional perspective and uniqueness about the participating schools, Tables 3.2 through 3.8 provide an individual school building profile of each of the seven elementary schools. Table 3.2 illustrates the demographic profile of students in School A. School A is located in the northwestern sector of this small-sized urban school district. Despite School A’s substantial Free or Reduced Lunch population, this school demonstrated a 90% pass rate on the NYSED ELA for current Grade 5 students.
Table 3.2

Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School A (n = 550)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-FRL</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner (ELL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ELL</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-IEP</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 illustrates the demographic profile of students in School B. School B is located in the southwestern sector of this small-sized urban school district. With African Americans being the predominate subgroup, School B has a large Free or Reduced Lunch population. This school demonstrated a 30% pass rate on the New York State English Language Arts for current Grade 5 students.
Table 3.3

Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School B (n = 497)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-FRL</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner (ELL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ELL</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-IEP</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 illustrates the demographic profile of students in School C. School C is located in the northwestern sector of this small-sized urban school district. Historically, schools in the northern sector of this small-sized urban school district, perform on or above State level mean on standardized State assessments. School C has a large Free or Reduced population, with 26% of its population as second language learners and 13% of its population receiving special education services. This school demonstrated a 27% pass rate on the New York State English Language Arts for current Grade 5 students.
Table 3.4

*Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School C (n = 366)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-FRL</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner (ELL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ELL</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-IEP</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5 illustrates the demographic profile of students in School D. School D is located in the southeastern sector of this small-sized urban school district. School D is predominantly African American, with 80% of its population receiving Free or Reduced Lunch. This school demonstrated a 55% pass rate on the New York State English Language Arts for current Grade 5 students.
Table 3.5

*Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School D (n = 365)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-FRL</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner (ELL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ELL</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-IEP</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6 illustrates the demographic profile of students in School E. School E is located in the southwestern sector of this small-sized urban school district. With African Americans as the predominant population, 89% of the student body receives Free or Reduced Lunch. This school demonstrated a 43% pass rate on the New York State English Language Arts for current Grade 5 students.
Table 3.6  

*Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School E (n= 357)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-FR</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner (ELL)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ELL</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-IEP</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7 illustrates the demographic profile of students in School F. School F is located in the northeastern sector of this small-sized urban school district. With 44% of the population African American and 40% White/Caucasian, 28% of the student body receives Free or Reduced Lunch. This school demonstrated a 60% pass rate on the New York State English Language Arts for current Grade 5 students.
Table 3.7

Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School F (n = 319)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-FRL</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner (ELL)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ELL</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-IEP</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8 illustrates the demographic profile of students in School G. School G is located in the northeastern sector of this small-sized urban school district. Unique to this region of the small-sized urban city, 65% of the student body receives Free or Reduced Lunch; 23% of the population receives special education services. This school demonstrated a 74% pass rate on the New York State English Language Arts for current Grade 5 students.
Table 3.8

Demographic Profile by Participating School Building School G (n = 315)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<td>Non-FRL</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-ELL</td>
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<td>94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-IEP</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.9 illustrates the demographic profile of the purposive 49 Grade 5 study participants. This data is representative of the seven schools identified for this mixed methods study.
Table 3.9

Demographic Profile of Participants (n = 49)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Participants</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-FRL</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Language Learner (ELL)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ELL</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-IEP</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students were identified for this study based on their results from multiple reading assessments: 2010 New York State English Language Arts Grade 4, Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA 2) and Reading Street Baseline Reading Assessment.

In order to address the literacy needs of its Grade 5 struggling readers population, the school district has employed specific guidelines for the admission of students into Title 1 reading classes. Figure 3.1 illustrates the process for how students are recommended, admitted, monitored and discharged from Title I reading classes.
For large populations, it is more efficient to draw a sample instead of conducting a census (Patten, 2009). Due to the limitation of time within this accelerated doctoral program, the tangible universe consists of seven elementary schools, within a small-sized urban school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State. Using stratified random sampling—dividing total school population into strata (north and south)—the sample size is illustrative and provides a general, broad analysis of the larger fifth-grade population within this district.
**Anonymity vs. Confidentiality**

Anonymity exists when no one—including the researcher—can relate a participant’s identity to any information pertaining to the project (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005). Confidentiality exists when only the researcher is aware of the participants’ identities and has promised not to reveal those identities in published or presented work (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005). This researcher used confidential protocols when collecting data. The researcher in this study asked participants to write their name on the survey and assessment booklet for the purpose of designating an identification number. Any recorded or published data referenced to participants was done so using the assigned identification number. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants in this study.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

To measure reading, one needs to examine what is a developmentally appropriate activity for a student at each stage of the process. It is important to note that the term developmentally appropriate in the context of learning to read refers to using appropriate instructional strategies at appropriate stages of the process.

It was the goal of this researcher to commence data collection in October of 2010. After successful completion of the dissertation proposal process on August 17, 2010, permission to conduct this mixed methods study was requested August 26, 2010 (Appendix A) and granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St John Fisher College on September 10, 2010 (Appendix B). Once permission was granted from the school district, the researcher sought permission from IRB to conduct this action research within seven elementary schools over a 10-month period. Moreover, parent, teacher, and student permission were solicited. Teachers were asked to read, sign, and return the
consent form (Appendix C); parents received an overview about the research and were asked to sign a form only if they wish for their child to decline participation (Appendix D); and after parent consent forms were signed and collected, students read and signed an assent form (Appendix E).

For this program evaluation, the researcher reported findings in the form of triangulation. This form of data reporting was achieved via observations/interviews, survey, and norm-reference assessments. “By combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements” (Berg, 2007, p. 5). The researcher collected qualitative and quantitative student data by (a) Survey: ERAS (Appendix F & G); (b) Observations: anecdotal records and reading behavioral checklist (Appendix H) and teacher interview (Appendix I); (c) random selection of archived data: report cards, interest inventories, Title I Reading Progress Report; and (d) reading assessments: NYSED ELA and GRADE Assessment (Appendix J).

**Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS).** The recent emphasis on enhanced reading proficiency has often ignored the important role played by students’ attitudes in the process of becoming literate. Wixson and Lipson (2007) acknowledge that the students’ attitudes toward reading are a central factor affecting reading performance. In 1762, the philosopher Rousseau speculated that any method of teaching reading would suffice given adequate motivation on the part of the learner (McKenna & Kear, 1990). The focus of recent research and development in reading assessment has been comprehension rather than attitude. The researcher’s purpose for using a survey was to
obtain quantitative information about the pre-adolescent and his/her attitude toward recreational and academic reading. The Grade 5 students identified for this study received an attitudinal survey at the beginning (Fall 2010) and end of the study (Spring 2011). Students completed the ERAS designed by McKenna & Kear (1990).

A test is said to be reliable if it yields consistent results (Patten, 2009). Validity refers to how well the test measures what it says it is measuring (Crocker, 1986). Reliability as well as evidence of validity of the ERAS were based on a national sample. A prototype of this instrument was administered to 499 elementary students in a mid-sized Midwestern school district. The final item sets (recreational and academic) were selected on the basis of inter-item correlation coefficients. The revised instrument was later administered to a national sample of over 18,000 students in Grades 1–6 (Sachmann, 1991).

The ERAS, also known as the Garfield Test, was developed to be applicable to children in Grades 1 through 6. Although this survey provides quantitative estimates of two important aspects of students’ attitudes toward reading (recreational and academic), the ERAS does little to identify the causes of poor attitudes nor does it suggest instructional techniques that are likely to improve such attitudes (Sachmann, 1991). Structured teacher interview and observations were used to support student response to the ERAS and explore further the nature, strength and origins of their values and beliefs. In an effort to measure attitudinal changes during the study period, the ERAS was administered during the Fall of 2010 (pre-test) and again in Spring 2011 (post-test). The reading specialists served as the administrators of such assessment, thus made them the gatekeepers of this portion of the research.
Using pictorial anchors, students responded to the ERAS by circling the cartoon character Garfield that represents how they feel about a specific item. Each item on the survey was given a Likert score from 1 to 4, ranging from the happiest Garfield on the far left to a very upset Garfield on the far right. On the left, Garfield has his four paws in the air and a large smile on his face. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Garfield is scowling, with limbs tensed at his side and paws clenched. Example questions are: “How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?”; “How do you feel about spending free time reading?”; and “How do you feel when it’s time for reading class?” The ERAS consists of 20 questions and was administered to the entire class in less than 30 minutes.

As a cross-reference, the researcher maintained anecdotal notes obtained through classroom observations. The observation provided the researcher with more depth and understanding into students’ attitudes and behaviors toward reading. Furthermore, observations provided further validity to the overall study. The anecdotal notes also included information about the scripted curriculum, the involvement of the students and comments students made in class. Additionally, the anecdotal notes were used to validate and/or compare the data obtained from the surveys, but not used in the reporting of findings.

The use of records and archived data further strengthened the overall research and provided qualitative data. During the study period, this researcher randomly collected various student worksheets used in the Title I Reading class, school schedule as well as Title I reading program schedule, Title I reading progress report, student report card, parent permission forms for Title I placement, teacher lesson plans/lesson logs and
student attendance data. Such documents served crucial in understanding the reading
histories of the participants and the intensity of the reading intervention treatment.
Although such data points were considered, the results of the aforementioned reports are
not included in the overall findings.

**Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE).** The Group
Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), created by Kathleen Williams
(2001) is a norm-referenced diagnostic reading assessment that is widely used to
determine which reading strategies students (Pre-Kindergarten–Grade 12) have mastered.
Each GRADE level contains multiple untimed subtests. Each subtest contains questions
or items designed to measure specific skills that are developmentally appropriate for that
level. The GRADE assessment Level 5, itself, provides formative information using the
following cognitive elements: listening comprehension, word meaning/vocabulary,
sentence comprehension, and passage comprehension. This specific test level is designed
for students who have been exposed to basic reading instruction and are using reading to
expand their vocabularies, language skills and general knowledge. For the purpose of
this research, the assessment was given to the entire class of students over a course of two
days. The researcher obtained this information within the first two weeks of the reading
intervention program and at the 30-week benchmark of the program. For this purpose,
GRADE Assessment Form A was administered in Fall 2010, Form B in Spring 2011.
The two forms at each GRADE level are parallel in content and difficulty (Williams,
2001).

Raw scores (RS) from GRADE subtests can be converted to stanines. Composite
and total test raw scores can be converted to standard scores, percentiles, (NCE), Grade
Equivalents (GE) and Growth Scale Values (GSV) (Williams, 2001). NCEs range from 1 to 99, with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 21.06. NCEs are based on percentiles but have been statistically converted to an equal-interval scale of measurement. A grade-equivalent (GE) score is the grade at which a particular raw score is the median (or at the 50th percentile). GE scores are presented in tenths of a grade. In other words, a GE score of 5.0 refers to a median performance for beginning fifth grade, whereas a 5.9 grade equivalent would indicate a median performance at the end of fifth grade. GSVs provide a means for tracking growth across GRADE levels or from form to form (i.e., Form A and Form B). Using GSVs, reading growth can be tracked within a given school year or over the course of multiple years. For this research GSV tracked reading growth within the various subtests over the course of one school year, more specifically a 30-week span.

This researcher used various data points to compare outcomes and measure reading growth during this study period. Such data are illustrated in Chapter 4 through various charts and graphs. GRADE Form A identified specific strengths and weaknesses in the subscale of vocabulary, inferential passage comprehension and sentence comprehension, and listening comprehension. GRADE Form B was used to determine the effectiveness of, or ineffectiveness, of the reading intervention program in addressing noted deficiencies or improving the noted strengths. The same subscales were measured in both forms of the GRADE Assessment.

To ensure GRADE purports the outcomes and measurements that it claims, 132 reliabilities were reported for all levels. Ninety-nine are in the range of .95 to.99, making the reliabilities quite high (Boehm, 2001). Moreover, there was a high correlation.
between Form A and Form B, indicating there is uniformity of measurement at all levels (Boehm, 2001). It is important to note that one reliability was below .90 (.89).

Since reading tests are often used for various purposes, several types of validity were used to tell how well the test measures what it claims it is measuring. Therefore, content validity, construct validity and Criterion-related were employed. This information provided substantial evidence that GRADE measures what it purports to measures and that appropriate inferences for test results can be made (Boehm, 2001).

**Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

**Pilot study of instrumentation.** After completing a six-week pilot study of the ERAS survey, the researcher re-assessed the instrument to validate its usefulness in this program evaluation. The pilot study was conducted at a 2010 literacy-based summer program within the Lower Hudson Region of New York State. Students of similar demographics of the experimental sample responded to the ERAS in a pre- and post-test format (Appendix K). This survey was administered at the start of the program in July of 2010 to obtain information about students’ attitudes toward reading academic and recreational texts. On the last day of the summer program, ERAS was administered to the same sample of 29 fourth graders. The data shows that the literacy-based summer program had no direct impact on students’ attitudes toward reading academic and recreational texts. In fact, the data illustrates there was a decline in their attitudes on both subscales.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

During the actual study period, this researcher collected data over a 30-week period. In the event this researcher required additional time for data collection, this
process could have expanded by five weeks—bringing the data collection period to a total of 35 weeks.

The process of analysis can occur simultaneously with data collection by continual reflection on what is being learned (Patten, 2009). For this study, the researcher analyzed qualitative data (observations and interview responses) by looking for patterns systematically (Berg, 2007). Data was grouped, then conceptualized by similar patterns or characteristics. The researcher compared data by examining similarities and differences. The patterns were coded based on similar concepts, key words and similar sentence responses. Finally, the experiences of the participants were written into a narrative description, using direct quotations. Creswell and Plano (2007) described this final process as the “essential structure of their experiences,” a narrative account of “what they experienced and how they experienced it” (p. 223). Direct quotations, as qualitative findings, corroborated the quantitative results.

In the quantitative component of the research, descriptive statistics was used to summarize data about the purposive participants’ performance, after receiving the treatment, using the GRADE Assessment. Furthermore, the quantitative data (pre-test) was used to identify the reading deficiencies among each participant and common threads found in the Grade 5 struggling reader—categorized by NCE, GSV, and GE. Toward the end of the study, such data was compared to post-test results to examine the effectiveness of the scripted reading intervention program. Additionally, the composite results of the ERAS were categorized by academic and recreational reading to measure attitudinal improvement of the 49 participants.
Descriptive statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Version 19 software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Mean, standard deviations, gain and effect size were computed for each variable. Paired t-tests were used to identify the mean differences between GRADE Assessment Form A and Form B and ERAS Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 test administration in order to answer the four research questions:

1. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program prove successful in improving the reading skills of Grade 5 struggling readers as measured by GRADE Assessment Forms A and B using the NCE, GE, and GSV?

2. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program accelerate Grade 5 struggling readers to read on grade level as measured by GRADE GE score?

3. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading academic texts?

4. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention Program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading recreational texts?

Statistical significance was considered to be demonstrated by probability values greater than or equal to .05. The effect size was calculated to determine the power of the finding. Furthermore, effect sizes accounted for the correlation of GRADE Form A and GRADE Form B scores and were calculated using a modified Cohen’s $d$ (Morris & DeShon, 2002). Cohen labeled an effect size small if $d = .20$. Cohen suggested large magnitudes of effects were $d = .80$. Medium-sized effects were placed between these two extremes, that is $d = .50$. Some areas, such as education, are likely to have smaller effect sizes than other areas (Cohen, 1998).
Each research question will address the various data collection methods. Table 3.10 provides information on how the research questions will be addressed.
Table 3.10

*Data Collection Method*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what degree does <em>My Sidewalks</em> Reading Intervention program prove successful in improving the reading skills of Grade 5 struggling readers as measured by GRADE Assessment Forms A and B, using the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE), Grade Equivalent (GE) and Growth Scale Value (GSV)?</td>
<td>GRADE Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what degree does <em>My Sidewalks</em> Reading Intervention program accelerate Grade 5 struggling readers to read on grade level as measured by GRADE Assessment Grade Equivalent (GE) score?</td>
<td>GRADE Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what degree does <em>My Sidewalks</em> Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading academic texts?</td>
<td>ERAS Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what degree does <em>My Sidewalks</em> Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading recreational texts?</td>
<td>ERAS Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monitoring and Documenting Project Activities

A researcher’s journal and Microsoft Word 2007 document files were used to monitor and document the various research activities. The journal provided reflective and descriptive information. This information served useful to inform and modify decisions or methods relevant to the program evaluation. Additionally, the researcher created a master matrix of all information gathered and activities completed. This matrix included pertinent information (i.e., date, time, method, parties involved, etc.) about the activity for the purpose of locating for future use and categorization. Additionally, all interviews will be audio-taped, using high quality equipment. All student survey sheets and assessment reporting sheets were destroyed at the completion of this study.

Summary

Over the course of 30 weeks, the researcher collected data for this action research study through pre and post standardized assessment, pre- and post-reading attitudinal survey and classroom observations/interview. The researcher’s role was as an onlooker, because the reading specialists served as gatekeepers and administrators of all assessments and surveys. Data analysis was ongoing (reflective). Although not included in the discussion of findings, observations were required in order to obtain the information necessary to evaluate the impact of the reading intervention program. Observational notes and statistical data were inputted in Microsoft Word, IBM SPSS Version 19, coded and categorized, then analyzed by themes. At the end of the study, the researcher triangulated the data to ensure validity and reliability.
Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

During the 2010-2011 school year, 457 students with reading difficulties attended eleven elementary schools in this small-sized urban school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State. Of that group, 384 (84%) of those 457 students received My Sidewalks Reading Intervention as their supplemental reading intervention program for 30-35 weeks. The remaining 73 students (16%), all of whom are sixth graders, received a different program as their treatment. It is important to note, My Sidewalks is a kindergarten through Grade 5 initiative. Of the 384 students, 71 Grade 5 students received My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program for the 2010-2011 school year. Of that group, 49 Grade 5 students participated in this study from October 2010 through June 2011, and it is their existing data that were considered for this study.

The purpose of this mixed methods research was to examine the effectiveness of a district-adopted reading intervention program [My Sidewalks] to improve pre-adolescent students’ reading skills and improve students’ positive attitudes toward academic and recreational reading. Data were collected and analyzed through Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) and interview. The mixed methods study has answered the following four research questions:
1. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program prove successful in improving the reading skills of Grade 5 struggling readers as measured by GRADE Assessment Forms A and B using the NCE, GE, and GSV?

2. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program accelerate Grade 5 struggling readers to read on grade level as measured by GRADE GE score?

3. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading academic texts?

4. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading recreational texts?

**Data Analysis and Findings**

**Attrition/mortality.** The study began with 53 students representing seven of the eleven elementary schools located within the small-sized urban school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State. At the midpoint of this school district’s Title I reading program, a progress monitoring tool, furnished by the school district, was administered to measure reading growth and allow for students who progress satisfactorily to return to their core reading class as such students have demonstrated that they are prepared to engage in on-grade-level reading activities alongside of their on-grade-level peers. In the case of this study, four of the original 53 (7.5%) students demonstrated acceleration at the midpoint of this reading intervention treatment and were exempted from the reading program, thus providing a mortality rate of $n = 4$. Any pre-test data for these students were stored for later reference and were not included in the findings presented in this study.
Cohen’s benchmarks (interpretation of effect sizes). Cohen (1998) attempted to address the issue of interpreting effect size estimates relative to the other effect sizes. He suggested some general definitions for small, medium and large effect sizes in the social sciences. However, Cohen chose these quantities to reflect the typical effect sizes encountered in the behavioral sciences as a whole. Cohen labeled an effect size small if $d=.20$. Cohen suggested large magnitudes of effects were $d=.80$. Medium-sized effects were placed between these two extremes, that is $d=.50$. Areas, like education, are likely to have smaller effect sizes than other areas.

