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An Examination of Reading Assignments in the Secondary Classroom

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AN EXAMINATION OF READING ASSIGNMENTS IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Teacher Education
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education in Literacy

By
Rachel Elizabeth Leer
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AN EXAMINATION OF READING ASSIGNMENTS IN SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

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The purpose of this research study is to examine reading assignments given in the secondary classroom of a rural secondary school. The intention is to analyze student readiness to handle complex text found in post-secondary education and/or the workforce, based on current reading trends within the school. The research questions guiding this study focus on the average amount of reading students are expected to complete in a week, what strategic support is being provided to students to enhance comprehension of text, the methodology behind how teachers select both reading assignments and reading strategies, and finally the methodology behind how teachers assess student content learning through assigned text.

This study is broken down into three major components: teacher-completed reading logs, student surveys, and two case studies. This mixed methods data collection process revealed that students are typically assigned less than two reading assignments per class per week, however nearly half of these students indicate that they read all of an assigned text. Case study data concluded that teachers are not consistent in their methodology neither in selecting reading assignments nor in utilization of reading strategies. Finally, based on the data, it is reasonable to conclude that students in this setting may not be prepared to handle complex texts found in post-secondary education and/or in the workforce.

*Keywords: reading, comprehension, strategy, content-area literacy*
Chapter 1

Introduction

Looking in any school, in any district, across the United States, several trends are becoming ever more apparent: 1) students are not reading complex text across all content-areas, 2) students are not receiving research-based, strategic instruction on how to comprehend complex texts, and 3) a majority of students are graduating from high school not prepared to handle complex texts they will encounter in college or the workforce (ACT; Ogle & Lang). The consequences of these trends are not limited to these particular students; instead they include local, national, and global implications as well.

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, schools now face the challenge of ensuring that students achieve reading proficiency by 2014 (Whitney, 2002). However, data collected from a variety of sources, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2009), The American College Testing (ACT) (2006), the Alliance for Excellent Education (2004), and others all suggest that current secondary students are performing less well in reading than they have in the last twelve years. Furthermore, these same sources suggest that until changes have been made on the federal, state, and local levels, then the downward performance trend is likely to continue.

Currently, far too many of our secondary students are making their way through school without being able to read proficiently. This trend implies that students are graduating and either going to college or entering the work force without the necessary reading abilities, some without even the basic reading abilities (Applegate, Applegate,
McGeehan, Pinto, & Kong, 2009). To combat this knowledge, schools search endlessly for the best-practices in literacy, the most effective programs, and the most efficacious strategies, with the goal of raising reading test scores, helping students raise levels of achievement, and close the ever-widening gap.

Ogle and Lang (2007) recommend that teachers need to start addressing these negative trends on their own and in their own schools. The authors suggest a starting point is to take a critical look at the real role reading plays within their own schools. The purpose of this research project is to do just that – to take a critical look at the role of reading in one rural high school in the south central region of the United States. In order to examine reading assignments given in the secondary classroom, this project will critically probe into the methodologies teachers employ when selecting reading assignments and reading strategies, how teachers assess student learning through text, the frequency of reading assignments given to students, and the amount of reading students are expected to complete.

Statement of the Problem

There are three central questions that this research project examines. The first deals with the issue that students may not be being assigned complex texts to read across all content-areas and there is question as to whether or not they are provided strategic support necessary to comprehend complex texts. The second question involves whether or not high school students are completing reading assignments given by teachers in content-areas. The third question derives directly from the first two – if students are not being assigned complex texts, are not being provided support to comprehend these texts, and are not actually reading these texts, then students are likely to graduate from high
school underprepared to read and understand the complex texts they will encounter in college or the work force. This research project is designed to look more closely at the questions one and two first by determining how much reading a student is expected to complete, the frequency of reading assignments, and how many students are/are not completing reading assignments. Further, through the case study, this study will conduct an analysis of two teachers’ methodologies use when selecting reading assignments, reading strategies, and how those two teachers’ assess student content learning through the assigned text.

**Research Questions**

There are four significant research questions that will be used to guide this project:

1. How much are secondary students expected to read per week?
2. What strategic support is being provided by the teacher to support student reading and content learning?
3. How do secondary teachers select reading assignments and reading strategies given to students?
4. How do secondary teachers determine students are learning content presented through reading assignments?

**Summary**

The research issue presented and discussed in this chapter focuses on the role of reading in the secondary classroom, particularly the amount and types of reading that students are being assigned, the increasing rate at which students are completing assigned readings, and the implications these trends have on our students’ futures – both in post-
secondary education and in the workforce. There are five questions guiding this project. These questions focus on how much students are expected to read per week, the frequency with which students are completing reading assignments, teachers’ processes in selecting reading assignments and reading strategies, and how teachers’ assess content learning through reading.
Chapter 2

Introduction

Chapter two will discuss the theoretical framework of this study and a review of the literature. The theoretical framework includes Rosenblatt’s (1969) Transactional Theory of Reading and Bandura’s (1986) Theory of Self-Efficacy. The review of the literature will first focus on the current state of reading in our nation and will contrast national reading standards against state standards. It will further explore the global implications of students who are graduating from high school not able to read and comprehend complex texts. Research will then explore content-area literacy and reading strategically in the classroom. Finally, the review of the literature will conclude with a discussion of literacy assessment of content-area learning.

Theoretical Framework

There are two major theoretical frameworks being utilized for this study. The first is the Transactional Theory of Reading developed by Louise Rosenblatt (1969). The Transactional Theory of Reading describes the reciprocal, mutually defining relationship between the reader and the literary text. These relationships are referred to as the “poem,” the outcome of the reading experience (Gourlay, 2003). The poem, then, is always significant, regardless of whether the text is being read solely for informational purposes, for aesthetic purposes, or somewhere in between. Also central to this theory are the connections made while reading, including text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-outside-text, and text-to-world.

This theory is particularly relevant when studying reading assignments given in secondary classrooms because high school students, in particular, are resistant to reading
assignments thus making their transaction with a text especially significant. How a student relates to the text has a serious impact on whether that student will complete a reading assignment, will use a strategy to enhance comprehension, and the depth of content knowledge the student will take away from the reading transaction. Further, this theory implies that classrooms must be cooperative learning environments, where each learner is valued and where each response to the text is both considered and examined. Finally, this framework includes the relationship of texts to one another and their application across both content-areas and genres. This becomes even more relevant considering that school districts and states are currently redesigning their curriculums so that the same content is taught across multiple content-areas in order to meet the demands set forth by No Child Left Behind. It is important that as students transact with a text by making connections that they to connect with texts within that same content-area and across multiple contents as well.

The second theory addressed is Bandura’s (1986) Theory of Self-Efficacy. Within this theory, Bandura suggests that self-efficacy is one’s beliefs regarding one’s competence on a perspective task. However, self-efficacy is often confused with perceived self-efficacy. “Perceived self-efficacy is defined as peoples’ judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). McCabe (2006) expounds on Bandura’s theory by noting that a self-efficacy belief is task-specific, exists prior to attempting a task, predicts how well a person believes he or she will do on the task, and may vary according to task.
Bandura’s theory has a broad application to this research study – both in examining assignments given by teachers and students completion of those reading assignments. In most secondary classrooms, teachers are faced with teaching the vast amount of content included in the curriculum as well as also acting as literacy coaches, so that their students may better understand texts that are assigned (Misulis, 2009). Unfortunately, these secondary teachers are generally not prepared to meet their students’ content-area literacy needs. Thus this theory applies in the sense of teachers’ own self-efficacy in regard to giving reading assignments and/or providing strategic support for those assignments. It further includes teachers’ skills in assessing students’ learning through assigned texts.

Bandura’s theory is also particularly relevant to the secondary student population. McCabe (2006) notes, “If self-efficacy is positive and strong, and the goal of a task has value to the individual, he or she will likely make the decision to become involved” (p. 253). Unfortunately as multiple sources of research indicate, including ACT, NAEP, and the Alliance for Excellent Education, the majority of our students are not reading at a proficient level and are underprepared for handling complex texts. This suggests that the current high school student population has a negative self-efficacy when it comes to reading. Because students are not reading well, they believe they will not comprehend what they read, therefore they avoid the reading assignment altogether. Thus the vicious cycle continues.
Review of the Literature

Current State of Reading Nationwide

Researchers across the board indicate that the state of literacy in this country is at an all-time low and is in need of a critical overhaul. Data from multiple sources all indicate that students are performing more poorly in reading than they have in the last decade. The state of literacy for students across the United States has been and continues to be an area demanding further in-depth research into the best methods to teach our students to read proficiently. The NAEP (2009) releases a National Report Card every other year that reports the scores of students across the nation in reading, math, science, social studies, and civics/economics. In 2009, scores overall were surprisingly and depressingly low. For eighth grade white/Caucasian students, only 4% scored advanced, 40% were at or above proficient and 84% at basic reading ability. Considering other ethnicities, these numbers were even lower. African American students scored with 0% advanced, 14% at or above proficient, 57% at basic reading ability. Hispanic students scored 1% advanced, 17% at or above proficient and 61% at basic reading ability.

Furthermore, the National Report Card includes the amount of time teachers spend on language arts instruction (language arts instruction includes specific and/or direct instruction in reading, writing, literature and related topics) in a given week. In 2009, 47% of fourth grade teachers reported spending ten-plus hours on language arts instruction but only 6% of eighth grade teachers reported the same. Instead, many eighth grade teachers (44%) reported only spending 3 to 4.9 hours on language arts instruction per week. The National Report Card doesn’t include assessment of high school students, leaving little documentation regarding how many fewer hours of language arts instruction
high school students are receiving. Consequently, how is the lack of reading instruction negatively impacting student achievement?

The National Endowment for the Arts, in its 2007 publication *To Read or Not to Read* reports that the average reading score of seventeen year-olds began a slow downward trend starting in 1992. Further, for more than thirty years, this age group has failed to sustain improvements in reading scores (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). They also include in their report that among high school seniors, the average score has declined for virtually all levels of reading. Little more than one third of high school seniors now read proficiently. “From 1992 to 2005 the average score declined for the *bottom 90%* [emphasis added] of readers; only the very best readers of 2005, scores held steady” (p. 13). Further, the National Endowment for the Arts suggest that this decline in reading scores could be related to the declining reading habits of teenagers. The percentage of seventeen-year-olds who read nothing at all for pleasure has doubled over a twenty year period and those same students are reading fifteen or fewer pages per week for school or homework (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). These poor reading habits follow students from high school into college. The percentage of individuals who choose not to read among college students nearly doubles after graduation.

Similar data has been reported through research conducted by the American College Testing Program, otherwise known as ACT. Their report published in 2006 indicates that in 2005 only 51% of high school students were ready for college-level reading (ACT, 2006). In fact, based on their data, more students are prepared for college level reading in the eighth and tenth grades than they are as finishing high school seniors. ACT has made this determination based on their readiness benchmark for reading which
represents the level of achievement required for students to have a high probability of success in such credit-bearing courses as Psychology or U.S. History, which are first-year courses that are generally considered to be reading dependent.

The ACT suggests that poor reading achievement for high school students is directly related to the lack of specific reading standards for secondary students at the state level. “Overall, nearly 60% of all states do not have grade specific standards that define the expectations for reading achievement in high school. If such standards do not exist, teachers can’t teach them and students can’t learn them. You can’t get what you don’t ask for” (ACT, 2006, p. 8). Finally, ACT concludes “…that the readiness of the nation’s high school students for college-level reading is far too low…what matters most in reading achievement is the ability to comprehend complex texts. We must find ways to help all students to read at the level of proficiency necessary to ensure that they are ready for success in college without remediation (ACT, 2006, p. 23).

National versus State Reading Standards

While there is general consensus that the state of literacy in our nation has been and continues to decline, individual states provide data that suggest that progress in reading is actually being achieved by students at all levels, including secondary students. This contradiction was discussed more in-depth by Applegate, Applegate, McGeehan, Pinto, and Kong in the study, *The Assessment of Thoughtful Literacy in NAEP: Why the states aren’t measuring up* (2009). In this study Applegate et al. (2009) completed a critical comparison between the NAEP reading assessment and the individual states standardized reading assessments. Applegate et al. indicates,
State-NAEP comparisons for 2005 reveal that states reported a level of proficiency at a startling average rate of 40% higher than that found on NAEP. In the face of what appear to be inflated levels of achievement on state tests, it is tempting to conclude that state tests have ‘lowered the bar’ in the face of demands stemming from No Child Left Behind (NCLB).”

(Applegate et al., 2009, p. 373)

This extreme discrepancy may be explained by the significant differences between NAEP and state assessments. [The] NAEP called for higher order interpretation more than twice as frequently as the highest ranked state test, more than three times as frequently as the average state test, and more than eight times as frequently as the lowest ranked state test. By the end of their analysis, Applegate et al. find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that state tests are not particularly well aligned with their own testing frameworks. Further, if that is the case, [state tests] may not be effective assessments of the results of their own curricula. The study finishes by acknowledging that to assume that state test results are showing us that a sizeable majority of our children are on the road to mature reading is a potentially serious error, one that may have critical repercussions. These repercussions include the very serious negative implications that low literacy levels may have on our nation and even around our world.

It is arguable that this extreme discrepancy is seen because setting standards has been left in the hands of the states and national reading standards are not in place. In her book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Diane Ravitch (2010), former Assistant Secretary of Education, discusses a time when a national standards movement was being pushed, but then abandoned for a climate of testing and
accountability instead. Ravitch stated, “Although its supporters often claimed it [NCLB] was a natural outgrowth of the standards movement, it was not. It demanded that schools generate higher tests scores in basic skills, but it required no curriculum at all nor did it raise standards” (p. 15-16). Ravitch continues,

Somehow our nation got off track in its efforts to improve education.

What was once the standards movement was replaced by the accountability movement. What once was an effort to improve the quality of education turned into an accounting strategy.” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 16)

She goes on to explain that in the late 1990’s, there was an attempt to create national standards in core content areas, however partisan controversy effectively eliminated any further such attempts and led to establishment of the Clinton’s administration passage of Goals2000, which gave the states federal money to write their own academic standards, but most of the state standards were vague when it came to any curriculum content…most state standards were windy rhetoric, devoid of concrete descriptions of what students should be expected to know and be able to do. (Ravitch, 2010, p. 19)

Per Ravitch (2010), vague standards melded well with the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2002. She notes,

But it was left to each state to decide what ‘proficiency’ meant. So the states, most of which had vague and meaningless standards, were left free to determine what children should learn and how well they should learn it.
In effect, they were asked to grade themselves by creating tests that almost all children could eventually pass.” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 21)

Ravitch (2010) explains the extreme discrepancies between state-reported scores regarding student reading proficiency and scores reported by the NAEP. Further, it could be reasonably argued that until national standards are set for reading/reading comprehension, ensuring that all teachers are presenting equitable content and students are being assessed using the same standards, then this divergence will continue. This further supports the notion presented by Applegate et al. (2009) that states have been and will continue to hold students to lower and lower standards to ensure that schools within the state can meet state and federal accountability requirements. Finally, holding students to increasingly lower standards not only devalues reading within the content-area classroom but also helps to ensure that a greater number of students will graduate from high school underprepared to comprehend complex texts.

**Global Implications of Low Literacy Levels**

Unfortunately, the negative impact of low literacy levels, as are indicated in the research above, has implications that expand far beyond the individual student. The National Endowment for the Arts reached three depressing conclusions within their 2007 report. They concluded 1) Americans are spending less time reading; 2) Reading comprehension skills are eroding; and 3) These declines have serious civic, social, cultural, and economic implications (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). The report continues to state,

There is a general decline in reading among teenage and adult Americans.

Most alarming, both reading ability and the habit of regular reading have
greatly declined among college graduates; these negative trends have
demonstrable social, economic, cultural, and civic implications (National
Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 5).

The report continues to suggest that as Americans read less, they read less well and
because they read less well, they have lower levels of academic achievement. These
lower levels of reading negatively impact individuals in the job market. Poor reading
skills correlate heavily with lack of employment, lower wages, and fewer opportunities
for advancement. Further, deficient readers are less likely to become active in civic and
cultural life, most noticeable in volunteering and voting.

The National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) support data gathered by
the National Endowment for the Arts. In the 2006 research brief, it is stated,

Both higher education and the workplace present readers with complex
texts. Without a highly literate pool of job applicants, employers are
forced to look off-shore for well trained and highly literate workers from
other countries. In other words, our nation cannot afford an under-literate
workforce. (NCTE, 2006, p. 4)

Further, NCTE says,

The moral imperatives that led the United States to establish public
schools during the early days of nationhood remain; schooling must
produce citizens sufficiently skilled in literacy to help foster the greater
good within our nation and in the world beyond. (NCTE, 2006, p. 5)

The ACT provides data consistent with NCTE and the National Endowment for
the Arts. In their 2006 report, ACT recognizes that the knowledge and skills needed to be
successful in college are equivalent to those needed in the workforce. Failing to graduate students who are prepared to read and comprehend such complex texts put our nation’s economic competitiveness in a growing global economy at risk. Currently a vast majority of jobs require at least some post-secondary education and the reading skills required to handle texts found in those courses. A survey conducted by the National Association of Manufacturers in 2001, and reported by ACT, determined that 80% of businesses had a moderate to serious shortage of qualified job candidates and cited poor reading skills as the key reason for the shortages. Finally, ACT suggests,

Without immediate action to correct deficiencies in elementary and secondary education resources nationwide, tomorrow’s workforce will be neither ready to meet the challenges of a knowledge-intensive workplace, nor be able to take advantage of the vast opportunities that our economy will offer. (ACT, 2006, p. 5)

Gallagher (2009) contributes to the discussion of the global repercussions of low literacy levels. Gallagher asks the question, “Are we going to have a generation of people who cannot manage their own behavior, manage their world, plan ahead, reflect on abstract ideas, or relate appropriately to moral, social and ethical issues?” (p. 41). He notes that these concerns arise when the brain is not given every opportunity to develop. Further, if we want our students to be complex thinkers – the type of thinking necessary for success in our nation and in the global economy – then we need to challenge our students to read long, complex texts.
State of Reading in the Classroom

Gallagher (2009) coined the term “readicide” to describe the current state of reading, as it presently exists in most secondary classrooms today. He defines readicide as, “The systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (p. 2). Gallagher takes the approach that poor reading skills, particularly content-area literacy, is in such dire shape because teachers have been slowly destroying students’ enjoyment found in reading, and even their motivation to pick up a book, through classroom practices that drive students and books apart. Gallagher notes that rather than helping students, many reading practices found in today’s classrooms are actually contributing to the death of reading; instead of instilling reading practices, teachers and administrators kill many students last chance to develop into lifelong readers. He argues that readicide is directly related to the increased focus on test-preparation in schools.

The focus has changed in our schools and not in a good way. High interest reading is being squeezed out in favor of more test preparation practice. Interesting books are disappearing as funding is diverted to purchase ‘magic pill’ reading programs. Sustained Silent Reading time is being abandoned because it is often seen as ‘soft’ or ‘non-academic.’

(Gallagher, 2009, p. 4)

Further, this truth is evidenced through three negative trends that exacerbate the problem and endanger minds: 1) There is a death of interesting reading materials in schools; 2) Many schools have removed novels and other longer challenging works to provide teachers and students with more test preparation; and 3) Students are not doing enough
reading in school. Finally, Gallagher notes that when schools remove reading to prepare for tests or when schools cut electives to increase reading scores, they are removing invaluable opportunities for students to widen and deepen knowledge that is foundational to developing readers. Without a broad knowledge base, students stand no chance of being excellent readers. Considering that reading is defined—not only as calling out words on a page, but also as making sense of a text by making connections and using prior knowledge—Gallagher’s argument is more than valid. If the only experiences that students encounter in school revolve around test preparation, how will they acquire the vast experiences necessary to connect with complex texts on any meaningful level?

However, when schools sit down to discuss the true state of reading in their classrooms; a central question tends to arise among teachers, most especially among secondary teachers—Who are responsible for teaching reading? In her study, Misulis (2009) explored that question more deeply. She argues that literacy instruction must not end at the elementary level; instead reading instruction should become an integral component of content-area instruction at all grade levels, especially as the need to apply literacy skills within content-areas increase. Unfortunately, content-area teachers often feel that attempting to teach literacy skills within their domain places one too many demands on their time. Misulis notes their frustration stating,

Too often, educators consider that content-literacy instruction is one more addition to their instruction and that time is not available for anything other than focused teaching of content; because time is often a constraint for teachers, it is important to identify instructional practices that are
manageable to plan for and to implement within the context of a busy instructional day. (Misulis, 2009, p. 11-12)

She argues that if content-area teachers would rethink their presentation of content and how they approach reading assignments with students, then they would find themselves no longer fighting against both the students and time. She suggests that an integrated content-area literacy model would reflect that content literacy instruction is, ideally, the integration of content instruction and literacy skills instruction with both occurring simultaneously. This requires comprehensive thinking about what content literacy learning could be and should be, rather than reducing content-area literacy to mere imposition of a set of skills and activities. Finally, effective implementation of content literacy instruction requires a proactive effort on the part of educators to seek strategies that will promote student learning. As students learn to use these tools, then they will be better able to apply such skills across content-areas and with greater independence which will result in enhanced student learning. Misulis ends her study with a provocative question to educators,

If it is possible to use instructional strategies to help our students learn subject matter more effectively while equipping them with tools that can contribute to their future independent learning of subject matter and if this can be manageable, then—in this age of accountability and assessment—can we really afford not to do so?” (Misulis, 2009, p. 18)

Gallagher and Misulis are only two of the many sources that report data regarding the dire state of reading in our secondary classrooms today. The problem is as prevalent as it is pervasive. Yet there is agreement that this can be combated and students can be
taught how to read and comprehend complex texts if they are provided the right set of strategies within their content-area courses.

*Reading Strategically in Secondary Classrooms*

As an educator today, it is easy to become overwhelmed with the vast array of strategies to choose from when teaching reading to students. While strategies have always been available to teachers throughout time, the real push for teaching reading strategically was reinforced with the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2002. It then became more predominant in secondary classrooms with the publication of *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research for Middle and High School Literacy* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). This report, written for the Carnegie Corporation of New York examines critically the state of reading in middle schools and high schools across the country. It also provides an in-depth discussion of potential strategies that can be applied to content-area classrooms in order to provide more effective reading instruction to students. In the introduction to the report, *Reading Next* states,

Ensuring adequate ongoing literacy development for all students in middle and high school years is a more challenging task than ensuring excellent reading education in the primary grades for two reasons: 1) secondary school literacy skills are more complex, more embedded in subject matters; 2) adolescents are not as universally motivated to read better or as interested in school-based reading as kindergarteners.” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004, p. 2)

In this report, the authors describe nine instructional elements that are key to adolescent literacy. Within these elements are research-based strategies that can be aptly applied to
content-area classrooms. The strategies discussed include questioning, clarifying, predicting, summarizing, visualizing, self-questioning, paraphrasing, and word-identification. The authors note,

The idea is not that content-area-teachers should become reading and writing teachers, but rather that they should emphasize the reading and writing practices that are specific to their subjects, so that students are encouraged to read and write like…subject area experts.” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004, p. 15)

Ogle and Lang (2007) delineate the five keys to a successful content-area literacy program include 1) build common understanding of the reading process, 2) creating a framework for teaching and student strategy control, 3) engaging students metacognitively, 4) ensuring that students have materials available they can read, and 5) creating contexts for students to learn together. Throughout the chapter, Ogle and Lang promote strategies parallel to those presented in Reading Next.

The NCTE in their 2006 report discusses the necessity for teaching reading strategies in content-area classes. Their report notes that reading complex texts requires the ability to discern deeply embedded ideas, comprehend highly sophisticated information, negotiate elaborate structures and intricate styles, understand context-dependent vocabulary, and recognize implicit purposes. NCTE argues,

Adolescents need instruction that integrates skills into each school discipline so they can learn from the texts they read. Adolescents also need instruction that links their personal experiences and their texts, making connections between students’ existing literacy resources and the
ones necessary for various disciplines. When instruction does not address adolescent’ literacy needs, motivation and engagement are diminished. Without a curriculum that fosters qualities of motivation and engagement, adolescents risk become under-literate. (NCTE, 2006, p. 6)

Further, when discussing strategies that should be applied, NCTE recommends that they should target student motivation, comprehension, and critical thinking. Motivation strategies would focus on teachers using diverse texts and allow for student self-selection of texts. Comprehension can be enhanced through vocabulary development, class discussions, question generation, and summarizing. Critical thinking should be enhanced through self-monitoring while reading, interpretation and analysis of texts, the inclusion of multiple disciplines, and the incorporation of technology (NCTE, 2006).

As is evidenced above, researchers agree that while strategies should be selected based upon the content being taught and the needs inherent within those content-areas, there are some strategies that can be applied across many content-areas and are especially relevant for secondary classrooms. Strategies, such as making connections, accessing prior knowledge or background knowledge, question generating, making predictions, reflecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and thinking metacognitively could be embraced by content teachers across the board. These strategies will develop students’ ability to monitor for comprehension, will teach them to think critically, and will instruct them how to tackle new and challenging texts. Further, they will increase content-based knowledge and their chances of being successful after graduation. With a little effort and training, secondary content-area teachers can set aside the myth that they are not responsible for
teaching reading and utilize these tools to make secondary schools and the students within them, significantly more successful.

**Best Practices in Literacy Assessment of Content Learning**

The selection of appropriate content-area reading selections and the utilization of efficacious reading strategies are not the only components to creating an environment where reading is both essential to content learning and academic success. Often success is determined based on assessment of learning—in this case, assessment of content-learning via assigned texts.

In 1994 and then revised in 1998 the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English jointly published a document that details the *Standard for the Assessment of Reading and Writing* (NCTE/IRA, 1998). The figure below provides a summary of the eleven standards written and published by the NCTE and the IRA.
Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing as published by the NCTE and the IRA, 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 1</strong>: The interests of the student are paramount in assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 2</strong>: The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 3</strong>: Assessment must reflect and allow for critical inquiry into curriculum and instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 4</strong>: Assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 5</strong>: Assessment must be fair and equitable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 6</strong>: The consequences of an assessment procedure are the first, and most important, consideration in establishing the validity of the assessment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 7</strong>: The teacher is the most important agent of assessment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 8</strong>: The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 9</strong>: Assessment must be based in the school community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 10</strong>: All members of the education community – students, parents, teachers, administrators, policy-makers – must have a voice in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Standard 11</strong>: Parents must be involved as active essential participants in the assessment process.</td>
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Based on the figure above, individuals from the national and state level, down to the district, administration, and individual classroom teacher should take these eleven standards into consideration when designing and implementing literacy assessment.

Winograd, Flores-Dueñas, and Arrington (2003) discuss research-based, best-practices in literacy assessment and note that best practices in literacy assessment are, “those that help us understand the larger issues, frame important goals, gather multiple kinds of evidence, and engage in right discussion about how to help children become better readers” (p. 205). The authors further note that best practices in literacy assessment are those that use a variety of appropriate indices to address the needs of different
audiences. They further note that effective literacy assessment should include, but is not limited to: focus on important goals and support meaningful student learning; based in the classroom rather than imposed from the outside; are integral parts of instruction; provide information that is clear and useful to students, teachers, and parents; and continually undergo review and revision.

Additionally, Winograd, et al. (2003) noted four research-based, effective and authentic assessment strategies that can be used in the classroom. These include 1) contextual and cultural surveys; 2) observation strategies, including literature discussion, anecdotal records and developmental checklists; 3) portfolios; and 4) student-teacher conferences. These assessment strategies are selected because surveys will provide important context for the information contained in portfolios, gathered during observations of daily students work, and the conversations that take place between students and teachers. Portfolios will contain, among other things, evidence of the students’ performance in writing and reading, records of the teacher’s observations, and conferences with students. Portfolios, anecdotal records, and developmental checklists provide important starting points for conferences between teachers and students. (Winograd et al., 2003, p. 215)

To conclude the chapter, the authors discuss the necessity of placing assessment of both literacy and content learning back into the hands of the classroom teachers themselves by stating:

We are making a genuine effort to reconceptualize the purpose of assessment from a process of classifying children into winners and losers,
to a process for providing students with opportunities to gain ownership of and insight about their own learning and providing teachers with a rich basis for making professional judgments about instruction…[but] this situation is not going to change until Americans have more trust and confidence in teachers and in public schools. (Winograd, et al., 2003, p. 233)

In 2007, the National Institute for Literacy, a division of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, released the publication *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know about Adolescent Literacy*. Within their paper, the authors discuss literacy assessment. In regard to assessment based on content-area literacy, it is stated, “Effective instruction depends on sound instructional decision-making, which, in turn, depends on reliable data regarding students’ strengths and weaknesses and progress in learning content and developing literacy” (National Institute for Literacy, 2007, p. 27). The report then divides assessment into two primary forms: formative and summative.

Summative assessments are described as “assessments [to] inform teachers whether classroom-level instruction has had the desired impact. Assessments provide necessary school-, district- and state-level data, but they do not inform daily instructional decision-making, nor do they provide information on individual student progress” (National Institute of Literacy, 2007, p. 27). Further, these assessments are identified as including quizzes, end-of-chapter tests, district and statewide tests, and standardized measures of reading and content-learning. However, while summative assessments do provide educators with necessary information regarding student achievement, this form of assessment is not the most commonly form used in the classroom nor does it meet the
day-to-day needs of both educators and students. Instead, formative assessment has taken rise, as a means of assessment to drive classroom instructional practices and ensure comprehension of content, and monitor continuous student achievement. Three key techniques for formative assessment include classroom discussion, teacher observation, and reading of students’ work. These techniques are considered formative assessment when they are used to adapt instruction to meet student needs.

Teacher questioning is perhaps the most common of these forms. Typically used after students have been assigned a passage or chapter to read, these comprehension checks may help the teacher informally assess what students have understood, however, these checks do little to help teachers understand reading skills and strategies students use to help them understand the reading (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). The National Institute for Literacy argues that teacher questioning should fall into three main categories: 1) Questions that focus on student learning of content; 2) Questions that focus on the development and use of reading skills and strategies; and 3) Questions that model the kinds of questions students should learn to ask themselves. Of the three categories, the authors note a significant flaw regarding the first.

It is sometimes difficult to formulate questions that tap only the content of what was to be read; many times questions can be correctly answered without actually reading the text; therefore teachers should not rely solely on the use of questioning to assess comprehension” (National Institute for Literacy, 2007, p. 28).

Further, the second and third categories are more significant because these involve
questions that focus on assessing student progress toward achieving standards and goals give teachers information on whether students are integrating what they have learned from reading texts, classroom discussions, teacher lectures, and other learning experiences relevant to achieving standards and goals. (National Institute for Literacy, 2007, p. 28)

The authors conclude the reading assessment portion of the publication by noting, “A debate continues about whether or not the effectiveness of strategy instruction should be assessed by reading achievement or subject matter achievement” (National Institute of Literacy, 2007 p. 30). This reflects the controversy within literacy assessment and assessment of content-learning. It also inherently suggests the necessity of teachers’ ability to be able to assess both content-area learning as well as proficiency in learning via content-area texts.

Lipson and Wixson (2009) delineate the five guidelines for implementing effective assessment of instruction. These include 1) Assess meaningful activities in appropriate contexts; 2) Match assessment to purpose and to instruction; 3) Be systematic; 4) Assess continuously; and 5) Promote reflection and self-assessment. In their text, the authors go on to discuss formative assessment in terms of classroom-based assessment, considering nearly all formative assessment is conducted within a specific content-area classroom. They argue “evidence points to the conclusion that achievement gains are improved dramatically when teachers increase the accuracy of their classroom assessments and engage students in the process” (Lipson & Wixson, 2009, p. 308).
Further the authors argue the inherent value of classroom-based assessment because they are

a) Tied to the curricular content and instructional strategies of the classroom;

b) More fine-grained than external assessments so that they help teachers plan specific lessons;

c) Focused on both the process and products of learning;

d) Timed to provide teachers and students with immediate feedback; and

e) Designed to provide opportunities for teachers to interact with students and adapt assessment to their individual needs. (Lipson & Wixson, 2009, p. 309)

Within the text, the authors then apply assessment techniques to a variety of reading strategies, therefore instructors can apply literacy-based assessments to assess content-learning concurrently. These strategies focus on the areas of: word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and self-regulation.

Finally they share the same final assessment-related concern expressed by the National Institute for Literacy. “Educators must continue to press for assessment instruments and methodologies that provide instructionally useful and contextually valid information” (Lipson & Wixson, 2009, p. 364). In other words, as teachers and implementers of assessment, we need to continue searching for reliable and valid means of conducting both formative and summative assessment, in a way to parallel methodologies and derive a means of continuously assessing both literacy growth and content-learning.
Summary

This chapter has presented information regarding the theoretical framework on which this study has been based and has explored a review of the literature regarding critical components. Research repeatedly suggests that our current high school students are not reading proficiently, are not reading across their content-areas, and are not being provided apt instruction on how to read and comprehend complex texts. These trends have national, even global, implications. Students are graduating from high school and entering post-secondary education or the workforce not able to read the complex texts they encounter. This puts the United States at risk of not advancing, like other industrialized nations, therefore not able to compete in the global economy. Further, students who graduate not able to read proficiently are less likely to be involved in the social and political arenas. Thus, if educators want to stop this vicious cycle from continuing its downward spiral, then teacher’s need to start including reading assignments and content-area reading strategies in their curriculum. By providing strategic support and meeting students’ literacy needs, classrooms will develop where students are able to comprehend complex texts, to think critically, and to advance successfully after graduation. Finally, in order to determine that true content-based learning was achieved through assigned texts, a discussion of literacy assessment, in terms of content-area classrooms was explored. Formative assessment has sprung up as the most viable means of assessing learning of content, as it helps instructors continuously discern students’ strengths, weaknesses, and guides future instructional practices. Effective classroom-based assessment techniques include questioning, classroom discussion, observations, and performance-based activities.
Chapter 3

Introduction

Considering the purpose of this study is to examine reading assignments in secondary classrooms, this chapter will discuss the research design and methodology, participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, triangulation of the data, and potential limitations of this study.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, a mixed methods approach was used for data collection, triangulation, and data analysis. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) define this methodology as,

A research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies.

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 5)

Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004) note that mixed methods is an expansive and creative form of research, not a limiting form of research. It is inclusive, pluralistic, and complementary, and it suggests that researchers take an eclectic approach to method selection and the thinking about and conduct of research.

Finally, Symonds & Gorard (2010) indicate that there are two key strengths inherent within mixed-methods research: 1) the extensive focus on data triangulation and
2) innovative research designs for promoting integration and data synthesis. The extensive focus on data triangulation increases the study’s validity. Further, triangulation is often cited as having methodological superiority over single methods. “By focusing on the benefits of juxtaposing data and viewpoints to get closer to the truth, mixed-methods studies have brought to our attention how one can design and entire research process to capitalize on the benefits of triangulation” (Symonds & Gorard, 2010, p. 129).

Research Design

This researcher intended to examine reading assignments given in the secondary classroom through mixed-methods approach to data collection, including both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Convenience sampling was used to select both teacher and student participants. First, the researcher contacted the superintendent of the school district where data collected was intended to take place and requested to be included in the upcoming school board’s meeting agenda for their regular monthly meeting. The researcher was granted permission to conduct research during the November 2009 meeting. At the meeting the researcher provided details regarding the study, as is delineated in the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) application to conduct research. The board reviewed the proposal and voted unanimously to grant permission for this study to be carried out as indicated. The superintendent then provided a letter to the researcher, indicating that permission was thusly granted. Further, the principal within the actual school where data collection was occurring provided a letter stating that the school agreed to participate fully in the study. This study was then presented to the university’s HSRB. After a full-board hearing, the HSRB approved the research study.
With HSRB approval, the participant sample was identified to include 14 Community, Health, Legal, and Social Services (CHLASS) academy teachers and 200 CHLASS academy students. A consent form, found in Appendix B, was provided and explained to participating teachers during a regular CHLASS academy meeting in the beginning of January, 2010. The consent form included the purpose and description of the study, delineated exactly what would be expected of teacher participants, and described potential risks and benefits for participants. Teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification before signing the consent form.

In regard to student participants, these individuals were given negative consent forms, one for the student and one for the legal parent/guardian. The negative consent forms for parents/guardians and students can be found in Appendices C and D respectively. These consent forms included the same components—an explanation of the purpose of the study, a description of the study survey, assurance that no identifying information about the student would be collected, and a description of potential benefits and risks of the study. Consent forms were given directly to students in the class in which data was to be collected, with a complete explanation of the negative consent form and an opportunity to ask questions and/or seek clarification. Students were initially given one-week to return the negative consent forms, however both teacher and student participants could choose to discontinue participation at any point during the data collection process.

The first set of reading logs were distributed one week after teachers and students were given copies of the consent/negative consent forms. A copy of the teacher reading log can be found in Appendix E. Teachers were given blank copies of reading logs on
Monday morning. It was intended for completion of a reading log to take approximately
ten minutes each week. Reading logs were then collected on Friday afternoons by the
primary researcher. After collection, reading logs were coded with a four-digit code,
which includes one letter and three numerical digits. This code was used to match reading
logs with student surveys.

Based on data provided in reading logs, student surveys were then developed. A
copy of the student survey can be found in Appendix F. The only identifying piece of
information on the survey was the four digit code on the top right hand corner which
matched the survey with the corresponding reading log. Surveys were given on Monday
during fourth block and took students approximately five minutes to complete. During
the time in which students were completing the surveys, the participating teacher left the
classroom to ensure fidelity of student responses. Students who choose not to participate
in the study were also given a survey to complete, however those surveys had a different
final digit in the ID code. This was used to ensure that these surveys were immediately
destroyed and no data from non-participating students were included in data analysis.

In order to provide a deeper context for this study, a case study portion was
included. The case study included interviews of two participating teachers. These
participants were purposefully selected based on frequency of reading assignments as
noted on submitted reading logs. Participants were given a new consent form with an
additional signature line included indicating permission to audio-tape and transcribe the
interview. A copy of this consent form can be found in Appendix G. Interviews were
conducted individually and lasted approximately one hour. A copy of the pre-set
interview questions can be found in Appendix H with transcriptions of the two case study
interviews found in Appendices I and J. At completion of the interviews, these audio-recordings were then transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and the audio-recordings destroyed. Transcripts were then analyzed and coded for common trends and patterns found in participant’s responses.

Upon completion of data collection, reading log data were broken down and analyzed based on number of reading assignments given, the frequency with which reading assignments were given, and reading strategies provided to support comprehension of text. These data were discussed in terms of best-practice. Further, reading log data were examined in both quantitative and qualitative means, in order to provide the most information-rich analysis of the information.

Survey data were examined in quantitative terms only. First survey responses were coded, then broken down into total, averages, and percents for each class and then again as a whole.

Case study data were the final data to be collected. These data were examined in qualitative terms only. Case study interviews were examined and coded to identify commonalities or deviances in teacher described processes and methodologies in assigning texts, reading strategies, and assessing content-learning. These trends were then discussed in terms of identified best-practices for content-area literacy.

Finally at the completion of this study, a report was given to the school board of the participating school district as was requested at the onset of this project. Results of this study were shared in aggregate form, with no individual information shared. General conclusions of the study as well as potential implications for the school, its teachers and students were shared with the school board.
Reading Log and Survey Design

The survey design portion included both reading logs completed by teachers as well as surveys–based on reading logs–completed by students. The reading logs were implemented to assist in answering the first two research questions guiding this study, including how much students are expected to read per week and what forms of strategic support are being provided to students to enhance comprehension of a text. This instrument, titled “Teacher Reading Log” can be found in Appendix E. Student surveys were then developed based on the information teachers provided on the reading logs. The student survey instrument can be found in Appendix F. It should be noted that each survey contains a unique four-digit code to match the survey to the teacher and each survey includes the corresponding reading assignments given by that teacher.

For the survey portion of this research study, data were collected in the form of reading logs from participating teachers, which were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Data collected from student surveys were only quantitative in nature. Teacher reported data were in the form of a weekly reading log, where teachers recorded reading assignments given to their fourth block class each week for nine weeks. The log asked teachers to identify the assigned date, the actual reading assignment (including page numbers and source), the type of text, and the reading strategy provided (if one was provided) to support text comprehension.

For each reading log collected, the students in that class were given a short survey asking about the reading assignments reported by teachers. Student surveys were written so that students would respond to a mixture of yes/no questions as well as several questions written using a Likert Scale. Survey questions asked students if they completed
the reading assignment, if a strategy was provided and used, if the strategy was helpful in supporting comprehension of the text, and how valuable the assignment was in relationship to content learning.

**Case Study Design**

Based on the frequency of reading assignments given, two teachers were selected to participate in a case study. The case study portion of this study was included to provide data to answer the third and fourth questions guiding this study. Primarily the purpose of the case study was to examine teacher’s processes and methodologies uses when assigning texts, utilizing reading strategies, and assessing student content learning. For this study, both case study participants taught in the same subject area so as to minimize variables. Further, participants were selected based on frequency of reading assignments given based on data provided on the teacher reading logs. One of the participants had a high frequency of reading assignments given and the other had a low frequency of reading assignments given. For the case study, the teachers were asked to complete an interview. A copy of the interview questions used can be found in Appendix G. All interview data collected were qualitative in nature. The two interviews were included as the primary means of data collection for the case study. In the interview, teachers were asked to discuss their methodologies and processes used when selecting reading assignments and reading strategies, about how they assess student content learning through assigned texts, and about their perceptions regarding student readiness in handling complex text encountered in post-secondary education and/or the workforce. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify common themes or patterns. Audiotapes were destroyed after transcription.


**Reading Log Methodology**

Data collected from teacher participants were a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data included information teachers included on the weekly reading log. This data indicated the frequency of reading assignments given, the type of reading assignment given, and information regarding strategic support provided to students to support comprehension of text. These logs could be filled out as a teacher prepares his/her weekly lesson plans. On Friday of each week, reading logs were collected. Each log was coded with a four digit code, with the coding occurring after the log was collected so the teacher did not have knowledge of the code associated with his/her reading log. The four digit code included one letter and three numbers. Data collected from the reading logs were used to create the surveys that students completed the following Monday. The duration of the reading log activity took approximately 10 minutes each week.

Quantitative data collected from the logs included the number of reading assignments given and the number of strategies provided. This number was totaled at the end of the nine weeks to determine how much reading the average student was expected to complete each week, and the number of strategies utilized by each teacher during the nine-week period. This data were totaled in aggregate with other participating teachers to ascertain the number of reading assignments students were given per week, the number of pages students were expected to read, and the number of strategies provided across all content-areas over a nine-week period of time.
Survey Methodology

All student data collected were quantitative in data. Data collection from students were in the form of a survey, which was completed in students fourth block class and only included reading assignments given in said fourth block class. The surveys were formatted in yes/no and a Likert Scale format. There were six questions on the survey for each reading assignment, with a maximum of five assignments. It was anticipated that completion of the quiz to take approximately five minutes each week. Surveys did not include any identifying information about the student. Each survey was coded with the same four digit code as matched the code on that teacher’s reading log. The only exception was for students who were not participating in the study. The last number of the four digit code was altered to indicate that the data from that survey were not included in the data collected. Surveys completed by students not participating were removed from the manila envelope immediately after completion of the survey and shredded. This process was used to ensure that only data provided by students who consented to participate in this study were included in the data analysis.

Teachers are not present in the classroom during survey administration. Teachers left the classroom so that they would have no knowledge of student responses on surveys. This step was taken to ensure the confidentiality and fidelity of student responses. Surveys were placed in a manila envelope which was then sealed and signed before the teacher was permitted to re-enter the classroom.

Quantitative data collected from student surveys were reported in totals and percentages. Specifically, data included the total number of reading assignments given
and the total number of strategies utilized. Data collected from Likert Scale questions were reported in percentages. All data were reported in aggregate.

*Case Study Methodology*

Case study participants were selected based on two criteria: 1) frequency of assignments given and 2) content area taught. Due to limited participation, two teachers from the English department were selected to participate in the case study. Participants from the same content area were selected in order to limit variables. Of the two case study participants, one submitted weekly reading logs that noted a high frequency of assigned text. The other participant submitted irregular reading logs with a low frequency of texts assigned.

For the case study portion of this study, the two participating teachers completed an individual interview, which was audio-taped, transcribed, and coded. The interview took place after the school day, in the primary researcher’s office. There were six pre-set interview questions, with potential extensions and follow-ups to be asked based on teacher responses. Further, additional interviews were conducted for follow-up or clarification after the initial interview was complete. It was intended for the interview to last approximately forty-five minutes. A list of the six pre-set interview questions and transcriptions of the interviews can be found in Appendix G. Pseudonyms were used to identify the two participating teachers. All data collected were qualitative in nature and sought to find common trends or patterns in teacher responses. It also sought to find deviations in their processes. These deviations were examined to determine if they might provide insight regarding why one teacher had a high frequency of reading assignments and the other teacher had a low frequency of reading assignments.
Participants

The research study was conducted in a high school, found in the south central part of the United States. The high school was located in a predominantly rural area, where the majority of students came from a low socioeconomic status. Of the teachers participating in this study, 100% of the teachers are Caucasian, and were split half and half between male and female teachers. Regarding the student population, approximately 95% of the students were Caucasian, 4% were African American, and less than 1% qualified as “other.”

The school was broken down into four small learning academies. All of the participants for this study were in the CLHASS academy. Participants in this study included all of the CHLASS academy teachers and the CHLASS academy students who range between tenth through twelfth grades. There were fourteen teachers participating in this study and two-hundred students. Students in this small learning community anticipated focusing on one of those areas for post-secondary education and teachers concentrated content specifically to advance student knowledge in those areas. Within this small learning community, students traveled from class to class in cohorts and only deviated from the community for elective courses.

From within the participating CHLASS academy teachers, two were selected as case study participants. These participates were selected based on the qualifying criteria of frequency of reading assignments given and the content-area taught. Considering limited participation, the two teachers selected for the case study taught within the English department. It was important for the case study participants to teach in the same subject area in order to minimize variables. Finally, one of the case study participants
submitted weekly reading logs that notated a high frequency of assigned text while the other participant submitted irregular reading logs with a low frequency of assigned text. The theoretical basis behind these selections included participants who are rich in information that lead to the identification of significant trends in process and methodology.

Data Collection Procedures

Teacher Protocol

Participating teachers were asked to maintain a log of reading assignments given throughout a week in their fourth block class. Logs were collected every Friday afternoon. Data regarding reading assignments were collected from these logs and used to create the surveys that students completed each Monday. Logs were notated after collection with an ID code containing one letter and three numbers by which surveys could be matched with teachers. Teachers were not given information regarding the ID code used with their log.

Student Protocol

Student surveys were conducted on Monday, during fourth block. Surveys were conducted solely by the lead researcher. The participating teacher of that class left the classroom during the time in which students were completing the survey so that survey data would be completely confidential and participating teachers had no knowledge of student responses. Further by removing the teacher from the classroom, students had an increased likelihood of responding honestly to the survey. When completed, surveys were returned to a manila envelope, sealed, and signed. The only identifying information on the survey was a four digit code in the top left hand corner of the survey which contained one letter and three numbers to match the survey to the appropriate reading log.
Students not participating in the survey, but in the class, were given a similar survey to complete. On that survey, the last number in the four digit code was altered to indicate that student was a non-participant and ensure that no data were collected from that survey. Surveys from non-participants were destroyed after the surveys were completed and returned to the primary researcher’s office.

Case Study Protocol

Interviews for the case study took place after school from 3:00 p.m. until approximately 4:00 p.m. Interviews were conducted in the primary researcher’s office and were audio-taped to ensure quality and integrity of the interview. The two case study participants were interviewed individually. There were six pre-set questions that were asked in the interview. These pre-set questions can be found in Appendix G. Interviews were transcribed and audio-tapes were destroyed immediately after completion of transcription. The primary researcher reserved the right to follow-up with the interviewee in order to get clarification on answers or seek additional information. Pseudonyms were used in data reporting.

Data Analysis Procedures

Reading Log Data Analysis

As previously noted, data collected from reading logs were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Quantitative data were analyzed based on frequency of assignments, frequency of reading strategies provided, and total pages assigned. All data were reported as totals, averages, and percentages. Specifically, data were looking at the total assignments given per class, the total number of reading strategies provided per class, and total number of pages assigned per class per week. Finally, data analysis examines the
average number of pages a CHLASS academy student is likely to be expected to read per week.

Qualitative data collected examined the types of texts assigned and the types of strategies provided. This included a description of strategies provided and how those strategies were applied to a reading assignment.

Survey Data Analysis

Survey data were only quantitative in nature and reported in totals, averages, and percentages. Survey data were first broken down by class, examining total student responses to each of the six survey questions, then determining averages for each response option, and deriving percentages of student responses. Data were then examined holistically, to determine overall totals of student responses, overall averages of each response option, and overall percentages of student responses.

Case Study Data Analysis

Case study data were solely qualitative in nature. Data included the transcriptions of conducted interviews. These data were examined for commonalities or deviations in teachers’ methodologies, processes, and beliefs. Conclusions may have been drawn about effective and/or ineffective teacher practices and potentially on the impact of teacher beliefs on their own actions regarding reading in the classroom. These conclusions were then generalized to the rest of the school, to help draw larger conclusions regarding teacher actions and their impact on the state of reading in the entire school.

Data Triangulation

Data triangulation was used in order to ensure both the validity and the reliability of this study. Considering that this project utilized a mixed-methods research
methodology, data were obtained through a variety of sources. Quantitative data were collected from reading logs and from student surveys. Qualitative data sources included reading logs and case study interviews. This data were then examined individually and then holistically, promoting data synthesis, in order to assure that appropriate conclusions were drawn. Further, to ensure the integrity of this study, a third party individual who served as a co-researcher on the project, but was not responsible for actual data collection was included. This person assisted the primary researcher in maintaining a clear viewpoint of the project, prevent bias, and ensure that accurate conclusions are drawn from the data. Data were further triangulated through review of the entire thesis committee. Their purpose was to review data collection and data analysis procedures in order to ensure that proper reporting of data is conducted and appropriate conclusions are reached based on data collected.

