STUDY OF A HIGH SCHOOL READING CLASS

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by

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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

_________________________________, Department Chair

Susan Heredia, Ph. D. Date

Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

STUDY OF A HIGH SCHOOL READING CLASS

by

Diane Kiley

Statement of Problem

Struggling adolescent readers enter high school at a disadvantage and need support in order to advance their reading skills. The Reading Tutorial class, the focus of this study, can provide this support. This descriptive study presents information that helps determine the instructional needs of struggling adolescent readers.

Sources of Data

This study described students’ literacy needs across five categories: overall reading comprehension, comprehension strategies and study skills, vocabulary and background knowledge, fluency, and motivation and attitudes towards reading. While some data was collected from all 21 students in the class, the study’s focus was on eight students, 7 freshmen, 1 sophomore, 5 males, and 3 females. Data collected derived from surveys of students’ knowledge and use of comprehension strategies as well as their attitudes toward reading and how they proceeded when faced with
reading difficulties. In addition, students provided data through assessments of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency.

Results

Struggling adolescent readers need explicit instruction and practice in using comprehension strategies and study skills as is suggested by the research literature (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Boardman, Roberts, Vaughn, Wexler, Murray & Kosanovich, 2008; Shanahan, 2006). They also need direction in self-selection of reading materials as a motivational tool (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Torgesen et al., 2007). These students can gain background knowledge and acquisition of vocabulary through immersion in general knowledge of the world (Hirsch, 2003). Promoting these skills will help develop better overall readers. This small study does not cover the complexities of differentiating instruction or involving other teachers in the support of advancing readers’ abilities, areas that are worthy of study.

The results that were obtained are listed as follows:

- There was variability in students’ literacy needs, suggesting that instruction in the Reading Tutorial class needs to be differentiated at least part of the time. In the area of vocabulary knowledge, 4 of the 8 students were below average (stanine 3) on a norm referenced assessment of vocabulary knowledge, while 3 were average (stanine 5) and one of the eight was above average (stanine 8).
• Across all 8 students there were significant numbers of comprehension and study strategies that students had never heard of. Some of these, such as setting a purpose for reading, activating background knowledge, questioning the text, and using a graphic organizer, are critical for understanding and studying academic text. On the other hand, there were some strategies that were known by 50% of the students, but just knowing and understanding a strategy did not mean that students used them. For example, half the students knew and understood the summarize strategy but only one student used it.

• Regarding attitudes toward reading and writing, 4 of 8 students felt excellent or good about themselves as readers while 3 felt fair and one felt poor, and as writers, 4 felt good, 3 felt fair, and one felt poor. Four of the 8 students rarely or never read at home, and although 3 students often read at school, the remaining 5 rarely or sometimes read at school.

• In general, it appeared that components of fluency (reading accuracy and rate) were not a problem except when limited vocabulary knowledge made it difficult for students to decode polysyllabic words.

• Some of the students’ needs initially could be addressed within the Reading Tutorial. For example, reading and study strategies could be introduced to students with the expectation that they would continue to use these strategies in their other classes. Other needs, such as building general
vocabulary knowledge, need to be worked on across classes. A heavy emphasis on vocabulary within the Reading Tutorial is unlikely to change overall vocabulary knowledge because of the large number of words used in academic texts.

Approved by:

______________________________________________, Committee Chair
John Shefelbine, Ph.D.

________________________
Date
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension Strategies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary and Background Knowledge</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation and Self-Concept as a Reader</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. METHODOLOGY ................................................................................................................. 28
   Participants ..................................................................................................................... 28
   Measures ......................................................................................................................... 30
   Summary ........................................................................................................................... 37

4. RESULTS ........................................................................................................................... 39
   Comprehension and Study Strategies ............................................................................. 39
   Vocabulary and Background Knowledge ....................................................................... 60
   Fluency ............................................................................................................................... 63
   Attitudes, Motivation, and Self-Concepts as Readers ....................................................... 65

5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS ..................................... 83
   Discussion and Recommendations .................................................................................. 83
   Conclusions ....................................................................................................................... 89

Appendix A. Consent to Participate in Research .............................................................. 93
Appendix B. Agreement to Participate in Research .......................................................... 95
Appendix C. Activity for the Readings ............................................................................. 97
Appendix D. Literacy Survey ............................................................................................ 99
Appendix E. Reading Strategies Survey ........................................................................ 104

References .......................................................................................................................... 107

LIST OF TABLES

Tables ................................................................................................................................. xi
1. 16-18/21 Students, Grouped by Passage and Difficulty................................. 41
2. 16-18/21 Students, Grouped by Question Difficulty and Type...................... 41
3. CAHSEE and STAR Results Summary Table of Students in Study............... 49
4. Students’ Use of Strategies............................................................................. 56
5. General Vocabulary Assessment Results, Stanine Scores ......................... 61
6. CAHSEE and STAR Vocabulary Assessment Results .................................. 62
7. Responses About Reading at Home, Reading at School............................. 65
8. Responses to Literacy Survey, Questions 2 & 3, Feelings About Self as Reader and Writer ................................................................. 68
9. Student Profiles Based on Summary of Assessments .................................... 80
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Variability in Correct Words per Minute</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Responses to Literacy Survey, Question 1: What do You Read Other</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Than Books? 24 Items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Literacy Survey Results, Question 4: Check Any or All of the Possible Reasons for You to Write. Write in Anything Not Listed</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

When students enter high school, they are expected to already know how to read and to be reading at grade level. Reading assignments in any subject area generally reflect the expectation that students are able to read the material independently. While some teachers may be able to provide scaffolding for particularly difficult text, most are not trained to teach students who are significantly below grade level in ability, nor do teachers generally have enough time for an activity if it is outside of their subject matter. Yet, students who start high school unable to read at the appropriate level will certainly struggle. The high school reading class or Reading Tutorial is one place that can provide another chance for these students to improve their reading.

Students who struggle to read may find their high school studies overwhelming, leading some to drop out of school. In today’s world, dropouts have few opportunities for financial or social success (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). The need to read and comprehend various types of information is growing, yet fewer adolescents today are reading at proficient levels (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Since research shows that certain instructional approaches are more valuable than others at this level (Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, Rintamaa, & Madden, 2010; Cromley & Azevedo, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007), an effort should be made to
provide research-based instruction that meets the needs of these struggling adolescent readers. This is especially true considering the more rigor-based instruction expected due to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (California Department of Education, 2013).

**Problem Statement**

High school students who struggle with reading often fall beyond the scope of the regular English teacher or other content-area teachers. While some general instructional practices address the particular needs of struggling readers, the reading class provides additional time and a more focused pursuit toward improving reading. When a class such as the Reading Tutorial is made available to high school students, its instructional practices should be supported by the relevant research. The literature reviewed shows that research-based instructional practices provide direction for teachers interested in guiding their students toward increasing reading skills.

**Research Question**

In four areas of adolescent literacy, namely, comprehension strategies, vocabulary and background knowledge, fluency, and motivation and attitudes towards reading, what are the relative strengths and needs of eight students in a high school reading tutorial class?

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this descriptive study was designed to determine the instructional needs of struggling adolescent readers across five categories: overall reading ability, comprehension strategies and study skills, vocabulary and background
knowledge, reading fluency, and motivation and self-concept as a reader. Information and data were gathered through observations, assessments, and surveys of those enrolled in a Reading Tutorial class of ninth and tenth graders and by reviewing the literature pertaining to this study to better determine best practices. Assessments and surveys were used to provide information as to the academic and motivational needs of the students who have been placed in this class, what they think about themselves as readers, and if they have similar or different needs. Through observation, information was gathered as to what students experienced in a real-life reading class. Moreover, the research literature was used to shed light on which instructional practices best promote advancement as a reader and how teachers might structure such a class to meet the needs of struggling readers.

**Definition of Terms**

*Background knowledge*—information previously obtained that aids in the acquisition of additional knowledge on a subject (Boardman et al., 2008; Hirsch, 2003).

*Comprehension strategies*—activities, such as rereading, visualizing, summarizing, questioning, predicting, and checking for understanding, that help readers comprehend a text (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Shanahan, 2006).

*Fluency*—a reader’s ability to recognize and understand words quickly or automatically and to read accurately and with expression (Osborn & Lehr, 2003).
*Reading Tutorial*—The name of the class in which struggling ninth-grade and tenth-grade students are placed if assessments, such as the standardized state test, show them at far below basic in reading.

*Vocabulary knowledge*—knowing the meaning of a word and understanding its uses in different contexts (Shanahan, 2006).

**Assumptions**

One assumption is that students will complete each survey in an honest and reflective manner and make an effort on the assessments. As stated above, the assumption is that all students in the class will have complete information in the school’s data collection system.

**Limitations**

One limitation is that this research will not necessarily be generalizable for any other reading classes since it will be specific to the students involved in the research. It will also not be generalizable to low or high-income groups since this high school tends to have a middle-income population. Another limitation is the relatively small amount of time, three and a half months of the spring semester, which the researcher will spend with these students. Also, another teacher teaches this class, and having the researching teacher in the classroom may affect classroom dynamics with unknown effects. A longer term, more complete study, including testing students before and after a lesson was taught and at the beginning and end of the school year, could be conducted if the teacher was also the researcher.
Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 provides a review of the research literature relevant to this study. Chapter 3 presents the methodology practiced, including information about the participants and the measures used. Chapter 4 details the results of the assessments and surveys, and Chapter 5 provides recommendations and conclusions pertaining to the findings.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review covers four main areas of research that inform instruction for struggling adolescent readers. First, the literature pertaining to comprehension strategies will be reviewed and discussed, followed by the research on vocabulary and background knowledge. A brief discussion on fluency research will follow, and then information about motivation and self-concept as a reader will be presented.

Comprehension Strategies

Comprehension of any text, particularly at the high school level, depends on many factors including fluency, and vocabulary and background knowledge (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006; Torgesen et al., 2007). With an understanding that weakness in any one of these areas may hamper comprehension, teaching reading comprehension strategies has been found to enhance comprehension (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Boardman et al., 2008; Duke & Pearson, 2002; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006; Torgesen et al., 2007). Direct, explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies is the most effective way to support improved comprehension (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Boardman et al., 2008; Duke & Pearson, 2002). Research shows that no single strategy is necessarily better than another (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). While the use of even one strategy can be helpful, student use of a variety of comprehension strategies significantly improves reading proficiency (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006;
Duke & Pearson, 2002; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006; Torgesen et al., 2007). Researchers’ opinions vary somewhat on whether a specific group of strategies should comprise the explicit instruction on reading comprehension or if a more inclusive list of strategies should be taught. The ideas concerning the teaching and use of comprehension strategies found in the research will be presented in what follows.

**Reciprocal Teaching**

One teaching approach that combines a specific group of strategies is called reciprocal teaching. Palincsar and Brown’s (1984) early study determined that six main activities were the most important approaches to checking on and improving comprehension, and these six activities could be further simplified into four main strategies of, (a) summarizing, (b) questioning, (c) clarifying, and (d) predicting. They saw that in summarizing a text, students are also monitoring their understanding of what they have read while attending to the main content of the text, and so the summarizing strategy encompasses self-monitoring and focus on main points of a text, thus simplifying the list of strategies (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). In addition, when questioning the content of a text, students are again required to focus on main ideas and check their understanding (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). The third strategy of clarifying also includes the activity of critically evaluating the text during reading, while the fourth strategy, predicting, involves consideration of inferences in the text, with all four strategies set up to activate background knowledge as well (Palincsar &
Brown, 1984). Teaching students to understand and use these strategies plays an important part in the success of this method for improving reading comprehension.  

**Reciprocal teaching methods.** The goal of reciprocal teaching is to train students to use the interrelated combination of strategies independently (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Slater & Horstman, 2002). In order to reach that goal, teachers must first model each of the four basic strategies of reciprocal teaching: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. Each strategy must be explained, the how and when to use each described, and each strategy’s usefulness communicated (National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). As the teacher explains and demonstrates the use of each strategy, doing her thinking aloud, students watch and listen, only gradually taking on the responsibility of performing this activity on their own, although always with the teacher available to monitor student work and provide additional support (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Shanahan, 2006; Slater & Horstman, 2002). The reciprocal teaching method includes regular discussions of the text between teacher and students, and as students adopt increasing responsibility for use of the strategies, they assume a leadership role within small group discussions or as the leader of the class (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). The scaffolding approach of the teacher, the necessary participation of the students as they assume more responsibility, and the required time that must be invested in the reciprocal teaching method result in significant student gains in reading comprehension (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).
Use of reciprocal teaching in a reading tutorial class. The strategies in use with reciprocal teaching are valuable instructional tools for struggling readers, as is suggested by the literature (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Torgesen et al., 2007). The methods, too, involve good teaching. Modeling, thinking aloud, and providing a gradual release of responsibility are all examples of good teaching. There are some considerations that should be made, though, before adopting this for a reading support class.

One consideration is the limited number of strategies. Several other useful strategies are also valuable. Shanahan (2006) remarks that sixteen strategies have been studied and were found to be worthwhile. When adding to the four used in reciprocal teaching, which include other strategies imbedded within them, graphic organizers, previewing the text, reading aloud, and visualization, are also useful tools for readers (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). Students particularly enjoy graphic organizers, which provide multiple manners of presentation and help fulfill their need for diversity in instruction and assignment, and research sources list graphic organizers as effective tools (Boardman, et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007).

There are other factors that diminish the appeal for reciprocal teaching in a reading support class. One is the time required, though some may disagree, finding the commitment of time of great value. Shanahan (2006) states that daily instruction for four weeks per strategy is necessary. He was not clear as to the inclusion of student practice time, but this method of teaching is regimented and does not seem to
include time for other activities within a class period. The reading tutorial class is not like a regular academic class with an assigned textbook or novels such as found in an English class. As such, it allows time for students’ independent reading of self-selected texts, which helps to foster motivation for reading (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007). Although Palincsar and Brown (1984) discuss some one-on-one, teacher to student interactions using an independently chosen text, which might allow for such a practice, this is not practical in a classroom of fifteen to twenty students.