**Research Question 1.** To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program prove successful in improving the reading skills of Grade 5 struggling readers as measured by GRADE Assessment Forms A and B using the NCE, GE, and GSV? The results of GRADE were presented in four different formats: Raw Score (RS), Grade Equivalent (GE), Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) and Growth Scale Value (GSV). Although the results were presented in such format, this researcher reported findings using the following formats: GE, NCE and GSV as raw scores do not lend any significance to the nature of this study. Raw scores on the GRADE subtests cannot be interpreted directly. Therefore, raw scores need to be converted to a form, normative or derived scores that will have uniform meaning from grade to grade or form to form.

The GRADE Form A was administered to participants in the Fall of 2010; the GRADE Form B was administered in the Spring of 2011 to all participants (n=49). For each form of the examination, participants were assessed on their ability to respond correctly to questions based on reading comprehension (sentence comprehension and passage comprehension), vocabulary and listening comprehension.
Quantitative findings (reading comprehension). Three of the four GRADE subscales and the three GRADE total scores indicated significant gains from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011. Although participants demonstrated gains in the listening comprehension subscale, the results were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

Table 4.1 illustrates that Spring 2011 mean results were statistically significant at the p-value of <.001 in the subscale of sentence comprehension (Fall 2010 \( M = 8.3 \); Spring 2011 \( M = 11.3 \)). Passage comprehension results were statistically significant (Fall 2010 \( M = 12.6 \); Spring 2011 \( M = 16.6 \)). The composite score provides a combined analysis of sentence comprehension and passage comprehension. Participants also demonstrated significant grade equivalent growth. Fall 2010 results indicate that participants performed at 3.6 grade equivalent—more specifically, midyear grade 3 equivalent. The effect size, according to the Morris and DeShon (2002) analysis was 0.81—a significant growth level. At the end of this treatment period, Spring 2011, participants increased their comprehension skills to a 4.7 grade equivalent score—more specifically, Grade 4 plus 7 months.
Table 4.1

*Comprehension Growth* (n = 49)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Spring 2011</th>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>(d_{MD})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Comp.</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage Comp.</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp. Composite Raw Score</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp. Composite GE</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>5.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp. Composite NCE</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \(d_{MD}\) = Morris & DeShon’s (2002) \(d\). Comp. = Comprehension.

*Qualitative findings* (*reading comprehension*). Seven of the seven interventionists support the quantitative results for reading comprehension. For example, Ms. Haywood (pseudonym) supports the statistical findings for reading comprehension by stating, “It’s no wonder my students’ reading comprehension skills soared. I am not surprised that many are reading close to or even on-grade level. The program is designed so that reading teachers will teach the right skills at the right time.”

To clarify, the reading intervention program is sequenced to provide lessons and activities in specific subskills to meet the requirements of the 2005 New York Core Curriculum in English Language Arts. Each *My Sidewalks* lesson for Grade 5 leads to the fulfillment of what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of Grade 5 as prescribed by the New York State Education Department (2005).
**Quantitative findings (vocabulary).** Participants demonstrated statistically significant growth in the subscale of vocabulary. In the Fall of 2010, participants performed at a GE of 4.4, indicating a midyear fourth grade level. As illustrated in Table 4.2, at the end of the treatment, *My Sidewalks*, participants demonstrated a growth by 1.1 grade level (Spring 2011 mean=5.5), thus performed at mid-year fifth grade level.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Spring 2011</th>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>$d_{MD}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary GE</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary NCE</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $d_{MD}$ = Morris & DeShon’s (2002) d.*

**Qualitative findings (vocabulary).** To corroborate the quantitative findings for vocabulary, 7 out of 7 interventionists expressed an overall improvement in vocabulary development in the areas of use and deciphering. To illustrate, one interventionist, Ms. Glatt (pseudonym), asserts, “My students were reluctant to engage in vocabulary activities. On most days, they would reach for the dictionary to define key vocabulary words within the program’s reading selections. By January, I found my reading students enjoying the activities that ask them to define vocabulary words using context clues. The program is rich in vocabulary development and gives my students a sense of independence they probably would not receive in their daily basal text.” Another
interventionist, Ms. Pullici (pseudonym), supports the aforementioned point by stating, “When you teach kids the context in which to interact with grade-level vocabulary, reading becomes a non-event. The My Sidewalks group enjoyed reading the stories aloud and within their peer groups once they overcame the fear of reading complicated vocabulary.”

**Quantitative findings (total test).** The total test score provides NCE and GSV for the entire test as a composite result. Normal Curve Equivalent and Growth Scale Value illustrates that participants, as a whole, demonstrated an overall statistically significant gain from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011 (NCE Fall 2010 $M = 33.0$; NCE Spring 2011 $M = 43.1$; GSV Fall 2010 $M = 433.4$, GSV Spring 2011 $M = 449.8$). Such findings are highlighted in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

**Total Test Score (n = 49)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2011</th>
<th></th>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>$d_{MD}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Test</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Test NCE</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Test GSV</td>
<td>433.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>449.8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $d_{MD}$ = Morris & DeShon’s (2002) $d$.*

**Quantitative findings (listening).** The listening comprehension items require students to listen to and understand orally presented, connected speech and to choose one of four pictures that best corresponds to what was read by the interventionist. This specific subtest purports to measure linguistic comprehension without printed cues.
Although there were no statistically significant gains from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011 at $p = .01$ and $p = .05$ in the subscale of listening comprehension, it is important to report that the paired t-tailed results indicated a 90% probability ($p = .10$), which supports substantial practical gains in sentence and passage comprehension, although not listening comprehension.

Table 4.4

*Listening Comprehension Growth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Spring 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Comprehension</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $d_{MD} =$ Morris & DeShon’s (2002) $d$.*

**Qualitative findings (listening).** Seven out of seven interventionists report that listening comprehension remains an area of weakness for their students. To uphold this statistic, one interventionist, Ms. Sidell (pseudonym) affirms, “Students tend to struggle in this area. We notice as early as 2nd grade that listening comprehension, notetaking and recalling are problematic for our students – and it shows on state assessments. Students do not always process what they hear, therefore they don’t visualize nor make connections with text.” Mr. LaSalle confirms this notion by stating, “The program does not offer as many opportunities to practice listening skills as I would like. Children should be engaged in listening activities in their core reading and supplemental classes daily. The more they practice, the better listeners they’ll become.”
Research Question 2. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program accelerate Grade 5 struggling readers to read on grade level as measured by GRADE Grade Equivalent (GE) score?

Quantitative findings (comprehension composite). The reading intervention program, My Sidewalks, purports to accelerate deficient readers’ reading level to end of year grade level by the end of the intervention period, which is a 30-week period. In the case of this study, My Sidewalks should increase students’ reading level to a GE score of 5.9 by the end of the treatment period. A GE score of 5.9 is equivalent to an end of school year fifth grade student (Grade 5 plus 9 months). The program is intended for students who read at least two grade levels below their on-level counterparts. The program, itself, purports to accelerate students’ reading level by two years within a given school year, thus making the program’s reading benchmark of 5.9.

Although the comprehension gains were statistically significant as reported in Table 4.1, the participants did not meet the goal of the program, which is GE score of 5.9 at the end of the treatment period in the area of comprehension. As illustrated in Figure 4.1, at the end of the treatment period, participants earned a GE score of 4.7. It is worthy to note that participants, in fact, increased their reading comprehension abilities by 1 year and 1 month. This specific population of students, through this reading intervention program, has reversed the negative trends of continuous reading deficiencies as this program provided them the opportunity to make gains. With sustained effort and continued use of this program, their trajectory for reaching or exceeding grade level reading is promising.
As shown in Figure 4.2, participants made significant gains in the area of vocabulary. As previously reported in Table 4.2, students increased their vocabulary development by 1 year and 1 month, (Fall 2010 GE score of 4.4; Spring 2011 GE score of 5.5), nearly reaching the program’s benchmark score of GE 5.9. The noteworthy gains place the participants on a route to sustain their significant gain as vocabulary is one of the most essential components of successful reading comprehension and reading development. This statistical trajectory offers promise to a group of students whose paths from early elementary results can be interpreted as despairing.
Figure 4.3 indicates that students did not reach the program’s benchmark score of GE 5.9 in the subscale of listening comprehension. It is significant to report that students demonstrated a slight increase of 25% (4 months) in this area (Fall 2010 GE score of =3.8, Spring 2011 GE score of =4.2).
Research Question 3. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program improve students’ attitudes toward reading academic texts?

Quantitative findings (attitudes toward academic reading). In order to measure attitudes toward reading academic text, the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) was administered in the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 of the study period. Both test administration periods served as pre- and post-tests to measure improved positive attitudes. The ERAS data indicates that the academic subscale and total score did not demonstrate significant growth during the study period. It is worthy to note that a slight mean gain was achieved in positive attitude towards academic reading, but not statistically significant enough to report (gain=0.3).
Table 4.5

*ERAS Data Fall 2010 to Spring 2011: Academic Reading (n = 49)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Fall 2010 M</th>
<th>Fall 2010 SD</th>
<th>Spring 2011 M</th>
<th>Spring 2011 SD</th>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d&lt;sub&gt;MD&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Reading</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. d<sub>MD</sub> = Morris & DeShon’s (2002) d.*

**Qualitative findings (attitudes toward academic reading).** During the teacher interviews, this researcher was able to glean a sense of support of the statistical data regarding attitudes toward reading academic texts. Ms. Peters (pseudonym), a 22-year veteran reading teacher, believes that changing the attitudes of academic reading requires more than a year. She says, “Many of our children lose the desire to enjoy academic reading at their first experience with failure and frustration with sophisticated, multisyllabic vocabulary words and expository content. It’s usually a downward spiral that begins in grade 3—when students are expected to make meaning from text. Many do not have the necessary prerequisites such as prior knowledge and previous experiences to fully understand what they read. In this case—like many of our students—it takes at least two years to foster a love for reading academic text.”