Summary

Chapter three centered on the research design, methodology, analysis, and triangulation. For participating teachers, data were collected through weekly reading logs. After collection, reading logs were notated with a four digit code which was the only identifying piece of information to match surveys to specific teachers and weeks. Data from teachers were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Student data were collected through a survey method. All surveys were anonymous and asked students to respond to questions in a yes/no format and a in a Likert Scale. Student data were solely quantitative in nature. Surveys were conducted with teachers out of the room to prevent teachers from having access to student responses. Case study data were collected through one-on-one interviews, which were audio-taped and transcribed. Audio-tapes were
destroyed after transcription. All case study data were qualitative in nature. All data collected were reviewed and triangulated with the co-researcher and thesis chair who is not participating in any of the data collection measures as well as with the entire thesis committee. Data triangulation helped the primary researcher maintain a clear viewpoint on the project, and prevented any bias in conclusions that might have been drawn.
Chapter 4

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the educational setting in which this study was conducted and study results. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine both the quantitative and qualitative data in relationship to the research questions guiding this study in order to determine trends, patterns, and determine the significance of these results. Quantitative data will include page number totals and weekly averages from reading logs and will include totals, averages, and percentages from survey data collected. Case study data are all qualitative with a focus on revealing similarities and differences between two participating teachers and their beliefs about literacy at this school.

Results

Educational Setting

The school where this research project took place is a typical high school located in a rural region of south central Kentucky. This district is broken down into five sectors, with each sector having its own school, comprised of grades preschool through eight. These five elementary/middle schools pour into the single high school for the district. The student population ranges from 1,095 to 1,115. Of those students, approximately 96% of the population is Caucasian, non-Hispanic. Another 4% is African American students, with less than 1% comprising students of Hispanic or other ethnicities. Within the school population, 6% of students qualify for special education services and only three students qualify for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) services. However, it should be noted that while many of the students who attend the school come from low-socioeconomic households, where their parents/guardians are typically self-employed as
farmers or else maintain a blue-collar working position, only 43% of the student
population qualifies for free/reduced lunch. This percentage is significantly lower than all
the surrounding elementary/middle schools. It is suspected that this percentage is lower in
the high school due to student failure to return free/reduced lunch application forms and
high school students are more aware of the implied stigma of utilizing free/reduced lunch,
therefore they do not apply for this service.

When one enters this school, immediately inside the front doors is the main
office. To the right is the main gym, the commons area – which includes the school
cafeteria, and access to the new portion of the school. The new portion holds an auxiliary
gym, the Alternative Learning Center (ALC) which provides in-school suspension, the
alternative school, and additional classrooms and multi-purpose rooms. Through the
front doors and to the left takes one into the academic portion of the building. While the
school is broken down into academies, classroom location is based on content area. The
main hallway includes Math and English classrooms. The first hallway to your right
houses the Library, Science, and Family Consumer Sciences classrooms. The second
hallway includes Social Studies and Spanish classrooms. The back hallway includes
technology-based classes, technical classes, and JROTC. Finally, at the far left hand side
of the building, through a set of double doors, is the freshman academy. Freshmen are
intentionally separated from upperclassmen in order to help them transition more
effectively to the secondary education setting.
Teacher and Student Participants

For the purpose of this study, only CHLASS academy teachers and students participated. There are 16 faculty members within the CHLASS academy. They teach a wide-array of core content and elective courses, including

- English II
- English III
- Journalism
- Integrated Social Studies
- Earth Space, FastMath (a remedial math course designed for students who are not performing on grade level in math)
- Pre-Calculus
- Commercial Foods
- JROTC
- AP Spanish
- Exceptional Education
- Computer Applications
- Physical Education
- Library Sciences

Of these teachers, 14 consented to participate in this study. The Library Sciences teacher and the academy guidance counselor were not eligible to participate because neither has an actual class. Of those fourteen participating faculty members, only eight turned in at least one reading log. From those eight teachers, the classes represented include: English II, English III, Journalism, JROTC (this includes two faculty members
as there are two JROTC Sergeant Majors), Computer Applications, Earth Space Science, and AP Spanish. It should be noted that one teacher was reluctant to agree to participate in the study and while that individual signed the Informed Consent document and never withdrew his consent, he also did not ever submit a reading log.

Of the 200 students who were invited to participate, 32 students returned the negative consent forms, declining participation. No students opted out of the study after the one-week period that students were given to return negative consent forms. It should be noted that of the 32 students who declined participation, 30 of those students were in the same class as the teacher who was reluctant to participate in the survey.

**Reading Logs**

The first part of this project included the distribution and collection of reading logs. A reading log (see appendix E for a copy of the reading log) was given to each of 14 teachers per week for a seven week duration. The original intention had been to collect nine weeks worth of reading log data, however; inclement weather led to excessive school closures, thus reducing the number of logs distributed from nine to seven. As noted in chapter three, it is suggested that this severe weather negatively impacted teacher completion and submission of reading logs as well.

The reading log is comprised of a five-column chart. A figure showing the headings for each of the five columns is shown below.
Figure 2

*Headings for the Five Columns of the Reading Logs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Assigned</th>
<th>Date Due (Including page #’s and source)</th>
<th>Reading Assignment (Including page #’s and source)</th>
<th>Type of Text Assigned (e.g. narrative, expository, informational)</th>
<th>Strategy (if one was provided to students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Each chart then had five blank rows below it, which would allow teachers to note each reading assignment for a given school week, presuming one reading assignment was given each day of the week.

In total, over the seven-week data collection period, 98 reading logs were distributed. Logs were collected, with at least one reading assignment noted, from eight of the 14 participating teachers. The six teachers who did not return a reading log thus indicated that no reading was assigned at all in their class over the seven-week data collection period. Of those six teachers who did not submit reading logs, three of the teachers verbally confirmed that they assigned no reading. These classes include: Physical Education, Pre-Calculus, and FastMath. Data from these teachers would indicate that no reading took place in approximately 21% of the participating classes. In regard to the remaining three classes, the occurrence of reading assignments not noted on reading logs could not be confirmed nor refuted.

Of the 98 logs distributed, 27 logs were returned noting at least one reading assignment for that week. This indicates that only 28% of the reading logs distributed were returned noting at least one reading assignment. It should be noted, that out of the 27 reading logs returned, 13 of the reading logs included one assignment, nine included two reading assignments, two included three reading assignments, one included four reading assignments, and two included five reading assignments. Further, one of the logs
with three assignments, the one log with four assignments and the two with five reading assignments were completed by the same English teacher. The other reading log that included three reading assignments was completed by the Earth Space Science teacher. The pie graph below shows the number of assignments listed on the reading logs by percentage.

Figure 3

*Number of Reading Assignments Listed on Reading Logs by Percentage*

![Pie chart showing the distribution of reading assignments](chart.png)

Note: n=27.

The pie graph above provide graphic data regarding the number of reading assignments noted on weekly reading logs which were collected over a seven-week duration. Based on the graph above, of the 27 reading logs returned, 48% of those logs noted only one reading assignment given to the class during that week. It should be noted that this is the largest piece of the pie graph and thusly indicates that nearly 13 of the reading logs noted only one reading assignments. Thirty-three percent of the reading logs
included two reading assignments. Seven-point-four percent of reading logs noted either three assignments or five assignments. The smallest piece of the pie graph, at 3.7%, included two reading assignments.

For further analysis, the data collected from the 27 reading logs should examine the total number of reading assignments given and the types of text assigned. There were a total of 51 reading assignments listed on the 27 reading logs that spanned over seven-week duration. When averaged, it suggests that in classes where reading is assigned, students are asked to read slightly less than two assignments per week. Of the 51 reading assignments given, only two types of text were represented: expository/informational and narrative/fiction. There are a total of 36 expository/informational assignments and 15 narrative/fiction assignments. This indicates that nearly 71% of reading assignments were expository or informational in nature. The expository/informational category can be broken down into six subcategories: News Articles (online or in-print), ACT Test Preparation, General Expository (from a textbook), Test-Related (non-ACT), Persuasive, and Labs (Science, Hands-on). The other 39% of reading assignments fall into the narrative category. The Narrative category can be broken down into the three subcategories: novels, short stories, and poetry. The chart below indicates each of the subcategories, with the number of assignments given within each of the areas, the percentage in relationship to the total number of assignments for that category, and the percentage of that subcategory in relationship to the total number of reading assignments given.
Based on the chart above, the most common type of reading assignment given is in the Informational/Expository category, specifically the News Article subcategory. Of the 51 reading assignments given, 16 of those assignments fell into this category, which equates to approximately 31% of the total reading assignments. Included in this subcategory are both printed articles, such as articles from the *New York Times*, as well as articles that students are assigned to read using an online source. However, it should be noted that of the 16 news articles assigned, six of them were assigned in the Journalism class, where students were assigned to read, proofread, and/or edit articles written by
students for the school newspaper, *Views in Blue*. While this may be a valuable learning experience for students in the Journalism class, particularly for those students interested in pursuing a career in Journalism, it is arguable that student-written articles do not contain the complexity nor are written on a reading level needed to be a text-source that promotes the type of reading necessary to be successful in post-secondary education or the workforce.

Therefore, only 10 of the news articles assigned came from sources outside of the school newspaper. Of the 10 non-school related articles, one article was from the *New York Times*, one article was written in Spanish from a Spanish-based news-source, and the other eight articles were from a variety of unspecified online sources. Compared to the mere five textbook-based reading assignments, this suggests that teachers within this sample have a greater proclivity to assign independently-found articles as opposed to using the assigned textbook for the course. However, since these articles are not necessarily included in the specific core content for the course, the relevance of the article to the content being taught cannot be concretely established. Further, the complexity of text for these articles cannot be ascertained since source data were not provided by these teachers on the collected reading logs. Ideally, these assigned articles should be both complex in nature as well as relevant to students’ own lives in order for them to be a viable source in promoting content-learning and positive reading experiences. Unfortunately, based on the data provided, no such conclusions can be drawn regarding the assigned articles.

The second most common type of reading assignment given involves novels within the narrative category. Specifically, two novels were assigned during the duration
of the data collection time period–*A Separate Peace* by John Knowles and *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck. With 11 novel-based reading assignments, novels account for approximately 22% of total reading assignments; though it should be noted that all 11 of these assignments were given by the same English III teacher. Further, both of these novels are included in the required English III content for the district. Interestingly enough, as opposed to other data discussed, the inclusion of novels within a course is arguably best-practice and is the first established best-practice method utilized thus far. Gallagher (2009) writes that students should be provided with the opportunity to read full-length novels and that, unfortunately, teachers are more often than not, replacing novels with shorter, less complex reading assignments. Gallagher goes on to indicate that instead many schools are removing novels from the core content and replacing them with increased test-preparation time. Further, Gallagher writes, “When schools remove novels from students’ curriculum and replace the challenging books with shorter pieces and worksheets, they are denying students the foundational reading experiences for developing those regions of their brains that enable them to think deeply” (p. 40). Therefore, based on the data collected, it can be reasonably confirmed that of the reading assignments given, only 21% of those assignments were derived using best-practices in reading instruction. The methodology behind this teacher’s usage of these novels is further explored in the first case study examined later in this chapter.

The third most common text assigned fell in the expository category, within the confines of ACT Test-Preparation. Of the 51 reading assignments, nine were ACT test-preparation based, which calculates to approximately 18% of the total reading assignments given. It should be noted that this number is actually surprisingly low.
considering that the ACT is now a mandatory assessment for all high school juniors in this state and is given state-wide at the beginning of March. Therefore, in the time leading up to the ACT (which includes the time in which these data were being collected) teachers are asked to include ACT test preparation time in their weekly lesson plans. The administration and school curriculum specialist recommend including a set of several (approximately three to five) practice questions as a bell-ringer for class each day. (A bell-ringer is a mini-assignment given to the class before class has started, that students can work on during the first few minutes of class, to enable active student engagement while teachers take care of non-instructional responsibilities, such as taking attendance, passing out papers, etc. This assignment is then reviewed before moving on to the core-content for the lesson that day. It is also typically ungraded). To extend beyond that, the CHLASS academy teachers agreed during an academy meeting in the fall of 2009, that parts of a practice test in their particular subject area should be given weekly with at least one full timed portion of the ACT should be given at least once per month. In other words, English teachers should give 60-question practice English tests and 40-question Reading tests, using timed conditions, and to be scored, at least once per month. Science teachers should give the 35-question practice science test, under timed conditions, at least once per month. Considering that the reading section of the ACT includes passages from both social-sciences and arts and humanities, teachers in those content areas are asked to give practice reading tests to their classes.

Further based Table 1, it is interesting to note that only five assignments (which equates to slightly less than 10%) of reading assignments given came out of the textbook for that course. Three of those five assignments were given in the JROTC class, where
the textbook used is not a typical textbook. Instead of a traditional textbook, students are given a workbook, which includes both written text and student activities, and is authored by the United States Army Cadet Command. The other two textbook-based reading assignments were given in the Computer Technology and Applications course. Again, a traditional textbook is not used in this course; instead students are given a binder comprised of workbook-style pages. Typically, a lesson starts with a short reading passage, to establish the purpose of the activity, and then gives the students a set of instructions, which students then follow one-by-one in order to learn the skill being taught. For example, on the reading log submitted for this class, the teacher noted that students were working with Microsoft Excel. The reading assignment was in the *Excel It!* workbook where through a series of numbered steps, students master a particular technique or skill necessary for proficiency with Microsoft Excel. Therefore, based on all the above information, no reading assignments were given to students coming from a traditional course textbook in terms of reading a chapter or a selected number of pages.

Based on this information, it can be reasonably inferred that these teachers did not assign students textbook-based reading and it could be concluded that instead of having students read content for a course out of a textbook, that teachers are utilizing verbal and visual presentation or other types of instruction for of the content instead. Thus a parallel can be drawn from chapter one to the data collected. In chapter one, the “vicious cycle” was discussed, whereby students train teachers to present new content through PowerPoint and lecture methods as opposed to assigning text. This “training” is a result of teachers attempting to assign reading in the past with the result of students not engaging with the assigned text. Teachers then resign themselves to the fact that students
will not read an assignment and then resort to other teaching styles (i.e. PowerPoint) instead. The lack of data collected through reading logs supports the conclusion that many of the teachers of this school have also fallen victim to this vicious cycle, moving teaching methods away from being text-based and making content more lecture-based. The ACT (2006) and the National Endowment for the Arts (2007) both suggest that teachers are not assigning complex texts, thus leading to students graduating from high school not able to read the complex texts necessary for success in post-secondary education and/or the workforce. Data collected from reading logs supports these findings from the ACT and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Another critical data component to consider, based on data collected from reading logs, is strategic reading support, as provided by teachers, to assist students in comprehending an assigned text. Of the 51 reading assignments given, 38 of those assignments also included a strategy provided to students. This indicates that students were provided strategic support to assist in comprehension of the text approximately 75% of the time. However, not all of the “strategies” noted on reading logs fall into the definition of a reading strategy, as is being used in this study. For the purpose of this study, the term “strategy” generally referred to as a “reading strategy” has been defined by Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris (2008) as “deliberate goal-directed attempts to control and modify the readers’ efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meaning of text” (p. 368). Thus, what teachers noted as reading strategies, can actually be broken down into three separate categories: Best Practice Strategies, Not Best Practice Strategies, and Assessment Strategies. It should be noted that a definition of reading strategies and an explanation of what a reading strategy is was shared with all
participating teachers at the start of this study as a part of the explanation for the Consent form. Teachers were given an opportunity to ask questions for clarification if needed. The three-column table below breaks down all the strategies noted on reading logs based upon the already noted categories. Each strategy was only used one time unless otherwise noted within the chart.

Table 2

Breakdown of Reading Strategies as Identified on Submitted Reading Logs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best Practice Reading Strategies</th>
<th>Not Best Practice Reading Strategies</th>
<th>Assessment Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Vocabulary Sheet – 2</td>
<td>• Copy Editing</td>
<td>• Timed practice test – 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graphic Organizer (not otherwise specified) – 2</td>
<td>• Follow directions</td>
<td>• Timed reading with questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visualization graphic organizer</td>
<td>• Read steps in order</td>
<td>• Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multiple-Step Flow Map</td>
<td>• Silent Reading</td>
<td>• Test Taking Strategies (Not otherwise specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reading For Meaning – 3</td>
<td>• Peer Editing – 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Making Predictions with comparison after reading</td>
<td>• Review Sheet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Outlining text to apply to an open response question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Passage Journal – 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion Questions (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Webquest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Task Rotation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presentations of content read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Study Guides – 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Character Chart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Given n=38

Based on the table above, there were 22 instances of strategies used that are considered best-practice in reading instruction; there were seven instances of strategies used that are not considered best-practice, and nine instances of strategies that would be
more aptly described as assessment or test-taking strategies. There were a total of 38 occurrences of strategies being provided to support comprehension. Given the information in the chart above, approximately 58% of strategies used fall into the best-practice category. Eighteen percent of strategies used are not considered best-practice, and the remaining 24% of strategies would be more aptly qualified as test-taking or assessment strategies. The 58% of best-practice reading strategies were utilized by teachers in the following five content classes: English II, English III, Earth Space Science, JROTC, and Spanish.

Of the 22 best-practice strategies, 11 of those strategies were used in the English III class, which accounts for exactly 50% of best-practice strategies. This indicates that the same teacher gave both the greatest number of reading assignments and also had the highest percentage of best-practice reading strategies provided to her students. After English III, the next two classes (each indicating three occurrences of best-practice strategies) were found in the English II and the JROTC classes. This indicates a combined total of about 28% of best-practice strategies were utilized in these classes (or 14% per class). Earth Space Science noted two occurrences of best-practice strategies, which equates to 9%. Finally, the Spanish teacher utilized only one-best practice strategy, which accounts for 5% of best-practice strategies used.

Of the above strategies that qualify as best-practice, two of the strategies particularly stand out: Task Rotation and Reading for Meaning. At the beginning of the 2005-2006 school-year, this school was provided a grant by the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC) to establish and support a series of best-practice strategies published by Silver and Strong in 2004. This series of strategies are more
commonly known as “The Thoughtful Classroom.” Silver, Strong, and Perini (2000) propose a set of classroom strategies to promote effective learning in the classroom. These strategies are supported by their “five pillars” of Thoughtful Education: the hidden skills of academic literacy, research-based strategies, diversity that works, classroom curriculum design, and instructional learning teams (Silver & Strong, 2004). Teachers then attended a series of workshops, fishbowls, and classroom observations throughout the subsequent three school years to ensure proficient application of said strategies within their classrooms. The Thoughtful Classroom strategies bolstered by Silver and Strong include Word Works (for vocabulary development), Reading for Meaning (broken down into three parts to include before, during, and after reading), New American Lecture (for oral presentation of new content), and Task Rotation (can qualify as both a literacy strategy and an oral-presentation strategy). All but two of the teachers who participated in this study were employed at this school during at least one of the three years of training. Further, while the three years of training concluded at the end of the 2007-2008 school year, each teacher has been given a Thoughtful Classroom manual and is expected to continue including these strategies into his/her classrooms. Even new teachers who may not have been present during the three years of training were given a copy of the Thoughtful Classroom manual upon employment. However reading logs reveal that, of the teachers who participated in this study, only one teacher continues to apply Thoughtful Classroom strategies into her classroom. The English III teacher utilized both Reading for Meaning and Task Rotation as strategies for students to use to better comprehend a text.
As described in the *Reading for Meaning: Planning and Implementation Guide*, Reading for Meaning is defined as “a strategy that helps students become proficient at making claims, finding main ideas, and using reasoning and details to support their ideas” (Silver & Strong, 2004, p. 1). When using this strategy, teachers present students with a series of “reading for meaning” statements, which includes four to eight sentences, based on the passage that asks students to either agree or disagree with the sentence. This qualifies as the before-reading portion of this strategy. Students make connections with their own prior knowledge, and using this knowledge, determine if they agree or disagree with the statement. The second step in reading for meaning involves actually reading the passage. During reading, students make notes of sentences/passages within the text that either support or negate their original stance for each statement. After reading, students apply the notations made and reconsider each of the original statements. The general idea is that class discussion of the statements will follow, providing the teacher an opportunity to expand on the text. While, arguably, Reading for Meaning is more of a process rather than a strategy, it meets the qualifications of a reading strategy as has been defined for the purposes of this study.

The second *Thoughtful Classroom* strategy utilized is Task Rotation. Based on the *Task Rotation: Teacher Planning and Implementation Guide* (2005), this strategy is defined as, “a differentiated strategy that provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned in a variety of learning styles” (Silver & Strong, 2005, p. 1). It should be noted that this strategy is applicable to new content presented through reading a text or through verbal presentation of content. Since this strategy was used in relationship to content presented through text, it is being considered a reading
strategy and discussed in terms of content learned through reading. Also, similar to Reading for Meaning, this strategy can be considered more of a process, yet it meets the criteria established in the definition of a reading strategy, therefore is being considered as such. This strategy asks students to move beyond basic comprehension of a text and asks them to explore the text on a deeper level, based on learning style. Per *The Thoughtful Classroom* there are four learning styles: Mastery, Understanding, Interpersonal, and Self-Expressive. When presenting a task-rotation, the teacher first has students read an assigned text. After reading, students are given a sheet with four learning tasks – one for each learning style. Students are asked to select the task of their choice (however it is recommended that students select the task associated with their learning style) and either individually or in a small group, complete the task. Tasks ask students to work with the content on a deeper level – applying information, synthesizing, evaluating, etc. For example, if students are asked to read a passage on events leading up to the American Revolutionary War, the task rotation to accompany that passage might look like what is presented in Figure 4:
**Figure 4**  
*Task Rotation Example as Presented by Silver & Strong, 2005.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mastery:</th>
<th>Interpersonal:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a chart showing the major events from the end of the French and Indian War leading up to the first shot fired at Lexington. Identify the reactions of both the colonists and British to each event.</td>
<td>If you are angry with the government, what means do you have to bring about change? Under what circumstances would you consider armed rebellion an acceptable opinion? Write a personal opinion essay explaining your position.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding:</th>
<th>Self-Expressive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are a reporter covering the skirmish at Lexington on April 18, 1775. You want the article to be fair, complete, and exciting. Before you write your article, ask yourself: Who are you interviewing? What background information do you need? What sketches do you want for the front page of the newspaper?</td>
<td>Create a reenactment of the skirmish at Lexington. Write two interior monologues that explain what is going on in the mind of a colonial militia member and a British trooper as they confront each other. What is each one thinking as the first shot is fired. Be creative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In regard to the best-practice strategies not yet discussed, these have also been identified. Biancarosa and Snow (2004) presented literacy strategies that have been researched, studied, and determined to be best-practice. These are strategies similar to the ones recommended by the NCTE (2006). Both organizations recommend strategies that
have been determined to be both research-based and best-practice in literacy. Several of
the strategies listed in the best-practice column parallel those recommended strategies.
These include: predictions, discussion questions/study guides, passage journals, and
vocabulary sheets.

The remaining strategies that have not yet been addressed would fall into a non-
linguistic category of reading strategies. Marzano (2010) condones the application of
strategies that are not semantic in nature. Marzano notes:

Nonlinguistic strategies require students to generate a representation of
new information…Specifically, across 129 studies in which teachers used
nonlinguistic strategies – such as graphic organizers, sketches, and
pictographs – with one class but not with another class studying the same
content, the average effect was a 17 percentile point gain in student
achievement. (Marzano, 2010, p. 84)

Marzano then identifies a list of nonlinguistic strategies, which include: graphic
organizers, sketches, pictographs, concept maps, dramatizations, flow charts, and
computerized simulations. Many of these same strategies were used in the process of this
study. Nonlinguistic strategies employed by teachers during the data collection period (as
are noted in the strategies chart) include graphic organizers (both specific and not-
otherwise-specified), multi-step flow charts, character charts, presentations of content
read, and webquest. Of that list, the webquest is the only computer-simulation strategy
and was utilized in the Earth Space Science course. As noted by Marzano in the
conclusion of his paper, these nonlinguistic strategies are considered best-practice
because they are “a powerful technique available to classroom teachers. When used well,
they can have a positive effect on student achievement and provide diversity in the way students’ process new information” (Marzano, 2010, p. 86).

Survey Data

The secondary means of data collection was through survey data. In the course of this study, there were a total of 26 surveys given, with a one to five reading assignments referenced per survey. The purpose of the survey was to determine student reading—specifically how much of an assignment students read, if students are using provided reading strategies, and how students’ value reading assignments in relationship to content learning. A copy of the survey used can be found in Appendix E. As per the procedure for this study, student surveys were given on Mondays and reflected reading assignments given the previous week. The intention was by giving students surveys on Mondays, then minimal time would have elapsed since the assignment was first given, thus students should have greater memory of the assignment and their interaction with the text and any strategies provided.

During the data collection time period, there were a total of 26 surveys given, encompassing all 51 reading assignments. Of the 26 surveys, one was given in Computer Applications, two were given in Spanish, two were given in English II, three were given in JROTC, five were given in Earth Space Science, seven were given in Journalism, and seven were given in English III. As previously noted, only in Journalism and English III were reading logs submitted for all seven weeks that data were collected. After taking away students who declined to participate, a total of 156 students participated through survey completion. To best analyze this data, it will be broken down first by student
responses to individual questions and then examined further to determine if a relationship exists within the data.

The first question on the survey asked students, “Of the assignment above, I completed…” with answer choices available of All, Most, Some, None, Don’t Remember. The figure below provides data regarding student responses by percentage.

Figure 5

*Student Responses to Survey Item #1 by Percentage*

The purpose of this question is both clear and simple – to gather data regarding how much of the assigned reading are students completing on average. Surprisingly, the tallest bar in this figure is the one that parallels the answer selection of all. Evidence suggests that, on average, nearly 49% of all students read all of the assigned text. Further 20% of students read most of the assignment; nearly 10% read some of the assignment; 3% read none of the assignment and 12% do not remember the assignment at all. These results are encouraging because students are not engaging in reading and neglect to
complete reading assignments when they are given. This data suggests that, at least during this data collection period, nearly half of all students are reading the entire reading assignment and that percentage rises to slightly over two-thirds of students who either read all or most of an assignment. It should be noted that a sixth column was included in this figure and will be included in the subsequent five figures. This column deals with “non-responders” for this survey item. The topic of non-responders will be addressed at the conclusion of the survey item results discussion.

The second question in the survey asks students about whether a reading strategy was provided to assist in comprehension of the text assigned. The intention with this question was to assist in understanding whether students are able to recognize reading strategies or not. The figure below delineates the results of this question. Question two goes hand-in-hand with question three, so the figure for the third chart will be included here and the answer response percentages will be examined together. Question three asks students about whether they used a reading strategy if one was provided.
Figure 6

*Student Responses to Survey Item #2 by Percentage*

![Graph showing percentage responses to Question 2: A strategy was provided to assist me with the assignment.]

Figure 7

*Student Responses to Survey Item #3 by Percentage*

![Graph showing percentage responses to Question 3: I used the strategy provided to complete the above assignment.]
The second and third questions in the survey ask students if a strategy was provided and, if a strategy was provided, was the strategy utilized by the student. The data indicate that 63% of students indicated that a strategy was provided with nearly 59% of students using the strategy. Twenty-six percent of students marked that a strategy was not provided and approximately 23% of students indicated that they did not use the strategy. This suggests that 5% of students who were provided a strategy then elected not to use the strategy. It is arguable that this 5% who elected not to use a given strategy either a) recognized that the strategy was not a best-practice strategy and therefore did not use it or b) are not aware of the purpose of a reading strategy as a means of enhancing comprehension. However no data were collected to determine why students would choose not to use a strategy, therefore only hypotheses can be postulated. Further, it should be noted that students who responded “No” to question number two, were then guided to skip questions three through five and answer question number six since questions three through five focused on the provided reading strategy and if one was not provided, then no response could be given. This also explains the greater percentage of non-responders for questions three through five.

The fourth survey item inquired whether the provided reading strategy was useful or not. Unlike questions two and three, which offered simple yes or no responses, questions four through six returns to Likert Scale response options. The figure below shows the average percentages of how students responded to this question.
For question four, 22% noted that they strongly agreed, 32% agreed, 21.5% were neutral, 3.5% disagreed, and 2.5% strongly disagreed. Interestingly, this suggests that over 50% of students indicated that they both used a strategy and they found the strategy helpful in completing the reading assignment. Further, this should be compared to student responses to question three. In question three, 58% of students indicated that they did indeed use the reading strategy provided to assist in comprehending the assignment. Further, 54% of students indicated that they found the reading strategy helpful in reading the text. This suggests that only about 4% of students who identified that they used a strategy either were neutral about how the strategy impacted their reading or had negative feelings towards the strategy. Additionally, similar to question three, no data was gathered regarding why students did not find the strategy to be helpful. It could be argued that reading has become so non-essential for content learning and students have become
so inundated with only reading for testing-purposes, that the best reading selection
coupled with a prime reading strategy could be presented to the student and the student
would still simply feel neutral about the situation.

The fifth question is an interesting item because it asks students how the strategy
provided assisted in comprehension of the text. This is significant, especially considering
that not all strategies provided to students could be considered best practice. For example,
one of the not-best-practice strategies provided to students was to simply, "Read steps in
order." While this recommendation may assist students in completing the assignments
(i.e. because students then read the steps in order) the strategy probably did not enhance
students’ comprehension of a text. The figure below provides data regarding average
student responses by percent.

Figure 9

*Student Responses to Survey Item #5 by Percentage*
Student responses to question number five were very similar as compared to question four. Thus 14% of students strongly agreed and 35% of students agreed that the strategy supported comprehension of a text. Slightly over one-quarter, 26.5% were neutral about the impact on comprehension. However 2.3% disagreed and 3.5% of students strongly disagreed with survey item five. This suggests that only about 5% of students believed that a provided strategy had a negative impact on comprehension of a text. This may be related to a student’s lack of understanding of how to use the strategy or the relationship of that particular strategy to the content being read. In particular, when discussing content-area literacy, some strategies are more aptly applied to some content areas rather than others. For example, a flow chart graphic organizer may be an effective method for delineating the steps of a lab experiment in a science class, but will likely be less effective when reading about a particular artist’s style in Arts and Humanities.

The final question on the survey asks students to identify how they value the specified reading assignment in relationship to the content being learned. While a student’s value-set is not an easily assessed area, the purpose of this question was to establish how students’ value reading assignments as they pertain to content learning. The figure below delineates student responses by percentage.
Based on the figure above, 19% of students strongly agreed, 34.5% agreed, 26.6% were neutral, 3.4%, and 5.9% strongly disagreed. This indicates that over 50% of students who read an assignment also felt a positive relationship between that reading assignment and content learning.

It should be noted, as is indicated in the final column in all six of the figures above, that not all students who participated responded to each question on each survey. Thus, the percentage of non-responders should also be examined. It is logical that there should be some percentage of non-responders for each question. This would account for absences in classes on the days surveys were given. Absences may be due to student illness, driver’s testing, court appearances, and/or field trips, just to name a few. Illness in particular stands out, as data were collected during the height of cold and flu season. In a
population where 37% of all adults are still illiterate, it is reasonable to suggest that many students may not have adequate access to medical attention and medicine, therefore exacerbating absenteeism. Of the six questions, the first question has the smallest percentage of non-responders at only 6.6%. The second and sixth questions had the second highest percentage of non-responders at 10.6%. It is reasonable that these two questions should be equal in percentage of non-responders, since students who responded “no” to question two were then prompted to skip to question six. The percentage of non-responders was nearly equal for questions three through five, with only a point-eight difference in percentages. Data indicated an 18.4% of non-responders for question number three, which was the question with the highest percentage of non-responders. Question four was 18.3% and question five had a 17.6% of non-responders.

Considering what has already been stated, it is logical that these questions would have a higher percentage of non-responders. Further, it should be expected that the percentage of non-responders for this category should be approximately 20%. Of the 51 reading assignments noted on reading logs, 12 of those assignments did not indicate that any reading strategy was given. This indicates that of the readings assigned, 24% did not include a reading strategy. Therefore, the percentage of non-responders for questions three through six is actually lower than what it should be. That further suggests that students are not proficient at identifying whether a reading strategy has been provided or not with a reading assignment. If a student is not able to determine if a strategy is provided, how is that student expected to implement a strategy effectively when one is provided? Finally, it could be argued that students need direct instruction in the
identification and application of strategies as a means of enhancing interaction with and comprehension of a text.

Case Study One: Kristy

In order to provide this research study a deeper level of context, especially in consideration of the unexpected data collection limitations, two case studies were conducted. Case study participants were selected based on the number of reading assignments given, as noted on reading logs, with the intention of selecting a participant who had a high frequency of reading assignments and a participant with a low frequency of reading assignments. An additional criterion for selection was course taught by the teacher. It was necessary for the two participants to teach classes in the same content area in order to minimize extraneous variables. Meeting this criteria were two English teachers – one who taught English II and one who taught English III. The purpose of the case studies was to examine teacher’s processes and methodologies behind the selection of both reading assignments and reading strategies to accompany those assignments. Furthermore, the case study provides deeper insight regarding the perceptions of the state of reading within this school as a whole, as well as includes recommendations on how the state of reading might be improved.

The first case study participant is Kristy. Kristy is the English III teacher, selected based on her high frequency of reading assignments. In fact, of all participating teachers, Kristy gave her class the highest number of reading assignments (21) and utilized the greatest percentage of best-practice reading strategies (50%).

This case study was conducted via an interview, including six preset questions with an additional five follow up questions. A complete transcription of the interview can
be found in Appendix I. In order to most effectively examine the interview, it should be broken down into four concepts: 1) methodology for assigning text; 2) methodology for designing/utilizing reading strategies; 3) methodology for assessment of content learning; and 4) the current state of reading within the school, including how this current state impacts student preparedness for post-secondary education and/or the workforce.

The first of these concepts, the methodology behind assigning text, Kristy stated,

When it comes to my AP classes, I follow the set curriculum and I assign them texts that I know will be on the AP test in the spring…With my other classes – sophomores and juniors – I follow the curriculum that this district has set and I try to assign readings that I know will catch their interest. I always try to assign a variety of material – from short stories and novels, to journals and articles. I enjoy reading novels with students. It is an experience to read something over a longer period of time, seeing students – those who do not give up anyway – actually following the characters and being invested in the story. It requires more dedication to try to read a novel than it does a short story and novels have really been pushed to the wayside. We’re so focused on tests, that we have just pushed novels out of the way to read shorter, quicker, less time-consuming texts.

This response indicates, as would be expected, that a great deal of her reading assignments are based on the pre-set English curriculum. In fact, Kristy participated with other English teachers, across grade levels, in developing the English curriculum currently used in this district. Therefore, it would be expected that she would be deeply
knowledgeable about the curriculum and thus be able to select readings from it effectively. Further, Kristy’s response is almost parallel to the argument made by Gallagher (2009). Gallagher suggests that students should be more often exposed to novels, as they pose a greater challenge to students in regard to comprehension and enable a deeper, more meaningful, transaction with the text. Therefore, it is logical to conclude, that even working within the confines of a specific curriculum, Kristy demonstrates proficiency in the selection of reading assignments. However, it is arguable that this proficiency may be directly related to the number of years she has been teaching and her experiences in teaching various texts. Naturally, it would be expected that if/when she finds a text that students handle particularly well, that she would reuse that text again in future years.

A viable follow-up question, not on the preset list, asked about her favorite texts to assign. She noted that her favorites included, *Night* by Elie Wiesel with sophomores. With juniors she prefers *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck and *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles. The latter of those two choices is interesting because *A Separate Peace* is a challenging text for many high school students. In regard to that sentiment, Kristy remarks,

*A Separate Peace* is hard to read. Kids enjoy the characters and the problems that the characters deal with in the book; it is just the way the book is written, that it loses kids [but] kids who will stick it out and actually read all the way through to the end really like the way the story ends.
Finally she notes that, of the novels that teachers can select from as a part of the English III curriculum, that these two are more interesting than some of their other choices.

The next concept examined in this case study is the methodology behind how reading strategies are selected, and consequently, the effectiveness of these strategies. The question was posed to Kristy, “When you select a reading assignment, how do you select or devise a strategy to provide to students to support reading comprehension?” Kristy responded,

It depends on what we’re reading. If it is a novel or short story, I like to have them do passage journals, where they select a passage from the book or story, write it in their journal, and then connect it to their own lives…we also do some visualizing with passage journals.

The first part of her response suggests that Kristy is proficient in the development and application of strategies in relationship to short stories or novels. The utilization of passage journals for visualization and making connections have both been identified as best-practice strategies. These strategies enable students to transact with the text in a meaningful way that is also simultaneously requiring a deeper depth of knowledge.

However, her development and application of strategies in relationship to shorter texts is not as strong. Kristy stated, “…with journal articles, or something like that, I do a variety of things. I will generally have them summarize the passage, look at the main idea, and maybe answer some comprehension questions about the text...” While it is agreed upon that identifying main idea and supporting details is a significant component of reading comprehension, these are considered low level tasks. Further, having students answer multiple choice questions to assess comprehension turns the reading assignment
into another test-preparation activity. And as Gallagher (2009) has noted, students are already overly inundated with test-preparation activities. It could be reasonably argued that as soon as a reading a text becomes a test-preparation activity, students are inherently disinterested in the reading assignment. These forms of activities do not require students to interact with the text on a meaningful level, thus, even if the text is a more complicated text, students will not acquire the necessary benefit from reading it. Finally, it could be suggested that, considering Kristy’s statements indicate proficiency at developing and using strategies for short stories and novels, that she prefers this type of text over journals or articles. Perhaps she, like students, views journals or articles as being too test-centric, therefore does not require students to read that form of text often. In fact, reading assignments noted on reading logs were primarily focused on longer texts, such as *A Separate Peace* and *Of Mice and Men* which supports the argument that she prefers novels over articles.

Assessment is the next critical issue about which Kristy shared her insight. When asked about how she determines if students are learning the content she is intending for them to learn from a reading assignment, she responded:

When we’re reading books or novels, I will give them short quizzes about what they’ve been assigned. The quizzes are pretty specific about the book too, so kids can’t easily pass them if they haven’t read it or only read *Spark Notes*. But in my class, students are able to do poorly on quizzes and still manage to make a good grade in the class.

This response suggests a de-valuing of reading assignments in the class. It suggests that, while reading is often assigned, it is not made essential; even in the
classroom, within the CHLASS academy, where the highest percentage of reading is occurring, the accountability for reading the text is not as high as it could be. However, Kristy further notes,

The best way that I know that learning is taking place is from class discussion. I love it when they’ve been assigned to read something...when I ask them a question and then six or seven hands go up in the air and soon no one is raising their hand because everyone has just joined into the conversation. That’s when I know real learning has happened and is happening...When it is discussion, I know what the kids are thinking and there’s no need for cheating.

The use of questioning and class discussion is arguably a better practice than that of giving short surface-level comprehension questions regarding main ideas and supporting details. Assuming that a thought-provoking question was asked, responding to the question will require students to interact with a text in more complex, sophisticated manners. With the right question, students may be asked to analyze, synthesize, or evaluate a text—whether it is the text as a whole or a specific component within the text. Class discussion is also commonly considered a viable form of formative assessment and with formative assessments being pushed this school year, it is logical that she would incorporate such assessment into her classroom. Conversely though, while class discussion is a viable means of assessing learning, it is also a method that enables students who did not complete a reading assignment to mask the fact that they did not read. It is arguable that, with the right background knowledge, even students who have not read any or all of an assigned text would still be able to contribute to a class
discussion in meaningful way; thereby hiding from the teacher the fact that reading was not completed. It could be suggested that an experience, such as this one, would “teach” the student that completing assigned reading is not necessary in order to be successful in the class. In fact, this practice may further entrench the student in the belief that reading is not essential and rarely will they be held accountable for reading in a meaningful manner.

Finally, it should be noted, that to some extent—as Kristy pointed out—assessment is not entirely in her hands. As the head of the CHLASS academy, Kristy is responsible for working with both the CHLASS academy teachers as well as other English teachers to create common assessments. She noted,

With the common assessments that we’re creating this year, we’re trying to move into higher order thinking. I’ve always tried to create tests that not only ask about the book, [but] focuses on the application and what students have taken away from the reading experience.

Considering the parallel between assessment and student achievement, Kristy was asked about her perceptions regarding the relationship between reading an assigned text and individual student success. Kristy stated,

I do not think success in school is dependent on reading a text at all. I know students who have probably made it through all four years of high school, graduated solid B students, and never opened a text book, never read a novel, never looked at a journal article. We make it so you can work your way through your years here without ever reading at thing.
Considering this assertion, a follow up question asked for her prediction about how a student might fare in her own classroom if that student never read an assignment. She responded that a student could probably earn a B in her class without ever reading. Her response poses another, this time rhetorical, question: how is it possible that, in the classroom where students are given more reading assignments than any other classroom in the academy, and arguably in the school, that a student could spend a year in her room, never read a single assignment, and still earn a B? That potential is arguably why students graduate from high school, with an apathetic attitude towards reading, and then enter post-secondary education or the workforce unable to handle complex text.

The final major component of the case study focused on the state of reading within the school – including the current state of reading, how the state may be improved, and finally, how well students are prepared to handle complex text in post-secondary education and/or the workforce given the state of reading in the school as it is now.

When asked about the current state of reading within the school, Kristy responded,

I do not think that reading is very valued at all here…speaking across all contents in the school, there’s a real lack of value in reading. Teachers are not assigning reading and so kids are not reading…considering the high rate of illiteracy [in this county] it is safe to assume that many parents didn’t learn how to read and they pass that value set onto their kids.

Kristy’s response suggests that she has an awareness of the way the school functions as a whole. Being the head of the CHLASS academy and a member of the Leadership Team it is reasonable to assume that she has a solid understanding of the strengths and
weaknesses within the school and her response indicates that, at least at present, reading is a significant area of weakness. Given that content learning and reading should go hand-in-hand, and further considering that reading is a skill not practiced or valued within the school, what percentage of content learning comes from reading a text? When asked that question, Kristy noted,

I do not think that much of what we teach is text-dependent. It can’t be reading-dependent if a student can make it all the way through school without actually ever having to read…But really, for the school in general, I would say that virtually none of our content is text-dependent. How can it be if we do not even have enough textbooks for all of our students? Granted, I feel privileged because I teach English. There’s a level of expectation that students will have to at least be assigned some amount of reading to pass an English class. But even then, I’m sure there are kids who make it through even my class that read very little, if at all. It is hard to be one of the few teachers who are actually trying to get students to read. It is like fighting against a brick wall. I just do the best I can.

Her response reinforces her previous response that suggests that she’s aware of the poor current state of reading within the school. Further, it suggests that her efforts are devalued because other teachers do not share the same belief about the necessity of reading. Arguably, like it is hard to be the only teacher who assigns homework, it is similarly challenging to be one of the few teachers who put forth legitimate effort to motivate students to read and thereby also attempt to make reading essential.
As a follow up question, Kristy was asked about the recommendations that she might make to other faculty and/or the administration about improving the state of reading within the school. She indicated that her only recommendation is to require independent reading, both in and out of class. That is the only way, she felt, that reading could finally claim a place of value and significance within the school. Arguably the state of reading is unlikely to improve until the school–faculty, administration, and the student body–work together to adopt a new, more positive, position and attitude towards reading.

The final, and perhaps most significant question, posed to Kristy asked about her perceptions regarding student readiness to handle complex texts found in post-secondary education and/or the workforce after graduation. Kristy replied,

Content-wise, I think we do a pretty good job preparing our students for college. I think we do as well as anyone else around here. But when it comes to reading, I think they’re in for a seriously rude awakening. Without a value placed on reading here, it is a complete turnaround to go to college where so much is reading dependent. That’s why I like to read novels with my classes. I feel like if they can make it through a long text, like a novel, and comprehend it all the way through, then that better prepares them for the challenging things they’ll have to read in college. But really, students leave here and they do not expect to read. They lost faith in reading in elementary and middle schools, so that by the time they get to high school, they do not care anymore. Plus, if you can get all the way through high school without reading, they expect the same to be true of college. But it is not, or at least in my experience it is not…I think a lot
of our students graduate here and come to realize later on, that they should have opened up that book after all, that it would make their lives easier now.

Kristy’s response practically mirrors that what many literacy researchers have been suggesting for years. As has been stated in chapter two, there are many groups out there that have presented evidence that students do not develop necessary skills during high school to be able to cope effectively with complex texts. After all, one of the purposes of this study is to examine, what is happening regarding reading in secondary classrooms and what that means for students after graduation. Based on Kristy’s response, it suggests that students’ apathetic and inert attitude towards reading starts before high school, but that secondary teachers are not taking the necessary steps in order to revert that attitude before graduation. Arguably, secondary education only exacerbates the preexisting problem.

In conclusion, through the process of the interview, Kristy’s responses indicate that, in some areas of reading, she demonstrates proficiency in utilizing best-practices. When selecting reading, she leans towards short stories and novels, particularly novels, as they push students to transact with the text on a deeper level. As this appears to be her preferred style of reading, she utilizes best-practice strategies with her students that encourage students to work with the text on deeper, more meaningful levels. However, when she does elect to assign shorter readings, such as journals or articles, she utilizes strategies that do not require students to think or interact with the text on deep levels. Instead her strategies for this form of reading tend not to ask students to look below the surface of the text-focusing instead on main idea, supporting details, and completion of
comprehension questions. Further, while she acknowledges that students are likely able to make it through their entire high school career without ever reading a text, she also then admits that she’s guilty of the same crime. She even responded that a student could not read a single assignment in her class and still likely pass with a B. This implies that while she’s aware of the problem, it is hard to break from the status quo – as she said, “It is like fighting against a brick wall.” The line “it only gives you a headache” could reasonably be tacked on to the end of her sentence. Further, she indicates that she is trying to break from the mold, that she works to make reading material available and tries to motivate students to read, but at this point, students simply dislike the act of reading so much that they simply will not open a book. Additionally she indicated that the state of reading within the school is dismal. Her recommendation is that in order to change what has been happening for so long, independent reading must become mandatory, both in and out of class, and presumably for all classes. Finally, and arguably most significant, is that students are currently graduating from this school without the skills necessary to read, comprehend, and transact with complex texts in post-secondary education and/or the workforce. Students’ lack of interest in reading in high school is leading them down the path of potential failure when they enter the real world. If nothing else, students are in for a “rude awakening.” While it is convenient to place the blame on the students themselves, if teachers are allowing students to graduate without these skills, then it is arguable that the school itself is setting these students up for failure.

Case Study Two: Tammy

The second case study participant is Tammy. She was selected to participate in this case study because she also teaches English. Her class that participated in this study
and the class she recorded reading assignments for is an English II class. She was further selected for participation because of her low frequency of reading assignments given. The purpose is to compare her viewpoints and methodologies regarding reading with Kristy’s, to identify trends and contradictions between the two teachers. This will provide deeper insight regarding reading in the secondary classroom.

For the purpose of this study, Tammy was asked the same set of questions as was Kristy. A complete transcript of her interview can be found in Appendix H.

The first component to be explored in this case study is Tammy’s methodologies regarding assigning reading. When asked to describe her process in selecting reading assignments to give to her students, she stated, “I try to pick things that I think they would be interested in. Sometimes it is harder than others because sometimes you’re trying to teach a particular content.” It is interesting to note that her response did not include the preset curriculum that English teachers are supposed to be using. This streamline curriculum outlines major topics, includes potential readings for each topic, and, after this year, will include common assessments for all English teachers to use. Due to this seeming lack of awareness, a follow up question was given asking about the content lined out for English teachers. In her response she said,

Right, I have a couple of choices with novels. Night of course is a must.

You know, blood, shootings, things like that. They love it. But I would never read Pride and Prejudice to my classes. I try to–big reading books, big reading projects. Now the little stuff, I try to pull articles that I think they might be interested in, like about war. With the short stories, I chose to stay away from the girlie short stories and I did the science fiction stuff.
Her response to the follow up question supports the idea that she is not currently fully aware of the curriculum and while everything she mentioned is included in the curriculum (i.e. short stories, novels, etc) never did she mention utilizing the curriculum when selecting reading assignments. However, she did note that she tries to select readings that will perk greater interest among her students. This is arguably a better practice than simply following the curriculum word for word because selecting readings to match students’ interests has a greater chance of enhancing student motivation to read the given assignments.

Tammy was then asked about her process in selecting or devising reading strategies to accompany reading assignments. She noted that,

I try to mix it up because I feel like if I do the same strategy over and over again, they’ll get bored and they’ll learn it and find a way to work around it. My honors kids do a lot of outside reading and then come back and take a quiz. With my collaborative kids, it is mostly paired readings or out loud reading. Or, if they read silently, we always do a summary afterwards to make sure everyone got it.

It should be noted that her response sidestepped the question and did not actually answer it. This would suggest that she might lack awareness of what a reading strategy actually is and/or how to devise or implement an effective reading strategy to support comprehension. In her response, she indicated that when reading silently, she has students do a summary afterwards. This was the only actual strategy that she identified. Additionally it should be noted that that her response acknowledged “collaborative kids.” This references students who receive special education services through a collaborative
service method. Tammy’s seventh period class, the class that participated in this study, includes an exceptional education teacher (also in the CHLASS academy) and several students who receive special education services. However, as the collaborator is not highly qualified in English, Tammy is the primary educator responsible for presentation of new content and the collaborator works to provide supportive instruction and is responsible for creating and implementing appropriate modifications and accommodations necessary for student success.

Since Tammy did not actually identify or describe strategies that she does use, a follow up question was posed to her, asking her which strategies she has found to be least effective. She responded, “The least effective one is the pairing because they do not read all the time or they do not stay on task.” It is both interesting and disheartening that in her previous response, she suggests that this is a strategy that she uses with her students, but then turns around to identify this further as “least effective.” That she would use a strategy she is aware is ineffective with her students further supports the notion that she likely lacks awareness of what a reading strategy is and how to implement one effectively for student usage. Further, it could be reasonably argued that if she is using a strategy that is known to fail, then she is thereby willingly and knowingly setting her students up for failure. Finally, she did not note whether she gives her students a purpose for the reading when having them pair up to read. If students do not have a purpose for reading, then it is logical that students would be off task and fail to complete the assigned readings.

At this point, it should be interjected, while her responses regarding the implementation of reading strategies are basic in this interview, examination of reading logs submitted by her suggest that she may be implementing strategies of which she is
not entirely aware. For example, on one of the reading logs, in the strategy column, she wrote that students were going to make predictions about the article being read before reading and then compare those predictions to the content embedded in the article after reading. This process involves evaluating the text in order to determine comparisons and contrasts. Further, predictions are generally made using prior knowledge about the topic. Thus, at least in this one instance, she did employ a best-practice strategy. However her awareness of such is questionable.

The next critical component discussed asked Tammy about her processes when selecting assessments to determine if students have actually learned the intended content from the reading assignment. When asked how she knows students are learning the content, Tammy responded, “That’s where I take up their work and just grade it. Quizzes, making them write summaries over what they read. So—not just letting them do it in groups…of course questioning them as they’re reading, that always works.” This response is intriguing. By grading work, Tammy is, on some level, actually holding kids accountable for content, presuming that she is grading for content and not for completion. As a high school teacher, it is easy to fall into the habit of grading for completeness and not for correct application of content. Further, it could be postulated that if she is only giving her students’ low-levels tasks—such as writing a summary—then students are still not working with the text in any meaningful way that will be necessary to be successful in post-secondary education. It is unlikely that a college professor is going to ask students to simply summarize a text and turn in said summary for a grade. In post-secondary education and the workforce, both college professors and employers are looking to see that the individual can not only summarize the text, but can apply the content to new
situations. So while it is positive that Tammy is taking the time to grade work, the effectiveness as a means of ensuring student content learning is questionable. When asked how much student success is dependent upon reading a text she answered,

> For my class it is. I mean, it is English. If they do not understand what they read, then they’re not going to be able to answer the questions. And we probably do more reading than anything because of the CATS test, it focuses on reading. So we do a lot of shorter reading assignments…the content focuses around that, so reading is pretty important to be successful in this class.

Reading this, one might contend that her response suggests that reading, and therefore content learning, is necessary for successful completion of the CATS test, not learning content for the betterment of the individual students’ lives. This reinforces the notion that content learning is not designed to prepare students for their lives after high school, but instead is designed solely to prepare students to take a test that means nothing to them and they care nothing about. However, arguably, this should be a significant worry for Tammy, as she is a first year teacher, is not tenured, and considering the recent firing, transferring, and/or replacing of so many Kentucky teachers as a result of poor test scores, it is reasonable that her classes performing well on the CATS test should be a primary concern (Koncz, 2010).

When asked to expound as to whether what happens in her classroom, regarding assessment of reading content, in terms of student success is indicative of what is occurring in other content areas, Tammy stated, “I think teachers just tell them what they should know instead of letting them discover it on their own. And I do not think that’s
just a [this-school] thing. I think that’s pretty much everywhere.” In other words, her response suggests that across the board teachers are not being successful in holding students accountable for content learned via reading and are thusly removing the reading from the content learning and presenting the content orally instead.

The final critical component deals with the state of reading within the school, recommendations regarding improving this state, and how this state of reading impacts students’ readiness to handle complex texts after graduating. When asked about the current state of reading in this school, Tammy responded,

The English teachers’ value [reading] quite a bit. Not for sure about the other teachers, just because I haven’t heard. But students do not at all. It is like pulling teeth getting them to read. My honors classes are not that bad. They enjoy reading and whatever I put in front of them, they read and they do not complain about it too much. But with my collaborative classes, if you do not read it to them, it doesn’t get read unless you threaten, walking around with discipline forms.

Tammy’s response to this question may have been anticipated. Having only worked in the school a single year, it is possible that she has not yet developed a complete awareness of the role of reading in classrooms other than her own. Additionally her final comment in that response is disconcerting. Walking around with discipline referrals in one’s hand has the potential of creating a climate of intimidation or fear within the classroom. Should students actually read an assignment with this happening, it is understandable that the purpose for reading the assignment is not to derive meaning or content from the text, but instead simply to stay out of trouble. That would then,
logically, lead the students to associate feelings of negativity or fear in relationship to reading an assigned text. A climate of fear does not foster learning for anyone.

However, when asked about her recommendations to the administration and other faculty members about improving the state of reading in the school, her response was both logical and demonstrated an awareness of the needs of the school. She noted, “Begin early; provide every student with a textbook, not just a class set. Also require all content areas to practice reading skills.” These are all ideal recommendations that should be considered seriously. Most significant is the necessity of having a textbook for each student. Currently, within this school, some classes only have classroom sets of a textbook – not enough to distribute one to every student. Without having textbooks for all students, it is definitely a greater challenge to assign reading, particularly content-related readings. Is not that the purpose of a textbook? So that students can read said textbook and learn the content from the book? How are we preparing students for engaging with textbooks at the college level if we do not give them numerous opportunities to engage with textbooks at the secondary level?

Finally, Tammy was asked about her perceptions regarding student readiness to handle complex texts at the post-secondary level and/or the workforce after graduating from this school. When asked this question, she immediately responded, “Oh, do I have to be honest on that one?” She was assured that honesty was appreciated and she was encouraged to say exactly what she thinks. In her response, she said,

My honors kids – yes, they’re very high readers, but I have some collaborative kids who just can’t read, It is not just…they do not understand that it is not just about reading the words – they can read the
words, they can pronounce, maybe better than I can – but they have no idea what the text is talking about. I feel like it is knowing what you read and being able to understand it, explain it, connect to it, is what reading is – not just being able to pronounce the words and being able to summarize it. On that level, I do not think they’re prepared, as prepared as they should be… They can not apply information to other things outside of what they’ve learned. That’s the biggest problem I’m having. I do not know how to fight it…

Of all her responses to all her questions, this is potentially the most important of them all, for several reasons. First of all, this response indicates that Tammy does indeed have a deep understanding of what reading is–that it is a process much deeper than reading words on a page, but requires interacting with the text on a meaningful level. Further, she even identifies strategies of how to do so (i.e. making connections, applying content). Yet in the same breathe she acknowledges that she’s not guiding students to read on that deep level and that she doesn’t know how to “fight the problem.” That issue will be discussed in the implications for secondary teachers section of chapter five. Finally, she also indicates that without being able to perform these functions for comprehension then students are graduating “not as prepared as they should be” which may just be a very diplomatic way of saying that students are graduating without the necessary skills to be successful in post-secondary education and/or the workforce.

In review, Tammy is a first year English II and III teacher who was selected to participate in the case study portion of this study because of her low frequency of reading assignments given. In the course of this interview, Tammy has demonstrated, repeatedly,
that she is working with a basic level of giving reading assignments, of implementing reading strategies, and of assessing content learning through reading. However, her responses also indicated that she is aware of this and acknowledges that she doesn’t know how to fix the problem. While she notes that she enjoys reading novels with students, particularly *Night* by Elie Wiesel, her reading assignments tend to be shorter and parallel CATS testing format. As a first year teacher it is reasonable that test scores should be a primary concern, however interactions with a text for testing purposes are surface level, at best, and do not require the meaningful experiences that secondary students need in order to learn to hope cope with complex texts after high school. Her recommendation for improving the state of reading is logical, reasonable, and a viable first step for any school looking to improve the state of reading in the school. The provision of textbooks for all students and requiring all content-area teachers to practice reading skills with their students is a recommendation agreed upon by many literacy researchers. Finally, she indicates that, presently students who graduate are not prepared to work with complex texts after high school, but admits that this is a problem that she does not know how to combat. It may be reasonable to conclude that, given direct instruction on implementing effective reading strategies and effective forms of assessment, that Tammy could develop proficiency in her current areas of weakness, thus improving her classroom, her process in selecting reading assignments and strategies, and empower her to lead her students to greater proficiency with text. Finally, greater proficiency in transacting with text in high school will then lead to greater student success in post-secondary education and/or the workforce.
**Case Study Trends**

In order to derive value from these two case studies, they must be examined in terms of common trends between the two teachers and conversely, deviations between the two teachers.

The single greatest commonality found in these case studies is the shared perceptions regarding the state of reading within the school. Both teachers acknowledge that the current state of reading within the school is poor and they both feel while the English teachers are attempting to place a value on reading within their classes, that the same cannot be said of teachers in other content areas. Further, both teachers note that the lack of consistency across content areas devalues reading as a whole, thus making their battle against such apathy even more challenging. In the same vein, both teachers share similar ideas regarding improving the state of reading within the school. Kristy recommended requiring independent reading, both inside and outside of class. Tammy recommended having enough copies of textbooks available so each student can have a textbook in each class. Having a textbook for the student to use throughout the year would both support and enable independent reading. Tammy also noted that teachers across all content-areas should be responsible for practicing reading skills with their classes. Finally, both teachers agree that, at present, students are graduating from this school unable to cope with complex text on the necessary, deep, meaningful levels necessary for success in post-secondary education and/or the workforce. While Kristy stated that students were in for a rude awakening after graduation, Tammy indirectly pointed out the need to educate teachers themselves on how more effectively to
implement reading assignments, reading strategies, and generally to make reading a more essential component of content learning.

Another common trend between Kristy and Tammy are their inclusion of test-preparation activities as a part of reading assignments. Both teachers note that they will give their students journals, articles, or other short readings and then assess learning through multiple-choice comprehension questions that parallel the CATS or ACT tests. The prevalence of such test-preparation activities is not surprising, as teachers are told to include test-preparation activities into their lesson plans and regularly practice for these standardized assessments. As has been noted, students are already inundated with test-preparation. In fact, as was evidenced in reading log data, nearly 20% of all reading assignments given in the data collection period reflected some form of test-preparation. Unfortunately, as has been noted, such activities only require students to work on the surface level of a text and do not require, nor enable, deeper, more meaningful transactions with text. Further, it could be argued that continuous test-preparation is related to the devaluing of reading both teachers perceive as being evident within the school. Students typically do not find a value in the CATS or ACT test, therefore when so much of reading revolves around these tests, it is logical that then students devalue reading as a whole.

A final trend to be identified is both Kristy’s and Tammy’s proclivity in their responses to “blame the victim.” When interviewing Kristy she noted that the role of reading is not only devalued by the teachers within the school, but also by the parents outside of the school. Kristy states, “Considering the high rate of illiteracy [in this county] it is safe to assume that many parents didn’t learn how to read and they pass that
value set onto their kids.” While Tammy never makes a similar statement directly, it is implied throughout her interview that she feels that some students are simply products of their upbringing and which results in their poor reading skills. Considering these opinion, it can be argued that both of these teachers are blaming the parents and the students instead of holding themselves accountable. This is likely a common belief system shared by many of the faculty within the school.

However, shared perceptions and test-preparation activities are where the commonalities end. The first distinguishable difference between Kristy and Tammy is their differences in expectations for their students, or even differences of expectations for different groups of students within a class. Both Kristy and Tammy make distinguishing comments within their interviews which suggest their expectations for student achievement changes based on the compilation of students. When discussing selecting reading assignments, Kristy notes that for her AP classes, she adheres strictly to the AP curriculum. Further, she notes that her AP classes tend to have a greater amount of reading outside of class that her “regular” classes may have. Tammy, similarly, notes that she tends to give her honors students more outside reading to complete than her regular or collaborative classes. But within the confines of regular English classes, it is evidenced that Kristy attempts to hold all of her students to the same expectations whereas Tammy may not be doing the same. During her interview, Tammy stated, “…my honors kids do a lot of outside reading and then come back and take a quiz. With my collaborative kids, it is paired reading or out loud reading…we always do a summary afterward.” This statement may indicate that she doesn’t feel like students in her regular classes are capable of performing to the same levels as the students in her honors classes, thereby
suggesting she has differing expectations for these two groups of students. It could be argued that by changing the expectations, that student access to core content is no longer equitable.

When asked to describe her methodology used when selecting reading assignments, Kristy indicates that she primarily follows the curriculum developed and adopted by the district. From there, she selects readings from the ones set forth in the curriculum. When assigning reading, she tends to focus more on short stories and novels and utilizes articles or journals primarily for test-preparation. Her selection of novels reflects her understanding that, in order to read a novel effectively, students must interact with the text on a deeper level. When having students read novels, she provides them with best-practice strategies to assist in comprehension. For example, she will often have students maintain passage journals as a means of making connections with the text. Another preferred strategy is having students’ complete visualizations about the content. Both the evidence provided in reading logs and gathered through the interview process, indicates that Kristy often has her students employ strategies that are considered best-practice in the literacy field. However, when it comes to articles or journals, she tends to stick with having students summarize the text, identify main ideas and supporting details. While still best practice, these do not provide students with the deep, meaningful experiences that they are experiencing when reading a novel or short story.

Conversely, Tammy made no mention of the adopted curriculum when describing her methodology in assigning texts to students. However, she did note that she tries to select readings that she knows will strike student interest. For example, when reading short stories, she focused on the ones from the science fiction genre and would not be
considered “girlie.” When discussing reading strategies, Tammy’s response suggests that she lacks proficiency in utilizing best-practice strategies with her students. In fact, in her interview she identified a strategy she tends to have students use, but then in responding to the next question, she identified that same strategy as being “least effective.” While it is unlikely that she’s intending to set her students up for failure, using ineffective strategies are setting students up for exactly that. When discussing strategies, Tammy was not able to answer the question fully and more-or-less answered around the question instead of answering it directly. This action reinforces that suggestion that she would benefit from additional instruction about devising and implementing best practice reading strategies.

In terms of assessing student learning of content, both teachers admit that they will give their students quizzes over assigned readings. But Kristy expounded that quizzes were not her preferred method of assessment and that she finds active, classroom discussion to be a more effective means of assessing student learning. While this is a viable means of assessing learning and is considered an acceptable means of formative assessment, class discussion also provides an opportunity for students to rely solely on their own background knowledge and prior experiences to mask the fact that they have not completed a reading assignment. Tammy indicated that she takes a different approach in assessing student learning. She suggested that she will question students during reading; however, her primary means of assessment is through collection and grading of work. While grading work does imply a level of accountability, it is only effective if she is grading for content, not just completion.
Another interesting contradiction between these two teachers is their perceptions of how a student might fare in their class if that student never opened a book or completed a single reading assignment. Kristy, who data would suggest, is the more effective teacher in terms of reading, stated that a student could make their way through her class without ever reading, and still pass and with a B no less. However, Tammy, who appears to be much less proficient in assigning texts and implementing best-practice strategies, stated that students who did no reading would not do well in her class at all. Granted, while that doesn’t mean a student would necessarily fail, it does suggest that the student would not do so well as to earn a B. This might suggest that even though Kristy had the highest frequency of reading assignments and provided the highest percentage of best-practice strategies to her students, to some extent has also fallen victim to the devalued role of reading in this school. If a student can work through an English class without ever reading a single assigned text, and still come out with a B would indicate that a significant problemexists – not just within that classroom, but within the school as a whole. Thus Tammy may still be idealistic in her perception of reading and achievement, at least within the confines of her own classroom.

Summary

Chapter four focused on an examination of the results derived from data collected during this study. The purpose of this chapter was to determine the significance of these results in relationship to the questions guiding this study. Specifically, this chapter examined reading log data, reporting data through both quantitative and qualitative means. Due to a lack of information provided by teachers on reading logs, it could not be determined how many pages the average secondary student is expected to read per week.
However, data does indicate that, in classes where some amount of reading is actually required, students are expected to read less than two assignments per week. Survey data, as reported by students, indicated that slightly less than 50% of students actively read all of an assigned text. That number increases to nearly 70% when you factor in students who read “all” or “most” of a text. Finally, case study data, as reported qualitatively through two English teachers showed a shared belief that this school does not value reading within the school and that students are not prepared to handle complex texts found in post-secondary education and/or the work-force upon graduation. However, it was noted that while one teacher employs a strong method for combating this lack of reading in the school by making reading essential within her classroom, data collected from the other teachers suggests that she does not have a repertoire of strategies necessary to make reading an essential part of her class.
Chapter 5

Introduction

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the results established in chapter four, considering these results in relationship to the research questions guiding the researcher. A part of the discussion will include information regarding readability of textbooks used both in the high school level and textbooks that college freshman would expect to use, to support the significance of why this lack of student reading may have unfortunate consequences for a student after high school. This chapter will also discuss the implications this study holds in relationship to pre-service teachers in a teacher education program, for current secondary teachers, and for incoming college freshman. This chapter concludes with a final note reflecting on this study as a whole.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine reading assignments given across content areas in a secondary school setting. To fulfill this purpose, multiple elements were studied, including the types and how much reading is being assigned, how much of assigned reading students are completing, and how students value reading assignments in relationship to content learning. The final component of this study analyzed the methodologies teachers employed when assigning reading, selecting/implementing a reading strategy, and finally assessing student content learning. The intention of this study was to take a deeper look into how likely it is that students are or will be prepared to handle text of a greater and deeper complexity when they transition into post-secondary education or into the workforce. Further, do these same students have the strategic repertoire necessary to make sense of these more complex texts? In order to
have these tools, students will need to have been both exposed to and taught how to employ effective reading strategies, particularly how to independently utilize these strategies to ensure deepest comprehension of a text.

Previous studies have shown repeatedly that students are graduating from high school in greater and greater numbers without necessary reading skills for continued success, including ACT (2006), NCTE (2006), and National Endowment for the Arts (2007). The 2009 National Assessment for Educational Progress indicates that only 32% of eighth graders are reading at or above a proficient level. This is a mere one percentage point higher than it was in 2007. These results from NAEP might be heartening, with the belief that after the eighth grade students will still have four years of high school to improve reading proficiency, however ACT reports that students are more prepared for college level reading in the eighth grade than they are as graduating high school seniors (ACT, 2006). This would suggest that less than 32% of high school graduates will leave school reading at or above a proficient reading level. What is even more frightening is the fact that NAEP (2009) results further show that the number of students scoring at or above a proficient level declines sharply when considering students who are eligible for the National School Lunch Program (i.e. free or reduced lunch). Thus in districts, such as the one where this study took place, where there is a high frequency of students receiving free or reduced lunch, only 16% of students scored at or above a proficient level while 60% of students scored at or above a basic reading level. For this school, it is reasonable to conclude that less than 16% of graduating seniors will be prepared to handle complex texts in post-secondary education and/or the workforce.
Data from this study support the NAEP (2009) and ACT (2006) results. Common sense says that in order to maintain or improve a skill, it must be worked at and practiced repeatedly. The first research question guiding this study asks how much reading students are expected to complete per week. While there was a lack of data provided on reading logs to determine approximately how many pages students are expected to read, data does indicate that students are given less than two reading assignments in classes where reading is assigned. It is reasonable to argue that having less than two reading assignments per class per week is not enough to maintain eighth grade reading proficiency levels nor substantial enough to prepare a student for complex texts encountered after graduation. It is interesting to note that data analysis concludes that, of reading assignments given, nearly 49% of students read all of an assigned reading and 69% of students either read all or most of an assigned reading.

Not only are the numbers of reading assignments given significant in relationship to student reading readiness after graduation, but also are teacher implementation and student usage of reading strategies. Biancarosa and Snow (2004) noted the necessity of reading strategically, especially in the secondary classroom, because secondary school literacy skills are more complex and because adolescents are simply not as motivated to actively engage in reading as kindergartners. This publication notes secondary teachers should become adept at applying effective, research-based strategies into their content-area classroom, including: questioning, clarifying, predicting, summarizing, visualizing, self-questioning, paraphrasing, and word-identification. By implementing these strategies, content-area teachers have the tools to emphasize reading practices specific to their subject areas.
The National Council for Teachers of English (2006) state that the usage and implementation of reading strategies are necessary for students to be able to discern deeply embedded ideas, comprehend highly sophisticated ideas, negotiate elaborate structures, intricate styles, understand context-dependent vocabulary, and recognize the implied purposes of the text. The NCTE purports that effective reading strategies focus on comprehension, motivation, and critical thinking.

Finally in a recent report conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) states that many teacher candidates lack the skills required to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and/or a career (Miller, 2010). Miller further states that many high school teacher candidates do not receive training to teach literacy skills within their subject areas. Further they rarely teach reading comprehension strategies in the upper grades and fail to include reading-heavy assignments or expose students to complex texts as often as students need in order to be prepared for college-level work.

Data collected in this study suggest that the secondary teachers within this school are attempting to implement reading strategies to enhance comprehension of the assignments that accompany them. Of the assignments given, 75% of those included a reading strategy provided by the teacher. However, of those reading assignments, only 58% of the strategies utilized could be considered best-practice in literacy instruction. This implies that nearly half of all texts assigned to students are given without a viable support necessary to enhance comprehension of a text. Further, it can be arguably concluded that if students are not given and taught strategic supports to enable deep comprehension of a text, then those students will not develop skills necessary to cope
with even more complex texts thus contributing to the declining numbers of students graduating from this school who can read at or above a proficient level. Data collected from this study also indicate that of the best-practice strategies utilized during this study, 50% of those strategies were used in a single class. Based on this data it is reasonable to conclude that across the board, teachers here are not effectively implementing strategies in secondary content-area classrooms. It further suggests that these individuals do not view themselves as teachers-of-reading within their content area nor are they aware of what strategies are considered best-practice. This is depressing considering the majority of teachers participating received three years of direct instruction through professional developments and workshops on effectively implementing teaching and reading strategies into the content-area classroom. Referencing back to the recent report from the Alliance for Excellent Education, Miller (2010) noted that of new teachers who responded to a survey, only 44% indicated that they felt “strongly prepared” to be an effective content-area teacher. Based on the data of this study, it can be deducted that one of the major areas where teachers are not being effectively prepared is in implementing strategic reading instruction within their classrooms.

Another intention of this study is to take a deeper look into the methodologies behind teacher selection of reading assignments, reading strategies, and the methods by which teachers assess for student learning. It is generally understood in the field of education that there must be a source for teacher selection of content to present as well as materials to be read. In the school where this study took place, there is a pre-set curriculum that all teachers in that content area are expected to follow to ensure that all major content is presented. This pre-set curriculum is based off of the program of studies
published by the state. Unfortunately it has been argued that states dim down their curriculum in order to allow more students to meet proficiency standards in mandatory standardized assessment. Applegate et al. (2009) argue that while states report that students are performing up to 40% higher in reading proficiency, these same state tests have simply lowered the bar in expectations. The authors note that the NAEP test more accurately assesses the true rigor behind proficient reading skills, thus promoting the necessity of national reading standards.

The combination of a lack of national reading standards combined with ineffective state reading standards may account for the apparent lack of common methodology in the selection of reading assignments and reading strategies. Based on the data collected in this study, it is reasonable to argue that the primary means of selecting reading assignments is based on the school’s own adopted curriculum, however it can also be reasonably concluded that not all teachers may be aware of this curriculum and/or how to apply said curriculum when selecting reading assignments. It is arguable that if a school fails to embed reading skills into a content area’s curriculum, then those students will not receive adequate reading instruction in that course. Data collected also leads to the inference that even if teachers are following the curriculum when assigning texts to read, they are not proficient in selecting appropriate and challenging reading assignments. This conclusion is evidenced by the fact that of all reading assignments given, the greatest percentage of assignments fell into the news articles category. Unfortunately, case study data collected also indicated that when assigning news articles, they were typically used as a continued means of preparing for the CATS or the ACT test. When used in this manner, students are not expected to transact with the text in deep and
meaningful ways. In fact, reading experts would not regard practice portions of the reading comprehension section of the ACT as best-practice in standardized test-preparation. It can be argued, based on the data analyzed, that participating teachers perceive practice ACT and CATS tests as viable and acceptable reading assignments. However, when discussed in the context of this research project, it could be argued that practice ACT/CATS tests are not considered true reading assignments. Ravitch (2009) argues that one of the reasons why the United States performs less well when compared to other industrialized countries is because “While American students are spending endless hours preparing to take tests of their basic reading skills, their peers in high performing nations are reading poetry and novels. We are the only industrialized nation that considers the mastery of basic skills to be the goal of k-12 education” (Ravitch & Cortese, 2009, p. 36). ACT actually recommends that if schools are going to truly prepare students both to be successful on the ACT as well as to be successful in post-secondary education or the workforce, then those schools should establish essential standards, common expectations, clear performance standards, rigorous high school courses, and early monitoring and intervention services (Herbert, 2010). Finally, Hollingworth (2007) suggests that one of the best means of preparing for the reading comprehension portion of a standardized test is for teachers to connect reading units to real world contexts. Hollingworth states:

The kind of reading that is done on standardized tests is a genre all its own, and it is not fair to teachers or students to limit classroom reading selections to ‘basalized,’ short pieces with questions at the end. Real readers read real books and select books about topics that are interesting to
them. The most effective and memorable moments in school happen when students are actively engaged as learners and can see the connections between what they are doing and the world outside the classroom. When the curriculum is narrowed down to test-preparation worksheets and skills and drills, teachers lose the heart and soul of what they should be focusing on in their classrooms. What is more, there is a large body of literacy research that demonstrates the connection between reading achievement and reading in real-world contexts (Hollingworth, 2007, p. 340).

It should be reiterated based on the data collected, there were a few articles assigned with the express purpose of having students read the articles and then answer several multiple choice questions. The rest of the ACT/CATS test-preparation in reading revolved around specific practice test reading selections and questions. Based on the research provided above, it can be reasonably argued that the participating teachers are not demonstrating best-practice in regards to standardized test-preparation. Instead, it could be argued that their perceptions have been altered so that they perceive such reading assignments as best-practice, when in fact, they are not enhancing students preparedness to handle complex texts. Put together, it is reasonable to extrapolate that, within this school, too much of the curriculum is based on standardized testing and fails to guide teachers adequately in the selection of appropriate and complex reading assignments.

In regard to reading strategically, the question was posed regarding how teachers select reading strategies to accompany assigned texts given to students to enhance comprehension. Both reading log data and case study data reveal inconsistencies in
application of reading strategies. Even though data indicated that 58% of all reading strategies utilized during the data collection portion of this study can be considered best-practice, those strategies were utilized by only five of the participating teachers. This indicates that nearly 40% of teachers who submitted at least one reading log did not indicate usage of a reading strategy that could be considered best practice in literacy instruction. However when that percentage is examined in terms of total teacher participants (meaning both participants who submitted reading logs and those who did not submit any reading logs) then the percentage of teachers not utilizing effective reading strategies within their classes rose to 64%. Further, while one of the case study participants described the application of strategies that would be considered best-practice in her classroom, the other case study participant failed to respond to the question directly. Additionally, of the one strategy that she mentioned often using, she then turned around to note that she found the strategy to be ineffective. Both case study participants noted that they felt like they were fighting a losing battle within the school. Considering all of this data, it is reasonable to conclude that teacher methodology for the selection and implementation of reading strategies within this school is inconsistent and teachers may lack understanding of both what qualifies as a reading strategy and how to select/apply one to a text to enhance comprehension.

The final question guiding this study reflects methodology behind teacher assessment of content-learning through assigned texts. In the review of the literature, two forms of assessment are discussed: formative and summative assessment. Summative assessments generally include end-of-chapter tests, district and statewide tests, and standardized measures (National Institute for Literacy, 2007). Further these assessments
are designed in making critical decisions, such as whether a student passes or fails a
class, however, this form of assessment does not provide information relevant to making
daily instructional decisions. On the other hand, formative assessments – also known as
classroom-based assessments - have derived as a means of driving classroom
instructional practices, ensure comprehension of content, and monitor student
achievement. Lipson and Wixson (2009) argue the necessity of classroom-based
assessments because they tie content to strategies, are more fine-grained, focus on both the
process and product of learning, provide immediate feedback, and provide
opportunities for teachers to interact with students and adapt assessment to meet student
needs. The National Institute for Literacy (2007) and Winograd et al. (2003) identified
the following as effective formative assessment strategies: teacher questioning,
observations, portfolios (otherwise viewed as performance assessments), and teacher-
student conferences.

In regard to the data collected, there were several assessment strategies described
by case study participants that can be viewed as best-practice in terms of the research discussed. Both participants note in their respective interviews that they use class-
discussion, quizzes, and tests as a means of assessing student content learning. Both
teachers also note that they use CATS or ACT like multiple choice questions in
relationship with articles to enhance students’ abilities to construe meaning in such a way
that is relevant to a standardized-assessment situation. Further both teachers indicate that
they will have students summarize main ideas and key points after reading an assignment.
In her interview Kristy also pointed out that the English teachers within the school were
in the process of creating streamlined common-assessments, so that all students are tested
equitably on their knowledge of the content within each unit prescribed in the curriculum. It should be noted that teacher effectiveness regarding formative assessment may be directly related to the formative assessment push within the school this school year. Finally, based on this data, it is reasonable to conclude that, at least for this school setting, these teachers are able to adequately apply assessment techniques and strategies to effectively assess student content learning through assigned text.

**Implications**

*Implications for Pre-Service Teachers and Teacher Education*

Upon the completion of this study and considering the data as it has been discussed, several significant implications for pre-service teachers who are currently completing a teacher education program come to light. First and foremost, particularly with the data collected from the second case study, it is evident that teachers need deeper, more effective instruction regarding how to implement efficacious content-area literacy instruction and strategies within their classrooms. In fact, all teachers, regardless of content area – or perhaps especially if the teacher is seeking a degree in a specific content area – should be required to take a content-area literacy course. This course should provide direct instruction regarding implementing best-practices in reading instruction for all students, with a particular focus on making reading an essential part of content learning. Further, this course should reinforce to pre-service teachers that they cannot fall into the vicious cycle of presenting content through PowerPoint and lecture alone. While it is unreasonable to expect that every ounce of learning should take place through reading, a significant portion should come from assigned texts. In order to make reading an essential part of content learning, pre-service teachers should be taught how
effectively to hold students accountable for completing reading assignments as well as how to efficiently assess student learning of content.

Perhaps above and beyond everything already said, pre-service teachers should be directly exposed to what it means to work with text on a deep, meaningful level. Granted, while identifying main idea and supporting details is a good starting point–it is exactly that–a starting point. This instruction for pre-service teachers should be both direct and metacognitive in nature, guiding pre-service teachers to think about their own habits when it comes to reading. If pre-service teachers do not understand the processes their brains work through when it comes to comprehending text, then they will have difficulty guiding their learners through this process. Through this course, it should be established to all future teachers that teaching reading is a part of their curriculum, regardless of what content they teach or the grade level they teach it in. A course such as this might help ensure that reading instruction does not die off after the student exits the third grade, but reinforces that reading is a process that should be continuously taught throughout a student’s entire educational career.

Another implication for pre-service teachers is that these future educators need to establish reading habits of their own. If a teacher does not read independently, outside of a required course, then that teacher will be hampered in their attempts to help their students develop independent reading habits of their own. Pre-service teachers should inundate themselves with a variety of reading material–both education-related and for personal pleasure. For example, a pre-service teacher who intends to work in a high school should read a variety of young adult literature so that he/she may be more likely to make recommendations to students based on the student’s interest and be able to entertain
literary-based conversation in general. Regardless students look up to teachers. If a student sees that his/her teacher actively reads, then that student is more likely to follow suit. This habit may then create a more motivating learning environment entrenched in critical thinking and deep comprehension of a text which is necessary for continued success after high school.

A final implication is relevant to both pre-service teachers as well as current secondary teachers–teachers need to alter their current beliefs, changing them instead to a belief set that is focused on placing blame where it should be placed and holding all students to the same high expectations. This implication is perhaps the hardest of them all to achieve. For pre-service teachers, it means that they should work to avoid falling into the “assimilation” trap when accepting a teaching position. The assimilation trap is when a new teacher begins a new teaching position and then immediately abandons what was learned in the teacher education program, instead replacing it with the value-set already established within the school. If anything, it is important for this group to work to avoid assimilation, instead applying the instructional techniques learned through their pre-service teacher education program. In this case, specifically the role of literacy instruction as it needs to be embedded within content-area instruction. As pre-service teachers learn and model how to embed reading instruction within content-area instruction, they also need to learn how to continue this practice in their own classrooms and not change their actions based on the other teachers within the school.

*Implications for Current Secondary Teachers*

As has been suggested, in today’s society, most content-area teachers do not feel responsible for teaching reading skills to their students. These teachers believe that
students should come to their classes already knowing how to read that particular content, not needing any additional instruction or support. Additionally, secondary teachers are often of the opinion that students should have mastered their reading skills long before they ever entered into a high school classroom. Unfortunately, the truth is that many students enter high school classrooms either not reading on grade level and/or without the necessary skills to handle that content’s text effectively. Secondary teachers often indicate that they are already overwhelmed with the amount of content they are required to teach and therefore do not have time to teach students how to read. In actuality, it is this very prevalent perception that has lead to the vicious cycle described throughout this study. What secondary content-area teachers do not realize is that, there is a specific skill set required to read the content for that course. These teachers, who are generally considered highly qualified in their content area, do not realize that they use this skill set automatically every time they read a text related to their content.

Thus, the initial and most significant implication for secondary teachers is two pronged. First and foremost, content-area teachers should be provided direct instruction geared towards their content, about how to embed reading into content learning and what strategies to employ with students so they can transact with the text on deep levels. This direct instruction would likely need to take place as professional development, but should include opportunities for teachers to practice demonstrating these practices and strategies as well as chances to observe best-practices in action. The second prong is that teachers need to demand access to a diverse selection of text-based materials – not necessarily textbooks. If the teacher learns these strategies but then does not have access to material to assign students, then the first prong is null and void. Students will inevitably have to
interact with various forms of print in post-secondary education; thus they need to be exposed to content learning via text in high school. Finally, these teachers need not only to demand provision of text-based materials but provision of text written on an appropriate grade level and are complex in nature but also embed support for comprehension.

However in order for these teachers ever to implement literacy instruction effectively in their own classrooms, they need to first sit down and truly self-reflect about themselves, as individuals, as learners, and as teachers. Professional development and training is great, but if the teacher is not invested in the training nor have a belief system opposed to what is presented in professional development, then that training and development becomes simply a requirement and will have no lasting impact in the classroom. Therefore, the culture of the school must change to a culture that values reading and literacy instruction; a culture that insists that every teacher within the building is responsible for providing appropriate literacy instruction as a component of their content-area instruction. When this is done well, teachers will not feel as though they are being loaded down with additional content to teach. Instead teachers should feel that students are interacting and comprehending content on deeper levels and achieving at higher ones.

Another implication for secondary educators is that teachers within a school need to come together to work to change the climate of reading within the school as a whole. All faculty members—administration included—should work to change the state of reading within the school from one that is likely devalued and ignored, to one that is embraced and has a central role in student learning and achievement. Students should recognize that
reading will be assigned in all classes consistently and that achievement is directly related
to completion of those reading assignments. The days when students can pass through
four years of high school, with a solid B (maybe A?) average must end. To do so will
both teach students that reading is an essential component of success, not just in high
school, but in life. Further it will also ensure that when students graduate, they walk away
from high school with a skill set that will garner success in post-secondary education
and/or the workforce.

A final implication for secondary teachers and one that is unlikely actually to be
used until serious education reform takes place in Washington D.C. is to take the focus
away from test-preparation. Students get it! They have been taking standardized tests for
as long as they have been in school. They know how to select an answer choice from a
set of four options and, generally speaking, they know how to answer an open response
question. In fact, it is arguable that the one consistent component of education, in all
classes, at all grade levels, throughout all content areas, is test-preparation. If teachers
really and truly want to raise test scores, then they need to take the focus off of the test
and refocus education on learning, reading, and thinking. Real learning too, not just
learning exactly what will be asked on the test in May and how to answer that question.
Secondary teachers should want to see students stop being apathetic towards learning but
become motivated towards school and the learning experience. If that is ever going to
happen, then teachers should cut out most test-preparation activities. Maybe then students
can read a journal article to derive true meaning and depth from the content therein and
not be stuck simply identifying the main idea and answering a set of ten multiple choice
questions that never move beyond the surface of the text.
Textbooks: Gunning Fog Readability

One of the major implications for current secondary teachers is that they should demand books so every student can have access to textbooks for each class that he or she is enrolled—not just a single classroom set. However another significant implication, for both educators and students, is the readability of those textbooks. In order for a textbook to be a viable source of text to assign, the textbook needs to be written on a level that challenges the average reader without being overwhelming. In other words, textbooks need to be written on the student’s reading level. Therefore a textbook used in a tenth-grade class should have an average reading level equal to the tenth grade. In the same right, textbooks should become increasingly complex so that when the student graduates from high school, then that student will be able to handle the type of text, written with greater complexity, found in the typical college freshman course.

To assess a textbook’s reading level, also known as the textbook’s readability, the Gunning Fog Index is commonly used. The Gunning Fog Index was developed by Robert Gunning who believed that most writings were cloudy and muddled; only after the “fog” had settled was the true meaning of the writing revealed and understood (Spinks & Wells, 1993, p. 84). This index considers the average sentence length of a passage and the percentage of polysyllabic words. “Therefore, in using the Gunning Fog Index, the “average sentence length” plus the “percentage of polysyllable words,” multiplied by .4, equals school grade level of the material being tested” (p. 85).

In the context of this study, the readability of the current textbooks used by the teachers who participated in this study, even if that teacher did not submit any reading logs was determined. Then the readability levels of five core-content classes that often
require heavy reading at the university located closest to the participating school were also determined. The purpose of considering the readability of these textbook is to draw potential conclusions about student readiness to handle complex college-based text after graduation. The following table indicates the reading levels of the textbooks used by the teachers who participated in this study. Passages with source information on which the readability was obtained can be found in Appendix I. Discussion of the table will follow.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class / Grade Level</th>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>FOG Readability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English II / 10th</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English III / 11th</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>13.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journalism / 12th</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Earth Space Science / 10th</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>10.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrated Social Studies 10th Grade</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>10.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foods / 11th &amp; 12th</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JROTC Let I / 9th – 12th</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Calculus / 12th</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>14.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Computer Applications 10th – 12th grades</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>11.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health &amp; Physical Education / 9th – 12th</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table above displays the readability of ten textbooks used by the various core content area teachers who participated in this study. It should be noted that one content area was left off, Spanish, because the text used in that class is written Spanish and the Gunning Fog Index was initially created for English text, therefore an accurate readability could not be obtained. Of the ten texts assessed, 40% of the texts were written on an appropriate readability level for the students in that class. Those courses included: English II, Earth Space Science, Integrated Social Studies, and Computer Applications. The first three are core-content classes, typically completed during the student’s sophomore year, and are required for graduation. The fourth class, Computer Applications, is an elective class that is available to students in tenth through twelfth grades, therefore with a readability of 11.04 it is arguable that this text is written on an appropriate grade level. Of the three core-content texts written on an accurate grade level, reading logs were submitted by teachers in two of the three content areas. It is interesting, albeit depressing, that the Integrated Social Studies textbook is written on a tenth grade level, however no evidence was collected to suggest that this book is actually utilized in this course.

Of the six remaining textbooks, three texts have a reading level below ninth grade, including Foods, JROTC, and Health/Physical Education. It is interesting to note that the first two include elective courses but the third is a core content class that is required for graduation. These three texts have an average readability that ranges from 8.34 to 8.84. The final three courses—English III, Pre-Calculus, and Journalism—all have average readabilities that fall into the college level. The average readabilities of these texts are 13.84, 14.87, and 15.56 respectively. Of these classes, English III is a course
required for graduation and Pre-Calculus is a class offered to upper-classmen to meet one of the math credit requirements, however is not required for all students. Finally, Journalism is a course offered only to seniors. Generally Pre-Calculus and Journalism are classes comprised of students who are on the Honors or Advanced Placement track for graduation. However, neither of these classes is considered Advanced Placement, which suggests that the textbook should still be written on or only slightly higher than the student’s grade level. However the Pre-Calculus book is written on a level equal to a college sophomore and the Journalism text for a college junior–neither of which are levels equitable to a high school junior or senior.

Based on this information, it is interesting to note that 60% of textbooks do not meet the reading needs of the average student. Less than half of the textbooks were written on an appropriate reading level and there is no evidence that one of those textbooks is even utilized in the classroom. Interestingly, of the five elective courses included in the chart above (Computer Applications, Foods, JROTC, Pre-Calculus, and Journalism), only 20% of those texts were written on an appropriate grade level. Forty percent were written on too-low of a level and the other 40% were written on too-high of a level. This evidence would imply that textbooks selected for elective courses—the courses that play a major role in guiding a student’s future—either fail to challenge the student appropriately as a reader or are written potentially way above a student’s head. Either way, the student is not being challenged appropriately and these texts are unlikely to guide a student to future reading success. Textbooks that are too easy to read will turn students off because they will believe they already know everything the text has to say, therefore there is no need to read it. Textbooks that are too difficult will only cause
excessive stress and frustration and the students will stop reading them because they will give up hope of ever comprehending the text.

However, this issue becomes even more pervasive when considering the readability of texts commonly read by college freshman. Considering that freshman year of college is equated with the thirteenth year of school, textbooks written for college freshman should be written at about a thirteen grade level. The following table displays the readability of textbooks for five heavy-reading courses commonly taken by college freshman. Discussion of the table will follow.

Table 4

FOG Readability for Post-Secondary Textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>FOG Readability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociology 100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>16.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology 100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology 113</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>17.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science 110</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>14.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Civilization 120</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the data provided in the chart above, none of the textbooks used in these classes are appropriate for the average college freshman. The textbook used in Political Science 110 has the lowest reading level, averaging at 14.66 while the Biology 113
textbook has the highest reading level, averaging at 17.47, which is very nearly graduate school reading level.

Considering the data from both Fog Readability tables above, several implications regarding textbooks and their usage can be drawn. The first of which is that the majority of textbooks—whether adopted in the secondary or post-secondary setting—are not appropriately written for the grade level of the student within the course. In high school, the significant problem is that too many textbooks, particularly books found in elective courses, are not written as challenging as they should be. These texts appear to be written on too simple of a level, thus devaluing the content within the text and leading students to neglect reading assignments sourced from said book. Further, students who do choose to apply themselves and take more challenging courses are given textbooks written far above their reading level, thus likely making the text too difficult for the students to comprehend adequately. The end implication is that students will not read. Very few textbooks have an appropriate average reading level and not all of those textbooks are utilized within their accompanying courses. Further, if in 60% of their classes, students use textbooks that are either too easy or too hard, then it is unlikely that the student will be more willing to use or benefit from the rare accurately-leveled textbook. The student especially cannot benefit from a textbook written on the correct grade level if the text is not used or if there are not enough copies of the textbook for each student to have one.

Additionally, students make their way through four years of high school with textbooks that likely did not adequately prepare them to handle even more complex college texts. The second major implication is that incoming college freshmen may be more likely to stop reading in their heavy-reading freshman courses because the texts are
written on much too high of a reading level; especially if the student graduated with a
decent grade point average without ever having to open a textbook. It is unreasonable to
expect the average college freshman to be prepared to handle complex text if the student
was not exposed to texts of gradually increasing complexity in high school. Further, it is
even more unreasonable to expect the same college freshman to be able to cope with texts
that are written at one or more grade levels above freshman-level readability.

In order to ensure that graduating seniors are prepared for college through
exposition to appropriately leveled texts, it may be necessary for a school to consider
adapting or completely changing textbook adoption policies. It could be argued that
instead of adopting textbooks, districts should consider adopting a variety of texts that
can be provided to students, which are written on an appropriate reading level and expose
students to various complex styles of print. Text sources should be identified based on
what the text has to offer and on the textbook being written at an appropriate reading
level for the students who will be using this. By simply changing textbook adoption
policies, school’s can ensure that they are providing students with the best texts needed to
prepare them for life after graduation.

A final textbook-related implication is that until both secondary schools and post-
secondary courses adopt appropriately leveled textbooks then it is likely that students will
continue to enter college needing remedial reading courses. These courses are designed to
help students make sense of the complex texts that they are being and will be assigned
throughout their college career, specifically including textbooks. Such a class is designed
to help a student improve their reading skills, so that he or she can cope with complex
texts, in areas including: vocabulary development, comprehension strategies, application
of knowledge, coping with the volume of reading assignments, and reading as a means of test-preparation, to name a few. While college freshman may benefit from such a course, it is ridiculous that a student should have to pay for an additional class—one that may or may not count for credit hours—to teach skills that should have been developed in the student throughout his or her first twelve years of education. Instead it should be considered much more pertinent that secondary schools both adopt textbooks that are written on students’ actual reading levels and then also make reading those textbooks essential for both content learning and academic success. Until textbooks are used in such a way, it is unlikely that students will transition from high school into college with necessary reading skills and a repertoire of strategies necessary to handle college-level reading.

Based on the discussion regarding textbooks above, an arguable conclusion can be suggested–textbooks are ineffective tools for selecting and assigning readings and teachers in secondary and post-secondary education should likely select reading assignments from other appropriately-leveled print sources. Instead of using a textbook as a primary source of reading, teacher should consider using textbooks as a secondary resource, one that is valuable for student-based research and for supporting content presented through other text-sources. This way, students are exposed to a variety of print sources, including both primary and secondary sources, as well as various genres of print, including expository, narrative, poetry, persuasive, etc. By adopting this method and using textbooks as a secondary source of reading assignments, teachers will not be dependent on access to textbooks in order to assign readings to their students.
Implications for Incoming College Freshman

The data collected in this study suggests that when students are assigned readings, they are actually completing them to some degree. Further this data also suggests that students who read an assignment generally value that assignment in relationship to content learning. That being said, there are several important implications in relationship to reading in post-secondary education.

First of all, the typical college freshman has just spent four years learning how to pass a test, as test scores are a school’s number one concern. However, in college, freshman are expected to read complex text, presented in textbooks generally written well above a grade thirteen reading level, and expected to transact with the text in deep, meaningful ways, so they can analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and apply the content presented in the text. Unfortunately, these same college freshmen also learned in their four years of high school that reading is not essential for academic success. Therefore, they are less likely to complete assigned readings, leading to poor grades in core content classes, and may then cause a portion of students to drop out of college. It is vital that incoming college freshman be aware that reading is essentially mandatory in post-secondary education; to no small degree academic success is depending on deriving meaning from complex texts. Thus, the initial implication is simply awareness—awareness of what will be expected, awareness of what is necessary to survive the freshman year of college, and awareness that the skill set that may have taken a student through high school will not be effective in post-secondary education.

An additional implication for incoming college freshman, one that is shared with both pre-service teachers and current secondary teachers, is to develop independent
reading habits. Reading habits should include both reading for pleasure as well as professional reading related to their future career. It is never too early for a student to begin reading content related to his/her future course of study. Students who develop independent reading habits before entering college will be more effective learners, will be more capable at comprehending assigned texts, and will expand their knowledge base. Increased knowledge can then only continue to benefit a student throughout his/her college career.

Limitations

Due to the research methodology and design, several limitations to the study can be identified. The first limitation is the small sample size. The population included in the study was very small (n=214). Thus, to make the results of the summary more reliable, the study should have been conducted on a larger scale, with a greater number of students that include greater diversity in student demographics.

A second limitation was the condensed time in which the study was conducted. Data collection was intended to be completed during a nine-week quarter. Further, data was being collected during the nine-weeks leading up to state standardized assessments. This suggests that teachers were focusing a great deal of their instruction on test-preparation, especially considering that this school was already in a consequence tier, thus there was a school-wide emphasis on preparing for state assessments and bringing up the school’s composite score. This limitation was further exacerbated by inclement weather, resulting in numerous school closings. In the time of the survey data collection, the school was closed 10 days due to snow and severe weather. Snow days negatively impacted teacher participation and submission of reading logs. For approximately one
month straight, school was only in session two or three days a week. Irregular school attendance negatively impacted time to assign texts, negatively affected teacher completion of reading logs, and challenged the regular completion of surveys. Thus survey data was limited at best.

A further limitation of this study is the lack of teacher participation. Of the fourteen participating teachers, only three submitted six or more reading logs, three submitted only two to five reading logs, and two submitted only one reading log. Six teachers did not submit any reading logs. Limited reading log submission limited survey collection data. It was through this lack of data available that prompted the addition of the case study to this study. The case study became necessary to take a deeper look at the questions raised by this lack of data, to look deeper at teachers’ methodologies and processes used when assigning/not assigning texts to read and teachers’ perceptions of the state of reading in the classroom and this impact on student readiness for post-secondary education and/or the workforce.

A final limitation was the lack of generalization of this study to other demographics. Considering the location and make-up of the participants, conclusions drawn from this study could only be generalized to similar schools, with similar demographics and in similar locations, thereby leaving out the majority of schools in the United States. Limiting the ability to generalize results to other populations detracts from the significance of the conclusions; however for schools with similar demographics, these conclusions have the potential of being both substantial and significant.
Recommendations for Future Research

Based on all of the prior research read, studied, and deeply examined, it is arguable that this is perhaps one of the most comprehensive studies of reading assignments given in the secondary classroom within this state to date. However, this study barely grazes the surface in comparison to the vast amount of information there is still out there waiting to be gathered and analyzed.

Considering the data collected and the results that have been discussed, several recommendations for future research in this field can be suggested. First of all, another study, similar to this should be conducted—only it should be conducted using a larger sample, over a longer-period of time, and using an educational setting that has demographics that parallel state demographics as a whole. However, it should be recommended that future research should not simply consist of reading logs, surveys, and case studies. A researcher should take the time to obtain a more detailed look at what is happening concerning reading in secondary content-area classrooms. This might include extensive observations, interviews with a greater number of faculty members and potentially even interviews with the students themselves.

One of the major intentions of this study was to examine reading assignments given in the secondary classroom and use that information to present viable hypotheses regarding student preparedness to handle the complex text found in post-secondary education and/or the workforce. Therefore, future research should consider the identification of such a hypothesis as a starting point. Thus, a study might examine the relationship between students completion of reading assignments in high school with academic success in college. Researchers may find that students who take the time to
read assigned text during high school have a significantly lower drop-out rate when it comes to college. Further they might determine these same students who develop a strong repertoire of reading strategies in high school are able to efficiently navigate their way through complex text and achieve greater heights of success in the long run.

Regardless of the path, it is a necessity that future research in this area be conducted, for the benefit of students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Considering that currently far too many students are graduating without the necessary tools to be successful after graduation, it is imperative to take the time now to examine where the weaknesses within content-area literacy are happening, so that we can provide our educators with the direct instruction and professional development needed to close the literacy gap. Finally this research is also needed to help instill in our youth the reasons why building a repertoire of positive readings skills, from reading strategically to reading metacognitively, so that they will be able to transition out of high school into post-secondary education and/or the workforce and become successful, productive members of our global economy.

A Final Note

Research suggests that high school seniors are graduating from high school less and less prepared to handle the complex texts that they will encounter in the real world, whether the real world is entering some form of post-secondary education or entering the workforce. Regardless of the choice, young people today need to be able to successfully transition into the next steps of their lives with the reading skills essential to be successful. Students need to be able to pick up a text and not only read the words as they’re written on the page, but to be able to comprehend, analyze, synthesize, and apply
the content within that text. They must be able to connect with the content within that reading, integrate the new knowledge with their prior knowledge and then apply the combined knowledge in unique methods. This is not only for the individual’s own benefit, but for the national and global benefits that extend from a country of young people who are taught essential reading skills. Young people today must graduate from high school able to cope with complex texts so they can go on to support our troubled economy through business and innovation. Further, the days when potential employers are not able to fill empty positions because the job candidates do not have necessary reading skills must cease. Reading is a life-long learning skill – not a content area to be left by the wayside after third grade. It is necessary that reading become a skill that is taught through all grade levels, across all content areas. Only when reading is made essential and necessary for success will we be able to support students’ transition into a group of active, engaged readers who will graduate from high school with the tools necessary to be successful in whatever path of life they choose to walk.
References


Appendix A

Definition of Terms

As the purpose of this study is to examine reading assignments given to students in a secondary setting, strategies provided to support student comprehension of texts, and student completion of assigned readings, the following operational definitions will be used.

**Reading.** The term reading is defined by Salinger, Kamil, Kapinus, and Afflerbach (2005) for the 2009 NAEP as “…an active and complex process that involves understanding written text; developing and interpreting meaning; and using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation.”

**Comprehension.** Often taken to mean *reading* comprehension in literacy, comprehension occurs when “readers derive meaning from text when they engage in intentional, problem solving, thinking processes… and is enhanced when readers actively relate the ideas represented in print to their own knowledge and experiences and construct mental representations in memory (National Reading Panel, 2000, 14).

**Strategy.** The term “strategy” generally referred to as a “reading strategy” has been defined by Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris (2008) as “…deliberate goal-directed attempts to control and modify the readers’ efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meaning of text” (368).

**Content-Area Literacy.** This term may also be used as “content-area reading” or “content literacy” and has been defined by Vacca & Vacca (2005) as “…the ability to use reading, writing, talking, and listening to learn subject matter in a given discipline” (7).
Appendix B

Informed Consent Document for CHLASS Academy Teachers

Project Title: An examination of reading assignments in secondary classrooms

Investigator: Rachel E. Hanger, Literacy Department, 270.726.8454

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project:

The purpose of this study is to examine reading assignments given to students in a rural high school. Included in this will be the type of texts assigned, frequency of reading assignments, strategy(ies) provided to support comprehension of the reading assignment.

2. Explanation of Procedures:

Participating teachers will be asked to maintain a reading assignments log over nine-week duration, with a new log completed each week. On the log, teachers will record reading assignments given to students, type of text assigned, and whether a strategy was provided to students to support reading the text. This log will be collected on Friday of each week. It is anticipated that completion of the reading logs should take approximately 10 minutes each week.

3. Discomfort and Risks:

There are no identified risks to the participants involved in this study. Teachers may experience discomfort associated with completing the reading logs honestly on a weekly basis.

4. Benefits:

There are no direct benefits for teachers participating in this study. Data collection may help teachers recognize a pattern of reading assignments given, strategic support provided, and the types of reading assignments given. Teachers should recognize that reading assignments given in a high school level should be designed not only to assist students in content learning but prepare them for the complex texts that they will encounter in college or the workplace.

5. Confidentiality:

Individual privacy of all participants will be maintained in all publications and/or presentations of results stemming from this project. All findings will be reported in aggregate. At no time will your identity be made public by any means.
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:**

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. *You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.*

__________________________________________
Signature of Participant      Date
Appendix C

Negative Informed Consent for Parents/Guardians for CHLASS Academy students

Project Title: An examination of reading assignments in secondary classrooms
Investigator: Rachel E. Hanger, Literacy Department, 270.535.5538

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project:

The purpose of this study is to examine reading assignments given to students in a rural high school. Included in this will be the type of reading assignments, how often reading assignments are given, tools or strategies provided to support student learning, how often students completed assigned readings, and how students valued the reading assignment.

2. Explanation of Procedures:

This study will be conducted over the third nine-weeks of school. Each Monday, students will be asked to complete a short survey over completed reading assignments. Surveys do not include open-ended questions and should only take about 5 minutes to complete. Questions include:

1) Whether they completed the assignment
2) If a strategy was provided
3) If a strategy was provided, did they use it
4) How helpful was the strategy and
5) How they valued the reading assignment in relationship to content learning.

3. Discomfort and Risks:

Students may experience discomfort related to responding honestly to survey questions. This discomfort may be related to students having feelings of guilt or being upset due to not completing assigned readings.

4. Benefits:

There are no direct benefits identified for students. By completing the surveys honestly, students may become more aware of the number of reading assignments given and how often they complete those assignments. Students may realize that reading assignments should be designed to help prepare them for reading in college and for adult working life.

5. Confidentiality:

Individual privacy of all participants will be maintained in all publications and/or presentations of results stemming from this project. All findings will be reported in as a single whole. At no time will your son/daughter’s identity be made public by any means.
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:**

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may receive to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. No one other than Rachel Hanger will see the surveys that students submit. Data from this study will not be reported by individual students, as all student surveys are submitted anonymously. No student responses will be shared with teachers, administrators, or parents.

*You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks. By signing this consent form, you are acknowledging that you do not want your son or daughter to participate in the study presented above. This form should be signed and returned within five business days.*

__________________________________________ _______________
Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian    Date

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD

Paul Mooney, Compliance Coordinator

TELEPHONE: (270) 745-4652
Appendix D
Negative Informed Consent for CHLASS Academy Students
For Research Involving Minors

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:**

The purpose of this study is to examine reading assignments given to students in a rural high school. Included in this will be the type of texts assigned, the frequency of reading assignments, strategy(ies) provided to support student comprehension of the reading assignment, and the rate at which students completed assigned readings.

2. **Explanation of Procedures:**

This study will be conducted over the third nine-weeks of school. Each Monday, you will be asked to complete a short survey over completed reading assignments. Surveys do not include open-ended questions and should only take about 5 minutes to complete. Questions include:

1) Whether you completed the readings assigned
2) If a strategy was provided
3) If a strategy was provided, did you use it
4) How helpful was the strategy and
5) How you valued the reading assignment in relationship to content learning.

3. **Discomfort and Risks:**

You may experience discomfort during this study while completing the surveys. This discomfort may be caused by unwanted feelings of guilt or from being upset as a result of completing or not completing reading assignments and responding honestly to the survey questions.

4. **Benefits:**

There are no direct identified benefits to students. Data collected through this process may make you aware of the amount of reading that is assigned to you in a given week and enable you to identify the amount of reading that you actually complete. Final results may provide you with a realization that reading assignments given in high school should be designed not only to help them learn content, but to better prepare you for complex texts found in college reading.
5. **Confidentiality:**

Individual privacy of all participants will be maintained in all publications and/or presentations of results stemming from this project. All findings will be reported in whole. At no time will your identity be made public by any means.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:**

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. No one other than Rachel Hanger will have access to the forms/surveys that you submit. Data from this study will not be reported by individual students as all student surveys are submitted anonymously. None of your responses will be shared with teachers, administrators, or parents.

I, ________________________________, understand that my parents/guardians have not given permission for me to participate in a study concerning reading assignments given in the CHLASS Academy at Logan County High School, under the direction of Rachel E. Hanger.

My participation in this project is voluntary. If I choose not to participate, it will not affect my grade (treatment/care, etc., as appropriate) in any way.

Signature ______________________________ Date _________________
Appendix E

Teacher Reading Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Assigned</th>
<th>Date Due</th>
<th>Reading Assignment (Including page #’s and source)</th>
<th>Type of Text Assigned (e.g. narrative, expository, informational)</th>
<th>Strategy (if one was provided to students)</th>
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Appendix F
Student Survey

A-111 (4-digit code)

Student Survey

Reading Assignments

Date:________________________

Assignment 1: (include assignment information here)___________________________

1. Of the assignment above, I completed…
   All  Most  Some  None  Do not Remember

2. A strategy was provided to assist me with the assignment. (If no, proceed to assignment 2)
   Yes  No

3. I used the strategy provided to complete the above assignment.
   Yes  No

4. The strategy provided assisted me in completing the assignment.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

5. The strategy provided assisted me in comprehending the reading assignment.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

6. This was a valuable reading assignment because it enhanced my content knowledge.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

*Repeat the above for all assignments
Appendix G

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

CASE STUDY

CHLASS ACADEMY TEACHERS

Project Title: An examination of reading assignments in secondary classrooms

Investigator: Rachel E. Hanger, Literacy Department, 270.726.8454

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project:

The purpose of this study is to examine reading assignments given to students in a rural high school. Included in this will be the type of texts assigned, frequency of reading assignments, strategy(ies) provided to support comprehension of the reading assignment.

2. Explanation of Procedures:

Participating teachers will be asked to participate in an interview for a case study. The interview will be guided with a pre-set list of questions. Questions will ask teachers about their processes and methodologies regarding giving reading assignments, devising/selecting strategies, and perceptions regarding student reading readiness for post-secondary education and/or the workforce. The interview will be conducted after school, starting at 3pm, and will last approximately one hour. Follow up interviews may be conducted to clarify information and or fill in gaps of information. For quality assurance purposes, interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed. After transcription, all audiotapes will be destroyed.

3. Discomfort and Risks:

There are no identified risks to the participants involved in this study. Teachers may experience discomfort associated with honestly responding to interview questions.

4. Benefits:

There are no direct benefits for teachers participating in this study. Data collection may help teachers recognize a pattern of reading assignments given, strategic support provided, and the types of reading assignments given. Teachers should recognize that reading assignments given in a high school level should be designed not only to assist students in content learning but prepare them for the complex texts that they will encounter in college or the workplace.
5. **Confidentiality:**

Individual privacy of all participants will be maintained in all publications and/or presentations of results stemming from this project. At no time will your identity be made public by any means.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:**

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

__________________________________________  ________________
Signature of Participant                         Date

__________________________________________  ________________
Consent of Participant to be audio-taped         Date
during the interview

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD

Paul Mooney, Compliance Coordinator

TELEPHONE: (270) 745-4652
Appendix H

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the way reading is valued in terms of learning at this school?

2. Describe your process in selecting reading assignments given to your classes.

3. When you select reading assignments, how do you select or devise a strategy to provide students to support reading comprehension?

4. How do you know that students are learning the content that you are intending them to learn from the reading assignments?

5. How much is student success dependent upon reading the text?
   a) Follow up: In what ways is success dependent on reading the text?
   b) Follow up: What percentage of content comes from reading the text?

6. How prepared do you feel students are to handle complex texts found in post-secondary education and/or the workforce when they graduate from this school?
Appendix I
Case Study One: Kristy
Interview transcription

Interview Transcription
April 14, 2010 at 3:05 pm, Room 184
It is 3:05pm on April 14, 2010. My name is Rachel Leer and I am conducting an interview with Kristy for the case study portion of my thesis project. Thank you Kristy for meeting with me this afternoon.

Rachel: My first question for you is how would you describe the way reading is valued in terms of learning at this school?

Kristy: I do not think that reading is very valued at all here. For kids in the AP track, there is material that we push them to read, but speaking across all the contents in the school, there’s a real lack of value in reading. Teachers are not assigning reading and so kids are not reading. I think it is entirely possible to make it through your time here without actually reading anything and still make passing grades in their classes. It might be because this is a rural area and so we’re just continuing on the value set that has been set before us… carrying on the tradition. Considering the high rate of illiteracy here, it is safe to assume that many parents didn’t learn how to read and they pass that value set onto their kids. And if reading is not valued at home, it is hard to expect reading to be valued here, especially when so many of the teachers here were born and raised in this area. I do not know…does that answer the question?

Rachel: Yes, that’s good. So, would you describe your process in selecting reading assignments given to your classes?
Kristy: When it comes to my AP classes, I follow the set curriculum and I assign them texts that I know will be on the AP test in the spring. That way I know that they are prepared and they’re the ones who are generally more motivated to read anyways. With my other classes – sophomores and juniors – I follow the curriculum that we’ve set and I try to assign readings that I know will catch their interest. I always try to assign a variety of material – from short stories and novels, to journals and articles. I try to vary their reading to try and catch their interest. Of course, when I started filling out the reading logs, I wrote down a lot of test-prep assignments, because we were preparing for the ACT and CATS test. We do a lot of reading of a passage and then answering multiple choice questions or responding to open responses or essays. It is not my favorite thing to assign, but I realize that we need to practice it. But then we moved away from that and we read *Of Mice and Men* and *A Separate Peace*. I enjoy reading novels with students. It is an experience to read something over a longer period of time, seeing students – those who do not give up anyway – actually following the characters and being invested in the story. It requires more dedication to try to read a novel than it does a short story and novels have really been pushed to the wayside. We’re so focused on preparing for tests, that we have just pushed novels out of the way to read shorter, quicker, less time consuming texts. And of course, we do DEAR time, so students have the chance to pick out their own books to read. For some students, it really seems to motivate them, but for other students, DEAR time is just another chance for them to avoid reading.

*Rachel: (follow-up). What are some of your favorite texts to assign?*
Kristy: Well, I love Night by Elie Wiesel, but you know that. It is by far my favorite book of all time and I love teaching it. It raises such significant issues and kids really seem to enjoy it. I do Night with my sophomores and we do a whole unit on WWII and the Holocaust with the Social Studies department. With juniors, I really enjoy reading Of Mice and Men and A Separate Peace. But A Separate Peace is hard to read. Kids enjoy the characters and the problems that the characters deal with in the book, it is just the way the book’s written, that it loses the kids. They’ll give up before they reach the end.

Rachel: I’ll agree, A Separate Peace is definitely hard to read, but if you can make it to the end...

Kristy: And that’s what I’ve found, kids that will stick it out and actually read all the way through to the end really like the ending and they like the way the story ends. Students that do not make it through will quit by chapter four or five. But even then, at least the majority of them will pick up spark notes or something like that and keep up with the book that way. It is not what I prefer, but it is better than nothing. It is the same way with Of Mice and Men. Kids that stick it out end up really liking the book. Kids that give up, I think, really miss out on something. It is sad, but it is true. At any rate, I think those are two books within the curriculum that are more interesting than some of our other options.

Rachel: So, when you select reading assignments, how do you select or devise a strategy to provide students to support reading comprehension?

Kristy: It depends on what we are reading. If it is a novel or a short story, I like to have them do passage journals, where they select a passage from the book or story, write it in
their journal, and then connect it to their own lives. Kids really seem to enjoy that one too. They understand the story better when they are able to make connections with the characters or the content. We also do some visualizing with passage journals. With a strategy like that, it is impressive what some kids can remember.

Rachel: Like D.S. We’re reading a book aloud in my class for independent reading. He sits there with his eyes closed the entire time. I always want to harp on him to open his eyes, but I do not, because every time we stop to discuss, he’s able to talk about everything we just read…and in such detail.

Kristy: Exactly, he is such a neat kid. I miss having him in class. He always had a unique perspective.

Rachel: I agree…granted, he will avoid reading whenever he can and he likes to sit quietly and hope to be ignored, but when he really tries, he’s a very impressive student. Anyways, back to what you were saying.

Kristy: Yes, so, with journal articles or something like that, I do a variety of things. I will generally have them summarize the passage, look at the main idea, and maybe answer some comprehension questions about the text. I try to continue doing some of that since that’s the format for the ACT and CATS tests. When it comes to novels, I’ve found that students really like study guides. They’re not my favorite, but they really seem to help students study for tests. When I take the time to make and give them a study guide, students tend to perform better on tests.
Rachel: And I’m familiar with your tests, your tests are not easy and they are not basic level comprehension question that come straight from the text. Your tests really make students think.

Kristy: That’s what I try to do. With the common assessments that we’re creating this year, we’re trying to move into higher order thinking. But I’ve always tried to create tests that not only ask about the book that focuses on the application and what students have taken away from the reading experience. I get some pretty neat responses too.

Rachel: Speaking of tests, how do you know that students are learning the content that you are intending them to learn from the reading assignments?

Kristy: Well, when we’re reading books or novels, I will give them short quizzes about what they’ve been assigned. The quizzes are pretty specific about the book too, so kids can not easily pass them if they haven’t read it or only read spark notes. But, in my class, students are able to do poorly on quizzes and still manage to make a good grade in the class. They tend to do better on tests than the quizzes. But really, the best way that I know that learning is taking place is from class discussion. I love it when they’ve been assigned to read something and I’ll ask them, “So what did you think of this character’s actions’ or ‘How did you feel when you read that part?’ When the classroom is completely quiet, then I think ‘uh-oh, we need to read that together, go over that again. But when I ask them a question and then six or seven hands go up in the air, and soon no one is raising their hand because every has just joined into the conversation, that’s when I know that real learning has happened and is happening. When kids take the time to really talk and share about what they’re reading, not only do they learn it on a much
deeper level, but they are more motivated to keep on reading. That’s why class discussions are my favorite and I prefer it over tests or quizzes – when it is discussion I know what the kids are thinking and there’s no need for cheating. Cheating is a hard thing to deal with. Kids want to avoid reading to the point that they will cheat any way they can to avoid it. Of course, I just deal with cheating by giving them a zero, but that’s not necessarily the way the rest of the school works.

Rachel: Yes, that’s been my experience. Cheating is rampant in this school and to some degree, there are those who even support student’s decision to cheat.

Kristy: Exactly, which makes it that much harder for me and you – it is much harder to hold students accountable for what they’ve learned when they’re constantly trying to cheat. And thus it is hard to determine if real learning has occurred from an assigned text.

Rachel: Considering what we just talked about, in what ways is success dependent on reading the text?

Kristy: Do you mean in my classroom or the school in general?

Rachel: Either, or both.

Kristy: In the school in general, I do not think success in school is dependent on reading a text at all. I know students who have probably made it through all four years of high school, graduated a solid B student, and never opened a text book, never read a novel, never looked at a journal article. We make it so you can work your way through your
years here, without ever reading a thing. It is a shame really and it is a vicious cycle. Students push teachers not to assign texts to read.

Rachel: I agree, I’ve described the “vicious cycle” in the first my three chapters of my thesis, where students train teachers to teach through power point and by just telling information. They’ve taught us not to assign any reading because we do not want to fight the battle of them not reading. They’ve taught us that it is just easier their way.

Kristy: Exactly, and even the best of us fall prey to it. My juniors have done that to me with writing. I have to push myself to give them writing assignments. They act so terrible whenever I assign something written; sometimes it is just not worth the headache. Granted, I still try, but I find myself assigning writing to them less and less. I do not have as many problems with reading as some other teachers do.

Rachel: Follow up: What percentage of content comes from reading the text? Or do you think that any content that we teach is text-dependent?

Kristy: I do not think that much of what we teach is text-dependent. Like we said, with power points, technology, and group projects, we do not really require students to read in order to learn the content. It can not be reading-dependent if a student can make it all the way through school without actually ever having to read. But, I know that all of the teachers put it out there – we all do. We all have books available and I know that we make recommendations to students. It is there, it is just motivating students to pick something up and invest something in the text. But really, for the school in general, I would say that virtually none of our content is text-dependent. How can it be if we do
not even have enough text books for all of our students? Granted, I feel privileged because I teach English. There’s a level of expectation that students will have to at least be assigned some amount of reading to pass an English class. But even then, I’m sure there are kids who make it through even my class that read very little, if at all. It is hard to be one of the few teachers who are actually trying to get students to read. It is like fighting against a brick wall. I just do the best I can. Like I said, I put it out there, I make it available, I try to make it interesting, but I can not physically make anyone pick up the book and read.

Rachel: How prepared do you feel students are to handle complex texts found in post-secondary education and/or the workforce when they graduate from this school?

Kristy: Content-wise, I think we do a pretty good job preparing our students for college. I think we do as well as anyone else around here. But when it comes to reading, I think they’re in for a serious rude awakening. Without a value placed on reading here, it is a complete turnaround to go to college where so much is reading dependent. That’s why I like to read novels with my classes. I feel like if they can make it through a long text like a novel and comprehend it all the way through, then that better prepares them for the challenging things they’ll have to read in college. But really, students leave here and they do not expect to read. They lost faith in reading in elementary and middle school, so that by the time they get to high school, they do not care anymore. Plus, if you can get all the way through high school without reading, they expect the same to be true of college. But it is not, or at least in my experience, it is not. You have to be able to read to survive in college or to get any sort of a job. I think a lot of our students graduate from here and
come to realize later on, that they should have opened up that book after all, that it would
make their lives easier now.

*Rachel:* Well those are all the questions that I have. Thank you again for meeting with me
this afternoon.

Kristy: Not a problem. If you any more questions, let me know.
Interview Transcription

Date: April 15, 2010
Location: Room 184 at 3:00pm

This is Rachel Leer. I’m conducting this interview with Tammy on Thursday April 15th, 2010 at 3:00pm in room 184. Thank you for participating in this interview Tammy.

Rachel: To get started, how would you describe the way reading is valued in terms of learning at this school?

Tammy: Teachers or students? Either or both? The English teachers value it quite a bit. Not for sure about the other teachers, just because I haven’t heard. But students do not at all. It is like pulling teeth getting them to read. My honors classes are not that bad. They enjoy reading and whatever I put in front of them, they read and they do not complain about it too much, but with my collaborative classes, if you do not read it to them, it doesn’t get read unless you threaten, walking around with discipline forms.

Rachel: Describe your process in selecting reading assignments given to your classes

Tammy: I try to pick things that I think they would be interested in. Sometimes it is harder than others because sometimes, if you’re trying to teach a particular content, it is hard to find something that pertains to a lot of boys. Especially poetry.

Rachel: And our content is pretty lined out here, as to what you teach? What you read? Is not it?

Tammy: Right, I have a couple of choices with the novels. Night of course is a must. You know – blood, shootings, things like that. They love it. But I would never read, you know, Pride and Prejudice, to my classes. I try to – big reading books, big reading
projects. Now the little stuff, I try to pull articles that I think they might be interested in, like about war and stuff. You know, poetry is the hardest, but I mean, with the short stories, I chose to stay away from the girlie short stories and I did the science fiction stuff, because I have mostly boys.

Rachel: Right, you have majority of boys in your classes...you do not have a lot of girls, do you?

Tammy: My seventh period are about it.

Rachel: When you select reading assignments, how do you select or devise a strategy to provide students to support reading comprehension?

Tammy: I try to mix it up because I feel like if I do the same strategy over and over again, they’ll get bored and they’ll learn it and find a way to work around it. I try to mix it up. I do a lot of, my honors kids do a lot of outside reading and then come back and take a quiz. They focus more when they read outside. With my collaborative kids, it is mostly paired or out loud reading. Or if they read it silently, we always do a summary afterwards, to make sure everyone got it.

Rachel: What strategies do you like best or do you think are the most effective?

Tammy: The least effective one is the pairing because they do not read all the time or they do not stay on task.

Rachel: Yeah, we fight that battle here. We have some seriously off-task kiddos.

Tammy: The best one is probably out-loud because they always listen to reading. I also have recordings. They do not necessarily like to listen to the recordings, but they will listen to them. And that’s the difference. So I use my voice and my TV [points to the almost-brand new, flat screen HD TV that is mounted in her room and connects to her
computer]. I put in the CD, for the most part, but I always have to stop it and redirect and ask questions. They hate it, so when I stop using it, they’ll be more willing to do popcorn reading. I do have some kids who are willing to read out-loud. And if I use a strategy that they do not like, then they are more willing to try the other strategy.

Rachel: *How do you know that students are learning the content that you are intending them to learn from the reading assignments?*

Tammy: That’s where I take up their work and just grade it. Quizzes, making them write summaries over what they read. So, not just letting them do it in groups. Making the individual, I mean, “You write me a summary.” Of course, questioning them as they’re reading, that always works.

Rachel: *How much is student success dependent upon reading the text?*

Tammy: Quite a bit, I would say.

Rachel: *For your class, or for the whole school?*

Tammy: For my class it is. I mean, it is English. If they do not understand what they read, then they’re not going to be able to answer the questions. And we probably do more reading than anything because of the CATS test, focuses on reading. So we do a lot of shorter reading assignments. The content focuses around that, so reading is pretty important to be successful in this class.

Rachel: *Do you think that is indicative of what we see in the rest of the school? In other classes? In other content areas? Success is dependent upon reading?*

Tammy: I do not think, not as much. I think teachers tell them what they should know instead of letting them discover it on their own. And I do not think that’s just a Logan County thing, I think that’s pretty much everywhere.
Rachel: What percentage of content comes from reading the text? What percentage of content that students are supposed to learn comes from reading the text, or reading a text, or reading assignments?

Tammy: This one is kind of hard for me to answer. I try to do it half and half – half reading and half writing. But at the same time, everything that they write about, they have to read something before.

Rachel: In English, you kind of have the privilege of it is all dependent on reading…

Tammy: Right, because to write they have to read the prompt, most of the time it is the response to something else. Because for every unit that I have, I try to have reading followed by a writing assignment, but they will not understand the writing assignment until they’ve read.

Rachel: Do you have a lot of instances where things are just grossly wrong because they haven’t taken the time to read?

Tammy: Oh, yeah

Rachel: So what do you do when that happens?

Tammy: Give it back, mark it wrong. Big red X.

Rachel: How prepared do you feel students are to handle complex texts found in post-secondary education and/or the workforce when they graduate from this school?

Tammy: Oh, do I have to be honest on that one?

Rachel: yes, and be honest, say exactly what you think.

Tammy: My honors kids – yes, they’re very high readers, but I have some collaborative kids who just can not read. It is not just…they do not understand that it is not just about reading the words – they can read the words, they can pronounce, maybe better than I can
– but they have no idea what the text is talking about. I feel like it is knowing what you just read and being able to understand it, explain it, connect to it, is what reading is – not just being able to pronounce the words and being able to summarize it. On that level, I do not think they’re prepared, as prepared as they should be.

Rachel: I think that’s a very diplomatic way of saying it, I think.

Tammy: I mean, they’ll read something and they’ll get a multiple choice question…oh what was it? (Reaches for a packet) it was a good example. [Reading a question from the packet after the reading passage.] Packet comes from the KCCTS Reading Test Prep book]. It says, “The narrator’s words, ‘the darkness wrapped about me in a stifling embrace’ is an example of? Alliteration, personification, hyperbole, or simile. And they can not, they couldn’t answer it. That’s not even something they have to read the text for. And I do not know if, well first of all, I wonder if they even remember what personification is. These are words – all four of those choices – are concepts that we’ve spent all year on and they can tell me the definition of each one of those words. They can tell me the definition of personification, of hyperbole, of alliteration, of simile, but they couldn’t tell me what this was an example of based on their reading. Am I making sense?

Rachel: Yes, because when you go out into the real world, you study things in college or you get on the job training skills, they can tell you over and over and over again how to do something. But if you cannot retain it, you cannot apply it, you’re not going to be successful.

Tammy: That’s a good way to put it. They can not apply the information to other things, outside of what they’ve learned it. That’s the biggest problem I’m having. I do not know how to fight it. I guess just keep trying and keep working with them on it.
Appendix K

Fog Readability Passages with Source Annotation

Secondary Textbooks

English II


1. (pg. 18). The setting of a story is the time and place in which the events occur. The place can be real or imaginary and the time can be a particular time of day, a season, a period of history, or even the future. Setting plays an important part in some stories, having a major effect on what happens to the characters. In other stories, the settings are only backdrops. In *The Interlopers* the setting serves as the scene of a key conflict between man and nature. A theme is a central idea or message in a work of literature. It is…

2. (pg. 494). Strategies for building vocabulary. When you read and write you need to be aware of both the implied meanings of words and the literal meanings of words. An awareness of connotations lead to deeper understanding in your reading and better word choice in your writing. Go beyond the literal meaning. Be sensitive to any emotional meanings of words a writer may have intended. Writers have to bring a particular attitude or tone to their stories. This can be done through their choice of words. The connotations of a word can reveal the writer’s opinion or reveal what a character thinks.

3. (page 820). Figurative language, a few good words. The difference between literal and figurative language is similar to the difference between the denotation, or the dictionary definition, of a word and its connotations, or mental associations. For example, think about the expression, “caught between a rock and a hard place.” Taken literally, the phrase doesn’t mean much. It only makes sense as a way of expressing what feels like to be stuck in a bad situation. Like symbols, figures of speech, another term for figurative language, say a lot with a few well-chosen words. Here are some common figures of speech. A...
1. (page 6-7). The strategies you need to become an active reader are already within your grasp. In fact, you use them every day to make sense of the images and the events in your world. And you really exercise them when you are watching a television program or a movie! Take a look at this photograph. The four strategies shown here – Clarify, Question, Predict, and Evaluate – are among those you can use to understand and interpret the situation portrayed. These, and other reading strategies listed on the next page, can help you interact with literature as well. Following are specific reading strategies…

2. (page 250). Exploring word histories can help you remember words’ meanings and expand your understanding of the English language. For example, in the excerpt on the right, Edgar Allan Poe, used the word grotesque to mean, “Having a bizarre, fantastic appearance,” and the history of the word sheds a good deal of light on how it came to have that meaning. The adjective grotesque has been part of the English language for about 400 years. During the Renaissance when ancient Roman buildings were being excavated in Italy, the Italians used the word grotte, meaning “caves,” to refer to the subterranean chambers uncovered....

3. (page 547) Contemporary American writers are more diverse than ever before, so it is difficult to generalize about characteristics of their writing. As you read the selections in this part of Unit Seven, however, you’ll notice differences in tone from modernist works. The chart and text that follow explore the distinguishing features of tone in contemporary literature. Modernist literature is, as a rule, utterly humorless. Flannery O’Connor, writing in the 1950’s, was one of the first to introduce a new kind of humor in American literature. Her characters, such as Mr. Shiftlet in “The Life You Save May Be Your Own” are...

Earth Space Science


1. (page 9). When you place a hot cooking pot in a cooler place, does the pot become hotter as it stands? No, it will always get cooler. This example illustrates a scientific law that states that warm objects always become cooler when they are placed in cooler surroundings. A scientific law describes a process in nature that
2. can be tested by repeated experiments. A law allows predictions to be made about how a system will behave under a wide range of conditions. However a law does not explain how a process takes place. In the example of the hot cooking pot, nothing...

3. (page 407). When Earth’s gravity is the only force acting on an object, the object is said to be in free-fall. Free-fall acceleration is directed toward the center of the earth. In the absence of air resistance, all objects near earth’s surface accelerate at the same rate regardless of their mass. Why do all objects have the same free-fall acceleration? Newton’s Second Law states acceleration depends on mass and force. A heavy object has a greater gravitational force than a light object. However, it is harder to accelerate a heavy object than a light object because the heavy object has more mass.

4. (page 831) Reducing the use of energy and products can cut down on pollution. Many people believe that the best solution to the problem of pollution is to reduce our overall consumption. If less energy is used, then less pollution is generated. Turning off lights and lowering thermostats are two simple ways to conserve energy. Car pooling or buying a car with higher than average gas mileage is another way to conserve energy. Some people conserve water by reusing rinse water from dishes and laundry to water garden and lawns. This way they use less water so less energy is required to...

**Integrated Social Studies**


1. (page 7). A government is the ruling authority for a community. Any organization that has the power to make and enforce laws and decisions for its member acts as a government. For hundreds of years, people have formed governments. The earliest Native Americans had tribal councils. Thomas Hobbes, an English political thinker during the 1600’s, believed that without government, life would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Hobbes claimed that human beings naturally compete for territory, resources, and power. If each of us could do just as we pleased, fighting would be common and survival would depend on strength and cunning.

2. (page 315). Just as most states are divided into counties, counties are often divided into smaller political units. In the New England states these units are called towns, like the town of Sudbury. In man other states, especially in the Midwest, they
3. are called townships. Still smaller areas within towns are townships may be incorporated into villages. Town, township, and village governments, like those of cities and counties, receive their authority from the state. The relationship between town or township governments and their surrounding counties varies. In New England, town governments handle the needs of most small communities, while counties are mainly...

4. (page 624-625). The United Nations has encouraged the spread of democracy and human rights throughout the world. So has the United States, which has made these causes an important part of its foreign policy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, only about 12% of the world’s people lived in a democracy. By 1950 there were 22 democratic nations with 31% of the world’s population. Over the next 50 years, democracy grew rapidly, especially after 1980. By 2001 nearly 60% of the world’s population in 120 countries lived under conditions of democracy. A publication called *Freedom in the World*...

### Foods


1. (page 24). When should you think about your health? Some people wait until they develop health problems to ask what they should have done differently. Today many people prefer to do their best to stay healthy. The word wellness is commonly used to explain this approach. Wellness is a person’s total health, including physical, mental, and emotional well-being. With wellness, you’re not just free from illness, you are practicing preventative care that helps you stay at your peak of good health. Wellness is a philosophy that encourages people to take responsibility for their own health before they become ill. It is reflected...

2. (page 421). Fruits can be prepared with minimal effort. Whether your peel fruits or not, always wash them first under cool, running water. The running water provides a scrubbing action that loosens and washes away dirt and micro-organisms that can cause illness. Thick skin fruits can be brushed. Avoid soaking fruits in water since flavor and nutrient can be lost. Have you ever wondered why some fruits are shiny, particularly apples and oranges? Some fruits are waxed to make them look more attractive and to prevent moisture loss so they can last longer. The waxes, which are on the FDA list of...

3. (page 718-719). Breakfast is a light meal in the southwest-Asian diet often consisting of Labneh, yogurt cheese on a flatbread. Marcook, a dome-shaped flat bread, is baked on the surface of a rounded pan. Taboun, a thick Palestinian loaf, is traditionally baked on hot rocks in a round oven of the same name. A Lebanese...
4. favorite is the Zittar topped Manakeesh. The midday meal is the largest. If often starts with Mezza, or appetizers. Common choices includes hummus, pureed Garbanzo Beans seasoned with Tahini and sometimes garlic and Baba Ghannoush, a similar puree of eggplant. Both are served with strips of pita-bread.

**Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp. (JROTC)**


1. (page 7). Center rank insignia on the shoulder loop 5/8 inch from the outside shoulder seam for all cadet officers. The unit crest will be worn centered ¼ inch above the HU HUD or MU for ¼ or ¼ above the name plate for all cadets. When worn, center special JROTC team pins or arches between the bottom of the pocket flap and the bottom of the pocket. If more than one team pin is worn, space them 1/8 of an inch between each arch for male cadets. Male black oxford shoes are authorized for wear for all males. Place the ROTC...

2. (page 30). Step two: take responsibility for the judgmental belief and its results. Acknowledge that you have created this reality through your beliefs. You have co-created the situation with the other person in that situation. It takes two to create a relationship problem. Allow that idea permeate your being. Be willing to accept full responsibility for your beliefs and actions that flowed out from those beliefs. Step three: acknowledge and embrace your judgmental belief. In your mind, you’ve been making the person or situation wrong or bad. You’ve been judging. That’s part of being human. To create harmony, you must release your...

3. (page 39). Curl-ups. Conduct this event on a flat, clean surface, preferably with a mat. Start cadets in a lying position on their backs with their knees up, so their feet are flat on the floor and are about twelve inches from their buttocks. Cadets should have their arms crossed with their hands placed on opposite shoulders and their elbows held close to the chest throughout the exercise. The feet are to be held by a partner at the instep. At the command, “Ready, go” the cadets raise the trunks of their bodies, curling up to touch the elbows to the thighs.

**Journalism**


1. (page 3). The information age has dawned with a bang. Millions, soon to be billions, of people around the planet are electronically linked, building virtual communities with little regard for international boundaries. Fiercely independent,
2. sometimes chaotic, always resistant to government regulation, the Internet appears to have changed communication as much as any development in history. In its impact on the way humans communicate, the Internet ranks with the invention of moveable type, the advent of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and television, and the creation of satellite technology, or so it seems. The exact meaning of this development is unknown to anyone. Journalists...

3. (page 290-291). An editorial page frequently will carry a number of columns written by students - some serious, some amusing. Unlike editorials, which are the voice of the newspaper, these editorial columns, or commentaries, express the personal viewpoints of individual identified student writers. A column requires the same amount of hard work and research before writing it than an editorial does and columnists must be fair and accurate in the information they use. Editorial columns can express a diversity of opinions and often are written in an informal, personal style. In some cases, columns may be written by one or more journalists...

4. (page 450). Professor Ann Auman of the University of Hawaii surveyed newspaper editors across the country about which skills they considered important in the people they hired. As these excerpts from her report show, the results tell something interesting about modern-day journalism. Newspaper editors often complain that journalism students can not spell or write decent headlines, can not locate Puerto Rico on a map, and do not bother to check even the phone book to make sure a store’s name is even spelled right. But at the same time, editors say they need people who are computer whizzes. What should an aspiring journalist focus on?

**Health and Physical Education**


1. (page 4). Although it may not be easy to see, you are in a constant state of change. Think about how your knowledge and skills have expanded in the past few years. What new relationships have you formed? What kind of adult will you become? Many of your answers depend on the choices and decisions that you make about your health. If you were to take a snapshot of your current state of health, how would it look? How are you feeling? Are you alert and well-rested? Are you ready to take on whatever challenges the day holds in store for you?

2. (page 278-279). Families teach children values, or beliefs and feelings, about what is important. Developing a good value system helps children know right
3. from wrong. It helps them make decisions that will affect their future and turns them into good citizens who follow the laws and contribute in a positive way to society. Does your family have certain traditions, such as spending the Fourth of July at the lake, or celebrating Kwanza at the end of the year? It is through traditions, such as these, that families pass their culture onto their children. By learning about their cultural background, children develop an...

4. (page 776-777). When you suspect someone has swallowed a poison, look for and save the container of the suspected poison. Then do the following. Call the nearest poison control center, a 24-hour hotline that provides emergency medical advice about treating poisoning victims. Such centers are part of a nationwide network that has been set up in and around large cities. A toll-free number for the poison control center in your locality may be listed in your local telephone directory. This number should be posted in a highly visible place in your home. Be prepared to give information about the victim and the…

Pre-Calculus


1. (page 2). Historically algebra was used to represent problems with symbols (algebraic models) and solve them by reducing the solution to algebraic manipulation of symbols. This technique is still important today. Graphing calculators are used today to approach problems by representing them with graphs (graphical models) and solve them with numerical and graphical techniques of the technology. We begin with basic properties of real numbers and introduce absolute value, distance formulas, midpoint formulas, and write equations of circles. Slope of a line is used to write standard equations for lines and applications involving linear equations are discussed. Equations and inequalities are solved...

2. (page 454). We now arrive at the best opportunity in the pre-calculus curriculum for you to try your hand at constructing analytic proofs: trigonometric identities. Some are easy and some can be quite challenging, but in every case the identity itself frames your work with a beginning and ending. The proof consists of filling in what lies between. The strategy for proving an identity is very different from the strategy for solving an equation, most notably in the very first step. Usually the first step in solving an equation is to write down the equation. If you do this with an identity...
3. (page 815). Progress in mathematics occurs gradually and without much fanfare in the early stages. The fanfare occurs much later, after the discoveries and innovations have been cleaned up and put into perspective. Calculus is certainly a case in point. Most of the ideas in this chapter pre-date Newton and Leibniz. Others were solving calculus problems as far back as Archimedes of Syracuse, long before calculus was “discovered.” What Newton and Leibniz did was to develop the rules of the game, so that derivatives and integrals could be computed algebraically. Most importantly, they developed what has come to be called the Fundamental Theorem...

Computer Application


1. (page 1). In this activity, you will practice how to: 1) create and save a Word document. 2) retrieve a saved document. 3) save an edited document with a new name (save as). Using word processing software to create documents has become a common task for millions of people. One of the most simple tasks it can do is also one of the greatest benefits of using such software – saving an existing document with a new name. Before word processing software, one would have to re-create an entire document, even if it required just a few small changes from the original version.

2. (page 161). Create an admission ticket for an event. Admission tickets are designed to communicate information to ticket holders. Whether it is a play or a professional football game, admission tickets are important documents that are carefully designed by event coordinators. In this project, you will use your desktop publishing software to create and design an admission ticket to an event of your choice. Typically, admission tickets are small rectangular pieces of cardstock paper designed to have a portion torn off by the ticket taker upon entering an event. Admission tickets usually include the name, date, time, location, seat number, and price of...

3. (page 402). In this activity you will practice how to use a spreadsheet as a database to store and organize data. Going to college will be one of the biggest decisions you will ever make. Many factors have to be considered and researched to ensure that the college you choose to attend is “right for you.” Among these factors, location, tuition costs, and your decided major are the most important. In this activity, you will use a spreadsheet to create a database of ten possible colleges
4. you can attend. Create a new spreadsheet. Note: Unless otherwise states, the font should be set...

Post-Secondary Education Textbooks

Sociology 100


1. (page 3). What is unique about the perspective of sociology? The starting point for sociology is the predictability and recurrence of social behavior. Sociologists do not concentrate on the idiosyncratic behavior of individuals, but on the patterns of behavior individuals share with others in their group or society. Sociologists are interested in the patterns of social relationships referred to as social structures. The average person tends to explain human behavior in individualistic or personal terms: A young man goes to war to prove his patriotism; a woman divorces her husband to develop her potential; a college student commits suicide to escape depression.

2. (page 277). In what ways are men and women biologically different? The obvious biological differences between the sexes include distinctive muscle and bone structure and fatty tissue composition. The differences in reproductive organs, however, are much more important, because they result in certain facts of life: only men can impregnate; only women can secrete milk for nursing infants. In addition, the genetic composition of the body cells of men and women is different. All human beings have twenty-three pairs of chromosomes (the components of cells that determine heredity), but one of those pairs is sex distinctive. Males have an X and Y...

3. (page 549). The three theories of social movements just discussed are more complementary than they are mutually exclusive. Relative deprivation theory emphasizes discontent from a social-psychological, or micro, viewpoint. Value-added theory implies discontent (within the concept of structural strain) but focuses on the operation of several factors at the macro level of analysis. Value-added theory, also at the macro level, implies the need for resources through its mobilization factor, but resource mobilization theory is needed to spell out this contributing factor to the rise of social movements. Social movement theory in the future will likely encompass both preexisting structure and spontaneity, both...

Psychology 100

1. (page 3). Science involves two types of research: Basic research, which reflects the quest for knowledge purely for its own sake, and applied research, which is designed to solve specific, practical problems. For psychologists, most basic research examines how and why people behave, think, and feel the way they do. Basic research may be carried out in laboratories or real-world settings, with human participants or other species. Psychologists who study other species usually attempt to discover principles that ultimately will shed light on human behavior, but some study animal behavior for its own sake. In applied research, psychologists often use basic scientific…

2. (page 333). To answer questions like these, researchers administer diverse measures of mental abilities and then correlate them with one another. They reason that if certain tests are correlated highly with one another – if they “cluster” mathematically – then performance on these tests probably reflects the same underlying mental skill. Further, if the tests within cluster correlate highly with one another but much less with tests in other clusters, then these various test clusters probably reflect different mental abilities. Thus researchers hope to determine the number of test clusters and to use this information to infer the nature of the underlying abilities. When…

3. (page 659). Many psychological factors affect whether we behave aggressively in specific situations. From gang-violence to rape and war, people may employ several types of self-justification to make it psychologically easier to harm other people. Aggressors may blame the victim for imagined wrongs or otherwise convince themselves that the victim “deserves it.” They may also dehumanize their victims, as the guard in the Stanford Prison study did when he began to view the prisoners as “cattle.” Our attribution of intentionality and degree of empathy also affect how we respond to provocation. When we believe that someone’s negative behavior toward us was intentional…

Biology 113


1. (page 2). Biologists have become increasingly dazzled by the diversity and complexity of cells as advances in microscopy have made it possible to examine cells at higher magnifications. The basic conclusion made in the 1800s is intact, however: As far as is known, all organisms are made of cells. Today a cell is defined as a highly organized compartment that is bounded by a think flexible structure called a plasma membrane and that contains concentrated chemicals in
2. an aqueous (watery) solution. The chemical reactions that sustain life take place inside cells. More cells are also capable of reproducing by dividing – effect, by…

3. (page 631). The green algae have long been hypothesized to be closely related to land plants on the basis of several key morphological traits. Both green algae and land plants have chloroplasts that contain the photosynthetic pigments chlorophyll a and b and the accessory pigment b-carotene as well as similar arrangements of the internal, membrane-bound sacs called thylakoids. The cell walls of green algae and land plants are similar in composition, both groups synthesize starch as a storage product in their chloroplasts and their sperm and peroxisomes are similar in structure and composition. (Recall from Chapter 7 that peroxisomes are organelles in…

4. (page 1258). Research programs collective known as bioprospecting focus on assessing bacteria, archaea, plants, fungi, and frogs, as novel sources of drugs or ingredients in consumer products. Bioprospecting has benefited from the recent explosion of genetic and phylo-genetic information, because biologists can now search genomes from a wide array of species to find alleles with desired functions. Recent advances in biotechnology facilitated the development of a new painkiller from the paralyzing sting of tropical cone snails. And blood anticoagulant from the saliva of vampire bats. Agriculture scientists are preserving diverse strains of crop plants in seed banks and continue to use wild…

**Western Civilization 120**


1. (page 3). Although science has given us more precise methods for examining prehistory, much of our understanding of early humans still relies on considerable conjecture. Given the rate of new discoveries, the following account of the current theory of early human life might well be changed in a few years. As the great British archaeologist Louis Leakey reminded us years ago, “Theories on prehistory and early man constantly change as new evidence comes to light.” The earliest humanlike creatures – known as hominids – lived in Africa some three to four million years ago. Called Australopithecines, or “southern ape-men” by their discoverers, they flourished…

2. (page 441) Whether Mughal rule had much effect on the lives of ordinary Indians seems somewhat problematic. The treatment of women is a good example. Women had traditionally played an active role in Mongol tribal society – many
3. actually fought on the battlefield alongside the mend – and Babur and his successors often relied on the women in their families for political advice. Women from aristocratic families were often awarded honorific titles, received salaries, and were permitted to own land and engage in business. Women at court sometimes received an education, and Emperor Akbar reportedly established a girls’ school at Fatehpur Sikri to provide...

4. (page 879). There is no reason to doubt that cultural factors have contributed to the economic success of these societies. Habits such as frugality, industriousness, and subordination of individual desires have all played a role in their governments’ ability to concentrate on the collective interest. Whether such values should be specifically identified with Confucianism, however, is a matter of debate. After all, until recently, mainland China did not share in the economic success of its neighbors despite a long tradition of espousing Confucian values. In fact, some historians in recent years have maintained that it was precisely those Confucian values that hindered...

Political Science 110


1. (page 4) An annual nationwide study of college freshman found in 2003 that only 34% said “keeping up with politics” was an important priority for them. As shown in Figure 1.1, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, there has been some resurgence of political interest among college students, but nevertheless remains far below what researchers found in the 1960s. Furthermore, political interest among young people as a whole is quite low. In 2000, the National Election Study asked a nationwide sample about their general level of interest in politics. Only 26% of young people interviewed said they followed politics..

2. (page 346). Equality at the polls, in housing, on the job, in education, and in all other facets of American life has long been the dominant goal of the African-American groups. The oldest and largest of these groups is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It argued and won the monumental Brown vs. Board of Education case in 1954, in which the Supreme Court held that segregated schools were unconstitutional. Although the NAACP has won many victories in principle, equality in practice has been much slower in coming. Today, civil rights groups continue to push for more effective...
3. (pg 688). Growth in subnational government employment has proceeded at a pace exceeding that of the federal government for most of this century, as we learned in Chapter 15. Most of this growth has been driven by citizen demand for more government services. Although most American voters want their elected representatives to control the size of government, voters also want government to provide them with more and better programs. Has the reform and professionalization of subnational government in the past generation made any difference for taxpayers? In most cases, it has not resulted in smaller government. By its very nature, legislative professionalism…
Appendix L

Human Subjects Review Board

Letter of Approval

Rachel E. Hanger
School of Teacher Education
WKU

In future correspondence, please refer to HS10-115, December 18, 2009

Rachel E. Hanger:

Your research project, Examination of Reading Assignments in Secondary Classrooms, was reviewed by the HSRB and it has been determined that risks to subjects are: (1) minimized and reasonable, and that (2) research procedures are consistent with a sound research design and do not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk. Reviewers determined that: (1) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (2) selection of subjects is equitable; and (3) the purposes of the research and the research setting is acceptable to subjects’ welfare and producing desired outcomes, that indications of coercion or obligation are absent, and that participation is voluntary.

1. In addition, the HSRB found that you need to orient participants as follows: (1) signed informed consent is required; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data; (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects.

This project is therefore approved at the Full Board Review Level until May 15, 2010.

2. Please note that the institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subjects review, your application, and this approval, are maintained in the Office of Sponsored Programs at the above address. Please report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. A Continuing Review protocol will be sent to you in the future to determine the status of the project. Also, please use the stamped approval forms to ensure participants of compliance with The Office of Human Research Protections regulations.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Mooney, M.S.T.M.
Compliance Coordinator
Office of Sponsored Programs
Western Kentucky University

cc: HSR file number Hanger HS10-115

The Spirit Makes the Master
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