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Teachers Describe Their Confidence in Teaching Secondary Students with Low Literacy

Skills

by

Tamara Polzin

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate in Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, MN

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Research Questions

“The single greatest factor in student achievement is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher,” (ILA, 2000).

Researchers (Copeland, S. & Keefe, E., 2019; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000; Standovich, 1986) suggest literacy is at the core of all academic learning. However, in over 30 years of experience as a teacher (elementary, English Language Arts, English as a Second Language, and literacy), not all children “crack the code” to reading at the same pace. As a teacher, I was a part of a team, including volunteers, classroom, Title 1, Special Education, and English Language Learner teachers that worked to enhance all students' literacy skills, especially those who did not crack the code. This collaborative effort worked for some but not for all, even though children were afforded the opportunity to have a collaborative team of educators with the knowledge and background, focusing on best research practices, to augment their literacy development.

Given this situation, my qualitative research dissertation will focus on the following research questions. *How do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills?* The secondary research questions for this study are: *What factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students? How do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students?*

The research questions focus on the middle and high school (7th - 12th grade) setting because researchers suggest (Brevik, 2017; Copeland, & Keefe, 2019; Vaughn, et al., 2008) that while there are many support systems in place in elementary school, there are few support systems in place as children enter middle school and high school. The placement of these support systems is within their courses based on the assumption that literacy development is finished by third grade, where researchers such as Snow and Moje (2010) argued: “early vaccination of reading instruction protects permanently against reading failure” (p. 66). A different view is held by other researchers (Brevik, 2017; Chambers Cantrell, David Burns, & Callaway, 2008; Ciullo, et al., 2016; Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Snow & Moje, 2010; Spires, Kerkhoff, Graham, Thompson, & Lee, 2018; Spor & Schneider, 1999; Swanson, et al., 2016; Toews & Kurth, 2019) who state that literacy instruction needs to continue throughout adolescence. However, these same authors also note the lack of research in adolescent literacy and support it. Given this lack of research in 2018, Towes and Kurth called upon the research community to study literacy instruction throughout a student’s academic journey, especially for older students.

In the 1970s, researchers started to explore who assumes responsibility for supporting the literacy development of older students. For example, in 1978, Shuman (as cited in Spor & Schneider, 1999) suggested literacy instruction fell upon the English instructor, many of whom did not have knowledge or background to aid struggling readers to make the necessary changes to become skilled readers. Spor and Schneider reported in 1999, the burden of literacy instruction continued to dog English instructors, while in recent years, Spires, et al., (2018) argued the lack of adolescent literacy research

beyond the discourse of the English department contributed to the obstacles found in other disciplines. The researchers (2018) argued the complex challenges of literacy differ between disciplines and should not be viewed as a one-size-fits-all approach.

Aligned with Toews and Kurth's (2019) call to action, the research shared within this dissertation will focus on the continued development of literacy as students move beyond elementary school. This dissertation will seek to understand how social studies teachers describe their confidence/skill level in literacy affects their ability to include literacy in the classroom and explore their perception of the relationship between it and their ability to work with students with low literacy skills.

In this chapter, the researcher will describe the research questions that will lay the foundation of this study. This chapter will also include an overview of the literary themes entailing the importance of literacy skills learned and the researcher's personal and professional connection to the significance of the research.

Overview of the Importance of Literacy Skills and Learning

Swanson, et al. (2016) describe the magnitude of adolescents with low literacy development by noting that adolescent literacy achievement in the United States ranks 15th among developed nations, with over 30% of students in 8th and 12th grade lacking proficient literacy skills. Another indicator of the problem is noted by Snow and Moje (2010) who see the staggering increase in remedial reading and writing courses being offered as more evidence of the low levels of adolescent literacy skills. Evidence of the problem was noted in 1983 by Steiglitz, who reported middle and high school teachers were encouraged to include reading instruction in their courses. While researchers

(Chambers Cantrell, et al., 2008; Hall, 2005) agree with this assertion, teachers continue to be hesitant to include literacy instruction after the third grade. Toews and Kurth (2019) point to a lack of support teachers need to implement needed literacy instruction changes successfully.

Lasting and continued change, Giles and colleagues (2013) argue, occurs when teachers are provided quality professional development that offers continued support to make effective change in their instruction (Wilson, et al., 2009). The International Literacy Association (ILA) (Riley, 2020) further points to teacher effectiveness as a determining factor in student success, calling for the ongoing need for professional development and understanding of literacy development. Successful professional development Guskey (1986) argued occurs when teachers are provided the opportunity to directly see the change in their students' performance. Through this demonstrative gain, teachers develop robust mental modes that grow through experiences and time (Bogard, Sableski, Arnold, & Bowman, 2017). Furthermore, this gain provides the opportunity for teachers to learn that literacy is a multifaceted process that changes over time as students interact with text (Spor & Schneider, 1999).

Literacy

As a literacy educator and leader, I agree with researchers' assertion (Adams, 1990; Brevik, 2017; Faulkner, Oakley, Rohl, Lopes, & Solosy, 2012; NICHHD, 2000), that the foundation of learning begins with literacy. NICHHD (2000) further emphasizes two essential outcomes of well-developed literacy skills. One, if students do not have the basic concepts of phonemic and phonological awareness (alphabet knowledge), they

cannot move from manipulating phonemes into words, words into phrases, and phrases into sentences (the basics of early reading). Two, through language acquisition, children build vocabulary, gain an understanding of concepts, and begin to make connections (NICHD, 2000). As children develop and acquire language, this process transfers to literacy development, taking what can be heard in the dark, to symbols on paper, to meaningful understanding.

Furthermore, it is widely believed students spend their primary years learning how to read (Adams, 1990; NICHD, 2000) and transition to reading to learn throughout their intermediate years (Faulkner, et al. 2012; Shippen, Miller, Patterson, Houchins, & Darch 2014; Toews & Kurth, 2019). However, these researchers also suggest that learning to read is not finite; students need continued support in learning to read across the curriculum and throughout their schooling (Adams, 1990; Brevik, 2017; Faulkner, et al. 2012; NICHD, 2000; Shippen, et al., 2014; Toews & Kurth, 2019). As students advance in their education, the complexity of text they encounter increases, placing continued demands on a learner's ability to utilize their literacy skills (NICHD, 2000; Shippen, et al., 2014). These increased complexities include moving from simple words containing a single syllable that dominates primary reading to complex polysyllabic words that may vary in meaning depending on which content course the student is learning (Moje, 2008; NICHD, 2000.) Governors supported this belief that literacy learning is not finite as they created the Common Core Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) (2021). Here, descriptors of the complexities of literacy

were added not only to the literature standards but also are included in content area standards across the secondary setting.

Adolescent Literacy

The complexity and demands of reading increase throughout students' education and differ across curriculum courses. The foundations of literacy skills are introduced and taught in the primary grades, but Faulkner et al. (2012) and Shippen et al. (2014) suggest these skills must continue to be taught as students advance in school and, more importantly, across content areas. Although some readers have the metacognitive awareness that allows them to acquire literacy skills using a *Nike model of reading - Just do it!*; other readers need explicit connections made through literacy skills/strategies such as a *Sherlock Holmes model of reading* - a direct and methodical approach (Brevik, 2017).

Each subject area has words, sentences, and text unique to its' content and knowledge focus (Faulkner et al., 2012). For example, exclamatory reading (making a statement - claiming an analysis of fact) is often used in a science text but may not be found in a mathematics course. Crucial for students' learning, researchers (NICHHD, 2000) suggest students learn to break words apart (phonemic awareness) and be able to manipulate them to gain meaning not only at the individual word level (vocabulary) but also throughout the text allowing for an overall understanding (comprehension). The inclusion of these key literacy skills must be incorporated into instruction beyond the primary grades (NICHHD, 2000).

Teacher Beliefs/Confidence/Preparation

Hall (2005) suggests researchers have emphasized, for decades, the need for middle school and high school teachers to incorporate reading instruction within their content area learning. However, Hall (2005) and Kamil (2003) have found three reasons content area teachers believe it is not their responsibility to teach reading. One, content area teachers view themselves as highly trained experts in their field of discipline, and two, they have not been trained effectively or feel confident in teaching reading. A third reason is that content area teachers assert they have a depth of content expectations to cover and inefficient time to add reading to their curriculum (Bean, 2001; Chambers Cantrell, et al., 2008; Lester, 2000; Moje, 2008; Principal Leadership, 2001). Furthermore, research by Kamil (2003) has shown content area teachers may believe it is due to the poor educational opportunities provided by the elementary teachers; students continue to struggle in middle and high school reading. Although most teaching licensure programs require a minimum of one course in content literacy, Fisher and Ivey, (2005) and Kamil (2003) believed content area teachers do not always understand the developmental changes in reading as students move throughout their education and the connection to the acquisition of content knowledge; which includes the crucial role of the content teacher.

Personal Significance of the Research Topic

In her book, *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us*, Clinton (1996) asserts it takes a community to educate a child, and it is the responsibility of this community to ensure each child receives the fundamental right to an education. This

belief has been ingrained in my personal and professional learning from an early age. One of my core assumptions is that every child can learn and succeed. Educators, community members, and society should provide opportunities that will provide challenging academic, social, and emotional growth in an effort to enhance a child's respective gifts. So while my core belief is that all learners can learn and succeed, in my nearly thirty years of experience as a teacher, it is clear that the path to success is not the same for every student; some may glide through the learning process with ease, while others may find detours or obstacles in the road making learning challenging. Therefore, my role as a teacher is to guide students by providing strategies and learning opportunities that meet the needs of all students and support their learning no matter which path they may take.

In my personal experience, children who struggle are not always met with teachers who understand how to help them overcome challenges to reach their potential academic level. This belief came from a personal experience with my mother. Due to a physical disability and a child learning in the 1940-the 1950s, my mother missed many opportunities to not only learn to read and write but explore the vast academic possibilities provided to others as her teachers could not see beyond her physical challenges or realize her brain was like a sponge, eager to absorb new learning. Gaining support from family, my mother relied on her ambition to learn to read and write and overcome the challenges her academic community could not provide.

Historically, my mother's struggles were common challenges families encountered as they fought to ensure their child had access to an equitable education.

However, in 2010, Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education (as cited in, Spring, 2018), strongly supported all children's right to access education through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The passage of IDEA was a call to the educational system for educators to reframe the conversations and break the mental models that are ingrained with assumptions about a student's potential (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Senge, 2006).

One might suggest since the 1950s, as a community, educators have learned how to help struggling students. Have we? As a parent, I watched my daughter struggle in school in the late 1990s. As a young child, she loved to read and read books by the time she entered kindergarten. Her love of reading was encouraged, and her primary teachers expressed their enthusiasm for her reading abilities. At this time in academics, whole-language was a central component of the school's literacy learning. I recall teachers' lack of concern in her grasp of phonetic skills as my daughter was progressing in her reading through the whole language approach. She was a top reader, so was there a need for concern? It was not until my daughter began middle school that it was evident that she had started to struggle in school.

It felt like overnight; my daughter went from a love of reading to avoiding it like the plague. I could not understand what had changed in her success as a student, and her teachers were not able to identify an academic justification for the change. "Some children just change attitudes towards school at this age," I recall a teacher saying. My daughter struggled throughout middle school, but she was beginning to succeed again by the time she entered high school. At the time, my daughter's struggles were brushed off

to behavior that accompanied middle school girls' growth and personal development by teachers. However, as a parent, I wanted an answer. As a teacher, I did not understand why. It would not be until years later the realization that the challenges my daughter had faced were not due to misguided middle school behaviors but rather due to a lack of phonemic/phonetic awareness.

Professional Significance of Research Topic

As an educator, in the 1990s, my first full-time teaching position was in English as a Second Language (ESL). Excitement and nervousness for my new role consumed me as I did not have an ESL teaching license; rather, a few years of experience working in an ESL classroom as a paraprofessional was my only preparation. My supervising principal showed great confidence in my abilities to take charge of the task presented to me and provided support when needed. In this role, I first learned how to advocate for students and their needs to be academically successful. Although my teaching load included 150 students across four buildings in the district, this only comprised about two percent of the entire school population. The ESL department initially consisted of one full-time teacher, myself. By the end of the first year, the department grew with the addition of eight paraprofessionals across all district buildings working collaboratively to provide service for our ESL population. During this year, I learned a great deal about language acquisition; however, helping ESL students learn how to increase their literacy skills eluded my professional skill set.

As an undergraduate in the early 1990's, my literacy training focused on a whole-language approach to literacy development. This approach to literacy did not

provide the necessary background to help me with my work with students, and even more so, to help me coach classroom/content area teachers working with ESL students in their classrooms. My lack of knowledge and confidence greatly impacted my effect on helping my students or colleagues be effective in the classroom.

In 2012, I discovered and enrolled in a literacy education licensure/graduate program. Within two years of uncovering research and implementing theories, a new understanding of literacy acquisition and a feeling of confidence in my knowledge and ability to aid students in their learning came to fruition. Soon after, I began working as a Reading Specialist in a middle school classroom. Here, my knowledge and skills of literacy continued to grow my confidence, and the effects of this learning played out within my students' progress with literacy. However, working with content area teachers, I found myself in familiar territory, not knowing how to help content area teachers move forward with their understanding of literacy and how it affected a student's ability to succeed in their classroom. Once again, my confidence began to wane as I struggled to lead and provide the support my peers required to help struggling readers in the classroom. This realization of the need to provide the necessary professional development opportunities to understand better what content area teachers specifically need also fuels my desire to complete this dissertation research.

As I reflect on my growth in literacy, I did not have the educational background or professional development support needed to feel/be successful in the classroom. As a leader, it is important to ask the questions of my colleagues and define where, what, or how they need help to ensure they too gain the skills required and feel confident in

providing support for their students. As a scholar, researcher, leader, and community member, how can I help others if I do not know what is needed? My goal is to understand the needs of content area teachers better.

Primary Goal of this Research

Stanovich's (1986) assertion of the "Matthew Effect," the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer, meaning, as students fall behind their peers in literacy development, their peers continue to increase development tenfold (literacy gap) has had a profound effect on me. Through my professional experience, I have had the opportunity to witness Stanovich's belief in the *Matthew Effect* with students who struggle in school. When students with whom I have worked lack the necessary literacy skills for comprehension, it inhibits their ability to grasp the concepts taught and puts individuals at risk of never closing this literacy achievement gap. With the added demands and complexity of literacy as students move through school, researchers (Copeland & Keefe, 2009; Vaughn, et al., 2008; Wendt, 2013) contend a need for the explicit teaching of literacy skills throughout a child's education is imperative. If solutions to help middle and high school students build their literacy skills are not found, how can students ever catch up?

Students who struggle academically are at increased risk of dropping out, being in legal troubles, and/or landing in careers that keep them in low financial status, to name just a few problematic outcomes (Ciullo, et al., 2016; Patterson, Eubank, Rathbun, & Noble, 2010; NICHD, 2000). It is my assertion that, as a society, educators need to realize the importance of ensuring students acquire the necessary literacy skills to be successful not only in school but far beyond in life as they become contributing members

of society. This begins with providing students with literacy support throughout their educational practice. Towards this purpose, I aim to gain an understanding of how my role as a leader can influence change in the instruction of literacy at the middle and secondary school levels.

Chapter One Summary

The objective of the primary research question, *how do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills* is to bring an understanding of the needs of a small group of content area teachers as they continue to work with students who struggle with low literacy skills in the content area. To gain a deeper understanding of this objective, the secondary research questions, *what factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students, how do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students* also aimed to understand this need. Understanding the lived experience of even small groups of teachers has the potential to provide scholars, researchers, and school leaders with a path to help teachers with their professional growth in literacy skills allowing them to be more productive in the classroom.

The upcoming chapters of this dissertation will explore: 1) the challenges young adults face in literacy and 2) teachers' comfort/skill level in helping these struggling literacy learners. Chapter Two will establish the foundation of my research through a discussion of the literature. Chapter Three will describe my methodology in conducting

this research. Chapter Four will present my research findings, and Chapter Five will include my reflection on the findings and how they may contribute to the body of research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

“To create an alternative future, it is only going to happen through a shift in our language . . . to change the conversation - or more precisely, to have a conversation that we have not had before, one that has the power to create something new . . .” Block (2009)

Literacy development dominates the professional field of education when children enter public education. Several significant organizations and multiple researchers (Brevik, 2017; Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015; Snow & Moje, 2010; The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000; Towes & Kurth, 2019) all report that by the third grade, children are expected to have grasped the concepts of literacy so they may move from learning to read to reading to learn. However, what happens when a child is not yet ready to move on? Some learners are able to quickly grasp the concepts of literacy and are ready to use literacy as a tool to learn. However, Brevik (2017) contended other learners continue to struggle to use literacy as a tool to learn and need time and the methodical process of explicit teaching literacy to move to reading to learn, significantly impacting a learner's ability to find success in the content area courses. This can further be seen as Standovich (1986) asserted the disparity in vocabulary development creates a gap in literacy, where some learners acquire language necessary for comprehension tenfold compared to learners who struggle.

In the state where this research is taking place, through Title One and the state's Reading Corps, children in Kindergarten-Grade 3 that are not making adequate yearly progress are the primary focus of remedial literacy instruction to aid in students' learning to read. Starting in 4th grade, these resources slowly declined, leaving limited resources

for upper elementary students. Faulkner, et al. (2010) and Gilles, et al. (2013) also highlight how after 4th-grade educators may not necessarily be adequately trained to dig into the challenges of literacy difficulty nor understand the shift from learning to read to reading to learn that would aid in closing the literacy achievement gap. The development of this gap has been shown to correlate with various reasons, some including demographics and neurological development (Vaughn, et. al., 2008; NICHD, 2000). However, beyond elementary, Toews and Kurth (2019) describe how as children enter middle school and high school, the knowledge and skills of professional educators in the development of literacy are minimal as it is not a part of content area learning. Several researchers (Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Hunt, 2019; Toews & Kurth, 2019) provide an explanation for why content area teachers lack in-depth literacy knowledge. Although the researchers acknowledge content area teachers are often required to take a course in reading across the content areas, they note that content teachers are first and foremost experts in their field, spending years acquiring content-specific knowledge. For example, these authors describe how historians may focus specifically on U.S. History or biologists may focus on anatomy. Another factor contributing to content teachers' lack of expertise with literacy development put forth by Copeland and Keefe (2019), Hunt, (2019), Toews and Kurth, (2019) is the impact of a few studies focused on literacy development beyond elementary grades. However, the lack of literacy research beyond the elementary grades is problematic because literacy is at the core of all academic learning.

Brevik (2017) and Hunt (2019) argued research in literacy must move beyond the elementary grades and into secondary classrooms if there is the hope of improving the

literacy skills of low-level literacy learners. Due to the lack of research, or buy-in of this research, practitioners do not have a solid baseline of literacy practices that have been proven to help older learners build their literacy skills (Swanson, et al., 2016; Vaughn, et al., 2008). Spires and colleagues (2018) contend this lack of measurable data highlighting optimal literacy learning at the secondary level further hinders progress in implementing literacy across disciplinary instruction. Furthermore, Vaughn et al. (2008) maintained this lack of research prevents schools from developing effective remediation programs to close the literacy gap of students struggling to acquire the needed literacy skills to access the complex text demands of content/disciplinary courses.

To add to these challenges, Moje (2008) claimed the terms used to define the teaching of literacy within the content area have changed depending on the researcher and time period, such as content reading, content area literacy, disciplinary literacy, subject literacy, to name a few. For the purpose of this research, this literature review will expand on McKenna and Robinson's (1990) definition of content literacy as a student's ability to read and write within the content area, such as social studies, science, mathematics. In addition, this literature review will explore the evolution of researchers' definition of disciplinary literacy, which emphasizes the unique literacy tools used by experts in a discipline related to the act of reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

The National Reading Panel (NRP) (NICHHD, 2000) acknowledges that literacy is one key to individuals finding successful opportunities as they move beyond the halls of the school and into society. As a society, it is reasonable to assume that we ALL have a

stake in the success of our students. Successful students move into careers that help provide for themselves and their families and become contributing members of society. Unfortunately, NRP (NICHD, 2000) highlights that many children continue to move through school without the adequate literacy skills needed to succeed. Therefore, educational learning systems must work to provide teachers with the tools they need to guide students towards successful learning opportunities (Senge, 2006).

This research will contribute to future researchers' and practitioners' work towards increasing literacy development in all aspects of a child's education. It is with this mindset; this research aims to add to the conversations of literacy instruction in middle school and high school in an effort to provide a future where elementary through high school age learners are provided the necessities for academic success. This chapter reviews the current literature significant to answer the central questions for this study:

How do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills? The secondary research questions for this study are: What factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students? How do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students?

Research-Based Foundational Literacy Skills

In 2000, the NRP (NICHD) completed a meta-analysis of literacy research and concluded five key skills necessary to attain proficient literacy: *phonemic awareness* - the ability to manipulate spoken sounds, *phonological awareness* - the ability to

manipulate unites of written language, *fluency* - the ability to read with accuracy and intonation, *vocabulary* - the ability to understand the meaning within a unit of written language, and *comprehension* - the ability to make meaning from units of language, to words, to sentences.

The NRP (NICHD, 2000) asserted that with these key literacy skills, students are able to progress through the stages of literacy development. However, as students progress through their educational journey, few studies have included all components identified by the NRP (NICHD, 2000) in literacy instruction (Brevik, 2017; Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Hunt, 2019). In addition to research exploring all components necessary for literacy development, Toews and Kurth (2019) have highlighted that the current research base also is conducted primarily at the primary level. As a result, these authors (2019) have placed “a call to action” with researchers to conduct studies that move beyond the elementary level and into the secondary level to help fill this void.

Reports on literacy development support the researchers’ call to action. Fang and Schleppegrell (2010) reported that over 8,000,000 children in 4th to 12th grade lacked the necessary skills to successfully comprehend content literacy. In 2016, Swanson, et al. reported the United States ranked 15th among developed nations in literacy achievements, as 30% of high school seniors lacked basic literacy skills. Furthermore, Universities across the country have concluded that entering freshmen are not prepared for college courses and now offer remedial reading and writing courses to an alarming percentage of students (Snow & Moje, 2010). These reports help support the call for added attention to literacy beyond the early years of learning. It is the cornerstone of

academic achievement and supports every aspect of daily life (Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Faulkner, et al, 2012).

In 2009, the National Governors Association (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], 2021) acknowledged the importance of literacy throughout a learner's education and called for the inclusion of disciplinary literature beyond elementary school. In the state where this research took place, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (CCSSI, 2021) was completed in 2010. The new standards positioned disciplinary literacy at the center of content/discipline courses and encouraging inquiry, critical analysis, dissemination of materials in ways that are meaningful, realistic, and evidence-driven for all students through reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Bogard, Sableski, & Arnold, 2017; Shanahan, 2013; Swanson, et al., 2016; Wendt, 2013)

In the state where this research took place, standards for literacy in social studies were added to the common core anchor standards for secondary social studies to define literacy expectations for college and career readiness. The new standards highlight the importance of understanding vocabulary, exploring various forms of writing and structure to aid in the construction of knowledge, evaluation, and analysis of primary and secondary sources, in addition to crafting descriptions of explanation or creating questions to unsolved theories.

Adolescent Student Literacy: Definition and Development

Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) stated researchers had spent the more significant part of the last hundred years believing if basic early literacy skills were taught well, students would succeed throughout their remaining academic journey. Snow and Moje

(2010) agree with the researchers, further emphasizing the misconception of research that reading instruction is finished by third grade while neglecting later literacy development with the belief students are “*vaccinated*” through strong early reading skill teaching that protects against later reading failure (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

The National Education Association (Sweet, 2000), along with educational leaders (Teaching Reading Across the Curriculum, 2001), recognize the importance of literacy skills obtained through primary literacy development. These leaders agree primary literacy development skills are generalizable and learned through phonemic/phonetic awareness and fluency. As students move beyond their primary development stage and into adolescent literacy development, a shift in literacy learning is recognized by multiple researchers (Faulkner, et al., 2012; Gilles, Wang, Smith, & Johnson, 2013; McCulley & Osman, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Spires, et al., 2018; Spor & Schneider, 1999). These researchers contend, adolescent literacy development requires highly complex literacy skills needed to tackle disciplinary-specific vocabulary and multifaceted text structures unique to each disciplinary course found in middle school and high school. Furthermore, literacy in the primary grades helps students focus learning on decoding as a tool to decipher print automatically (Adams, 1990; Bolanos, et al., 2013; Faulkner, et al. 2012; NICHD, 2000). Whereas, adolescent literacy skills requires students to construct meaning through the interaction of a myriad of complex disciplinary text structures. Additionally, students must employ strategies to help them abstract meaning from the text through an array of language features (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) (Brevik, 2017; Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Fang &

Schleppegrell, 2010; Sweet, 2000; Teaching Reading Across the Curriculum, 2001; Spires, et al., 2018; Spor & Schneider, 1999; Toews & Kurth, 2019). Too often, teachers believe adolescent students should know the necessary literacy skills needed to be successful (Faulkner, et al., 2012), as can further be seen by the decrease in literacy strategy instruction provided within middle school and high school (Gilles, et al., 2013). However, it is imperative teachers understand the continued need for literacy instruction beyond elementary (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Snow & Moje, 2010). More so is the understanding that literacy requires refined sophisticated thinking that necessitates the interaction with text, much like young children use play and games to learn, adolescent students use reading, writing, listening, and speaking to ask questions such as how, why, and when to make connections with the text creating new knowledge (Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Gilles, et al., 2013; Sweet, 2000; Snow & Moje, 2010; Spires, et al., 2018).

Vaughn, et al. (2008) reported as many as 70% of adolescent students struggle with comprehension due to a lack of early interventions, inadequate interventions, challenges to reading due to the changing nuances of text in later grades, or the manifestation of reading difficulties. As literacy has become a multifaceted aspect of education, essential for student success (Wendt, 2013), academic leaders need to create a school culture that meets the needs of all students, providing activities to explore, discover, and think critically as they continue to develop literacy skills needed for future success (Lester, 2000; Teaching Reading Across the Curriculum, 2001). The Governors Association (CCSSI, 2021), along with researchers (Fisher & Ivey, 2005; Wendt, 2013), called for the inclusion of literacy within all content or disciplinary courses.

Content Area Literacy

It takes a village to educate a child (Clinton, 1996), and through this collective effort and conversations, a shift occurs in our mindset to envision new possibilities (Block, 2009). Over the past several decades, there has been a new mindset in the community of literary researchers (Adams & Pegg, 2012; McKenna & Robinson, 1990; Sweet, 2000; Stieglitz, 1983, Toews & Kurth, 2019; Wilson, Grisham, & Smetana, 2009) who have promoted and encouraged the inclusion of literacy instruction to move beyond the elementary classroom to the community of educators as a whole (content area courses). The language that reflects this new mindset identified by Fisher and Ivery (2005) is the phrase “*Every teacher a teacher of reading*” used throughout school districts to promote the idea that all teachers, including content teachers, were capable and responsible for the inclusion of literacy instruction as a measure to increase students’ academic performance.

With the belief that students would benefit from literacy instruction within the content area courses, researchers (Adams & Pegg, 2012; McKenna & Robinson, 1990; Wilson, et al., 2009) defined content literacy as the ability to make meaningful interaction and understanding with content to learn the particulars of each discipline. Gilles, et al. (2013) further describe content literacy as the ability to use a variety of complex reading skills to make a meaningful understanding of unique text structures, jargon, technical terms, multisyllabic words, graphs, and maps found in content area courses.

Adams and Pegg (2012) emphasized that all learning is language-based with distinct ways of generating new knowledge within each content area; for example, a new

understanding in mathematics unfolds through proofs and justification using logic and mathematical laws. With a wealth of content-specific knowledge, Meltzer and Okashige (2001) declared content teachers as the most effective teachers, with a deep understanding of relevant concepts, that have the ability to model these through literary techniques to meet the needs of students. Several authors (Flynt & Brozo, 2009; Meltzer & Okashige, 2001) explain why content teachers can be effective literacy instructors. They describe how effective teachers of content literacy are “*adaptive experts*” that integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking of topics being studied, are flexible, and willing to experiment with new evidence-based strategies to aid struggling students. The idea of content teachers as adaptive experts is different from the traditional view.

Traditionally, Conley (2008) highlights how content area education has focused on the development of content knowledge, where teaching is seen as the passing on of authoritative knowledge to willing recipients, a teacher-centered approach. The teacher-centered method of instruction is in contrast with researchers’ (Fisher & Ivey, 2005) efforts to guide student learning through a student-centered approach of discovery and exploration of content through the engagement of literacy. To move beyond the teacher-centered approach for content teachers Snow and Moje (2010) suggest starting in pre-service education.

Snow and Moje (2010) stress transitional learning of teaching literacy skills within content areas should begin in pre-service education. During these pre-service teaching years, individuals develop the necessary skills and knowledge of effective instructional practice (Snow & Moje, 2010), and the ability to differentiate instruction to

meet the needs of students. Conley (2008) warns literary textbooks may overemphasize the use of broad approaches where one-size-fits-all generalization prevents teachers from learning strategies that best fit the demands of each content area. Adding to the concerns of Conely (2008 are Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) when stressing strategies that are most effective in an English course may not fit another content area course such as Science without modification. Researchers (Conley, 2008; Gilles, et al., 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008) all emphasize when strategies are used as a one-size-fits-all approach, the strategies are not appreciated as learning tools and become rehearsed practice instead of the opportunity to engage in deep thinking and conversation. However, content teachers can adopt literacy strategies that are not one-size-fits-all.

Wilson, et al. (2009) describe how teachers who successfully transition into content literacy instruction provide literacy instruction where students are aware of and can apply critical thinking skills to their learning. Flynt and Brozo (2009) and Wilson, et al. (2009) describe how effective teachers experienced with content literacy instruction are confident in their instruction and use of literacy as they incorporate new strategies, hands-on activities, and collaborative learning where learners use active strategic thinking, knowing the what's, why's and how's assignments require to solve. As a result of effective content literacy instruction, students begin to make connections with their prior knowledge and the new content explicitly, they begin to see relationships between their academic studies (Flynt & Brozo, 2009), transferring their learning and meta-thinking across different academic studies creating further depths of understanding (Wilson, et al., 2009).

Disciplinary Literacy

Researchers (McArthur, 2012; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan 2008) continue to expand on McKenna and Robinson's (1990) definition of content literacy as a student's ability to read and write within the content area. Moje (2008) further explained how the terms used to describe literacy in content area classes have changed depending on the time period and researcher. More recently, disciplinary literacy has taken the place of content literacy in some research studies (McArthur, 2012; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan 2008) in an attempt to broaden the definition and understanding of literacy within the context of each discipline.

The researcher, Moje (2008) challenged researchers and educational institutions to reexamine how we think about disciplinary learning and literacy instruction. The focus has too often been on literacy rather than the subject itself; she believed this was the core problem in implementing literacy in disciplinary courses. Instead of thinking about how literacy can be added to a discipline, Moje (2008) asserted we should examine how disciplines work, think, and produce knowledge. By understanding how knowledge is constructed in each discipline Moje (2008) argues that through the construction and interaction of knowledge, students use reading, writing, listening, and speaking to communicate their learning, to express ideas, or to question and challenge ideas. This construction of knowledge requires teachers (Moje, 2008) who are experts in the discipline, to mediate and scaffold students' learning and embed literacy strategies that align with the subject.

Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) appealed to educators to move beyond “every teacher is a teacher of reading” and appreciate the broad scope of literacy. Reading is often viewed as a set of basic skills students learn that can be adapted and transferred across a wide range of text and reading situations. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) argued this is a limited view on literacy; reading within each discipline becomes far more complex, unique, and specific as students advance through school. The researchers identify these stages of literacy as basic literacy, intermediate literacy, and disciplinary literacy (2008). Researchers, Shanahan, Shanahan, and Misischia (2011), further emphasized disciplines possessing specialized genre, vocabulary, and communication styles with different and purposeful learning methods specific to their domain. Furthermore, how learners interact with literacy depends on many factors: text structure, purpose, or one text versus multiple texts (Shanahan, et al., 2011).

Fellow researcher, McArthur (2012) expanded the literacy conversation to include metalinguistics. The researcher focused on the unique ways the disciplines use thinking and language to construct knowledge, discourse, and social interaction. The differences in mediating inquiry through this process may be challenging for adolescents as it requires multiple forms of thinking strategies to access each discipline. Historians use time (past/present), sequence, cause/effect, maps, photographs, etc. to analyze events. Scientists use problem/solutions, charts, graphs, etcetera to develop their thinking in constructing knowledge through the scientific method. These disciplines are filled with technical vocabulary, unique grammatical functions, and lexical density specific to each discipline. McArthur (2012) underscores the multiple cognitive complexities each

discipline requires of adolescents as they navigate the extensive literacy elements of each discipline.

Researchers, Rainey, Maher, Coupland, Franchi, and Moje (2018) explored the epistemological processes of disciplines, the theory, and the construction of knowledge unique to each discipline. The researchers examined the cognitive strategies students needed to comprehend and produce text, the language features within each discipline, and the evolving cultural practices of each discipline. The nature of the inquiry, the researchers asserted, is unique to each discipline and the pursuit of answers. This inquiry can be observed in disciplines through the generation of questions, the methods of exploration for solutions, the communication of results are dependent on the audiences and evaluation of others – all unique to each discipline (Rainey, et al., 2018).

Fellow researchers, Spires, Kerkhoff, Graham, Thompson, and Lee (2108) described disciplinary literacy as the use of reading, reasoning, investigating, speaking, and writing to construct knowledge applicable to an individual discipline. This differs from content literacy as it is not a simple use of strategies but rather a set of tools used as social practices within a domain and the analysis of the differences in language usage. However, the researchers suggest the terms have been used interchangeably (Spires, et al., 2018).

Spires, et al. (2018) suggested disciplinary literacy has a multidimensional construction; source literacy, analytic literacy, and expressive literacy. The researchers believed it is essential to acknowledge how the unique differences in literacy are used within the four core disciplines: English language arts, sciences, history/social studies,

and mathematics. Source literacy is most often used in history/social studies courses as experts consider the author's point of view, contextualization, and corroboration in their construction of knowledge. Analytic literacy is used chiefly in science and mathematical courses as experts use quantitative reasoning, technical vocabulary, graphs, and models to understand and interpret data to support findings. Expressive literacy is most often used in English language arts courses as experts use literary devices – figurative language, literal meanings, inferences, author's craft – to interpret layers of meaning. Spires, et al. (2018) believed literacy theory had been pushed too often onto disciplines instead of looking at literacy through the lens of the discipline. Teachers need to provide students opportunities to learn how language is used within each particular discipline and see literacy as a continuum of learning.

Strategy Instruction

Graham and Herbert (2010) reported universities and businesses annually spent \$16 billion due to the inadequate reading and writing skills of students. The lack of literacy skills found in learners beyond high school can be attributed to the poorly written curriculum (Fisher & Ivey, 2005), the “fourth-grade slump” (Reed & Vaughn, 2012), but most importantly, a lack of adequate literacy strategies to aid in the progression of literacy skills (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Brevik, 2017; Cuillo, et al., 2016).

Curriculum companies have moved to produce “teacher-proof” scripted lessons, which teachers are pressured to follow (Nichols, et al., 2007). Furthermore, Fisher and Ivey (2005) explained that the format of many of these textbooks is problematic; text structure, unmotivating presentation, complex text that impedes learning and instruction.

With added pressure to use the poorly written purchased curriculum (Nichols, et al., 2007), teachers are left with little opportunity to meet the needs of a diverse academic student population through this one-size-fits-all approach.

Additionally, Reed and Vaughn (2012) argued a phenomenon known as the “fourth-grade slump” has also led to an increase in struggling readers. Reed and Vaughn (2012) define the fourth-grade slump as referring to students who did well-grasping literacy concepts in the early primary grades but emerged as struggling readers, often beginning in fourth grade. Two variables contribute to this slump. One, the regression can be associated with an increase in academic literacy specific to content or disciplinary language. For example, content or disciplinary language contains multisyllabic words, new challenging text features, vocabulary, and word identification (Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; Reed & Vaughn, 2012). Two, another variable identified by Marchand-Martella and colleagues (2013) is how students need more complex literacy skills to access the challenging text associated with content or disciplinary courses. While the existence of the fourth-grade slump is well documented, there is also consensus on the attributes of good readers.

Researchers (Brevik, 2017; NICHD, 2000) agreed; good readers understand how and when to use strategies effectively to help make challenging text accessible while struggling readers have not yet grasped these concepts. Simply stated, literacy strategies improve comprehension (Brevik, 2017; NICHD, 2000). Spor and Schneider (1999) defined strategies as tools practiced but yet flexible in responding to recognizable contexts, situations, or demands of literacy. The researchers further claimed effective

reading provides scaffolding for students to bridge the gap between prior knowledge, experience, and the content to be learned. The review of the research also provided an array of recommendations, some conflicting, for how to support learners in becoming good readers.

Snow and Moje (2009) claimed teachers need to provide students with targeted interventions. Still, Adams and Pegg (2012) contend that teachers must first understand the importance of incorporating literacy strategies into their instruction. This lack of understanding can be seen as Brevik (2017) found teachers expected students to apply strategies independently without learning how and when to use the strategy first. Yet, some researchers (Ciullo, et al., 2016) believed teachers should provide students with generalizable strategies that could be applied across subject areas, while other researchers (Conley, 2008; Gritter, 2010; Snow & Moje, 2010) contend strategies may need to be selected, adapted, and appropriate for specific content or disciplinary course. However, many researchers agreed strategies should be taught explicitly (Brevik, 2017; Kamil, et al., 2008; Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; NEA, 2000; Ness, 2009; NICHD, 2000; Swanson, et al., 2016; Williams, Brooke, Laurer, Hall, Pollini, 2009).

In a meta-analysis of literacy instruction, the NRP (NICHD, 2000) found explicit instruction of comprehension strategies leads to improved reading comprehension. “The idea behind explicit instruction of text comprehension is that comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to comprehension when reading” (NICHD, 2000, pp. 4-39). This explicit instruction includes direct teaching through

teacher modeling, guided structured practice with feedback, and independent student practice (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; NICHD, 2000; Swanson, et al., 2016; Williams, et al., 2008). Brevik (2017) believed it is through this gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallaher, 1983) learning approach that students learn to understand when, why, and how strategies can be used to aid in the construction of knowledge and transfer this to independent practice.

Over the past few decades, researchers agreed (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Kamil, et al., 2008; Ness, 2009; NICHD, 2000; Swanson, et al., 2016) the focus of instruction that shows the most significant potential for improved literacy skills should begin with comprehension and vocabulary instruction. Ness (2009) defined reading comprehension as the process readers move through as they interact with written language by extracting and constructing meaning. Marchand-Martella, et al. (2013) claimed vocabulary as complex and multidimensional. Vocabulary instruction includes more than just extracting meaning; blending sounds, suffixes, prefixes, roots, syllables, differing connotations dependent on context, syntax, and origin are among a few of the complexities related to the study of vocabulary (Faulkner, et al., 2012; Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; NICHD, 2000).

Brevik (2017) contends students need as many literacy strategies as they have shoes “can you ever have enough?” According to Brevik, no, you can never have too many strategies. However, where do you begin? There are a plethora of strategies for both comprehension and vocabulary. Nichols, et al., (2007) believed strategy instruction begins with scaffolded supervision and guidance where students are taught when and how

to use strategies before, during, and after reading. Ness (2009) encourages using a single strategy or multiple strategies to guide students towards independent practice. Yet other researchers (Brevik, 2017; Ciullo, et al., 2016; Conley, 2008; Nichols, et al., 2007; Snow & Moje, 2010; Swanson, et al., 2016) describe seven successful strategies as:

- 1) activate and build prior knowledge through previewing and predicting
- 2) summarization and analysis - retell
- 3) make the connection between text and real-life,
- 4) promote higher-level reasoning and thinking through discussions - ask answer questions, formulate and critique arguments, identify perspectives
- 5) visualize and monitor comprehension across a variety of text using graphic organizers
- 6) understand the complexity and clarification of vocabulary
- 7) understand various text structures found throughout disciplines.

The National Education Association (2000) claimed children learn through a constructive interactive process where children need careful guidance and support within their reading, writing, listening, and speaking experiences. This belief is supported by the research previously discussed but is this belief transferred to the active practice in the classroom? Swanson, et al. (2016) considers vocabulary acquisition a predictor of successful reading comprehension but found only 37% of English Language Arts and 31.6% of Social Studies teachers included vocabulary instruction. Even more alarming, the researchers observed only 26.4% of English Language Arts and 19% of Social Studies classrooms included comprehension strategy instruction in their lessons. This

lack of commitment to comprehension instruction was also evident in Ness's (2009) observations. Throughout 600 minutes of observations of high school Social Studies courses, only 3 minutes accounted for comprehension instruction, with no instruction in the use of comprehension strategies. Ness's (2009) findings were slightly improved through the 600 minutes of observation in middle school Social Studies courses with 82 minutes of instruction focused on comprehension instruction and included 60 minutes of strategy instruction.

The International Literacy Association (2020) reported that 45% of respondents believed the determination of effective instructional strategies for struggling readers is critical for implementing literacy instruction. This begs the question, are teachers using effective instructional comprehension and vocabulary strategies today? If not, what obstacles are getting in the way of including these in content & disciplinary instruction?

Comprehension Instruction

Researchers (Ness, 2009; NICHD, 2000; Nichols, et al., 2007; Reed, Vaughn, 2012) have identified various comprehension strategies that have proven to be effective. Within these strategies, Moje (2008) and Shanahan, et al., (2011) remind us that strategies should be explicitly developed for the desired discipline or modified to ensure it aligns with the needs of the discipline. With this thought in mind, eight broad strategies identified by The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000), and multiple researchers, to show the greatest potential for improvement have been chosen for the purpose of this study: *comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic/semantic organizers,*

question answering, question generating, text structure, summarization/analysis, and multiple strategy instruction.

Comprehension Monitoring

Students learn to monitor their own metacognition during the reading process and implement strategies when confronted with challenges - *activating prior knowledge, rereading, identifying confusing words, asking/answering questions, are a few examples* (Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013; Ness, 2009; NICHD, 2000; Nichols, et al., 2007; Reed, Vaughn, 2012; Shanahan, et al., 2011; Spires, et al., 2017; Swanson, et al., 2016).

Cooperative Learning

Students work together to learn the content and take responsibility for each other's learning. This peer interaction promotes collaborative discussions, use of strategies, and increases reading comprehension (Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009; NICHD, 2000; Nichols, et al., 2007; Reed, Vaughn, 2012; Spires, et al., 2017; Swanson, et al., 2016).

Graphic and Semantic Organizers

Students use graphic organizers as tools to help organize information, identify key concepts, or draw relationships between ideas before, during, and after reading. Organizers may take the form of drawings or written expression and can be used for a variety of reasons such as to elicit discussion, as a pretext for writing or examining information (Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009; NICHD, 2000; Nichols, et al., 2007; Reed, Vaughn, 2012; Shanahan, et al., 2011; Swanson, et al., 2016).

Question Answering

Students answer questions throughout the reading - before, during, and after reading. Teachers pose questions that promote higher cognitive processes; (remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating), encouraging students to participate in a meaningful discourse that justifies responses and elaborates positions/understanding (Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009; NICHHD, 2000; Nichols, et al., 2007; Reed, Vaughn, 2012; Shanahan, et al., 2011; Spires, et al., 2017; Swanson, et al., 2016).

Question Generating

Students generate questions throughout the readings, asking themselves: why, when, where, what, how, and who. This process allows the students to transfer strategic learning to comprehension by interacting with the text, searching for clarification, using inferential thinking, seeking evidence to support their thinking, or motivation for reading (Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009; NICHHD, 2000; Nichols, et al., 2007; Reed, Vaughn, 2012; Shanahan, et al., 2011; Spires, et al., 2017; Swanson, et al., 2016).

Text Structure

Students use text structures to help understand the organization of information. Each discipline uses text structure in unique ways to communicate information. Understanding text structure helps students organize their understanding of the most essential concepts and ideas authors are trying to convey (Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009; NICHHD, 2000; Nichols et al., 2007; Shanahan, et al., 2011).

Summarization/Analysis

Students extract key information from the text and summarize their learning in a written form that integrates the ideas or meanings into a coherent whole

(Marchand-Martella, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009; NICHD, 2000; Nichols, et al., 2007; Shanahan, et al., 2011; Spires, et al., 2017).

Multiple Strategy Instruction

Students use multiple strategies to interact with the text bolstering their understanding of the text's concepts and ideas (Ness, 2009; NICHD, 2000).

Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary instruction has been identified as an essential component of reading achievement (NICHD, 2000). Davis (1942, as cited in NICHD, 2000) believed comprehension encompasses two “skills,” word knowledge or vocabulary and reasoning in reading (pp. 4-15). Supporting Davis' (1942, as cited in NICHD, 2000) conclusion is a meta-analysis completed by the NRP (NICHD, 2000) suggesting vocabulary instruction addresses the language of disciplines and promotes students' ability to engage in the understanding of the complex text. For the purpose of this research, five broad instructional strategies identified by the NRP (NICHD, 2000) as showing promising instructional effectiveness have been identified: explicit instruction, indirect instruction, multimedia methods, capacity methods, and association methods (pp. 4-17, 4-18) which are defined next.

Explicit Instruction

Students are provided with explicit instruction in vocabulary where the teacher provides the instruction through definitions, algorithms, or analysis of word roots or affixes to determine meaning (NICHHD, 2000; Swanson, et al., 2011).

Indirect Instruction

Students are exposed to a breadth of text which in turn reveals to them a broad scope of vocabulary where it is assumed they will infer meaning (NICHHD, 2000).

Multimedia Methods

Students are provided with multiple media sources to aid in the understanding of vocabulary - such as semantic mapping, graphic representation, word attributes (NICHHD, 2000).

Capacity Methods

Students are provided multiple opportunities to engage with vocabulary terms, so their meanings become automatic when discovered in the text (NICHHD, 2000).

Association Methods

Students are encouraged to make semantic or contextual connections between words they already know and those they discover in the text (NICHHD, 2000).

Challenges of Adolescent Literacy Development in the Secondary Setting

As researchers (Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Faulkner, et al. 2012; Toews & Kurth, 2019) remind us, one of the challenges in adolescent literacy is a lack of focused research in the secondary setting; fellow researchers (Guskey, 2002; Fisher & Ivey (2005) believe teacher attitude, belief systems, and confidence are additional challenges. Still yet, other

researchers (Ciullo, et al., 2016; Moje, 2008; Swanson, et al., 2016) identified the structure of the secondary school setting as problematic. Finally, Guskey (2002) highlighted challenges that are seen within the quality of professional development. Next, the challenges identified by these researchers are explored.

Research

After several decades of literary experts emphasizing “every teacher is a teacher of reading,” Fisher and Ivey (2005) suggest sweeping changes have not occurred in adolescent literacy instruction across the curriculum. Two primary reasons for this were identified in the review of the research for this dissertation. One, Swanson, et al. (2016) and Brevik (2017) claim the lack of research beyond the primary grades and within the secondary setting is partly to blame for the failure of successful implementation of literacy instruction across content areas. Two, in addition, Ciullo, et al. (2016) suggested that much of the research that has been completed in literacy has focused too little on effective literacy interventions that can be conducted within secondary general education classrooms; leaving content area teachers with a lack of well-tested instruction models that can be employed effectively.

Another impact of the lack of research and its focus has been noted by Copeland and Keefe (2019) and Toews and Kurth (2019). The research of these authors also supports the call for additional research to describe how to embed effective literacy instruction within the curriculum. In addition, the researchers call for the engagement of administration, leaders, policymakers, and most importantly, teachers, citing the need for

training and lasting support to bring upon effective change (Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Toews & Kurth, 2019).

Teacher Belief – Confidence

A report by The International Literacy Association's (2020, 1/20) indicated that 93% of responding educators believe research is the backbone of effective instruction, with 85% of respondents wanting support from academic and professional experts. The report further concluded, the single greatest factor in student achievement is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher (ILA, 2000; ILA, 2000 1/20), so why do students continue to struggle with literacy beyond their primary years?

Historically, researchers (Durkin, 1978; Patterson, Eubank, Rathbun, & Noble, 2010; Spor & Schneider, 1999; Swanson, et al., 2016) found literacy skills were not being included in content area instruction effectively. Too often, content area teachers believed it was not their responsibility to teach literacy (Cantrell, Burns, Callaway, 2008; Conley, 2008, Gilles, et al., 2013; Hall, 2005; Kamil, 2003; Patterson, et al., 2010) as they considered themselves content specialists, not literacy teachers (McCulley, & Osman, 2015; Sweet, 2001).

A lack of confidence in teaching literacy strategies has also been shown to prevent content area teachers from moving towards embedding literacy within their instruction (Hall, 2005; Gilles, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009). This belief is supported by The International Literacy Association (2020), as they reported 34% of teachers felt ill-equipped to teach literacy in their content area classes. Furthermore, many teachers believe strategies are time-consuming and take away from content learning (Adams &

Pegg, 2012; Bean, 1997; Moje, 2008; Ness, 2009). The lack of confidence in teaching strategies and the consumption of time has led to interference in classroom management (Bean, 1997), continuing to dissuade teachers from making the transition to deeper literacy inclusion.

Fisher and Ivey (2005) found content area teachers may “feel discredited like my subject doesn’t matter as much” (p. 4). A cultural shift in pedagogy, Moje (2008) believed, may need to occur for teachers to feel confident in their instruction of content material through literacy. Bogard, et al., (2017) agreed and believed this would require a shift in mental models that will build over time through experience and deliberate practice. Cantrell, et al. (2008) and Conley (2008) state this shift in pedagogy moves from where the teacher has been the center of learning as the authoritative expert to a student-centered approach where students are actively engaged in their learning through reading, writing, listening and speaking (Spor & Schneider, 1999).

Gritter (2010) believed teachers are responsible for sharing their expertise in critical thinking and should move students to higher cognitive levels of understanding; however, Kamil (2003) reported content area teachers believed if elementary teachers had done their job, the burden would not fall on them, and students would not continue to struggle with literacy. This belief shows a lack of developmental knowledge encompassed in literacy learning (Kamil, 2003). Researchers (Hall, 2005; Friedland, McMillen, Hill, 2011; Gilles, et al., 2013; Toews & Kurth, 2019) point to needed training and continued support to fully understand this development and see the benefits in content area learning because of the inclusion of literacy instruction. Another group of

researchers (Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Hall, 2005; ILA, 2020; Ruppar, 2017; Toews & Kurth, 2019) also note the importance of teachers not feeling alone in striving for improvements. In addition to not feeling alone, these authors stress how teachers need access to evidence-based research strategies, professional development opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of how to use these language-rich strategies within their scope of practice, continued support and collaboration within their learning community, and the opportunity to feel safe as they strive to improve their professional craft.

School Structure

The distinct differences of educational studies conducted within an elementary setting and, more so, the lack of studies completed in education in middle school and high school (secondary) go far beyond the research itself but speak to the greater differences and the cultural divide in education (Ciullo, et al., 2016; Moje, 2008; Swanson, et al., 2016). The structure of secondary education is compartmentalized learning instruction (content areas) where students are shuffled from classroom to classroom filled with lab tables, writing groups, lecture halls, and the primary pedagogy is focused on telling - the belief that instructors are the purveyors of content knowledge (Bean, 1997; Faulkner, et al., 2012; Moje, 2008).

The division implies content areas are inherently different and require not only differences in instruction but also differences in beliefs, knowledge, and doing (Moje, 2008). Lester (2000) described these differences as courses that value literacy instruction, English and social studies courses, to courses that are more “hands-on” such as science, highlighting a student may find themselves literate in one course and illiterate in another.

Faulkner, et al., (2012) described this phenomenon further by examining the differences in text structure across content areas. The language (words, sentences, or whole text) used across content areas varies where declarative or exclamatory sentences may be widely used in an English course and would never be seen in another, like mathematics, cause-effect may be commonly found in science. In contrast, history may use expositions and arguments (2012).

In addition to distinct content areas, Lester (2000) and Moje (2008) write how secondary schools are filled with highly specialized instructors of these content areas, experts in their fields, who may feel overloaded with curriculum and pressured by administration and standards to cover a breadth of knowledge in a short span of time. Furthermore, Fisher and Ivey (2005), Lester (2000), and Ness (2009) describe how these experts may feel discredited as if their subject does not matter when being asked to implement literacy instruction that they were not well trained for, nor feel confident in teaching. An issue identified by Wendt (2013) is how the wide scope of the field of literacy may also prove too confusing for educators unfamiliar with the subject matter. Several authors (Swanson, et al., 2016; Towes, & Kurth, 2013; Wendt, 2013) speculate that the training of content teachers and scope of literacy is also connected to the lack of research focusing on literacy education in the secondary setting in addition to the lack of funding dedicated to not only research but interventions at the secondary level.

Professional Development

Two researchers, Brevik (2017 and Guskey (2002), connect improving teacher training and professional development as central in making effective improvements in

professional practices, beliefs, and understanding in literacy instruction. Shippen, et al. (2014) links explicitly the lack of professional development opportunities beyond pre-service training to the need for content teachers to receive literacy instruction to improve their instruction to aid struggling readers within their classroom. Even though some curricula provide scripted “teacher-proof” manuals for educators, according to Nichols, Young, and Rickelman (2007), this is not sufficient. For these authors, content teachers need quality professional development. Quality professional development is essential to help teachers feel confident in their instruction and develop a community of critical thinking learners. In addition to creating critical thinking learners, Guskey (2002) establishes a connection between quality professional development and teacher beliefs/attitudes changes.

Chambers Cantrell, et al. (2008) and Hall (2005) called for additional professional development opportunities that move beyond the focus of changing attitudes and beliefs to showing teachers how to infuse literacy into their content areas through the explicit teaching of strategies/techniques. Efforts to change teachers’ attitudes and beliefs should include opportunities for teachers to not only see these modeled and demonstrated, but also further opportunities to practice, experiment, modify, apply, and critique their new learning for use in their content course (Chambers Cantrell, et al., 2008; Ciullo, et al., 2016; Conley, 2008; Halls, 2005). Through the process of practice and multiple exposures, teachers can learn and move to sustain change to be effective in their instruction (Guskey, 2002; Wilson, et al., 2009).

Gilles, et al. (2013) argued literacy experts and the developers of professional development must work with content area teachers by using the wealth of knowledge and understanding these experts bring to the table. This approach, Spor and Schneider (1999) argue, allows literacy experts and content experts time to work together as they infuse literacy within the instruction rather than providing a learning opportunity that is simply done to content area teachers. This collaborative approach is essential as Gritter (2010) reminds us that reading, writing, and critical literacy strategies are not necessarily exportable across content area courses. Each discipline has its own way of thinking and doing. Although some strategies may be generalizable and fit across multiple content areas (Ciullo, et al., 2016), rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, strategies need to be modified to accommodate the unique characteristics of each content area, in addition to the individual teacher (Conley, 2008; Gilles, et al., 2013; Nichols, et al., 2007).

Allowing teachers time to discover how to modify, experiment, implement, and create their own literacy strategies that align with their instruction, is recommended by Gilles, et al. (2013) to provide the needed “buy-in” to convince them they are the right instructor to provide literacy strategies within their content area. Another way to create “buy-in” by teachers, as described by Guskey (2002) and Patterson, et al. (2010), is the importance of providing time for teachers to reflect, discover, and continue to learn and develop a long-term commitment to implementing change. A long-term commitment to change can often be lost by the pressure to show immediate results that can impede performance and implementation, leaving teachers feeling frustrated, unsuccessful, and unwilling to embrace potentially successful changes (Patterson, et al., 2010).

Another consideration to developing a long-term commitment to change is described by Thibodeau (2008). He contends teachers need the ability to see failure as added opportunities for learning. Furthermore, Thibodeau (2008) points to collaboration with peers as a critical factor in school improvement and positive change. Through collaboration and the commitment to a mutual goal, individuals are provided opportunities for collaborative discussion and reflection of the nuances of their learning, to depend on each other, and hold each other accountable in the strive to endure; having confidence in taking risks to meet their goals (Thibodeau, 2008).

Support goes beyond individual peers; Guskey (2002) encourages educational leaders to provide this support through encouragement, motivation, and an occasional nudging of individuals to make effective progress on the challenging tasks of implementing new learning. Effective leaders must commit to the design and implementation of a successful schoolwide initiative by providing access to research-based initiatives, structuring time, money, and personnel that align with school goals (Meltzer & Okashige, 2001; Patterson, et al., 2010; Teaching Reading Across the Curriculum, 2001). Guskey (2002) and Lester (2000) believed it is important to support teachers beyond the initial rollout of initiatives through continuous learning opportunities, feedback, and reflection with their leaders. Professional learning is an ongoing process, not an event, that holds great promise (Guskey, 2002).

Chapter Two Summary

Despite the wide breadth of literacy research, researchers suggest that a lack of research in the secondary setting has placed significant challenges toward successfully

implementing literacy instruction in the secondary setting. From identifying the basics of literacy skills (phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), researchers have expanded the concept of literacy to include disciplinary-specific skills where students explore the multifaceted complexity of literacy through the use of reading, reasoning, investigating, speaking and writing to construct meaning. Still, more work needs to be done to bring the conversation into each specific discipline and explore literacy, not as an individual theory that lies outside of the context but instead as an inclusion of how students acquire knowledge within each discipline. To make this shift, disciplinary teachers' belief systems and confidence in literacy must change. It is this shift in mindset that is the basis of this research; how does the confidence level of social studies teachers affect their ability to infuse literacy instruction within their instruction? Understanding how social studies teachers are able to make this shift will aid professional development developers, administrators, and curriculum members to understand better and support teachers in their literacy instruction.

To explore the insights of social studies teachers' confidence level in working with low-level literacy students, this study will aim to provide some insights in answering the following questions: *How do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills?* The secondary research questions for this study are: *What factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students? How do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working*

with these students? Finally, Chapter Three of this dissertation will explore my research methodology through a qualitative inquiry study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

“When working with human beings, you are becoming a sacred holder of their stories Create a plan worthy of their contributions.” Adams, Jones, & Ellis (2014)

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research design for this study. This chapter includes a discussion of the qualitative conceptual framework, the research design using qualitative interviews, setting, participants, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The primary research question for this study is: *How do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills?* The secondary research questions for this study are: *What factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students? How do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students?*

Conceptual Framework: Rationale for Using a Qualitative Research Approach

As a researcher, my attraction to a qualitative research approach was based on my orientation of the importance of participating in conversations with individuals to ensure collaboration, trust, and my commitment to building a relationship between the researcher and participants. Creating a research design based on conversations creates an opportunity for me to understand an educator's confidence and skill set in constructing lessons/curriculum that aid students with low literacy skills in the secondary school setting and serve as the reason for designing this research as a qualitative study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2012) defined qualitative study as “the study of things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Conducting a study in its natural setting, Denzin and Lincoln (2012) argued, allows the researcher to make the world visible, allowing practices to transform the world. Denzin and Lincoln’s (2012) focus on doing research in a natural setting and exploring the meaning people bring to the research topic supports my decision to use a qualitative case study approach. Creswell and Poth (2018) provide an additional reason for using a qualitative design. These authors argue that engaging in qualitative research allows the researcher to impact the world through the interpretive process of transforming practices. This aligns with one of my long-term research goals, to increase support for students struggling with literacy skills at the secondary level.

This holistic approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012), focuses on the natural settings of my participants, allowed me to position myself within the study to collect information by survey, interviewing, and using a researcher’s reflective journal. Many experts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Fraenkel, et al., 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) describe how a qualitative design is an effective way to gain an understanding of the participants’ perspective, feelings, and beliefs. Conducting a study within the real world, not in a laboratory, reflexivity will be used (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to help analyze and interpret the complex picture of the data collected throughout the study. Qualitative research is not completing a complex problem that is already understood, instead as Bogdan and Biklin (2006) suggest, it is constructing a picture that

evolves through the collection and examination of parts. A qualitative interview design was used to construct the picture of secondary social studies teachers' experiences working with struggling literacy learners.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) describe qualitative interviews as the study of themes within the lived experience of participants' personal perspectives. The structure of interviews provides an avenue of collecting data in a professional discussion that comes as close to an everyday conversation. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) further describe qualitative interviews as an opportunity to gain a historical perspective of the consciousness and experience of the participants' lived world. Through the participants' precise descriptions, I was able to evaluate the diversity, differences, and/or varieties of the phenomenon being studied.

Both an online survey and qualitative individual interviews were used as data collection tools to determine secondary social studies teachers' confidence level in working with students with low literacy levels. As described by Fink (2017), surveys are a valuable tool to gather data quickly with the ability to process it through sorting and analyzing data in a spreadsheet. Whereas, qualitative individual interviews allowed the researcher to participate in a holistic approach to a conversation with participants gaining an authentic sense of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Part One Survey

To obtain a snapshot of the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of the social studies teachers before conducting the qualitative interviews, I followed the suggestions of researchers (Fink, 2017; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) and developed a

self-administered online Google form (10-21 questions) survey (Appendix A).

The part one survey consisted of 10 questions. Questions 1-4 provided demographic information. These questions provided the opportunity to explore the relationship between the background information and the research questions; gender, number of years as an experienced content area teacher, grade level(s) taught, and educational license(s).

Survey questions 5-10 directly linked to the primary research question of this study; *how do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching students with low literacy skills?* An ordinal scale was used in responding to the questions. Participants used the following responses to answer question 5: *extremely important, important, and not important*. In responding to questions 6-8, participants used the following responses; *extremely confident, confident, and not confident*.

In addition, question 9 included an open-ended response that allowed participants to expand on their experiences in gaining confidence working with low-level literacy students. The format of these responses allowed me to apply Salahan's (2016) code to the belief and confidence levels of the participants. As described by Saldana (2016), this coding system allowed the researcher to analyze the values and attitudes of participants' views of literacy within their content/disciplinary course. These values and attitudes directly affect an individual's belief systems and can provide insight into the participant's "buy-in" of the investigated concepts (Saldana, 2016).

Question 10 in the survey linked directly to the second secondary research question; *how do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems*

available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students? This open-ended question allowed the participants to identify further support systems not previously identified within the research. The responses provided the participants' feelings of the support systems available to them as they implement literacy instruction in their classrooms.

Upon completing the third section, participants were asked if they would like to continue with their participation in the research study. Participants who chose to complete the part one survey were directed to submit their responses. Individuals interested in participating further in the study were asked to provide their name, email address, and place of teaching to aid the researcher in identifying demographic information for the analysis of the study. The 11 participants who had agreed to move forward in the research were asked to answer to complete Survey Part Two questions.

Part Two Survey

The Survey Part Two consisted of 8 questions that directly aligned with the final question of this research study; *what factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching low-level literacy students?* Again, an ordinal scale (Fink, 2017) was used to respond to the questions using the following terms: *extremely confident*, *confident*, and *not confident*. This survey provided an efficient opportunity to obtain background knowledge of the research participants in relation to the general knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of literacy instruction.

To ensure the survey was designed to capture the responses of participants effectively, a pilot test was conducted. Fink (2017) described two reasons for doing a

pilot test of the survey. One, a pilot test ensures the instructions and questions of a survey provide information about the study. Two, a pilot test can also bolster the reliability and validity of the survey and final analysis of responses (Fink, 2017; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). With the understanding of these suggestions by Fink (2017), careful consideration to word choice was used. The language included in questions was directly pulled from the research that was gathered in Chapter Two. Furthermore, only literacy strategies that were highlighted by multiple researchers were used in the development of the extended questionnaire that would be completed by participants who agreed to participate in the final stage of the research. It is this careful consideration of the language used within the development of questions, Fink (2017) further argued, aided in the reliability and validity of the survey. These reasons for a pilot study were corroborated by Fraenkel, et al. (2012), as they further stated that pilot studies could also help detect problems that may arise so they can be corrected before the study is carried out.

For these reasons, a pilot test was conducted within the development phase of the survey. During this pilot test, some technical issues were discovered and resolved. In addition, suggestions were made to streamline the response options for the survey questions. At the time of development, the researcher chose to follow the suggestions of shortening the survey by removing some of the open-ended questions and limiting more of the responses to questions that used an ordinal scale. Therefore, participants would be able to complete the survey in a shorter time frame. It is unclear to what extent this change may have influenced the results of the survey. At the time, the researcher believed

that gaining a clear understanding of the participants' personal experiences and beliefs was best ascertained through the qualitative interview process.

However, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested that surveys are versatile and efficient. As a research tool, the versatility of the survey provides an opportunity to collect data that directly aligns with my research questions - teacher beliefs/attitudes, experiences, knowledge, and perceived effectiveness. I agree with McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the use of the survey is a means to obtain an accurate representation of a population's traits, beliefs, and attitudes. As such, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested surveys provide credible information in an efficient time frame where the analysis and reporting of a survey delivered a versatile (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) method to understand the beliefs and attitudes of the community.

Qualitative Individual Interview

The qualitative data collection tool that was used within this study included semi-structured qualitative interviews (Birks & Mills, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Fraenkel, et al., 2012). Participants were provided the opportunity to participate in qualitative individual interviews based on their responses to the survey. The semi-structured qualitative interviews included a series of open-ended questions that allowed for authentic responses of the participants. (Appendix A).

Brinkman and Kvale (2015) state that if you want to understand an individual's lived perspective, talk to them. With this goal in mind, a researcher-designed semi-structured qualitative interview (Appendix B) allowed the researcher to participate in a one-one conversation, constructing knowledge through the interchange of

conversation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview format provided a comfortable and respected environment where participants are not merely viewed as “research subjects,” but rather, individuals who are provided an opportunity to describe or unfold the meaning of their experiences, both negative or positive and without judgment (Brinkman & Kvale, 015; Krueger, & Casey, 2021)

Furthermore, the qualitative interview was designed to be completed in forty-five minutes. Using a 45-minute time frame created the opportunity to gain an in-depth picture of the participants’ personal stories, recording not only participants' responses but also observing the human behavior, tone, and emotions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

In this study, a semi-structured interview format was chosen. Fraenkel, et al. (2012) describe a semi-structured format as a formal verbal open-ended questionnaire designed to collect information through the responses of specific questions developed by the researcher. In developing the questionnaire, questions were grouped into sections that directly related to the research questions posed by this study. Furthermore, in this study, I chose to use the questionnaire as a guide, as suggested by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015). Using this approach allowed for the use of a formal open-ended questionnaire. It enables the researcher to dig deeper into responses by asking follow-up questions, seeking a greater understanding of the participant’s point of view. Due to the parameters of the qualitative interview time, participants answer questions within each section of the questionnaire. Still, all participants may not complete all of the questions within each area as we may spend more time discussing fewer questions.

A primary objective of the qualitative interview was to provide an opportunity to have a conversation about the teachers' lived experiences, creating a qualitative interview environment that promotes trust and openness, allowing the participants the opportunity to express their views, emotions, and perspective freely, without bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraenkel, et al., 2012).

Researcher's Reflective Journal

The final data collection tool used in this study was the researcher's reflective notes that were recorded following the qualitative individual interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe these notes as a researcher's instrument to document their observations, descriptive summaries, and reflections. This tool allowed the researcher to process their participation in the study informally.

Once the data collection tools were developed it was time for careful consideration of the process for analyzing that data. The next several sections of the chapter describe how following the suggestions of Saldana (2016), a coding process was developed for both the survey and interview analysis.

Data Analysis: Survey (Part One and Two)

The Part One and Part Two surveys (Appendix A) used in this study were developed and conducted using Google Forms. This approach allowed participants the opportunity to complete the Party One and Part Two surveys (containing up to 21 questions) online and submit their responses electronically, limiting the time commitment required to fulfill the task. This format also allowed the data to be downloaded into an excel sheet for ease of analysis. Using Saldana's (2016) provisional coding method,

surveys were reviewed and read multiple times to allow themes to unfold. The data was then organized into their respective themes to be reflected upon, analyzed, as well as the addition of anecdotal notes.

Data Analysis: Qualitative Interviews

The forty-five minutes qualitative individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview approach. Interview questions (Appendix B) were predetermined open-ended questions that allowed follow-up questions or questions of clarification. Due to this nature, participants may not answer all of the questions in the same manner. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested this semi-structured approach allows for the research to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' responses. In this research, this approach allowed me to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the participants' belief systems related to the topic of study.

The qualitative interview sessions were recorded using two devices. Due to Covid-19, the qualitative interview was held virtually and recorded using the online media service Zoom. A second recording was also completed to ensure the data was collected and not lost due to technical errors. Finally, the recording was uploaded to the Otter application, a digital tool that created a transcription of the qualitative interview. Once the transcriptions were verified, the recordings were deleted.

With the final transcription, a process of coding was conducted. Fraenkel, et al. (2012) define coding as a set of categories the observer uses to record the frequency of a person's or group's behavior. Using Saldana's (2016) provisional coding process, where a list of predetermined themes are identified but allows for themes to emerge through the

coding process, was completed. The predetermined themes for this research were identified as: teacher beliefs and attitudes in relation to the inclusion of literacy in their disciplinary course, the use and understanding of literacy skills, challenges teachers identify within the inclusion of literacy in their instruction or school setting, and support systems identified as needing to ensure the successful implementation of literacy in their disciplinary course.

As mentioned, the transcriptions were coded using Saldana's (2016) provisional coding method, a predetermined set of themes were identified, in addition to themes that were added after the completion of preliminary pre-coding reading. This coding process includes multiple steps. First, as Saldana (2016) suggested, each qualitative interview transcript was broken down into sections to allow for ease of coding. Second, the transcription was read in its entirety; this initial pre-coding reading enabled the researcher to reflect on the transcript as a researcher and not as a participant. In addition, this initial preview of the transcripts provided an opportunity to identify themes that were not predetermined. The third and fourth steps included the clarification, identification, and anecdotal note-taking of the themes identified.

Participants

The study presented here consisted of two data collection points, a two-part survey, and a qualitative individual interview. Therefore, the number of participants for each collection method differed. The part one survey was completed by 21 participants, while the part two survey geared to obtain responses directly linked to the secondary research question included only 11 of these initial participants. And finally, although 11

of the participants indicated they would be willing to participate in the individual survey, only six participants completed the final phase of the data collected through the qualitative individual interview.

All participants in this research were identified as secondary social studies teachers. Furthermore, in order to participate in this study, participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) have worked as a middle or high school social studies content area teacher, (b) be licensed as secondary social studies teacher, and (c) be available for a qualitative individual interview.

Participants in this study were acquired through social media postings (email, newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) as recommended by the chair of a state social studies council, identification through the part one survey, and a snowball sample. A snowball sample is a technique that asks participants to personally recommend others for a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraenkel, et al., 2012).

All potential participants initially completed a Google forms survey that highlighted the purpose of the research study, the parameters of the study, and included the informed consent documentation. This search resulted in securing 21 secondary social studies teachers with experience teaching across multiple grade levels to participate in this study. Of the 21 participants, 11 participants (52.3%) identified as male, and 10 participants (47.6%) identified as female. Participants in this study represented various districts around the state where this research was conducted.

Research Location

The study included in this dissertation took place throughout a mid-western state.

Due to the nature of obtaining participants, there was no specific geographic location of this research study. Rather, participants represent a broad scope of school districts across the state in which this research took place. The broad spectrum of participants was achieved through the wide casting of the survey included in the state's social studies council's social media publications. Specific locations for participants were not collected as it was not deemed important to the researcher at the time of developing this research study.

Ethical Considerations

By Hamline University's research requirements, the research presented here was submitted and accepted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. With no revisions requested, the IRB application, online survey, and the questionnaire used for qualitative individual interviews were approved on May 18, 2021, at which time the data collection was permitted to begin.

Chapter Three Summary

The primary research question: *how do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills*, and the secondary research questions: *what factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students, how do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students*, were examined using a qualitative design that incorporated the study and analysis of qualitative interviews.

Utilizing online surveys, as recommended by Fink (2017), and semi-structured qualitative interviews, as recommended by researchers Brinkman and Kvale (2015), Cresswell and Poth (2018), data was collected and analyzed using Saldana's (2016) coding process. The research design was chosen because it allowed for the researcher to use a holistic approach as participants engaged in a conversation that allowed for authentic responses and discussion of their lived experiences (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). By embedding within the data collection process, the researcher's positionality provided a unique lens to interpret the experiences of teachers. This analysis and interpretation are detailed in the following chapter, Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

“I don’t remember having ever learned anything while I was talking. Every single thing I’ve ever learned in my life, I’ve learned by listening or reading,” Rios, A. (2020).

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this study aimed to understand the lived experience of educators’ practice of literacy within the social studies discipline. Specifically, the primary question is: *How do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills?* The secondary research questions are: *What factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students? How do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students?*

Two online surveys (Part One and Part Two) and qualitative interviews were conducted with secondary social studies teachers. A total of 21 teachers participated in the part one survey, with 11 volunteering to extend their participation with the completion of a part two survey and a qualitative interview. Volunteers who completed the part two survey were contacted and encouraged to participate in a follow-up qualitative interview. Of those 11 individuals who initially agreed to participate, six agreed to the qualitative interview portion of the study.

Chapter Four has been organized into two parts, the description, and analysis of the survey results and the results and interpretation of the qualitative interviews. Chapter Four will describe the demographics of the participants and a discussion of the holistic

approach of semi-structured qualitative interviews that focused on studying literacy within the content teacher's classroom. Chapter Four concludes with an overview of the themes derived from the lived experience of participants' personal perspectives.

Introduction to Survey Results

The Part One Survey (Appendix A) was posted throughout the summer and fall of 2021 in the Minnesota Council for Social Studies (MNCSS) newsletters and social media sites. In addition, potential participants were encouraged to share the research opportunity with other social studies teachers. A total of 21 participants completed the part one survey, with 11 completing the part two survey. The part two survey included eight questions that directly aligned with the final research question, providing valuable information to the researcher prior to the conductions of qualitative individual interviews. All participants in the survey identified themselves as secondary social studies teachers. As previously mentioned, to obtain a snapshot of the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of social studies teachers prior to conducting the qualitative interview, I followed researchers' suggestions (Fink, 2017; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) and developed a self-administered online Google form survey.

The part one survey included three sections: demographic information, beliefs and attitudes about participants' confidence level using literacy strategies, and participants' views on support systems that would help them be successful in using literacy strategies in their teaching.

The part two survey was completed by 11 participants (52.3 % follow-up) who indicated that they would be interested in further participating in the research study. The

part two survey included only one section: participants identified their confidence level in applying literacy strategies in their teaching.

Before the research study, predetermined themes reported in the research literature related to the confidence level in applying literacy strategies were: attitudes and beliefs, literacy skills used in the classroom, challenges of including literacy strategies, and finally, support systems needed to successfully fit literacy in teachers' disciplinary courses. Opportunities for additional themes to emerge were allowed. However, it was determined that the predetermined themes were sufficient.

Survey Participants Demographics

As the survey was available to teachers throughout the state in which this research was conducted, little demographic information was collected from participants except for participants' gender, the total number of years taught, and grade levels taught. Of the 21 participants who completed the survey, 11 participants (52.3%) identified as male, and 10 participants (47.6%) identified as female. These statistics aligned with the information gathered from Zippia (2021), as they reported in September of 2021, 52.3 % of social studies teachers in the United States are male, and 47.6% of social studies teachers are female.

The total number of years teaching social studies was collected and analyzed. The analysis indicated the majority (70%) of the participants have been teaching in social studies for a total of 10 years or more. It is also noted that all of the participants have been teaching social studies for a minimum of 4 years (see **Table 1: Total Number of Years Teaching Social Studies**).

Table 1:*Total Number of Years Teaching Social Studies.*

	0-3 Years	4-6 Years	7-10 Years	10+ Years
	#	#	#	#
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Number of years' experience teaching social studies.	0	2	4	15
	0%	9.5%	19%	71.4%

Note: 21 total responses

In addition to identifying the total number of years participants have taught social studies, participants also identified which grade levels they have taught throughout the secondary school setting (7th - 12th grade). According to the analysis participants who complete the Part One Survey are well represented throughout all secondary school grade levels, with 10th grade having the lowest representation of 29% of teachers who have had experience or are currently teaching compared to 11th and 12th grade where 52% of teachers have had experience or are currently teaching (see **Table 2: Grade Levels Participants Have Taught Social Studies**).

Table 2:*Grade Levels Participants Have Taught Social Studies.*

	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
	#(%)	#(%)	#(%)	#(%)	#(%)	#(%)
Grade levels participant has taught social	9 (43%)	10 (48%)	8 (38%)	6 (29%)	11 (52%)	11 (52%)

Note: 21 total responses

Confidence Using Literacy Strategies

The next section of the survey is directly linked to the primary research question of this study: *how do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching students with low literacy skills?* The survey participants were asked to identify their confidence using a three-level ordinal scale of extremely confident, confident, and not confident.

According to the data, 100% of the participants in this study agreed with researchers (Brevik, 2027; Hunt, 2019) that the inclusion of literacy in the secondary setting was important or extremely important. In 2005, Hall, in 2009, Ness, and again in 2013, Gilles, et al., asserted content area teachers lacked confidence in teaching literacy strategies in their classroom. Today, in 2021, according to this limited study, 80% of teachers self-identified as extremely confident or confident, in teaching literacy strategies. In addition, 95% of teachers self-identified as extremely confident or confident, in their ability to identify students who struggle with low literacy skills. Finally, 76% of teachers in this research study self-identified as extremely confident, or confident, in working with students with low literacy skills. The data collected from this small sample size suggests there may be a shift in attitudes towards the inclusion of literacy strategies in disciplinary courses compared with earlier studies. To confirm these results, additional research would be needed (see **Table 3: Teachers' Opinions About Teaching Students with Low Literacy Skills**).

Table 3:
Teachers' Opinions About Teaching Students with Low Literacy Skills

	Extremely Important # (%)	Important # (%)	Not Important # (%)
Rate the importance of teaching literacy strategies in your content area course.	13 (61.9%)	8 (38%)	0 (0%)
	Extremely Confident	Confident	Not Confident
Rate your current confidence level in teaching literacy strategies in your classroom.	6 (28.57%)	11 (52.3%)	4 (19%)
Rate your current confidence level in identifying students with low literacy levels.	9 (42.85%)	11 (52.3%)	1 (4.76%)
Rate your confidence level in working with students with low literacy levels.	5 (23.8%)	11 (52.3%)	5 (23.8%)

Note: 21 responses

In an attempt to dig deeper into these beliefs, the researcher disaggregated the data using multiple data points, including gender, grade level, and participation. Through this disaggregation of data, no clear differences were identified. Both groups of participants (100%) believed literacy was an important part of their social studies courses, with 80-82% of participants self-identified confidence in teaching literacy strategies in their classroom.

However, a slight difference is highlighted in the participants' ability to identify students with low literacy, with 90% of females identified as being confident and 100%

of males identified as being confident. It is noted this 10% difference is due to one female participant stating they are not confident in identifying students with low literacy skills.

Finally, another slight difference was noted in the participants' confidence level in working with students with low literacy skills, as 30% of females self-identified as not having confidence and 18% of males self-identified as not having confidence in working with low literacy students. This data suggests that building the confidence level of participants' ability to work directly with low-level literacy students is an opportunity on which professional development programs can build. Building teachers' confidence in working with students with low literacy skills was highlighted in the ILA (2020) report, as it asserted that teachers are central to students' academic success (see **Table 4:**

Teachers' Opinions About Teaching Students with Low Literacy Skills - Gender).

Table 4:

Teachers' Opinions About Teaching Students with Low Literacy Skills: Gender

		Female #(%)	Male #(%)
Rate the importance of teaching literacy strategies in your content area course.	Extremely Important	6 (60%)	7 (64%)
	Important	4 (40%)	4 (36%)
	Not Important	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Rate your current confidence level in teaching literacy strategies in your classroom.	Extremely Confident	3 (30%)	3 (27%)
	Confident	5 (50%)	6 (55%)
	Not Confident	2 (20%)	2 (18%)
Rate your current confidence level in identifying students with low literacy levels.	Extremely Confident	4 (40%)	5 (45%)
	Confident	5 (50%)	6 (55%)
	Not Confident	1 (10%)	0 (0%)
Rate your confidence level in working with students with low literacy levels.	Extremely Confident	3 (30%)	2 (18%)
	Confident	4 (40%)	7 (64%)
	Not Confident	3 (30%)	2 (18%)

Note: Participants identify as female (10), and male (11)

Through the literature review in Chapter Two, researchers (Faulkner, et al., 2010; Giles, et al., 2013; Towes & Kurth, 2019) suggested there is a decline in teachers' understanding of literacy as students progress through their education. Using the demographic information, data was disaggregated into participants who taught in middle school, high school, or both middle and high school to examine these statements.

Although limited in scope, the data from this small sample size acknowledges the importance of including literacy strategies in the secondary social studies classroom, with 100% of participants responding. However, looking more closely at this data, 100% of the middle school teachers participating in this study self-identified that inclusion of

literacy strategies are extremely important, compared to 44% of high school colleagues. Fifty percent (50%) of teachers who teach at both middle and high school levels believed literacy strategies are extremely important.

This difference between middle school and high school social studies teachers continues to be seen as 100% of middle school teachers self-identified as having extreme confidence or confidence in their ability to teach literacy strategies, identify students with low literacy skills, and work with students with low literacy skills. This distinction is compared to high school teachers and teachers who teach across both levels where up to 30% of teachers self-identified as not having confidence in teaching literacy strategies, up to 17% do not have confidence in identifying students with low literacy skills, and finally, 33% of teachers self-identified as not having confidence in working with students with low literacy skills. This disaggregation of data aligns with the researchers (Faulkner, et al., 2010; Giles, et al., 2013; Towes & Kurth, 2019) earlier reports and may suggest that as students advance through their education journey, they are met with teachers that do not have as much experience and confidence with teaching literacy (see **Table 5: Teachers' Opinions About Teaching Students with Low Literacy Skills - Grade Levels**).

Table 5:*Teachers' Opinions About Teaching Students with Low Literacy Skills: Grade Levels Taught*

		M.S. #(%)	H.S. #(%)	B. #(%)
Rate the importance of teaching literacy strategies in your content area course.	Extremely Important	6 (100%)	4 (44%)	3 (50%)
	Important	0 (0%)	5 (55%)	3 (50%)
	Not Important	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Rate your current confidence level in teaching literacy strategies in your classroom.	Extremely Confident	3 (50%)	2 (22%)	1 (17%)
	Confident	3 (50%)	5 (55%)	3 (50%)
	Not Confident	0 (0%)	2 (22%)	2 (33%)
Rate your current confidence level in identifying students with low literacy levels.	Extremely Confident	3 (50%)	3 (33%)	3 (50%)
	Confident	3 (50%)	6 (67%)	2 (33%)
	Not Confident	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)
Rate your confidence level in working with students with low literacy levels.	Extremely Confident	3 (50%)	2 (22%)	0 (0%)
	Confident	3 (50%)	4 (44%)	4 (67%)
	Not Confident	0 (0%)	3 (33%)	2 (33%)

Note: Participants teach in Middle School (M.S.-6), High School (H.S.-9), or Teach Both (B-6)

The final disaggregation of this data included a look at the differences between participants who choose to complete only the part one survey with those who agreed to participate further with the research through the inclusion of the part two survey and qualitative individual interview.

As previously mentioned, all participants believed literacy strategies should be included within classroom instruction. The data shows a distinction between those who only completed the part one survey and those who participated further in the research study. Specifically, 30% of participants completing the Part One survey self-identified as not having confidence in their ability to teach literacy strategies, 10% stated that they did

not have confidence in identifying low literacy skill levels within their students, and 40% believe that they do not have confidence in working with students with low literacy skills.

This reporting is important because of the 11 people who chose to participate further in the study either through the completion of the part two survey or the qualitative individual interview; only one participant self-identified as not having confidence in teaching literacy strategies or working with students with low literacy skills. It is beyond the scope of this research to speculate why participants who only completed the Part One survey and reported having less confidence in both teaching literacy and working with low literacy learners did not choose to participate further. We look for answers to the open-ended survey questions that discussed where teachers gained confidence levels to work with low-level literacy students to uncover this phenomenon (see **Table 6: Teachers' Opinions About Teaching Students with Low Literacy Skills: Participation Level**).

Table 6:*Teachers' Opinions About Teaching Students with Low Literacy Skills: Participation Level*

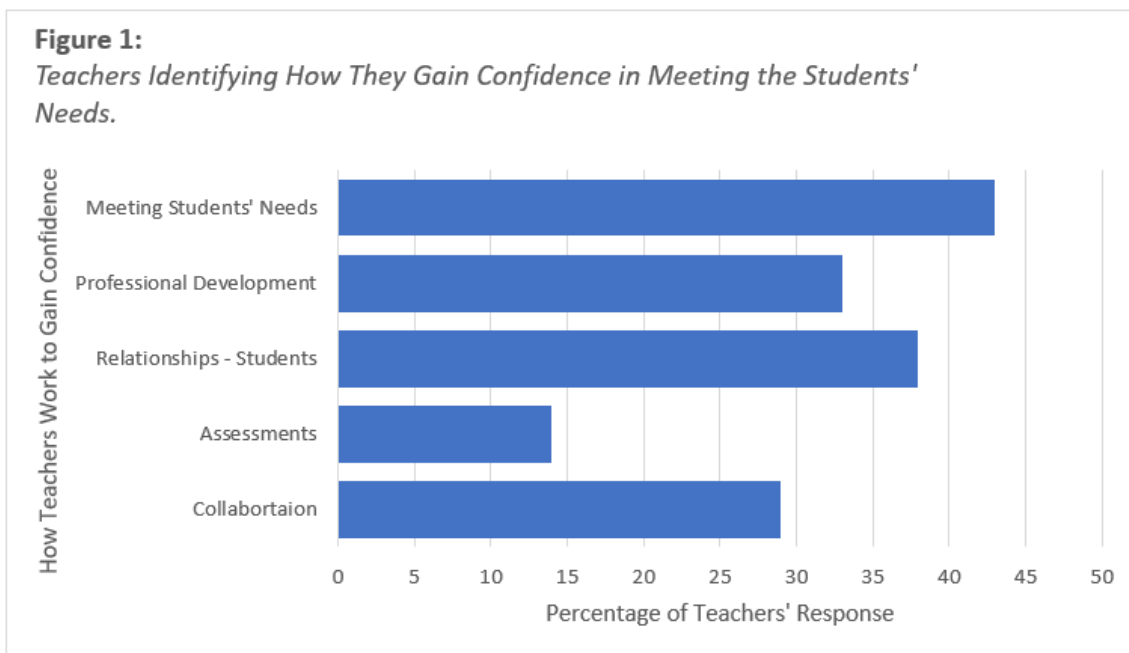
		Initial Survey #(%)	Extended Survey #(%)	Interview Participants #(%)
Rate the importance of teaching literacy strategies in your content area course.	Extremely Important	5 (50%)	8 (73%)	4 (67%)
	Important	5 (50%)	3 (27%)	2 (33%)
	Not Important	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Rate your current confidence level in teaching literacy strategies in your classroom.	Extremely Confident	2 (20%)	4 (36%)	1 (17%)
	Confident	5 (50%)	6 (55%)	4 (67%)
	Not Confident	3 (30%)	1 (9%)	1 (17%)
Rate your current confidence level in identifying students with low literacy levels.	Extremely Confident	5 (50%)	4 (46%)	2 (33%)
	Confident	4 (40%)	7 (64%)	4 (67%)
	Not Confident	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Rate your confidence level in working with students with low literacy levels.	Extremely Confident	3 (30%)	2 (18%)	0 (0%)
	Confident	3 (30%)	8 (73%)	5 (83%)
	Not Confident	4 (40%)	1 (9%)	1 (17%)

Note: 21 Total participants include Initial Survey (10), Extended Survey (11), Interview (6)

Teachers were asked to reflect upon a final, open-ended statement in this section; *As an educator, describe how you work (what do you do) to gain confidence to meet students' needs.* Again, this statement aligns with the secondary research question of this study. During the initial reading of these responses, it was determined several themes were present within the teachers' responses. Through a thorough analysis of reading the data collected in response to the statement, five themes emerged throughout the responses (collaboration, assessments, building relationships with students, professional development, and meeting students' needs). These themes were identified in response to the statement; *As an educator, describe how you work (what do you do) to gain confidence to meet students' needs.*

Two overarching themes emerged from the analysis of this statement where 38% of teachers reported they believe building relationships with students and 43% of teachers reported learning ways to meet their students' academic needs are essential ways teachers work to develop confidence in teaching students with low literacy skills. Furthermore, 33% of teachers credit professional development, in addition to 29% acknowledge collaboration as an essential opportunity to build their confidence in learning more about literacy and its impact on student learning throughout disciplinary courses.

These responses aligned with the research of Gritter (2010) and Guskey (2002), who stated teachers need the continuous support of learning from professionals as they develop an understanding of their learning opportunities for successful implementation. Lastly, teachers (14%) recognize the added support assessments can provide in learning where students lack the skills needed to be successful in their development of literacy skills (see **Figure 1: Teachers Identifying How They Gain Confidence in Meeting the Students' Needs**).



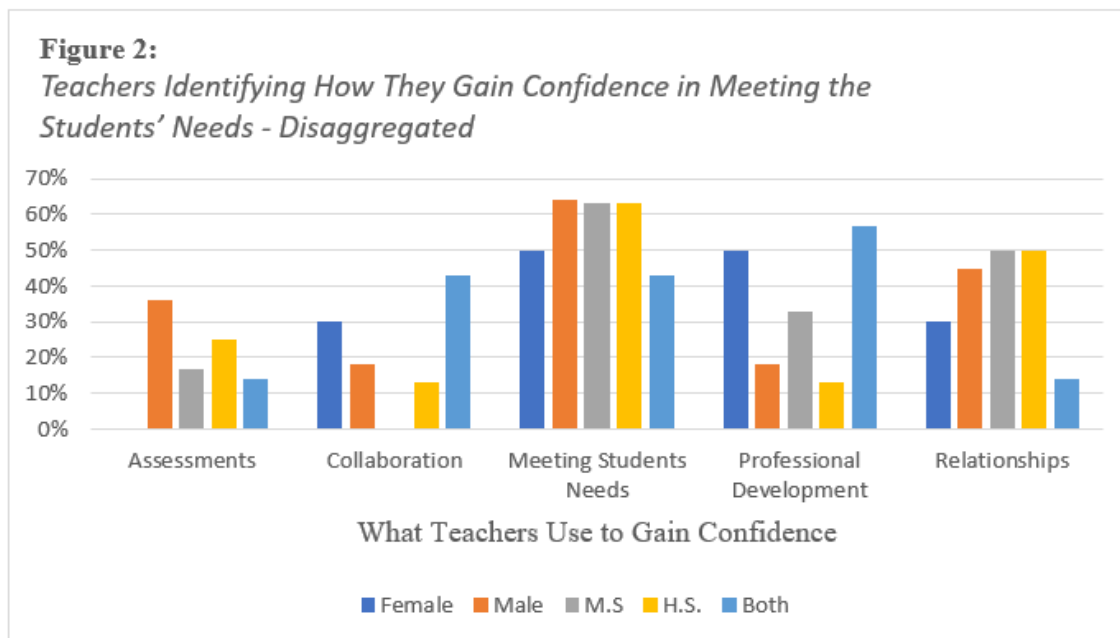
Note: 21 total responses

Although **Figure 1** provides analysis through a broad scope of teacher responses to the survey question, when the data is disaggregated into five categories: gender (female/male) and grade levels taught (middle school, high school, or both) another perspective is seen.

At first glance, efforts to build students' social-emotional wellness appeared to be an important tool for males, middle school, and high school teachers as 45-50 % reported relationships are important, and 63-64% believed meeting the needs of students was important. However, looking more closely at this data, it was discovered that these groups base these two tools as the most important ways to increase confidence. At the same time, females used a wider breadth of tools such as collaboration (30%), relationships (30%), professional development (50%), and meeting the students' needs (50%) to gain confidence in working with low-level literacy students. Furthermore,

surprising to this researcher, female participants (in this small scale study) did not self-identify the use of assessments as a tool they used to help as they worked with low-level literacy students. In contrast, 36% of males self-identified this was a valuable tool to gain confidence.

Another interesting revelation was found with teachers who teach both middle and high school students. Here, collaboration (43%) and professional development (57%) were reported as tools to gain confidence. This exceeded their colleagues who only teach at either the middle or high school levels. Although not within the scope of this research, further discussion on the differences found among teachers who teach across multiple secondary grade levels would be a potential research topic for future studies. This researcher questions if the difference is related to teachers having experience with the developmental level of students as they progress through school (see **Figure 2: Teachers Identifying How They Gain Confidence in Meeting the Students' Needs - Disaggregated**).



Note: 21 Participants total: Female (10), Male (11), Grade Levels Taught: Middle School (M.S.-6), High School (H.S.-8), Both (B-7)

Instructional Support

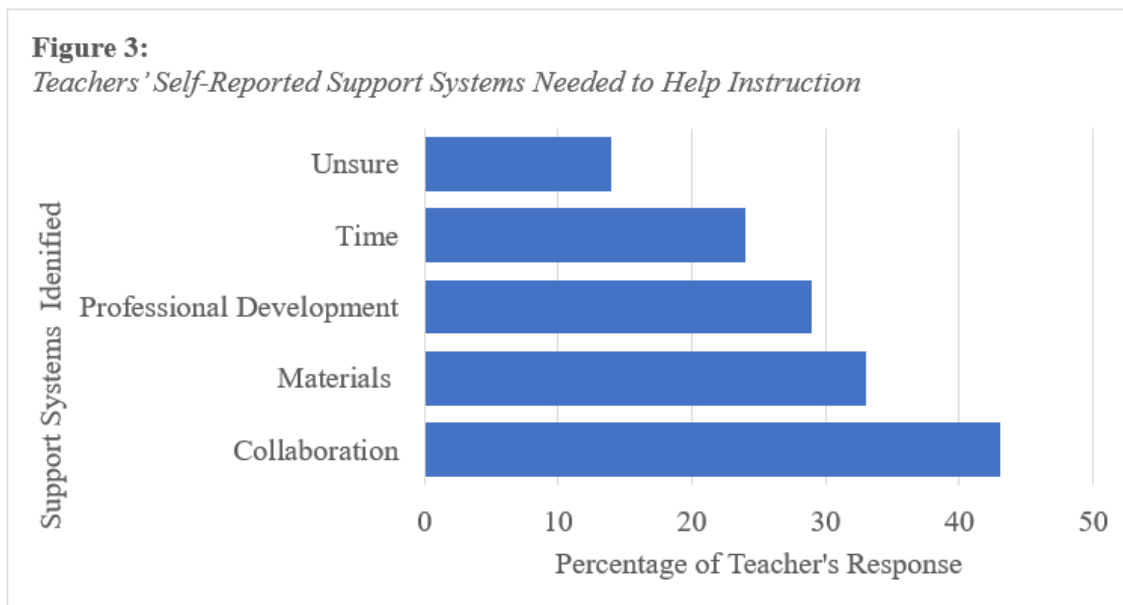
The final section of the part one survey directly linked to the final research question; *how do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these (low-level literacy) students?* To ascertain this information, participants were asked to reflect on the following statement: *As an educator, what support systems do you need to help you with instructing students with low literacy levels.* This open-ended statement provided the opportunity for participants to share their feelings of support systems available to them as they implement literacy strategies in their classrooms.

Once again, through a thorough analysis of reading the data collected in response to the statement, themes emerged throughout the responses. With additional readings, five

overarching themes were identified (collaboration, materials, time, professional development, and not sure).

Thidodeau (2008) highlighted the importance of collaboration with peers as a key factor in school improvement. According to the data collected, 43% of teachers responding to this survey agreed with the researcher. Teachers self-identified collaboration and support from administration, instructional coaches, special education teachers, literacy specialists, English/language arts teachers, as well as other colleagues as important factors that aid in their ability to meet students' literacy needs.

Furthermore, teachers (33%) highlighted the need for and availability of appropriate materials to use in their instruction that meets the needs of the low-level literacy students. In addition, 29% of respondents purported that being provided opportunities to further their learning of literacy through relevant professional development, graduate coursework, and shared knowledge allowed teachers to learn how to blend literacy with social studies skills and content that students need to be successful in the classroom. Finally, teachers continued to express that providing time to complete work on the collaboration, professional learning, finding new materials, and getting to know students were important to help them succeed in meeting the instructional needs of low-level literacy students (see **Figure 3: Teachers Self-Reported Support Systems Identified to Help Instruction**).

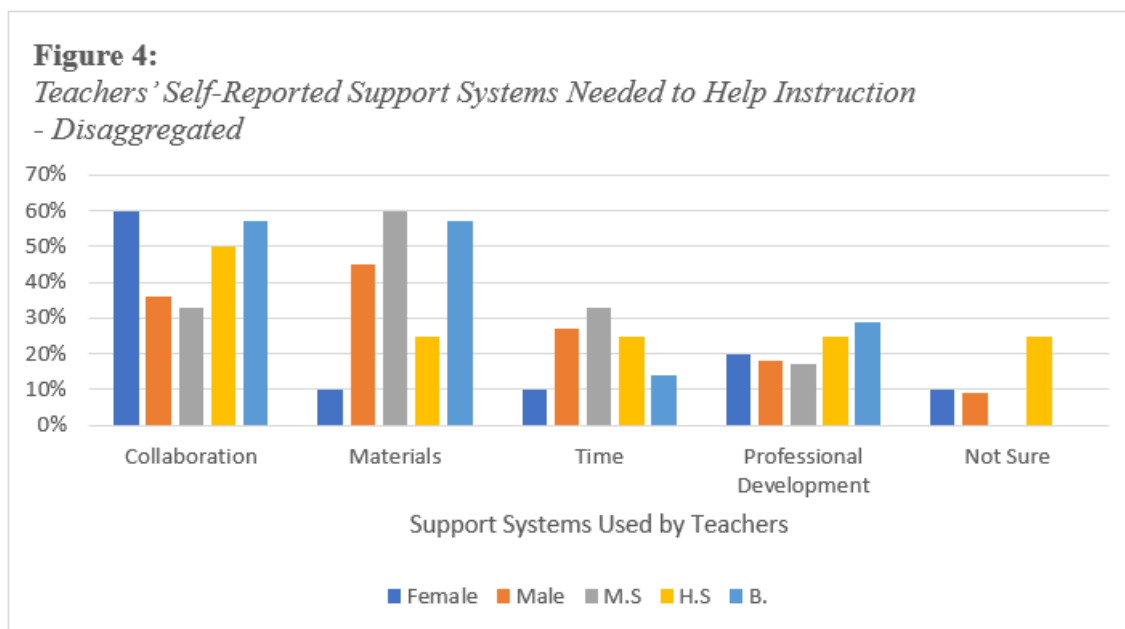


Note: 21 total responses

Once more, the data collected in response to the survey question presented in **Figure 3** provided a comprehensive examination of the themes identified through the participants' responses. Looking to dive further into the data, the participants' data was disaggregated into five categories: gender (female/male) and grade levels taught (middle school, high school, or both).

Taking a close look at data of this small study, female participants overwhelmingly stated (60%) that collaboration was the most important system of support needed to gain confidence in working with students with low literacy levels. This number was closely followed by 57% of teachers who teach both middle and high school and 50% of high school teachers who self-identified collaboration as essential support systems. In addition to collaboration, teachers who teach at both middle and high school levels identified materials (57%) as necessary support needed; this is followed by 45% of males who also identified the importance of materials.

Once again, an interesting discovery of the differences between female and male participants was identified. While the majority of females reported this one support system as being important in aiding in their ability to gain confidence, male participants reported a more comprehensive range of support systems: materials (45%), collaboration (36%), time (27%), and professional development (18%) (see **Figure 4: Teachers' Self-Reported Support Systems Needed to Help Instruction - Disaggregated**).



Note: 21 Participants total: Female (10), Male (11), Grade Levels Taught: Middle School (M.S.-6), High School (H.S.-8), Both (B-7)

Applying Literacy Strategies

The final 8 questions of the part two survey aligned with the primary research question of this study; *how do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching students with low literacy skills?* Of the 21 participants who initially partook in the study, 11 of those participants volunteered to continue their contribution to complete this part two survey. Here, participants were asked to rate a

series of statements using an ordinal leveling scale as described by Fink (2017); extremely confident, confident, and not confident concerning using literacy strategies in the classroom. The part two survey, and ordinal scale, allowed the participants to rate their own level of confidence. In addition, it provided an efficient opportunity to obtain background knowledge of the research participants in relation to the general knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of literacy instruction.

Early researchers (Guskey, 2002; Fisher & Ivey, 2005) believed that teachers' attitudes, belief systems, and confidence levels were challenges to the successful implementation of disciplinary literacy in the secondary school setting. Other researchers (Hall, 2005; Gilles, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009) asserted a lack of confidence in teaching literacy strategies as impeding the inclusion of these strategies into disciplinary courses in middle school and high school. Furthermore, Brevik (2017) contended that students need multiple strategies within their toolbox to aid in their ability to access complex text.

Although limited in scope, the data collected within the part two survey indicated a shift in confidence levels of these teachers who self-identified as using literacy strategies in the classroom. As self-identified by participants, 91% of participants rated themselves as being extremely confident or confident using both comprehension monitoring strategies (activating prior knowledge, reasoning, etc.) and summarization and analysis strategies. This was followed by 81% of teachers who identified as feeling extremely confident or confident in using strategies that identify various text structures within their lessons.

Likewise, Marchand-Martella, et al., (2013) claimed vocabulary as complex and multidimensional and encouraged the inclusion of vocabulary instruction in the secondary setting. The data found in the part two survey aligned with this suggestion, as 90% of the teachers included in this study self-identified as being extremely confident or confident in using vocabulary strategies in their instruction.

While the data displayed suggests that teachers are gaining confidence in using literacy strategies in their instruction, the data also highlights opportunities for improvement and growth in teachers' confidence levels using literacy strategies in their instruction. Less than 36% of teachers across all strategies (all but one strategy) self-identified as being extremely confident in their understanding and use of literacy strategies, with 36% of teachers identifying having no confidence in helping students generate questions to aid in their learning (see **Table 7: Teachers Rate Their Level of Confidence Using Various Literacy Strategies**).

Table 7:*Teachers Rate Their Level of Confidence Using Various Literacy Strategies.*

	Extremely Confident # (%)	Confident # (%)	Not Confident # (%)
comprehension monitoring (activating prior knowledge, reasoning ... etc).	5 (45.45%)	5 (45.45%)	1 (9%)
cooperative learning	2 (18%)	8 (72.7%)	1 (9%)
graphic or semantic organizers	2 (18%)	7 (63.6%)	2 (18%)
questions answering (response to teacher lead questions before, during, and after reading).	4 (36%)	5 (45.45%)	2 (18%)
question generating (students generate questions – why, when, where, what, how, and who).	4 (36%)	3 (27.27%)	4 (36%)
text structure	4 (36%)	5 (45.45%)	2 (18%)
summarization and analysis	3 (27.27%)	7 (63.6%)	1 (9%)
vocabulary instruction	4 (36%)	6 (54.54%)	1 (9%)

*Note: 11 responses***Summary of Survey Results**

At this point, Chapter Four has offered preliminary results of the research questions sought in this qualitative study. The information gleaned from the surveys was intended to provide a snapshot of the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of a small group of social studies teachers in a mid-western state, related to the confidence level of teachers

using literacy strategies in the classroom. The data gathered was displayed through tables and figures to aid the reader through the discernment process and to illustrate this research's preliminary discoveries. Preliminary findings based on the self-reporting of a small sample of social studies teachers in the state where this study took place include:

1. The number of social studies teachers in this sample who report they are confident in teaching literacy skills may indicate there has been an increase in confidence since previous studies. However, there continue to be opportunities for continued growth in this area.
2. Social studies teachers in this sample describe several factors that influenced their successful implementation of literacy strategies. A few of those factors include collaboration with peers, time to learn and use strategies, relying on literacy research and best practices, and building relationships with students.
3. Social studies teachers describe a few specific support systems that positively impact their ability to gain confidence in working successfully with low literacy students. Those support systems include collaboration, materials, professional development, and time. Although several teachers were able to identify specific needs to aid them in this area, 14% of the teachers responding remain uncertain of what support systems would adequately assist them in gaining the confidence needed to be successful in the implementation of literacy skills in their disciplinary course.

This data helped provide background knowledge prior to the conduction of interviews.

Overview of Qualitative Interview Results

In total, 11 of the initial 21 participants indicated they were interested in participating in the final qualitative individual interview, of this research. All 11 participants were contacted through email to schedule an individual. Of the initial 11 participants, six individuals responded and agreed to a qualitative individual interview with a set date and time. The six qualitative interviews were conducted between July 29 and November 13, 2021. Through email, participants were provided with the interview questions (Appendix B) prior to their scheduled qualitative interview, in addition to the consent form. As suggested by Fraenkel, et al. (2012), a semi-structured qualitative interview format was used for each qualitative interview. Qualitative interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom, with transcriptions processed using the online Otter program. Finally, transcriptions were read multiple times and coded using Saldana's (2016) provisional coding method. In addition to the data collected through the qualitative interview process, a reflective journal, as described by Creswell and Ploeth (2018), was used by the researcher to record observations and reflections following each qualitative interview.

Before the research study was conducted, as a result of the review of the research literature, predetermined themes were identified that would be used in the coding process of the qualitative interviews. The predetermined themes were:

- attitudes and beliefs
- literacy skills used in the classroom
- challenges of including literacy strategies

- support systems needed to successful

Opportunities for additional themes to emerge were allowed. However, it was determined that the predetermined themes were sufficient. An in-depth discussion of these themes will be addressed at the end of the chapter. Chapter Four concludes with a discussion of the research questions as they were addressed throughout the analysis and presentation of the data. Chapter Four concludes with a brief preview of Chapter Five.

Qualitative Interview Participants: Demographics Information

Through the part one survey, demographic information was collected for all participants of the study. It is here that the information was collected for the final six participants of the qualitative interview stage of this study. To protect the identity of the participants of this study, individuals have been recorded chronologically as participant #1, #2, etc.

Through an icebreaker question asking participants to provide background information about their professional experience, a specific number of years of teaching was gathered. According to data, a strong majority of the participants have been teaching for more than 20 years, with experience in more than one secondary grade level. In addition, although the initial participants were more evenly distributed between genders, it is noted here that a majority of the participants that were interviewed were male. It is unclear to this researcher if it would have been ideal for interviewing a pool of participants that were equally represented in gender or if it was simply a limitation to this study (see **Table 8: Demographic Information of Interview Participants**).

Table 8:*Demographic Information of Interview Participants.*

	Gender	Total Number of Years in Education	Grade Levels Taught in Social Studies					
			7	8	9	10	11	12
Participant #1	M	25			x		x	x
Participant #2	M	26	x	x				
Participant #3	M	8	x	x			x	x
Participant #4	M	21					x	x
Participant #5	M	29	x	x	x	x	x	x
Participant #6	F	21		x				

Interestingly, through this initial ice breaker question, the researcher discovered that five out of the six of the participants have advanced degrees, participate in leadership roles within their school, and/or participate in leadership roles through outside educational agencies such as state curriculum boards, state content boards, and adjunct University teaching. At the onset of this research, collecting this data was not deemed essential to this researcher. In hindsight, this information could have a direct impact on the final analysis of the research presented here and could be an additional limitation of the research. (It should be noted that one of the participants did not include this detail as a part of their discussion. Therefore, it is unclear whether or not they too possessed these qualifications.)

Several researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Fraenkel, et al., 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) describe a qualitative interview as an effective way to gain an understanding of the participants' perspective, feelings and beliefs. For this reason, this method was chosen in

this study to provide the researcher the opportunity to have a conversation with participants to construct a picture of the participants' experiences working with students with low literacy skills. Therefore, each participant's qualitative interview has been shared individually through a narrative summary of their lived experiences. Following each qualitative interview, I included my observations and reflections as a researcher of each participant's qualitative interview in my quest to answer the primary and secondary research questions at the end of the chapter.

Qualitative Interview with Participant #1

Participant's Professional Journey. Participant #1 did not begin his professional career in education; instead, he started with a degree that allowed him to work in a law firm researching litigation. Not feeling a sense of accomplishment, participant one reflected on his time spent in college working with a homeless program tutoring individuals for their general education degree (GED), working with Teach for America, a Discovery Center, and Community Impact programs. These experiences provided him with the belief that he was impacting individuals' lives. In the late 1990s, participant #1 began working on his masters to gain a teaching license in social studies. Since this time, he has worked as an educational leader and secondary social studies teacher. Although he has taught in all secondary grade levels, currently, he teaches students in ninth, eleventh, and twelfth grade in a north-metro-suburb in the state where this research is taking place. Participant #1 stated, "the classroom is where my passion is; working with kids is what I love and is the best part of my day."

Understanding and defining content area/disciplinary literacy. When thinking about the term disciplinary literacy, participant #1 believed that “it is more specialized and distinct from the generalized literacy that we have.” Furthermore, “literacy as a concept, like numeracy, is something that as a high school teacher, you tend to take more for granted.”

While working one-on-one with students during Covid-19’s distance learning, participant #1 stated he was “shocked and disappointed” to learn that some of his seniors struggled with basic literacy, like decoding text, phonetic awareness, the functions of the parts of speech, and patterns with writing language. Although some of these students were language learners, others were not. The participant acknowledged that he was aware of possible deficits in students' literacy. However, it was not until this personal experience he learned of the magnitude of these challenges. The goal here, he states, “is to build their language fluency and work towards the understanding of generalizable concepts within academic language.”

With a long history of working with ninth-grade students, participant #1 described the need to move beyond ordinary conversational language that allows students to access information and process it to the use and understanding of academic language where students learn the main idea of text by gaining a better experience of text structure. With this increased awareness of text structure, participant #1 claimed students are able to discover definitions of terms, concepts, and ideas. For example, he described how students might have a basic understanding of the terms checks and balances. However, when these terms are put together within social studies, they mean something completely

different. “When students begin to dig further into the discipline, they work to analyze by using three levels of questioning,” he stated. This is one thing that he believes makes social studies so challenging.

Using literacy strategies within instruction. When the conversation turned to use literacy strategies within instruction, participant #1 stated it “has varied over time, and it ebbs and flows, some things stick, and some things go away.” For example, in the early days of No Child Left Behind, the administration decided to ensure students' scores increased by assigning each department a section of the ACT test. The social studies department was assigned the reading section of the test, which frustrated the social studies department. Participant #1 explained, “the test is not about memorizing and knowing concepts; it is a reading test where students are expected to apply their reading skills to analyze the text to find the correct answer.”

Therefore, in the late 2000s, the professional development opportunities in the school focused on reading. During this time, the department decided a commonly agreed-upon set of language and prompts would be used across the grade levels. For example, task descriptors, common vocabulary was used, a common approach to teaching-reviewing vocabulary, common study guides, two-column not structure, extension questions, common assessments, etc. This common agreed-upon set of language and prompts, participant #1 described as one positive initiative that came out of the quest to focus on reading as an attempt to improve testing scores.

Participant #1 believed students need “a lot of tools in their toolbox” to aid in comprehending and analyzing the social studies context. With this belief, he incorporates multiple literacy strategies into his instruction. Including:

- two-column note structures
- discovering and understanding roots and stems in vocabulary
- background knowledge
- providing three-level reading guides/structures
- providing text with varying levels of complexity (length)
- writing questions that are designed to get kids thinking
- expanding vocabulary

Participant #1 believed that by providing students with a wide variety of literacy skills, his students would be able to be more successful not only in his classroom but throughout the academic journey.

However, an initiative that he struggled with was pre-teaching vocabulary. This is not to say that pre-teaching vocabulary does not have its place. At one point, the department reviewed the academic vocabulary needed for social studies, and they discovered the need to learn over 1,000 words. At this same time, another initiative by the administration was put into place, which required that every room have a word wall to aid in vocabulary instruction. This requirement was monitored through daily administrative walk-throughs of classrooms. Through his personal experience, participant #1 agreed vocabulary instruction was vital to understanding the concepts in social studies. However, according to him, teaching vocabulary in isolation does not result in the student’s ability

to grasp the required understanding needed to allow a student to gain a deeper and more meaningful connection. He believes for “students to acquire meaning through the text or through discussion that we’re doing in class and then see an application of it more in some sort of writing or further discussion rather than regurgitating something from a dictionary.”

Lastly, participant #1 expressed that time was the most significant challenge in incorporating literacy into instruction.

Do you have the time needed to do the things necessary for literacy and differentiation? There’s simply no time to develop differentiated lessons or take a text and rewrite it in three different ways, so what we tend to do a lot of aiming at the middle and differentiation each way when possible.

Like many schools, participant #1 mentioned they have a lot of inclusion of learners (special education or English language learners). To aid in this inclusion, the school has a co-teacher program, where special education and/or English as a second language teachers are assigned to work with content area teachers to help classroom teachers develop lessons, modifications, or accommodations for students in the content course. However, participant #1 explained they are not always available to be in the classroom. With the workload or philosophy of the co-teacher, there is not always enough time to properly collaborate to create differentiated lessons.

For example, when the participant was teaching 10th grade, he had a co-teacher who was actually in the classroom while participant # 1 was teaching. He explained how successful the year was because his co-teacher would see where and how

accommodations or modifications could be made to a text or overall lesson. This experience was very successful because they had time in the classroom to work together. The co-teacher has “a better understanding of the scaffolding of materials needed, ways to think about using graphic organizers, pairing images with vocabulary, varied approaches in learning, etc.” Finding time outside of the learning hour to collaborate and work together to develop lessons to meet the students' needs did prove to be more challenging. However, in another experience, the participants' co-teacher did not have the same philosophy on co-teaching and did not provide the same level of collaboration. Once again, finding time to collaborate was challenging, but so was overcoming the differences in philosophies of co-teaching.

Support systems needed for successful implementation of literacy instruction.

Participant #1 believed teachers need the right type of support system to be successful. In his experience, the most successful professional development opportunities are when they are job-embedded, related to what is currently happening in the classroom, and can be implemented immediately. For example, he described a successful staff planning day where a set of strategies or approaches were being discussed.

Throughout the all-school presentation of that successful staff planning day, each department shared how the strategy of graphic organizers would be used within their curriculum, i.e., the science teacher presented, the art teacher presented, the English teacher presented, etc. Each department was then tasked to work collaboratively as a group and determine where and how they could implement the strategy in their upcoming lessons or unit. The department was given a timeline to complete the task and then

convened again to discuss the application of the strategy. “Because it is job-embedded, and it is immediate, that’s really where I find the biggest value” in a professional development opportunity, he claimed. This example of professional development was specific for each department. As a team, they developed a graphic organizer that fit their needs in the classroom the best and would benefit the students within the context of their current learning.

In contrast, participant #1 felt a “one size fits all” approach to professional development was the least effective. When the district was focused on ACT scores, he explained that he participated in professional development opportunities that suggested the social studies department apply the strategies of analyzing an ACT passage to their textbook. Or, another year where vocabulary instruction was a focal point, the social studies department was tasked with adding ten vocabulary words to test every unit. Neither of these initiatives was based within the social studies context; he explained that a passage on the ACT is not similar to their social studies text. Learning vocabulary in isolation does not allow for the complex understanding of concepts needed to participate in in-depth discussions or writing in social studies. Neither of these initiatives were based on the literacy skills required to be successful in the social studies discipline. By including tasks that were in isolation of social studies learning and not job-embedded, participant #1 felt as though they were unsuccessful initiatives.

When asked for his advice on what he would like to see improved in support systems, participant #1 expressed frustration with the administration. “Administration simply does not seem to understand what we do with literacy, and they think we just put

in a videocassette and play movies or something.” He further explained that there are differing class size limitations for the science department due to laboratory work and the English department due to the amount of writing that is completed in their coursework. The social studies department has larger class sizes and three fewer teachers as a department than these other departments.

Furthermore, during the initiative to increase test scores, teachers in all other departments were encouraged and paid to gain a reading license, except the social studies teachers! He stated, “Social studies teachers were allowed to join the reading program. They simply would not get paid.” This lack of understanding of the literacy needs of students in social studies was amplified by larger class sizes, where 17 of your 34 students were identified as having a language need or disability. He encourages the administration to look deeper at the support systems needed for social studies as has been provided to other departments.

Researcher’s reflection. I was impressed with this participant’s passion for education and his depth of knowledge in literacy education. Participant #1 has acted as a leader outside of the classroom through his work on the board of education, the state council for social studies, early college programs, and through local school district administration roles. However, after a time in leadership roles, the participant determined that his passion lay with his students and returned full-time to the classroom.

The participant’s depth of literacy knowledge can be seen through his work as a classroom teacher. This depth of knowledge is evident as the participant has included multiple levels of literacy instruction within his teaching. When working with language

learners, throughout the challenges of distance learning, the participant explained how phonetic awareness was essential in aiding students to gain the skills needed to access text. In addition, the participant acknowledged the need to work on fluency as a means to process information for understanding. Furthermore, the participant described the importance of teaching vocabulary instruction in addition to comprehension. He described multiple literacy strategies in his instruction, such as: reading for the main idea, comparing and contrast, understanding text structure, the use of academic/domain-specific language, multiple levels of text and guided reading notes, understanding disciplinary concepts and ideas, pre-teaching, margin notes, writing questions, thinking, process concepts through writing or discussions, and graphic organizers.

Multiple avenues of literacy strategies have been provided in the participants' classrooms. He believed this is important as students need to be provided with multiple strategies to fill their toolboxes. It is through this expansive toolbox the participant felt students are able to pull the necessary strategy to help them access text and be able to comprehend and participate in the discussion entirely.

Although the participant has used multiple strategies in his teaching, he expressed that he was not confident in using comprehension strategies. This statement aligns with his survey, as he reported he was not confident in generating questions as a comprehension tool, a key skill needed for the social studies classroom. To overcome this confidence barrier, the participant leans on the support systems provided through the English as a Second Language teacher, special education teacher, colleagues, and

professional development opportunities. This effort to expand his own learning and confidence level shows the participant's commitment to his students' academic learning needs and success.

However, participant #1's frustration with some of his professional development opportunities was evident as his demeanor changed during this part of our conversation. The participant appreciated the time and opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and felt this was a challenge in finding the time to do this well. Lastly, the participant's overall enthusiasm for literacy education and students' success was evident throughout our conversation.

Qualitative Interview with Participant #2

Participant's professional journey. Participant #2 has spent nearly thirty years in education, the past 25 years as a middle school educator in a community in the western suburbs of the state where this research took place. As one of the longest-tenured teachers in the middle school building, he has taught at all grade levels (6th- 8th grade) and within various disciplines (social studies, science, language arts, computer science, and even physical education). Currently, he is teaching 7th grade U.S. History.

Understanding and defining content area/disciplinary literacy. Participant #2 believed that at literacy's core is the ability to read and write. In addition, you need to be able to communicate using the vocabulary of the discipline and use common vocabulary across disciplines. When he thinks of content literacy he said, "it is about reading and writing and gaining new knowledge." He also believed that "you have to be comfortable with the text you are working with to gain knowledge to the point it can be ingrained

where you understand the vocabulary you are using.” For example, participant #2 has students read and present current events. He has noticed students are more successful “when they read things that are interesting, and at their level, they are able to interact with the vocabulary and improve their ability to write and read more within the discipline.”

Using literacy strategies within instruction. Participant #2 stated, “seven or eight years ago, the district, in which he works, did a lot of professional training in regards to reading workshops.” He further stated, “like all trends in education, we saw it blow up for about two years, and then it started to go away, and nobody uses those terms anymore.” In addition, he highlighted a problem that has occurred when an individual is hired in between the cycles of initiatives.

New teachers are expected to include aspects of the training into their instruction without being taught the needed skills to succeed. Once the initial training is completed, there is often not enough time or commitment to ensure ongoing training. However, today, there is a new initiative, Read 180, which is the same thing, just a new name.

Participant #2 did admit that the strategies are “pretty much the same.” For example, he stated, “teachers use versions of previewing reading, setting purpose, summarizing every paragraph (5-10), and summarizing the main idea to aid in building content knowledge and make sure they’re understanding.” Although these strategies help build comprehension, he further explained, “we are not able to complete these for everything because we would never get through everything. Definitely, the challenging

pieces and pieces that directly relate to the learning targets.” Using his hands to describe the vast differences, he exclaimed, “the content is this big, while the time we have is only this big.”

A positive literacy initiative, participant #2 believed, was when he participated in a building-wide literacy initiative around five years ago or more. The participant worked as an academy teacher. This duty included working with 60 students that were identified as at risk. He followed students into their science, social studies, and mathematics classrooms, where he described himself working beside students more as a paraprofessional. Here, he gathered the information for the direct purpose of gaining an understanding of what precisely the students were learning so he could gather additional materials that he would later use in an academy course to deepen their knowledge.

He summarized his work in this role as:

We read articles, they were maybe old articles, but it was related to the content.

We would break it down using the reading strategies, post-it notes, and the preview and highlight method. It was amazing, our reading scores went through the roof, and it was because of these 60 kids.

He explained that these 60 students had to give up their electives to participate in the academy course. Although they did not like giving up their elective, “they saw their grades skyrocketing because they were actually doing better than the kids in the regular ed classes,” he stated. Participant #2 defined this as a very focused approach to increasing scores. He was sad to see this initiative end after realizing the positive impact

it made on student achievement. “After two years, the district ended the program due to the expensive nature of the program,” he stated.

In addition to the academy program, participant #2 believed the compass or ignited initiative has also positively impacted student learning. Participant #2 explained compass or ignite as an initiative where everyone throughout the building is required to begin their lessons with a question or statement that is related to the day's lesson. This question ignites the brain and engages the students in thinking about what they are going to learn that day. It is “one of the most important things is getting kids ready to learn,” he claimed and believed this compass initiative had made a positive impact on student learning. He further explained he spends the first five to ten minutes (sometimes more) discussing the questions with students and then writing a response. He claimed, “Building schema, or background knowledge, is important,” and the participant tries to find ways to build this into his daily compass discussion. These discussions may lead to creating a KWL chart (what you know, what you want to know, and what you learned). However, he does not always feel the need to create the KWL chart, but at times simply ensures the class participates in a quick review of the concepts included in the chart.

Beyond his experiences with successful literacy initiatives, participant #2 admitted he has experienced limitations and challenges in working with struggling readers. For example, he stated, “fluency is important”; however, activities like “popcorn reading simply don’t work because it does not get the point of the reading across” when working with large class sizes. If he is working with “a small group, coaching session or something,” he may have them orally read. But when reading in class, the point is to get

to the content, so he finds other ways to present material to allow for discussion as a whole class.

The participant further described challenges in working with students with low literacy skills: the time and ability for small group pull-out instruction. He stated, “I want to be an inclusive classroom, but some kids need to be pulled out. They don’t do this enough.” He described a struggling student, who is also a language learner, who is unable to understand and read something as simple as directions; needs more help than he can provide in the classroom. With these challenges, asking the student to read and grasp concepts in social studies is not fair to the student. After much deliberation with other departments, the student has now been removed from the social studies classroom and is being provided the individual support needed.

Support systems needed for successful implementation of literacy instruction.

When asked about the support systems required to be successful in teaching, participant #2 identified opportunities he believed were effective and least effective.

The participant believed some of the most effective support opportunities he has experienced were professional development days where “teachers are teaching teachers.” A few times a year, the participant’s district offers professional development days where teachers within the district develop courses to teach other teachers. The participant described this style of professional development day as to where teachers sign up for several courses (40 minutes each) throughout the day.

A few examples he described were:

The media specialist offers a course on how to find and choose books for your content area; someone may present on how to use Google Slides in your classroom to be more effective, a counselor offering a discussion on mental health, or the district offering a course on a procedure or information that needs to be disseminated to the staff.

Professional development opportunities such as this provide opportunities to hear from fellow teachers who are currently in the classroom and find ways to be successful with their students. This opportunity allowed the teachers to share their experiences in real-time and relevant to what is currently happening. “I think that’s really valuable, the most valuable, when teachers are teaching teachers.”

In addition to teachers teaching teachers, participant #2 believed the instructional coaching program was also valuable and effective. He stated that the program has gone through changes and was once seen as ineffective and cumbersome. However, it has changed, and the instructional coaches now have better training and work to help you become a better teacher. In addition to helping with questions when needed, they observe lessons and then follow up with a reflective conversation.

The participant described the reflective conversation as a discussion with an instructional coach as questions, such as:

What am I going to see, what would you like me to look for? It’s confidential. The next day, they’d ask, what do you think, how did you think it went? In reply, I think it went well - you may wait for a response, but they don’t. They ask you more questions. Like, what questions do you have about your instruction, or what

went well and why? Or what did not go well? They tend to answer with a question. They really want you to think. It really makes you reflect. I think reflection is a good professional development tool.

In contrast, an event-based professional development opportunity, participant #2 believed, is the least effective. “I love event-based PD because it’s always entertaining. But . . . it’s just not productive.” He further described at the moment how the stories were entertaining, but “they simply are not long-lasting and either the speaker speaks well above everyone’s heads or the advice is not practical because they haven’t been in the classroom in 25 years. I just don’t like it.”

In addition, participant #2 encouraged administration or those who are in charge of professional development to “simply give time, time to plan. Don’t have the meetings that you think you need to have if you want it to work. Let the teachers plan, tell them what you’d like to see but let the teachers plan.” This past year, the participant’s building had a new administrator. During one district’s opportunities for professional learning, the administrator requested departments spend 20 minutes answering three questions for the administration. After this he said, “the administrator told us to remain in our rooms and work on the things that we never had the time to work on.” This time was very valuable to the participant. His advice to those in charge would be, “tell teachers what you’d like, but let them figure it out, let them work together, and they’re going to build quite a machine that way.”

Researcher’s reflection. Participant #2’s ability to be flexible and meet the needs of his students was evident throughout our discussion. From working with students across

the middle school grade levels to teaching a variety of courses, the participant spoke about the need to ensure literacy is incorporated into the instruction of all disciplinary courses. The participant brought a wide variety of learning opportunities to his students.

For example, he encouraged the use of multimedia to enhance student learning, hands-on activities to promote sensory learning, visuals to accompany the text and promote comprehension, and opening questions or statements to energize students' brains to ignite learning. He stated students need motivation and opportunities that allow access to learning. Each day, he begins class with questions, statements, or a visual that encourages students to begin the learning process. Through this, he builds background knowledge, makes connections, and introduces concepts the students will take a deeper dive into discovering. The enthusiasm the participant had in teaching was evident throughout our conversation.

Qualitative *Interview with Participant #3*

Participant's professional journey. Participant #3 has been teaching for eight years. He works in a tiny district in the northern, most rural area of the state where this research is taking place. He teaches everything from history, economics, geography, etc. in the social studies field throughout middle and high school (7th-12th grade). However, he prefers teaching middle school. Due to the school's population, he splits his time between social studies and special education (graduating class is about 25 students). He felt the number of free and reduced lunch and special education needs was slightly higher than the state average, stating, "the needs in the classroom are definitely maybe a little more elevated than your traditional placement or your stereotypical placement."

Understanding and defining content area/disciplinary literacy. Participant #3

appeared to have a simple and explicit definition of literacy as he described literacy:

The ability to make sense of written or typed in some kind of way, language, reading the language. It could mean someone being able to pick up the morning newspaper, reading a table of figures. Literacy is basically being able to read anything we are trying to comprehend, anything that is written.

When asked if there was anything further he would like to add in defining literacy, he declined to embellish on his initial response.

Using literacy strategies within instruction. Participant #3 had mixed feelings about what works well, what does not, and the challenges of meeting the needs of students. As a social studies department teacher (participant #3 and an additional social studies teacher), working with informational text and the inquiry process has been central to social studies teaching. This need has also been found throughout the standardized testing scores of students. When helping students learn how to ask and answer questions, he explained:

Taking them through this process, finding answers is important. Or, learning where an author or a historical document is from, why they wrote the document, what was the purpose of the writing, creates a whole new question where we go back and try to find the answers to those new questions. It is kind of a cyclical process.

This process of inquiry and teaching students how to preview, ask questions or make predictions, access background knowledge, navigate through the text and have classroom discussions have been a focal point for his department.

However, at this time, participant #3 believed, working with the whole group reading once a week to be the most effective tool for his students. He believed, due to covid-19, students are entering 7th and 8th grade with significantly lower reading abilities than he has seen in the past. Due to this lack of skills, he has returned to reading in the classroom at least once a week. He stated:

We are intentional about reading a textbook or selection, pointing out items like the headers, sub-header, pointing out vocabulary, and how to use the glossary. It is really going back to those really fundamental basics of what a book looks like. How is a text designed and laid out differently? It was these fundamental ideas and going back to the basics that have really helped the students.

Participant #3 further explained his classroom has one-on-one iPads. Although this tool can be helpful, he felt it had not been beneficial for his struggling readers as much as a traditional book. He stated, “the kids do not like reading on electronic devices as much as they do in a textbook.” Although students do have the ability to highlight text, he does not feel it provides the varied text for the various levels of readers that are found in the classroom. He explained, “in my 7th-grade classroom, I have students that are reading at the 3rd-grade reading level and kids that are as high as 9th or 10th-grade level. How do you keep them engaged while still reaching all levels?” Moving outside of the textbook, participant #3 explained that he uses Newsela as a tool to locate the text at

different Lexile levels. In addition, he has moved to ask a variety of leveled questions, entry-level questions that allow struggling readers the ability to participate. Also, higher and in-depth questions would enable the advanced students the ability to move beyond the basic concepts and begin to wander into the more prominent ideas/concepts of social studies.

Another point participant #3 shared, he does not like to use is graphic organizers. He explained:

They are a pain to organize, and as a student, my mind did not wrap around it. At times, ones developed by the textbook companies are so involved students look at them and wonder what they are supposed to do.

Participant #3 believed the practical organizers could be beneficial; for example, guided notes or two-column notes are organizers used successfully in his classroom.

Support systems needed for successful implementation of literacy instruction.

When asked about the success or failure of a support system, participant #3 explained:

Consistency is important. Consistency in what we are trying to accomplish, from a district standpoint or mandate, or whatever is coming down the pipeline. If they are going to start an initiative, stick with it, do not change the game 15 months down the line. It feels like when we are starting to learn something, and then it gets swapped out, and we are left wondering where we are going next. The frustration leads to others closing up or just refusing to try. If we are going to approach something new, give us time and consistency.

In addition, he felt district-wide initiatives were also less effective. He recalled when the district worked on a literacy initiative. The entire staff was assembled to learn about a specific literacy topic. “We had staff asking what it was we were doing, not understanding the task they were being asked to do,” he explained. But most memorable, the industrial technology teacher was frustrated because he needed to help his students who struggled with reading, and the initiative did not align with this need.

Participant #3 believed professional development needs to be “flexible enough to work for each individual content area.” English, social studies, and science use documents, charts, maps, books, and text unique to their courses. Just as other courses like industrial technology use other forms of materials for students to learn like designs, graphs, machine manuals specific to their course, through this experience, the participant did explain that forms of collaboration across content areas had begun. For example, social studies and English departments worked together to discuss nonfiction texts. The industrial technology teachers worked with other content area teachers and discussed processes. This collaboration, he claimed, “has created more excitement around our professional learning. Hopefully, we will be able to go out and find resources to match our efforts” and keep this process moving forward.

On the other hand, participant #3 has found the most effective professional development opportunities have come when he has participated in conferences or workshops where “I am put in a room full of other social studies people, it is like heaven.” Furthermore, he believed:

Knowing how to teach disciplinary literacy or having students that have been immersed in that disciplinary literacy makes the rest of the job so much easier. So, it is well worth the time needed to tackle it. When a student knows how to read and understand the language of a subject area, he can engage with the subject itself.

Researcher's reflection. Participant #3 had a passion for his social studies classes and meeting the needs of his students. He was well versed in the social studies content and had a depth of understanding of literacy concepts. As many of his students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or come from homes with socio-economic challenges, the participant decided it was in both his best interest to work on a masters in special education. Here, he learned about literacy and incorporated it into his disciplinary coursework. As he has found many of his students struggled with reading, he has incorporated literacy strategies into his lessons. For example, informational text, learning text structure, pre-reading, question predicting, and learning the inquiry process (asking and finding answers). He has learned that students need a variety of text, with varying ability levels, to fully participate and learn in the classroom.

He acknowledged that he was not comfortable teaching some strategies and did not include those in his practice. This was also highlighted in his survey as he reported that he was not confident in using graphic or semantic organizers for vocabulary instruction in his instruction. For example, he felt graphic organizers were not a helpful tool for his own learning and did not feel he could teach the strategy well enough to help his students learn it effectively. This insight into his own understanding and limitations

was beneficial to his instruction. Lastly, the participant believed in learning as a community of educators through personal learning communities, cross-curricular discussions, and professional development opportunities that are specific to the disciplinary courses.

Although participant #3 appeared well versed in response to the qualitative interview questions, he did not provide a depth in responses. The participants' responses were clear and direct in answering each question. The lack of added stories or examples is possibly due to the participant having the qualitative interview questions in advance and preparing responses for the qualitative interview. In looking back at the time it took to complete this qualitative interview, it was by far the shortest qualitative interview completed (around 25 minutes). Another reason may be, compared to other participants with over twenty years of experience, this participant had the least experience with only 7 years of teaching. The participant simply may not have the breadth of experience as other participants and, therefore, not as many stories to tell.

Qualitative Interview with Participant #4

Participant's professional journey. Participant #4 has been in education for twenty-one years. He has taught some form of government education, from ninth-grade civics or citizenship to general or advanced placement (AP) government to seniors. He mentioned that he often says it is better than working when asked if he liked teaching. He enjoys coming to school every day, it is fun, and he is able to laugh every day; "it is a good vacation," he stated.

Understanding and defining content area/disciplinary literacy. Participant #4 agreed with the notion that “we all teach reading, or at least we should,” although he would give a pass to math teachers as he did not believe they use a great deal of language within their courses. He further explained, “I do not feel like it is an area of tremendous emphasis. I think it happens, maybe by happenstance.” Expanding on his statement, participant #2 expressed the importance of understanding vocabulary within the social studies context. He provided an example from his lesson that day, explaining that certain words are just not a part of students’ everyday vocabulary. Precedent, as it pertains to legal cases in the Supreme Court, was an example of terminology that had to be pre-taught prior to moving forward with lessons. In his experience, “a lot of the literacy focus would be at that basic level of just introducing vocabulary words that might be unique to your curriculum or your content area.”

Using literacy strategies within instruction. When speaking about the social studies department, or personal experiences, participant #4 further described his thoughts on literacy. In his social studies department, he explained that there is no collective thought on literacy or a work of their own volition. For example, instead of the social studies department choosing their own literacy initiatives, they come from a top-down perspective. The administration has required teachers to compare students’ writing performance that revolved around reading comprehension. Here, he explained, teachers compiled students’ writing assignments for one of their classes and compared the writing completed in one semester with another semester. It is through this examination of

student work that teachers were tasked with reviewing the progress made by students.

With this information, teachers were asked to determine the need for additional support.

Beyond this requirement, teachers were asked to find new ways to incorporate literacy into their instruction during another initiative. The participant explained that he felt there was no direction provided more than the direction to find a way to integrate literacy into their instruction. Responding to this request, participant #4 described the “The Thought of the Day” activity as an initiative to meet the requirements of his administration. He explained, “The Thought of the Day” is a statement or question that is presented at the beginning of class to build or access background knowledge related to the lesson for the day. Furthermore, the participant explained vocabulary, information about the author, and context may need to be provided when the statement/quote is presented to help provide context for the students. Students are asked to read a statement or quote posted on the board, and after time for reflection or writing, the class discusses the statement/quote. The participant explained:

I really enjoy the “Thought of the Day,” I get to hear different perspectives; there is rarely a clearly defined right answer; it is opinion-based. Social studies is not defined by right or wrong. It contains the gray areas in which we live.

He further stated that these conversations are robust at times, and they may be limited at other times. He encourages students to speak up and share their voices as this is a crucial part of their civic responsibilities as an adult.

Although “The Thought of the Day” was a literacy initiative to appease the administration requirements, the participant stated that he has always incorporated this

activity into his teaching and will continue to do so in an attempt to build background knowledge, introduce vocabulary that may be pertinent to the lesson for the day, or introduce the important concept, historical figure, etc. Participant #2 further explained he believed top-down initiatives such as this do not tend to remain but become fads that fade away. They fade away as they were not initiated within the department. On the other hand, if the teachers see value in something and see where it can be of value across the grade levels, he stated, they would encourage it to happen in the classrooms.

As the discussion moved on from strategies used within the social studies department to, more specifically, the classroom, participant #4 explained that he was reluctant to use the term strategy, as he felt there are layers to a strategy. The participant described what he does is more prescriptive in his approach to the direct teaching of vocabulary. Many years ago, the participant attended a conference about AP courses. Here, he listened to a seasoned AP teacher explain that vocabulary is the most essential concept to assess in AP courses and will ensure students pass the AP assessment.

Taking the advice from this seasoned teacher, the participant implemented this strategy into his coursework. The participant admitted:

It feels like jumping through hoops, but it has been pretty successful, and students have done well on the national test. Is it the direct result of writing down definitions? I don't know, but it is all I have ever done, so I do not have anything to compare it to.

As for learning or using other strategies, the participant felt as though he may have been shown some, "but no matter what it was, it did not stick with me."

In trying to understand what the participant's class looks like, I asked him to describe what happens in the classroom after discussing the "Thought of the Day." The participant described the use of the morning news broadcast, integrated lecture, and even storytelling as tools for instruction. He explained:

I will tie it (vocabulary) to existing knowledge or encourage them to use it in a conversation with parents. Using the morning news and stopping to discuss what Mitch McConnell said today demonstrates the relevance to them in what they are learning.

The participant admitted that his classroom is not filled with colored dioramas or arts and crafts. Instead, students participate in the intermittent discussion of topics related to their learning throughout their notetaking of the lecture. For example, when telling the story about Joseph Guillotine and how he wanted to change the death penalty as it was inhumane to bring the Minaya (the guillotine) from Italy, the classroom debated the death penalty. It explored the cause and effects of this device and how it has inspired terror in the world. The participant explained that he pulls in Paul Harvey stories to relate them to their learning. Students love to be read to, and they enjoy the interactions and predictions involved as the story unfolds.

Support systems needed for successful implementation of literacy instruction.

Participant #4 felt like "it has been years since he derived anything useful or positive out of any professional development" that has been offered through his district. He further stated that "it is usually a global approach. It is not department or content-specific in any way." He felt professional development "is reactive to something going on in the world,

or a complaint,” or a race to emulate what competing districts the school is chasing after or aspire to be like. Instead, participant #4 offers the following advice:

Let us define what it is that we want to be as a district, then craft professional development around that. Let us stick with it and not change every 12 to 16 months and start over. We need to have consistency and follow through for it to mean something.

In asking if there was a professional development opportunity that he felt did work well, he stated, “just talking with other teachers or watching a video another teacher posted.” The conversations between and among teachers who are in the classroom have offered the best advice in continuing the participant’s professional learning. “After 21 years of teaching, I have learned what works and what doesn’t work,” he stated. He admits this is not necessarily the healthiest perspective but also felt his students are doing well in his class, so he has not seen the need to change.

Researcher’s reflection. Participant #4 had a deep understanding and passion for civic education. Although he has taught other grade levels, his primary experience over the past 25 years has been working with seniors teaching government education. As we began our conversation, the participant stated several times that he was not sure if he was right for this study and that he did not have the confidence or was well practiced in teaching literacy in his classroom. This sentiment was corroborated with the participants’ survey as he identified he was not confident in all areas of literacy strategies throughout the survey. However, the participant believed that literacy was an important skill all

students needed to be successful in school. It is a task he found challenging to include within all the expectations of his disciplinary requirements.

The primary literacy strategy the participant identified with was the direct teaching of vocabulary. He believed vocabulary was central to understanding and comprehending social studies context. Although the participant may not have used the specific language found in literacy, the participant does include literacy strategies through:

- daily opportunities for both the teacher and the student to ask and answer questions
- relate the learning to real-life experiences
- digs deeper into concepts through class discussions and writing opportunities
- provides opportunities to discover vocabulary specific to the discipline
- provides guided notes and discussion points for students
- uses visuals to aid in comprehension of challenging tasks
- Retelling - teacher-led stories - or student-led

He contended that he was not sure when the last time his school had offered a professional development opportunity in regards to literacy. However, the participant stated that he had learned what does and what does not work for his students throughout his career. He felt that he was successful in helping his students access the literacy needed to succeed in his classroom. He stated this was evident as the students performed well on the summative assessments in his coursework.

Qualitative Interview with Participant #5

Participant's professional journey. Participant #5 has been working in education for twenty-five years, with the last twenty-three years teaching in a community in a Northern, rural region of the state where this research is taking place. Throughout his tenure as a social studies teacher, he has worked across all areas of social studies but is currently teaching courses in 8th - 12th grade. In addition, he has shown to be a leader through his participation in both state and national social studies organizations, presenting at conferences, and working with the alignment of standards.

Understanding and defining content area/disciplinary literacy. Participant #5 looked at literacy in multiple dimensions. He stated, "literacy is not only being able to read and comprehend, but it is also about being able to read, comprehend, think and share your thoughts both in written and oral forms at a higher level."

Using literacy strategies within instruction. When turning the conversation to strategies used throughout the social studies department or within his own classroom, participant #5 described both successes and challenges. He stated, as a department, "they work as a group on different ways to address literacy and teach it and assess it." He acknowledged that "we are all at different stages of teacher development. Some have worked in the field for more than ten years, while others have only worked in the field for a few years." This experience as a classroom teacher has allowed each to develop tools for their toolbox that work for them. As they become more familiar with a tool, they are able to work to add the next tool. He stated, "it is important to add to your toolbox."

Members of the department help each other out. They learn from each other and grow as a department.

As for specific strategies, participant #5 believed that you have to work with each student to identify their needs and work to make adjustments or modifications to meet these needs. He has worked to take the time to spend one-on-one with students that needed extra support in reading and comprehending. The participant made a point to explain that “reading in social studies goes well beyond the written words in writing: graphs, charts, pictures, artifacts, etc.” These varied forms of text/medium are important pieces that require different literacy skills to access.

In addition, participant #5 is a firm believer in learning how to take well-organized notes. This is not to say that he felt one specific note-taking strategy works best, but he has learned that Cornell notes, mark-ups, and margin notes work well in his classroom. He stated, “in 8th grade, students may begin learning how to take notes in the margin.” After reading a small section, students write a brief summary in the margin. They may write a question or other notes, such as a definition of a word they defined. As students move through high school, the complexity of notetaking increases.

However, two strategies the participant does not feel are effective are popcorn reading and graphic organizers. He believed popcorn reading does not provide the opportunity for students to work on their reading fluency as “they spend the entire class being so concerned about being called on that they are not paying attention to the content being read.” He explained if they plan to read in class, he will seek out volunteers in advance or simply plan to read to the students himself. As for graphic organizers, in his

experience, they simply are not designed to work within the constraints of the social studies classroom.

Furthermore, participant #5 stated becoming a one-on-one iPad school has been a game-changer for marking up documents in the social studies classroom. Students can write directly on their documents, highlight a word and search for a definition, and/or highlight text and include summaries or responses in the margin. Participant #5 stated that social studies has changed over the years he has been teaching. It is no longer focused on specific content, such as names and dates - those things students can easily access with their devices. He believed, now, “social studies is more about learning to use critical thinking skills as they look at concepts within social studies, be able to evaluate good vs. bad sources, to think about what happened and how it affects what happens next,” positively or negatively.

Finally, participant #5 believed the most significant challenge in school today is not about academics. Rather:

We have students who have not been in school for a year and a half. They have lost socialization skills. They have seen the stress at from Covid-19, seen parents or grandparents being sick, having people die, losing jobs, or simply not being able to see or spend time with friends for a year. We need to work on the social-emotional learning of our kids, and then we can work on academics.

We are not back to normal. He believed that we are wasting our time if we are not addressing our students' foundational needs of safety, belonging, and food and shelter.

When we have addressed these issues, he believed, we can then catch students up on the learning they missed over the last year and a half.

Support systems needed for successful implementation of literacy instruction.

Participant #5 struggled with professional development that was geared towards specific topic content. At times, the participant had experienced professional development opportunities where an expert in their field may present on a given topic that does not make connections to each content area. He believed if we are going to spend this time learning something new, “provide opportunities for us to work with and practice these skills that are directly connected to our own classrooms.” In recent years, the participant felt blessed to work in a district that allows teachers to have a greater say in what professional development looks like in their setting.

For example, he described, through contract negotiations, teachers earned the opportunity for professional learning each Wednesday afternoon. As students go home 30 minutes early, teachers spend about two hours working on various professional learning opportunities. He stated:

If you want teachers to embed their learning and make use of fresh development, you give them time to either work on their own or in their department asking; how are we going to do that, how are we going to practice it, or share ideas now that your colleagues thought about it, etc.

Finally, he advised administrators, “if you want to support teachers, give them time, time to work on their own, time to collaborate with teachers. The need for time is essential.”

Researcher's reflection. Participant #5 was a leader and advocate for social studies. He has participated in the state council for social studies and many other organizations in advancing the discussion of social studies in education. The participant has spent nearly 30 years educating students in the social sciences. However, he contends that in order for students to grasp the concepts in the social sciences, they first need to be able to capture the necessary literacy skills to understand social studies. This includes not only being able to read and comprehend but also being able to think critically and write about your thoughts.

He believed in filling students' toolboxes with strategies that would help them. He does not believe there is a one-size-fits-all approach. Strategies should be specific to the concepts being learned and taught well. For example, graphic organizers explicitly designed for social studies and for a particular concept may be a helpful tool. At the same time, a basic four-box note-taking strategy may not aid in the depth of learning one may have expected. He expressed the need to understand how and when strategies should be used.

Lastly, participant #5 stated the need for teachers to have time to collaborate, have a voice at the table, and then opportunities and time to embed their learning and safely reflect on the success of those new efforts.

Qualitative Interview with Participant #6

Participant's professional journey. Since she was five years old, participant #6 had known that she wanted to be a teacher when she grew up. However, after completing her educational degree, she began working in an office for a few years before entering the

education system. Participant #6 currently works in one of the largest districts in the state where this research is taking place. Throughout her professional career, she has worked as a literacy coach, program and curriculum coordinator, in addition to her experience as an eighth-grade geography teacher. Early in her teaching career, she discovered that her students could not read. This discovery led her to the geography alliance, where she says she “got hooked on literacy and picture books.” This learning fueled her passion for helping students with literacy, as this skill is essential for learning.

Understanding and defining content area/disciplinary literacy. Participant #6’s definition of literacy has changed since her early years in education. At that time, she said, “I would have defined literacy as reading and vocabulary.” Today, her definition of literacy has evolved due to her work with students and the professional learning opportunities she has experienced through graduate studies and professional learning communities. Today, she says, literacy is a lot more than reading and vocabulary. It is reading and writing, in addition to vocabulary and comprehension.” She believed, “reading in the content area or disciplinary literacy is totally different from literacy.” She further explained, “general literacy consists of the main idea, summary, opinion, etc. Where content literacy or disciplinary literacy is more like accountable talk, reading a timeline, understanding and using primary resources, comprehending material” specific to the course.

Using literacy strategies within instruction. When turning the conversation to literacy strategies used within her department and her classroom, participant #6 expressed varying levels of effectiveness and challenges. The participant stated several years ago;

her district worked hard to help literacy and social studies teachers collaborate in their planning. For example, if the social studies department was learning about the civil war, the literacy department included literature based around the civil war theme, using both fiction and nonfiction. She did state; initially, there was push back from social studies teachers because they were not reading teachers. However, the participant felt the feelings evolved from the social studies teachers not feeling confident using this teaching format. Due to these challenges, “the district’s professional development had a heavy focus around literacy in the content area,” she stated. With this added support, where teachers were taught how to incorporate literacy into their classroom, the participant believed it helped promote buy-in from teachers.

For example, a colleague of participant #6 relied heavily on his classroom textbook and pushed back on the changes that were being implemented. Once shown how a one-page handout about a topic provided ample opportunities for students to dig deeper into the concept, the colleague’s attitude changed, and he discovered that his students were able to learn and understand the concepts being taught. In addition to the support, teachers were provided through professional development, many social studies teachers were also trained to be AVID teachers. Since then, the participant mentioned the district had moved away from what she thought was a successful program of implementing literacy in the content areas. However, due to the expectations of literacy being included in disciplinary courses in the Common Core, much of the learning about literacy in content areas has remained. Common Core are standards that position disciplinary literacy at the center of content/discipline courses and encourage inquiry, critical analysis,

dissemination of materials in ways that are meaningful, realistic, and evidence-driven (Bogard, et al., 2017; Shanahan, 2013).

Aside from the changes in the district's literacy approach in social studies, the participant felt that literacy and the strategies used within the social studies curriculum were more about how effectively you taught the strategy. She stated that "it is all about the gradual release of responsibility." She further explained that "you start with something super easy, you model it, practice it, and gradually release it to them." She stated, she did not "think there is a least effective or most effective strategy. It is all about how you use them."

For example, the participant's favorite strategies to use are "say what matters" and "save the last word." In the first strategy, say what matters; students identify what the text says, identify what it means, and identify why it matters. In the second strategy, save the last word, students choose a quote from the text and read it to the group. One by one, group members express their understanding or feelings about the quote. After all, members have shared their thoughts, the individual who chose the quote states why they chose the quote and possibly add to what has already been stated. She has noted that kids love this activity. The participant stated strategies have different purposes. It is important to understand the difference and how they can be modified or changed to fit the learning outcome.

Participant #6 felt students should have a toolbox filled with strategies. However, she feels the one strategy that has been overused is the KWL chart (know, want to know, and what you learned). She stated, "there are so many other strategies, like see think

wonder, anticipatory guides, post-it-notes, delete the title of the article - choose a new one, author's purpose, concept maps, graphic organizers, a gimmick, etc." She believed, some strategies are too long and take too much time." She encouraged using one strategy per unit and teaching it well. If you do not take the time to learn it well, "you will have to reteach the procedure, and the students may get sick of it."

Beyond strategies, the participant felt that another challenge in teaching social studies is the vast amount of benchmarks. For example, in Global Studies alone, there are 48 benchmarks. "It is absolutely ridiculous. There is no way you could teach all the content you are supposed to cover. This is a huge problem." she stated. The participant believed there has been too much pressure to cover too much. Therefore, teachers feel as though they do not have time for literacy. However, she stated, "they do not realize that by doing literacy strategies, the kids are actually going to understand what it is that you are trying to teach."

Support systems needed for successful implementation of literacy instruction.

Participant #6 stated there were two areas of growth for those who plan professional development. Her first belief is that, at times, professional development opportunities provide too many ideas or choices and do not provide ample opportunity for participants to practice what they are learning. When she was first excited about college, she further explained that she wanted "stuff, lots of stuff" to fill her toolbox. At the time, there was no internet, and as a young teacher, she wanted things in her hands to use. However, she has learned since this time that when she attends professional development opportunities, there is too much stuff, and it becomes overwhelming. At this time, she believed, "instead

of providing 20 literacy strategies, work with three strategies and actually work through them.” Furthermore, she stated, “do something hands-on because we will remember it. It will actually be implemented with our students when we can see how it works and how effective and engaging it may be in our classroom.”

Next, participant #6 believed professional development should look like a lesson where you state your goal, activate knowledge, provide new information, and then apply the new information (G.A.N.A.R.). She believed these skills needed to be modeled and practiced. The participant summarized her belief by stating:

The problem is that we think it is about teaching, instruction, and curriculum when it is not. It is about the students, and it is about learning. If those are not at the center of what you are doing, you are not going to be successful.

Researcher’s reflection. The participant’s passion for education can be seen as she works to provide the best education possible for her students, as well as future students. The participant has worked as a classroom teacher and held several leadership positions within her district. Here, she has influenced and coached classroom teachers in their use of literacy through her work as a district literacy specialist and a curriculum coordinator. In addition, the participant teaches a social studies methods class at a local university. Here, she ensures her students understand the importance of literacy and provides examples of best practices through modeling and course requirements.

The participant's personal journey towards the inclusion of literacy began when she recognized the needs of her students. She stated many students could not read the text. Eager to learn to provide the best education for her students, she participated in a

literacy institute program that used picture books to teach geography. This experience jump-started her professional learning of literacy. From here, she moved forward in gaining a masters in literacy education and found avenues to use this as a leader in her district to promote literacy across disciplines.

As a classroom teacher, she has included meaningful literacy strategies and promotes vocabulary and comprehension of social studies concepts. She feels students need a variety of strategies, including opportunities to practice and share their knowledge. She feels strategies are excellent tools; however, she is concerned that strategies can be overused, too long or confusing, and/or not aligned to fit the intended learning goal. She feels that if students are not excited or motivated with the work they are doing, they cannot reach their potential and learn. She stated it is important to recall that students should be at the center of all decision-making practices.

Addressing The Research Questions

The primary research question for this qualitative interview study was: *How do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills?* Part one of the online survey answered this question confirming that 100% of teachers believe it is important for literacy strategies to be included in disciplinary courses, and 80% of teachers identifying that they are confident (55%) or extremely confident (25%) in teaching literacy strategies in their classrooms. These results do indicate that there is room for improvement, especially since 20% of teachers indicated that they are not confident in teaching literacy strategies in their classrooms. Within this small self-reported study, the

part one survey does highlight that teachers are using literacy strategies in their classrooms. However, the confidence level of this group of teachers using specific strategies does depend on the specific task. For example, working with strategies to gain background information appears to be less challenging as 91% of respondents indicated their confidence in these strategies. At the same time, helping students generate questions evades the confidence level of 36% of teachers as they indicate no confidence in this strategy.

Collaboration, time, knowledge of research/best practices, and building relationships were identified by teachers as factors that influence their level of confidence in working with low-level literacy students. This short answer response directly addresses the first secondary question of this research: *What factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students?* And finally, teachers' responses to the final short answer question in the part two survey identified collaboration, access to materials, professional development, and time as items needed to help support them in their work that impacts their ability to gain confidence in working with students with low literacy skills. This final short answer helps us begin to answer the final secondary question of this study: *How do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students?*

To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' personal experiences and lived stories, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted. As it was the goal of this research to provide the individual story of each participant, their responses were

presented in a narrative allowing their stories to unfold naturally through a conversation with the researcher. Through a thorough review of the literature (found in Chapter Two), several obstacles arose that have been shown to hinder teachers' confidence level in working with literacy in their instruction, in addition to working with students with low literacy levels. Therefore, these obstacles were chosen as predetermined themes in an attempt to show if they continue to provide the same challenges today as they appeared to in earlier research. In reviewing the transcripts of qualitative interviews, predetermined these themes were coded. Those themes below were used to address the research questions.

Attitude and Beliefs

All the teachers interviewed in this study reported a positive attitude regarding the inclusion of literacy in their discipline was positive. Those interviewed suggested that all teachers are teachers of literacy to various extents. One teacher interviewed believed literacy is learned by happenstance in the social studies discipline through the inquiry process of asking and answering questions through classroom discussions. Others reported the need for social studies teachers to take a more proactive approach and explicitly teach literacy strategies as they maneuver through their day-to-day curriculum. It was suggested by several teachers interviewed that through the collaboration of disciplinary peers, support of the administration, effective professional development, and a thread of philosophy that aligns throughout the community, it is possible to have buy-in from teachers across a community and include literacy within the discipline.

Although this group of teachers interviewed for this study were quite positive in their attitude towards disciplinary literacy, they acknowledged this was a challenge they saw in practice. Some teachers spoke about peers who did not believe it was their responsibility to teach literacy. Others did not find the extra work required was of value, and some felt the challenges seen in the secondary social studies program were due to a decrease in social studies content taught in elementary. Finally, some acknowledged the challenges of including literacy due to content requirements and time. Furthermore, as experienced teachers, a few of the participants believed they knew what would work well and not work well in their classes, closing the door to new opportunities of gaining new knowledge in understanding.

Literacy Skills

All teachers interviewed expressed the need for an expansive toolbox of strategies to aid students in accessing, comprehending, and thinking critically within the social studies discipline. In connecting to the literary concepts, two teachers expressed the need to help or explicitly teach students the roots and stems of vocabulary words (phonetic awareness). Furthermore, a teacher stated that the lack of phonetic awareness prevents students from decoding vocabulary included in their classroom.

Despite some students no longer in need of assistance in phonetic awareness, teachers stated many considerable differences in reading levels are found in each classroom. Teachers acknowledged the wide range of reading levels that could be found in one class period. For example, a teacher noted that they had students reading as low as a third-grade level and as high as a tenth-grade level in one of their seventh-grade social

studies classes. Most of the teachers spoke about various resources at different reading levels, which they found to assist students in accessing content at their reading level. However, finding material to cover the substantial content in their class is challenging. Due to the different reading levels, most teachers chose not to include the whole class reading of the text. However, some choose to include read-a-loud in small groups to help students practice fluency and to aid in comprehension checks.

Accessing a text moves beyond just the reading level. All teachers discussed the need to access background knowledge and make personal connections to concepts taught in social studies. Furthermore, teachers asserted the need to pay close attention to the various text structures (headings, subheadings, vocabulary, visuals, etc.) of informational text often found in social studies. In addition to the informational text, teachers spoke about the use of biographies, journals, maps, charts, visuals, and other primary resources included in the social studies discipline. One teacher made an explicit point to ensure this researcher understood that text in the social studies discipline is unlike that found in other content disciplines.

In addition to text structure, teachers indicated that vocabulary teaching is central to the understanding of concepts taught in the discipline. Although some stated they had been encouraged to pre-teach vocabulary, many teachers commented that it is much easier for students to acquire an understanding of vocabulary if it is taught within the context of their learning. One teacher noted when their department reviewed the content of the secondary social studies program; they identified more than 1,000 terms specific to the discipline that needed to be taught.

Moreover, comprehension is at the core of the literacy skills used in all the teachers' classrooms. The teachers spoke about using different strategies to access a text: Cornell notes, study guides, anticipatory guides, two-column notes, margin notes, lecture notes, concept maps, and graphic organizers. Through these various forms of note-taking strategies, teachers help students learn how to mark up the text and focus on gathering and understanding the main idea, author's purpose, summarizing, defining terms, comparing/contrasting, asking questions, in addition to other relevant purposes.

Furthermore, the teachers expressed the importance of critical thinking. Through an inquiry process, the teachers use classroom discussions based on a variety of questions (both teacher and student lead) and reflection to dig deeper into analyzing and comprehending concepts in the social studies discipline.

Challenges

The teachers interviewed in this study identified several challenges to the inclusion of disciplinary literacy. Several teachers spoke of the lack of a support system for inclusion students (special education, English language learners) and those who struggle with low literacy skills. Some teachers felt this inclusion, without support, limited the students' ability to be successful in the classroom. Some teachers expressed that teachers must collaborate and work together as a team to help students. One teacher asked, how do you find teachers who are willing to create authentic partnerships across content areas and share their expertise to better students' academic learning? Overcoming the attitude of "it's not my job" has proven challenging for some of the participants of this study.

This partnership is necessary, as it takes a great deal of time to differentiate lessons, and teachers reported they do not have the time to ensure that every lesson includes opportunities for leveled text. This issue is enhanced by the number of students in a single class period, times multiple periods a day. For example, with 35 students in a class and 5 periods a day, a teacher expressed frustration stating it is not possible to meet the needs of each student and ensure different Lexile leveled text is available for each lesson. Some teachers questioned the use of time spent on differentiating lessons when students may not take advantage of these opportunities due to a lack of motivation.

In addition to a lack of time and class size, the vast amount of content required in the social studies discipline was expressed as a challenge by all the teachers. Asking teachers to add on top of the content requirement, additional requirements for literacy instruction is overwhelming, one teacher conveyed. However, another teacher articulated if you can tweak out time to teach literacy strategies that align with the learning outcome, it allows the students the ability to dig deeper into the concepts and discussions of the discipline.

Beyond the immense content requirements, the expectations, inconsistency, and lack of following through by administration was a resounding frustration and challenge for all the qualitative interviewees. One teacher described the ebb and flow of ever-changing practices and policies to be a cause for a lack of teacher buy-in for many initiatives. In addition, other teachers commented on the misunderstanding from administration and professional development leaders regarding the concepts taught in the social studies discipline itself as a central point of frustration and challenge.

Support Systems

In a resounding disdain for professional development opportunities, all teachers spoke about the ineffective use of school-wide initiatives. The teachers argued that these approaches to professional development lack authentic learning and are not reflective of the daily happenings in the classroom. One teacher mentioned they are very skeptical of school-wide professional development opportunities. They did not feel they had derived anything worthwhile or of value in these experiences in years. In addition, many suggested the school-wide initiatives are not inclusive of all content areas. For example, a teacher noted in a recent professional learning opportunity a fellow colleague raised their hand and asked how they were to incorporate the learning when it was not relevant to what was happening in their classroom? Another teacher expressed concern over outside professionals presenting material without having a complete understanding of the community itself.

Aligning professional development around the needs of the students is important, some teachers reported. Teachers stated professional development is successful when teachers teach teachers. For example, one teacher explained that, recently, their school was working on a literacy strategy. A colleague from each department shared examples of how it could be used within their current teaching. After the presentation, teachers broke into their departments and had time to practice the skill and see how it could be used in their upcoming lessons. They explained this style of professional development was job-embedded, could be used immediately, and was explicitly taught to each discipline.

Another successful professional development opportunity some teachers felt was conferences specifically for social studies teachers. This provides an excellent atmosphere for collaboration and learning from others. One teacher conveyed sitting in a conference room learning from other social studies teachers is like heaven.

Finally, all teachers agreed that for professional learning to be successful, teachers must have the time to learn strategies properly, the time to practice them, the time to reflect and talk with others about their experiences, and the support and time to continue learning how to be more successful without the initiative being dropped or another initiative added. Consistency is important, teachers explained.

Chapter Four Summary

Chapter Four began with an overview of the purpose and rationale of this qualitative interview study. A two part online survey and semi-structured qualitative interviews were both used to collect data in the quest to answer the primary and secondary research questions:

How do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills? The number of social studies teachers who are confident in teaching literacy skills has increased since previous studies have been conducted. However, it was discovered that there is still room to improve the confidence of teachers as 19% of teachers identified that they were not confident in teaching literacy strategies in their classroom. Taking a closer look at specific strategies, comprehension monitoring, summarization, and analysis strategies

was shown to have gained the confidence of teachers in the classroom while helping students generate questions remains one area that teachers continue to struggle with.

What factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students? Social studies teachers describe several factors that influence their successful implementation of literacy strategies. A few of those factors include collaboration, time, knowledge of literacy strategies, attitudes, beliefs, research/best practices, and relationships with students.

How do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students? Social studies teachers describe collaboration, materials, professional development, and time as specific support systems needed to aid in building their confidence level in working with students with low literacy skills. However, 14% of the teachers responding remained uncertain about what types of support would benefit them in gaining this confidence.

Chapter Five will include a final brief review of the online survey and qualitative interviews included in this study. Next, connections will be made to the literature review relating to the themes that were identified throughout this study. Following this, a discussion of the implications and limitations of the study will be included, followed by brief recommendations for further research. This dissertation will conclude with this researcher's plans for communicating the results and a final reflection of this researcher's final thoughts and journey through this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

“A trim tab - a tiny thing on the edge of a ship's rudder. Just moving the little trim tab takes almost no effort at all. One individual can be a trim tab and change the course of history.” Buckminster Fuller (as cited in Kowalski, 2021)

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter Five is the culminating chapter of this dissertation and will provide a final discussion and summary of this qualitative interview study that strove to answer the primary and secondary research questions: *how do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills? Secondly, what factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students? Finally, how do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students?* Next, this chapter will make explicit connections between the literature review and the findings of my study through a discussion of the predetermined themes. Furthermore, I will discuss the implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research of disciplinary literacy in the secondary setting before sharing my plans for communicating these results. To conclude, I will offer a final reflection of my own experiences of this dissertation process and my research study.

Introduction

Both an online survey and individual semi-structured qualitative interviews were used as data collection resources for this qualitative interview study. Through a thorough

review of the completed online survey completed by a small sample size of secondary social studies teachers within a midwestern state, a confirmation of the primary research question unfolded. These highly experienced secondary social studies teachers have reported a gain in confidence in using literacy strategies with low-level literacy students. Participants in the online survey provided several factors and support systems for influencing their confidence in working with students with low literacy skills.

The Part One Survey responses provided me with background information that aided in the individual semi-structured qualitative interview process. Upon the completion of a reflective journal (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the thoughts and reflections of the researcher's observations of the participants' qualitative interviews were presented in Chapter Four. As it was my intent to learn about the lived experiences of my participants, a summary of the qualitative interviews was presented as a narrative response to the research questions in Chapter Four. Finally, a coding process, as described by Saldana (2016), was used to review the short answer survey responses and the semi-structured qualitative interviews. Here, predetermined themes were identified, in addition to themes that emerged from the short answer responses in the online survey. A discussion of the themes identified was presented in Chapter Four. A final review of the survey, qualitative interviews, and themes linked to research will be addressed here in Chapter Five.

Review of the Survey

The Part One Survey confirmed that the participants (100%) in this study believed literacy strategies are important to include in secondary social studies courses. **Table 3**

relayed this information, in addition to secondary social studies teachers' belief in their confidence level of teaching literacy strategies in the classroom. The data from the table does suggest that there is an opportunity for improvement as 23.8% of the 21 participants reported they remained not confident in working with students with low literacy levels.

Participants in the part one survey identified several resources they used to gain confidence in working with students with low literacy levels. **Figures 1 and 2** highlight the findings of this data with teachers expressing that meeting students' needs are important, in addition to professional development, relationships with students, assessments, and collaboration with peers. Furthermore, **Figures 3 and 4** highlight the support systems participants identified in helping them be successful with low literacy students as collaboration, materials, professional development, and time. It should also be noted that 14% of participants remain unclear on what support systems will help them gain confidence in working with students with low literacy levels. Finally, **Table 7** breaks down various literacy strategies used by the participants of the qualitative interviews and highlights their confidence level using a wide variety of strategies. Although participants are gaining confidence using most literacy strategies, helping students generate questions remains a challenge for 36% of the 21 participants.

For the specific group of secondary social studies teachers included in this study, the results of the survey have shown that there has been improvement in confidence levels since earlier research. However, it is important to note that the surveys also highlighted several areas where these participants continue to struggle and could use

support to improve their confidence in working with various strategies to help students with low-level literacy skills.

Review of the Qualitative Interviews

The part one survey allowed me to gain a better understanding of the participants' beliefs and attitudes towards the inclusion of literacy strategies in their classroom prior to the conduction of the individual semi-structured qualitative interviews. Of the initial 21 participants, six individuals were interviewed for the final stage of the data collection process. Through a qualitative interview, as described by Brinkman and Kvale (2015), I was able to be placed within the study and participated in a discussion of the lived experience of participants' use and understanding of literacy. In addition, predetermined themes were identified that aligned with the research questions. Qualitative interview questions were developed with the research questions in mind. Participants provided personal stories of how they worked to learn about using literacy strategies within their discipline, identified areas of strengths and weakness, highlighted opportunities to grow professionally in the field of literacy, and provided descriptions of frustration in the lack of support needed to gain the confidence to work with students with low literacy levels. Through the researchers' reflective journaling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and a coding process (Saldana, 2016) predetermined themes were explored and discussed thoroughly through a narrative summary in Chapter Four and will be addressed in the next section.

Connection to the Literature Review

The following four predetermined themes were identified as a result of completing the literature review and were used to analyze the qualitative interview

transcripts. Using a coding process identified by Saldana (2016), qualitative individual interviews were reviewed to capture the participants' responses that highlighted these themes in an attempt to answer the research questions.

Attitude and Beliefs

The NRP (NICHD, 2000) acknowledges the key to student success is the ability to build the literacy skills needed to access the complex academic challenges of disciplinary courses throughout a student's educational journey. Furthermore, the International Literacy Association (2020) stated: "the single greatest factor in student achievement is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher" (p 15). This belief is further illustrated as Fisher and Ivey (2005) emphasize the phrase "*Every teacher a teacher of reading*" was used to promote the idea that all teachers, including content teachers, were capable and responsible for the inclusion of literacy instruction as a measure to increase students' academic performance.

However, researchers (Guskey, 2002; Fisher & Ivey (2005) believe teacher attitude, belief systems, and confidence remain challenges to the successful inclusion of literacy in the secondary setting. Fellow researchers contend content area teachers believed it was not their responsibility to teach literacy (Cantrell, et al., 2008; Conley, 2008, Gilles, et al., 2013; Hall, 2005; Kamil, 2003; Patterson, et al., 2010) as they considered themselves content specialists, not literacy teachers (McCulley, & Osman, 2015; Sweet, 2001).

Although this study's research pointed to secondary teachers' belief that they were not responsible for teaching literacy in their courses, the limited research conducted

within this study did not produce similar findings. Rather, all of the participants in the survey pointed to the importance of including literacy instruction in their courses. While those participants interviewed, all elaborated on the importance of this inclusion.

Research also pointed to a lack of confidence in teaching literacy strategies has prevented content area teachers from moving towards embedding literacy within their instruction (Hall, 2005; Gilles, et al., 2013; Ness, 2009). Some participants in this study agreed that some literacy strategies are more challenging. This statement was supported by the data collected in the survey where participants reported differences in confidence levels of various strategies; specifically, generating questions was reported as an area in which these teachers felt the least confident in working.

Through the qualitative interview process, most participants also acknowledged students need a wide variety of literacy strategies in their toolbox. Furthermore, participants suggested when teachers learn and practice literacy strategies multiple times, and they gain confidence in using strategies. When they have mastered a strategy, a participant suggested it is then time to work at adding additional strategies to their instructional practices.

Finally, past research has shown teachers believe strategies are time-consuming and take away from content learning (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Bean, 1997; Moje, 2008; Ness, 2009). The lack of confidence in teaching strategies and the consumption of time has continued to dissuade teachers from making the transition to deeper literacy inclusion Bean (1997) reported. Although the participants in this study agreed that adding literacy strategies took a great deal of time, they also agreed it is worth the initial time provided

for students to learn a strategy as it helps students access the content at a deeper level and engage in the analysis and discussion of topics more thoroughly.

Literacy Skills

The experiences of participants throughout this limited study found that teachers believed literacy strategies were essential to the academic success of their students. The continued need to learn literacy skills throughout the secondary setting is highlighted throughout Chapter Two and by researchers (Brevik, 2017; Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Sweet, 2000; Teaching Reading Across the Curriculum, 2001; Spires, et al., 2018; Spor & Schneider, 1999; Toews & Kurth, 2019). These researchers reported that as students move through school, their academic learning requires students to construct meaning through the interaction of a myriad of complex disciplinary text structures where students employ strategies to help them abstract meaning from the text through an array of language features (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Fellow researchers (Faulkner, et al., 2012; Gilles, Wang, Smith, & Johnson, 2013; McCulley & Osman, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008) expanded on this notion and recognized a shift in adolescent literacy development to highly complex literacy skills needed to tackle disciplinary-specific vocabulary and multifaceted text structures unique to each disciplinary course found in middle school and high school.

Supported by the research of Gilles, et al. (2013), the participants in this study acknowledged that students in their classrooms not only have to tackle the challenging text, but also must learn how to interpret maps, charts, graphs, or other historical documents that are valuable resources associated within the social studies disciplines. In

addition, participants highlighted the importance of understanding the dynamics of vocabulary as they relate to the discipline itself. For example, checks and balances may have a generalizable understanding of an individual's finances. Still, within the understanding of the social studies discipline, the terms play a very important role in the understanding of how governments operate. As identified by researchers (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Snow & Moje, 2010), participants agreed literacy strategies were an important part of their classroom instruction to aid students through the variety of complex text structures and disciplinary language.

Most of the participants in this study agreed with Brevik's (2017) assertion that students need as many literacy strategies as they have shoes. According to Brevik, and in agreement with several participants, you can never have too many strategies; students need to fill their toolboxes with a wide variety of strategies. Participants in this research warned of a one-size-fits-all approach to strategies. This acknowledgment was supported by researchers (Conley, 2008; Gilles, et al., 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). These researchers emphasized when strategies are used as a one-size-fits-all approach; the strategies are not appreciated as learning tools. They become rehearsed practice instead of an opportunity to engage in deep thinking and conversation.

Instead of thinking about how literacy can be added to a discipline, Moje (2008) asserted we should examine how disciplines work, think, and produce knowledge. Participants in this study agreed with Moje's assertion. Participants expressed frustration with colleagues and administration who seemed not to understand what happened in their classrooms. When asked to prepare students in their classroom through the use of literacy

strategies that aligned with ACT preparation, one participant expressed great frustration at the lack of understanding that social studies text does not align with the text of this standardized test. In addition, several participants expressed frustration with generalizable literacy strategies, specifically graphic organizers.

The participants acknowledged that when graphic organizers are developed for social studies specifically, the organizer could be a useful tool. However, participants felt too often publishers created documents that were too generalizable and too abstract for the sake of creativity, causing further confusion and frustration for students, making them useless tools. These experiences and thoughts aligned with Moje (2008) and Shanahan, et al. (2011), as they reminded us that strategies should be explicitly developed for the desired discipline or modified to ensure it aligns with the needs of the discipline.

Challenges

Beyond teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and confidence in learning to incorporate literacy strategies successfully, researchers and participants in this study have identified other challenges teachers face toward the successful implementation of literacy in their classrooms. Among those challenges, researchers (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Bean, 1997; Moje, 2008; Ness, 2009) have reported many teachers believe strategies are time-consuming and take away from content learning. The participants in this study agreed that the availability of time was challenging, especially how it relates to the time they are provided to watch strategies be modeled, practice those strategies, and then implement them into their classroom instruction. Not only do they need time to learn these strategies successfully, so do the students. The participants all reiterated that

literacy learning is important, but they also agreed that there is not enough time to use literacy strategies with each of their lessons or concepts. In agreement with the research (Lester, 2000; Moje, 2008) presented in Chapter Two, social studies teachers expressed the pressure to cover a breadth of knowledge in a short span of time. Like the teachers reported in the research literature, the teachers in this study also described how their ability to incorporate literacy strategies is limited due to time.

In addition to this pressure, some participants in this study expressed frustration with the expectation to meet the literacy needs of students when an average class size is 35 and teachers may teach 5-6 class periods a day. More so, participants also reported that each discipline is perceived differently, with social studies courses having higher numbers of students than other disciplines. This frustration correlated with researchers' (Ciullo, et al., 2016; Moje, 2008; Swanson, et al., 2016) belief that the secondary school setting itself is a part of the challenges teachers face in successfully implementing changes in their instruction.

Finally, literacy instruction has been widely debated over the past few decades. Through these debates and research, various terms and definitions have arisen. Moje (2008) further explained that with each new researcher or time period, literacy terms and definitions have evolved and changed. Some participants in this study have acknowledged seeing these changes firsthand and expressed frustration and believed this has led to a lack of continuity. One participant shared that his school has tried to overcome these challenges by using the same terminology throughout their department. In comparison, another participant expressed the need for strategies to be taught to

teachers like a lesson through modeling, collaboration, and practice. Participants felt when a common language is used, an understanding of the literacy strategy has the potential to be learned and incorporated into instruction successfully.

Support Systems

The final theme that was addressed throughout the literature review and the qualitative interviews was a discussion of the support systems needed for teachers to have or gain confidence in working with students with low literacy skills. It is here that the learning gleaned from the participants parroted that of past research studies. In agreement with Guskey (2002), participants highlighted the importance of quality professional development.

Throughout the qualitative interview process, participants expressed frustration with their experiences with a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development opportunities for staff. Participants described these experiences as ineffective, a waste of time with little value-added, and not germane to their disciplinary course work. Although some strategies may be generalizable and fit across multiple content areas, researchers (Ciullo, et al., 2016) pointed out that strategies need to be modified to accommodate the unique characteristics of each content area, in addition to the individual teacher (Conley, 2008; Gilles, et al., 2013; Nichols, et al., 2007).

Allowing teachers time to discover how to modify, experiment, implement, and create their own literacy strategies that align with their instruction, is recommended by Gilles, et al. (2013). The participants echoed this belief by researchers. Here, participants expressed frustration as initiatives were packaged into district-wide initiatives that were

required to be infused into the classrooms across the district without an explicit differentiated plan for each disciplinary course, limited time to learn initiatives adequately, and a lack of continued support that follows the implementation of these initiatives.

Moreover, participants expressed the desire to work with literacy, special education, and language specialists to ensure they were successfully reaching the needs of students with low literacy needs. It is through this collaboration many of the participants conveyed they were able to gain the confidence and reassurance that was needed for them to be successful in engaging students in literacy through their disciplinary course.

This desire is supported by research. Gilles, et al. (2013) argued literacy experts and the developers of professional development must work **with** content area teachers by using the wealth of knowledge and understanding these experts bring to the table. This approach, Spor and Schneider (1999) argued, allows literacy experts and content experts time to work together as they infuse literacy within the instruction rather than providing a learning opportunity that is simply done **to** content area teachers. This collaborative approach is essential as Gritter (2010) reminded us that reading, writing, and critical literacy strategies are not necessarily exportable across content area courses. Finally, participants agreed with researchers (Copeland & Keefe, 2019; Hall, 2005; ILA, 2020; Rupp, 2017; Toews & Kurth, 2019) as they stipulated, teachers need access to evidence-based research strategies professional development opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of how to use these language-rich strategies within their scope of

practice, continued support and collaboration within their learning community, and the opportunity to feel safe as they strive to improve their professional craft.

Conclusion

While this review of literature, and the connections made with the study, is not an exhaustive review, it has shown that progress in regards to the implementation of literacy strategies in the social studies classroom has improved over time, as reported by the small selection of participants in the study presented here. The participants expressed a belief in the importance of including literacy within the disciplinary courses. In addition, participants identified various aspects of challenges that continue to obstruct their perception of gains made in their confidence in using literacy strategies in their instruction. Furthermore, several implications of this study have been identified and will be discussed next.

Implications of this Qualitative Interview Study

This study builds upon the professional discussion of disciplinary literacy within the secondary classroom. Although not an exhaustive review of teachers' confidence in literacy and their practices as it was beyond the scope of this dissertation, it does offer glimpses of changes in the following areas:

- teachers' experiences with working with low-level literacy students in their classrooms
- suggestions for continued learning of literacy strategies,
- advice for those who develop professional development opportunities in relation to literacy

For this group of secondary social studies teachers, confidence in teaching literacy strategies and the inclusion of these strategies in teaching were indicated by all participants as important inclusions of their classroom instruction. However, how and to what extent these strategies are successfully used is subject and dependent on each participant's attitude and beliefs. Therefore, my suggestion to future researchers is to continue the conversation with classroom teachers and allow for opportunities to reflect on their understanding and use of literacy strategies. Where possible, speak in person with participants and ask that they share materials that represent the strategies they are using or even observe classrooms to see how this practice unfolds. Through these conversations and reflections, teachers gain further knowledge and confidence in using literacy strategies with low-level literacy students.

Using a direct and explicit instruction of literacy strategies abounds within the literacy research, as shown in the literature review included in Chapter Two. However, overwhelmingly, as indicated through this research, participants point to a lack of teaching literacy strategies that provide this explicit understanding through the modeling, practice, review, and reflection of learning these strategies. Teachers noted that the gradual release of responsibility is important in helping their students learn in the classroom. However, they point to the lack of this philosophy when it relates to the professional development presented to teachers. For example, one participant had a staff development opportunity the day after our interview. Their attitude towards the learning opportunity was already one that believed it would be a waste of time, effectively closing off their mindset for learning anything new before the learning opportunity began.

Furthermore, consistency and time were shown to be factors that were presented by each of the participants. Both of these variables presented limitations not only on the learning and successful implementation of an initiative they also played a role in the buy-in from participants. Most participants here acknowledged that their experience with initiatives often began with a lot of emphasis and hype. However, that initial excitement waned as time moved on. Furthermore, participants acknowledged a lack of continued support for initiatives was shown too often.

Finally, ensuring the introduction of literacy strategies that align with disciplinary courses is important. As the research has shown, literacy within each discipline can be expansive and unique to that discipline. To those who plan professional learning opportunities, I recommend that this knowledge be taken into consideration when working with each disciplinary department. This frustration was seen as a participant described professional development opportunities that lacked a connection to their coursework, or even worse, a misunderstanding of what their course actually taught.

Limitations of this Qualitative Interview Study

Even with precautions taken, there are limitations to this study. As described by Denzin and Lincoln (2012), qualitative study is “the study of things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Furthermore, Brinkman and Kvale (2015) describe qualitative interviews as the study of themes within the lived experience of participants' personal perspectives. The intent of my study was to have the participants describe their confidence level in working with students with low literacy levels and the factors and

support systems that influence their confidence through the examination of their lived experiences. Therefore, it is inherent within the design of this study that participants' biases may have crept into the study.

In addition to the inherent biases, the scope of participants included in this study was limited to participants who gained access to the online survey through their own participation in an organization (council for social studies teachers) outside of their work environment. It is also noted, the participants of this study had deeper expertise and leadership experience than many other teachers. Therefore, participants in this study may already have a strong bias towards their own professional growth opportunities beyond that of their district. Along with the potential biases of the participants, I may also have introduced my own personal biases towards disciplinary literacy through my personal experiences as a literacy and language specialist. Therefore, my conclusion may be reflective of these experiences and biases.

Efforts to mitigate these biases were taken. The creation of the online survey was informed through the synthesis of research gathered throughout Chapter Two. In addition, the strategies used throughout the questions were acquired from The National Reading Panel's meta-analysis of literacy studies (NICHHD, 2000). Finally, predetermined themes were identified through the development of Chapter Two. By using predetermined themes, allowed the researcher to write qualitative interview questions that directly aligned with the research presented. This attempt was to limit my personal experiences working with secondary social studies teachers. Although predetermined themes were identified, the research did allow for themes to appear as interviews unfolded, wherein in

the end, no additional themes were found in the qualitative interview process. Both of these efforts may have led to further limitations to this study.

Other limitations of my study were the number of participants and the timing of the research in relation to the researcher's goal of completing this dissertation. Although the participants in this study represented a wide range of regions throughout the state in which this research took place, conclusions gleaned from this research must remain within the lived experiences of these participants. Applying the lessons learned from this study met with caution. As the understanding and interpretation of disciplinary literacy is complex and tends to change with time and researchers, additional research is encouraged through the inclusion of more participants across all secondary grade levels to ensure the trustworthiness of these results as qualitative interviews are subject to the interpretation and biases of the researcher.

Finally, as the nation and world are navigating through challenges of Covid-19, teachers are bearing a heavy burden. The participants in this study commented on the challenges distance learning had placed on classroom teachers and students. However, a few participants acknowledged it was through this challenge they have had the ability to work one-on-one with students and have brought greater awareness of students' lack of basic literacy skills. One participant explained how shocked he was to learn that a senior he worked with lacked the skills to read basic information. The challenges of gaining participants for this study were compounded by the demands of the teaching profession today. This was evident when participants were asked if they were willing to pass the

research opportunity on to colleagues. Several participants mentioned they could not in good conscience ask teachers to add more to the already hectic schedule.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are several recommendations to continue this research and add to the disciplinary literacy discussion. As previously mentioned, individuals who participated in the final stage of this study had more than 20 years of educational experience, opportunities to participate in leadership roles, were self-driven to enhance their own learning and understanding of literacy by means beyond their local professional development opportunities and had advanced degrees. Therefore, it is recommended that the scope of this research expands to include additional participants to include those who do not have the vast portfolio of the participants found within this study.

As mentioned, the challenges of Covid-19 limited the participation within this study and prevented valuable data collection opportunities. The data collected for this research was ascertained through online interviews. The ability to meet participants in person, observe classroom practices, and develop relationships with participants face-face was prohibited. Furthermore, as mentioned by participants, the terminology has changed throughout the course of literacy research. It is through these classroom observations the depth of literacy understanding of literacy concepts can be ascertained. Therefore, it is recommended that future research allows for these obstacles. Observing participants in action would add to the field.

Moreover, there are two areas for continued research that arose from the survey responses and qualitative interviews. First, participants expressed the need to build

relationships with students. It is through these relationships that participants expressed their ability to meet the needs of students. In addition, these relationships helped them learn more about the student and have a better understanding of how to better support students' literacy needs. As this was not a focus of this study, it was not addressed to a full extent. Therefore, a much deeper understanding of how participants incorporated literacy successfully in their instruction with this understanding would add to the field.

Not to mention, at the conclusion of one of the qualitative interviews, the participant discussed the use of a teacher-developed curriculum. I realized that other participants had commented on similar inclusions, but I did not have the foresight to dig deeper. Moreover, participants of the survey pointed to the need for additional curriculum support to use for their low literacy level students. However, as the participant discussed the use of teacher-made curriculum and materials, they also expressed concern over the use of leveled literacy, asking: Are we lowering standards? Are we helping students learn how to tackle challenging text? Are we preparing students with the rigorous literacy needed to be successful as they step into their next academic journey? As the research presented here did not include the discussion of curriculum and materials and how those materials support the needs of low-level literacy students, it is recommended that further research focuses on these aspects.

Plans for Communicating and Using the Results

The completion of this dissertation is the final task required in the completion of my course work in the pursuit of my Doctorate of Education. The results of this research will be published through Hamline University and Bush Library's Digital Commons

communication platform. Future plans to publish this research may include presenting my findings at various literary conferences, professional development opportunities, or education journals. It is my great hope that the results of my research will aid in the professional discussion of disciplinary literacy. More specifically, the professional discussion as it relates to my primary and secondary research questions: *How do secondary social studies teachers describe their confidence in teaching disciplinary literacy within their courses to students with low literacy skills? What factors do secondary social studies teachers describe as influencing confidence/skill levels in teaching these students? How do secondary social studies teachers describe the support systems available to them in their setting as impacting their level of confidence/skills for working with these students?*

The results of my research can be used to demonstrate the continued need to develop teachers' confidence levels in working with students with low literacy levels. In addition, my research provides suggestions for how to help teachers gain this confidence as they continue to build their own professional toolbox in the area of literacy strategies.

Final Reflection of Lessons Learned

Admittedly, I am a novice researcher and was unprepared for some of the challenges and roadblocks along the way. At the beginning of this research, I had laid out a plan for the completion of each step of this study over the course of four semesters. In planning, I wanted to ensure I had enough time to commit to each stage of the process and enough time for family commitments.

Initially, I spent a great deal of time working with the teaching and learning director of a school district with the goal of completing a case study. My interest in completing a case study was to obtain a broader perspective of literacy across the secondary setting. With the completion of my first three chapters, I had my final meeting with the teaching and learning director and the superintendent of the district. They were both on board with the research but decided they needed a final commitment from the secondary administration team. It was at this stage that my research plan fell apart as the administration determined teachers were struggling with another year of Covid-19. Therefore, a new plan was needed to be put in place.

Without a location for my research, a new plan was to seek a supporter that would enable me to do virtual data collection. I reached out to several organizations throughout the state in which this study was conducted. Finally, I received permission from the state council for social studies teachers. The president of the council agreed to help distribute the online survey for my study through their newsletter and social media resources.

With a resource to distribute my study obtained, I finally moved to the proposal and was able to receive approval from IRB quickly. However, due to the challenges of finding a source to distribute my survey, time had passed, and the end of the school year was upon us. My survey was distributed in June and received a minimal response. With a reissuing of the survey in July, I received my first participant. I quickly completed the qualitative interview with this participant and was eager to continue my research. However, responses to my survey were stagnant until October. With continued

distributions of my survey each month, in October, I finally received several responses and was able to move forward.

Initially, this research included plans for the inclusion of focus groups, in addition to qualitative individual interviews, as a method in collecting data. With 11 participants indicating they would be interested in participating in qualitative interviews, I reached out to all participants to set up appointments for the qualitative interviews. Of the six participants who responded, I was only able to complete qualitative individual interviews as the participants' time was limited. Several attempts to connect with the remaining five participants that had initially indicated an interest in participating in discussions were made to no avail.

As mentioned, as a novice researcher, my personal experience with transcribing interviews was limited. Upon the suggestion of a colleague, I was grateful to learn of online programs to help with the transcription process. This tool was invaluable in this research and helped me regain some of the time lost due to previous struggles.

As for the topic of this research, literacy has become an area of great passion and concern for me. As an elementary school teacher, middle school English language arts, and social studies teacher, I did not have the opportunity to learn about teaching literacy when completing my undergraduate degree and initially obtained a teaching license. In my personal experiences working with students who lacked literacy skills, I lacked the confidence to teach these students. This lack of confidence pushed me back into the classroom to learn how I could help students learn literacy skills. This pursuit of learning was due to my own ambitions, as I never received professional development

opportunities through my school districts in regards to literacy instruction during the first 20 years of teaching.

Later, gaining a literacy specialist and an English as a second language degree, I developed my own opinions about literacy and how it was being included in instruction beyond the elementary classrooms. As a specialist, I found teachers resistant to new learning. Gaining an understanding of my own biases was an important task in the completion of my study.

Understanding my own experiences and biases, I was astonished at the level of commitment the participants in this study brought to their classroom and to this study. Similar to my own experiences, these teachers commented that they needed to be explicitly taught strategies that were relevant to their classroom in order to gain confidence in using them within their instruction. The majority of participants also described there not being a one-size-fits-all approach to learning literacy. Therefore, it should not be presented in the same way across disciplines.

Prior to the completion of this research, I looked at literacy through the eyes of a literacy specialist and not through the lens of an expert in a disciplinary course. The social studies teachers within this study raised similar concerns I have made throughout my own experiences in learning and teaching. However, their needs in the classroom are reflective of the unique vocabulary, text, graphs, pictures, materials, etc., that are used within the discipline.

It is through these conversations and opportunities to reflect that I have developed a better understanding of the use of literacy within the social studies context. The

knowledge gained through this study will remain with me and influence the work I do in developing professional development opportunities for others.

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Appendix A

Online Survey Questions

The following survey was presented to a state social studies teaching organization. The original survey was presented in a Google form; with the exception of formatting, this Google document best represents the electronic version of the survey.

Survey Questions

The purpose of this critical qualitative study is to explore various factors that influence social studies teachers' sense of efficacy when working with low literacy students in the classroom.

By focusing on the voices and lived experiences of social studies teachers, this study will allow these teachers a safe space to share their inside perspectives on working with low literacy students in their classrooms. Expanding the understanding of their lived experience has the potential to support social studies in their future work with low literacy students.

If you choose to participate, you will first be asked to respond to a survey to identify background information and current confidence and experiences with literacy instruction. Furthermore, the survey seeks to find participants that would participate in a focus group discussion or an individual interview. The following survey contains only 15-24 questions (depending on responses).

By selecting "I CONSENT" below, you are endorsing and acknowledging the following: You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks, and you have received the opportunity to download or save a copy of this form. ([Click here to download](#))

Part One

Background Information (section 2)

Please select the information that best describes you as a participant.

Gender:

male, female, non-binary

The number of years experience as an educator:

0-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-10 years, more than 10 years

Identify the current grade level(s) taught. (select all that apply):
7th grade, 8th grade, 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade

Do you hold a secondary social studies license:
yes, no, other

Confidence Using Literacy Strategies (section 3)

After reading the literacy statement, please select the statement that best represents your current belief.

Rate the importance of teaching literacy strategies in your content area course:
extremely important, important, not important

Rate your current level of confidence in teaching literacy strategies in your classroom:
extremely confident, confident, not confident

Rate your current confidence level in identifying students with low literacy levels:
extremely confident, confident, not confident

Rate your confidence level in working with students with low literacy levels:
extremely confident, confident, not confident

As an educator, describe how you work (what do you do) to gain confidence in your instruction to meet students' needs. (*short answer*)

Instructional Support (section 4)

After reading the literacy statement, please select the statement that best represents your current belief.

As an educator, what support systems do you need to help you with your confidence in instructing students with low literacy levels? (*short answer*)

Would you be willing to participate further in this study (focus group discussion or individual interview)?

Yes, No (no-advances to thank you/submit section)

Research Participation (section 5)

Thank you for agreeing to participate further in this study. As a reminder, you have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks, and you have received the opportunity to download or save a copy of this form. (Click [here](#) to download)

Part Two

Further participation in this study will include answering 8 simple multiple choice questions and the participation in a discussion about content area/disciplinary literacy (focus group or an individual interview). Please include your name and email address so I can contact you to arrange this discussion.

Name: *(short answer)*

Email address: *(short answer)*

For the purposes of this research, please identify the school you currently teach within. Please note, this information will be used for demographic information only and will not be used as an identifier within this research. The information gathered here will remain confidential.

School: *(short answer)*

Applying Literacy Strategies (section 6)

The following eight multiple-choice questions will help me understand your current level of literacy strategies used in your instruction. Please select the answer that best represents your inclusion of literacy strategies at this time.

Rate your current level of confidence in using comprehension monitoring strategies within your instruction (activating prior knowledge, reasoning, identifying confusing words, asking/answering questions, etc).

Rate the level of confidence in using cooperative learning strategies within your instruction. *extremely confident, confident, not confident*

Rate the level of confidence in using graphic or semantic organizers as a comprehension strategy within your instruction. *extremely confident, confident, not confident*

Rate the level of confidence in using questions answering as a comprehension strategy within your instruction (students respond to teacher lead questions before, during, and after reading). *extremely confident, confident, not confident*

Rate the level of confidence in using question generating as a comprehension strategy within your instruction (students generate questions – why, when, where, what, how, and who). *extremely confident, confident, not confident*

Rate the level of confidence in using text structure as a comprehension strategy within your instruction. *extremely confident, confident, not confident*

Rate the level of confidence in using summarization and analysis as a comprehension strategy within your instruction. *extremely confident, confident, not confident*

Rate the level of confidence in using vocabulary instruction within your instruction.
extremely confident, confident, not confident

Thank you (section 7)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The information gathered in this survey will be used to help further the discussion of content/disciplinary literacy within the professional community. **Submit**

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Participants of this dissertation were given the option of participating in either a focus group or an individual interview. The following questions were used as data collection tools for both semi-structured forums; this process allowed questions to emerge as the discussion unfolded. However, due to the nature of a semi-structured forum, not all questions may have been answered by all participants. Due to Covid-19, the focus group and interviews were conducted virtually and recorded for future analysis purposes. Focus groups consisted of a 60-minute discussion while the qualitative individual interviews were 45 minutes in length.

Opening - Thank you for participating in this research and more importantly in the conversation of literacy. To help ensure I capture the conversations in detail, the discussion will be recorded. Furthermore, I would like to remind you of the informed consent you have signed in agreeing to be a part of this interview or focus group. Again, the information you provide through the survey and this discussion will be used to complete my dissertation. The identities and location of this research will remain confidential. For the purpose of the research paper, identities will be coded, materials collected will remain in the sole possession of the researcher, and the recording of this conversation will be only located on this researcher's computer which is password protected. After the completion of the study and the defense of the research to the University, all materials will be destroyed.

Introductions - Please introduce yourself by identifying your name, what course(s) you teach, how long have you been in the district, and what you like most about teaching here. **Focus group - 5 min everyone responds, Interview up to 2 min.**

This section focuses on the participants' understanding of the content area/disciplinary literacy - focus group 10 - 15 min - open discussion, interview - 5-10 min.

Transition question - The terms content literacy, reading in the classroom, disciplinary literacy, are terms that have been around in education for a while. I am interested in hearing the first thing that comes to mind when you hear these terms? In your own words, define literacy within your discipline.

The second set of questions relates to the schools and participants' use of literacy strategies within instruction - focus group - 15 min - open discussion, interview 10-15 min.

Key Questions - At this point, I want to change the direction of the conversation to having you describe your school or departments' approach to literacy in the content areas/disciplinary instruction?

Of the literacy strategies listed on your survey, I am interested in hearing about the one that is used most often in your classroom and why?

Of the literacy strategies listed on your survey, I am interested in hearing about the one that used the least in your classroom and why?

As you work to include literacy in your classroom, what do you see as some of the major challenges of incorporating literacy into your instruction?

The final set of questions relates to the support systems needed for the successful implementation of literacy instruction. - Focus group - 15 min - open discussion, interview - 5-10 min.

Finally, I would like to move the conversation to professional development or training in content area/disciplinary literacy. I am interested in hearing about your experience with professional development or one-on-one support in being able to teach literacy in your content area. What systems do you feel have been the most effective, or what systems have been the least effective? Have they been successful for you as an individual instructor? Are there additional support systems you wish were available?

Ending Question - If you had a chance to give advice about the content area/disciplinary literacy to your administration or colleagues, what advice would you give? Focus group - **5-10 min everyone responds, interview - up to 5 min.**

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we end, is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation about the content area/disciplinary literacy?