**Research Question 4.** To what degree does *My Sidewalks Reading Intervention Program* improve students’ attitudes toward reading recreational texts?

**Quantitative findings (attitudes toward recreational reading).** As shown in Table 4.6, the ERAS data indicates that recreational subscale and total score demonstrated significant improvement in attitude towards recreational reading during the study period (Fall mean=25.6; Spring mean=27.6).
Table 4.6

*ERAS Data Fall to Spring: Recreational Reading (n = 49)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Fall 2010 M</th>
<th>Fall 2010 SD</th>
<th>Spring 2011 M</th>
<th>Spring 2011 SD</th>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d_{MD}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recreational Reading</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $d_{MD} = $ Morris & DeShon’s (2002) $d$.

Also worthy to note, as shown in Table 4.7, there was an educationally meaningful trend when looking at gender gains in the subscale of recreational reading (trend: $p \geq .05$ and $p < .10$). On average, males demonstrated a 1.7 point higher gain score than females on ERAS Recreational subscale from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011; Gain score: 3.0 (males) and 1.3 (females), $t = 2.01$, $p = .05$, Cohen’s effect size ($d_c$) = .57.

General linear models with gain score as the dependent variable and gender as the independent factor were used to check for differences between the gender groups. Since this demographic comparison looked at independent groups, unmodified Cohen’s effect sizes were calculated. Note that some areas, like education, are likely to have smaller effect sizes than other areas (Cohen, 1998).
Table 4.7

*ERAS Mean Gain by Gender: Recreational Reading (n = 49)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Gain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* †p (≥ .05 and < .10) considered practically significant. Superscript t = statistical trend. d_W = Cohen’s (1998) d.

**Qualitative findings (attitudes toward recreational reading).** Seven out of seven interventionists agree that the reading intervention program had a positive impact on students’ attitudes toward self-selected, recreational reading material. For the purpose of clarity, self-selected reading is self-initiated reading activities that are selected by students. To illustrate this belief regarding the statistical findings, Mr. LaSalle asserts, “My students enter the reading room and immediately go to the ‘SS’ (self-select reading) table. I keep high-interest, motivational books there. Students, um, um, can sometimes get bored in the reading room [pause]. When I see that they are bored or become frustrated, I ask that they go to the ‘SS’ table. I sometimes use the SS table as an incentive for finishing their work on *My Sidewalks*. They no longer need cues to go the SS table... They just go. I think they love it.”

It is important to point out that the reading intervention program has a handsome array of reading passages that are known to be appealing to male audiences (Tatum, 2004). Such topics as deadly weather, archaeology, cartooning, science and historical adventures are found in the Grade 5 reading intervention program. These genres of
reading materials may explain why boys demonstrated a significantly higher gain score than their female counterparts in the area of recreational reading. Additionally, Title I reading teachers purchased numerous leisurely reading materials specifically geared toward male readers in the previous year. Such reading materials are included in teachers’ classroom library or self-selected reading area.

Summary of Results

In conclusion, Chapter 4 presented the results of the reading intervention research study to answer four research questions:

1. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program prove successful in improving the reading skills of Grade 5 struggling readers as measured by GRADE Assessment Forms A and B using Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE), Grade Equivalent (GE) and Growth Scale Value (GSV)?

Three of the four GRADE subscales and the three GRADE total scores indicated significant gains over the 30-week treatment period, from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011:

- Sentence comprehension mean results were statistically significant (Fall 2010 $M = 8.3$; Spring 2011 $M = 11.3$).
- Passage comprehension results were statistically significant (Fall $M = 12.6$; Spring $M = 16.6$).
- Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) and Growth Scale Value (GSV) show that participants, as a whole, demonstrated an overall significant gain from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011 (NCE Fall $M = 33.0$; NCE Spring $M = 43.1$; GSV Fall $M = 433.4$, GSV Spring $M = 449.8$).
Participants demonstrated significant grade equivalent growth. Fall 2010 results indicate that participants performed at 3.6 grade equivalent—more specifically, midyear Grade 3 equivalent (Grade 3 plus 6 months). At the end of the treatment period, Spring 2011, participants increased their composite comprehension skills to 4.7 grade equivalent—more specifically, Grade 4 plus 7 months.

Participants demonstrated statistically significant growth in the subscale of vocabulary. In the Fall of 2010, participants performed at a GE score of 4.4, indicating a midyear fourth-grade level. At the end of the treatment, participants demonstrated a growth of 1.1 grade level, bringing their Spring mean score to 5.5, thus performed at mid-year fifth-grade level.

Although there were no statistically significant gains from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011 in the subscale of listening comprehension, it is worthy to report that the paired t-test results indicate p-value=.10 rate, which supports practical significant gains in the listening comprehension subscale.

2. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program accelerate Grade 5 struggling readers to read on grade level as measured by GRADE Assessment GE score?

Although the gains were statistically significant, the participants did not meet the goal of the program, which is a GE score of 5.9 at the end of the treatment period. A GE score of 5.9 is equivalent to end of year fifth grade (Grade 5 plus 9 months). The results are as follows:
Participants increased their reading comprehension abilities by 1 year and 1 month (Spring 2011 GE score of 4.7).

Participants increased their vocabulary development by 1 year and 1 month (Spring 2011 GE score of 5.5), nearly reaching the program’s benchmark of GE score of 5.9.

Participants did not reach the program’s benchmark of GE score of 5.9 in the subscale of listening comprehension. It is significant to report, however, that participants demonstrated a slight increase of 25% (4 months) in this area (Fall 2010 GE = 3.8, Spring 2011 GE = 4.2).

3. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading academic texts?

The ERAS was administered in the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 of the study period to measure positive attitudinal changes toward academic reading. The ERAS data indicates that the academic subscale and total score did not demonstrate significant growth during the study period. It is worthy to note that a slight mean gain was achieved in positive attitudes toward academic reading, but not statistically significant enough to report (gain = 0.3).

4. To what degree does My Sidewalks Reading intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading recreational texts?

The ERAS data revealed that recreational subscale and total score demonstrated statistically significant growth during the study period (Fall $M = 25.6$; Spring $M = 27.6$). Also emerged from this finding was an educationally meaningful trend when looking at gender (trend: $p > 0.05$ and $p < 0.10$). On average, boys demonstrated a 1.7 point higher gain
score than girls on ERAS Recreational subscale from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011; Gain score: 3.0 (males) and 1.3 (females), \( t = 2.01, p = .05 \), Cohen’s effect size \((d_c) = .57\).  

A full discussion of the research findings, including study conclusions and implications are included in Chapter 5. This research is discussed within the context of best practices for providing and monitoring effective reading instruction for pre-adolescent students who struggle with reading. Chapter 5 also includes recommendations for future research and policy as it relates to the struggling reader dilemma.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter summarizes the findings of the research study on the effectiveness of a reading intervention program for pre-adolescent struggling readers by drawing conclusions related to the four research questions, examining the implications and making recommendations for further research and practices in the field of education. The findings in this study will prove beneficial to educators, more specifically educational leaders, who may not be formally trained in literacy development, implementation, program evaluation and literacy leadership (Zipperer, Worley & Sisson, Said, 2002). Considering the findings extracted from Group Reading and Assessment Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) and teacher interview, the questions under investigation in this study included:

1. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program prove successful in improving the reading skills of Grade 5 struggling readers as measured by GRADE Assessment Forms A and B using the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE), Grade Equivalent (GE) and Growth Scale Value (GSV)?

2. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program accelerate Grade 5 struggling readers to read on grade level as measured by GRADE GE score?

3. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading academic texts?

4. To what degree does *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention Program improve students’ positive attitudes toward reading recreational texts?
The investigation identified 49 students, within a small-sized urban school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York State, with reading deficiencies in Grade 5 who received Tier II/Tier III instruction using *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program during the 2010-2011 school year. For the purpose of clarity regarding this research, reading deficient students are Grade 5 students who read two grade levels below their on-level counterparts. It was the intent of this program to increase students’ reading grade equivalent to 5.9 (end of year fifth grade; grade five plus nine months) by the end of the treatment period and increase students’ overall reading abilities in the areas of comprehension, vocabulary and listening. Furthermore, this study examined the program’s ability to improve students’ positive attitudes toward academic and recreational reading.

**Implications of Findings**

Policymakers have referred to the literacy problems facing American students as a crisis (Conley & Hinchman, 2004). To respond to the crisis, the 2009 federal budget included $200 million to support the *Striving Readers* initiative in an effort to improve reading skills of older students who struggle with reading (White House Press Release, 2010). There is an expectation that all American students will be academically and socially prepared to compete in the global society and become college and career ready as they graduate from high school.

