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A Program Evaluation of the Impact of a "Read to Learn" Model on Alternative High School Students' LEXILE Levels and Reading Achievements

By
James D. Quinn

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by James D. Quinn under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Abstract

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This study is a program evaluation of the effectiveness of a reading initiative in an alternative school utilizing the Stufflebeam CIPP evaluation model. In order to assess effectiveness, this evaluation explored the reading growth of high school students in an alternative school setting where the application being critiqued was a "read to learn" model.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a "read to learn" model on students who were exposed to reading as the primary mode of learning in all content areas and who participated in daily silent reading with self-selected topics. Baseline data on LEXILE, RIT band levels, and reading achievement were gathered from a pre and posttest administration with the same assessment after a 12-week exposure to the model.

The context for the program was found to be sound as was the rationale for implementation. In addition, the evaluation found the "read to learn" model to have been properly implemented according to the CIPP model assessment. The study also found the program had been implemented with fidelity and consistency. Though no significant reading impact was evidenced, the "read to learn" model was perceived to have been successful.

This evaluation analyzed a "read to learn" model that can be replicated in other schools. The data indicates that many of the attributes of this model are appropriate for other schools similar to the Last Chance Academy.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
Statement of the Problem 1
Purpose of the Study 8
Theoretical Framework of the Study 9
Evaluation Questions 12
Setting of the Study 14
Significance of the Study 18
Definition of Terms 19
Chapter 2: Literature Review 21
Overview 21
Conclusion 49
Chapter 3: Methodology 50
Introduction 50
Data Analysis Format 51
Sample Population 67
Conclusion 68
Chapter 4: Results 69
Introduction 69
Data Analysis 70
Conclusion 89
Chapter 5: Discussion 90
Overview 90
Limitations 115
Delimitations 116
Recommendations for Further Research 116
Conclusions 117
References 122
Appendices
A Last Chance Academy Teacher Interview Format 131
B Last Chance Academy School District Administrative Interview Format 133
C Last Chance Academy Teacher Process Follow-up Interview Format 135
Sample Tables
1 Context Evaluation: Rationale for "Read to Learn" Model (online curriculum) 54
2 Input Evaluation: Other Online "Read to Learn" Models Explored & Selection of Apex 55
3 Input Evaluation: Specific Unique Features About This "Read to Learn" Model 56
4 Input Evaluation: Perceived Differences Teachers and Administrators Observed 56
5 Process Evaluation: Quality and Consistency of Training for the "Read to Learn" 58
6 Process Evaluation: Quality and Consistency of Implementation for the "Read to Learn" Model 59

7 Process Evaluation: Sustainability of the "Read to Learn" Model 59
8 Product: Reading Achievement Alternative Setting: RIT Score, Percentile, & Growth 62
9 Product: RIT Growth Significance 62
10 Product: RIT Percentile Growth Significance 63
11 Product: Student LEXILE Growth – Alternative School Environment.....64
12 Product: LEXILE Growth Significance 65

Tables

13 Context Evaluation: Rationale for "Read to Learn" Model (online curriculum).....72
14 Input Evaluation: Other Online "Read to Learn" Models Explored & Selection of Apex.....73
15 Input Evaluation: Specific Unique features About This "Read to Learn" Model 75
16 Input Evaluation: Perceived Differences Teachers and Administrators Observed 77
17 Process Evaluation: Quality and Consistency of Training for the "Read to Learn" 80
18 Process Evaluation: Quality and Consistency of Implementation for the "Read to Learn" Model.....82
19 Process Evaluation: Sustainability of the "Read to Learn" Model 84
20 Product: Reading Achievement Alternative Setting: RIT Score, Percentile, & Growth 86
21 Product: RIT Growth Significance 87
22 Product: RIT Percentile Growth Significance 87
23 Product: Student LEXILE Growth – Alternative School Environment.....88
24 Product: LEXILE Growth Significance 88

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The landscape of educational opportunities for high school students has changed greatly in the digital age (Clark, 2008). A host of online curriculum delivery options have become ubiquitous for K-12 schools across the country, such as PLATO by Edmentum and Apex Learning systems. This influx of new technology has afforded students new educational options. One of the skills needed to adequately utilize this new pedagogy is the ability to read the information. Those students who can successfully navigate the reading challenges of online learning are having increased engagement and flexibility, thus earning the credits they need to successfully graduate (Tapscott, 1998). There are a host of virtual delivery companies such as Apex, A+nyWhere Learning System, and PLATO by Edmentum that are taking advantage of this wave of pedagogy changes. Each company boasts newer and more innovative online instructional models that offer a different and unique approach to delivering the content.

This new era of education is especially unsettling to those who have continued to crave the old days where the teacher directly delivers content students must know and be able to do. However, even these educators must recognize that the sustained national graduation rates over the last decade are on the decline. According to Swanson (2010), "Every school day, more than 7,200 students fall through the cracks of America's public high schools. Three of every 10 members of this year's graduating class, 1.3 million students in all, will fail to graduate with a diploma" (p. 22). These statistics are staggering and have shown that more than 30% of students have failed to meet graduation standards (Swanson, 2010). This is enough to convince even the greatest of skeptics that there should be additional student learning models investigated to offer new and differing

options in today's educational arena. Graduation rates reached their peak in 1969 at 77.1%, but since 2000, they have hovered in the 69.9% range, giving cause to concern about the United States' ability to compete in a global society (Barton, 2005).

Consequently, since 2000, the public schools have strategically offered a menu of virtual as well as blended options for learning course content. As the technology has come of age, charter schools, alternative schools, correspondence schools, and magnet schools have exploded in numbers (Hefner-Packer, 1991). The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) conducted a survey among Educational Technology Cooperatives throughout the south and have projected as many as three-quarters of all districts in the SREB region will offer courses through online learning options by 2015. The National Education Association reported that by 2006, a high percentage of K-12 high school students reported taking at least one high school course online before graduating (Kiekel, 2007). For example, Picianno and Seaman (2007) estimated that 700,000 K-12 students were enrolled in either online or blended learning courses in 2006. Reasons for the proliferation of online content by K-12 school districts have varied according to SREB (2013), but they have centered on three distinct reasons including a need to attract students who would leave public venues for more flexible options; a need to provide rigorous courses that smaller districts may not have the funding to offer, such as advanced placement and dual credit options; and, perhaps most importantly, a need to provide a nontraditional learning environment for students who have difficulty learning in a traditional face-to-face school or on a traditional schedule to increase graduation rates.

However, in order to access the full power that an online curriculum provides, students have had to possess the reading stamina, motivation, and comprehension skills to

successfully complete the online course work. A key question that many educators and researchers have pondered has been, "Does reading online require the same skill set as reading and comprehending from a traditional textbook?" (Leu, Castek, Hartman, Coiro, Kulikowich, & Lyver, 2005). A report by Leu et al. (2005) suggested that online reading comprehension actually requires new skills and reading strategies to effectively learn new information. Further, the RAND Reading Study Group (2002) stated that online reading made large demands on a reader's literacy skills. The problem with the new literacy required of online reading has been that public schools have steadily increased the number of online courses they have offered to students, but they have not figured out how to adequately prepare students for the reading load required to access information from online venues. In fact, since 2002, when the first state-run virtual school was developed, the states involved in the SREB now have 15 completely virtual school programs (SREB, 2013), but the preparation for students to participate in these programs has changed little. Research conducted in South Africa indicated that many South African high school graduates who registered for undergraduate study proved to be underprepared for university education because they had lower levels of reading abilities needed for online learning. This has had an adverse effect on their academic success in this venue (Dreyer & Nel, 2003). Previous studies have also indicated that some students have had difficulty learning online because they lacked the ability to shift their learning styles to learn from reading electronic texts, particularly learners who lacked confidence in their overall academic ability or who lacked the habits of skilled readers (Hsieh & Dwyer, 2003).

Background and significance of the problem. The trend of online learning as a primary curriculum delivery model has become more prevalent throughout all schools, but this is also true with the alternative school constituency (SREB, 2013). These are

programs that really started growing in the late 1950s and 1960s. These schools were developed as the original "dropout prevention programs" (dropoutprevention.org). Now these programs are prevalent and are operating in most school districts. The typical goal is to serve the at-risk secondary youths with discipline issues in order to reduce the likelihood or probability of these students dropping out of school before graduation. The students attending these schools are typically underachieving and deficient in the number of credits needed to graduate with their peers (dropoutprevention.org). This group of students has had an adverse effect on each school district's data with regards to graduation rates.

Because of the variety of academic needs of this at-risk group, alternative programs have been turning more often to the online academic delivery options. The need to do so has been driven in large part by several key factors. First, alternative schools have needed a viable curriculum that would allow for flexible entry points for students who were remanded to the alternative setting at various points in the school year. Second, alternative schools have needed to offer various high school courses across multiple content areas that they may have not been adequately staffed to offer. The online course vendors have effectively solved this problem by providing multiple complete courses aligned to state and national standards. Third, alternative schools traditionally have served students who were academically behind their grade-level peers; therefore, they have needed the self-paced curriculum that online learning offers to give students hope of ultimately catching up with their peers and graduating on time. Finally, the online curriculum delivery vendors have also developed critical instructional scaffolds in these academic programs. The purpose of the scaffolding is to model the desired learning strategy or task in a type of framework that is easily understandable for

the student and to guide instruction through a type of questioning or framework (Cazden, 1983). This helps the student begin to understand the process of acquiring the knowledge as well as divide the mastery of the concepts into smaller intervals. Then, as time goes on, the content framing responsibility is gradually shifted back to the students. This format helps struggling students structure the learning, get immediate feedback when they have not understood a concept, and reassess when they have failed. Zumbach, Hillers, and Reimann (2004) researched the concept of availability of immediate feedback and the positive influence this has on students in online environments. This feature has been particularly appealing to the alternative school philosophy. One of the major characteristics of at-risk learners is that many lack the motivational component needed for success in the traditional school; however, this feedback mechanism offered by the online environment helps to alleviate this problem. These researchers found that these feedback mechanisms have a positive impact on students' motivation levels as well as their overall learning (Zumbach et al., 2004).

Still, the problem with placing the most at-risk students in a situation where they must be independent readers and consumers of digital information for the majority of their day has been that one of the key descriptors of the at-risk students has been low reading levels. Morgan, Farkas, Tufis, and Sperling (2008) reported that reading problems in school resulted in behavioral problems because they triggered "frustration, agitation, acting out, avoidance, and withdrawal from learning tasks" (p. 417). In order to escape the aversive task of reading, these students were more apt to engage in negative social behavior, which had the long-term effect of decreasing the students' reading abilities and general knowledge as well as alienating them from the school and peers. The opposite has also been true according to Morgan et al. Behavioral problems have

also led to reading problems. "Off-task and disruptive behavior problems have decreased attending to instruction and activities thereby worsening a child's school performance" (Morgan et al., 2008, p. 417). Finally, Morgan et al. hypothesized that reading and behavioral problems have been reciprocally causative over time which has led to a negative feedback cycle for the student.

The research problem. The crux of the problem has been that at-risk high school students have not been routinely immersed in a literacy-rich environment at critical stages in their early and late adolescence for a myriad of academic, social, behavioral, and economic reasons. For instance, 90% of middle-high income families report providing some type of literacy experience for their children at least once a month, such as going to a library, whereas those families faced with lower socioeconomic status surveyed showed less opportunities. The research by Baker, Serpell, and Sonnenschein (1995) stated that less than 43% surveyed had offered these types of experiences. There is also a substantial difference in language exposure. Hart and Risely (1995) discovered that there is a significant difference in even the language used around poor children which is also contributing to their lack of literacy skills needed at a young age, and, as a result, they have found themselves functionally behind their grade-level peers in reading motivation, comprehension, and LEXILE level. In fact, Moje and Tysvaer (2010) stated that the statistics indicated that many of the adolescents across the United States lack the more advanced literacy skills that are needed to be successful in the higher education arena (Moje & Tysvaer, 2010). What is so startling about this fact is that "Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than any other time in human history" (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999, p. 7). Further, high school teachers in the traditional environment have defaulted to fewer reading demands for at-

risk students because they have believed these students lacked the motivation and skills to keep up with their grade-level peers in the reading for course assignments. Absent the time and structure to appropriately address the students' specific reading deficiencies, traditional high school teachers have simply required less content reading across all subjects and found other ways to teach the content (Allington, 2011). Additionally, very few high school schedules have provided time for daily self-selected silent reading (SSSR) where students have had total choice on the topics and texts they have read. Allington (2001) reported that students who were two or more grade levels behind in reading needed a minimum of 90 minutes per day in reading books they could read in order to improve their reading level. The result of the traditional high school model has been that the very students who have needed to read more have actually read less. Further, their deficient reading development has contributed to repeated course failures, increased discipline problems, apathy, and poor attendance, all of which have led to many at-risk students being *pushed out* of the traditional school setting and into the alternative school setting. In the alternative school setting, many school districts have utilized online curriculum delivery models to provide core content. While the online curriculum vendors have developed course content rich in visual and auditory representations to help increase comprehension and learning (Hsieh & Dwyer, 2009), students in the alternative school environment, in large part, have had to make the learning shift from passive recipients of content to active reading engagement with the content. This approach is being utilized in many school settings, but this is especially true in alternative school settings. This program evaluation measured the effect of this type of application in one specific alternative school setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this program evaluation was to determine the impact of the "read to learn" model on students in an alternative school environment. The model consisted of reading as the primary mode of learning in core content areas as well as a daily SSSR period. This evaluation measured if the students had significant growth in reading LEXILE levels and overall reading achievement as measured by the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment and a student reading inventory (SRI) assessment. This evaluation assessed the impact of a curriculum program that primarily relied on online instruction and reading for the content delivery. Students from one suburban school district's alternative school were the population for this study. These students were immersed in a "read to learn" environment for one or more core content areas for a minimum of 12 weeks in a school year. Teachers supported student learning of the content through a blended model that included small group and one-to-one tutoring when needed and requested by the student, but the primary learning style executed by the students was to read content through the online venue. Students in the study were also required to read for pleasure 25 minutes per day in an SSSR period. Though some students may not read as intently as others, a reading log was kept that asked specific questions about the piece of literature that the student was reading during this period. The reading log was a monitoring device to keep the students actively participating in the reading activity. In this period, students were given complete choice on the reading material. Allington (2011), a national reading researcher, reported that students improve their overall reading achievement and get better at the strategic moves that good readers make by reading more. Likewise, Allen (2000), adolescent reading researcher and author of numerous books on reading achievement for middle and high school students, found

that struggling readers who are willing to clock an abundance of reading mileage will increase their overall fluency and reading ability. For cost, flexibility, and engagement reasons, school districts across the country have invested large amounts of money in hardware (computers) and online curriculum to ensure that students have access to online course content for the primary purpose of helping these students earn the course credit they need to graduate (SREB, 2013). Some states have even modified their regulations to allow the funding to be available to these virtual options, thus providing more virtual opportunities (SREB, 2013). Some legislation is being passed to now require students to participate in some type of virtual learning to be able to graduate because state governments believe that students' needs for being acclimated to this type of learning is critical for them to be successful (SREB, 2013). However, this particular study determined if the daily exposure to a "read to learn" model had other effects on the at-risk students by impacting one of the key risk factors for dropouts, low reading achievement.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This evaluation measured the effectiveness of the application of a "read to learn" model with an SSSR intervention in an alternative school. This program was evaluated by measuring the reading growth of academically at-risk students who were immersed in daily "read to learn" and daily reading for pleasure activities. In prior studies, reading growth has been achieved as an outcome when students have gained greater fluency in attacking the lexical content of multiple text types and greater abilities to make meaning of such texts (Torgesen et al., 2007). Therefore, the theoretical framework of this evaluation was grounded in the theory of constructivism, which had its roots in psychology and philosophy and has been a focus of educational theorists and practitioners for the past 20 years (Campbell, 2008).

The core of the constructivist theory has been that learners actively develop their own knowledge and meaning from the experiences they have encountered (Fosnot, 1996). Constructivism has also underpinned numerous studies on reading comprehension because as students read they interact with text cognitively to construct meaning. By definition, comprehension has been described as the construction of knowledge (Allington, 2002). The students in this study engaged in reading comprehension as their primary mode of learning. They were not necessarily directly taught new strategies to read; they were simply asked to read significantly more texts than they had previously been asked to read for purposes of learning and pleasure. The motivation to comprehend the reading is high as it means passing course content and ultimately earning course credits toward graduation. While the online curriculum resource provides some supplemental resources for low reading ability such as visuals, videos, read aloud features, and repetition of content, students still had to independently read and make meaning of content in all courses on a daily basis. A longitudinal study by Juel (1988) of how young children first learn to read and write and how those skills develop over time found that good readers read considerably more than the poor readers both in and out of school, which appeared to contribute to the good readers' growth in some reading and writing skills. At-risk students in this study engaged in habitual reading of the diverse digital curriculum both in and out of school and participated in daily SSSR with texts on the students' interests and reading levels. Due to the independence of this type of learning, students had to construct their own understanding of the content at deeper levels than they had previously done in the traditional school environment, potentially enhancing both their intellectual abilities and their overall reading levels.

With the explosion of the Internet and other online reading options, the concept of

constructivism in reading has been expanded to *new literacies* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu et al., 2005). The interpretation of new literacies has been referred to as the rapid progression of literacy and learning due to the impact of new technologies. As the new technologies have emerged, learning or construction of meaning has been transformed (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). In order to be successful in the online venue, students in this study had to routinely construct meaning from the texts across multiple content areas. A study by Spiro, Feltovich, Jacobsen, and Coulson (1991) examined the significance of online learning with regard to that of flexible cognitive abilities. In this study, the researchers surmised that one could not routinely read and comprehend ideas conveyed via the Internet without some impact on his or her reading ability as a whole. Moreover, other researchers found that reading in virtual venues actually demanded a broader construction of meaning and overall comprehension because the reader often had to "tease out and strategically respond to diverse situational cues encountered with each new online text" (Coiro, 2011, p 355). Alexander and Jetton (2002) and Pearson (2001) explained the act of comprehension as an activity where the reader, the online text, and the activity all formed a synergistic reaction to make meaning. In his research, Kintsch (1988) agreed that to comprehend text, assimilation of prior knowledge about text structures and experience of topics were intertwined with the cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies. By successfully participating in the online reading and adequately responding to the prompts within the online text, a reader improved his or her intellectual capacity. Conversely, by actively constructing new meaning in the online venue, a reader also positively impacted his or her reading ability by significantly expanding unique reading skills needed for effective comprehension. "The investigation of accomplished Internet reading revealed strategies that appeared to

have no counterpart in traditional reading" (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009, p. 217). This research suggested that students who were immersed in daily online "read to learn" may have significantly greater gains in reading abilities because of the cognitive demands of comprehending online texts.

Finally, researchers such as Krashen (2004) have strongly supported the theory of constructivism applied to the practice of free voluntary reading (FVR) or reading for pleasure. In Krashen's work with the reading development of English language learners, he found that when FVR was implemented consistently and children truly had a choice in what they read, the SSSR practice was effective in increasing reading skills, comprehension skills, writing, and vocabulary attainment in young as well as adolescent students. Krashen's research has indicated that vocabulary is best developed through "real encounters with words in context, over time, and in small doses" (p. 3). He believed that general knowledge of words and superior construction of meaning occurred in the natural setting of reading when students were allowed to choose texts they enjoyed and could read.

In conclusion, the theoretical philosophy of constructivism has been applied in this program evaluation model to both the formal construction of knowledge students gained through online content reading and informal comprehension of knowledge through leisure reading. The aim of this study was to determine the extent to which this expansion of cognitive ability impacted the readers as a whole and if the daily exposure and practice of reading produced significant changes in student reading levels.

Evaluation Questions

At the heart of this program evaluation is the study of the effectiveness of a "read to learn" model for at-risk students in an alternative school setting. The question of

whether the daily online curriculum model and SSSR practice had an impact on the low reading achievement of the alternative high school students was explored. As such, this evaluation is based on judging effectiveness of the reading application by answering the following questions.

Evaluation questions according to the steps in the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) Model.

Context evaluation. The context of the study assesses needs, assets, and problems within a defined environment (Stufflebeam, 2005). The program evaluation analyzed the following research question related to the context analysis.

1. What was the rationale for the "read to learn" model including both the online content reading and the SSSR?

Input evaluation. Input evaluation assesses competing strategies and the work plans and budgets of the selected approach (Stufflebeam, 2005). The program evaluation analyzed the following research questions related to the input analysis.

2. Were other online "read to learn" models explored, and, if so, why was this particular online curriculum selected?
3. What were the unique features about this "read to learn" model?

Process evaluation. Process evaluation assesses the implementation of the application being evaluated (Stufflebeam, 2005). When referring to the CIPP model matrix, this is the part of the evaluation that measures the actions and the methods as these methods are implemented. The program evaluation analyzed the following research questions related to the process analysis.

4. Was the "read to learn" model implemented with consistency and fidelity?
5. What would be done differently if this intervention were replicated?

Product evaluation. Product evaluation assesses the outcomes of the selected approach (Stufflebeam, 2005). The product evaluation is at the heart of this study and the research questions that guided the study to evaluate the impact on reading. The overall effectiveness of the model was measured by quantitatively evaluating to what extent the online curriculum delivery model and SSSR practice had an impact on the traditionally low reading achievement of the alternative high school students. This was quantified by measuring the reading data of at-risk students in an alternative school setting to answer the question of whether the daily online curriculum model and SSSR practice had an impact on the traditionally low reading achievement of the alternative high school students. As such, the process of this program was evaluated by answering the following research questions.

6. What impact did the "read to learn" model have on MAP reading scores of students?
7. What were the changes in LEXILE scores of students exposed to the "read to learn" model?

Setting of the Study

The setting of the study was a medium-sized suburban school district with approximately 18,000 students in the southeast United States. The student population examined in this program evaluation was 30 alternative high school students who originated from one of three medium-sized suburban high schools within the district. The high schools ranged in size from 1,394 to 2,092 students as of 2014.

The significant economic downturn in the state of the study school from 2010-2014 and inadequate funding for public education greatly impacted the culture of the community which has seen increased unemployment, increased numbers of families

living in poverty, and increased numbers of students who have significant behavioral, social, and academic problems. The free and reduced lunch population of the school district increased from just over 50% in 2011 to almost 60% in 2014 (Baker, personal communication, 2014). Research has shown a strong correlation between poverty and negative social and behavioral issues in schools. A study conducted at Tennessee State University found that poor socioeconomic status, extreme poverty, family problems, and negative social expectations were linked to behavioral problems in schools (Chakraborti-Ghosh, 2008). The community in which this program evaluation was conducted saw similar correlations between increased poverty and increased behavioral issues in school. In 2006, a local *Weed and Seed* initiative reflected data collected from the city police department that indicated increased gang activity with a major insurgence in the urban segments of this city. By 2013, there were eight identified gangs located in the urban areas of the community. Not surprisingly, police reports indicated that there were growing numbers of middle and high school students becoming involved in gangs within the school district. African-American male youth comprised 42% of the gang membership within the city. Many of the student participants involved in this study lived in the neighborhoods known by police as the "hot zones" with the highest frequency of violent occurrences and gang activity. Perhaps more importantly, the district had a significantly higher number of students who were expelled from school annually. From 2011- 2013, the district averaged 257 high school students expelled from school each year (District Expulsion Data Report, 2011-2013). Students expelled from school during 2010-2011 totaled 274; in 2011-2012, 247; and in 2012-2013, 250 (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013). All of the students in the sample for this study were excluded from one of the three traditional high schools in the community. This exclusion

refers to having their opportunity to be educated in the traditional high school environment removed, thus being expelled from school.

Negative social and behavioral factors have also been correlated to lower reading ability levels and poorer overall academic achievement in schools, particularly with at-risk youth. In a 7-year study on poverty and reading levels, Greenbaum et al. (1996) found that emotionally and behaviorally challenged children (especially those with formally diagnosed emotional behavioral disorders) consistently read below grade level. In the school district of this study, district-wide reading achievement data indicated a significant number of students were not meeting the reading benchmarks established by the state. For example, the district had the highest percentage of students (23.4%) not meeting benchmarks in 2011. Twenty-one percent of students were scored as "not met," meaning that they did not meet the state's reading benchmarks in 2013. These percentages are calculated by measuring which students are reading below grade level in Grades 3-8 as measured by the state Palmetto Achievement of State Standards (PASS) reading assessment (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013). Likewise, in the same period, the district's high school students showed a range of 19.9% (high) in 2011 to 17.4% (low) in 2013 who failed to pass the basic reading and math on the High School Assessment Program (HSAP) assessment (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013). Student participants in this study had lower overall reading levels than the district's at-large population due in large part to their at-risk status. Forty-five percent of freshmen students in the proposed study scored "not met" on the reading PASS assessment. Seventy-five percent of sophomores, juniors, and seniors scored a level 1 (not met) on the HSAP assessment (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013).

A combination of high expulsion rates and significant numbers of students not

meeting academic success in the traditional schools created a need for viable educational alternatives for the students. To address these needs, this urban school district established a hybrid virtual learning alternative educational program for expelled students. For the purpose of this study, the program was called the Last Chance Academy. Last Chance Academy provided an educational opportunity for students who had no option to attend any public school in the state for the remainder of the school year because of their *excluded* status. Though a small percentage of the students attending this alternative school are from other alternative placements outside of the school district or recently returning from another placement such as jail, the majority of the population served at this school must go there because they have been expelled or excluded from the traditional school environment for behavioral reasons. Since its inception in March 2008, the Last Chance Academy has served over 500 students with an average demographic population of 72% free/reduced lunch status. The program utilizes a virtual online academic curriculum with the support of highly qualified certified teachers in the core content areas of English, mathematics, science, and social studies. As such, the primary mode of learning was through reading and interacting with online curriculum on a daily basis. The mission of the Last Chance Academy was to positively impact the academic achievement and to improve behavioral issues of the itinerant students while they attended the academy. To achieve this goal, the school implemented many tiers of academic and behavioral interventions designed to give the students exposure to positive influences and maximize opportunities for academic success. These strategies included but were not limited to a flexible virtual curriculum with teacher tutoring and support, a consistent character education program, teacher mentoring, and active participation in community service and networking. One specific academic intervention applied to all

students in this program was designed to target students' motivations and abilities to read independently. The academy implemented a daily SSSR period with all students and teachers to help build students' stamina for reading and potentially change students' views of reading for pleasure. The combination of online curriculum and daily SSSR created a more literacy-rich environment for many students who had practiced avoidance strategies for reading in the traditional environment.

Significance of the Study

In a public school culture that has turned increasingly toward flexible online learning opportunities, two things have emerged as critically important considerations. First, academic achievement will be intricately tied to the ability to read and comprehend online resources at high levels (Alexander & Jetton, 2002); and second, it is essential for schools to support student success in the new literacy models required for online reading (Leu et al., 2005). Research has indicated that students with poor reading comprehension skills have traditionally had less success in school and have been more likely to be at risk of dropping out (Leu et al., 2005). Alternative schools have placed the most at-risk students and potentially some of the weakest readers in a position to read and comprehend more than they have ever been asked to do in their school career. This model was developed with the aim of successfully meeting the course credit needs of students who have been behind their grade-level peers but also meet the functional literacy needs of these students. Studies have supported the notion that reading more (i.e., increasing reading volume) can lead to increased reading achievement (Gambrell, 1978); however, more of the studies have focused primarily on older adolescent readers, and more research has long been needed to substantiate this practice at the middle and high school levels.

Definition of Terms

Alternative school. The phrase alternative school is used to describe nontraditional schools designed to serve a unique and special population of students such as those who have interests and learning styles that are different than those served in the traditional learning environment (Koetke, 1999). Some examples of these would include but not be limited to those that have disabilities, teenage parents, students who are potential dropouts or have other at-risk factors, violent or criminal offenders, or court-adjudicated youths and those in the juvenile detention systems. These schools usually employ nontraditional techniques for serving the students and are typically part of the school district's comprehensive dropout prevention program (http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effective-strategies/alternative-schooling).

MAP assessment. A test created by Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), MAP is a group-administered, criterion-referenced, computer-adaptive assessment that measures math skills as well as reading and language skills. The test has a thorough diagnostic approach to breaking the results into categories and goal areas that can be utilized to prescribe specific content to administer targeted instructional techniques (Sample, 2005).

Blended learning. Refers to a teaching method with a student-centered approach to creating a learning experience whereby the learner interacts with other students, with the instructor, and with content through thoughtful integration of online and face-to-face learning environments (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

Virtual delivery model. An instructional technique where a majority of the academic content is delivered through a computer and is based on an online or virtual curriculum.

At-risk students. Those students who exhibit the characteristics or indicators of being potentially more likely than their peers to drop out of school before they receive a high school credential of graduation.

Silent Sustained Reading (SSR). The act where students are given class time to silently read for a set period of time (Birmingham, 2006).

Reading levels. For the purpose of this study, reading levels were measured by LEXILE ranges according to a standardized assessment tool.

Growth index. NWEA defines growth index as the difference between the nationally normed projected growth for that student over the time period and the student's actual growth.

South Carolina Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SCPASS). The new statewide assessment program that is administered to South Carolina public school students, including charter school students in Grades 3-8.

High School Assessment Program (HSAP). Used in the calculation of absolute ratings, growth ratings, and federal accountability status for high schools. This is an assessment of the general knowledge expected for South Carolina high school graduates (HSAP, 2014).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The study evaluated the effectiveness of a reading instructional program in a specific alternative school setting. This effectiveness was gauged by measuring the reading growth of high school students in an alternative school setting where course content was delivered through an online curriculum delivery model and students received specific daily interventions through a defined reading program. The purpose of this program evaluation was to determine the reading impact on students' LEXILE levels and overall reading achievements when they were exposed to a "read to learn" model. This model utilized reading as the primary mode of learning in all content areas for a sustained interval of time and participated in daily SSSR for leisure. The study focused on at-risk alternative school youth because research has shown that many of these students typically lack a literacy-rich environment at critical stages of their reading development; and, therefore, they have fallen functionally behind their peers in reading motivation, comprehension, and LEXILE level. The destructive cycle of poor reading has initiated dire consequences such as repeated course failures, increased discipline problems, apathy, and poor attendance (Morgan et al., 2008). Ultimately, these factors have propelled the at-risk high school youth into alternative school settings where online curriculum delivery models and "read to learn" have been the primary modus operandi. Immersed daily in reading as the primary pedagogical approach to learning in the alternative school setting, these students had to address their reading problems in order to be successful. This study explored whether the program of applying an immersion into reading had the bi-product of positively impacting one of the key factors that caused the students to be labeled at-risk in the first place–low reading ability. This chapter presents

a review of the literature around alternative schools and their online curriculum delivery models, adolescent reading theory, and LEXILE reading growth.

Alternative schools. The concept of alternative schooling has had many different definitions throughout the years. Looking back to colonial times, alternative learning models were present in the fabric of the American educational system, primarily to separate learning opportunities between the wealthy elite and the rest of the population (Koetke, 1999). As a result of these early separate school systems, two different varieties of alternative schools have emerged, including those labeled by Koetke (1999) as *outside the system* and those *inside the system*. Among alternative settings considered today to be outside the system have been those schools that have served the socially elite. These schools were designed to appeal to those families who could afford the costly private or religious educational option (Koetke, 1999). By contrast, other types of alternative schools have emerged inside the system, which were been designed to serve a less glamorous clientele. These school alternatives targeted students who were less fortunate and less likely to succeed, including students with learning or behavioral difficulties, students with unique learning interests or disabilities, teenage parents, and those students who were likely to be dropouts due to their violent or court adjudicated consequences (Koetke, 1999).

In the 1990s, Hefner-Packer (1991) categorized five distinct models of alternative education. The first type was the alternative classroom which was a self-contained setting within a traditional school to provide a different program for students with special learning needs. Second was the *school-within-a-school model* that provided a more specified curricular program to students with different needs housed within the traditional school building. The third type was the *separate alternative school* site. This model was

separated from the regular school and had dramatically different academic and social intervention programs to address students who were deemed ineligible to attend the traditional school because of inappropriate behaviors. The fourth type was *continuation schools* or *street academies* for job-related training or parenting centers. These were developed for students who no longer chose to attend traditional schools. The final type, according to Hefner-Packer, was magnet schools which offered an intensified curriculum in one or more subject areas around a specific theme or concept. Later, Raywid (1994) simplified the list of alternative school options to three succinct types including *schools of choice*–offering specialized learning opportunities, *last chance schools*–providing education programs to students who are disruptive or unsafe for other students, and *remedial schools*–providing programs that focus on a student's academic or social rehabilitation.

The most common form of alternative school today to serve youth in at-risk situations was designed to be part of a school district's comprehensive dropout prevention program (Reimer & Cash, 2003). For example, many districts have begun to offer online credit recovery programs within the alternative school settings to help students catch up or get ahead in the graduation race (Watson & Gemin, 2008). The National Dropout Prevention Center has recognized eight characteristics that appear to be a consistent profile for the most successful alternative schools. These include a maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:10, a small student base not exceeding 250 students, a clearly stated mission and disciplinary code, a caring faculty with continual staff development, a school staff having high expectations for student achievement, a learning program specific to the student's expectations and learning style, a flexible school schedule with community involvement and support, and a commitment to have each

student be a success. Adolescent literacy has often been a key component of the alternative school's curricular program, due in large part to the highly personalized model these schools endorse as well as the widely disparate academic backgrounds of the students they serve. The most successful alternative programs for struggling adolescent readers have helped students bridge their reading gaps with the academic demands of earning credits for content mastery. These programs have implemented strategies to help students persevere through the reading demands of online curriculum while they have continued to work on the problems that may have driven the students to the alternative setting in the first place. Specifically, these programs have addressed literacy along with many other issues such as setting goals, resolving conflicts, staying within the law, and avoiding alcohol and drugs. They have worked through barriers of work schedules, lack of family support, parenting responsibilities, and gangs (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000).

The myriad of social issues that adolescent learners face today has created a clear need for alternative schools in today's school systems. In fact, Dynarski (1999) suggested that society has made a critical mistake by setting compulsory attendance requirements in the *traditional high school*. He has contended that at-risk students should be offered the alternative route to drop out and ultimately seek graduation through other means such as alternative schools that offer the General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The alternatives to the traditional school have shown the capacity to meet students' needs in the smaller, specialized programs they have offered across the country.

Instructional strategies in online verses traditional settings. The way we educate students has forever changed due to the influence of virtual platforms in the United States (Archambault et al., 2010; Ash, 2010, Desai, Hary, & Richards, 2008;

Watson & Gemin, 2008). Alternative schools have been among the first K-12 educational groups who have embraced the power of online curriculum due to the transient nature of students they have served and their diverse learning needs. We have long known that the strategies teachers utilize consistently in the classroom have been a product of their experiences with how students learn best (Izrik, 2005; Russell, Munby, Spafford, & Johnson, 1988; Schunk, 2003). A teacher must perceive that the strategy has been effective for the frequency of the strategy to be high (Wozney, Vivek, & Abrami, 2006). Likewise, when analyzing the impact of a virtual school on reading-level growth, one must have considered other variables that may have impacted the growth. Online instructional strategies would be one of these variables. Key questions when looking at growth have arisen including how different was the instruction in the online venue from the traditional classroom and was the impact on reading growth directly attributable to the curriculum delivery model or was it also related to some degree of deviation in instructional strategies? A study by Diego (2012) on teachers' perceptions of best instructional practices used in the traditional and online class settings found that teachers perceived a significant difference between some of the effective pedagogical strategies between the two settings. The study compared Aliso Niguel High School with four nontraditional virtual schools to determine if nine *best practice instructional strategies* defined by Marzano (2003) worked equally as well to promote student learning in the traditional and virtual classrooms. Teachers in both learning platforms agreed on six best practice strategies as effective for student learning including, "identifying similarities and differences, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, setting objectives and feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and cues, questions and advanced organizers" (Diego, 2012, p. 58). The

teachers from each learning platform, however, differed in the perception of the effectiveness of cooperative learning, summarizing, and note taking. Teachers in the online venue valued these instructional strategies less (Diego, 2012). The content delivery model, whether a face-to-face teacher or online venue, was a conduit between the student and knowledge and a critical part of the student's success in learning (Izrik, 2005; Shulman, 1987). This study, however, corroborated other research that strategies teachers perceived as effective to promote learning in the traditional classroom were not equally valued as effective in the online model.

21st century literacy. The term adolescent literacy first pointed to the specific instruction of reading and writing in content area subjects related to secondary schooling but has recently been expanded to a wide-range of online and offline literacies relevant to today's millennial students (Moje et al., 2000). The advent of the Internet has forced literacy specialists and researchers to ponder the difference in reading demands between traditional books and resources or "offline texts" (Coiro, 2011, p. 355) and online resources. The central question has been, "how different is reading on the Internet," followed by "how 21st century literacy should be defined with the influx of online delivery methods?" Researchers have agreed that what it means to be a literate consumer of digital information has been redefined in the last 2 decades (Hartman, Morsink, & Zheng, 2010). "The internet has prompted new technologies that have challenged students' abilities to comprehend informational text" (Coiro, 2011, p. 353). This type of reading and informational download has required a separate and new set of skills that initial research about how students read and comprehend can only partially explain (Hartman et al., 2010). It has been reported by the RAND Reading Study Group (2002) that "electronic texts that incorporate hyperlinks and hypermedia . . . required skills and

abilities beyond those required for the comprehension of conventional, linear print" (p. 14). For example, a recent study by Coiro (2011) investigated the extent to which new reading comprehension proficiencies were required when adolescents read for information on the Internet. She found that there was an interaction between the variables of online reading comprehension and prior knowledge about the subject matter. Specifically, she noted that students who possessed higher levels of online reading comprehension skills were better able to compensate for lower subject-specific background knowledge because they had superior skills in locating, synthesizing, evaluating, and communicating information in the online reading venue. In short, they had greater facility with the text structure.

Experts on adolescent reading have reported that readers apply a wide range of skills and strategies to read print sources such as books, textbooks, and newspapers (Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001). They routinely perceived these familiar text structures and adjusted their reading stance to help them make sense of the subject matter (Tovani, 2000). However, research has also shown that the set of skills that were critical to comprehending offline texts, while closely aligned with several new and novel skills connected to reading online texts, have not painted a complete picture of the reading demands (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009; Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Coiro, Malloy, & Rogers, 2006). Constructing knowledge through reading online venues has included processing information from "hyperlinks, images, animation, audio, and video within an online networked system" (Coiro, 2011, p. 356). As readers have moved through the dynamic Internet environment from different text types and information sources, the ability to adjust reading stances has been more complicated. A distinct example of this has been the difficulty of navigating the new vehicle of online

research. For instance, many students could be skilled when analyzing information from traditional sources but have difficulty when utilizing search engines online to discover and evaluate research material (Eagleton & Guinee, 2002).

Until recently, there has been little research that even indicated the extent or significance of technology in the nation's schools; however, this change in information delivery has impacted schools across the world. The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reported that 95% of classrooms in the United States had one or more computers connected to the Internet. This is not a new trend; more than a decade ago research found that approximately 95% of American teens were using the Internet for research within the schools (Lenhart, Simon, & Graziano, 2001). This has since been on the increase. As such, it is imperative that educators gain a better understanding of what reading on the Internet entails if they are to prepare all students to succeed in a world where these skills have been vital to digital literacy (Coiro, 2011).

Adolescent learning theory and literacy. The 1998 Reading Report Card produced by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that many adolescent readers had learned a great deal about the basics of reading and writing, but they had not mastered all that they needed to have mastered by Grade 7. While 60% of adolescents showed that they could comprehend basic facts and recall information, fewer than 5% could extend meaning and elaborate on text (Moore et al., 1999). More recently, adolescent learning theory, specifically adolescent literacy development, has become a highly researched topic because national studies have supported the concern that the United States has reached "a crisis that calls for intervention" (Franzak, 2006, p. 209). There have been numerous programs for reading improvement across elementary schools in America; however, when a child has reached middle and high school, reading support

has generally ceased to exist. A position paper by the International Reading Association (Moore et al., 1999) stated that adolescents have long deserved texts, classroom instruction, and school organizations that support increased literacy development for older developing readers. Moreover, the most struggling adolescent readers have also deserved more direct literacy attention, which implies more funding to address their needs (Lenski & Lewis, 2008). Because schools have failed to view a student's reading development as a continuum that moves into the adolescent years, the reading needs of teenage students have been largely ignored. Studies now show that middle and high school students have needed increased opportunities to build upon the literacy strategies they learned in the early grades so that they could apply those strategies to increasingly more complex and abstract texts (Moore et al., 1999). Moreover, they have needed teachers who possessed the knowledge, willingness, and ability to model how effective literacy strategies are applied to the complex content reading of the secondary school curricula. In short, the idea that reading development is a continuum means that guidance from qualified teachers has been needed to ensure that adolescents continue to develop "their oral language, thinking ability, and knowledge of the world" (Moore et al., 1999, p. 8). Even the best reading and writing instruction in the early grades has not been enough to support adolescent reading needs into the upper grades.

Lenski and Lewis (2008) cited several factors that have impeded schools' abilities to help adolescent readers including a decline in Title 1 support at the middle and secondary level, the lack of reading courses for students in those grades, the lack of content area reading integration across subjects, an increased range of reading abilities across students which has resulted in fewer specific reading resources to match students' reading levels, a use of more whole group instruction at the upper grades instead of small

group and individualized instruction, and a general lack of knowledge on the part of middle and high school teachers on how to teach reading. Other barriers to adolescent reading success have been summarized by the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices (2005) in *Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Theory* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). These barriers focused on both students and schools and included decreased motivation to read content-area text; decreased inclination to read for pleasure; inadequate opportunities to develop vocabulary, background, and content knowledge in the content areas that secondary students must master; and decreased access to comprehension instruction with teachers highly skilled in adolescent reading theory and practice. The combination of these barriers with the higher cognitive comprehension demands of 21st century literacy has created significant gaps between adolescent readers. Additionally, these barriers have dovetailed into a lack of widespread support of adolescent literacy.

A report entitled *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy* released in 2004 by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Alliance for Excellent Education identified 15 key elements considered as critical for successful high school literacy programs (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). These 15 elements have been divided into two different categories including instructional improvements that would increase adolescents' abilities to comprehend texts at higher levels and infrastructure improvements for the middle and high schools themselves to support a more literacy-rich environment. On the instructional side, there were nine key elements in which students needed consistent exposure. These included a direct, explicit comprehension model; effective instructional principles embedded across the content areas; motivation and self-directed learning; text-based collaborative learning; strategic

tutoring; diverse texts; intensive writing; a technology component; and ongoing formative assessment of students. To expound upon these, Moore et al. (1999) maintained that only one-quarter of 17-year-olds reported reading for pleasure. Therefore, one of the critical instructional changes for middle and secondary schools has been to provide adolescents with access to a wide variety of texts they can and want to read. Motivation to read was cited as a primary barrier for reading volume in the adolescent years, and such motivation has been directly related to the inability of teens to find texts at the secondary level that they, first, were interested in and, second, did not frustrate them to read independently. A key element in finding texts they can read has been the idea of choice. All adolescents, especially struggling readers, should have the choice of selecting age-appropriate texts that interest them. Teachers who have provided high interest inquiry-based learning opportunities where students have had choice in what they read and studied have been shown to increase student reading volume. This has also meant that teachers had to assist in making choices available to students by bringing in a variety of reading materials to the classroom or helping them find online options appropriate to the students' interests and reading levels.

A second instructional change has focused on time for students to engage in reading. Research has shown that more time spent reading has yielded greater reading gains in word knowledge, fluency, and comprehension than implementing skill and drill practice in reading workbooks or programs (Allington, 2001). Additionally, time spent reading has also been associated with positive attitudes about reading in teenage students. For example "students who habitually read in the present have tended to seek out new materials to read in the future" (Moore et al., 1999, p. 5). Finally, time spent reading has been associated with increased world knowledge. When students have consistently read

information from textbooks, websites, and magazines, their worldview, background knowledge, and content vocabulary has been expanded (Moore et al., 1999). This factor has helped improve overall achievement of students across multiple content areas.

Third, time and choice have only been a part of the instructional changes that have been needed for adolescent reading improvement in the middle and secondary schools. Studies have shown that these two elements must be accompanied by strategic support. Such support has included direct comprehension instruction that builds the adolescent's skill and desire to read increasingly more complex texts. "Adolescents need a well-developed repertoire of reading comprehension and study strategies" (Moore et al., 1999, p. 9). Some of these strategies have included questioning themselves as they read, synthesizing information from various sources, identifying and remembering new vocabulary, noticing how text is organized, taking notes, monitoring their comprehension, and recognizing one's own as well as others' viewpoints (Tovani, 2000). Adolescent students have needed support from classroom content teachers who are the best sources to model these reading strategies within their content specialties (Tovani, 2000), but they have also needed high-quality literacy teachers to support them in small group intervention classes to address specific reading deficits (Beers, 2002).

A fourth instructional change that has been promoted in the last decade has been high-quality assessments that indicate where students have strengths and where they have weaknesses. These assessments have included both classroom formative assessments that yield specific information to drive targeted interventions as well as nationally normed assessments that provide teachers with normative student benchmarks (Moore et al., 1999). Feedback from assessments that is accurate, timely, and specific has been shown to dramatically increase student performance (Reeves, 2007).

On the infrastructure side, the critical elements outlined to improve the literacy environment for struggling readers included extended time for literacy; professional development for teachers on the needs of adolescent readers; ongoing, high-quality summative assessments of students' reading growth; ongoing assessments of reading programs and interventions; a reorganization of teacher teams to support literacy; stronger instructional leadership for literacy initiatives; and a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). In particular, the concept of strong instructional leadership for school-wide literacy programs at the middle and secondary levels was also enumerated by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2005) in their publication of *Creating a Culture of Literacy: A Guide for Middle and High Schools Principals.* The core goal of improving literacy levels required a significant cultural change in the middle and high school grades to include committed instructional leadership and knowledge of best practices for literacy instruction; balanced informal assessments that guide literacy instruction; ongoing, job-embedded, research-based professional development for teachers across content areas; highly effective literacy teachers; and strategic acceleration of students with supportive interventions to ensure they grow in their literacy levels. Although a number of scholars have noted the importance of continued literacy development for middle and secondary students in recent years, state and federal funding for such programs has not increased (Moore et al., 1999).

Mismatch in reading ability and reading to learn. Research on adolescent reading practices has indicated that not all high school learners have been developmentally reading to tackle the reading demands of high school course content in the online venue. A reader who has demonstrated a literacy skillset below the content

being delivered online has had increased difficulties mastering the content. In such cases, poor reading ability along with other potential problems inherent in the online learning model, such as reading stamina and motivation, have prevented learning. Allington (2002) studied the impact of student reading levels on their abilities to understand and learn the content. He found that students at the secondary level who were behind in reading levels have routinely been exposed to texts they could not read when actually what they needed was daily reading with texts on their own reading level in order to improve their fluency and comprehension skills (Allington, 2002). Specifically, he found that there were two primary reasons why secondary students struggled with learning content. First, there was a mismatch between the texts students were given and the reading ability of the students. Second, adolescent students have struggled with content because there have been a consistent lack of resources for high school content written at lower reading levels, thus forcing teachers to utilize textbooks with high LEXILE levels as their primary vehicle for delivering their academic content. In his research, Allington (2002) also found that exemplary teachers overcame both of these obstacles by implementing multiple levels of instructional resources and providing choice for the students.

One fallacy that has persisted in the secondary schools has been that exposure to tasks that are more difficult than the student's present skill level will increase the student's aptitude for learning. The exact opposite has been found true for reading growth. Allen (2000) explained that students had to clock a lot of reading mileage with texts they could read if they were to grow in their reading maturity and comprehension sophistication. Educational policy advocated by the National Reading Panel (2000) called for significant steps toward addressing reading level shortcomings in recent years;

however, most of the attention has focused on reading instruction for students in prekindergarten through Grade 4. Though well-intentioned, this focus on the early grades has created a significant gap for students in the system in Grades 5-12 who may have already *fallen through the cracks*. For example, when comparing the international data between different academic areas–mainly math, science, and reading–fourth graders of the United States were very competitive. As a matter of fact, they ranked among the best in the world. Yet when these students were examined at the middle school level, there were significant declines and results hovered around *average* by international standards. When results in these content areas were further examined at the high school level, American students compared poorly to other nations around the world (Allington, 2001; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001). Allington (2002) maintained that one reason for the sharp decline in content knowledge in the middle and high school results has been the inappropriateness of assigned content texts as well as limited instructional support for addressing specific reading problems.

The problem with mismatched text to readers has not been a new phenomenon. In fact, Chall (1983) noted that in the early grades, teachers have tended to deliver instructional content through multiple instructional resources; however, in about the fourth grade, teachers have relied more heavily on the utilization of textbooks to convey content. Because textbooks have traditionally included specialized vocabulary and expository text formats, students have needed to possess greater technical reading skills. These factors have increased the difficulty and complexity of the texts adolescents have been expected to read and thereby increased the cognitive comprehension demands. Some students who have performed average or close to average when compared to peers in the younger elementary grades begin to struggle in the upper elementary and middle

school grades. Moreover, research has confirmed that they may never recover the gap because the resources become less available and reading difficulty of grade-level texts becomes more substantial (Allington, 2002).

The use of a single textbook within and among the various content areas students must master to earn a high school diploma has inadvertently created a *one-size-fits-all* curriculum that has been inappropriate for at-risk adolescents who may have struggled to read. As a matter of fact, this approach has failed miserably if the goal across the board has been to increase the academic achievement of all of the students in our schools (Baumann & Duffy, 1997). To further exacerbate this problem, the majority of texts utilized in schools have been written at least two LEXILE levels above the average grade level of the students utilizing the text (Budiansky, 2001; Chall & Conard, 1991). Even students who were on grade level in their reading and comprehension abilities have had their share of difficulty with text given to them from textbooks. Reading researchers have projected a normal accepted percent of accuracy for reading informational texts which ranges from 95-97%. Therefore, the typical grade-level student has generally skipped or misread close to five of 100 words (Harris & Sipay, 1990). Those students who were behind their grade level have skipped or misread even more. To make matters worse, they have typically skipped the words that were the most critical for mastery of the material, amplifying the negative effects on those students who were lagging behind their peers.

Virtual or blended high school courses that utilize online curriculum have offered the same reading demands as the high school textbooks for content area courses. Similarly, in this environment, students have had to significantly increase their reading demands to learn the content.

Overcoming mismatched text. Research in adolescent literacy has suggested that students have been more successful at learning new content when the tasks they faced were closely targeted to their academic skills and developmental stage and the resources matched their independent reading levels (Roderick & Camburn, 1999). The goal of schools when text resources do not match a student's independent reading level has been to "structure tasks in ways that provide appropriate levels of challenge and support" (Roderick & Camburn, 1999, p. 336). The Center for English Learning and Achievement conducted a large-scale study where they analyzed the methods of exemplary teachers who consistently achieved high results with the learners in their classrooms on standardized test scores. The study found that these teachers utilized multiple levels of text-based content that included both the textbook and resources outside the textbook. Additionally, they offered instructional support for struggling readers (Allington, 2002; Allington & Johnston, 2002; Langer, 2001; Nystrand, 1997; Pressley et al., 2001). These teachers understood the importance of creating learning opportunities that used multiple sources to deliver content without an over-reliance on a single textbook. Another attribute of the exemplary teacher profile was the utilization of student choice. Allington (2002) called this approach *managed choice*. Allowing students different ways to not only learn but also illustrate mastery was a critical component to a student gaining deeper mastery of the content. The final component of overcoming mismatched texts with learners cited in this research was individualizing the instruction. This was deemed one of the most critical elements in student performance. The more personalized and individualized the instruction was for students, the more positively they performed. This evidence was recognized at both primary and secondary levels (Langer, 2001; Nystrand, 1997; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000).

Online curriculum delivery vendors who have created the blended and virtual high school curricula have utilized a variety of strategies listed in the previous study to help students navigate challenging content area texts which had the potential to be a mismatch for high school readers (Apex). First, online courses have offered a variety of text formats on a variety of reading levels within a single course (Plato). Apex Learning, Compass Learning, and Plato, for example, have described the reading level of their content as a mixture of both grade-level and below grade-level text so that all learners can fluently read the content and comprehend the material at higher levels (Plato). Second, virtual courses have featured straight expository texts similar to that found in textbooks, but they have also provided video content, audio content, and visual supports like graphs, pictures, and pop-up texts to scaffold student learning (Plato). A third key support provided in online curriculum courses has been what Hunter (2004) called an *anticipatory set*. Virtual courses have routinely used videos, easier to comprehend texts, or audio stories to build students' prior knowledge on the content before they were required to tackle the difficult reading. Tovani (2000) indicated that a lack of prior knowledge was one of the key reasons why meaning broke down for students when they read expository texts; therefore, building prior knowledge before a student has to read expository texts has been shown to increase their comprehension ability (Tovani, 2000). A fourth feature used routinely by online curriculum developers has been the use of frequent reviews that take students back to specific areas in the text to reread and relearn. With the power of the computer-based programs, students who have not shown mastery of content on reviews or quizzes have gotten immediate feedback on exactly what they did not master so that the student did not have to reread the entire text again but could instead go back to the exact area where their learning broke down. Finally, online

curriculum vendors have also utilized the managed choice model outlined by Allington (2002). Based on results from quick comprehension checks within the online program, students have been able to choose to go back and reread or continue on with the material. They could also choose to retake formative assessments up to three times before moving on to ensure they learned the material. In her book, Beers (2002) found that the number one way to increase reading comprehension was to reread. Struggling readers who may have thought that comprehension comes magically at the end of a text have often neglected rereading as a strategy to repair misunderstanding. Online curriculum, by its nature, has forced students to have the habits that good readers do by giving the structured ways to reread text when they have not fully understood it.

Measuring reading growth with academic measurement scales. In order to objectively determine if students have shown growth in reading ability, researchers have utilized various academic measurement scales. Scales have been determined by testing a set of particular criteria. The criteria being measured was compiled into a test which was administered to the sample population that the level of tested characteristics was aimed to analyze. For example, a sample population might have been a targeted or random group of students. "The test was a collection of items sampled from a specified universe" (Smith, 1989, p. 5). The test items determined different levels or degrees between the students in order to diagnose the presence or lack of presence of different traits. "The trait that was measured was called a construct" (Smith, 1989, p. 5). Each construct was measured by variations in ability to correctly answer the questions on the assessment. To define a construct, one had to utilize a process whereby ability was operationalized by differentiating ability on specific test questions. Some items were more difficult than others so that variations could then be identified and ultimately addressed or diagnosed

(Smith, 1989). "This method allowed the assessor to utilize variation in order to better understand the cognitive processes associated with the construct" (Smith, 1989, p. 6). Therefore, the assessor could make generalizations that allowed the entire student sample to be properly treated. This process of construct generalization has been widely used in reading growth measurements.

Lexile. One highly regarded academic measurement scale to determine reading level or text complexity has been the use of LEXILE levels. "The LEXILE Framework for Reading was developed as a scientific approach to reading and text measurement" (Smith, 1989, p. 1). The LEXILE range utilized levels for generalizing in the same way other academic scales do. Word frequency and sentence length were constructs used in developing LEXILE scales to gauge the difficulty or complexity of texts (Stenner, 1996). However, to make this generalization with a high level of accuracy, many steps were implemented. The first was to create a regression equation. A regression analysis was performed to properly analyze the relationship between variables. Independent variables were modified to determine the effect on the dependent variable. For example, when referring to LEXILE range, the word frequency and sentence length measures were combined to produce a regression equation that could explain the varying degrees of student comprehension between different reading items (Smith, 1989). "The respective weights produced by the regression operation formulated the following equation: (9.82247 * LMSL) – (2.14634 * MLWF) – 3.23274 = Theoretical Logit. Where LMSL = log of Mean Sentence Length and MLWF = Mean of the Log Word Frequencies" (Smith, 1989, p. 10).

When utilized, the LEXILE level methodology has identified levels in two different categories. It has produced LEXILE reader measures that identify the reader's

ability to read text as well as LEXILE text measures which identify the difficulty level of the text. The benefit of the duality of measures has been that the LEXILE scores have been able to accurately match readers to appropriate level texts. Additionally, the LEXILE score has been able to track when readers were able to move up to more difficult level texts over time, which has provided a means for measure reading growth (Smith, 1989). The higher the score on the LEXILE reader measure, the higher the difficulty of text that the reader is equipped to understand. The reader measure has been obtained by assessing the reader's ability to comprehend accurately different levels of texts. Multiple commercial assessments have reported LEXILE reading ranges such as, but not limited to, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), many of the end-of-course (EOC) assessments, and Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) (Smith, 1989). These tests have provided student reading ranges on a scale from 0L to 2000L, with 2000L being the highest LEXILE level and indicating the highest reading level. A student could also score a BR level indicating that the student was a beginning reader and therefore too low to have a minimum LEXILE designation.

The LEXILE levels related to measuring the difficulty of texts have been reported on the same scale with texts scoring in the range of beginning reader to 2000L. As such, a LEXILE text score of 650L is rated as easier to comprehend than a text with a LEXILE level of 850L; however, the correlation between comprehension and LEXILE level has not been accurate 100% of the time. A student with a reader LEXILE score of 1000L who has chosen a text with a LEXILE score of 1000L has typically been expected to comprehend at least 75% of the text. This calculation is based on independent reading level and not instructional reading level which excludes some level of assistance. When there was a teacher or facilitator assisting with the reading of the text, the student's

comprehension ability has increased. This facilitation can exist in many different capacities. Using a variety of teaching tactic reading strategies such as questioning, predicting, and summarizing important information can increase student understanding of the texts (Ulusoy & Dedeoglu, 2011).

The 75% has been identified as the *target reading rate*, or the point at which a reader should comprehend enough of the text to understand the text sufficiently. It has indicated the point at which the text difficulty has not reached the reader's frustration level and thereby caused the reader to abandon the text.

The LEXILE score on a given text has not traditionally provided an indication of the quality or content of the book or reading passage. It has simply been a measurement of difficulty related to a text's "word frequency and sentence length" (Smith, 1989, p. 9). When selecting appropriate texts for readers, there have been many factors teachers and curriculum vendors should have considered. For example, comprehension of content has often been impacted by such factors as the age of the reader, the interest of the reader with the content, the background knowledge of the content, and the reader's perseverance (Tovani, 2000). However, the LEXILE level has offered a good starting point for determining which text may be appropriate for a particular reader.

One of the most critical uses for the LEXILE scale has been to measure reading growth or lack thereof for any student. At times throughout the school year, a teacher may have used LEXILE scales to determine if a student has made sufficient progress in his or her ability to read and comprehend increasingly difficult text. This use of LEXILE levels has been beneficial to track student growth as well as to determine the effectiveness of reading interventions (Smith, 1989).

MAP. The NWEA has developed an assessment of reading, mathematics, science

and language usage that has been widely used across school systems in the United States. The assessment known as MAP has provided educators with nationally normed data using a computer-adaptive format that identifies a student's individual performance level in each of the tested areas. One of the key features of the MAP assessment has been its ability to track student growth across fall to spring administrations in order to adequately identify if a student has made 1 year's academic growth in the areas tested. MAP assessments measure four different categories of curriculum: reading, language usage, mathematics, and science (NWEA, 2012). With the results that come from this computerized assessment tool, educators have been able to make informed decisions based on nationally normed data and make their instruction much more student-focused.

Computer adaptive tests such as MAP have provided educators with both achievement level and growth data. For example, a sixth-grade student taking a reading MAP assessment has been given a question and LEXILE passage appropriate for the typical sixth grader. However, the assessment is able to calibrate the student's responses and change the level of question based on whether the student has gotten the questions correct or incorrect. The difficulty of subsequent questions is ultimately determined by the amount of accurate answers given by the student, thus making the assessment adaptable to the skill set of the student completing the assessment. At the end of the fall assessment, the student earns a RIT score (NWEA), a RIT band showing the range of possible student scores within the standard error of measure, a percentile ranking comparing that student to other students at his or her grade level, and a projected growth score indicating what the student needs to score on the spring assessment of MAP to achieve 1 year's growth in the subject area. The RIT score is also tied to program's Descartes Continuum of Learning. This tool has allowed educators to pinpoint the exact

skills students have been able to show mastery on in the assessment and which skills were weaknesses for the student. These data have been invaluable for educators to pinpoint and drive the instruction needed to help students improve. In addition to RIT band, the MAP reading assessment has also provided a LEXILE score and LEXILE range, thus indicating the reading ability of the student with regard to complexity of text (NWEA, 2012). The reading MAP assessment has also been able to track student LEXILE reading growth from fall to spring assessments.

In NWEA's RIT Scale Norms Studies, research has shown that low-performing and high-performing students have not tended to develop and grow at exact rates. To generalize grade-level growth for students without taking their performance levels into account has produced inaccurate data. With this in mind, NWEA has also made a scale accessible that would predict growth according to different starting points of skill levels (NWEA, 2012). This information has provided educators with yet another tool for predicting student achievement that can be utilized for many purposes when creating and planning student instruction as well as creating accountability measures for the educators to gauge effectiveness.

Silent reading benefits for middle and secondary students. SSR programs have adopted many names and formats including SSR, FVR, Providing Opportunities With Everyday Reading (POWER) and SSSR. First recommended by Lyman Hunt at the University of Vermont in the 1960s, versions of silent reading have been implemented in public school settings across America since the early 1970s (Gardiner, 2001). Although the names have differed, the intent to have students read silently on a daily basis, practice reading independently, choose their own books, and not be formally assessed on the books have been common (Gardiner, 2001). The teacher has served as a role model for

independent reading in much the same way a parent has done in the home for early childhood reading. The underlying philosophy behind the approach has been that students have to practice reading to improve in their independent reading ability. The SSSR approach has been endorsed by many advocates (Allington, 1975b; Hunt, 1970; McCracken, 1971; Towner & Evans, 1975). A noteworthy National Reading Report Card produced by National Assessment of Education Progress found that fourth-grade students who read self-selected books on a daily basis averaged higher reading scores than those students without such opportunities (Campbell & Ashworth, 1995). However, the same results were not found to be true for students in Grades 8 and 12. These national results have produced conflicting viewpoints about the effectiveness of SSSR at the secondary level (Moje et al., 2000). Borrowing from the studies on young children, most researchers have acknowledged the common sense opinion that teachers of adolescent students should draw widely from texts that adolescents find interesting and give them choices on how they represent their learning from those texts. Texts that teenagers have chosen to read, even those from online sources, comics, and magazines, engage them in the reading process and increase motivation to read (Moje et al., 2000). Arthur (1995) studied the link between silent reading and attitudes about reading. Interestingly, she found that silent reading had benefits beyond just changing attitudes. Studies of children in kindergarten, primary, and middle grades showed that students who read voluntarily on a daily basis not only had better work habits but also had better language structure and overall school performance. In a typical SSSR program implemented with fidelity, Krashen (2004) found that middle school students read approximately one million words and learned approximately 1,000 new words per year. Arthur also found studies showing that high school students who enjoyed reading daily

read more books than their same-age peers and developed better comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary skills. One such study used a Nelson Denny Reading Test to assess rates of improvement in vocabulary and reading comprehension for high schools students in Colorado. Students who completed an 18-week silent reading program showed a 1.9 grade-level improvement, which was four times the control group's improvement (Gardiner, 2001). Likewise, in a study with high school students in Georgia which used POWER as a part of its language arts curricular program, 64% of teachers reported students' attitudes for reading had improved, while 53% reported students reading skills had improved (Weller & Weller, 1999).

Stufflebeam and the CIPP model. To make intelligent choices, leaders must have accurate information as to assess the overall effectiveness of programs (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). This is the purpose of a program evaluation. Evaluation in general is defined as "identification, clarification, and application of defensible criteria to determine an evaluation objects value (worth or merit) in relation to those criteria" (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004, p. 5). Just as all school administrators should utilize data to make decisions about curriculum, leaders also need to be aware of methods to adequately vet programs for effectiveness. The purpose is the difference between research and evaluation. Research is meant to add to the knowledge of a field or growth of a theory. Though a program evaluation may also add to the base of knowledge, this is not the actual intent but more of a bi-product. The intent of evaluation is to help the stakeholders make a decision regarding effectiveness and, thus, viability of a specific program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). In this situation, the product is evaluated on a specific population that is being served in an alternative school.

The evaluation method used in this specific evaluation was Stufflebeam's CIPP

model. In 1971, Stufflebeam developed the CIPP model. This was developed in response to the need for evaluation models that would be more informative for decision making as opposed to just measuring (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). The major objective of this particular evaluation system is to maximize information available to enhance the decision-making ability for those considering a program or application. The Stufflebeam CIPP model is centered around planning and optimizing the development of initiatives in a timely and efficient manner (Randal, 1969). The CIPP model is divided into four distinct categories that are designed to classify the data into different categorical orientations. The four kinds of evaluation–context evaluation, input evaluation, process evaluation, and product evaluation–each have a unique purpose and serve the stakeholders in an individual and unique way (Randal, 1969).

The first category is context evaluation.

> To serve problem priority decisions the information needs to include knowledge both of constraints of the organization and of the conditions that exist in the general problem area, assuming that not all components of the problem could be attacked initially. (Randal, 1969, p. 2)

To adequately implement any program, one must consider the issues or priorities that are intended to be addressed as well as the constraints that the intervention must overcome to be successful. A major contributor of this type of information will be committees, research surveys, literature, or expert opinion (Randal, 1969).

The second category of Stufflebeam's CIPP model is the input evaluation. After defining needs and considering organizational assets and potential interventions, using input evaluation helps the managers to select a strategy that is appropriate. This is usually done by measuring expense or time and resources and then comparing this to

other options or strategies. This is the phase of the process where the actual plan is created. Then this plan is utilized to implement the process evaluation that begins the action (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004).

The third component of the CIPP model is the evaluation of the process. "Process information consists of the evidence needed to determine effectiveness in attaining the objectives and other information about how the test is being conducted" (Randal, 1969, p. 3). This poses the question of whether the application or intervention was implemented with fidelity in the manner it was designed to be. This phase of the evaluation analyzes if the steps were followed consistently and according to the parameters of the application and if these parameters were adhered to with changes in personnel and leadership.

The fourth and final phase of the CIPP model is to evaluate the product. This step is to measure or evaluate if the program reached the intended goals or objectives. This step collects information that will be utilized to determine the impact of the intervention. By collecting information "called product information, entails not only evidence about effectiveness in attaining short- and long-range goals, but also effectiveness over a several-month or year time period compared with that of another program or strategy" (Randal, 1969, p. 6). The comparison is made to gauge the effectiveness of the application or program as compared to another strategy. The attempt here is to obtain convincing evidence that the program will attain its objectives and, moreover, that those objectives are worthy and reasonable when compared with other methods.

The utilization of all four of these steps helps to formulate an analysis of a program from top to bottom. The information collected can weigh and compare the program evaluated against other strategies that may be competing for utilization. This is yet another attempt to create more data-driven rationales for utilizing certain programs

instead of others.

Conclusion

In summary, this evaluation explored the effectiveness of an alternative school's program of a "read to learn" application. The effectiveness was measured by comparing the reading growth of high school students in an alternative school setting where course content was delivered through an online curriculum delivery model and students received specific daily interventions through a defined SSSR program to those who were in a traditional school model where this application was not the normal protocol. A thorough review of the literature around adolescent reading growth supports the notion that daily immersion in content reading with strategic support by either a teacher or the online curriculum program could produce gains in reading levels. Further, daily SSSR where students can choose texts that interest them and texts that match their independent reading levels has been shown to consistently improve the reading abilities of younger students. However, studies on high school students with SSSR have produced mixed results on growth measures. The evaluation of this program added to the body of literature on the conditions that produce reading growth in high school students. Further, depending upon the outcomes, it helped to validate or challenge the use of online curriculum delivery models to address high school course credit.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study was a program evaluation to determine the impact of a "read to learn" application on the reading levels of a population of students at an alternative school. The evaluation was conducted utilizing an evaluation technique developed by Stufflebeam (2005), which included "a process of delineating, obtaining, reporting and applying descriptive and judgmental information about some object's merit, worth, probability, and significance to guide decision making, support accountability, disseminate effective practices, and increase understanding of the involved phenomena" (p. 61). By utilizing Stufflebeam's model, the program was evaluated utilizing the four components: context, input, process, and product (CIPP) evaluation. "In general, these four parts of an evaluation respectively ask, What needs to be done? How should it be done? Is it being done? Did it succeed?" (Stufflebeam, 2002, p. 1). This study ultimately explored the product of a "read to learn" model and measured the reading growth of high school students in an alternative school setting where course content was delivered through an online curriculum delivery model and students received specific daily interventions through a defined SSSR program. The purpose of the study was to gauge the effectiveness and viability of this program by determining if students who were exposed to reading as the primary mode of learning in all content areas for a sustained interval of time and who participated in daily SSSR for leisure had significant growth in reading LEXILE levels and overall reading achievement as measured by the nationally normed MAP assessment and the Scholastic SRI. This ultimately determined the impact of the application on these alternative school students.

Data Analysis Format

The study was conducted utilizing the Stufflebeam CIPP model to analyze and examine this program by measuring the RIT band-level change of a representative student sample attending a single alternative high school (as measured by the spring 2013 to spring 2014 MAP reading assessment and SRI LEXILE assessment). The researcher used quantitative and/or qualitative measures to analyze the four areas of the CIPP process. Quantitative measures were used in the product phase to evaluate reading ability and LEXILE level at two points in time (spring and again during the following spring assessments). The method employed LEXILE academic scales and normative achievement data to answer the question of whether the combined use of SSSR and the online content area reading achieved specific, measurable reading level increases. Qualitative research methods such as interviews of district- and school-level staff were used to evaluate context, input, and processes used in the alternative school's "read to learn" model.

Context evaluation. The context of the study assessed the needs, assets, and problems within the defined environment (Stufflebeam, 2005). The program evaluation analyzed the following research question related to the context analysis.

Research Question 1. What was the rationale for the "read to learn" model including both the online content reading and the SSSR?

Research Question 1 from the context section examined the district's rationale for implementing the "read to learn" model which consists of an online academic curriculum and a self-selected SSR block on a daily basis at the alternative school. These were the two distinct reading components that made up the "read to learn" program. This research question sought to establish the district's rationale for both of the components of this

"read to learn" model: using online curriculum through a blended approach for course delivery and specifically its selection of Apex as the curriculum vendor for the alternative school and the addition of the SSR portion of the model. To adequately explore the context of the selection of the online curriculum, the researcher interviewed the team of administrators who selected the online curriculum approach for content delivery at this alternative school. To answer the first part of this evaluation question, the researcher interviewed the Director of Student Services, Director of Secondary Education, selected secondary administrators involved in the research and planning of the program, and the Director of Instructional Technology who conducted the review of various curriculum options and ultimately selection of the online vehicle for content delivery. The interviews for this section sought to establish the district's rationale for implementing the "read to learn" model for course delivery at the alternative school. To adequately explore this, the interview questions focused on specific needs considered during the selection of this platform for delivery (Appendix A). In addition, the interview format inquired as to the vision of the leadership and the rationale for the input associated with creating a "read to learn" program for expelled students.

The interview questions focused on specific reasons for selection of this platform for delivery over the other curricula that were available and were as follows:

1. What is your title and position?
2. What part did you play in the designing and implementation of the Last Chance Academy?
3. What research was completed to determine the model for the program?
4. Was there a specific reason that the alternative school was equipped with an online option for content delivery?

5. What was your vision for the alternative school during the designing phase?
6. How have the school and the programs that are offered in the school fit into your original vision?

The second part of Research Question 1 of the context of the "read to learn" program being studied concerned the addition of the daily SSSR approach. This research question analyzed the school-level staff's rationale for creating a daily SSSR period whereby students could self-select reading material based on interest. To this end, the researcher interviewed school-level staff who were instrumental in the addition of this component of the "read to learn" model: the Director of the Alternative School program and teachers on staff. These qualitative interviews were to determine the reasons and objectives for creation of the daily SSSR period (Appendix B). This interview focused on selection and criteria for the selection of the addition of this component to the "read to learn" model. The interview format focused on evaluating the context of the program being studied which is the addition of the daily SSSR approach. This second part of Research Question 1 analyzed the school's rationale for creating a daily SSSR period whereby students could self-select reading material based on interest. The researcher interviewed the leadership behind this addition, who was the Director of the Alternative School program, and the staff who were responsible for determining the reasons and objectives for creating the daily SSSR period. This interview focused on selection and criteria for this selection (Appendix B). The questions asked were as follows:

1. What is your title and position?
2. What part did you play in the designing and implementation of the "read to learn" model at this alternative school?
3. What research was completed to determine the model for the program?

4. Was there a specific reason that this specific "read to learn" model was employed?
5. How was the SSSR addition decided upon when choosing the reading intervention for the alternative school?
6. What was your vision for the SSSR model during the designing phase?
7. How has this reading intervention fit into your original vision?

The information provided by the school staff such as person interviewed, common themes, and frequency was presented in a table format (see Sample Table 1).

Sample Table 1

Context Evaluation: Rationale for "Read to Learn" Model (online curriculum)

Themes	Person Reporting	Frequency

Input evaluation. Input evaluation assessed competing strategies of the selected approach (Stufflebeam, 2005). The input evaluation segment of this study explored the impact of implementing a "read to learn" model in the alternative school setting with regard to the selection of a particular online curriculum vendor for content delivery and unique characteristics about the "read to learn" model that made it appropriate for this school and students. Students transitioning to the alternative school setting where online "read to learn" was the primary vehicle for learning the curriculum encountered significant changes in their daily reading demand; therefore, the input phase of the study also explored the differences introduced into the new model. Overall, the input analysis measured if the "read to learn" approach was selected thoughtfully and was appropriately selected for the population attending the alternative school. This program evaluation analyzed the following research questions related to the input analysis.

Research Question 2. Were other "read to learn" models explored, and, if so, why was this particular online curriculum selected?

Research Question 3. What were the unique features about this "read to learn" model?

Research Question 2 focused on the different online curriculum vendors the district explored. To determine why Apex was selected, district-level administrators were interviewed regarding the process, the strengths and weaknesses, and the final rationale for selecting the application (Appendix A). The questions asked were as follows:

1. Why was the Apex curriculum selected when choosing the online delivery platform for the alternative school?
2. What was your vision for the alternative school during the designing phase?

The information provided by the district staff such as person interviewed, common themes, and frequency was presented in a table format (see Sample Table 2).

Sample Table 2

Input Evaluation: Other Online "Read to Learn" Models Explored & Selection of Apex

Theme	Person Reporting	Frequency

Research Question 2 explored the perceived differences teachers and administrators observed in the reading demands of students in the alternative school setting with the "read to learn" model and the SSSR requirement. In interviews, school-level teachers and administers were asked to list characteristics and features of the alternative school "read to learn" application. Because each teacher and administrator had many different teaching experiences other than the alternative school where the

application was being administered, their perceptions of the differences in the reading demand for students were appropriate and valid. The answers provided by staff were transcribed verbatim if the interview was conducted in person, or typed by the interviewee if the interview occurred via email (Appendix B). The question asked was as follows:

1. What are some notable differences about this "read to learn" model?

The answers were analyzed to get a general sense of the range of responses about the characteristics and differences they perceived and then shortened into chunks of responses by labeling them with a term or phrase that characterizes the response (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 171). These responses were presented in a table showing each interviewee's perceptions of the characteristics and unique differences about the alternative school. The information provided by the school staff such as person interviewed, common themes, and frequency was presented in a table format (see Sample Tables 3 and 4).

Sample Table 3

Input Evaluation: Specific Unique Features About This "Read to Learn" Model

Themes	Person Reporting	Frequency

Sample Table 4

Input Evaluation: Perceived Differences Teachers and Administrators Observed

Themes	Persons Reporting	Frequency

Process evaluation. Process evaluation assessed the implementation of the application being evaluated (Stufflebeam, 2005). Within the CIPP model, this phase

evaluated the consistency and fidelity of the actions that were implemented. Specifically, the program evaluation analyzed the following research questions related to the process analysis.

Research Question 4. Was the "read to learn" model implemented with consistency and fidelity?

Research Question 5. What would be done differently if this intervention were replicated?

Both process questions were answered using qualitative data collected through staff and administrative interviews at the building level. Information for each question was collected through face-to-face interviews (Appendix C). The questions asked in Research Question 4 regarding fidelity and consistency were as follows:

1. Describe how the faculty was prepared for this program?
2. Who conducted the training?
3. How many times have you had opportunities to participate in training?
4. Would you have liked more training on this model?
5. Were the trainers adequately prepared to deliver quality instruction?
6. Was the training theoretical or application-based?
7. Were other resources available to assist you after training? If so, what kind?
8. Was the staff engaged in the training?
9. Were there opportunities to ask questions before, during, and after implementation?
10. Is there effective 2-way communication when questions are asked?

Research Question 5 analyzed the implementation also by the interview format (Appendix C). Information for each question was collected through face-to-face

interviews. The questions asked in Research Question 5 regarding changes for future implementation were as follows:

1. Was the implementation of the program impacted by practical/institutional problems? If so, can you list some?
2. Were there environmental factors that inhibited the implementation? If so, can you list some?
3. Did the application decrease or increase your workload? How so?
4. What were problems with utilizing the program given?
5. Was the model difficult to learn?
6. Which parts were the most difficult?
7. Was the instruction continuous throughout the process or did it end after the training?

Answers to the questions were recorded verbatim and presented in three separate tables organized by the research question. The information provided by the school staff such as person interviewed, common themes, and frequency was presented in a table format (see Sample Tables 5, 6, and 7).

Sample Table 5

Process Evaluation: Quality and Consistency of Training for the "Read to Learn" Model

Themes	Person Reporting	Frequency

Sample Table 6

Process Evaluation: Quality and Consistency of Implementation for the "Read to Learn" Model

Themes	Person Reporting	Frequency

Sample Table 7

Process Evaluation: Sustainability of the "Read to Learn" Model

Theme	Person Reported	Frequency

Product evaluation. Product evaluation assessed the outcomes of the selected approach (Stufflebeam, 2005). The product evaluation phase of this study was central in determining if the "read to learn" and SSSR applications were successful for the at-risk student population of the alternative school. The effectiveness of the model was measured quantitatively to determine the extent to which the online curriculum delivery model and SSSR practice had a positive impact on the reading achievement of the alternative high school students. This study utilized quantitative measures in a preexperimental design model (0 X 0) in which subjects were given a pretest, an experimental treatment, and a posttest (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The pre and posttest measures will provide growth data in reading achievement (i.e., RIT percentile ranking) and reading level (i.e., LEXILE level). Specifically, the researcher sought to answer these product questions:

Research Question 6. What impact did the "read to learn" model have on MAP reading scores of students?

Research Question 7. What were the changes in LEXILE scores of students

exposed to the “read to learn” model?

To quantify and make generalizations regarding the product, question 6 was answered by comparing the pre and postscores of NWEA’s MAP Reading Assessment from spring 2013 to spring 2014. NWEA’s nationally normed RIT score quantified students’ skills in four reading subscales including literary text reading, informational texts reading, vocabulary, and research. The final reading RIT score percentile ranking was recorded to show how the student performed compared to other students across the nation at that same grade level. Growth in reading achievement was determined by analyzing the change in each student’s percentile rank from spring-to-spring administrations of the MAP reading assessment. The MAP Assessment was administered in spring 2013 prior to the student’s entrance into the Last Chance Academy and prior to consistent exposure to the “read to learn” model. A posttest after exposure to the program was administered in the spring 2014. In order to be counted in the data, students with a minimum of 12 weeks exposure to the application of the “read to learn” model were established. The students’ percentile rankings before and after the program were also measured. Lastly, LEXILE scores before and after exposure to the application were also recorded. The reading level was measured using the Scholastic SRI LEXILE range ranking which showed each student’s LEXILE range at the end of exposure to the “read to learn” model.

The growth in reading achievement was documented by comparing a student’s spring RIT percentile ranking on the MAP reading assessment with the spring reading RIT percentile ranking of the subsequent year. Tests developed by NWEA use a scale called RIT to measure student achievement and growth. RIT stands for Rasch Unit, which is a measurement scale developed to simplify the interpretation of test scores. The

RIT score relates directly to the curriculum scale in each subject area. It is an equal-interval scale, so scores can be added together to calculate accurate class or school averages (NWEA, 2012). A student's individual RIT score determines the percentile rank across four reading subscales: vocabulary, literary texts, informational texts, and research. The RIT score documents how a student is performing in those areas at the beginning and end of the year compared to students at the same grade level nationally. Theoretically, if instruction is effective, a student's RIT score and corresponding percentile ranking should improve by the end of an instructional period. The NWEA (2012) tool also provides schools with each student's individual growth data by pinpointing where a student is performing in the fall and where he or she should be performing in the spring to show 1 year's growth in reading. Growth projections in the MAP assessment are generally based on 32-36 weeks of instruction. For comparison purposes in this study, the reading achievement results (i.e., RIT percentile rankings on the MAP reading assessment and RIT 1-year growth) were reported from two points in time, the spring and subsequent spring MAP testing. Spring-to-spring percentile results were then compared, and the amount of change was calculated and analyzed for significance. Once the RIT score percentile was calculated for the sample group, the change was measured and then analyzed to evaluate if the change was significant enough to attribute to the application. Thus, the change in RIT score performance from spring to subsequent spring MAP reading assessments documented the students' growth as a result of exposure to the application in the alternative school while participating in the "read to learn" model. A sample of the data collection format on reading achievement by RIT score and RIT percentile ranking is presented in tables below.

Spring-to-spring RIT scores and percentile rankings were reported for the year the

student attended the alternative school setting where they received the experimental treatment for a minimum of 12 weeks. The recorded data were the student code, spring pretest score, the subsequent spring posttest score, spring pretest percentile, and the subsequent spring posttest percentile. A sample of the data collection format is presented below in Sample Table 8.

Sample Table 8

Product: Reading Achievement Alternative Setting: RIT Score, Percentile, & Growth

Code	Spring RIT Pretest	Spring RIT Posttest	Change	Percentile Pretest	Percentile Posttest	Change
1						
2						
Average Change RIT/%tile for Sample:						

The researcher sought to determine if there was a significant difference in the RIT percentile achievement gains made in the alternative school setting as a result of the "read to learn" model. The significance of the difference in RIT score was then measured by conducting the *t* test. The data was recorded in a table format and indicated the growth variance, the minimum variance to be considered significant, and if the change was great enough to be considered significant (see Sample Table 9). The same data were recorded regarding RIT percentile (see Sample Table 10).

Sample Table 9

Product: RIT Growth Significance

RIT t Stat:

Minimum variance for significance (t Critical):

Is this considered significant?

Sample Table 10

Product: RIT Percentile Growth Significance

RIT Percentile t Stat:
Minimum variance for significance (*t* Critical):
Is this considered significant?

Research Question 7 in the product phase was answered by comparing the pre and postscores on the Scholastic SRI, which reported specific LEXILE reading levels. All students in the program were administered the SRI assessment at the beginning of their tenure with the Last Chance Academy. Students were given a posttest in their final week of the program in June 2014 if they successfully completed the school year without being expelled or removed for other reasons such as returning to their home school, moving, or incarceration. This limited the sample to 13 students because many students did not finish the school year that ran through the summer. In order to count in the data, students had to be present at the end of the school year and have a minimum of 12 weeks of exposure to the "read to learn" model. LEXILE levels at the beginning and end the program as well as growth were recorded in a table.

The application's effect on growth in reading level was documented by determining the quantified impact of the "read to learn" model. The sample group (students attending the alternative program and exposed to the application for a minimum of 12 weeks) had their LEXILE scores (pretest) from the beginning of their tenure with the Last Chance Academy through the end of the school year administration (posttest) to obtain the final LEXILE score on the SRI reading assessment measured. The change in LEXILE levels indicates the complexity of text a student can independently read at the

beginning of the school year with the complexity of text he or she can read at the end of the year. Theoretically, if instruction is effective for students, LEXILE levels at the end of the period of instruction should increase. Student results in LEXILE levels were reported numerically (i.e., 900L). The higher the score, the greater the complexity of text the reader can independently handle. For comparison purposes in this study, LEXILE results were measured from specific testing points in time, entry into the Last Chance Academy and completion of the Last Chance Academy with a minimum of 12 weeks in between. From this, a range of growth was calculated. After final SRI administration, the growth ranges were calculated and compared for the change in scores, thus indicating the extent of the impact of the "read to learn" model. Once this comparison of average growth ranges was calculated, the numerical value comparison was then utilized to indicate the effectiveness of the studied application on LEXILE scores. This score documented the difference in LEXILE level averages for the exposed students in LEXILE level averages. The data recorded was the student code, spring pretest score, the subsequent spring posttest score, and the total change. A sample of the data collection format is presented below in Sample Table 11.

Sample Table 11

Product: Student LEXILE Growth – Alternative School Environment

Student	Initial LEXILE Level	Spring LEXILE Level	Total Change
1			
2			
Average LEXILE change for sample:			

From this comparison, the researcher sought to determine if there was a significant difference in the LEXILE gains made in the alternative school setting as a result of the online "read to learn" and reading for pleasure curriculum.

Finally, