READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES
FOR ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES
FOR ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

By
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Master of Arts in Education

This graduate project reviews research on the reading process and additional variables that cause emergent readers to fall into the 4th grade slump and consequently develop substantial difficulties with reading comprehension as adolescents. The project consists of nine figures, which together offer a guideline for general education teachers and administrators wishing to improve adolescent reading comprehension in the content areas. This project was created for teachers in English only classrooms who need to modify instruction at the tier one level for adolescent students with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension. Additionally, since the literature reviewed attributes additional outside variables to difficulties in reading comprehension, this project specifically addresses the needs of difficult populations including low SES and ELL students. The project offers practical assessments and instructional modifications to the curriculum. This guideline addresses the four reading strategies reviewed in the research: the reading process, academic/oral language, independent reading, and motivation/engagement.
When used over time, these strategies become automatic reading skills that prepare adolescent readers for deeper comprehension in content area reading.
Chapter 1
Rationale

As a Reading Specialist and classroom teacher, I have worked with a variety of language and literacy issues across the grades from Kindergarten through eighth grade. In the classroom, I have observed many students make almost seamless progress through the reading process. These students read with delight and ease. Still, I have also observed many students labor daily over reading struggling to make even the smallest gains. After years of experience teaching reading, I want to better understand the reading process and how it is different for “good readers” and “poor readers” (Weaver, 2009, p. 62) during the emergent reader stage. Specifically, why do some students make typical progress as emergent readers and others do not? Furthermore, if students struggle to learn to read during the emergent reading stage, will they subsequently fall into the “4th grade slump” (Chall, 1983)? Then, once a student is an adolescent with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension, what are the best intervention strategies?

Teaching first grade in a traditional classroom setting has caused me to reflect on early indicators that identify poor readers in the reading process and those who will eventually become adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension. In my class, I quickly noticed a connection between reading, and speech and oral language. For example, the three lowest readers were all in the process of being referred for Speech and Language Services. These three also struggled daily to follow classroom and playground rules, often fighting and at times causing physical harm to themselves or other students. Teaching these struggling emergent readers caused me great concern. I wanted to intervene and prevent the inevitable up hill struggle I could foresee when they
eventually hit the 4th grade slump. Yet, I knew reading instruction would not necessarily prevent them from continuing to struggle because they still had behavior and speech and language issues as well as challenging home lives which would affect their future progress. Preventing the 4th grade slump for poor readers is complicated since there are several variables affecting their success inside and outside school.

National standardized testing has targeted this 4th grade slump through extended reading and writing assessments now given in fourth grade. Although the national average showed a slight improvement with the average reading score increasing from 217 to 219 in 2002, scores have not changed in the past 5 years (US Department of Education National Report Card). Since growth occurred during new testing implementations, progress may indicate possible biases regarding testing reliability and not any true impact in the 4th grade slump. Furthermore, the national average in reading scores from 1992 to 2011 has seen little impact from the implementation of the NCLB accountability movement. If educational researcher Chall brought national attention to reading and the 4th grade slump in 1983 and again in 1990, then why is this reading issue still a national problem?

In my experience of teaching upper elementary and middle school students to read, I have observed that these readers lacked effective and efficient reading habits and rarely used reading strategies. I have observed that most upper grade teachers focus solely on teaching content with the false assumption that older students are good readers. When I provide reading intervention to upper grade students, I have to explicitly teach reading strategies in order for them to learn the content. While successful readers
automatically use reading strategies until they become habits, struggling readers need still need reading strategy instruction.

In my experience across the grade levels, I have observed more reading strategies available and currently being used with emergent readers. Yet, based on my experience, many struggling readers who fall into the 4th grade slump still need reading strategies.

My interest in adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension comes from my own personal struggle with reading. As an emergent reader, several outside variables caused me to fall into the 4th grade slump. I grew up in a low socio-economic-status (SES) community and had little access to high interest literature. I also had significant health problems and always missed a lot of school. Although I was a capable student, my high absenteeism and low SES quickly positioned me as a poor reader as early as first grade. Although I began going to reading intervention in third grade, I did not identify myself as a poor reader until grade when my best friend’s brother (a first grader) pointed out that we were reading the same basal reader. From then on, I hated reading because it shamed me; I felt dumb.

In junior high school, I started becoming a good reader because I no longer identified myself as a poor reader. I spent the summer before seventh grade with my Aunt and Uncle. They did not have a TV, so we spent the summer reading and going out doors. My aunt and uncle did not see the twelve-year-old Julie who was convinced that she was dumb and never going to be good at anything. They saw me as an amazing kid and encouraged me to work hard for my dreams. Their encouragement changed the way I saw myself and made me believe I was smart and capable of achieving success. When school started in the fall, my school librarian gave book talks that further peaked my interest in
reading. Soon I loved reading and I read constantly. After so many home run book experiences, I went from needing reading intervention in sixth grade to all GATE classes in eighth grade.

My experiences have shown me that many students who are labeled as poor readers could be excellent students under different circumstances. I want to explore the psychosocial outside influences that position emergent readers as either good readers or poor readers, such as, identity, discourse, access to literature and other issues I am yet to discover. I also want to explore research based reading intervention for adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension.

This graduate project reviews research on the reading process for emergent readers and the additional variables which cause emergent readers to fall into the 4th grade slump and consequently develop substantial difficulties with reading comprehension as adolescents. Upon reviewing the following educational theories and research, I created a four-strategy reading comprehension guide for teachers of adolescents with significant difficulties in reading comprehension. This guide is designed for general education middle and high school teachers who need instructional modifications in order to teach reading strategies to adolescent students in the content areas.
Chapter 2  
Literature Review

In this chapter, I present research and theories that will evaluate different perspectives of the reading process. I then examine how the reading process differs for good readers and poor readers and how consequently poor readers fall into the 4th grade slump and become adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension. Finally, I provide research on strategies to address the needs of adolescent readers with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension.

In the recent decade, educators in the U.S. have experienced a pendulum swing in reading instruction. Under President Bush’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies, the first decade of the millennium narrowed the curriculum by defining reading as a set of isolated skills. Although NCLB’s emphasis on assessment and accountability did improve national reading scores, there still remains little overall improvement in fourth grade scores. In recent years under a new administration, many aspects of NCLB remain, however, many schools are looking for a different approach to reading that will prevent the 4th grade slump and better prepare students for the academic language required in content area reading.

Educational researcher, Jean Chall, first coined the phrase ‘4th grade slump’ in her book, Stages of Reading Development (1983). According to Chall, this slump occurs when students fail to transition from earlier stages of learning to read (decoding and fluency) to the fourth grade stage of reading to learn (e.g., science, social studies). According to Chall (1983), while in early stages, the reading task is to “master print” (p.21), the fourth grade task is to “master ideas” (p.22). Chall attributed this decline in
reading achievement to a lack of proficiency in earlier stages. Readers must master earlier stages with sophisticated decoding and fluency skills in order to be able to read content area reading. Chall also noted though that many students are able to decode fluently, but still fall into the slump. For these students, she offered that fluency and decoding are not sufficient skills, but students must also possess a mature vocabulary and background knowledge in order to comprehend the concepts they encounter while reading (Chall, 1983).

Students that successfully make the fourth grade transition posses the minimum level of functional literacy required to read and write in our modern society (Chall, 1983). Currently, illiteracy in the U.S. is rare with the number of people exhibiting the ability to read and write at a basic level steadily increasing over the past century (Krashen, 2004). This increase in basic literacy, however, fails to meet the recent demand for more complex levels of reading and writing. In the U.S., 30% of fourth graders and 60% of high school students score below basic levels of reading (Goldman, 2012). Without intervention, these students will become a part of the approximately 90 million Americans who lack a fourth grade level of academic language to be able to read and write well enough to compete in the contemporary work force (Goldman, 2012).

The Reading Process

Contrasting perspectives on reading. How do typical students learn to read? What is the essence of the reading process? Of course the answer depends on one’s political views. There are different answers to the question, “What is reading”? For the past decade, the federal government has instituted political, economic, and educational policies under NCLB based on a part to whole definition of reading as a set of separate
skills to be mastered. In contrast, other definitions maintain that reading is a whole to part meaning making process.

In 2000, the Senate commissioned a National Reading Panel (NRP) to investigate reading. This report investigated reading as a set of 5 separate skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Implicit in the evaluation of the separate skills of reading was a definition of reading as a separate set of 5 skills to be mastered. Consequently, the NPR report became the basis for enacted policies under NCLB, such as the Reading First Initiative, which mandated skill based reading instruction.

A skills approach to reading instruction requires the mastery of separate reading skills in sequential order. The first skill is letter-sound relationships and graphic cues (phonics and phonemic awareness). When students learn to read solely focusing on graphic cues, they learn that reading is hierarchal with certain sounds learned first, sounds are learned before words, and meaning is a byproduct of the decoding process at the word level. This model assumes that meaning and comprehension become automatic once students develop sufficiency fluency with decoding.

Although schools under NCLB instituted strict adherence to this program, the final Impact Study found no advantage to teaching reading skills separately (National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2009). They did however find “there was no consistent pattern of effects over time in the impact estimate for reading instruction in grade one or in reading comprehension” (Weaver, xvi, 2009). So, even when first graders mastered separate skills for reading under the Reading First Initiative, this form of instruction did not produce gains in reading comprehension.
Furthermore, if comprehension is automatic once a student can decode, then why do many adolescent readers decode fluently yet lack comprehension with content area reading? One reason would be because a part to whole definition of reading fails to consider background knowledge and context. For example, try to read the following from a user manual:

“You can store a value in a user-defined variable in one statement and then refer to it later in another statement.” (MySQL, 20103)

Although you were probably able to accurately decode all of the words, you probably read with little meaning or comprehension because you lacked the background knowledge and context for full meaning and comprehension.

Political and public accountability policies lower the level of learning in order to increase testing reliability and appeal to a public and political audience that easily understands isolated objective measures of growth. In their case study of “successful” 3rd grade bilingual Open Court classrooms, Pancheco (2010) observed that standardized testing had lowered the level of learning in the curriculum. What counts as reading instruction in these classrooms was narrowly defined to align with standardized tests. The Open Court curriculum offered limited texts, world views, and bilingual/biliterate opportunities for this bilingual school. Thus, in order to adhere to new accountability measures that test discrete skills, scripted programs like Open Court isolate reading into a set of systematic skills for daily instruction, which reduces reading comprehension to a number of obscure understandings. Literacy presented as obscure understandings caused lower levels of understanding, meaning, and comprehension (Wilson, Martens & Arya, 2005, p. 622). NCLB used these isolated measurements not because they reflect literacy
achievement, but because isolating literacy skills increased testing reliability and reported results in a numerical format that was easily understood by the public and political policy makers (Pancheco, 2010; Wilson et al., 2005).

Instead of advancing student achievement, NCLB has actually stagnated the development of higher order thinking skills. Since critical thinking skills cannot be tested, NCLB’s test-based curriculum lowered the level of thinking by emphasizing performance-based input-output instruction. Researchers Donnor and Shockley (2010) examined the current level of proficiency required for high-tier employment and the skills needed for knowledge in a global economy. Their analysis found that standardized tests did not align with skills needed in a global economy (social skills, complex problem solving, creative thinking, engineering, technology, and leadership). Instead of teaching students critical thinking skills, researchers found the test-driven curriculum to be irrelevant as it only measured literacy achievement according to information retrieval. Donnor and Shockley (2010) concluded that by aligning the curriculum with basic skills being tested, this input-out-put student performance system has lowered the level of thinking.

Traditional language and literacy programs can be characterized by skill building and error correction (Krashen, 2004). In skill building, students are given sequenced systematic instruction in order to learn rules for words and language structures. Students then participate in repetitive drills and exercises (output practice) in order to make the rules automatic. Errors are corrected so students can adjust their understanding of the rules accordingly (Krashen, 2004). In this way, traditional language and literacy instruction makes acquisition merely a set of isolated skills, while reading for meaning
develops strategies for authentic, highly contextualized, and meaningful language and literacy skills.

Researchers conducting eye movement research found that reading for meaning increased word identification and recall. Smith (1975) studied reader’s eye fixations and found that the brain’s ability to recognize words increases with the relatedness of the words. In ¼ of a second, the brain can identify 2-3 unrelated words (“can’t well this”) or 4-5 related words (“this frog can’t jump well”). Therefore, as these examples prove, readers do not need sequential isolated reading instruction, but are more successful when using multiple strategies and reading for meaning and comprehension.

Reading for meaning is a comprehensive whole to part view of the reading process. In this transactional meaning making process, the reader uses all 3 cueing systems (graphic, syntactic and semantics) in order to gain meaning from the text. The reader is making meaning from the moment s/he is introduced to the text. In contrast to the skills based approach, meaning in the transactional approach is the result of on going transactions between the reader and the text. This perspective of the reading process can best be labeled as the Sociopsycholinguistic Reading Process, in which meaning is the result of individual interpretation (schemas) and readers are social beings that share meaning through language.

The 3 cueing systems (graphic, syntactic, and semantic) in the reading process are not learned sequentially because readers use them simultaneously (Weaver, 2009). For example, when readers are predicting, they are using syntax, semantics, and graphophonic cues. Even emergent readers instinctively know they can rely on multiple cues to gain meaning from a text. When trying to read an unknown word, these readers
will often substitute similar words based on the letters graphics and the sentences’ syntax and semantics.

The redundancy model of the reading process posits that comprehension does not need to be taught after mastery of decoding and fluency because comprehension is a part of the reading process and is supported by decoding and fluency. They are not separate skills, but mutually support and reinforce the reading process. For example, when readers decode, they are also connecting their schemas to the language of the text. In this way, the reading process does not occur in separate sequential skills that are part to whole, but rather a “whole to part, top to bottom, deep to surface, and inside out (from the reader to the text)” (Weaver, p.36, 2009). The various aspects of reading (letter-sound relationships, words/text, context, schemas and vocabulary) directly and indirectly simultaneously support each other in the readers ongoing comprehension (Weaver, 2009).

Readers construct meaning based on schemas, or experiences, beliefs and prior knowledge. In the reading process, the writer’s meaning is not inherent at the word level in the text, but rather, it is the reader who while transacting with the text constructs meaning based on his/her schema. For example, when reading “restaurant” the reader will identify a type based on his/her past experiences. Thus, the writers intended meaning is not understood by decoding the word, but the reader has transacted with the text and constructed his/her own meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978). Goodman referred to this as “personal text” where the reader’s meaning is parallel, but not equal to, the original text (Goodman, 94). When readers construct meaning based on their schema, it is never the same as the writer’s because both people have different schemas.

**The Reading Process in Emergent Readers**
Language and literacy. Emergent readers acquire language and literacy skills within the context of a larger developmental reading process. Chall (1983) described the 20 year progression required in order to move from emergent reading skills to the most complex. The six stages are described according to the age and grade level of the reader. Chall also describes not only the 4th grade slump (stage 3), but roadblocks that can occur at any given stage to prevent a reader from successfully transitioning to the next stage.

According to Chall (1983), from birth until the beginning of formal schooling (Stage 0), children engage in the Prereading stage where they accumulate funds of knowledge about letters, words, books, and language. From ages 6-7, children learn to decode (Stage 1) by understanding the sound-letter relationship. From ages 7-8, children gain fluency and speed (Stage 2) by confirming stage 1 concepts. If readers have learned to read in stages 0-2 and are decoding fluently, then they will successfully transition into Stage 3: reading to learn. Stage 3, from ages 8-14, is characterized by the reader’s first attempts to read for meaning. At Stage 4, from ages 14-18, adolescent readers learn to read from multiple viewpoints and texts, which are densely layered with facts. At the most mature stage, age 18 and beyond, reading is a constructive process where readers analyze, synthesize, and make judgments. According to Chall (1983), some people never reach stage 5, while others at stage 5 are able to successfully “construct and reconstruct knowledge on a high level of abstraction” (Chall, 1983, p. 24).

According to Chall (1983), if students hit the 4th grade slump at Stage 3, the only solution is remedial instruction at lower stages. Chall observed that readers who hit the 4th grade slump also had poor reading skills in earlier stages. Therefore, by her definition, the only remedy for poor readers was more instruction in lower level skills. According to
Chall, once students reach mastery at lower stages, then they will successfully transition out of the 4th grade slump. Inherent in Chall’s definition is the perspective that reading is a set of isolate skills to be mastered sequentially. For over a decade NCLB has instituted an isolated sequential skills based approach and a fourth grade gap still exists. Clearly, this skills based approach to reading instruction, as seen in the federal government’s NCLB policies, has not been successful since the average national fourth grade reading score has only increased by 4 points out of 500 (NCLB Report).

Emergent readers who have access to a variety of text use strategic metacognitive skills to read for meaning. Martin and Kragler’s study (2012) followed two Kindergarten classes and examined how Kindergarten students self regulated their understanding of fiction and non-fiction texts. They found students used more strategies with non-fiction texts and the strategies were automatic (pictures) and not strategic. Martin and Kragler (2012) point to the important role non-fiction plays in the “development of kindergartners strategic monitoring and self-regulating behaviors” (p.151). Since the Kindergarteners in this study automatically use comprehension strategies and metacognitively thought of themselves as readers, especially while reading informational texts, researchers concluded that Kindergartners can be taught to use strategic approaches to self regulate their understanding of texts. This finding is in contrast to researchers such as Chall (1983) who claimed that emergent readers learn to read through isolated skill instruction in sequential stages. Furthermore, Martin and Kragler’s (2012) study found that only 5% of books in K are non-fiction texts, but students more often automatically use strategic reading strategies and consider themselves readers with non-fiction. Since Kindergartner’s in this study automatically used reading strategies with non-fiction
materials, Martin and Kragler (2012) advocated for more non-fiction reading materials in order to develop academic language content in emergent readers. By providing access to non-fiction materials, teachers can help emergent readers gain academic language from text structures, features, and academic content, which will prevent the 4th grade gap (Martin & Kragler, 2012).

In their review of CIERA studies, educational researchers Stahl and Yaden (2004) discussed theories regarding the nature of reading, writing and spelling for emergent readers. Two CIERA studies found that before children understand sound-symbol and sound-spelling relationships, they use pseudocursive scribble, nonphonetic strings of real or pseudoletters and invented spelling (Stahl & Yaden, 2004, p. 149).

Stahl and Yaden (2004) posited that the developmental process of understanding the sound-symbol and sound-spelling relationship can be divided into 4 phases: prealphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic. In the prealphabetic phase, emergent readers remember words by making visual connections. Readers in this phase do not yet recognize the letter-sound relationship. Students in the partial alphabetic phase begin to make some letter-sound connections (initial or final sounds) to the written word. Readers in this phase begin to understand that spoken words can be thought of in terms of their phonemes and that letters represent these sounds. They recognize the names of letters and possess some phonemic awareness using one sound to represent the whole word (e.g., “C” for “Cat”). In the full alphabetic phase, readers recognize that graphemes represent phonemes and are able to use conventional spelling. Readers understand the alphabetic principal and gain orthographic awareness. They understand long and short vowels and a variety of ways to spell the same vowel sounds.
(e.g., VC+ silent e as in “mane” makes the same long a sound as other VVC patterns as in main). In the final consolidate alphabetic phase readers recognize letter patterns. Readers gain morphological awareness that units of sound consistently carry meaning (e.g., -ed always means in the past regardless if it is pronounced as /t/, /d/, or /ed/). These phases are echoed in educational research, including Chall’s (1983) research that divides the process into stages.

In addition to graphophonetic cues, good readers draw upon context to effectively and efficiently use graphic (phonic) cues in order to read for meaning. Educators who understand this connection do not teach phonics first as an isolated skill, but rather teach phonics along with other language cues (syntax and semantics) in the context of reading and writing whole texts. Teaching phonics as an isolated skill has temporary benefits when isolated skills are the only reading measured being assessed. However, when readers transition into content area reading, they will need multiple reading strategies in order to read to learn. Due to the fact that young readers use phonics in context, good readers are able to develop automatic reading strategies and consequently avoid the 4th grade slump (Weaver, 2009).

In order to reach the federal government’s goal that every child should read by third grade, the government’s Center for the Improvement of Reading Development (CIERA) developed research projects to examine what children need to know in order to become successful readers. Educational researchers, Stahl and Yaden (2004) review and evaluate CIERA’s findings. Upon reviewing CIERA’s reports from federally funded Head Start and Even Start programs, Stahl and Yaden (2004) report results from both programs place students far below the national average. Since both programs have seen
an increase in the Spanish speaking population, these programs have seen an increased need to address the language and literacy needs specific to English Language Learners (ELLs). Even though NCLB policy emphasized isolated skills based instruction, CIERA’s research shows the need for the complementary development in students language and literacy skills in order to read for meaning. In a comprehensive evaluation of CIERA’s research, Stahl and Yaden (2004) concluded that a knowledge of language including academic language and school discourses and fluent decoding with a reading for understanding is required for reading readiness by third grade.

Reading assessments and miscue analysis. Reading assessments effectively identify and screen emergent readers who will later become the highest at risk students. Heath and Hogben (2004) developed a cost effective early screening tool to predict which students would fall into the highest at-risk group for reading difficulties. After thoroughly testing preschoolers with follow-up assessments for two years, 91% of good readers were identified with phonemic awareness screenings alone. Of the poor phonemic awareness group, the highest at risk students were isolated based on phonemic awareness and additional sentence recall screenings. Furthermore, while readers with good phonemic awareness were only affected by phonemic retrieval, students with poor phonemic awareness were impacted by all aspects of oral language and performance I.Q.. Thus, Heath and Hogben (2004) concluded that phonemic awareness and sentence recall were the most cost efficient and effective assessments to identify both good readers and at risk readers.

Although many reading programs teach emergent readers to rely on graphophonic (phonetic) cues alone, “proficient readers” (Goodman, 1978, p.6) are readers who
effectively and efficiently use all three language cueing systems in order to construct meaning. Proficient readers effectively use multiple reading strategies (predicting, sampling, monitoring comprehension and confirming and correcting) (Weaver, 2009, p. 80) to gain meaning from the text. They also are efficient readers in their ability to “use the least amount of effort to achieve effectiveness” (Goodman, 1978, p. 6). By effectively and efficiently reading to construct meaning, proficient readers’ primary focus is on context instead of attempting to correctly identifying all the words.

Analyzing miscues enables educators to examine the relationship between language cueing systems and reading strategies. Educational researcher Kenneth Goodman (1963) made several inferences about the automatic reading habits of proficient readers by examining their miscues, which he defined as, reading responses that differed from what was expected. Instead of dismissing errors as mistakes, miscue analysis allowed Goodman to discover that perceived errors of proficient readers were due to their sensitivity to context. Goodman discovered that proficient readers were not only much more likely to notice and correct a miscue when it disrupted meaning, but when they made a miscue, it fit within with in the context and meaning of what came before the word (Goodman, 1963).

Instead of dismissing errors as mistakes, educators can examine and evaluate miscues for evidence of language cueing systems and any reading strategies that students are using. A miscue analysis offers the unique opportunity for educators to understand if readers are reading for decoding or constructing meaning or both. For example, a proficient reader may change the pronoun (saying “her” in place of “it”) or substitute another word (saying “toad” instead of “frog”). In this way, this reader’s error is not a
mistake, but rather a miscue that reveals how they are in fact a proficient reader that is using all three language cueing systems and multiple reading strategies to both decode and read for meaning since the substituted word makes sense in the context.

Goodman (1965) found that words are easier to identify in context than in isolation. After reading a list of words in isolation, a group of first graders improved 62% of the words they missed when encountering them in context. Since over relying on graphic cues and underusing semantics and syntax makes reading more difficult, when emergent or nonproficient readers read words in context, they improved their word recognition ability. In their attempt to do exactly what they have been taught by teachers who say, “sound out the word,” nonproficient emergent readers are limited to 1 language cueing system. When reader’s language cueing systems are reduced, so are the reading strategies available for their use. These readers are not proficient readers precisely because of the limited strategies and language cues they use (Goodman, 1965).

In contrast to these good readers, Goodman (1965) discovered non-proficient readers did not consider the context of the sentence and overly relied on graphic cues. In his extensive study of reader’s miscues, Goodman found that non-proficient readers often read words that were phonetically similar to the unknown word but were either nonsense words or simply did not fit the meaning of the sentence. Non-proficient readers overly rely on graphic language cues (phonics) because they believe they have to say all the words correctly. Since they are reading to get the words, these readers do not attempt to make sense of the text. When they read, non-proficient readers sound as if they are reading a list instead of a meaningful passage. Consequently, in their attempt to say all
the words correctly, they fail to develop an automatic use of context, which ultimately hinders their reading process (Goodman, 1965).

**Good Readers and Poor Readers.**

Building on Goodman’s research of proficient and non-proficient readers, educational researcher, Weaver (2009), further refined Goodman’s terms proficient and non-proficient readers. Goodman defined proficient readers as effective (construct meaning from a text) and an efficient (do not waste time and effort) while non-proficient readers are neither effective nor efficient. However, Weaver pointed out that many readers are effective in their use of language cues and strategies without being efficient. Therefore, readers cannot be divided into only two camps as proficient (either effective and efficient) or non-proficient (not effective and not efficient). Instead of proficient reader, Weaver (2009, p. 62) used the term “good reader” to include both fairly proficient readers (effective and efficient) and moderately proficient readers (effective but not efficient) and “poor reader” to include those who are neither effective nor efficient.

According to Weaver, when good readers come to an unknown word (as in the previous frog example), they use context-based strategies to monitor their comprehension. When reading, good readers momentarily focus on the word while simultaneously sampling language cues for decoding and reading strategies such as confirming and correcting what they just read and predicting what they will read in order to read for meaning.

In contrast, this means that poor readers are ineffective in reading for context since they over rely on phonics and lack reading strategies. Although poor readers use context, it is not automatic. Since poor readers read to identify words, they only look to
context clues when they are not able to decode. In this way, poor readers use context differently than good readers because they need context as a scaffold to identify unknown words. Good readers automatically attend to context while reading. Since good readers predict before and after identifying a word, sometimes their predictions are incorrect. Still, reading for meaning is so automatic for good readers that when meaning is disrupted, they go back to correct their miscues. For example, read the following sentences out loud (Weaver, 2009, p. 50):

I saw a tear in her eye.

She looked at the minute printing on the label.

He made her a bow and arrow.

While reading, did you use all three-language cueing systems to read for meaning or did you simply decode the words? If you were reading for meaning, did any miscues disrupt your reading? If so, did you use the context following the word to go back and confirm or correct your reading? Hopefully, this metacognitive exercise allowed you to personally experience the same strategies good readers use but that which poor readers lack.

Good readers automatically read in context because they can automatically identify whole words faster than individual letters. As noted earlier, eye movement research has found that the brain can predict, in context, four words beyond the word one is focusing on. Good readers do not need context to identify every word, but rather use context to direct their eye movements. This reduction in time due to context makes good readers more efficient. Furthermore, the automatic efficiency of eye fixations allows good readers to read fluently because they identify phrases in chunks instead of decoding at the letter-sound word level.
Additional Variables Affecting the Reading Process

**Psycho-socio Factors in the Home that Affect the Reading Process.** Due to the effects of multiple variables outside of school, at risk readers continually remain at risk regardless of initial academic progress. When the circumstances in the student’s home life change, these students are provided access to the language and literacy opportunities that reposition them as good readers. The effects of a student’s home life continue to impact academic progress even after academic language and literacy intervention efforts. A study by Otaiba, Folsom, J., Schatschneider, C., Wanzek, J., and Greulich, L. (2011) found that success in tier 1 instruction is not an accurate predictor for first grade reading. The study followed at risk Kindergartener’s responses to tier 1 and found a negative correlation between growth in Kindergarten and first grade reading success. Their research found that the more growth a student makes in Kindergarten, the more at risk they are for academic failure in first grade. Researchers determined this negative correlation was due to a lack of home literacy, which caused at risk students to begin Kindergarten at a lower starting point. Consequently, they made steeper gains, yet their lack of home literacy skills did not prepare them to sustain growth throughout first grade and, therefore, they were again labeled at risk students. Researchers therefore concluded that until their home literacy environment changes, at risk students will remain at risk regardless of the RtI screenings that may identify these students as successful readers (Otaiba, et al., 2011)

The reading process is affected by a child’s home environment and variables such as poverty (SES), oral language development, and behavior. The federally funded Reach Out and Read program has been successful in promoting language and literacy
development as early as infancy. Fahey and Forman (2012) evaluated several studies conducted by Reach Out and Read which demonstrate the connection between poverty, lack of access to literature, less spoken words, lower vocabulary, behavior problems. From infancy to adolescence, a student’s socio-economic status (SES) consistently impacts their reading progress. In one longitudinal study of 1,100 infants (Halle, 2009), researchers found that the learning gap for low-income children began to widen as early as 9 months of age. Compared to those from high-income families, infants from low SES families scored lower on cognitive assessments had poorer health, and more behavior problems. Hernandez (2011) echoed these findings with a study the correlation of SES and fourth grade reading scores. Hernandez (2001) found that compared with 55% of middle class students, 83% of low-income fourth graders scored below proficient in reading.

Multiple studies have found a consistent relationship between a child’s oral language development and reading proficiency. One study found that oral language development within a child’s first 3 years, predicted reading achievement (Fahey & Forman, 2012). In a study of 3 year olds, those from educated families had typically heard 30 million more words than those from undereducated or low-income families. Therefore, researchers concluded that without oral language intervention, these low-income readers will fail to develop necessary vocabulary and consequently will fall into the 4th grade slump (Fahey & Forman, 2012).

The connection between literacy development and oral language development is so prevalent that early phonemic awareness screenings can easily identify good readers. Heath and Hogben (2004) conducted a study with the goal of developing a cost effective
early screening tool to predict students who would be most at-risk for reading difficulties. After thoroughly testing preschoolers with follow-up assessments for 2 years, Heath and Hoghen found that 91% of good readers were identified solely on phonemic awareness. Of the poor phonemic awareness group, the highest at risk students could be identified based on their phonemic awareness score plus and additional testing of sentence recall. Also, these researchers found that students with poor phonemic awareness were more impacted by all aspects of oral language and performance I.Q., whereas readers with good phonemic awareness are only affected by phonemic retrieval. These results demonstrate the importance of oral language skills for language and literacy acquisition.

The home-based oral language development and behavior skills Kindergarten students possess predictably determine their reading success. Spira and Bracken, S. (2005) investigated the role of early literacy and behavioral skills in predicting the improvement of children who fall below the 30th percentile in first grade. After initially testing the subjects as incoming Kindergarteners, researchers retested at the end of first, second, third, and fourth grade. They found that end of first grade reading scores predicted future fourth grade reading success at 19% and end of second grade scores predicted fourth grade success at 72%. Of the students who improved reading scores, there was a strong correlation with both initial kindergarten skills (especially oral language) and behavior. This study concluded that by third grade, children’s reading levels are attained and remain stable.

Research consistently shows the link between poor oral language skills and poor behavior. Morgan and Meier (2008) hypothesized that “low oral vocabulary skills make it more difficult for children to use pragmatic language, thereby leading to more acting out
or withdrawal behavior” (p.12). In order to improve oral language skills, and consequently behavior skills, these researchers proposed Dialogic Reading (DR), a standardized procedure for storybook intervention. DR develops oral language through teacher-student and peer-peer retelling and questioning at school and at home. Morgan and Meier (2008, p.15) concluded that as students are actively participating (instead of passively listening) with authentic literature, oral language skills improve, which will have a positive affect on student behavior and reading development.

Since both strong oral language skills and behavior skills are linked to reading success, in addition to oral language intervention, at-risk readers also need behavior intervention. For example, in one study of emergent readers, researchers found that “behavior difficulties [such as hyperactivity and classroom conduct] interfered with learning” (Spira et al, 2005, p. 232). In an attempt to isolate the skills needed for reading success, these researchers provided oral language and behavior intervention along with reading intervention. The relationship between reading and behavior skills is so strong that emergent readers did not benefit from reading intervention until they received behavior intervention.

Similarly, Lemberger and Clemens (2012) another study found that by implementing behavior intervention, at risk students improved their reading skills. This study implemented executive functioning counseling intervention with fourth and fifth graders. The treatment taught skills such as: “holding information in mind while completing a task, managing task demands, and organizing work and play spaces” (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012, p.455). Findings demonstrated when compared with the control group, students who received the counseling treatment reported significant
changes in metacognitive skills and feelings of connectedness to school. By linking counseling to the classroom, this treatment demonstrated the potential impact behavior intervention can have on student academic success (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012).

Psycho-socio factors with school that affect the reading process. The educational system influences a students reading process through psycho-social variables through social stratification, social capital, and access to resources. The revolutionary educational reformer Paulo Freire argued that we do not exist in a closed world, but simply a limited situation that has yet to be transformed (Freire, 1970, p. 49). Since human beings have socially constructed the educational system, it can be deconstructed. Currently, many teachers question how they can transform and deconstruct socially constructed systems of power, which affect the reading process in schools.

The NCLB movement has created a climate where people in positions of power restrict the thinking of minority students. In seeking to raise scores and to teacher-proof and student proof the curriculum; one implication of the standardized curriculum has been scripted curricula. According to Dudley-Marling Jackson and Stevens (2006) scripted programs from get-tough-on-kids policies “signal a national fear of minority students out of control” (p. 753). When scripted programs limited the curriculum for minority students, researchers found that an oppositional culture set in by fourth grade, which consequently determined school and future occupational success (Farkas, 2003).

The result of NCLB’s political drive for testing accountability has reduced the level of literacy. In a case study of “successful” third grade Bilingual Open Court classrooms, Pancheco (2010) observed that standardized testing has lowered the level of literacy by redefining what counts as reading. In order to align literacy with standardized
tests, what counts as reading instruction in the classrooms in this study was narrowly defined within a scripted skills based curriculum: Open Court. The Open Court curriculum offered limited texts, limited world-views, and limited bilingual/biliterate opportunities for the students in the bilingual school where this study was conducted. Thus, in order to adhere to new accountability measures that tests discrete skills, scripted programs like Open Court isolated reading into a set of systematic skills for daily instruction (Pancheco, 2010, p. 294), which reduced reading comprehension to a number of obscure understandings. Literacy presented as obscure understandings causes lower levels of understanding, meaning, and comprehension (Wilson, et al., 2005, p. 622). NCLB used these isolated measurements not because they reflect literacy achievement, but because isolating literacy skills increased testing reliability and reported results in a numerical format that was easily understood by the public and political policy makers (Wilson, et al., 2005, p. 630).

NCLB has dehumanized students and teachers through the banking system of education. According to Freire (1970), the banking system of education deposits knowledge into teachers and student accounts, thus limiting their actions to “receiving, filing and storing the deposits” (p. 72). Dudley-Marling et al. (2006) pointed out the danger of NCLB’s attempt to process teachers and students as standardized products. They argued that by allotting them passive one-size-fits-all roles to be imprinted upon, the uniqueness and diversity of teachers and students has been removed. Reduced to a product, teachers and students are being objectified. Through this input-output system, people are no longer valued for their humanity, but instead for their potential to contribute to the dominant capitalist society (Giroux, 1983).
Academic Discourses (with a capital D) (Gee, 2008) within school reinforce the social stratification system of power, which favors higher SES students. According to educational researcher, Gee, Discourses can be defined as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities by specific groups[;] language can be understood only within a particular discourse” (Gee, 2008). This concept means that school Discourses go beyond oral language and assign higher value to the home practices that higher SES students bring to school.

When there is a match between the students home Discourse and the school discourse, students are positioned to succeed. One study by Heath (1983) found the match or mismatch between students’ primary Discourse and the school-based Discourse influenced how quickly students developed the oral and written academic registers of schooling. In this study, all of the students were English Only (EO) speakers. Students from town came from high SES families who were associated with the local college and thus, experienced a match between their home Discourse practices and their school Discourse practices. In contrast, the rural students’ primary Discourse practices did not match school Discourses. This mismatch caused them to “experience more difficulties in school than children from the town, whose parents prepared them for the ways of talking and acting that teachers in the school (who had themselves been townspeople) expected” (Heath, 1983). Since the teachers were themselves from the town, they shared the same primary Discourses as the high SES students. As a result of their Discourse match with teachers and schools, Heath (1983) concluded the high SES students are afforded the cultural capital, which positioned them for success.
Discourse research has found that dialect differences socially position students for success in reading. One study (Terry, N., Connor, C., Petscher, Y., & Conlin, C., 2012) found a high correlation between changes in nonmainstream American English and reading achievement in first and second grade. This study followed Non-Mainstream English speaking first graders to see if they increased their Main Stream English (MAE) production by the end of second grade and if this correlated with reading gains. They found the more children increased their MAE production, the greater were their reading gains from first grade through second grade. Likewise, another study examined the impact of dialect on reading fluency of a minority student population and found a correlation between MAE acquisition and reading achievement. This study found that students who made the most gains in MAE were able to code switch back and fourth between dialects. Additionally, this study found that when students attended lower SES schools (as measured by the number of students receiving free lunch), they were less likely to code switch. Researchers concluded that with higher numbers of minorities in low SES schools, race and SES in schools have a significant impact on a minority students’ ability to learn code switching with MAE, which ultimately results in greater gains in reading success (Terry, et al., 2012).