Reading difficulty is particularly acute in schools serving students from minority and economically disadvantaged homes. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), many students enter kindergarten without the pre-literacy experiences and oral language skills needed for early classroom learning. More than 50 percent of
urban students are substantially deficient in reading; for urban African American and Hispanic students, the rates approach to 70 percent (Bursuck & Damer, 2007). Students, especially those in urban school districts, require intensive reading intervention at the onset of noticeable reading difficulties. Teachers who implement such reading intervention must be well-trained and well-versed in the social impacts of academic achievement. Effective reading instruction must be explicit, intensive and systematic. By explicit instruction, teachers teach specific reading skills that help students acquire knowledge to decode print. Intensive instruction provides students more learning opportunities through increased repetition of previously learned skills. This concept is also referred to as spiraling. Systematic instruction requires a teacher to sequence instruction so that each skill builds upon the one previously taught. This concept is also referred to as scaffolding (Chard et al., 2006).

The implications of this study support the research indicating that reading achievement skills for struggling pre-adolescent readers, especially in urban school districts, can be accelerated with intensive research-based intervention strategies used with fidelity. The findings in this study indicate that full implementation, with assurance of fidelity, of My Sidewalks can produce statistically significant gains in reading achievement for struggling pre-adolescent readers in a small-sized urban school district. In the case of this research, fidelity in literacy is the strict following of protocols of the program’s design without modifications made by school district or program administer (Paratore, 2007). The program, My Sidewalks, positively influenced students’ interest, motivation and confidence in reading. It is important to note that the aforementioned traits are key components in motivating students, including those in urban school
districts, to sustain effective reading skills throughout their school career. Results of this 30-week study indicate that the program was successful in statistically significantly improving reading skills in the area of passage comprehension, sentence comprehension and vocabulary at the <.001 level. Although students did not make statistically significant gains in listening comprehension, they demonstrated practical significant growth in this area by advancing four months.

Interventionists, also referred to as reading teachers, noted significant gains in vocabulary development and usage as well as reading comprehension. Listening comprehension still requires development and growth, although participants demonstrated slight progress in this area. Furthermore, all interventionists noted significant improvement in students’ positive attitudes toward reading recreational texts. This was especially apparent in male readers. In fact, study results indicate a 1.7 point higher gain score in males readers than female readers on the ERAS Recreational subscale from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011; Gain score 3.0 (boys); 1.3 (girls), $t = 2.01$, $p = .05$, Cohen’s effect size ($d_c$)=.57.

Students’ attitudes toward reading academic text did not demonstrate significant growth. Academic reading requires students to utilize prior knowledge in order to understand complex content, decipher sophisticated vocabulary words and infuse their own experiences to extract meaning from text. This can be a complex task for many struggling readers, therefore students are often perplexed by printed information or become frustrated and do not comprehend the printed material (Chard et al., 2006). This is especially relevant to students in urban communities as many students enter school lacking the prerequisite literacy skills (Tatum, 2007). Many urban students spend the
first three years of school “catching up” to their on-level counterparts who may have received exposure to literacy during toddler and pre-school years.

This study revealed that during the first year of implementation, *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program demonstrated effectiveness in increasing struggling pre-adolescents’ reading abilities and improving their positive attitudes toward reading. Interventionists were trained in the appropriate use of the product and supported by the small-sized urban school district throughout the 30-week implementation of *My Sidewalks*.

*Math Sidewalks* is a research-based intensive reading intervention program that follows the Response to Intervention (RtI) three-tiered model. It is a complement to the core reading program, *Reading Street* and can be used as a stand-alone reading program. This intervention program was specifically designed for Tier III learners—those requiring intensive intervention and are reading two grade levels below their on-level counterparts. Research shows that for students to make significant progress, they require systematic, explicit and intensive instruction that is tailored to their current instructional level (Vaughn et al., 2008).

*Math Sidewalks* focuses on the priority skills children need in order to succeed at learning to read and using text to access information. Such priority skills include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary (National Reading Panel, 2002). The program allows for students to spend more time on task in the priority skills, interventionists to model specific strategies, and students to receive information and engage in task in smaller steps. According to the program’s authors, Vaughn et al. (2008) struggling learners are exposed, on a daily basis, to critical
comprehension skills such as drawing conclusions, compare and contrast, sequence, and finding the main idea and supporting details. These skills have been identified as being the most critical for developing reading success from kindergarten through grade 12 (National Reading Panel, 2008).

President George W. Bush signed the NCLB act as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in January 2002, ensuring that all students receive a quality education and reach proficiency in the core subject areas. The NCLB Acts requires that highly qualified teachers use reading interventions that are scientifically based and proven to be effective. Since this era, the standards and expectations have been raised. Many schools throughout the country, including those in urban communities, continue to rely on grade-level or above grade-level textbooks as the primary printed source of curriculum delivery, even in light of the evidence that the average student beyond grade 4 reads below the level of many content-area texts (Allington, 2005; NAEP, 2008). This specific study adds support to the existing body of research indicating that when My Sidewalks instructional model is employed with fidelity, reading achievement gains are realized (Magnolia, 2008; Kammeneui, 2009).

Information from reported assessments as well as that which was provided by interventionists present factors worthy of consideration before any future research design commences. This research is expected to renew educators’ and researchers’ efforts for improving reading intervention and reading instructional practices for struggling pre-adolescents during a time of increased accountability mandates for a wide variety of learners, including those labeled with learning disabilities and second language learners; to improve practitioners’ intervention behaviors; to increase educational leaders’
awareness of the implementation and monitoring of reading interventions; and to improve intervention and instructional practices themselves while making them more feasible for interventionists to implement within the constraints of the upper elementary and secondary environment to ensure sustainability of the early elementary intervention Response to Intervention (RtI) program model. It is important to point out that RtI is only a mandate for grades kindergarten – Grade 4 in the State of New York. Educators and educational leaders can and should take responsibility for acquiring and utilizing knowledge and skills of research-based practices. Building the capacity of upper elementary and secondary educators and educational leaders in the area of reading should be a goal at the federal, state and district level if no child truly is to be left behind. The implication is that literacy must be embraced vertically across the grade levels and content areas. The phrase “every teacher is a reading teacher,” coined by William S. Gray in 1937, must be embraced and fully realized to ensure that all students are college and career ready.

Limitations

Data gathered qualitatively is not done smoothly and neatly. It is fragile work in which relationships must be created and sustained in order to truly capture the depth and breadth of research. Credibility of both participants’ findings and interpretations depends upon careful attention to establishing trustworthiness. Frequent engagement in the research and continued member checks increased credibility. With this notion, this research did not avail itself to a large number of participants. The participants of this study represented seven of the eleven elementary schools. Generalizations of the results are limited by the very personal nature of the purposive sample of the total population.
Some critics claim mixed-methods research may not lend itself to generalization (Berg, 2007; Yin, 2003). The goal of this research was to generalize about a population of students by assessing the effectiveness of a district-adopted reading intervention program among students in small-sized urban school district with similar traits and academic profiles. Additionally, this mixed-methods study was impeded by external restraints. As the small-sized school district prepared itself for yet another financially challenged academic year (2010-2011), the loss of interventionists (reading specialists) was a strong possibility. This notion played a crucial role in the interventionists’ ability to focus and maintain the desire to participate in this study. At the time, the interventionists provided small-group instruction as prescribed in the reading intervention program. Their input in this study (records, anecdotes, surveys, and interviews) strengthened the findings and added validity to the overall research.

Time limitation was also a foreseeable challenge because the data collection period was restricted to two semesters (Fall 2010 and Spring 2011). The reading intervention program was designed to provide instruction for 30 weeks, which was in close proximity of this cohort’s completion date as prescribed by St. John Fisher College. Due to this time constraint, the researcher was not able to examine the sustainability of the program as participants transition into the next grade level. With this, the reading intervention implementation period and examination of sustainability supersede the time allotted to conduct the study and collect data. Data were provided in Chapter 4 to illustrate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the scripted reading intervention program only.
Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries placed on a study by the researcher (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005). Such limitations are important to the study as they are used to limit and possibly clarify the scope of the study. This researcher restricted the study due to time constraints of this doctoral coursework. Although this study has broader implications, beyond the scope of the small-sized urban school district in Lower Hudson Region of New York State, the confines and demands of the accelerated 28-month doctoral program did not lend itself to a larger or longer study. Additionally, this researcher has limited the study to only 7 of the 11 elementary schools within the small-sized urban school district in Lower Hudson Region of New York State. Chapter 5 will offer recommendations to expand this study to school district with dissimilar demographics within the school setting and community. Recommendations

The findings in this study revealed that an intensive reading intervention program, My Sidewalks, has significantly improved the overall reading achievement for struggling pre-adolescent students, within a small-sized urban school district, as a result of its implementation with high fidelity. Future research must focus on sustaining highly effective reading intervention processes at the upper elementary and secondary school levels to increase the likelihood of high school graduation, post-secondary schooling and career-readiness for urban learners. Moreover, the federal and state levels must employ a new formulaic rationale to provide further support for school districts that serve economically-challenged, second language learners, migrant and minority students. This unique population of students requires intensive support in the area of reading and reading instruction.
This action research was limited by sample size and restricted to a 30-week time span. For future research, larger samples should be selected from various subgroups with a longitudinal approach of 3 or more years of evaluation. Although this specific study is complete, several questions still remain regarding effective strategies to accelerate and sustain the reading improvement of struggling pre-adolescent readers, especially those in urban communities, as a result of this reading intervention program.

Eight specific recommendations based on the results of this study are as follows:

1. Principal leadership is critical for improved student outcomes (Allington, 2005). Such leadership is more crucial in urban school districts as students are likely to rate well below national benchmarks in the area of reading, thus increasing the likelihood of high school dropout. Future research is recommended to measure the correlation of effective principals' behavior with regard to literacy development using research-based reading intervention that lead to successful outcomes for struggling pre-adolescent readers in urban school districts. A more intensive study is recommended to examine the following principal leadership characteristics that have the greatest impact on reading achievement. Such characteristics should include, but not limited to:

   - Serves as the instructional leader for literacy instruction;
   - Understands the social impacts and social factors of reading achievement as it relates to urban communities;
   - Ensures literacy is taught across the curriculum and the notion of “every teacher is a teacher of reading” is not just a mantra, but a common practice;
   - Creates and upholds the vision of every student learning to read and utilizing reading as a tool to obtain information;
Develops a system for identifying reading difficulties at the beginning of the school year or in the lower grades so that remediation can begin early, allowing the student to benefit from more time on task in the intervention model;

- Aligns effect reading teachers where students demonstrate the greatest level of struggle;

- Strategically evaluates and guides reading teachers, interventionists, specialists, coaches and classroom teachers;

- Ensures parent and family involvement in school-wide seminars and workshops, endeavors and celebrations;

- Stays abreast of the current trends in literacy and reading research; and

- Knows the names, faces and deficiencies of each pupil in a given building who has demonstrated difficulties with reading.

2. A longitudinal study is needed to examine the impact and sustainability of My Sidewalks on students’ ability to interact with complex text throughout middle and high school as well as the desired readiness for post-high school opportunities. A longitudinal study can investigate the effects of the vertical alignment across grade levels with regard to the implementation of My Sidewalks at the elementary, middle and high school levels to provide support to struggling readers for academic and post high school success. The investigative research can answer the following question: To what degree does the implementation of My Sidewalks at the elementary level impact reading success at the middle and high school levels?
3. Further research is recommended to investigate the types and modes of professional development that will improve literacy across the curriculum. In order to improve students’ reading abilities, especially in urban areas, every teacher must be a teacher of reading. Therefore, the need for systematic and inclusive literacy-based professional development in all subject areas is essential.

4. Further research is warranted to investigate whether the reading gains achieved in this study transfer to academic achievement in other core areas. A correlational study is recommended to examine participation in *My Sidewalks* Reading Intervention program and academic performance in core classes and performance on New York State Assessments.

5. This researcher further recommends an investigation of the differences in the achievement gap between diverse groups of students (i.e., ethnic background; socioeconomic status; and IEP/non-IEP). This study will guide instructional practices and school improvement plans in an effort to close the achievement gap among subgroups. Although, this specific research did not lend itself to report on demographic findings due to small sample size of specific ethnic sub-groups (Total sample size \( N = 49 \); African-American/Black, \( n = 40 \); Hispanic/Latino, \( n = 7 \); White/Caucasian, \( n = 2 \)), it is a worthwhile venture to explore the degree in which *My Sidewalks* can close the achievement gap among the diverse populations over a 3-year period.

6. Another worthwhile endeavor is a replication study with dissimilar demographics and an increased sample size at elementary schools located in different cities and states. This replication study will support generalizing the findings of this specific study.
7. Further research is needed to examine the most recent disproportionality of federal resources (Title I) to urban school districts and its impact on school district’s ability to provide appropriate reading intervention programs and to sustain trained interventionists and skilled leadership to enhance reading abilities of urban students. With accountability on the rise and a decrease of federal funding to meet mandates, students in urban communities will not be afforded the opportunities to change the course of their statistically despairing trajectory of academic failure. A longitudinal study is warranted to explore the impacts of this imbalance of funding distribution on reading achievement and sustainabilities as students transition from elementary to middle school, then middle to high school.

8. Last, this researcher recommends conducting an investigation to compare reading intervention programs and identify the characteristics that prove most successful in improving reading abilities in an urban school environment. A control group will receive a specific scripted reading intervention program during the span of a school year, while the treatment group receives *My Sidewalks* during the course of the same school year. Findings from this type of study will prove useful to urban educational leaders as they identify best practices and instructional solutions that support the learning needs of the diverse populations they serve.

**Conclusion**

Students leaving elementary school grades unable to read face years of frustration in school and in their adult roles (NAEP, 2008). Their inability to derive meaning from text incapacitates them in just about every endeavor, from completing homework to filling out a job application. The serious consequences of this handicap can never
adequately be measured, but there is little doubt that illiteracy is a major factor behind poverty and crime (NAEP, 2008). When school districts are faced with exorbitant numbers of students failing in reading as shown by district and state assessments and graduation rates, a decision must be made to address the literacy needs of these students. A search for the “magic bullet” ensues, facilitated by federal guidelines (NCLB, 2001) stating that reading programs selected by school districts must be based in research.

This researcher acknowledges there are several strong reading intervention programs from which to choose that fit this criterion. There are programs that address needs specific to common deficits of pre-adolescent struggling readers. What follows is an examination of the components research tells us are vital when remediating weak reading skills at the upper elementary and secondary levels such as a solid understanding of sound-letter association; increasing fluency and word recognition; building vocabulary knowledge; and improving interpretation of print information through reading and writing (Chall, 1996; Chard et al., 2006; National Reading Panel, 2009; Parker, 2009; Tatum, 2004). It is evident from the 30-week study that My Sidewalks indeed fits this gold standard of excellence in increasing reading abilities and improving positive attitudes toward reading.

Historically, emphasis on early literacy development has been the focus of reading initiatives and funding (Parker, 2009), but emergent readers represent only the initial stage of growth toward full literacy. Students, today, require a continuum of support throughout their school career to fully develop the breadth and depth of reading skills in order to engage richly and meaningfully in academia, seeking and preparing for college and career, and engaging in leisure and recreation (Alexander, 2005 & Grosso de
León, 2002). This is especially relevant to students in urban school districts. Today, people must engage in reading and writing more than any other time in history in order to perform their jobs, live independently and participate in society (Alexander, 2005). The ability to read and extract meaning from text is extremely crucial. Educational leaders, more specifically principals, must become literacy leaders; therefore, in any given school building, literacy must be embraced vertically across the grade levels and content areas. The concept that every teacher is a teacher of reading must be embraced and fully realized to ensure that all students are ready for postsecondary education and the ever-changing world of work.

If this nation is committed to leaving no child behind, the policies at the federal and state levels must address the dire need to build capacity in its educational leaders and teachers. Additional resources must become available to lead long-term sustainable literacy initiatives—and not just trends. Emphasis must be placed on the underserved populations as many young children enter school or school setting for the first time at the age of 5, and in some cases age 6. Such students begin their school career at an unfair disadvantage (i.e., outdated instructional materials, dilapidated school buildings, incompetent teachers, language gap, digital divide, socio-economic gap; English as a second language). American students deserve this level of commitment from policymakers and school leaders.
References


RAND Reading Study Group (2002) Reading for understanding: toward a research and development program in reading comprehension. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.


Appendix A
IRB Application

FORM A  For Office Use Only

________________            St. John Fisher College  Chair, Signature
Institutional Review Board

__________________________ Date

Notice of Exempt Research

Please submit two (2) copies of this form to the Office of Academic Affairs, K-202, Attention: Jamie Mosca.

Name of Investigator(s): Tahira DuPree Chase

Address/City/State/Zip: XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Telephone:      Day XXXXXXXXXXX  Evening XXXXXXXX

E-mail Address: tadchase@hotmail.com  FAX: XXXXXXXX

Faculty/Staff Sponsor (if different): Ronald Valenti, Ph.D., Director of Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership
St. John Fisher College at the College of New Rochelle

Title of Project: The Children Left Behind: An Evaluation of a Reading Intervention Program for Upper Elementary Students

Abstract of Project:

Reading is the key that unlocks success in school. Nationwide, older students who have experienced failure in the foundational years often become frustrated, disengaged and disillusioned about themselves and their ability to succeed. In order for school district to address the reading difficulties among older students, it is important that they make bold changes in how instruction is delivered to the most reading-deficient students. School districts must identify the best practices and strategies to remediate this unique group of students who struggle to read.
The purpose of this 30-week mixed methods action research is to evaluate the effectiveness of a district-adopted reading intervention program to improve pre-adolescent students’ reading skills as well as increase reading engagement and motivation. Reading skills will be measured by the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) in a pre and post test format. Similarly, student reading engagement and motivation will be measured by the Elementary Reading Assessment (ERAS) in a pre and post test format. Each measurement instrument will be administered at the beginning and end of the study. This action research will take place in a medium-sized school district in the Lower Hudson Region of New York. Using stratified random sampling, the purposive participants will be 66 Grade 5 students who are categorized as struggling readers. In other words, this unique population of students read at least two years below their on-level counterparts.

The landmark No Child Left Behind Act has directed great attention and increased awareness to early literacy instruction. Still, less attention has been paid to older students who struggle to read. The practical significance of this study will lead to broader investigation and evaluation of reading intervention programs and best practices that address the struggling reader dilemma among older students.

Type of Investigator and Nature of Activity (check one):

- Faculty or staff at St. John Fisher College ____
- Student of St. John Fisher College _X___

Individuals other than faculty, staff, or students of St. John Fisher College. (Please identify investigator and explain nature of research activity.)

Under which of the following categories are you claiming exemption from IRB review? (check one)

_X___ (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (I) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among institutional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

___ (2) Research, involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

___ (3) Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (I) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

___ (4) Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (I) Public benefits or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining
benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

(5) Research involving the unobtrusive observation (including observation by participants) of public behavior, except where any of the following conditions exist: (I) observations are recorded in such a manner that the human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, (ii) the observations recorded about the individual, if they became known outside the research, could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject’s financial standing or employability, (iii) the research deals with sensitive aspects of the subject’s own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior, or use of alcohol.

(6) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement) survey or interview procedures, except where any of the following conditions exist: (I) responses are recorded in such a manner that the human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, (ii) the subject’s responses, if they became known outside the research, could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject’s financial standing or employability, (iii) the research deals with sensitive aspects of the subject’s own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior, or use of alcohol, (iv) the survey or interview involves children or respondents requiring supervision, e.g. mentally retarded adults. All research involving survey or interview procedures is exempt, without exception, when the respondents are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

Certification

1. I am familiar with the policies and procedures of St. John Fisher College regarding human subjects. I subscribe to the standards described in the document, IRB Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects.

2. I am familiar with the published guidelines for the ethical treatment of subjects associated with my particular field of inquiry (e.g., as published by the American Psychological Association, American Sociological Association).

3. I am familiar with and will adhere to any official policies in my department concerning research with human subjects.

4. I understand that upon consideration of the nature of my project, the IRB may request a full application for review of my research at their discretion and convenience.

5. If changes in procedures involving human subjects become necessary, I will submit these changes for review before initiating the changes.

________________________
________________________
All student applications and applicants from outside the College must have a College sponsor.
Decision of Institutional Review Board

☐ Approved  ☐ Not Approved

Comments:

☐ No Research  The proposed project has not research component and does not need to be in further compliance with Article 24-A.

☐ Minimal Risk  The proposed project has a research component but does not place subjects at risk and need not be in further compliance with Article 24-A.

☐ Research & Risk  The proposed project has a research component and places subjects at risk. The proposal must be in compliance with Article 24-A.

_______________________________________________
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board       Date

Rev 11/08 jm
Appendix B: IRB Approval

IRB Approval

Add to contacts
To tadchase@hotmail.com, Valenti, Ronald D

From: Mosca, Jamie (jmosca@sjfc.edu)
Sent: Mon 9/20/10 4:10 PM
To: tadchase@hotmail.com
Cc: Valenti, Ronald D (rvalenti@sjfc.edu)

We've added this sender to your safe list. That way you can always see what they've sent you.

Dear Tahira:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved the proposal entitled, “The Children Left Behind: An Evaluation of a Reading Intervention Program for Upper Elementary Students.”

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at 385-5262 or by e-mail to emerges@sjfc.edu.

Sincerely,

Eileen M. Merges, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Appendix C: Teacher Consent Form

Dear Reading Specialist:

I am a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College at the College of New Rochelle. I am in pursuit of the Ed.D. in Executive Leadership. My study will focus on the evaluation of your core reading program, My Sidewalks and its effectiveness in improving the reading skills of Grade 5 students who struggle to read. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a current user of My Sidewalks user. There is no penalty for not participating in this study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact My Sidewalks is having on Mount Vernon City School District’s most struggling Grade 5 readers. Moreover, this study will be used to inform program expansion efforts or any enhancements deemed necessary.

**Participation:** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to provide information about students’ reading achievement using Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) at the beginning and end of your reading program. In addition, you will be asked to administer an attitudinal survey at the beginning and end of the year. Random classroom observations will be conducted three times during the 35-week program.

**Risks and Benefits:** The potential risks associated with this study are minor inconveniences due to time required to administer assessment, administer survey and provide names of students and their required information.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will never be associated with any of your students’ performance. Each concept associated with your students will be coded to maintain anonymity. Your students will be assigned an identification number. Specific names will never be used. You and your students’ individual privacy will be maintained in all publication or presentations resulting from this study.

Should you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at 917.757.7897 or tadchase@hotmail.com. Please know the Institutional Review Board and the superintendent of schools have approved this study and its procedures. The Board, itself, is responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants.

Your consent below indicates your willingness to participate in this study and comply to all requirements. A signed copy of this consent will be given to you.

Signature of Participant__________________________________ Date________________

Printed Name of Participant_________________________________________________

Signature of Researcher____________________________________________________ Date________________

Thank you kindly!
Appendix D: Parent Consent Form

Dear Parent(s):

My name is Tahira DuPree Chase. I am the Director of Curriculum and Instruction as well as a doctoral candidate at St. John Fisher College at the College of New Rochelle. I am in pursuit of the Ed.D. in Executive Leadership. My study will focus on the evaluation of Mount Vernon City School District’s core reading intervention program, *My Sidewalks*. This is the reading intervention curriculum at your child’s school. As part of this research project, your child will be asked to complete a standardized, national reading assessment and a survey about their feelings toward reading. The results of this assessment and survey will in NO WAY impact your child’s grade in his or her class.

**Participation:** Your child will be asked to complete a reading assessment twice, once in the Fall of 2010 and again in Spring of 2011. This assessment measures fluency, comprehension and vocabulary and should take about one hour to complete. Similarly, students will be asked to take survey at the beginning and end of the year. This survey will measure your child’s attitude toward academic and recreational reading.

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no potential risks to your child associated with this study. Your child has the right to not answer any questions on the assessment and survey that may make him/her uncomfortable. It is my expectation that this project will benefit the Mount Vernon City School District by helping us to understand how to better address the literacy needs of all upper elementary students, thus improving our secondary reading programs.

**Compensation:** Neither you nor your child will receive any compensation for participating in this research.

**Confidentiality:** Your child’s individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations resulting in this study. No individual assessments will be provided to any staff or administrator, although group level means may be provided to teachers or schools upon request. Once your child completes the assessment, his/her name will be removed and will be replaced with an identification number. I will be the only individual who will have access to the file that links the student name to the assigned identification number. This procedure will ensure confidentiality of your child’s responses.

Should you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at 917.757.7897 or tadchase@hotmail.com. Please know the Institutional Review Board and the superintendent of schools have approved this study and its procedures. The Board, itself, is responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants.
Please sign and return this form to your child’s reading teacher ONLY IF YOU **DO NOT WISH FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH.**

Signature of Parent__________________________________________Date________________

Printed Name of Parent________________________________________________________

Printed Name of Student________________________________________________________

Thank you kindly!
Appendix E: Student Assent Form

Dear Grade 5 Student:

Hello. My name is Ms. Tahira DuPree Chase, and I am the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Mount Vernon City School District. Like you, I am a student. I am a student at St. John Fisher College at the College of New Rochelle. In order to finish college, I will need to complete a large project. I need your help in completing this project. Therefore, I am asking you to participate in a research study because you are a Grade 5 student who attends a school in Mount Vernon.

**Purpose:** In this project, I am trying to understand whether the reading curriculum at your school is helping you to learn to read.

**Participation:** You will be asked to complete a reading assessment at the beginning and end of the 2010-2011 school year. You will also be asked to complete a survey at the beginning and end of year.

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no risks to you for participating in this study. The benefits of completing the assessment and survey are numerous, given that you will help me to understand how the reading curriculum helps to improve the district’s understanding of literacy development.

I have already asked your parents if it is okay to ask you to take part in this project. But, you get to decide whether you want to participate. You can also talk with your parents or reading teacher before making a decision. No one will be upset if you do not want to participate, or if you change your mind later and want to stop. You can also skip any of the questions you do not want to answer.

You can ask questions now or whenever you wish. Please know that St. John Fisher Institutional Board has approved this project and its procedures. This Board is responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants. A copy of this signed consent will be made available to you upon your request.

Please sign your name below if you agree to participate in my project.

Please sign your name here_________________________ Date___________

Please print your name here______________________________________

Thank you for your help!
Appendix F: ERAS Administration Guide

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS)

Directions for Administration

To the Teacher:

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey provides a quick indication of student attitudes toward reading. This survey consists of 20 items and can be administered to an entire class in about 10 minutes. Each item presents a brief, simply worded statement about reading, followed by four pictures of Garfield. Each prose is designed to depict a different emotional state, ranging from very positive to very negative.

Administration:

Begin by telling students that you wish to find out how they feel about reading. Emphasize that this is not a test and that there are neither right nor wrong answers. Please encourage sincerity.

Distribute the survey forms and ask students to write their names in the space at the top on the first page. Hold up a copy of the survey so that the students can see the first page. Point to the picture of Garfield at the far left of the first item. Ask the students to look at this same picture on their own survey form. Discuss with them the mood Garfield seems to be in (very happy). Then move to the next picture and again discuss Garfield’s mood (this time, somewhat happy). In the same way, move to the third and fourth pictures and discuss Garfield’s mood—a somewhat upset and very upset. It is helpful to point out the position of Garfield’s mouth, especially in the middle two figures.

Explain to the students that together they will read some statements about reading and that the students should think about how they feel about each statement. They should then circle the picture of Garfield that is closest to their own feelings. Emphasize that students should respond according to their own feelings—not as Garfield may respond.

Read each item aloud slowly and distinctly; then read it a second time while students are thinking. Be sure to read the item number and to remind students of page numbers when new pages are reached.

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

School_________________ Grade_____ Name____________________

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?
   ![Picture 1](image1)

2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?
   ![Picture 2](image2)

3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?
   ![Picture 3](image3)

4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?
   ![Picture 4](image4)

Page 1

© PAWS – www.professorgarfield.org
Survey designed by Dennis J. Kear, Wichita State University
Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

5. How do you feel about spending free time reading a book?

6. How do you feel about starting a new book?

7. How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?

8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?
Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?

10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?