There are questions, too, about student participation in this process, which is an integral part of the process. While students are encouraged to participate through group activities with the understanding that they are learning and with continued help will succeed, there is little indication of exactly how this will work (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Experience with struggling readers suggests that they are not likely to be motivated to participate in the manner described.

**Other Reading Strategies**

The reciprocal teaching method offers a set plan for teachers to follow and students to use, as previously stated, and research shows that it is successful (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Torgesen et al., 2007). Researchers also suggest that other strategies provide help for students struggling to improve their reading abilities (Boardman et al., 2008; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Shanahan, 2006; Torgesen et al. 2007). In addition to the basic four strategies used in reciprocal teaching of summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting, other
strategies include visualization or visual representations or graphic organizers, reading aloud, and vocabulary building (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Torgesen et al., 2007). Strategies overlap with each other as was pointed out with reciprocal teaching in that activating prior knowledge was part of all four strategies, and comprehension monitoring and text evaluation were included within other strategy activities (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). While the names vary somewhat in different contexts, they are all strategies that work to support advancing reading proficiency.

**Teaching methods for other reading strategies.** The teaching methods for strategies in general are the same as those for reciprocal teaching. Explicit, direct instruction by the teacher needs to be employed as she explains the what, how, and usefulness of each strategy in her modeling of each strategy’s use (National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). Also, the teacher thinks aloud while demonstrating the strategy with the students watching and listening until they can take on more and more responsibility for using the strategy, but always with support from the teacher, and the inclusion of discussions about the text (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Shanahan, 2006). These are good teaching methods in general.

**Use of other reading strategies in a reading tutorial class.** Once again, a reading tutorial class is not a standard academic class. Its students are struggling adolescent readers who have not been as academically successful as their peers and need all the help available to advance their comprehension of texts. To limit their use of any reading strategy seems unprofitable. Thoroughly teaching strategies beyond those used with reciprocal teaching would involve greater time and less structure, but
all the strategies mentioned involve the reading and writing that should permeate this class, so time should not be an issue.

One reason to incorporate all the strategies is to find those that work best for each student and for the types of texts they would likely encounter in their classes. They need to be able to know how to attack vocabulary words in various content areas or in literature, to graph or chart or illustrate or otherwise create a visual representation or graphic organizer, or to just realize that when confused by a text, reading it aloud can clarify its meaning. Using a variety of strategies is recommended by research sources (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Duke & Pearson, 2002; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006; Torgesen et al., 2007).

**Vocabulary and Background Knowledge**

Vocabulary and background knowledge are so dependent upon each other that it is difficult to determine which deserves more attention. Some researchers (Adams, 2010-2011; Hirsch, 2003; Torgesen et al., 2007; Willingham, 2006) explain how understanding the words in a story or a speech, for example, is not as important as having knowledge of the subject. Hirsch (2003) describes how someone listening to Einstein understood all of Einstein’s words but lacked the deep knowledge necessary to comprehend the subject. In another report, researchers presented information about soccer and showed that even students with lower vocabulary knowledge understood the story as well as students of higher ability because of their knowledge of the subject (Torgesen et al., 2007). On the other hand, knowing the meaning of words enables a reader to understand the content (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2006;
Boardman et al., 2008), gain more knowledge of both words and the world, and be better prepared to understand future materials. Both vocabulary and background knowledge play a significant role in reading comprehension.

**Vocabulary Knowledge**

Students learn vocabulary incidentally by listening as others speak or read aloud or as they read for themselves and figure out new words (Boardman et al., 2008; Pressley, 2001). This incidental learning is enhanced through explicit instruction of vocabulary words (Adams, 2010-2011; Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). Researchers are in agreement that effective vocabulary instruction is both explicit and implicit (Shanahan, 2006).

**Vocabulary instruction practices.** Teachers assist indirect vocabulary acquisition when they read to their students, giving them an opportunity to hear language rich in vocabulary, and when they provide them with time for reading independently and widely (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). These teaching practices are more a commitment of time than actual teaching, but they do reflect the intention of the teacher to foster an environment rich in vocabulary and language, which in itself aids vocabulary development and can provide material for more explicit instruction (Blachowicz, 2006).

Researchers not only describe the benefits of explicit vocabulary instruction, they provide details for how to teach it (Blachowicz et al., 2006; Boardman et al. 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). Direct, explicit
vocabulary instruction offers a multitude of teaching practices. Determining which words to teach is an important consideration (Blachowicz et al., 2006; Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006), but whichever words are taught, best practices should be followed.

Best practices include scaffolding instruction and teacher modeling. To start, teachers need to explain word meanings clearly with simple definitions and model their usage in sentences reflecting the context (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007). Guided practice with feedback from the teacher, time for students’ interaction with the words in collaboration with their peers, and repeated instruction and use of the words in the classroom are some important steps to building better knowledge (Blachowicz et al., 2006; Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). The literature also details instruction using word games, charts, semantic maps, and other graphic organizers to help students interact in multiple ways and times with words. Boardman et al. (2008) explain that students need about 12 exposures to a word for full understanding of it, and these exposures must be varied and allow for students to work in groups or pairs and with the teacher.

In addition, in pre-teaching difficult words such as academic vocabulary, it is important to first find connections to prior knowledge on which to build understanding, and then to use the same teaching practices of providing clear, simple definitions, modeling use of the words in context, and arranging for multiple interactions with the words through discussions, collaborative learning, and repeated use of and practice with the words in multiple ways (National Institute for Literacy,
Researchers (Blachowicz et al., 2006; National Institute for Literacy, 2007) find that including the studying of word parts, including roots, prefixes, and suffixes, in vocabulary instruction supplies students with powerful tools for dealing with unknown words independently. Teaching students to learn words independently is the ultimate goal of vocabulary instruction.

**Vocabulary instruction practices in a reading tutorial class.** A reading tutorial class is unlikely to have a weekly list of vocabulary words for students to learn and be tested on. Nevertheless, vocabulary, as an important aspect of reading comprehension, can play a part in this class. As suggested in the literature (National Institute for Literacy, 2007), difficult words in any texts read as a class could be studied through pre-reading activities followed by instruction using discussion, group work, and interaction with charts or graphs or word maps. Reading students might also use words from their academic classes or independent reading books as a source of vocabulary study, with the class structured for time to work on words in interactive and varied formats.

Once students are well acquainted with vocabulary strategies, they will have the opportunity to practice independent word acquisition as they read and listen to sources imbued with rich vocabulary. With time set aside for independent reading, their personal choice reading materials could be a prime source for continued incidental gaining of vocabulary knowledge as well.
Background Knowledge

Having vocabulary knowledge is necessary for comprehension of texts, but without background knowledge, the words may be nearly meaningless (Adams, 2010-2011; Hirsch, 2003). When students know about a topic, though, they are better able to understand and remember what they read (Hirsch, 2006; Pressley, 2001; Torgesen et al., 2007; Willingham, 2006). Therefore, what students need, especially struggling readers, is greater background knowledge (Hirsch, 2006). Hirsch (2006) contends that when instruction involves general knowledge topics such as history, art, science, and literature, great improvements can be made in reading ability, and so, great content should be part of the reading curriculum.

**Background knowledge instruction.** Accessing prior knowledge, or background knowledge, is necessary to reaping the benefits of having prior knowledge of a subject. Students do not always automatically relate new material to what they learned before, and in order to make the best of their prior knowledge, they need to be asked to reflect and find connections between information sources (Pressley, 2001; Schoenback, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999). A good way to promote that reflection is to first explain the importance of activating prior knowledge so that students understand the reasoning behind connecting to background knowledge (Schoenback et al., 1999). Schoenback et al. (1999), in their book *Reading for Understanding*, provide an example of an activity in which students read headlines that will only make sense if prior knowledge is applied. For example, “’Red Tape Holds Up Bridge’” only makes sense if the reader understands that red tape is a
reference to bureaucracy and the headline is not to be taken literally (Schoenback et al., 1999, p. 101).

Other activities also help connect to background knowledge. Asking students to list what they already know about a topic, discuss that knowledge with a classmate, and revise the list as needed helps students connect to their stored knowledge, information found in their memories (Schoenback et al., 1999). When students find the information stored in their memories, learning new information becomes easier and more automatic (Willingham, 2006). Cloze activities are another way to elicit prior knowledge from students as is a pre-reading vocabulary activity that asks students to chart how familiar they are with words they are about to encounter in a text (Schoenback et al., 1999). In a cloze activity, words are omitted from a passage and students are asked to fill in the blanks with words that make sense. A word bank may or may not be provided depending on teacher preferences (Schoenback et al., 1999). A cloze activity can be used as a check-for-understanding assignment as well. Graphic organizers might also be used, as is illustrated by Schoenback et al. (1999) in their use of a drawing of a tree with the roots showing the background knowledge that students provide and then develop as they fill in the branches and leaves with new information.

One troubling concern relates to the Language Arts section of California’s Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Nowhere in the ninth-tenth grade Language Arts section is any mention made of prior knowledge; only kindergarten and first grade standards reflect a need for activating prior knowledge (California Department
of Education, 2013). This is important in that teachers might hesitate to engage
students in activities that connect to background knowledge if they are not encouraged
to do so in the standards. Based on the literature concerning this subject, this would
be a mistake (Hirsch, 2003; Schoenback et al., 1999; Willingham, 2006).

Another Common Core inspired move away from connecting to background
knowledge comes through the practice of Close Reading (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012;
Fisher & Frey, 2012). Close Reading demands a focus on the text itself, from which
knowledge is acquired through purposeful readings and rereadings, and a general
avoidance of activities that are not included in the standards, such as time spent on
pre-reading, pre-teaching vocabulary, or drawing on prior knowledge (Coleman &
Pimentel, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2012). Despite the conflict between researchers who
stress the advantages of accessing vocabulary and background knowledge before
reading the text (Pressley, 2001; Schoenback et al., 1999) and those who contend that
activating background knowledge does not build knowledge (Coleman & Pimentel,
2012; Fisher & Frey, 2012), there is common ground between the two groups. Both
groups acknowledge that providing scaffolding, even to pre-teach difficult vocabulary
or concepts, supports students in the acquisition of world knowledge from texts and
the building of skills and strategies that lead them toward more independent learning
habits (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Pressley, 2001; Schoenback
et al., 1999).

Including content materials that promote world knowledge also promotes
educational advantages (Hirsch, 2006). Interesting, informational texts that elevate
students’ background knowledge, if made the core materials and are taught following best instructional practices, will greatly advance student reading comprehension (Adams, 2010-2011; Hirsch, 2003; Schoenback et al., 1999; Willingham, 2006).

**Background knowledge instruction in a reading tutorial class.** All the instructional practices suggested above fit the needs of a reading tutorial class. Explaining the importance of prior knowledge, asking students to list what they already know about a topic and discuss and revise their information will help students connect to their background knowledge (Schoenback et al., 1999). Using cloze activities and graphic organizers should also be helpful (Schoenback et al., 1999). The text materials necessary for expansion of world or general knowledge, while beneficial, might be difficult to procure without the help of administration, but every effort made would be a worthwhile endeavor for the advantages that knowledge of the world brings to reading comprehension.

**Fluency**

Fluency is a reader’s ability to recognize and understand words quickly or automatically and to read accurately and with expression (Osborn & Lehr, 2003). When readers are slowed down by unknown words, reading comprehension suffers as the focus moves to decoding or defining a word rather than the meaning of the text (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). This is why having good vocabulary and background knowledge plays a significant role in fluency (Hirsch, 2003). Fluent readers recognize words automatically, so students with more extensive vocabulary knowledge will recognize more words, which will improve their fluency (Hirsch,
2003; National Institute for Literacy, 2007). In addition, knowledge of the world, or background knowledge, allows readers to build on their knowledge and that eases comprehension, speeding up the reading instead of overloading the mind deciphering unknown words or concepts (Hirsch, 2003).

While reading speed is a factor in fluency, researchers are still questioning what rate is acceptable to determine sufficient fluency for middle and high school students (Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilfong, Friedauer, & Heim, 2005; Torgesen et al., 2007). Torgesen et al. (2007) point to 150 correct words per minute as an average level for middle and high school students, but other factors can help students compensate for poor reading rate and accuracy, factors such as a strong vocabulary or motivation can support comprehension when fluency is weak, although those weak in vocabulary and background knowledge need to read more accurately and fluently in order to achieve appropriate comprehension.

**Fluency instruction.** Since fluency does generally affect comprehension, researchers point to successful instructional practices to help improve reading fluency. Researchers agree that reading aloud, repeated readings, and guidance and feedback are necessary components of fluency instruction (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012; Shanahan, 2006).

Reading aloud, as is suggested by the research, includes having the teacher or other proficient reader read aloud to model fluent reading, providing a standard for students to strive for (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007).
Students themselves need to practice oral reading in order to better develop their fluency (National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). This practice in oral reading can take place in several ways. One is that students can practice reading to themselves, which helps with possible embarrassment. Another is guided, oral reading with a teacher or other proficient reader who provides feedback and checks for comprehension. Paired reading is also suggested, again to help with the possible embarrassment of reading to the whole class and to allow for some feedback.

Repeated readings, in which students reread a text, are found to be beneficial to fluency (Boardman et al., 2008; Paige et al., 2012; Rasinski, et al., 2005; Shanahan, 2006; National Institute for Literacy, 2007). Students reread until they reach a certain level of fluency. This activity might be undertaken as Reader’s Theater in which students practice reading their part of a text until sufficiently fluent for a performance. There are drawbacks to this approach as some students will have different amounts of reading allotted to them and may spend too much time waiting for their turn to read, similar to round robin reading which is generally not recommended (Shanahan, 2006).

Within both of these fluency activities, teachers or other proficient readers should be providing guidance and feedback (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Paige et al., 2012; Rasinski et al., 2005; Shanahan, 2006). When students read aloud, they should have a listener who is able to help them correct their errors and provide a good model of fluent reading. Boardman et al. (2008) also suggest that students track their gains in fluency, monitoring their progress. In addition, as Hirsch (2003) points out, improved vocabulary and background
knowledge enhances reading fluency and should be considered an integral part of teaching fluency.

**Fluency instruction in a reading tutorial class.** Paige et al. (2012) request that reading teachers at the high school level include reading fluency in their instruction. Teaching students who are not fluent readers to read more fluently is an important consideration for a reading teacher, especially since these struggling readers are unlikely to find such instruction in any other high school class. While the suggested activities might be reasonably included in a reading tutorial class, it would require a certain amount of differentiated instruction since not all students lack fluency. This would be particularly true when teacher feedback to oral reading was needed, as this is a one-on-one activity. Otherwise, having students read aloud, while noisy, is feasible, as is repeated reading and paired reading. Paired reading also works well when language learners are students in this class.

**Motivation and Self-Concept as a Reader**

Motivated readers are engaged in their reading, know that they have control over their reading, and set goals for their reading; also, they feel that they can be successful, which leads to a positive concept of themselves as readers (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). Adolescents who struggle to read are often not motivated (Boardman et al., 2008). With motivation and engagement with a text, readers are more successful (Torgesen et al., 2007), which should result in a higher self-concept as a reader.
Despite the seemingly personal nature of motivation and self-concept, teachers can support the growth of both of these critical aspects of successful readers (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007). Researchers have found that several teaching practices lead to increased motivation. Three large compilations of research (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007) put forth four instructional practices for improving students’ reading motivation: (a) support student autonomy by allowing students to have some say in what they read; (b) provide a wide range of interesting texts; (c) help students set learning goals; and (d) create opportunities for social interaction and collaboration related to reading and learning goals.

Motivation instruction. Other researchers (Alvermann, 2001; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Donalson & Halsey, 2007; Skerrett, 2012; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011) also agree that allowing students to have some say in what they read is important for motivating them to read. This seems a logical practice; if a student is interested in a particular topic or literature genre, it is reasonable to expect him to be interested and engaged while reading that text. One way to promote reading self-selected materials is to provide regular independent reading time in class (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Lee, 2011; Skerrett & Bomer; 2011). Self-selection of texts can also play a part in readers’ identity as students choose reading materials that reflect views of themselves or others (Skerrett, 2012). Teachers do need to guide students in their choices, helping them discover their interests and finding materials that meet their needs (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Lee, 2011).
More traditional teachers might have some difficulties accepting student choices in reading materials, particularly what are termed outside-of-school literacies, genres that are traditionally not studied academically and often include the use of technology. Some examples of these popular cultural literacies are fan-fiction, zines, rap, tags, online chats, blogs, MySpace, and even videogames (Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). Although not traditional forms of literacy, they involve reading and/or writing, and connections can be made to more traditional literacy practices through teachers’ acceptance and use of these new literacies in the classroom (Alvermann, 2001; Skerrett, 2012; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). Students interact with the new literacies while working on improving their comprehension and analysis and discovery of themselves as readers and writers (Skerrett & Bomer, 2011). Although some teachers may not want to acknowledge that texts other than books and other traditional sources of reading material are valuable sources for building literacy skills, these outside-of-school literacies and the technology often connects with them and can bridge the gap between what students enjoy outside of school, what motivates and engages them, and what they need to learn while in school.

In order for students to find texts that interest them, a wide range of texts need to be accessible to them, including texts at variable reading levels (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007). The reading teacher, content-area teachers, special education teacher, and librarian can all work together to see that sufficient materials are collected and made available in order to meet the needs of the students (National Institute for Literacy, 2007).
Another teaching practice that helps motivate students concerns setting goals. The literature suggests that both the teacher and the students need clear learning goals to foster motivation (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007). The teacher must make her goals for assignments clear so that students understand what is expected of them and provide modeling and examples that help students successfully participate in discussions and other work related to each assignment (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). Teachers should also guide students in setting their own goals so that students know what their purpose is when reading, what knowledge they expect to gain as they pursue their goals (Boardman et al., 2008). It is also suggested by some researchers that students track their progress in meeting their goals (Boardman et al. 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007).

A fourth teaching practice has been identified as helping motivate students in their pursuit of learning through reading. Students are more motivated when given time to collaborate with each other in pairs or small groups as they work on their reading or their sharing of knowledge resulting from their reading tasks (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007). Teachers should also show students how best to work collaboratively and be accountable for their own work when working with others (Boardman et al., 2008).

When teachers support students’ autonomy in their selection of reading materials, provide interesting, relevant, and varied texts for student use, focus on learning goals, and create opportunities for student interaction and collaboration, motivation to read and learn from reading will increase (Boardman et al., 2008;
National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007). As motivated readers, students will be more engaged in their reading and attain higher levels of literacy (Torgesen et al., 2007), which will help them see themselves as more successful and will foster a more positive self-concept as a reader.

**Motivation instruction in a reading tutorial class.** The suggestions presented in the literature on instructional practices for adolescent readers regarding motivation are all suitable for a reading tutorial class. Anyone who teaches such a class is likely to see the positive results of allowing and encouraging students to read books of their choice and to share what they have learned or experienced through their readings. Student text choices can expand beyond what a school library offers or what texts are offered in content-area classes if a classroom library can be created based, in part, on students’ requests. The one area, of the four suggested, that students might resist is their setting of learning goals. While they are relatively used to teachers explaining the teachers’ goals for assignments, setting their own goals is not the focus of general academic high school classes but could certainly be included in a reading tutorial class.

**Summary**

This literature review was designed to inform instruction in a high school reading tutorial class. It focused on reading comprehension strategies, vocabulary and background knowledge, fluency, motivation and self-concept as a reader, and the instructional practices suggested by the literature. Chapter 3 will present information...
gained through observations, surveys, and assessments of the participants in a
descriptive study of a reading tutorial class.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

In an effort to establish best instructional practices to use in a ninth/tenth grade Reading Tutorial class, a review of the literature, which was presented in Chapter 2, was conducted. Along with the literature review, this study was designed to determine ways of addressing the academic and motivational needs of struggling adolescent readers in this type of class. Through a variety of assessments, surveys, and observations, the students’ needs were determined. This chapter will present information about the participants, the assessments, the surveys, and the observations that took place during one school semester.

Participants

The participants in this study were eight of the twenty-one students enrolled in the Reading Tutorial class. Although there were twenty-one students enrolled in this class, only eight returned the Consent to Participate in Research form (Appendix A) signed by their parents and the Agreement to Participate in Research form (Appendix B) signed by the students. The eight participants are the only students reported on specifically, though anonymously, in this study, but the whole class was part of each observation and all but one of the surveys. After the first survey was given, the Reading Tutorial class teacher agreed that assigning the entire class to complete each survey and assessment created a better classroom environment since all the students were expected to complete the work as a whole-class assignment and no students would be left with nothing to occupy them. This had the additional benefit of
allowing the class’s teacher to see the shared results for all of her students and to get a more comprehensive view of the class for the study.

**The Eight Official Participants**

Of the eight officially participating, seven were ninth-grade students and one was in tenth grade. Five of the participants were boys and three were girls. One of the three girls was in the tenth grade.

**The Remaining Thirteen Students in the Class**

Of those who were part of the class but did not officially participate, nine were boys and four were girls. One of the girls in that group was in tenth grade and was returning for a second year in the class; the rest were in the ninth grade. The whole class consisted of fourteen boys and seven girls.

**Process of Assignment to This Class**

The information that helped build a list of students to be assessed for possible inclusion in this class included state tests scores, grades, and teacher recommendations. Teacher recommendations sometimes originated with a teacher from a previous grade but also from a current teacher, usually an English teacher. Since the reading teacher started her search for students for the class a few weeks after school started, she was able to send a note to ninth-grade English teachers asking for recommendations.

Once the reading teacher compiled the list, she used the San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability or *The Graded Word List: Quick Gauge of Reading Ability* (La Pray & Ross, 1969) as the main determinate of assessment. She also used
supplemental assessments to help build a more complete picture of the students’ abilities in reading, vocabulary, and spelling. After assessments, her notes indicate that all the students included in the class were shown to be reading below grade level by at least two years based on the San Diego Quick assessment. Six of the eight official students in this study were assessed using the San Diego Quick and were shown to be reading at the fifth-seventh grade level, two at each grade level. Of the students not officially in the study, two were reading at a fifth-grade level, six were reading at a sixth-grade level, one was reading at the seventh-grade level, and the one student returning for a second year in the reading class was reading at a third-grade level. The reading teacher herself concluded that the students were at least two years behind in their reading levels. Her assessments showed that these students were indeed struggling readers in need of the support that the Reading Tutorial class could give them but did not provide definitive information about their actual needs.

Measures

During this study the students completed five assessments and three surveys. In addition, three kinds of observations were made.

Assessments

Overview. Three of the assessments focused on reading comprehension. One of these involved released questions from the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) chosen from the Reading section (California Department of Education, 2008), and one from the California Standards Test (California Department of Education, 2009) English-Language Arts section for eighth grade. Both assessments
required that students read non-fiction texts and answer multiple-choice questions. A third assessment asked students to read an informational text selection and to paraphrase, summarize, and give the main idea in writing. The latter included an extra activity to complete while reading (Appendix C) and served as one of the surveys for this study.

General vocabulary knowledge was assessed using the vocabulary subtest of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (MacGinitie, MacGinitie, Maria, Dreyer, & Hughes, 2000).

In addition, students’ reading accuracy and rate were measured while reading orally as part of a class assignment.

**California High School Exit Exam and California Standards Test.** One important test for all California high school students is the CAHSEE. Without a passing grade on this exam, a student, unless excluded due to a disability, cannot graduate from high school with a diploma, even if all required classes are completed and all credits are earned (California Department of Education, 2014). Assessments using released CASHEE documents allow for a look at students’ strengths and weaknesses in order to develop instruction to help them be successful in passing this test. Their first opportunity to pass the CAHSEE occurs in the spring semester of tenth grade.

The sample CAHSEE test presented to the reading class was a three-paragraph, non-fiction text about koalas and eucalyptus leaves entitled “Deadly Leaves.” Students followed the written directions, which were also given orally, and read the
text and answered the three questions that followed. The first question asked about the meaning of the word *contaminated* as it was used in the passage, providing the sentence from the passage for review and four phrases to choose from for determining the meaning. A question about the article’s purpose and one about author’s tone were also posed.

The other sample test, from the STAR released material, included more reading passages, “Sun Veil Sunscreen” and “Sunscreen 30,” and six questions. The reading material itself consisted of two documents presenting information about a particular sunscreen and the importance of using sunscreen. Six questions followed the reading. One of the questions asked about the two documents together, two asked for comparisons between the two documents, and the other three questions pertained to only one document at a time. Correct responses could show that students could determine purpose, similarities, differences, implications, and word meaning.

**Paraphrasing, summarizing, and identifying the main idea.** A third assessment asked students to read a short, three-paragraph passage from the California Reading and Literature Project (2014) entitled “Texting While Driving Increases Crash Risk By Large Percentage” and to write responses to the reading. Students were encouraged to mark the text as they read for information they deemed important and were provided highlighters to further encourage them in that pursuit. The directions were read aloud to them before they started reading; these directions were also included at the top of the page for their later reference. They were directed to read carefully and closely and respond in writing to indicate the topic of the passage, to
paraphrase the first paragraph, to summarize the whole section, and to state the passage’s main idea. They were given a form that separated and titled each area for placement of the four responses.

**Assessment of general vocabulary knowledge.** The vocabulary subtest of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Level 7/9 (MacGinitie et al., 2000), included two practice questions and forty-five additional questions. This multiple-choice test lists five possible responses. Before starting the test, the administrator went over the directions using the practice questions that are in the same format as the test questions. Each question has an underlined word in a phrase or short sentence in order to provide some context, and students were expected to find a matching word or phrase that is similar in meaning to the underlined word. They were to fill the circle indicating the best match in meaning and were given twenty minutes to answer the questions as was indicated in the directions.

The results provided a raw score, a percentile rank, a normal curve equivalent, a stanine score, an extended scale score, and a grade equivalent; the percentile rank, normal equivalent, and stanine allow for student ranking during fall, winter, and spring school terms.

**Assessment of oral reading correct words per minute.** Students often read aloud in this class in the Round Robin style of having one student read a paragraph and then another student taking on the next paragraph until the reading of the text is complete. The Reading Tutorial teacher found this style the most convenient way of regularly hearing her students read. Although most observation days involved
students reading in this manner, only one assessment was made of their correct words per minute. The conditions were not optimal as the reading time for each student was generally around twenty or thirty seconds which is not as comprehensive as it might be. The texts students read were reported by the classroom teacher to be at the seventh grade level.

**Surveys**

**Overview.** Three surveys were given to the students of the Reading Tutorial class. These surveys include a literacy survey, a reading strategies survey, and a reading process survey.

**Literacy survey.** The Literacy Survey (Appendix D) included questions about what types of materials they read, how they felt about themselves as readers and writers, where and when they read and what prompted them to write, and what they liked or disliked about reading. It listed items to check and a place for comments. This survey was designed to determined student practices and attitudes regarding reading and writing.

**Reading strategies survey.** The Reading Strategies Survey (Appendix E) asked students to respond to statements about sixteen methods, or strategies, that they might use to help them understand a text. The numbered choices indicated whether they had (a) never heard of it, (b) heard of it, (c) have some idea or experience with it, (d) know/understand it, or (e) use it. Since several researchers (Abersek & Abersek, 2013; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Cantrell et al., 2010; Cuevas, Russell, & Irving, 2012; Lamb, 2010; Ness, 2008; Pressley, 2001; Slater & Horstman, 2002; Snow,
2002) note the helpfulness of many of these strategies, determining student knowledge and use of these methods could guide a teacher’s lesson development in working with struggling readers.

“Questions About How You Read” survey. The reading survey, which also directed students to annotate the text (Appendix C), asked students to respond to four questions about how they read. These questions were in response to their reading of the CAHSEE passages “Sun Veil Sunscreen” and “Sunscreen 30.” The questions included how they felt about the passages read, what they did when they had trouble understanding the text, if they were able to stay focused while reading, and if they could connect the text to something they already knew.

The section of Appendix C that directed students to annotate the texts was disregarded for lack of any conclusive information since only two students circled a word each.

Observations

Overview. Most of the observations covered the daily class routines. One was made during a class visit to the library, and another was made during student presentations of PowerPoint materials.

Daily Routines. As might be expected, daily routines made up the bulk of the observations. During this time notes were taken regarding everything from the teacher’s notes on the board indicating the lessons for that day and week to where students sat at their desks in the room. As students read aloud or silently, asked questions, moved about the room, worked together or with the teacher, were called to
the office, or engaged in other activities, notes were made. These notes included information about all the students in the class.

**Library Day.** Only one library day visit was observed. Again, detailed notes were made on the activities of all of the students in the reading class. As there were no teacher-led activities on this day and the normal quiet of the library needed to be maintained, the observations were generally limited to what students could be seen doing, such as searching for a book to read, working on paper assignments, moving about the room, reading, or quietly conferencing with the teacher.

**Presentations.** Another variation from the daily routine involved students showing their PowerPoint presentations to the class. The work leading up to these presentations was not observed, but notes were taken on the content of the computer work and the comments students made as they spoke about their work. Notes were also made on the follow-up assignment and activities that completed that day’s work.

**Procedures**

Before this study could begin, the Reading Tutorial teacher was contacted and asked if this study could take place in her class. She confirmed that she was willing to allow a fellow teacher to make regular observations and administer surveys and assessments to her Reading Tutorial students. She was very generous in allowing for observations and time away from her own lessons in order for the surveys and assessments to be given to her students. Without her permission, this study could not have taken place. The high school principal also gave her permission when she signed a letter indicating her approval of this study.
At the start of the spring 2014 semester, students in the Reading Tutorial class were informed that another teacher at their school would be observing the class on a semi-regular basis for several months. They were then given the Consent to Participate in Research form (Appendix A) and the Agreement to Participate in Research form (Appendix B). Students who returned the consent forms with their parents’ signatures and the agreement forms with their own signatures became part of the study. The class was observed as a whole, and they worked as a class to complete all but one of the surveys, but only those with signed forms are specifically referred to in reporting on this study.

This class met during the second hour of the school day, roughly between nine and ten in the morning. The schedule for observations or other study-related activities was not set to any particular day, but in order to avoid disrupting the class as much as possible, observations and administrations of assessments and surveys were conducted on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays only. Arrangements were always made in advance to allow time for surveys or assessments, so that time could be set aside for these activities, and also for observation-only days simply as a matter of consideration for the teacher and her lessons.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided information about how the study was arranged and conducted. This information included the particulars regarding the types of assessments and surveys that were given. In addition, how observation notes were
collected on the details of class activities and daily routines, or the exceptions to those routines, were detailed. The results of this study will be presented in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4
RESULTS

Chapter 3 described how information was gathered during this study. Chapter 4 will present the results obtained from the assessments and surveys as they relate to comprehension and study strategies, vocabulary and background knowledge, fluency, and attitudes, motivation and self-concept as a reader.

**Comprehension and Study Strategies**

**California High School Exit Exam and California Standards Test Results**

The released sample passages and questions from the California High School exit Exam (CAHSEE) and the California Standards Test (STAR) provided an opportunity to assess how students would respond to reading comprehension questions similar to those students might find on these standardized tests. The two assessments given during the study included questions about purpose, tone, and vocabulary for the CAHSEE test, and purpose, vocabulary, implications, and similarities and differences between a pair of passages for the STAR assessment.

Due to student absences, only eighteen of the twenty-one students took the assessment for “Deadly Leaves” and only sixteen students were present for the sunscreen passages assessment. Ten students outside the study were present for each assessment.

**Overall performance.** A passing score on the English Language Arts sections of the CAHSEE is 60% (California Department of Education, 2014). Four of the eight in the study who took that assessment had percentages over 60%, but the other four
scored below passing. The passage used for this assessment is short, with only three questions, so is not likely a clear indicator of success or failure for the full test, but still reveals some areas of focus for instruction of struggling readers.

One surprise based on these results was that students in the class scored higher on the CAHSEE assessment, a test for tenth graders, than on the STAR test for eighth graders. The fact that the CAHSEE passage, “Deadly Leaves,” is short with only three questions while the STAR passages about sunscreen involve two documents and six questions leads one to believe that struggling readers are reluctant to spend much time with texts, even if the questions about them deal with relatively familiar concepts such as finding similarities and differences. Some might argue that the CAHSEE questions were easier than the STAR questions despite the designated grade levels. This calls into question the Common Core State Standards’ emphasis on increased reading levels of text.

**Question difficulty across students and within question types.** CAHSEE and STAR questions measuring specific types of skills or strategies varied in difficulty. The STAR vocabulary and purpose questions proved more difficult than the same types of questions for the CAHSEE assessment. Other types of questions varied in difficulty across the two tests (see Tables 1 and 2).
Learning words from context. The students varied in how well they answered the three questions in “Deadly Leaves,” a CAHSEE released passage, and the six questions about the pair of sunscreen passages, “Sun Veil Sunscreen 30” and “Sunscreen 30,” from released STAR materials. The CAHSEE released questions are geared for tenth grade students. The STAR test was identified as at the eighth-grade level.

The CAHSEE vocabulary question that included a context clue was easier for students, which is noticeable in their scores. More difficult was the STAR vocabulary question which asked students to understand the subtleties or connotations of a word.
Determining word connotations requires more complete word knowledge, which some students lacked.

The vocabulary questions for both assessments showed reprints of the sentences that contained the vocabulary words with four multiple choice responses to choose from. The results for the students tested as a class showed that 72%, 13/18, answered the vocabulary question correctly on the “Deadly Leaves” passage but on the sunscreen passages scored at 62.5%, 10/16. The “Deadly Leaves” passage responses offered choices that included the phrase poisoned with in asking about the word contaminated in reference to leaves. The reprinted sentence concluded with the phrase “poisonous leaves.” The repetition of poison in the correct response, compared to carried with, polished with, and grown with may have made the correct response of poisoned with an easier, more explicit choice than those offered for the sunscreen passage. The sunscreen passage used for the vocabulary question, “Sunscreen 30,” asked students to determine in which of the four responses the word burning was used in the same way as in the original sentence. This question called for students to differentiate the subtleties or connotations of the word burning. A burning candle, the burning issue, a burning need, or a burning pavement needed to be compared to the sun’s burning rays. Ten of the sixteen correctly responded, and of the six who erred, five chose the first choice of a burning candle. That could indicate that they did not fully understand how a burning pavement was similar to the sun's burning rays, or that the options all appeared too similar to distinguish the correct response and perhaps the incorrect responses were guesses resulting from a lack of word
knowledge. No context clues were provided in the extracted sentence, such as had been done for the “Deadly Leaves” vocabulary question, making this question more difficult for the students and resulting in a lower percentage of correct responses, despite the grade level indications for these tests.

**Identifying the author’s purpose.** Similarly, students had little trouble finding the author’s purpose in the short CAHSEE passage but had difficulty finding author’s purpose when comparing the two, longer STAR passages. STAR’s two sources of information required more intense investigation of the passages which increased the level of difficulty of this question.

The questions about purpose, one for “Deadly Leaves” and two for the sunscreen passages, resulted in a 94%, 17/18, for the former, and 53%, 17/32, for the latter. This is a significant difference. The “Deadly Leaves” question about purpose offered responses of *to inform, to persuade, to entertain,* and *to express opinion.* The article was straightforward and only three paragraphs long. For 17/18 students, the response of *to inform* was clear. The sunscreen passages, on the otherhand, required that students read two separate passages, differently arranged, one with bullet points and the other with subtitles followed by information related to each subtitle. Students needed to answer two questions about purpose. The first question referenced the purpose of including the list of activities for which people require sunscreen. Since the activities covered a wide variety of activities, students were expected to respond that sunscreen was required most of the time. Nine of sixteen, 56%, responded correctly. Response possibilities ranged from *for both adults and children, necessary*
most of the time, available almost everywhere, and better than most others on the market. Since the list of activities included both driving in the car and playing on the playground, among other items that included both adults and children, students responding that sunscreen is for both adults and children might have felt justified in such a response, but only two students of the sixteen chose that answer. Nothing in that one passage suggested that the product was available almost everywhere or was better than others on the market yet four students chose better than others on the market and one other chose available almost everywhere. Seven of the sixteen made errors, and little justification is present. The advertisement presentation style of the passage suggests some reason for choosing the possible preference for availability of the product. Incorrect student choices otherwise seem to be guesses, possibly because students were disinterested readers who were unwilling to exert much effort in finding the correct response.

The second question regarding purpose is similar to the purpose question in “Deadly Leaves.” The question tells students that Document A’s, “Sun Veil Sunscreen 30,” purpose is to persuade the consumer and then asks students to choose between to influence, to encourage, to inform, and to entertain in response to the purpose of the product label in “Sunscreen 30,” Document B. Eight of the sixteen students in this class, 50%, responded correctly that this passage was to inform. Five of the others chose to encourage and three chose to influence. “Sunscreen 30” was factual in appearance, similar to a textbook in structure, and a close reading would indicate its informational purpose. Since this assessment also included the questions
about how they read, (Appendix C) students’ written comments indicated that they felt they understood the passages or that they reread if they had difficulties. Other comments mentioned that the passages were boring or that they already knew about the importance of sunscreen, so their lack of interest about a topic they felt they understood might explain the errors in that they did not feel a serious need to spend time or effort on the questions or responses. In addition, they might have been influenced by the stated purpose of Document A as persuasive, which they connected with to influence.

**Making inferences.** The question asking for the implications of a logo in the sunscreen assessment resulted in correct responses of 87.5%, 14/16. The smiling sun face on the “Sun Veil Sunscreen” passage is the logo for this advertisement-like passage and likely appealed to their prior knowledge of a common symbol. Students were asked to determine if the logo was *fun, easy, practical,* or *adventurous.* Fourteen of the sixteen responses correctly identified the smiling sun as implying that the product makes being in the sun *fun.* One student mistakenly chose *easy,* which is somewhat close in sentiment to *fun* but is not the best answer; the other student choose *practical* which seems illogical. The words in the responses are not difficult, but the word *implies* might have been difficult for a few students to understand because of a lack of word knowledge.

**Making comparisons.** This proved to be a problem again when students were making comparisons. Having to read and compare two passages proved difficult when students were asked to find similarities and differences. The material itself was not
the problem; students were fairly successful in answering a question regarding inferences. The question referred to a common symbol, which students likely had background knowledge of and found helpful in choosing the correct response.

In finding the similarities between the two passages about sunscreen, students needed to make comparisons, to read each document closely to check if the documents tell the reader *how to use the Sun Veil product, how to contact the manufacturer, where to purchase the product, or about the dangers of sun exposure.* Only “Sunscreen 30” provided the reader with directions for use and how to contact the manufacturer. The *DIRECTIONS* were the first item of subtitled information and clearly visible. Neither document told the reader where to buy the sunscreen. Both documents provided information about the dangers of the sun without sunscreen, which is the correct response. Ten of the sixteen, 62.5%, correctly responded to this question. Students who were not close readers would have difficulty finding the correct response, possibly influenced by the more conspicuous placement of *DIRECTIONS.* Six of the sixteen participating in the assessment incorrectly answered that both documents provided information about how to use the product, information found in the directions. These responses suggest that the incorrect responses were the result of less than close reading.

30,” referenced the sunscreen’s guarantee. The most common error, 7/16, occurred when students chose directions for using the product instead of the extent of the product guarantee. As previously stated, the DIRECTIONS information is near the top of the page and the first item with a subheading and fully capitalized in bold. Students could clearly see that particular information on the “Sunscreen 30” passage while in the “Sun Veil Sunscreen 30” passage, the guarantee was written in smaller print size at the bottom of the page. The most easily visible item was the DIRECTIONS subheading and no directions were mentioned on “Sun Veil Sunscreen 30,” which would suggest that students recognized information found on one document but not on the other, but did not read carefully enough to determine that the information had to be present on Document A but not on Document B. The question was complicated in that it asked for more than to find differences; students had to find very specific differences.

**Determining tone.** The question about tone in the CAHSEE passage caused problems for half of the students in the class, particularly for those with low general vocabulary knowledge. This question about tone occurred in the “Deadly Leaves” passage. The options available about tone included critical, hopeful, straightforward, and humorous. Fifty percent of students, 9/18, answered correctly. This passage was straightforward and certainly did not provide any humorous information, and not a single student in the class chose humorous. Students might have seen some criticism of the zoo keepers for their not realizing that young eucalyptus leaves are lethal to koalas as an explanation for 5/18 choosing critical, not understanding the rhetorical
use of the word. There might also be some reason for students to pick hopeful since the passage mentioned that it was fortunate that zoos now know how to avoid feeding koalas poisonous leaves. Both possible explanations for incorrect responses are conjecture based on experience with students who see an explanation for their answer and are unwilling to continue looking for the best answer.

**Other factors affecting question difficulty.** The patterns that emerged from student responses indicated that students performed better on assessments that provided familiar images, a connection to background knowledge, such as was found in the implication question about a smiling sun as a logo for fun. Also, their scores were higher when passages were short and to-the-point such as with questions found in “Deadly Leaves” about purpose. Finding purpose in the sunscreen passages required a weighing of more information to find the correct response; having to read through two texts produced lower percentages, 61.9% overall for the sunscreen passages and 72% overall for “Deadly Leaves.”

An explicit response such as found in the vocabulary question from “Deadly Leaves” resulted in more accurate responses. The vocabulary question based on the sunscreen passage proved more difficult. An answer based on implicit information required more analysis of the text, more thoughtful, perhaps painstaking work. Students who struggle to read are not likely to enjoy the activity and will want to finish quickly. If a passage is long or the questions require rereading or back-and-forth comparisons, more effort is required than many students are willing to put forth and a guess brings an end to their difficulties.
Analysis of the performance of individual students. Table 3 below summarizes how each of the eight students in the study responded to the CAHSEE and STAR questions.

Table 3

CAHSEE and STAR Results Summary Table of Students in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Deadly Leaves CAHSEE</th>
<th>Sunscreen STAR</th>
<th>Totals Correct Across Passages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P V T Total #/%</td>
<td>P I V D S Total #/%</td>
<td># %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>x x x 3/3 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/3 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>x x x 3/3 100%</td>
<td>x/x x x x □</td>
<td>5/6 83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>x x x 3/3 100%</td>
<td>□/x □ x x</td>
<td>3/6 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>x x □ 2/3 67%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2/3 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>x □ □ 1/3 34%</td>
<td>x/x □ x x x</td>
<td>5/6 83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>x □ □ 1/3 34%</td>
<td>x/ □ x x □ x</td>
<td>4/6 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>x □ □ 1/3 34%</td>
<td>x/x x x □ □</td>
<td>4/6 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>x □ □ 1/3 34%</td>
<td>x/ □ x x □ □</td>
<td>3/6 50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P=Purpose V=Vocabulary, T=Tone, I=Implication, D=Differences, S=Similarities X=correct, √=incorrect

Three of the eight students involved in the study, students A, B, and E, scored 100% on the three questions asked about the passage “Deadly Leaves” which was from the Reading section of the CAHSEE test. Those questions covered purpose,
tone, and vocabulary. Student E was absent for the STAR assessment, so no information is available for comparison, but Students A and B scored higher than the other students in this study when both tests scores are combined. Student B found difficulty with inferences and word knowledge connotations. Student C was the only other student in the study who missed the STAR test and so no comparisons of responses can be made with the CAHSEE.

The remaining four students in this study performed equally on the CAHSEE, missing the questions on vocabulary and tone but correctly answering the question on purpose. Two of these four, Students D and H, also missed the questions about similarities and differences from the STAR test, and Student D scored the lowest in additionaly missing one of the purpose questions in that test. Their low scores suggest that they read without comprehension strategies for explicit or implicit material and did not read closely. As students identified as struggling readers, placed in a reading tutorial class, they perhaps no longer see a reason to exert effort and have given up trying because they no longer believe they can be successful, something teachers see too often and research shows (National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Schoenback et al., 1999).

Summary of CAHSEE and STAR Results

The information gathered through these assessments shows that most of these students, in and out of the study, had difficulty determining either the similarities or differences, or both, between the passages from the STAR test. Tone also proved
difficult for students in both groups to pinpoint. These results indicate an area of study that could help students pass state tests.

**Paraphrasing, Summarizing, and Identifying the Topic and Main Idea**

This assessment asked students to read a short passage from the California Reading and Literature Project (2014) about the dangers of texting while driving. Students were asked to write a response to the text by stating its topic and main idea, paraphrasing the first paragraph, and summarizing the entire passage.

All eight of the students in this study were able to restate the topic appropriately in that they wrote a complete or shortened version of the title, which was an adequate response and considered average. The paraphrasing of the first paragraph proved a little more difficult. Half of the eight students wrote an adequate or average paraphrase, which indicated that they could restate the information in their own words without leaving out too much information or including material that was not mentioned in the paragraph. Two others wrote below-average paraphrases and only restated about half the material covered in the paragraph. The remaining two students wrote above-average paraphrases in that they used more of their own words while correctly covering the information from the paragraph.

Of the written responses to the main idea of the entire selection, six of the eight were considered average. Those six wrote something similar to the statement that texting while driving is dangerous, which was an average response about the main idea. The other two wrote responses that were either too specific to one part of the
passage or added in ideas that went beyond the main idea and so were gauged as below average.

As to the summary of the entire passage, half the group wrote an average response, and half wrote a below-average response. All students wrote longer summaries of the entire passage than they had of the main idea, showing they understood that an entire selection warranted more information than that required for the main idea. Those considered average covered most of the material, while those who wrote below average were either too short or too vague or wrote only briefly on one aspect of the text.

**Summary of paraphrasing, summarizing, and identifying the topic and main idea.** Student work in this area varied. All of them wrote an adequate restatement of the topic; six of the eight or 75% of them paraphrased the first paragraph at or above average, seventy-five percent of them also made average statements on the main idea; and 50% wrote average summaries of the passage while the other half wrote below average summaries that were too vague or too brief to cover the material. Little consistency was evident from this activity as students who scored high on comprehension and general vocabulary did not necessarily score high on this activity while students with low scores on vocabulary and comprehension performed as well or better than those with higher scores. For example, Student B, who has above average general vocabulary knowledge, wrote an average response about topic and below average responses on the other three sections.
Reading Process Survey Results from STAR Annotations

Students were asked to respond to four “process” questions (Appendix C) regarding the STAR passages about using sunscreen. The six who completed the survey responded to each question.

The first question asked, How did you feel about the reading passages you just read and responded to? Four of the six students felt that the passages were understandable, saying they were “average,” “easy,” “not hard to read,” or that “I understand some of it.” Another student found it “a real zzzz” and one said they were “not bad.” These passages did not cause the students to struggle with understanding the basic information about sunscreen. Additionally, another response stated that, “It would be a good product to use,” suggesting that the passages made their point.

The second question asked, What did you try to do when you didn’t understand certain parts? Five of the six students responded with some variation of having reread the passages if they did not understand some part. The one other student stated that, “I understood every word. I shouldn’t be in this class,” a feeling she expressed in the Literacy Survey also. As a reading strategy, rereading garnered only three responses of use it on the strategy survey, yet five of the six stated that they use this strategy, and the sixth one did not need a strategy. This suggests that while surveys do provide information that could be valuable, students do not always realize what they know and/or may not provide completely accurate information, perhaps trying to respond as they think they should.
The third question asked, *Were you able to keep your attention on what you read? Why or why not?* Students who were able to attend to the passages did so either because they were “easy to read,” “interesting to read about,” or because “the picture helped.” The student who felt that, “I shouldn’t be in this class,” was able to stay attentive despite having “ADD & ADHD.” Those who had trouble staying attentive found the passages “Boring,” or simply because the student was “getind [sic] distracted.” The ease of the passages, and some interest in the information, allowed for most students to stay focused, but disinterest resulted in loss of focus. Interest in materials helps motivate a student to read, but in content area classes, generating interest in the material is not always possible. Other reasons for reading need to be developed to help students reach beyond disinterest.

The fourth question asked, *Can you connect what you read to something you already know about?* Although in the Literacy Survey students showed that they did not *Connect background knowledge to the text* or *Connect* to something in their lives when reading, all but one of the six students completing this survey wrote about a connection to an experience or something they had heard before. They know to “use sunblock daily” or that, “sunrays are harmful,” and “sunblock is important.” One had connected the reading to something “my mom has said,” and another knew about this because he plays “football in the sun so I know how it feels.” As previously stated, students do not always reflect on what they know, so their responses to questions show some contradiction. The student who could not connect responded with a simple “No” to the question.
Summary of reading process survey results. In response to the first question, four of the six students felt that these reading passages were fairly easy to read. One commented that he understood some of it. Another commented that he found the passages “boring,” which is an ambiguous response, but since his response in the second question revealed that he reread to understand, his boredom with the reading might have been his manner of expressing frustration due to a lack of comprehension. Question 2 asked what they did when they did not understand the material, and five of the six said they reread those parts, revealing a use of a reading strategy, while one said she understood it all. In response to the third question, four of the six were able to keep their attention on the reading but one found it too boring and one was getting distracted. The last question about connections to something they already know generated responses from five of the six students about knowing the importance of using sunscreen or the dangers of the sun indicating that they have background knowledge related to this subject which enabled their ability to make the connections and supported their understanding of the texts. Only the distracted reader identified in the third question made no connection. A student who struggles to focus on reading will likely also struggle to make a connection to that reading.

Reading Strategies Survey Results

The Reading Strategies Survey (Appendix E) provided a form for students to indicate which reading strategies they had, (a) never heard of it, (b) heard of it, (c) have some idea or experience with it, (d) know/understand it, or (e) use it. Since Student C was absent the day of the survey, seven of the eight students completed it.
They placed the appropriate number on the line next to each of the sixteen reading strategies listed. Only eleven of the sixteen strategies were listed as used by students. Table 4 that follows shows the students’ use of strategies.

Table 4

*Students’ Use of Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None of the 7 students say they use:</th>
<th>--Set a purpose for reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Connect background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Make inferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Discuss and respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Connect to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the 7 students say they use:</td>
<td>--Activate background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Check for understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Read aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Summarize or retell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Use a graphic organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two of the 7 students say they use:</td>
<td>--Write to support understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three of the 7 students say they use:</td>
<td>--Preview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Predict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Reread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five of the 7 students say they use:</td>
<td>--Visualize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible factors affecting students’ use of strategies.** Five of the seven students, D, E, F, G, and H, indicated that *visualize* is a strategy that they use. This strategy does not require any written or oral response, which may explain its popularity. More students, 5/7, reported that they use it over any other strategy.

Three students, D, G, and H, all marked that they used the *Preview of text* and *Predict* strategies. Neither of these require any writing, although in a classroom setting students might be called upon to state what they noticed about the set-up of a
text or what they predict will happen while reading. If working on their own, these activities can be completed, like visualizing, completely in the mind. These two strategies frequently appear in students’ literature anthologies, which may also play a part in their familiarity with them and their use since teachers’ editions promote such use.

Three more students, A, B, and E, marked that they use the Reread strategy. Again, there is nothing for them to write or say. Certain classroom circumstances might include rereading aloud, but generally students would do this independently and silently. Students A and E again, plus Student H, stated that they Question the text. Once again, this strategy is completed internally unless a teacher assigns work that would show what questions students have about a text. Often in classrooms, questions are generated for reflection about the text and are not necessarily written or discussed.

Two students, A and F, are the only students who Write to support understanding. The suggested activities for this strategy included: take notes, highlight, outline, and summarize. Highlight seems misplaced as a writing activity, which might have skewed the results. The other activities do involve thoughtful work requiring some effort, which might explain why only two students marked that they use this strategy. Also, the summarize activity overlaps with the summarize strategy listed on this survey, which might have confused students.

One student, Student G, uses Check for understanding, Activate background knowledge, and Summarize or retell. Only Summarize or retell requires any written response. Summarizing is a common assignment before high school, one that students
are likely to be familiar with. Differing from summarizing, the Check for understanding and Activate background knowledge strategies are also both strategies that can be accomplished by thinking alone.

Only Student A reported use of Use a graphic organizer, and only Student B reported the use of Read aloud. The read aloud activity, like many others, does not require any written work so it is somewhat surprising that more students do not make use of it based on the trends mentioned earlier, but perhaps since it is not a silent activity and would be noticed in a classroom setting, it is too public to be used during class time and would require working beyond class time. The graphic organizer involves multiple types of organizers, and some written work, so that may contribute to its lack of popularity. The survey indicated that graphic organizers include timelines and Venn diagrams, among others, which are taught in the lower grades, but students may not have a clear understanding of when to use them.

Student’s non-use of strategies. While all of the seven students indicate that they use two or more of the strategies, five of the strategies are not used at all. These include Set a purpose for reading, Connect background knowledge to information in the text, Make inferences, Discuss and respond, and Connect, with this section further explaining that they are connecting to experiences in their lives rather than with a connection to what they already know about a topic. These activities do not necessarily require any written work either, but setting a purpose for reading is more useful for academic text rather than literature and may not be actively taught in content area classes, while making inferences requires an understanding of a text that
struggling readers often lack. If the strategy is not taught in the classroom, it is unlikely to be put to use by students.

Five of the seven students had *Never heard of* twelve of the sixteen strategies, which would certainly explain their lack of use. Six of the seven had only *Heard of it* for thirteen strategies, again explaining why they would not use it. All seven of the studied students had *Some idea or experience with it* for thirteen of the sixteen strategies. Why they did not use these strategies might be dependent on their understanding of the usefulness of the strategy or the level of work required to make use of the strategy. The strategies *Finding a purpose, Activate background knowledge, Predict, Check for understanding, Reread, Read aloud, Make inferences, Discuss and respond, Question,* and *Connect* all allow for work accomplished through thinking, but if their benefits are not recognized, they will not likely be employed. Students need to have practice using these strategies so that they see their benefits and know when they are most useful (Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Torgesen et al., 2007). The three remaining strategies, *Summarize or retell, Use a graphic organizer,* and *Write to support understanding* generally, at least at the high school level, involve both written work, which may diminish its appeal, and a comfort with and understanding of the benefits of these strategies. Not all of the strategies have equal value to all students for all reading practices, but students should have the opportunity to experience each in order to decide which ones work best for them in various situations.
Summary of Assessment and Survey Information Related to Comprehension Strategies

Five of the sixteen strategies are not used by any of the seven students, and of the eleven that were used, no student used more than six of the sixteen. Five students had never even heard of twelve of the sixteen strategies, with the other two having at least heard of all sixteen. One student of the seven only used two strategies: reread and read aloud, very simple strategies. Another student used six, two used four, and three others used three.

Half of the students were able to paraphrase, summarize, and/or identify the topic and main idea of a short passage about texting while driving. When asked about the process of reading, students felt the STAR passages they read were generally understandable and that if they had trouble they would reread. Four of the six remained attentive while reading, and all but one were able to connect the reading to something in their lives. More complete student profiles will be presented later.

Vocabulary and Background Knowledge

General Vocabulary Assessment Results

The general vocabulary assessment provided several different scores including a raw score, a stanine, and a grade equivalent that was determined for the winter time frame. Of the students studied, half, 4/8, achieved a stanine score of three, which falls at below average for this test. Their raw scores ranged from 17-20 with a grade equivalent of between 5.6-6.4. Three of the others achieved a stanine score of five, which is considered average. These three had raw scores between 27-29 and grade
equivalents ranging between 8.6-9.5. The other student’s stanine score was eight, with a raw score of 41 and a grade equivalent of above average or post high school (PHS). The Gates-Macgintie vocabulary subtest scoring manual, level 7/9, determined these rankings for this level. The table that follows shows the distribution of students’ scores on this vocabulary assessment, (see Table 5).

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanine 3 Below Average</th>
<th>Stanine 5 Average</th>
<th>Stanine 8 PHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students E, F, G, H</td>
<td>Students A, C, D</td>
<td>Student B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of general assessment results.** Half of the students in this study scored below average. Their low vocabulary knowledge would hamper their reading comprehension. The scores of the other half are average or above, but other vocabulary assessments show that not all of the students are consistent in their scores.

**California High School Exit Exam and California Standards Test Results**

Vocabulary was assessed on both of these tests. On the CAHSEE, half the students, 4/8, correctly responded to the vocabulary question, and half incorrectly responded. Of the six who were at school for the STAR test, four correctly responded to the vocabulary question, and two were incorrect. One student missed the vocabulary question on both assessments. Student scores showed variable results, but a few students were consistent. Student A, who scored as average on the general vocabulary assessment, showed some consistency in vocabulary in correctly
answering the vocabulary questions on these standardized tests. Student G, who
scored below average on the general vocabulary assessment, responded incorrectly on
both standardized tests, (see Table 6).

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students with Correct Response</th>
<th>Students with Incorrect Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STAR Test</td>
<td>A, D, F, H</td>
<td>B, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAHSEE Test</td>
<td>A, B, C*, E*</td>
<td>D, F, G, H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students C and E took only the CAHSEE

Summary of vocabulary and background knowledge related assessment results. Based on the rankings of Gates-Macgintie scoring manual, four of the eight students’ vocabulary levels were seen as below average, three as average, and one as above average or post high school level. The CAHSEE and STAR vocabulary questions revealed some variation in student scores. For example, Student B scored at PHS on the Gates-Macgintie assessment but made an error on the vocabulary question from the STAR test, which was an assessment at eighth-grade level. One implication gathered from these assessments is that testing shows only one aspect of a student’s abilities. Many other factors come into play that will be covered in greater detail later on.
Fluency

Correct Words per Minute

Students read aloud in the Round Robin style regularly. During one of those reading times, their correct words per minute was determined. The reading materials used were informational texts that dealt with the subjects of Bigfoot, pelicans, and the medicinal properties of the cinchona tree. The Reading Tutorial teacher reported these to be seventh-grade reading materials, making them at least two years below grade level for the students in this class and study.

While each student read, notes were made as to any possible errors each student made, the number of words read, and the time taken to read those words. The calculations showed that the range of correct words per minute (CWPM) was between 90-211 CWPM. Two of the students read twice and produced rather different correct words per minute scores. Student F read the first passage about Bigfoot at 135 CWPM and read again about the cinchona tree at 94 CWPM. Student G read the passage about pelicans at 107 CWPM and about the cinchona at 141 CWPM.

Although the vocabulary in the Bigfoot and pelican passages were at about the same level, the cinchona tree passage had unusual words such as *cinchona* and *quinine*, yet Student G’s accuracy and rate was higher for that passage than for the pelican passage.

Three passages were read that day and Student G read early and then last; he might have just been anxious to be finished reading for the day and hurried through, but that is just speculation.
The details of the results for each student are displayed in the figure below, showing the two results for Students F and G (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** Variability in Correct Words per Minute.

**Summary of correct words per minute results.** With reading texts reported to be at seventh-grade level, three students read at 90, 94, and 95 CWPM. At a faster rate were students who read at 135, 141, 145, 164, and 211 CWPM. These scores indicate that all the students were reading at an instructional or independent level with the below grade level texts (Leslie & Caldwell, 2011). No grade-level materials were read by these students during this study, so gauging their CWPM for their grade level was not possible.
Attitudes, Motivation, and Self-Concepts as Readers

An important aspect of helping struggling adolescent readers is understanding how they see themselves as readers and what motivates them to read, what interests and engages them (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Schoenback et al., 1999; Torgesen et al., 2007). Although it takes time to truly know and understand students, surveys provide some basic information on which to build over the course of a school year.

Literacy Survey Results

The Literacy Survey (Appendix D) asked students thirteen questions about what they were reading or had read, how they saw themselves as readers and writers, where and when they read, what prompted them to write, and what they liked or disliked about reading. The first ten questions offered items for them to mark and a place for comments, and the last three asked for written responses.

Questions 6 and 7: Reading at home, reading at school. Question 6, the reading-at-home question, received four responses for sometimes, three for rarely, and one for never. Question 7 asked about reading at school. Three students marked often, two sometimes, and three rarely. Student B included a comment of, “Only when Mrs. [teacher’s name] makes us.” (See Table 7)

Table 7

Responses About Reading at Home, Reading at School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q. 6 Read at home</td>
<td></td>
<td>Students A, C, D, F</td>
<td>Students E, G, H</td>
<td>Student B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. 7 Read at school</td>
<td>Students A, C, F</td>
<td>Students B, G</td>
<td>Students D, E, H</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of reading at home, reading at school. Student B marked *never* when asked about reading at home even though she reads more non-book items than any of the other students and considers herself an *excellent* reader. She also only reads at school when her teacher makes her. Without having greater access to conversations with this student, it is difficult to understand her reading practices. It is understandable, and expected, that students are reading *often or sometimes* while at school. The three students who rarely read at school also had a low self-concept of themselves as readers and are likely to avoid reading, even for school assignments. They also scored below average on the general vocabulary assessment. Their avoidance of reading, even assigned reading at school, denies them a chance to develop their vocabulary and background knowledge, leading them in a downward spiral such as suggested by Stanovich (1993-1994) when discussing the Matthew effect. This is a biblical reference to the idea that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Applied to readers, those who develop reading skills easily will enjoy the practice and will advance their abilities while those who struggle with reading will avoid the practice, becoming disadvantaged readers (Stanovich, 1993-1994).

**Question 1: What do you read other than books?** The first question listed twenty-four possible items to mark in response to the question. They were to mark every item that applied to them. According to their responses, seven of the eight students were reading text messages, making it the most popular, non-book reading response. The complete results are provided in the figure below, (see Figure 2).
7 responses—text messages (students A, B, C, E, F, G, H)
6 responses—video games (students A, B, C, D, E, F)
6 responses—own writings (students B, C, D, E, F, G)
6 responses—notes (students B, C, E, F, G, H)
6 responses—Facebook (students C, E, F, G, F, H)
5 responses—newspapers (students B, D, E, F, H)
5 responses—online chats (students B, C, D, E, F,
5 responses—messages (students B, C, E, F, H)
5 responses—ads (students B, D, E, F, G)
4 responses—e-mails (students B, D, E, F)
4 responses—magazines (students B, C, D, E)
4 responses—comics (students B, D, E, F)
3 responses—articles (students B, G, H)
3 responses—tags/graffiti (students B, C, D)
2 responses—symbols (students B, C)
2 responses—fan fiction (students B, D)
2 responses—tweets (students B, C)
2 responses—blogs (students C, E)
1 response—rap (student B)
1 response—journal, (student F)
0 responses—poetry, zines, My Space, diary

Figure 2. Responses to Literacy Survey, Question 1: What do You Read Other Than Books? 24 Items.

In addition, one student, Student B, wrote the comment, “I don’t like to read much,” although she marked seventeen of the twenty-four items.

**Summary of reading materials beyond books.** Most of the items listed are short and informal text, like emails, ads, text messages, and notes. Only four of the listed items, such as newspapers, magazines, articles, and possibly fan fiction are likely to be of any significant length, and none are extended academic text, which may be considered too close to a book to be considered as “other than books.” The favorites tend to be the shorter materials, although newspapers were relatively popular,
perhaps because academic assignments often include finding current events, which are easily found in newspapers.

Student B marked more items than any other student. She also scored highest on the general vocabulary assessment, had the highest correct words per minute when reading aloud, and feels she does not belong in this class. Other connections are more difficult to make. Student A scored the highest of anyone taking both the CAHSEE and STAR tests but only marked that he read two items beyond books. Reading beyond books, as Student B does, shows an interest in reading in general but does not seem to be necessary to being a successful reader as Student A is despite his disinterest in reading beyond books. Student A, as will be presented later, states that he does read often at school and only sometimes at home; he is reading, though, which shows support for his high scores on the assessments given.

**Students’ self-concepts as readers and writers.** Questions 2 and 3 asked students how they felt about themselves as readers and writers. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Responses to Literacy Survey, Questions 2 & 3, Feelings About Self as Reader and Writer*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Not so great</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q. 2 Feel about self as a reader</td>
<td>Students A, B</td>
<td>Students C, F</td>
<td>Students D, G, H</td>
<td>Student E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. 3 Feel about self as a writer</td>
<td>Students A, C, E, F</td>
<td>Students B, G, H</td>
<td>Student D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student B’s comment to Question 2 was that, “I don’t think I should be in this class at all.” Student E’s response to this question was that, “I can’t spell and letters mix up on me.” These same two students each also wrote a comment for Question 3. Student B wrote, “I am not as good at writing” [sic], and Student E wrote, “I’m good at writing but not spelling.”

For any students, such as Students A and B, placed in a reading tutorial class to state that they feel “excellent” about themselves as readers is somewhat surprising. That positive view should be helpful to these students since it is the students who see themselves as failures who are more likely to disengage in school, leading to continued failure (Cantrell et al., 2010). Student B, in particular, feels that she should not be in the class, and except for a few glitches, her assessments show her to be fairly successful. By comparison, Student D reveals a negative attitude about himself as both a reader (fair) and a writer (not so good), and his scores on the assessments given during this study are low.

**Summary of self-concepts as readers and writers.** Students A, C, and F see themselves as either excellent or good readers and writers. Students D, G, and H regard themselves as fair or not so great. Although there is some correlation between their views of themselves as readers and writers, other indicators show discrepancies, but this information will be covered later in greater detail.

**Question 4: Why students write.** Question 4 provided a list of eight options to mark to show reasons why they write. All eight students in the study completed
this survey and the results are shown in Figure 3 below. None of the students listed any other reasons for writing or made any comments.

- 7 responses—texting (students A, B, C, E, F, G, H)
- 6 responses—school assignments (students A, B, C, E, F, H)
- 6 responses—to help remember information (students B, C, D, E, F, H)
- 5 responses—to provide information (students B, C, E, F, H)
- 4 responses—notes or a letter to someone (students C, E, F, G)
- 4 responses—e-mail (students B, D, E, F)
- 2 responses—to express self creatively (students D, F)
- 1 response—to keep a diary (student E)

Figure 3. Literacy Survey Results, Question 4: Check Any or All of the Possible Reasons for You to Write. Write in Anything Not Listed.

**Summary of why students write.** Seven of the eight students indicated that they write text messages. Texting is a popular activity but not all students have phones that allow texting, which may be the reason Student D did not write to text. Since these are students with school assignments, it is understandable that they would also need to write to complete those assignments and to write to help them remember other information related to schoolwork. Apparently, two of the six do not write in order to complete school assignments, but they also only see themselves as “fair” or “not so good” as writers and likely avoid the activity whenever possible.

Five of the eight provided information by writing, with the suggested activities including such things as phone numbers and recipes, and half the group wrote notes or letters or emails. These writing activities are simple and not likely to include much time or effort, which adds to the suggestion that students are more willing to engage in
work that is less demanding. Only two students wrote creatively, and only one kept a diary.

**Questions 5: Use of computers.** Question 5 offered responses of *often, sometimes, rarely,* and *never* about using computers. Students A, B, C, D, and F all indicated that they use computers often. Student E marked the use of computers as *sometimes,* and students G and H marked that they rarely used computers. No comments were added about the use of computers, but it might be supposed that students who rarely use computers do not have them at home to use. Students do have opportunities to use computers at this school, either in the library or the classroom on occasion.

**Summary of use of computers.** Five of the eight students used computers often and one only sometimes. The two other students used computers rarely, but no one marked *never* about their use. Students who do not use computers will have a difficult time in school as they have become more commonly used academically, specifically for the new standardized testing.

**Question 8: Reading preferences.** Question 8 asked, “What do you prefer to read whenever you read?” Their choices were between fiction and non-fiction, with an additional section for comments. Six students preferred to read fiction and three non-fiction; one student marked both items. Student E listed two book types in the comments section.

**Summary of reading preferences.** Students A, C, D, E, F, and H all marked that they preferred reading fiction. Student E added the comment “vampires, magick”
[sic] as the type of fiction she liked. Students B and G preferred non-fiction, and student C indicated that she also preferred non-fiction. Knowing what students prefer to read helps teachers direct them to books that might interest them, which is an important step in guiding them toward becoming better, more engaged readers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Skerrett, 2012).

**Question 9: Choosing a book.** Question 9 asked, “How do you pick a book to read?” and directed students to check any or all of the five options that applied to them, so students marked anywhere from one to four reasons for choosing a book. Most students, A, B, C, D, F, and H, picked books that someone recommended. Students B, C, F, and H all “look at the cover” when choosing a book. Students B, D, E, and G all pick books because they are like other books or from the same genre. Students B, D, E, and F read the back cover or inner flap when choosing a book, and Students A and D decide based on knowing the author. Student A commented that he picked books “From a movie,” and Student H stated that he considered, “How big is it.”

**Summary of choosing a book.** Six of eight students used recommendations when picking a book, and “know the author,” “look at cover,” and “like other books you have read (same genre)” all were chosen by different groupings of four students. Only two students relied on knowing the author.

Students used what seem to be standard means of finding a book to read. The student that stated that he picked a book based on a movie mentioned something that English teachers would likely report that students often do. Although it is an
acceptable means of selecting a book, some teachers find that it is the movie plot that makes it into the essays or other written work about the book. Even if that suggests that the student was more engaged in the movie than the book, if the movie generates a motivation to read, that supports the student’s choice and interests. Allowing for student preferences supports student reading (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Lee, 2011; National Institute for Literacy, 2007).

**Question 10: Being read to.** Question 10 asked, “Who has read to you?” Ten possible choices were listed. Teachers received the most marks at seven; fathers and mothers both received five marks from students. Other family members and sisters received two marks each, and friends, brothers, and babysitters received one mark each. No comments were added on this question.

**Summary of question being read to.** Teachers read to their students more often than parents or any other family members or friends. Teachers do model good reading skills when they read to their students, but there can be some drawbacks from that practice. Sometimes teachers read to students because they think that students will not read the material themselves, so reading to them is the only way to present the information. In the lower grades, when dealing with emerging readers, that is a great way to interest students in reading, but for secondary students, it can be an activity that allows them to avoid reading for themselves. Since students need to practice to become good readers, teachers reading to students may backfire on them. A parent reading to a child helps demonstrate the love and value that should be placed on reading.
**Question 11: Written responses of remembered books.** Question 11 asked, “What books/stories do you remember? Write the titles, or authors, or what you remember of the stories.” All of the students provided written responses to this question, listing books or authors that they remembered.

In their responses, students named several different book titles. Students remembered many childhood stories such as *Where the Wild Things Are,* and Dr. Seuss books. They also remembered *The Giver* and *The Outsiders.* Others remembered reading stories or books from R. L. Stein, Edgar Allan Poe, and Stephen King. *No Easy Day* by Mark Owen and the Percy Jackson series were also mentioned, as was reading mythology. One student stated that he did not remember the author but the book was *Supernatural,* and another said she did not “really remember all the books I read.”

**Summary of question 11 written responses.** All eight students shared some of their thoughts about books they remembered. Many remembered books from the lower grades, perhaps suggesting they have read little beyond their elementary grades. Some mentioned books that are for young adults, such as the Percy Jackson series and *The Outsiders.* Questions about what they remember about becoming readers help them understand who they are as readers and what they need to do to become better readers (Schoenback et al., 1999).

**Question 12: Written responses on easy and enjoyable books.** Question 12 asked, “What kinds of reading are easiest and most enjoyable?” Seven of the eight students wrote responses to this question.
Two students stated that they like books with pictures, and one of those two also liked scary books. Another student liked scary books, too, with vampires or magic. Two other students liked interesting stories with one stating that she liked books with real-life situations. One wrote that he liked fiction with no specific types listed, and another student liked action-adventure fiction with a great story line. These students all prefer fiction books, and those books need to be interesting. This is not surprising information, in part because it is unlikely that anyone would like a book that was not interesting, but also because many of the current young adult books are action-adventure stories or fantasy with such things as vampires and magic.

**Summary of question 12 written responses.** Students all found that interesting fiction books are the easiest and most enjoyable. They liked scary or fantasy books with a good story line, and one mentioned liking real-life situations.

**Question 13: Written responses on books not liked.** Question 13 asked, “What kinds of reading do you not like to do?” All eight students wrote a response to this question.

Four of the eight students indicated that they did not like the kind of book that would be considered the opposite of the kind they had just said they liked. The one student who liked books with pictures expressed his dislike of books without pictures. The student who liked scary books with vampires or magic does not like books that are without those elements. The student who, without specifics, made mention of fiction books as books he liked, responded that he did not like reading nonfiction and added in poems as reading he disliked. The student who did not answer the previous
question about which books he liked, related that he did not like “made up stories,” so he differed from his classmates in not liking fiction books. Two other students expressed dislike of long books. One student wrote that she does not like to read, and another does not like being forced to read.

Summary of question 13 written responses. Students were consistent in their responses about books they liked or disliked. Those who voiced a preference for a particular kind of reading in response to Question 12 simply stated that they did not like the opposite of that kind of reading in Question 13. Two negative responses to reading in general, or assigned reading, revealed a common perspective in struggling readers: reading is difficult and books that are without pictures, too long, assigned, or just not interesting evoked their disapproval.

Summary of Literacy Survey Results. When students read materials other than books, they most often read text messages, their own writings, notes, and video games, short and informal material that does not task their thinking. Half of the eight students described themselves as feeling excellent or good about themselves as readers and writers, which is somewhat surprising since they were in the Reading Tutorial class, and their inclusion in that class designated them as struggling readers, although two students, A and B, scored high on the assessments and might be seen as justified in their views. Three of the eight, 37.5%, saw themselves as only fair readers and writers. For two of them, students G and H, their views of themselves are consistent with their assessment results in that they both have low vocabulary scores, rarely read, and struggle with comprehension. One student felt *not so great* as a reader, and
another one felt \textit{not so great} as a writer. These two students, D and E, had inconsistent assessment scores making them harder to evaluate.

Students indicated that their main reasons for writing are texting, school assignments, and remembering or providing information. With 87.5\% of students writing to text, compared with 75\% writing to complete assignments, texting proved to be a more common reason for writing, which does not necessarily mean they are writing more when texting than they would for assignments. Writing to complete assignments would likely require a more extensive amount of writing than what is commonly written for a text, which is generally short. Again, though, students show more inclination for work that is simple and easy. Exerting effort, should it result in less than successful results, could damage their self-image and so is less desirable.

Five students use computers \textit{often}. Computer use could be for most any purpose, playing video games or shopping or completing schoolwork or most anything. Since today’s high school student needs a computer for some schoolwork, students who use computers regularly gain, at least, some knowledge about computer use, which is helpful in completing school assignments.

No one marked \textit{often} for reading at home, and only half marked \textit{sometimes}, while reading at school received three marks for both \textit{often} and \textit{rarely} and two for \textit{sometimes}. To not be reading at school is disturbing. The assumption would be that teachers are assigning reading, but students are not completing the reading. This situation offers two outcomes. One would be that the student fails in whichever course he or she neglects to complete the assigned reading, or somehow the teacher or
class structure accommodates the non-reading student in such a way that the student can pass the class without completing the reading. As an English teacher in regular communication with other English teachers, getting students to read the texts assigned is a serious problem by everyone’s account. Some students manage to acquire enough information about a text through class discussions and can pass a test if it is mostly objective in format. This happens in other content areas too, with some teachers doing the reading for the students by reading aloud, or they create presentations that relay the necessary material with little if any reading required (Ness, 2008). When students find that teachers will accommodate them and eliminate or lessen the need to read, they are unlikely to see the value in reading and will continue to avoid it.

The remainder of the information showed that for those who do read, the preferred reading materials were fiction by an 87% majority. A dislike of non-fiction, or informational texts, will hamper these students, especially those who also do not like to read assigned materials. Most, 75%, of students picked books based on recommendations, a fairly common practice among readers.

Teachers, more than any other people, read to students with 7/8 students marking that response. Both mothers and fathers received 5/8 marks for reading to their children, but only three of the students had both parents reading to them. Two students had only fathers reading to them, and two had only mothers reading to them, and one student listed no parent as reading to him. Knowing that students are supported in reading at home can be helpful information in a general sense, but would
not necessarily change teaching practices in a reading class unless all the students had such support, but that would be unlikely, as this survey demonstrates.

All of the students listed book titles they remembered even if it were only one title and also stated what kinds of reading they do not like to do, which was assigned reading or poetry, or books that were too long, which would indicate academic problems for those students. Again, students resist reading that requires time and effort. With few reading strategies to help them, or that they are aware of and willing or knowledgeable about using, it is understandable that they avoid the struggle. One of the students did not provide a response to the question about what kinds of reading are easiest and most enjoyable, but all others did.

**Summary Across All Assessments**

The table below summarizes individual student results covering comprehension and study strategies; vocabulary and background knowledge; and motivation, self-concept and attitudes as a reader, and overall reading comprehension, (see Table 9).
Table 9

*Student Profiles Based on Summary of Assessments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Comprehension and study strategies</th>
<th>Vocabulary and background knowledge</th>
<th>Overall Reading Comprehension</th>
<th>Motivation, self-concept as a reader, attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Uses few comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Average general vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Average comprehension</td>
<td>Considers self excellent reader, reads academic text in school, some outside of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Uses very few comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Above average general vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Low to average comprehension</td>
<td>Considers self excellent reader, reads some academic text in school, no reading outside of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>No results for comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Average general vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Average comprehension (based on only one small assessment)</td>
<td>Considers self a good reader, reads academic text in school, some outside of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Uses several comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Below average general vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Low to average comprehension</td>
<td>Considers self a fair reader, reads some academic text in school, reads little outside of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Uses very few comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Below average general vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Low comprehension</td>
<td>Considers self a good reader, reads academic text in school, reads some outside school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Uses few comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Below average general vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Low comprehension</td>
<td>Considers self a fair reader, reads little academic text in and outside school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Uses very few comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Below average general vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Good comprehension (based on only one small assessment)</td>
<td>Considers self a poor reader, reads little academic text in and outside school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Uses very few comprehension strategies</td>
<td>Average general vocabulary knowledge</td>
<td>Very low comprehension</td>
<td>Considers self a poor reader, reads little academic text in and outside school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of student profile based on summary of assessments. Creating student profiles revealed some patterns related to general vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and self-image as a reader. In particular, the top two students, A and B, see themselves as excellent readers, have average or above vocabulary knowledge, and average or close to average reading comprehension, despite their limited use of strategies as reported in the Reading Strategies Survey (Appendix E) which may not be an accurate measure. They both read in school and Student A reads some outside of school too. Students who read in school are continuing to expand their background and vocabulary knowledge and their ability to read academic text. Making an effort to be successful in school, and their good self-image, likely accounts for their high ranking in this table.

The results for the other students are mixed. Not reading much in school is a common factor with several of the lower ranking students. The lower half of the table illustrates that students who read little in or outside of school struggle to comprehend text and generally produce below average general vocabulary scores. These four students do not share the same image of themselves as readers, with one listed as “good,” one as “fair,” and the last two as “poor,” and their other categories on this table do not show comparable results. Even so, they present themselves as in need of significant help with reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and attitudes about themselves as readers.

The other two students’ results were mixed, due in part to missed assessments or surveys. Both are average to below average in vocabulary and/or reading
comprehension and see themselves as good or fair readers who read some at school or at home. They need support to develop and expand on their vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension skills.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 4 presented the results of the assessments and surveys. Chapter 5 will provide discussion and recommendations based on the information gathered through this study, including some conclusions that will be drawn about the implications of this study.

Discussion and Recommendations

Comprehension and Study Strategies Recommendations

The information gathered during this study verified that most of these students were appropriately placed in the Reading Tutorial class with the possible exception of Student B who generally scored higher than her classmates on most of the assessments and stated her view that she was an excellent reader and did not belong in this class. The assessments and surveys reflecting comprehension and study strategies, including the CAHSEE and STAR passages; the Literacy Survey; the Paraphrasing, Summarizing, and Identifying the Topic and Main Idea activity; the Reading Process Survey; and the Reading Strategies Survey all provided varying degrees of useful information for determining whether a student needs this class and what areas of literacy are affecting their performance.

The CAHSEE and STAR passages provided some specific information about how well students determined what the purpose, tone, word meanings, and similarities and differences were regarding the information presented in the texts. This information helps direct teachers when preparing students for the exit exam,
standardized tests, or while teaching reading strategies that help students find meaning or how or why the author writes. Other released CAHSEE passages that are available for classroom use focus on different reading skills and could also be useful for advancing particular reading skills.

The results of the paraphrasing, summarizing, identifying topic and main idea assessment are less useful. One reason for this is that the results are somewhat subjectively decided so different perspectives might cause different judgments. Another is that students do not necessarily need to fully understand what they have read in order to state the main idea and topic, at least with this passage, since that information was reflected in the title of the piece, but titles often do just that. The interesting information found through this assessment was the difficulty students had writing a summary of the full passage, although they tackled the paraphrasing of the first paragraph fairly well. The summary required more effort and organization in order to cover the entire text. This shows a weakness that could be addressed in a support class such as the Reading Tutorial class. Summarizing is a reading strategy that improves reading comprehension and should be included, along with other strategies, in any program with better reading comprehension as its goal (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Snow, 2002; Torgesen et al., 2007).

The other survey, the Reading Strategies Survey (Appendix E), revealed that students use very few reading strategies. A few suppositions might be made as to why they did not use them. It might be that they did not find them useful, or they had used them when a teacher required use of a particular strategy, but without that requirement
to apply the strategy to their reading, they neglected to include it as tool to help improve their reading comprehension. Experienced teachers witness this type of behavior regularly, especially with struggling readers who seem to feel that if they do not understand the material easily, they would rather give up than exert the effort necessary to discover the meaning of a text.

Research shows that students need several reading strategy tools to employ when they find a passage difficult to understand (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007). A reading teacher should equip her students with enough strategies for use whenever the students face difficulties. As is described as a close reading practice, the strategies should promote reading comprehension particular to the text, such as rereading a text for author’s purpose rather than randomly choosing a strategy (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012). Any reading teacher who works with her students daily could discuss these strategies and their usefulness with the students to determine which ones were most helpful for which text types. With practice, students would be more likely to engage in monitoring their reading, or activating background knowledge, or discussing the text with a classmate, or any other of the possible strategies available. This practice would increase their chance of becoming better readers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Boardman et al., 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2007).

Research also shows that teaching reading strategies has a limited value in that if students do not have the necessary background knowledge, a comprehension strategy will not have much effect (Hirsch, 2003). These two views of reading
comprehension strategies are not necessarily incompatible. Hirsch (2006) acknowledges that it is good to teach students comprehension skills but more time needs to be devoted to building knowledge so that the reader can connect to the new material based on some previous knowledge. Combining these two views suggests that struggling readers need to acquire more knowledge to draw upon while reading new material but also need to know comprehension strategies to help them to monitor, summarize, question, or otherwise help them determine meaning from texts. As CCSS and Close Reading advocates claim, focusing on the text, reading with a purpose, and using specific strategies will help students develop effective reading practices (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012). During observations made of this class, the teacher would pause to hold discussions on the information in the readings. As this teacher also taught history and anthropology, she had much to share with her students on many of the topics about which they read as they often read about events in history or culture. Including general knowledge reading will support student needs.

**Vocabulary and Background Knowledge Recommendations**

The Gates-Macgintie vocabulary subtest, Level 7/9, provided a variety of score types. The study focused on the raw score leading to the stanine scores, which for the students in this study ranged from 3-8, with grade-level equivalents of 5.6 to post high school. The student scoring at PHS level expressed her feelings about not needing to be in this class, and perhaps she should not have been placed there, although her Reading Tutorial teacher’s assessment using the San Diego Quick placed her at grade six or seven. These two tests gauge different aspects of vocabulary words. The Gates-
Macgintie assesses word knowledge and usage while the San Diego Quick looks more at pronunciation and word recognition. The San Diego Quick is administered as a one-on-one test with students reading words aloud to the test administrator, which might cause more anxiety for students resulting in lower scores. The STAR and CAHSEE added to the vocabulary assessment information about the study students, which helped refine the information gathered. Using more than one assessment of vocabulary and word knowledge would provide more precise results about the students and give the reading teacher a stronger basis on which to inform her instruction.

Vocabulary is a critical aspect of reading comprehension and attention needs to be given to word knowledge in a reading support class (Blachowicz et al., 2006). Observations of the Reading Tutorial class included discussions of new or difficult words as students read aloud from a variety of informational texts. Talking about words, reading new words, working or playing with words should all be part of a reading class.

**Fluency Recommendations**

Minimal information was gathered regarding fluency. Only one check of correct words per minute occurred. Fluency affects reading comprehension and should be assessed to determine what help is needed by students in a reading support class, and checked somewhat regularly to determine progress or areas for focused instruction. This information could be gathered through paired read-aloud time as the teacher walks around checking students’ reading rate and accuracy.
Attitudes, Motivations, and Self-Concepts as Readers Recommendations

The Literacy Survey (Appendix D) was designed in part to learn what students read whether it was traditional reading material such as books or less traditional sources such as text messages, emails, tweets, video game information, or the like. Literacy encompasses more than just reading textbooks and novels and newspapers and magazines. The path to improved reading skills includes what students are reading outside of school and/or through the use of technology (Alvermann, 2001; Lawrence, McNeal, & Yildiz, 2009). One item of confirmation of that is the number of responses to the survey question about what students read other than books. Seven of the eight students in this study indicated that they read text messages. The same number of students also marked that as the reason why they write; they are texting. Teachers see this activity in the classroom daily and sometimes refer to the compelling nature of text messages as an addiction, and students often agree that they feel they must read and respond to a text message. This is a love of reading and writing that exists surrounding texting, as one example, and is an attitude that can be transferred to more academic pursuits of literacy (Alvermann, 2001; Lawrence et al., 2009).

Using this one instance of a need to read and write is at least a starting point for learning what students enjoy about reading and writing. Generally, reading or writing a text message is a short activity, which is one explanation for why students enjoy it. These comments are not meant as a recommendation of having students read and write text messages as a learning tool for becoming better readers and writers. It is meant to indicate that students need to be made aware of all the methods they use as
literate members of society, and that they can advance their literacy by building on what they have already achieved.

A key question in this survey asked students about reading at home and at school. Since half the students only sometimes read at home, it is clear that reading outside of school does not get the attention it needs. At the school at which this study took place, expectations for reading outside of school amount to a minimum of two hours per week within the English department alone. Students who only sometimes or rarely read at home will not meet this expectation. Students in a reading support class need to understand the value of reading and allowing reading time in class can do this. Struggling readers need to spend a significant amount of time reading in order to close the gap between themselves and readers reading at or above grade level (Lee, 2011). During observations of the Reading Tutorial class, little time was devoted to free choice, silent reading time, and when students had the opportunity, few made use of that time. If students are allowed to choose a book of interest to them, and are given class time to read it, they are more likely to read and develop an interest in reading additional books (Boardman et al., 2008; Torgesen et al., 2007). This should be a high priority for such a class.

Conclusions

This study revealed what struggling adolescent readers need to help improve their reading skills. The assessments showed that most were below grade level in reading and vocabulary knowledge. Also, these students used few comprehension strategies even if they knew and understood them. They were at best disinterested
readers and expressed little if any interest in reading or writing outside of required academic assignments, although most were regular readers and writers of text messages.

The literature proposes ways to address their needs such as the teaching of comprehension strategies (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Boardman et al., 2008; Shanahan, 2006), immersion in informational reading (Hirsch, 2003), and self-selection of reading materials as a motivational tool (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Torgesen et al., 2007). The literature also suggests that other subject matter classes take on part of the responsibility of supporting the development of reading comprehension skills (Ness, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This is not a practical responsibility of a Reading Tutorial teacher as other academic teachers have their own curriculum to address and are under no obligation to follow any advice from a fellow teacher. Subject matter teachers should be trained to include appropriate reading-strategies lessons, but this may be outside the realm of the reading teacher. If vocabulary and background knowledge are such an important issue, certainly all teachers can address these categories. Also, they can be encouraged to have students apply reading and writing strategies, some of which have been introduced by the reading teacher.

This small study of only eight of twenty-one students in a Reading Tutorial class for most of one semester limits its applicability to other reading support classes. Generalizations cannot necessarily be applied to other classes; the students in each class and the supporting materials and teacher experience will differ from year to year,
and school to school. Some schools have technology available daily for students and have administrators willing to support struggling readers with materials to expand their learning opportunities. Different approaches to supporting struggling readers will result in different outcomes.

Another concern with this study is its short duration. It took place during the spring semester of one school year and a limited number of observations were made due to the teacher’s needs to conduct her class without interruptions for assessments and surveys of the students. A better study would follow students over a longer period of time, although it is difficult to say what would qualify as a significant enough amount of time.

Regardless of how different approaches will affect different reading classes, struggling adolescent readers need support in order to become better readers with more motivation to read. A curriculum that includes the recommendations based on the research such as that reviewed for this study will promote a better reading program. This research and the other components of this study have proved valuable in directing the current Reading Tutorial teacher in the support of her class of struggling readers. Three key issues for the Reading Tutorial teacher are (a) how to determine students’ needs in an efficient and accurate manner, (b) how to organize instruction to meet those needs when there are distinct variations across students, and (c) how to determine which components of literacy cannot possibly be addressed without the involvement of other teachers, e.g., vocabulary and background knowledge development, motivation, reading of academic text. The major focus of
this study was assessing students’ needs in four major categories: vocabulary, comprehension strategies, motivation, and overall reading comprehension. This is a key step that is often overlooked by many teachers. While instructional issues have received some attention, it is clear that the researcher (I) have not delved into the complexities of differentiating instruction and involving other teachers. These are huge topics that are worthy of additional research.
APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Research
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to consent to your student’s participation in a study, which will be conducted by Mrs. Diane Kiley, who is in the Language and Literacy Master’s Program at California State University, Sacramento, and is an English teacher at Bella Vista High School. The purpose of this study is to assess students’ literacy skills, determine best curriculum practices to meet students’ needs, and help myself and others become better teachers.

Students in the Reading Tutorial class will be taught as usual by the teacher for that class. The study will consist of one or two classroom visits a week by Mrs. Kiley for approximately twelve weeks in order to administer some student surveys and four short reading assessments, a short, in-class writing assignment, and make observations of class activities. Your permission will allow the inclusion of your child’s data in this study. All information gathered will be kept confidential, and no student names will ever be used or reported. There is no risk associated with this study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Mrs. Kiley at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxx@xxx.

You may decline to have your student be a participant in this study without any consequences. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to allow your student to participate in the study.

Signature: ________________________________ Date: ________________

________________________________________________________
Student Name
APPENDIX B

Agreement to Participate in Research
Agreement to Participate in Research

Mrs. Kiley at California State University, Sacramento, who is also a teacher at Bella Vista High School, is asking you to participate in a study on how to best help students improve their reading skills or become better readers and have an easier time reading the textbooks in their classes. Also, this study will help Mrs. Kiley and others to become better teachers.

You will be asked to complete several surveys during Reading Tutorial class time and do four short reading activities and one short writing activity. Mrs. Kiley will be observing classroom activities during her visits.

Your parents have also been asked if you may take part in this study, but if you decide not to participate, you may do so without worry. All the information collected will remain confidential. No names will be used or reported in this project.

Please write and sign your name on the lines provided and include the date if you are willing to participate in this study.

Name of participant ____________________________________________________

Signature of participant _________________________________________________

Date __________________________________________
APPENDIX C

Activity for the Readings
Activity for the Readings

1. Circle words whose meaning you are not sure of.

2. Underline parts that are not very clear to you.

3. Make notes about any questions or thoughts you have about what you read.

Questions About How You Read

1. How did you feel about the reading passages you just read and responded to?

2. What did you try to do when you didn’t understand certain parts?

3. Were you able to keep your attention on what you read? Why or why not?

4. Can you connect what you read to something you already know about?
APPENDIX D

Literacy Survey
Literacy Survey

Please respond to each question as completely as possible. If you need more room for your response, continue on the back. Please write the number of the question for each continued response.

1. What do you read other than books? Check every item that applies to you and write in anything not listed.

   ___ e-mails   ___ text messages   ___ tweets
   ___ Facebook   ___ My Space   ___ notes
   ___ magazines   ___ newspapers   ___ articles
   ___ poetry   ___ fan fiction   ___ blogs
   ___ zines   ___ video games   ___ tags/
   ___ rap   ___ online chats   ___ graffiti
   ___ journal   ___ your own writings   ___ comics
   ___ symbols   ___ messages   ___ ads

   Other _________________________________________________________

   Comments ______________________________________________________

   _____________________________________________________________

2. How do you feel about yourself as a reader?

   ___ excellent   ___ good   ___ fair   ___ not so great

   Comments

   _____________________________________________________________

   _____________________________________________________________

3. How do you feel about yourself as a writer?

   ___ excellent   ___ good   ___ fair   ___ not so great

   Comments

   _____________________________________________________________

   _____________________________________________________________
4. Check any or all of the possible reasons for you to write. Write in anything not listed.

___ to keep a diary    ___ texting
___ school assignments  ___ e-mail
___ notes or a letter to someone  ___ to help you remember information
___ providing information for self or others (maps, recipes, phone numbers, etc.)
___ wanting to express yourself creatively (poem, story, rap, song)

Other _______________________________________________________

Comments___________________________________________________

5. Do you use computers?

___ often    ___ sometimes    ___ rarely    ___ never

Comments___________________________________________________

6. Do you read at home?

___ often    ___ sometimes    ___ rarely    ___ never

Comments___________________________________________________

7. Do you read at school?

___ often    ___ sometimes    ___ rarely    ___ never

Comments___________________________________________________
8. What do you prefer to read whenever you read?

___ fiction/made up stories  ___ nonfiction/real-life stories or information

Comments


9. How do you pick a book to read? Check all that apply and add any that are missing.

___ look at cover  ___ read back cover or inner flap
___ know the author  ___ someone recommended it
___ like other books you have read (same genre)

Other

Comments


10. Who has read to you?

___ mother  ___ father  ___ sister(s)  ___ brother(s)
___ other family members  ___ teachers  ___ friends  ___ babysitter

Other

Comments


11. What books/stories do you remember? Write the titles, or authors, or what you remember of the stories.


12. What kinds of reading are easiest and most enjoyable?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

13. What kinds of reading do you not like to do?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX E

Reading Strategies Survey
**Reading Strategies Survey**

Reading strategies are methods people use to help them better understand what they are reading. As you have made your way through school, you may have been taught some reading strategies and/or used some (whether or not you knew that that is what they are called).

Please write the number of the best response from the four numbered sections to show your familiarity with any of the reading strategies that follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Never heard of it</th>
<th>2 Heard of it</th>
<th>3 Have some idea or experience with it</th>
<th>4 Know/understand it</th>
<th>5 Use it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Set a purpose for reading—ask yourself if you are reading to find information or to find out what happens in a story</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Preview the text—look at the title/subtitles, pictures, captions, other graphics</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Activate background knowledge—think about what you already know about the topic</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Predict—think about what might happen in the story or what information you might learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Check for understanding—ask yourself if what you have read is making sense</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reread—if there is a problem, go back to the start of a sentence or paragraph and read it again</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Read aloud—read a section aloud to see if it sounds right</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Connect background knowledge to information in text—compare what you already know about the topic to what you are reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Make inferences—some things are directly stated in a text (explicit information), but some things can be inferred (implicit information) or figured out from clues the author gives. What inferences can you make based on what you have read?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Summarize and/or retell—write or tell about the important events and characters in a story or the information presented</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Know/understand it</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Use it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. **Use a graphic organizer**—use a story map/timeline, Venn diagram, KWL chart, plot diagram, etc.

12. **Discuss and respond**—talk with someone about what you have read; ask questions; look back in book to defend your view

13. **Write to support understanding**—write about what you have read
   - take notes
   - highlight
   - outline
   - summarize

14. **Question**—question the author’s ideas, point of view, etc., or ask yourself or others about the story or information

15. **Visualize**—create an image in your head (or an actual picture or symbol) that connects to what you have read

16. **Connect**—think about how what you have read connects to your life, the people you know, the things you have experienced. What did you think about while you were reading that reminded you of people, places, or events in your life or the world?

*Adapted from paec.org*
REFERENCES


California Reading & Literature Project. (2014). *Texting while driving increases crash risk by large percentage*. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Education, California State University, Sacramento.