According to theorists, schools institutionalize Discourse practices in order to maintain their authority over knowledge. Through the use of discourse theory, Van de Kleut (2001) argues, pedagogy has historically maintained power and authority over knowledge. Consequently, when school pedagogical practices marginalize the discourses of minorities by privileging the Discourses of high SES students, they position high SES students for success and low SES students to fail- an unfair practice since “social groups
that are deeply affiliated with formal schooling often incorporate into the socialization of their children practices that resonate with later school-based discourses” (Gee, 2008). In this way, schools assign knowledge and reward the Discourses of students with the cultural capital high SES students bring to school (a practice known as the hidden curriculum), which reinforces social stratification positions of power.

The hidden curriculum in schools positions high SES students for success based on their cultural capital. Educational researcher Giroux (1983) discussed how dominant societal values and norms of those in power are reinforced through the hidden curriculum in schools. According to Giroux, American schools operate under a hidden curriculum, which includes the norms, values and beliefs that are embedded into the daily routines and school setting. This curriculum, according to Van de Kleut (2011), reinforces the myth of meritocracy since it “supports the success of white, middleclass students” (p. 5). When the hidden curriculum aligns with white middle class values, according to Finders (2001) low SES students are denied membership in the school community. By positioning students for success based on SES, “the hidden curriculum functions not simply as a vehicle of socialization but also as an agency of social control” (Giroux, 1983, p. 47). According to Van de Kleut (2011), when the hidden curriculum aligns with the student’s social class and cultural experiences, they are successful. Thus, students who do not bring this cultural capital are blamed for failing.

Access to Resources. Schools are a potential source for SES differences in educational achievement (Duke, 2000). When schools offer different SES groups different print environments and experiences, schools knowingly or unknowingly educationally track students based on their SES (and are doing so quite early- first grade).
When high SES students are offered rich print environments, they develop important forms of semiotic capital (the educational systems currency: understanding and making meaning from signs, symbols, images and words). In this way, schools are “not only failing to act as a great equalizer, but acting as agents of further disequalization” (Duke, 2000, p. 470). Consequently, as students are offered less rich print experiences and environments in low SES schools, the achievement gap will only continue to widen (Duke, 2000).

Although NCLB attempts to close the achievement gap between low and high SES schools, according to researchers Donnor and Shockley (2010), public and political accountability under NCLB widens the achievement gap to further marginalize low SES students. When low SES students receive reduced levels of instruction because they attend underperforming schools that have mandated test-based curriculum, they are denied higher cognitive learning opportunities. Donnor and Shockley (2010) argued that unless marginalized low SES students develop critical thinking skills, in the future, they will not be prepared to participate in the high-tier global economy.

Krashen, S., Lee, S., and McQuillan, J. (2008) confirmed McQuillian’s 1998 study concluding that poverty was the strongest predictor for reading scores in fourth grade. However, when analyzing the difference between the scores from fourth to eighth grade, Krashen et al. (2008) found access to books to be the strongest predictor for reading scores regardless of poverty. Combining the two predictors, researchers could predict eighth graders NAEP reading score with 89% accuracy based on a student’s fourth grade score, poverty and access to print. This finding was consistent with their international study where they compared the socio-economic-status (SES), access, SSR,
and formal instruction of 40 countries’ and their respective scores on the Progress International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). At the international level, access and SES were still the strongest predictors as they alone accounted for 60% of the predicted outcome of fourth grade reading scores. Additionally, this test showed a negative correlation for formal instruction. This result validated test results from other studies (Cho & Choi, 2008; Lee, 2007; McQuillan & Au, 2001; Shin, 2001), which collectively demonstrated the ineffectiveness of tradition skills-based instruction. Due to the fact that both studies showed access to libraries to be the most consistent and strongest predictor of reading proficiency nationally and internationally, researchers concluded that access to books is the foundation for any successful language and literacy program (Krashen et al., 2008).

Instead of a deficit perspective, schools can actively provide easy access to resources that will position marginalized students to succeed. In their study of immigrant pre-schoolers Yaden, D. and Paratore, J. (2003) observed an increase in parent participation with home literacy when the school provided easier access to books. In addition to bilingual libraries in each classroom, the research team in this study also provided a parent lending library with select books located at the parent checkout/pickup. Even after working long hours with little means to easily transport books, still 83% of parents actively participated in co-selecting books with their children. Consequently, easy access to books had a positive effect on literacy as researchers found a correlation between participants and concepts of print.

In examining access to print environments and experiences for very high and very low SES groups, Duke (2000) concluded that the “rich are getting richer print
environments and experiences” (p. 470). Data was collected in 20 first grade classrooms over one school year that surveyed the amount, type, and nature of the print environment and experiences. Researchers found widespread differences with high SES schools having significantly more access to print (amount), more varied uses including cross curriculum extensions of print (type), and more instances with the student as an agent/authorship of print (nature).

Although all of these studies showed that students with more access read more, (Duke, 2000; Krashen et al., 2008; McQuillan & Au, 2001), Duke’s study (2000) proposes that access to print be further examined in terms of how to create a rich print environment with print rich experiences. Researchers argue that even if low and high SES schools were equalized in terms of the amount of books/student, it would not account for the widespread difference in the type and nature of how print is used in low and high SES schools. For example, Duke observed low SES first graders reading and writing print at the word level through the use of phonics curriculum and dictation (traditional skills-based instruction), while high SES first graders were reading authentic literature (SSR) and having novels read to them (read-alouds). This discrepancy translated to their writing where the low SES students wrote at the word level and the high SES students wrote at the sentence and paragraph level (Duke, 2000).

Typical activities were very different in low and high SES groups. The only area where the low SES group spent more time with print was on written language activities. However, when researchers evaluated the “type” of written activities, the low-SES group only spent time on worksheets in Reading and Math. The most commonly observed writing activity was coloring in worksheets with number codes. Researchers never
observed this type of print activity in the high SES group. Instead, the high SES group spent time in several domains across the curriculum. They were commonly observed working collaboratively in integrated Math, Reading, Writing, Social Studies and Science units steeped in inquiry-based learning (Duke, 2000). Thus, the richer the print environment and experiences, the greater the language and literacy development.

When schools host different curricula in different socioeconomic settings, they create an environment which ultimately limits the language and literacy acquisition of low SES students. In order to close the achievement gap, schools should be agents of equalization for print environments and experiences. This would require a reevaluation of ineffective (and unpleasant) traditional skills-based instructional methods and an adoption of an engaging SSR model that offers students access to motivating high quality authentic literature. After all, as ELLs struggle to learn a second language, perhaps the most effective instructional methods are those which are not only efficient, but also enjoyable.

**The Reading Process and Reading Delay in Adolescent Readers**

**4th grade slump.** After publishing the *Stages of Reading Development*, Chall conducted a study to research the causes behind the 4th grade slump. Without knowing the causes, Chall’s research found the 4th grade slump overwhelmingly affected low income students. In order to prevent the 4th grade slump, Chall investigated the language and literacy practices of low income students and in 1990 published *The Reading Crisis: Why Poor Children Fall Behind*.

According to Chall (1990), low income children predominately fall into the 4th grade slump because of a deficit in their vocabulary development. Chall’s study found
that when compared with middle class students, low income students were twice as likely
to have difficulty defining specialized words (academic vocabulary) (1990, p. 151).
According to Chall, this gap in academic vocabulary development was due to oral
language development and access to books in the home. In this study, middle class
students came to school with an academic vocabulary they learned in their home from
highly educated parents. Furthermore, in addition to academic language, middle class
parents also read to their children more and provided more access to books, causing the
middle class students to acquire additional academic vocabulary outside of school (Chall,
1990).

In order to prevent the 4th grade slump, according to Chall (1990), low income
students need to first acquire word recognition and fluency skills in early stages of the
reading process. Once low income readers reach fourth grade, schools need to provide
academic vocabulary development. Compared to classrooms that relied solely on Basal
readers, Chall observed those in the sample who were in classrooms with a variety of
informational texts in fourth grade made greater gains in vocabulary development and
reading comprehension. Thus, Chall (1990) concludes, in addition to explicitly teaching
key academic vocabulary, teachers need to provide students access and opportunities to
read authentic literature with rich content vocabulary.

As opposed to the deficit perspective of traditional researchers such as Chall who
attribute the 4th grade slump to a lack of oral language development in low SES students,
other researchers such as, Gee (2004) attributed the deficit to a mismatch between home
and school Discourses. Gee claimed that all children, including those from low SES
families, develop sophisticated forms of language, yet, schools only recognize the
language practices of high SES students. In one classroom, Gee observed a low SES African American student who told a poetic and highly symbolic story. The teacher continually interrupted and quieted her reasoning that she was rambling. This traditional classroom’s Discourses only allowed stories in which the series of events were recalled in a linear step-by-step structure. This student was quieted not because she lacked oral language development, but because her oral language practices did not match school discourses (Gee, 2004).

When schools do not incorporate Discourse practices of low SES students, they perpetuate an institutional system of racism and power, which privileges those already in positions power: the white middle and upper class (Gee, 2004). Both Gee and Chall’s research found that, before fourth grade, students from high SES families have acquired academic language at home. Gee argued that by waiting until fourth grade to expose children to academic vocabulary, as Chall advocated, schools have positioned low SES students to fall into the 4th grade slump. In this way, low SES students will suffer academically as long as schools expect all students to share the same Discourse practices of white middle class students. Instead of expecting low SES students assimilate to white middle class Discourses, Gee (2004) advocated schools recognize and value the home Discourse practices that students bring to school.

When schools use fluency as a gatekeeper for content area reading, they perpetuate the 4th grade slump. According to Weaver, “Time and again, researchers-including the researchers dominating the NRP- have not found that rapid, accurate, word identification-called “fluency”-improves reading scores beyond first grade” (Weaver, xxiv). According to Weaver, by focusing on fluency measures for reading success,
traditional skills based approaches to the reading process not only fail to recognize good
readers who read for meaning, but do not uncover the needs of those who may read
rapidly but comprehend little. Reading is not a process of word recognition, but
metaphorically more like waves that “ebb and flow” (Weaver, 2009, p. xxiv).

Traditional isolated skill building practices cause minority and low SES students
to fall into the 4th grade slump. Currently, under NCLB polices, the reading process is
defined as a set of isolated skills to be mastered where students read for fluency and
decoding; students do not progress until they master each stage of development (Chall,
1983). When students fail to make adequate progress through the stages, this perspective
of the reading process further tracks them into additional skill building exercises. Weaver
(2009) argues that by tracking the reading choices of emergent readers, fluency reading
practices become a gatekeeper for high interest reading, thus causing readers already
struggling to inevitably fall into the 4th grade slump.

Educational tracking through fluency practices disproportionately causes minority
and low SES students to fall into the 4th grade slump. According to Duke (2000), schools
offer different types of print experiences and unequal amounts of access to students based
on SES levels. In this study, low SES schools used more isolate skill building instruction
and provided less time and access to reading authentic informational texts for meaning.
Specifically, Duke found that children in low SES schools were exposed 1.9 minutes/day
of informational text compared to 3.6 minutes in high SES schools. In order to prevent a
disproportionate amount of low SES students from falling into the 4th grade slump,
according to Duke (2000), teachers need to provide equal access to authentic literature
and reading experiences to all students.
Adolescent readers make greater gains in reading scores when given access to authentic literature. In their research on poverty, access, and standardized reading scores, Krashen, et al. (2008) found access to literature to be the most significant predictor of the difference in reading scores from fourth to eighth grade and SES was the second greatest predictor. In addition to their language needs, since many ELLs are affected by both of these factors (a lack of access and low SES), they are highly at risk for reading difficulties (Goldenberg, 2008; and Krashen, et al., 2008). These factors are why ELLs disproportionately need intervention after hitting the 4th grade slump. Still, since access to books is the strongest predictor of reading test scores after fourth grade, SSR is an effective approach to adolescent intervention and could significantly help ELLs to improve their language and literacy acquisition.

Reading and writing in the 21st century has increased the need for advanced literacy (Goldman, 2012). With the onset of new literacies in the 21st century, schools need to begin teaching higher levels of thinking required in our modern society. According to Goldman (2012), in order to address and resolve the 4th grade slump, schools need to adapt a modern 21st century approach to the reading process. Modern 21st century literacies pose four major challenges to traditional isolated skill instruction: move beyond what the text says to what the text means, apply reading differently depending on the subject matter, navigate increased amounts of information, and connect information across different sources and then be able to evaluate the consistency. The problem then cannot be addressed by continuing to teach basic levels of reading, but instead, schools need to bring students to advanced levels of language and literacy proficiency (Goldman, 2012).
Bilingual and Bicultural Readers.

Bilingual and bicultural readers represent a wide variety of students from different backgrounds. According to Freeman and Freeman (2009), there are three types of English Language Learners (ELLs). Some have been well prepared from school in their home country and immigrate with primary language (L1) and literacy proficiency. Although these ELLs make the most progress, they struggle to make fast enough progress to pass standardized exams. Others, either young children or migrant students who have had years of interrupted schooling, come to school with limited L1 academic language and literacy. Still other ELLs, the long-term language learners, develop conversational English (L2), but lack L1 and L2 academic language and literacy. Even though they may sound like native English speakers, due to their lack of L1 and L2 academic language, these ELLs most often fall into the 4th grade slump during the reading development process (Goldenberg, 2008).

In addition to language, many ELLs fall into the 4th grade slump due to family SES and education factors. According to Goldenberg (2008), 80% of ELLs are Spanish speakers who not only tend to come from a lower SES than the general U.S. population, but other immigrants as well. Compared to 9% of other immigrants and 11% of the native born U.S. population, 24% of immigrants from Mexico and Central America are below the poverty line. Moreover, less than 40% Mexican/Central Americans immigrate with a H.S. diploma compared to 90% of other immigrants. ELLs are at a higher risk for the 4th grade slump when their families have lower SES and educational levels (Goldenberg, 2008).
Standardized tests most noticeably indicate this increased risk at fourth grade when assessments require more content area knowledge. According to national fourth grade reading scores, on average, ELLs score 36 points below general education students. In science, only 4% of ELLs score at or above proficiency. Standardized tests do not provide an explanation for this gap, only a below proficient score in reading comprehension. Yet, according to Goldenberg (2008), instead of their reading comprehension, standardized test scores for ELLs more accurately reflect other factors such as background knowledge, reading skills, language proficiency and/or a combination of all three.

Research-based findings for language and literacy acquisition can guide educators in improving curriculum and instruction for ELLs. The following section will examine the following conclusions from several studies, reports, and meta-analysis, which are summarized into three major points: (1) Teaching students to read in their first language promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English. (2) What we know about good instruction and curriculum in general holds true for ELLs as well; but (3) When instructing ELLs in English, teachers must modify instruction to take into account students’ language limitations.

Cummins’ Theoretical Framework distinguished between the two types of language proficiency. His work found that while many students can carry on conversations fluently in English, they had not developed the type of academic language to do well on school tasks. According to Cummins (1984), whereas BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) proficiency only requires 2-3 years, CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) requires 5-7 years. According to Goldenberg (2008),
ELLs make faster progress in early stages of language acquisition because they are exposed to highly contextualized conversation. In contrast, full proficiency in later stages takes more time because it requires more abstract language interaction and ELLs are only exposed to CALP in the classroom.

When students develop CALP first in their primary language, the academic language can transfer to English (Cummins, 2008). Cummins explained the concept of language transfer through his Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model. The CUP for language transfer states, “what we know in one language is accessible in a second language” (Cummins, 2000). According to language transfer, when students are given reading or CALP instruction in their primary language, that proficiency will transfer to English. This is why students who receive bilingual instruction do better in school. Unless they develop academic concepts in their native language, bilingual students will be behind in academic language and consequently will fall into the 4th grade slump. Garcia (2002) pointed out that in order to gain higher levels of academic language, readers need to be able to read and write in academic texts. When native speakers start school, they are fluent speakers and are beginning to develop academic language. In contrast, at a time when native speakers are beginning to learn academic language, ELLs are just beginning to learn conversational English (BICS). So, by the time ELLs are ready for academic language, their peers have already been exposed to 3 years of academic language and literacy development, just in time for ELLs to hit the 4th grade slump (Cummins, 2000; and Garcia, 2002).

Without regard for education research, several states passed English Only legislation due to public opinion, which assumed more time learning English would result
in more English language and literacy acquisition. Yet this assumption was easily disproven by five independent research groups that conducted a meta-analysis of multiple studies and all reached the same conclusion: teaching students to read in their first language promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English. According to Goldenberg (2008), the fact that five meta-analysis reached the same conclusion is a significant finding that no other area in educational research can claim. The most recent analysis performed by the National Literacy Panel (NLP), analyzed 17 studies (after reviewing over 3,000) and wrote their conclusions in the CREDE report. This report reviewed multiple studies which found that in addition to literacy, other skills and knowledge transfer across languages (Goldenberg, 2008).

Although modifications are necessary, good instruction for students in general holds true for ELLs (Goldenberg, 2008). All students benefit from goals, objectives, structure, active engagement, practice, assessments, re-teaching, and interaction. In their meta-analysis of ELL studies, the NLP report concluded that ELLs, just like general education students, benefit from explicit direction instruction with language and literacy embedded in a meaningful context. Additionally, the NLP also found that in particular ELLs benefit from cooperative, interactive, and mastery learning (Goldenberg, 2008).

When teaching ELLs in an English only class, teachers should modify the curriculum and instruction based on the students’ language limitations (Goldenberg, 2008). The NLP’s meta-analysis found ELLs were more successful when curriculum and instruction was modified. The NLP concluded, without modifications particular to their language and literacy needs, ELLs in an English only class will not have equal access to curriculum and instruction (Goldenberg, 2008).
Teachers can modify the curriculum by selecting and scaffolding highly contextualized text (Goldenberg, 2008). All readers comprehend familiar text because they connect the vocabulary with their own background knowledge. The NLPs meta-analysis found that when ELLs read culturally relevant texts, their comprehension improved. In this way, teachers can improve ELLs success by providing familiar reading material, which can be done in two ways: (1) use content and vocabulary already familiar to them or (2) expose them to the content and vocabulary before they need to read it in the text. When instruction is modified to teaching language simultaneously with content, students make progress in both (Goldenberg, 2008).

One way to modify language and content area reading instruction is by using the Scaffolding Reading Experience (SRE) (Graves & Fitzgerald cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009). SREs extend students’ Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), or tasks within their range of ability, because they provide different modifications in accordance with the students’ language limitations. SREs are typically used with content area reading because they provide pre, during, and post reading support. According to Graves and Fitzgerald (cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009, p. 124), teachers should provide enough scaffolding so that students feel confident and successful, but not so much that they feel spoon fed or bored.

The optimal way to offer instructional support is by using the primary language (Goldenberg, 2008). Even when the instruction and curriculum are in English, primary language support creates opportunities for language transfer, as well as additional explanations and clarifications for abstract concepts. Several studies in the NLP study found primary language Preview-Review to be especially effective. In Preview-Review
teachers introduce a concept in the primary language, teach the content in English, and review the material in the primary language. In one NLP comparative study, researchers found that Preview-Review produced better reading comprehension and recall than translating or reading in English only. Preview-review is different from clarification and translation because it builds background knowledge which prepares students to for language transfer. In this way, this model allows students to gain academic language and content simultaneously.

In addition to using the primary language for support, teachers in English only settings can offer scaffolds that target language and literacy development (Goldenberg, 2008). Given that ELLs must learn the content area curriculum in addition to the language, the most important modification would be additional time for extra practice. Several studies in the NLP also suggest: predictable and consistent classroom routines and procedures with visual aids; graphic organizers for academic content area instruction; redundant key information (Visual Cues, Pictures, Gestures); vocabulary development (identifying, highlighting and clarifying), consolidate texts by having the teacher or other students summarize; extended interactions with peers and teachers; adjust instruction (vocabulary, rate of speech, sentence complexity, and expectations) to students oral language proficiency; and target language and academic content standards in every lesson. Along with separate language and content objectives, teachers in English only classrooms should also separate assessments based language and content (Goldenberg, 2008).

Modifications that teach both language and content ensure ELLs have equal academic access (Goldenberg, 2008). NLP’s meta-analysis reviewed multiple studies and
concluded that reading intervention has less of an impact on ELLs. Specifically, reading comprehension strategy instruction for ELLs was found to be ineffective. Reading comprehension requires not only the skills of reading (decoding, fluency, and an understanding of how words carry meaning), but also fundamental language proficiency (vocabulary, syntax, semantics, and graphophonics). Students must have both in order to benefit from comprehension strategies. This is why native speakers, who possessed both reading skills and language proficiency, experienced an increase in their reading comprehension. The NLP concluded that since they already possessed reading skills and proficiency in English, native speakers were able to focus on understanding content. ELLs, in contrast, had to devote their attention to understanding language and therefore were unable to access the content.

ELLs make more progress in earlier stages in the reading process where the emphasis is on reading skills. Few modifications are needed because the language requirement is low. As ELLs progress through the reading stages into content area reading, they will need more language modifications. When they are not provided language modifications, they become Long-Term ELLs. Once these Long-Term ELLs miss academic content and language development, they become the predominate population effected by the 4th grade slump (Freeman & Freeman, 2009; and Goldenberg, 2008).

**Reading Intervention for Adolescent Readers**

Current reading intervention methods need to be reevaluated in light of comparative studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of RtI and SSR for adolescents. According to Krashen (2004), “we learn to read by reading” (p. 37). Yet, instead of
having students engage in authentic language and literacy experiences, traditional skills-based intervention methods further narrow the curriculum in order for students to improve reading scores on standardized tests. Known as the Paige Paradox, teaching in response to standardized tests is an ineffective method, which attempts to prepare students for testing at the expense of developing their language and literacy proficiency in the reading process (Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D., 2012). The ineffectiveness of traditional instruction compared with SSR can be observed in multiple experimental studies where control groups made zero or negative gains on standardized test (Cho & Choi, 2008; Krashen, et al. 2008; Lee, 2007; McQuillan & Au, 2001; Shin, 2001).

Motivation and engagement are keys to successful reading intervention approaches for adolescent readers (Kim & Guryan, 2011; and Shearer & Ruddell, 2006). In their summer reading intervention experiment, researchers Kim and Guryan (2011) found that access to high interest books over summer did not improve reading skills with low income and middle-income students more than students (the control group) who did not receive access to books. Researchers concluded that since all readers lacked intrinsic motivation, they did not benefit from an increase in access to books. Yet, during the school year, all students made more progress because teachers provided external reading motivators such as incentives and accountability. Since poor readers do not possess internal reading habits and lack motivation, intervention for adolescent readers must include an external motivator (Kim & Guryan, 2011; and Shearer & Ruddell, 2006).

Adolescent students are more successful when reading intervention developed metacognitive skills. Self-evaluation allows adolescent readers to set goals and learn new behaviors associated with success (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012; Shearer & Ruddell,
2006; and Shearer, Ruddell, & Vogt, 2001). By focusing on the behaviors associated with achievement, one study used counseling intervention to help students learn the skills that translate to academic success. The study provided Student Success Skills to 53 inner city, fourth and fifth grade African American students. In addition to higher test scores compared with the control group, students who received the treatment experienced significant changes in metacognitive skills and feelings of connectedness to school (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012).

For the past decade, Response to Intervention (RtI) has been an effective research based reading intervention model for poor readers in the reading process. RtI is a general education initiative that requires collaboration between general education and special education teachers, monitoring and accountability measures for students, and school-wide professional development. RtI is a 3-tier process of identification, which ranges from general education differentiated instruction to special education. By first applying strategies in the first tier, teachers using RtI can avoid the over identification of SPED students who do not have a disability but instead simply need instructional modifications because they come from a different SES, language or culture from the dominate school culture (Fuchs, L., & Vaughn, S. (2012).

The International Reading Association (IRA) (2012) has identified six principles, which have made RtI more successful than previous intervention methods. According to the IRA, schools using RtI should: Schedule time and space for teachers to meet and talk, utilize team- teaching with physical proximity, provide communication structures (identify how information and knowledge will be exchanged throughout the school), empower teachers with autonomy (teachers need to be given the opportunity to make
decisions about their work), and rotate roles (allows for diversity and gives all professionals opportunities to make positive contributions).

Although the first goal of RtI is to provide differentiated instruction in Tier 1, researchers point out that even the most capable teachers find this task to be extremely challenging. According to the RtI guide, educators need to assess students and provide differentiate instruction in code or meaning based instruction. Yet, understanding how to effectively do this requires extensive knowledge in the reading process. In order to simplify this process for teachers, my project (refer to chapter 4) provides a guideline for reading comprehension in adolescent readers at Tier 1. This guide includes assessments, which identify the strengths and needs of adolescent readers and multiple strategies, which all develop language and literacy simultaneously.

**Effective Strategies for Adolescent Readers**

Different academic disciplines in middle and high school require different reading approaches (NCTE Position Statement, 2004). According to Goldman (2012), students need more than just strategies for comprehending the content area reading, they need to, “become skilled in developmentally appropriate forms of doing history or writing like a historian” (p.105). Instead of teaching isolated reading comprehension strategies, teachers need to prepare students for how literacy in the 21st first century operates within academic disciplines.

When adolescent readers have substantial difficulties in reading comprehension, many educators teach traditional isolated skills. Studies have found traditional isolated skill instruction does not improve reading comprehension strategies because readers do not generalize isolated events. Consequently, traditional isolated skill-based instruction
does not develop reading comprehension because any progress made will be limited to the context of that isolated lesson (Goldman, 2012). Higher levels of content area literacy teach students how texts function and differ between different disciplines. By requiring students to “analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and make decisions regarding the validity and trustworthiness of information” (Goldman, 2012, p. 105), students engage in higher levels of critical thinking within various academic disciplines. Educators can increase comprehension by offering more sophisticated levels of rigor and complexity in content area reading.

Students who have fallen into the 4th grade slump and consequently have substantial difficulties in reading comprehension are not prepared for higher levels of rigor and complexity in literacy. In later grades, curriculum, and consequently teachers, assume adolescent readers already have acquired previous years’ academic content knowledge and are able to continue reading to learn. Yet, many adolescent readers who have fallen into the 4th grade slump still do not possess the reading skills and/or language proficiency that basic reading comprehension requires. The initial fourth grade gap widens each year between the assumed and actual knowledge these students bring to school. With an ever increasing gap each year, many of these students eventually disengage from reading and school completely with 18% eighth grade ELLs going on to graduate from high school (Goldman, 2012; Mohr & Mohr cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009).

Reading strategies prepare adolescents readers with substantial difficulties in comprehension for content area reading. Researchers have developed several strategies to teach adolescent readers how to read to learn content (comprehension). Reading
comprehension first requires fundamental reading skills and language proficiency. Many adolescent readers have substantial difficulties with reading comprehension because they lack either language or literacy proficiency (or both). If adolescent readers have literacy and language proficiency, then outside factors such as motivation or access to reading materials may be the cause for difficulties with comprehension. Therefore, in order to address the needs of adolescent readers who have fallen into the 4th grade slump and consequently have substantial difficulties with reading comprehension, the following strategies will address reading skills, language proficiency, independent reading, and motivation.

**Reading Process.** Students who have successfully developed fundamental reading skills throughout the reading process, automatically use all three cueing systems: graphophonic (decoding), syntactic (grammar), and semantic (meaning) (Weaver, 2009). Even if they are proficient in the language of the content area reading, if students lack even one cueing system, their comprehension is impaired. Thus, in order for some adolescents to improve their reading comprehension, notwithstanding language acquisition, teachers should provide additional fundamental reading skills instruction in one or more of the three cueing systems (Weaver, 2009).

Reading process strategies incorporate all three language cueing systems in order to teach students how to become effective and efficient readers (Weaver, 2009). Teachers can help students use preceding context to think ahead (syntactic). For students who still decode at the phoneme level or for those who read nonsense words when they come to an unknown word, teachers can teach decoding by morphemes with word chunking, word clusters, and frame a phrase (graphophonic). When students read nonsense words,
teachers can refocus their attention on the preceding and following context to generate a word that fits the meaning of the sentence or paragraph (graphophonic, syntactic, and semantics). In order to develop reading for meaning, teachers can model fluency and prosody with choral reading and provide engaging natural language opportunities (syntactic and semantics) (Weaver, 2009).

In order for students to become effective and efficient or good readers in the reading process, they need to develop a metacognitive awareness. Adolescent readers who are lacking one of the three-cueing systems need metacognitive experience in thinking critically about how they engage with different disciplinary texts. Instruction in metacognitive strategies helps students figure out when to keep trying to read a word, when to use a meaningful substitute, and when to just move on (Weaver, 2009).

According to the NCTE guidelines (2004), adolescent readers need to be able to ask:

- When do I comprehend?
- When do I understand a text?
- When do I not understand a text?
- What can I do when meaning breaks down?

Metacognitive instructional strategies help students become aware of the automatic strategies they already use. Teachers can start by having students create a list, which can be used when they encounter problems in the reading process. By creating a reference list of reading strategies, students are able to self-monitor their progress in the reading process.

Multiple strategy intervention models that are metacognitive, such as reciprocal teaching, are more effective for teaching reading comprehension. One extensive research
review (Goldman, 2012) on the effects of reciprocal teaching found that in addition to significant gains in classroom reading comprehension, students also experienced positive effects on standardized test scores. In reciprocal teaching, students interact with the text and with each other in small groups, in order to learn four self-monitoring strategies for meaning making in the reading process: clarification, question, summarize, and predict. When they use self-monitoring techniques, adolescent readers increase metacognition while simultaneously gaining language and literacy acquisition.

**Academic Language and Vocabulary.** Adolescent readers who fail to read to learn often lack language proficiency. In addition to the needs of bilingual students as previously addressed, many poor readers lack the oral language and academic language development necessary to comprehend content reading. A recent meta-analysis examined nine discussion based interventions and found comprehension increased as student talk increased and teacher talk decreased (Goldman, 2012). Thus, one way to develop academic language and reading comprehension is through student talk.

Traditional patterns of teacher-student discussion silence oral language development. In one case study of Long Term ELLs in an English only classroom, researchers found the predominant form of whole group classroom discussion was in the Initiation Response Evaluation (IRE) format. First identified over 30 years ago, this ineffective teacher-centered discourse remains today (Nora & Wollman cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009). In the first phase, Initiation, the teacher begins the discourse by asking a question with a known answer because “the teacher wants to know if the students know information the teacher already knows” (Nora & Wollman cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009, p. 164). In the second phase, Response, students are expected to respond. If no one
volunteers, than the teacher has the right to nominate a student who is then obligated to respond or will be seen as uncooperative. During the third phase, Evaluation, the teacher evaluates the student’s responses. Even though it minimizes student interactions and oral language development, IRE is still the most common form of discussion used in ELL classrooms today (Nora & Wollman cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009).

Discussion based instruction is essential for BICS and CALP development. Student interaction not only allows ELLs to test their new language, but also helps all adolescents gain new vocabulary when they talk and explore new concepts (Nora & Wollman cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009). Instead of using IRE, teachers can foster BICS/CALP growth through small groups or pairs where students are encouraged to extend their answers. Furthermore, students can increase BICS/CALP through rehearsing natural language with repeated readings or Reader’s Theater (Kim, J., & Guryan, J., 2011).

Bilingual programs that provide rich oral language development help ELLs transfer academic language to English. Since many ELLs are not in bilingual programs, teachers in English only classrooms can encourage academic language transfer by encouraging ELLs to use both languages during class discussion, group collaboration, or partner work time. Guiterrez (2002) conducted 3 case studies of High School math classes where Spanish-speaking students were highly successful. In all three classes, teachers used similar strategies: they built on background knowledge, had students work in collaborative groups, allowed them to speak in their primary language, and they supplemented and/or modified the textbook. Although the teachers in this study were
English-only speakers, they still created a bilingual environment advantageous for academic language transfer.

Vocabulary strategies increase academic language proficiency in adolescent readers. In one study of how students acquire new words, Sedita (2005) found that on average students learn about 100-150 words per week from context clues and word parts. Yet, when learning individual words, this study found acquisition is limited to 8-10 new words (a typical vocabulary quiz). Current research on vocabulary development concludes that teachers should follow four procedures to ensure vocabulary development: (1) provide rich and varied oral language experiences; (2) teach individual words; (3) teach word-learning strategies; and (4) foster word consciousness (Graves, 2006).

Most of the words students will learn come from context. Teachers can scaffold students to develop word meaning habits using semantic and syntactic context clues. According to Zwiers (2010), authors provide context clues, with or without text signals, so that students will understand unknown words. Teachers can point out text signals such as: explanations/definitions, synonyms/restatements, antonyms/contrast, cause/effect, and an example of the word; or non-text signals such as pictures or grammar (noun or a verb). New vocabulary is retained through multiple contextualized encounters. Furthermore, single exposure to new vocabulary, even in context, does not substantially increase learning and retention (Zwiers, 2010). Teachers can instead reinforce vocabulary and contextualize new strategies by using student work samples. Word sorts also provide multiple encounters with new vocabulary as students group and analyze connections. For example, in word sorts, students learn vocabulary and spelling patterns in context with several activities to reinforce the new pattern.
Explicitly teaching carefully selected vocabulary words is more effective than traditional vocabulary instruction. According to one study by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) traditional vocabulary instruction, which requires extensive time searching for dictionary definitions and then writing random sentences with the word, is not an effective use of instructional time. Instead, teachers should explicitly teach tier 2 words with graphic organizers, which are not the most basic (tier 1) or specialized (tier 3). According to Beck et al. (2002), teachers should choose Tier 2 words with the following criteria: importance and utility, instructional potential and conceptual understanding.

Effective vocabulary instruction teaches students strategies for word parts (morphology). Educational researchers Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) found that using morphology to break down words should be explicitly taught in 4 steps: (1) recognize s/he doesn’t understand the word (2) analyze the word for morphemes (3) hypothesize a meaning (4) check hypothesis against the context. In order for students to be able to practice these steps, they need additional explicit instruction in the meaning of prefixes and suffixes, how words get transformed and roots. Teachers can start with the 20 most common prefixes and suffixes and have students create word walls. Students can also create word walls for variations of the same roots in order to see how spelling and pronunciation changes. Finally, in order for students to be able to extract roots, they need to recognize the root’s meaning in isolation. Teachers can explicitly teach the most common Latin and Greek roots to be memorized. Other roots that are common can be taught in a meaningful context as they occur in the curriculum (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007).

In addition to word walls and explicit instruction in prefixes, suffixes and roots, Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) recommended morphology for Spanish speaking students can
be taught through the use of cognates. Teachers can create a word wall with the Spanish word and encourage students to figure out the English cognate or vice versa. Students can also be explicitly taught English and Spanish cognate suffixes (for example -idad translates to -ity as in originalidad and originality).

In order for students to become independent word learners, they need to be able to self-select vocabulary they can use in their everyday conversations. According to one study by Blachowicz, C., and Fisher, P.J. (2002), when students self-select vocabulary words to study they learn and retain the meaning more than when the teacher assigns words. Additionally, students retained more words when the word was usable in their peer group and frequently occurred in readings or the media. This study concluded that teachers can either have students bring words they do not know (especially ELL’s) or teachers and students can collaborate and design word study that incorporates student self selection and teacher-selected content area vocabulary (Blachowicz, C., & Fisher, P.J. 2002).

The Guided Writing process develops academic language while simultaneously reinforcing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Mohr & Mohr cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009). In their case study of the effects of Guided Writing on reading and writing achievement, Mohr & Mohr (cited in Coppola & Primas, 2009) found ELLs standardized reading test scores had significantly improved. At the beginning of the year, students scored well below average, but by the end of the year, they were all within average range. This improvement was due to an increase in vocabulary growth, which resulted in more complex syntactic and semantic structures.
Rich in language and literacy acquisition, Text Talk is one example of a vocabulary strategy that increases academic language (McKeown & Beck, 2003). During Read Alouds, Text Talk uses oral language to develop vocabulary and engage readers in deeper comprehension. While the story is being read out loud, students are scaffolded through vocabulary development. Throughout the story, students utilize new vocabulary to extend the text through discussion and questions. In a comparative study, the average Text Talk response to literature was 7.7 words compared to 2.1 words in the control group. By having students verbally synthesize and articulate their understanding of new vocabulary, Text Talks uses oral language to reinforce academic language and literacy acquisition (McKeown & Beck, 2003).

**Self-Selected Reading.** SSR and traditional skills-based instruction have different methods for addressing language and literacy acquisition. According to Krashen (2004), SSR simply means, “Reading because you want to” (p. 1). When SSR is implemented, it can range from sustained silent reading to self-selected reading programs (Krashen, 2003). In sustained silent reading, students read whatever they want with no assignments and little accountability. In self-selected reading, the whole class has structured reading time with minimal accountability such as, keeping a reading journal and weekly teacher conferences (for the purpose of this paper, SSR will be limited to “self-selected” reading). All ranges of SSR, however, are different from traditional skills-based instruction in that there are no book reports, no questions to be answered at the end of the chapter, and no list of vocabulary words to be looked up.

An overwhelming amount of research has shown SSR to be highly effective for language and literacy acquisition. In his recent summary of SSR programs, Krashen
(2005) found that 51 out of 54 studies showed readers doing as well or better than comparison students in traditional language arts or second language program. In further studies, which specifically examined ELL programs, he found that 23 out of 23 (100%) of students out performed comparison students in second language programs (Krashen, 2005).

The SSR programs in these studies varied in their approaches to language and literacy instruction. Cho and Choi’s (2008) study used self-selected reading and shared-reading. The shared reading aspect allowed for more verbal interaction, which could account for an increase in language scores. A study by Lee and McQuillan (2008) used graded readers (simplified phonetic based texts) in addition to authentic literature. Student reading logs revealed, however, that students gradually chose to move from graded readers to authentic literature. The progression in reading selection (graded readers to authentic literature) naturally corresponded to their progression in literacy and language development. Lee and McQuillan (2008) concluded that students in earlier stages of language development need access to simplified text in order to receive input at their comprehensible input level.

Students in SSR programs made language and literacy growth without the use of tests, formal study, or even oral language production (Cho & Choi 2008; Krashen, 2005; Lee, 2007; Shin, 2001; 2004). This finding is particularly significant for language acquisition in ELLs who struggle with oral language production (especially in the pre-production and early-production stages of language). Although oral language is a critical component for language acquisition, SSR allows for a silent period, in which language gains are still being made. The progress made through SSR in this silent period can then
aide and eventually transfer to oral language production (Krashen, 1982). Traditional direct instruction with drills, exercises, for testing however, does not aid or transfer to the student’s oral language because isolated words/skills do not translate to authentic language production. In this way, directly teaching literacy and language skills does not teach authentic literacy and language acquisition, but merely teaches testing (Krashen, 2005).

Affective variables in SSR motivate students to become independent readers. According to research on SSR (Cho & Choi 2008; Lee, 2007; Shin, 2001; 2004), when students can self-select reading, they are more engaged which motivates them to take independent action to read more. The impact of self-selection was particularly observed in Lee’s (2007) study comparing traditional instruction, and two reading groups: (1) student self-selected reading and (2) teacher selected reading. Although the teacher selected group made greater progress than the traditional instruction group, the student self-selected group made the most language growth of all three groups. Students in the self-select group were given choice, which motivated them to not only take independent action to read more, but they retained more because they were engaged in the material (Lee, 2007).

Motivation also creates positive attitudes towards reading that empowers students to take responsibility for their learning. Shin (2001) observed that when ELL students were given access to high interest books and magazines, they began to develop positive attitudes toward reading. Instead of viewing reading as “schoolwork” they began to see it as “exciting and interesting” (p. 16). In Lee’s three consecutive SSR studies (2007), ELL students felt empowered and took responsibility for language learning when they were
given the opportunity for choice through self-selection. Consequently, experimental
groups that were given a choice showed the most language growth because they were
motivated to learn English for the love of reading (Lee, 2007).

A rich print environment engages students in reading. According to McQuillan
and Au (2001) "environments can create situational interest, which in turns leads to
greater individual motivation and ultimately to greater participation in an activity" (p. 227). When students have access to high interest reading material in a rich print
environment, they become more interested in the material, which motivates them to read
more. When students do not have access to an engaging rich print environment, they lack
motivation and fall behind academically. Many of these students may be labeled as
“reluctant readers” who “hate” reading when in fact they lack access to engaging
materials. These differences in amount, type, and nature of print environments and
experiences led researchers (Duke, 2000) to conclude that low SES children have lower
levels of literacy partly due to the minimally engaging schools they attend. In addition to
the need for schools to equalize the amount of access to print, schools also have an
obligation to actively change the type and nature of print experiences and the
environment in the classroom. All schools should have opportunities for students to be
active agents of print (Duke, 2000; and Krashen et al., 2008).

Engaging rich print environments must be accompanied with SSR for authentic
language and literacy to be acquired. Direct Instruction does not translate to authentic
language and literacy improvement because students are not reading authentic print
materials. For example, the books in the classroom libraries of the low SES classrooms in
Duke’s study (2000) were used rarely if at all. Thus, even when a traditional skills-based
program has access to a rich print environment, books are often underutilized because they are not central to the curriculum. In this way, Duke’s study (2000) answers why traditional instruction is an ineffective method for language and literacy acquisition: the students need to actually read the books to become better readers (Krashen, 2004).

Access to print material has been found to be the strongest predictor of reading success. In their national and international study, Krashen et al. (2008) replicated McQuillian’s 1998 study and examined the correlation between poverty and access to print materials in school and public libraries and reading test scores. Both studies measured poverty and access in the home, school and community and found a access to books had a strong correlation to national reading scores, regardless of poverty, for fourth graders in each state in the U.S. Furthermore, Krashen et al. (2008) then examined the same data for the same sample in eighth grade. This study found that 89% of the difference in reading scores from fourth to eighth grade could be accounted for based on poverty, access to books, and fourth grade reading scores (Krashen et al., 2008).

When students have more access to authentic literature at home, school, and in their community, they read more. Both Krashen et al. (2008) and McQuillian’s (1998) study found that increased accessed had an independent, causal role in increasing student motivation to read. Specifically, students were motivated to read more when they owned more books and when they were taken to the school or public library. Both studies also found the number of books students owned correlated to their time spent reading and their reading test scores. Thus, in addition to providing access to authentic reading materials, in order to increase motivation for independent reading, teachers and parents
need to set aside time and space for SSR (Krashen et al., 2008; McQuillian, 1998; and McQuillan & Au, 2001).

Several studies document the importance of student motivation and how it can lead to a life-long reading habit. In their comparative study, Cho and Choi (2008) found that the SSR group not only outperformed the control group on standardized tests, but also showed a significant change in their interest, confidence and anxiety. Moreover, the SSR students in this study independently used the English library on their free time while students in the control group never used it. Cho and Choi noted, "even if students do well on formal test of English, it is of no consequence if they do not continue to improve on their own" (p. 73). Likewise, at-risk ELL students in Shin’s comparative study (2001) were extremely successful and improved their reading due to a new sense of intrinsic motivation. At the start of the summer reading intervention program, 86% began independently reading at home and 61% continued independently reading on their own even after the program ended.

**Engagement and Motivation.** Successful modifications must first lower student’s affective filters in order to provide comprehensible input in a low anxiety environment (Krashen, 1982). According to Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis (1982), certain affective variables such as, motivation, self-confidence and anxiety, function as a filter to allow or block language acquisition. When the speaker feels anxiety and low motivation and/or self-confidence, they seek out less language input (either written or oral) and erect a high filter for language input to pass through. This filter then obstructs understanding as negative feelings prevent (filter) input from reaching the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition. According to Krashen’s Comprehensible Input
Hypothesis (1982), instruction at the speaker’s level of comprehensible input increases literacy and language acquisition because when the speaker has a low filter, they seek out more input and understand more.

Students with a low affective filter are more motivated to become independent readers. Motivation lowers the affective filter, thus making students more receptive to language acquisition, which enables them to be more successful and seek out more reading (language and literacy input). This affective filter cycle, SSR (choice) - motivation - engagement - success - SSR, is why SSR programs yield greater gains that can be seen not only in test results, but also in student’s attitudes toward taking action to become life-long learners (Cho & Choi 2008; Lee, 2007; Shin, 2001; and Shin, 2004). This cycle can only be practiced, however, when students are given access to authentic literature in a print rich environment.

Students are motivated and engaged when teachers are more like coaches who scaffold and modify tasks according to the students ZPD in order to ensure success. In Shin’s case study (2004), one teacher’s direct coaching and encouragement influenced students to read more. One student, Tanisha, was not underperforming due to a lack of competence, but a lack of self-confidence. As the teacher offered encouragement, she gained confidence, which lowered her affective filter. Researchers noted direct encouragement was only received because of three conditions: (1) there was access to plenty of books, (2) the reading was compelling and students were allowed to choose what to read (self-select/high-interest), (3) the student was capable (at the right reading level) but lacked confidence. Consequently, Tanisha went from reading a chapter or
two/day to a book/day. This dramatic increase in success motivated her to continue to develop a life-long reading habit even after the program ended.

Although there is a substantial amount of research on reading comprehension strategies, many teachers need additional resources that synthesize best practices. Taking the research reviewed, I have created a project in chapter 4 that offers teachers a guide for modifying general education instruction for adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to create a guideline of adolescent reading strategies for general education teachers who wish to develop reading comprehension in the content areas. This guideline targets four reading strategies (reading process, academic/oral language, independent reading, and motivation/engagement) for adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension. Although each strategy has multiple options to modify instruction, teachers should use all four strategies in order to address the substantial reading comprehension difficulties of adolescent students. When used over time, these strategies become automatic reading skills that prepare adolescent readers for deeper comprehension of content area reading.

Population and Setting

This project was designed as a resource to guide teachers in challenging general education classroom settings. Specifically, the guide in chapter four provides instructional modifications for adolescent students with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension in grades fourth through twelfth. Furthermore, since the research reviewed finds an increased learning gap due to the combination of low SES and language, this project was particularly designed for ELLs in English Only (EO) classrooms. A typical ELL population may consist of new arrivals, migrants, and long-term language learners.

Method
I designed a set of graphics, charts, informal assessments, and resources in order to target four strategies for adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension: reading process, academic/oral language, independent reading, and motivation/engagement. The strategies, in this guideline, were selected from the research in the literature review. All strategies were selected for their ability to target language and literacy acquisition simultaneously, which are the components of comprehension.

**A graphic to represent the interaction of reading comprehension strategies.**

Many middle school and high school content areas teachers struggle to teach reading comprehension. I created this graphic in order to help teachers and administrators understand the different aspects of reading comprehension and how they interact. Not only do adolescent readers need fundamental reading skills and academic language, but they also need engaging/motivating curriculum and a print rich environment that provides opportunities for them to become independent readers.

**A chart of instructional modification comprehension strategies classroom teachers are easily able to use during instruction.** Many teachers want to modify the content area curriculum, but may not know how. I created this chart to organize various instructional modifications according to the four strategies for reading comprehension. I offer several choices within each strategy in order for teachers to choose modifications appropriate for their students.

**A graphic to represent the interaction of schemas, language cues, and strategies in the reading process.** Adolescent students with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension often lack fundamental reading skills. I created this graphic to
illustrate to teachers how good readers use all three cueing systems as well as schemas and strategies in the reading process.

A list of metacognitive strategies in the reading process. Over time, reading strategies become automatic reading habits or skills. I created this chart for students to become aware of the strategies they can use when approaching challenging content area text. Students can refer to this chart and add to it as they become more metacognitively aware of their reading strategies.

Informal assessments: The typical classroom teacher has had little specialized training beyond a basic credential. This project contains a list of informal assessment that are not time consuming to conduct. Each of these assessments will provide the classroom teacher with useful data to assist them in understanding the areas where students are misapplying or not applying reading strategies and will provide an avenue to know their students.

A list of resources for teachers who are searching for high interest/low readability books to recommend to students for independent reading or for use in their classrooms. Adolescent readers with substantial difficulties in comprehension need text at their readability level. Secondly, they need high interests texts that will motivate and engage them to become independent life long readers. This chart offers features and resources high interest/low readability books should contain in order to support reader motivation. Moreover, the websites listed provide resources to identify or purchase high interest-low readability books.
Chapter 4

Project

Based on the literature reviewed, I created a guideline to address the needs of adolescent readers who have fallen into the 4th grade slump and consequently have substantial difficulties with reading comprehension. My guideline addresses four strategies for reading comprehension: reading skills, language proficiency, independent reading, and motivation. All are research-based strategies effective for both poor readers and ELLs in English only classrooms. These strategies are not intended for isolated reading skill instruction. When incorporated together, over time, the strategies contained in this project can help adolescent ELLs and students with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension develop automatic reading habits or skills for reading comprehension, which will enable them to become good readers for content area reading.
The following figure demonstrates different aspects of reading comprehension. Not only do adolescent readers need fundamental reading skills and academic language, but they also need engaging/motivating curriculum and a print rich environment that provides opportunities for them to become independent readers.

**Figure 1.**

**What Causes Substantial Difficulties with Reading Comprehension for Adolescent Readers?**
Many teachers want to modify the content area curriculum, but may not know which strategies to use. I created this chart to organize various instructional modifications according to the four strategies for reading comprehension. Teachers should choose instructional modifications from each of the four components of reading comprehension. I offer several choices within each of the four components in order for teachers to choose modifications appropriate for their students. These strategies are not intended for isolated skill instruction, but when used over time become automatic reading habits.

Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the student struggle with…</th>
<th>Teaching Objective</th>
<th>Instructional Modifications (Strategies for Reading Comprehension)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **The Reading Process**        | **All 3 Cueing Systems:** (fig. 5) | Perform a Miscue analysis to assess strengths and needs in the reading process.  
1. Graphophonic (phonics)  
2. Syntactic (sentence structure and fluency)  
3. Semantic (meaning) |
|                               |                   | 1. Graphophonic-  
• Word Chunking  
• Word Clusters  
• Frame a phrase  
  
2. Syntactic-  
• Teacher Model- Choral reading, Shadow reading  
• Engaging Natural Language- poetry, Reader’s Theatre, record/listen to books on tape  
• Use color to mark patterns for tracking  
  
3. Semantic-  
• Activate schema  
• Contextualize new vocabulary  
• Preview the text  
• Substitute meaning based responses to unknown words (no nonsense words) |
|                               |                   |  
Increase Metacognition (fig. 6) |
| **Oral Language or Academic Language** | ELLs:  
• Primary Language Transfer  
• Comprehensible | Home Language Interview (fig. 7)  
Words their Way Spelling Inventory  
Discussion Based Instruction (Goldman 2012)  
Rehearsing Language (e.g. journaling, |
| Input (or ZPD) | repeated readings, Readers Theater (Kim et.al. 2009)  
|               | Language Experience Approach (Heald-Taylor, 1986)  
|               | Scaffolded Reading Experience (SREs)  
|               | Reciprocal Teaching (Nora & Wollman, 2009)  
|               | Guided Writing (Mohr & Mohr, 2009)  
|               | Text Talk (McKeown & Beck, 2002)  
|               | Authentic Literacy & Disciplinary Practices (Goldman, 2012)  
|               | Graphic Organizers (Zwiers, 2010)  
|               | Teach Tier 2 Words (Beck 2002)  
|               | Context Clues (Graves, 2006)  
|               | Word Parts (Graves, 2006)  
|               | Collaborative Groups (Goldman, 2008)  
|               | Extra time for practice/reinforcement (Goldman 2008)  
| All Students: |  
|               | Connect Primary & Secondary Discourses  
|               | Activate Schema  
|               | Contextualize New Concepts  
|               | Learn Word Meanings  
|               | Simultaneously teach content and language  
| Reading Independently | Provide choice and access to a variety of high interest reading materials at the student’s independent reading level (95% readability).  
|               | Book Talks  
|               | Read Aloud  
|               | Variety of genres  
|               | High Interest-Low Readability (fig. 9)  
|               | Class time for SSR  
|               | Library visits  
|               | Reading Interview (fig. 8)  
| Staying motivated/engaged | Comprehensible Input  
|               | Lower the Affective Filter  
|               | Mediate Learning  
|               | Scaffold tasks  
|               | Modify/Differentiate Instruction and Materials  
|               | Select materials that appear short so students experience success (Shin, 2001)  
|               | Use activities with movable elements (e.g. word cards, letter tiles, sequencing picture cards) to increase interest and decrease risk (movable trial responses allow for “mistakes”)  
|               | Segment tasks and extend ZPD after each success  
|               | Coach to reinforce effort (not intelligence) (Shin, 2001)  
|               | Provide choice with tasks/materials  
|               | Authentic reading materials inclusive of print, audio, and digital media (e.g. biographies, newspaper articles, editorials, memoirs, documentaries, photographs, artwork, maps, timelines, websites, blogs, wiki, PowerPoint, video, mixed media, and audio files) (IRA, 2012) |
The following is one example of instructional modification that can be implemented over the course of a school year in a general education classroom. Although these instructional modifications do not include all strategies, they do cover all four components of reading comprehension. Note, these modifications are in addition to implementing independent reading (SSR).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Covariates (setting, duration, time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARI</td>
<td>An miscue analysis designed to provide a thorough analysis of the students reading fluency, comprehension, and listening comprehension level</td>
<td>1-1 setting 20 minutes 2 times/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Writing</td>
<td>Teachers and students engage in a shared writing experience and use the writing sample as an meaningful contextualized text to examine language and literacy.</td>
<td>Small groups Unit or theme 10-60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>Similar to Guided Writing, this approach is centered on a shared experience as teachers scaffold student's language practices into academic writing.</td>
<td>Small groups Unit or theme 10-60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader's Theater</td>
<td>An integrated reading, writing, speaking, and listening approach where students use scripts to rehearse and reenact dramatic retellings of stories.</td>
<td>Small groups Unit or theme 20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal Teaching</td>
<td>A multi-strategy approach for small group discussion and reading comprehension.</td>
<td>Small groups 1 Text selection 30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRE (Fig. 4)</td>
<td>Instructional modifications that scaffold readers in successfully comprehending various content area materials.</td>
<td>Whole group, Small group, partners, and/or independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Talk</td>
<td>Used in Read Aloud, this format increases comprehension through student discussion questions that target intensive vocabulary development</td>
<td>Small groups 1 Text selection 15-30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Sorts</td>
<td>Vocabulary and phonetic word study activities where students learn patterns through sorting and grouping flash cards.</td>
<td>Small groups 1 sort/week 15 minutes/day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SRE’s can be used to scaffold students before, during, and after reading. Teachers can choose one SRE for guided reading lessons. SRE’s are especially effective for ELLs who need additional activities to support their schemas and academic language transfer.

**Figure 4.**

**Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prereading activities</th>
<th>During-reading activities</th>
<th>Postreading activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivating</td>
<td>Silent reading</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activating or building background knowledge</td>
<td>Reading to students</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing text specific knowledge</td>
<td>Supported reading</td>
<td>Building connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating the reading to students' lives</td>
<td>Oral reading by students</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preteaching vocabulary</td>
<td>Modifying the text</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preteaching concepts</td>
<td>Using students’ native language</td>
<td>Artistic, graphic, and non-verbal activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prequestioning, predicting, and direction setting</td>
<td>Engaging students community people as resources</td>
<td>Application and outreach activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using students’ native language</td>
<td></td>
<td>Using students’ native language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging students and community people as resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging students and community people as resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggesting strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This graphic represents the interaction of schemas, language cues, and strategies in the reading process. Adolescent students with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension often lack fundamental reading skills. I created this graphic to illustrate to teachers how good readers use all three cueing systems as well as schemas and strategies in the reading process.

Figure 5.

**Reading Process**

While focusing momentarily on a word or phrase, good readers simultaneously use schemas, language cues and reading strategies.

- **Schemas**
  - Knowledge of grammar or conventions of print
  - Contexts (situational or in the text)

- **Language Cues**
  - Graphonetic (phonics)
  - Syntactic (sentence structure)
  - Semantic (meaning)

- **Reading Strategies**
  - Confirm, clarify or correct what we've just read
  - Sample phonics
  - Make new predictions about what's to follow
Over time, reading strategies become automatic reading habits or skills. I created this list for students to become aware of the strategies they can use when approaching challenging content area text. Students can refer to this chart and add to it as they become more metacognitively aware of their reading strategies.

Figure 6.

Reading Process

Metacognitive Strategies

- **PLAN**
  - Preview
  - Vocabulary
  - Background knowledge
  - Contextualize content
  - Predict
  - Question
  - Primary Language

- **MONITOR**
  - Sound out
  - Reread
  - Self correct
  - Imagery
  - Substitution
  - Ask someone

- **MANAGE**
  - What am I thinking
  - What am I doing to understand?
  - Do I have a problem?
  - What do I do?

- **EVALUATE**
  - Ask questions
  - Discussion
  - Make connections
  - Main Ideas
  - Summary
  - Primary Language
Figures 7 and 8 are informal interviews that provide teachers with useful data to understand students. When teachers know their students background and interests, they can better modify instruction and match readers to high interests books. Additionally, since several questions focus on reading strategies, teachers can use the following interviews to better understanding the areas where students are misapplying or not applying reading strategies.

**Figure 7.**

**Home Language Interview**

Name____________________________ Age/Birthday____________________ Date____

1. Which language do you hear most at home? ________________________________
   Always       Often       Sometimes       Never

2. Your father speaks to you in: ________________________________
   Always       Often       Sometimes       Never

3. Your mother speaks to you in: ________________________________
   Always       Often       Sometimes       Never

4. Your brothers and sisters speak to you in: ________________________________
   Always       Often       Sometimes       Never

5. Does your father ever speak English to you?
   How often? ________________________________
   When? ________________________________

6. Does your mother ever speak English to you?
   How often? ________________________________
   When? ________________________________

7. Do your brother/sister ever speak English to you?
   How often? ________________________________
   When? ________________________________

8. Which language does your parents consider most important for you to know?

9. What TV shows does your family watch?
Reading Interview

Name ___________________________ Age/Birthday ___________________ Date _____

1. What do you do for fun? What else are you interested in?

2. What do you read? What do you like to read? Favorite book?

3. Do your parents like to read? What do you see your parents reading for themselves?

4. Do/did your parents read to you? What/When/how often? How many books do you have at home?

5. How did you learn to read? What do/did your parents/teachers do to help you learn to read?


7. Why do people read? Why do you read?

8. What do people do when they read? What do you do inside your head when you read?
   a. When you are reading and come to a word you don’t know, what do you do? Does this help?
   b. What else do you do?
   c. What else do you think you could do, if you were reading by yourself, and there was no one around to help you?

9. What do you do well as a reader?

10. What would you like to do better as a reader?

Comments/Notes:
Many teachers often lack knowledge or access to specific books or other reading materials that are both age appropriate and engaging for adolescents while also remaining at a low readability level. The following links represent a few examples of current, up-to-date book lists that provide teachers with high interests- low readability literature in multiple genres.

Figure 9.

**Independent Reading (SSR)**

**High Interests – Low Readability**

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http://www.grassrootsbooks.net/us/

Grassroots press specifically publishes high interests-low readability books for high school and young adults. Grassroots has over 500 high interest books. Most books are biographies, but they other genres as well. All books come with lesson plans and are affordable at $2.99/book. Books can also be purchased in sets for classroom use.
The Austin Public Library system has a dedicated website offering resources for adolescent readers. Multiple links offer a variety of high interest books in different genres at low readability levels for adolescent readers. The site has arranged book lists by topic with engaging descriptions to hook young readers. Selecting the “Great Reads for all ages” link offers one example of engaging reading, which can be used for any grade level.

Scholastics offers teachers’ classroom sets of high interest books at a low readability level. The text sets include the age appropriate level along with the readability level. For example one text set, Shockwave, focuses on middle school science content with engaging stories, information, pictures, and illustrations in both fiction and expository texts while written at a 2nd grade readability level.

School on Wheels has a book list with brief descriptions coded by Reading Level (RL) and Interests Level (IL). For example, Battle of the Bands by K.L. Denman has a 2.9 RL and 7+ IL.

The Northwest Territories (NWT) literacy council has compiled a thorough 166 page book list specifically for high school readers requiring low readability books. The list includes readability level, book cover images, subject/genre, and engaging descriptions. Most of these books come from Grassroots Press.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

A review of the research concerning adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension reveals some critical instructional components of content area literacy practices. Adolescents need automatic reading skills (not isolated skill-based instruction) for deeper comprehension, to approach higher levels of rigor and complexity in content area reading. Reading strategies practiced over time become automatic skills. Successful comprehension requires fundamental reading skills and language proficiency. In order to develop comprehension skills, teachers should not assume proficiency, but should address adolescent needs in the reading process and language acquisition. Additionally, many adolescents are impacted by additional variables that affect their success; therefore, teachers should implement motivating and engaging practices, which help adolescents to become independent readers.

The research reviewed shows that once poor readers in the emergent stage fall into the 4th grade slump they become adolescents with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension and remain in this gap throughout school. For many students this gap can be prevented in the emergent reading stage by developing fundamental reading skills (graphophonic, syntactic, and semantics) and oral language. ELLs are disproportionately affected by this gap and therefore are in the greatest need of instructional modifications starting in the emergent reader stage. Not only do ELLs have a greater need for language and literacy acquisition, but also their success is more often impacted by outside factors such as poverty and access.
Educators have an enormous responsibility to modify instruction for adolescent readers with substantial difficulties in reading comprehension. Theoretical and practical implications, however, may prevent many teachers and administrators from implementing these strategies. In the education field there are contrasting theoretical definitions of the reading process. While some support a multi-strategy meaning-based approach, most teach the more traditional isolated skills-based method. Educators wishing to teach according to the three language cues may be limited by their district’s adopted curriculum.

Instructional modifications require time, space, and access to materials. Teachers who use mandated curricula may struggle to find time for modifications within their allotted scope and sequence. These strategies are not intended to be in addition to the standard curriculum, but should modify it. Extra time to train teachers in multi-strategy modifications should be a practical consideration for administrators.

Teachers and students need access to engaging materials. In order for students to become highly motivated independent readers, they need access to high interest reading. This modification would require schools and communities to create rich print environments including diverse and extensive public, school and classroom libraries. Furthermore, in addition to providing access, time and space in the classroom should also be a practical implication for self-select reading.

Instructional modifications give educators the tools to prepare students for content area reading. If educators use this research based multi-strategy approach for adolescent students with substantial difficulties in reading, student achievement is likely to rise.
Over time, these strategies become automatic skills that prepare adolescents for more complex and rigorous comprehension in content area texts.
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