11. How do you feel when a teacher asks you questions about what you read?

12. How do you feel about reading workbook pages and worksheets?
Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

13. How do you feel about reading in school?

14. How do you feel about reading your school books?

15. How do you feel about learning from a book?

16. How do you feel when it's time for reading in class?
Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pictures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. How do you feel about stories you read in reading class?</td>
<td>![Picture Options]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?</td>
<td>![Picture Options]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?</td>
<td>![Picture Options]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?</td>
<td>![Picture Options]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Survey designed by Dennis J. Kear, Wichita State University
Appendix G: ERAS Scoring Document

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey Scoring Sheet

Student Name_____________________________________________________
Teacher__________________________________________________________
Grade________ Administration Date__________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recreational reading</th>
<th>Academic reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ____</td>
<td>1. ____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ____</td>
<td>2. ____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ____</td>
<td>3. ____</td>
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<td>4. ____</td>
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<td>5. ____</td>
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<td>8. ____</td>
<td>8. ____</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. ____</td>
<td>9. ____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. ____</td>
<td>10. ____</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Raw Score: ____ Raw Score: ____
Full scale raw score . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . (Recreational + Academic): _____

Percentile ranks: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Recreational ______

................................. Academic___________

................................. .Full scale ___________

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Appendix H: Classroom and *My Sidewalks* Observation Checklists

**FALL 2010-Spring 2011 PULL-OUT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL: *My Sidewalks***

Teacher Observed: ____________________________ Date of Observation: ____________________ School: ____________________________  
Grade: 5  
Number of students observed: ___________ Observation start time: _______________ Observation stop time: _______________

Observation of: *My Sidewalks*

My Sidewalks Lesson: ☐ Day 1 ☐ Day 2 ☐ Day 3 ☐ Day 4 ☐ Day 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain Code</th>
<th>Domain/Indicator</th>
<th>Mark “X” if observed “NA” if not applicable</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(brief description of the nature and quality of this domain, including examples/quotes for illustration)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DIMENSION: INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-Student Interactions</th>
<th>“X” if observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher-Student Interactions**

- Teacher language and encouragement reflects high expectations for

**Notes**

- Talk is centered on what students are learning rather than on controlling behavior.
- The timing for teaching points is appropriate (e.g., teacher does not interfere in a matter that interferes with children’s reading & writing).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain Code</th>
<th>Domain/Indicator</th>
<th>Mark “X” if observed “NA” if not applicable</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students and positive reinforcement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td><strong>Instructional Strategies</strong></td>
<td>“X” if observed</td>
<td>(brief description of the nature and quality of this domain, including examples/quotes for illustration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain Code</td>
<td>Domain/Indicator</td>
<td>Mark “X” if observed “NA” if not applicable</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher explicitly models skills and strategies for students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher speaks appropriately given students’ proficiency level (e.g., slower rate, enunciation, and simple sentence structures)</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

**DIMENSION: LESSON IMPLEMENTATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>“X” if observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials are organized and easily accessible, thus allowing the teacher to transition smoothly from one activity to the next.</td>
<td>❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pace of the lesson is appropriate for the developmental levels/needs of the students and the purposes of the lesson.</td>
<td>❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Study:</strong> Facilitates blending strategies for multi-syllabic words, applying knowledge of letter-sounds to decode unknown words when reading, recognition of high frequency words</td>
<td>❌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain Code</td>
<td>Domain/Indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain Code</td>
<td>Domain/Indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>smoothly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students are focused on the lesson approximately 90-100% of the period (most students taking part and on task throughout the lesson).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students show interest in the lesson and the materials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### My Sidewalks Observation Checklist

Teacher_____________________________________

# of Students_________________________________

Date________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials Observed</th>
<th>My Sidewalks Lesson Focus</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials</strong></td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s Guide</td>
<td>Day 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student readers (or leveled)</td>
<td>Build Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary Cards</td>
<td>Read a Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio CDs</td>
<td>Write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Books</td>
<td>Day 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write on/Wipe off cards</td>
<td>Word Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine cards</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnetic letters</td>
<td>Day 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Wall</td>
<td>Read a Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other __________</td>
<td>Write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other __________</td>
<td>Day 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other __________</td>
<td>Word Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other __________</td>
<td>Day 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other __________</td>
<td>Read a Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other __________</td>
<td>Build Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other __________</td>
<td>Write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other __________</td>
<td>Assessment Options</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check materials observed
Appendix I: Teacher Interview Protocol

*My Sidewalks* INTERVIEW Questions for READING interventionists

SPRING 2011

ABOUT OBSERVED LESSON

1. Did the instruction I observed go as you intended?  □ Yes □ No
2. a. Did you accomplish what you wanted to?  □ Yes □ No
   b. Why or why not?
3. a. Was today’s instruction pretty representative of how you do things?  □ Yes □ No
   b. If not, why?

ABOUT THE READING GROUPS

4. a. Have any students moved in or out of your groups?  □ Yes □ No (If yes, why?)
   b. Are you concerned about any students (in either group) missing too many pull-out sessions?
      □ Yes □ No
      If yes, what is the extent of their attrition?

ABOUT YOUR READING INSTRUCTION

5. How well does the program address the areas of need for the participating students? (*probe for SPED and ELL students, if applicable*)

6. How is the pacing and flow of the program, including transition time between activities?

7. Which of the resource materials offered in the back of the TE have been most useful?

8. a. Are you receiving adequate support at the school level for your participation in MSW?  □ Yes □ No
    b. Do you have opportunities to confer with others about MSW?  □ Yes □ No
    c. In what ways/areas do you need additional support?
9. In what ways has the MSW program influenced your instruction? (probe: Are the Routine Cards helpful?)

10. What do you see as the strengths of the MSW program?

11. Have there been any shortcomings in the *My Sidewalks* program? How could these issues be addressed?

**ABOUT STUDENT IMPACT**
12.a. Have the *My Sidewalks* materials had an impact on students’ **interest** in reading?  
   [ ] Yes  [ ] No  
   b. If yes, what have you observed that leads you to believe this?

13. a. Have the *My Sidewalks* materials had an impact on students’ **attitude** in reading?  
   [ ] Yes  [ ] No  
   b. If yes, what have you observed that leads you to believe this?

14. a. Based on your observations and assessments, what impact has the *My Sidewalks* program had on student **learning** in reading?  
   b. What impact, if any, has the MSW program had on special education/ESL/ELL students?
Appendix J: GRADE Administration Guide

Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE)

Administration Instructions

Thank you very much for administering the GRADE reading assessment to your students. This assessment is an essential part of this study. Therefore, I am appreciative of your commitment in giving it to your class. This document provides instructions for administering the GRADE to your class. You will find much of this information in pages 1-10 of your Teachers’ Administration Manual. However, for your convenience such information has been condensed within this manual guide. Please also refer to any training materials you may have received to assist in the administration of this test.

Assessment Materials

Please make sure you have the following materials:

✓ Student answer sheets;
✓ Student test booklets;
✓ One teacher administration manual;
✓ List of students who took the pre-test (if applicable), who did not take the pre-test, whose parents granted permission to participate in the study;
✓ Any new students who entered your class after the pre-test (if applicable).
✓ Student Assent forms to be completed by all students (except those who parents declined participation)
✓ Extra parental consent forms for any new students

GRADE Overview

The GRADE assessment is a diagnostic tool that measures what reading skills children possess and what skills needs to be taught. Although the test is not times, it should take
approximately 60-75 minutes to complete. The GRADE should be administered to the entire class, not to individual students separately. Feel free to administer the entire test all at once or a couple of subtests at a time over a one week period.

**Pre-administration Procedures**

Prior to administering the GRADE, there are a few things that you need to do:

- Make sure your bundle of testing materials has everything you will need. If not, please contact Ms. Chase as soon as possible.
- Distribute parental consent forms to *new* student(s) in your class 2-3 days before you plan to administer the GRADE assessment.
- Collect any parental consent forms that have been returned and arrange for these students to not participate in testing. Remember, parents return consent forms if they wish for their child to not participate in the study.
- If a student’s name is not already printed on the test booklet, write their first and last name on the Grade 5 answer sheet prior to administration. You do not need to bubble in student/teacher information.

**Test Administration Procedures**

Below are specific steps for GRADE administration. Please make sure that you understand these steps and feel comfortable following them prior to testing.

**Specific Steps for Test Administration:**

1. Administer the GRADE during the 2nd week in October and last week in May.
2. Make sure that students whose parents decline participation, do not take the assessment.
3. Distribute an answer document to each student.
4. Provide each student with a test booklet.
5. Provide each student with a pencil.
6. Please ensure that each student write their name on the bottom of the assent form.
7. Refer to page 11 of the Teacher’s Administration Manual for testing instructions. *It is extremely important that you follow the administration scripts on page 11 as written.*
8. Some of the most important administration practices include:

- Begin by projecting a supportive and encouraging attitude
- Read instructions and test items exactly as they are written
- Begin each subtest by administering the examples for that subtest
- Administer the subtests in the suggested order
- Try to avoid interruptions once you have started a subtest
- Read items aloud slowly and clearly, using normal tone and phrasing
- Do not coach for a correct response, define or spell an unfamiliar word or substitute a synonym for an unknown word. To overprompt in this manner may invalidate the results.
- Give feedback only on the examples. Do not tell students whether an answer is correct or incorrect. If a student asks for help, say something like: “I’m sorry. I can’t help you with that. Just do your best work!”
- Encourage students to attempt all items. If students ask about guessing, tell them to mark an answer if they can make a “good guess”, but do not encourage them to just mark anything.

9. If any student is absent on the day of testing, please try to administer the missed assessment to the student(s) by the end of the following week.

10. Once testing is over, collect all answer sheets and test booklets, verify that each student’s name is on his/her answer sheet, and return them to Ms. Chase.

You time in administering this test is much appreciated. Again, if you have any questions about the testing process, please contact Ms. Chase at 917.757.7897 or tadchase@hotmail.com.

Thank you kindly!
Appendix K: Pilot Instrumentation Usage

Pilot ERAS Results
Academic Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*Name</th>
<th>Pre Academic Reading</th>
<th>Post Academic Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melodie</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyla</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traya</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>34</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devin</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>24</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dante</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenny</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dylan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andre</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiyana</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Score | 385 | 375 |
Mean Score  | 29.6 | 28.8 |

*Pseudonyms were used
Pilot ERAS Results
Recreational Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pre Recreational Reading</th>
<th>Post Recreational Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melodie</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyla</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andre</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiyana</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Score</strong></td>
<td><strong>372</strong></td>
<td><strong>362</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean Score</strong></td>
<td><strong>28.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>27.8</strong></td>
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*Pseudonyms were used
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Pre Recreational Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tatiyana</td>
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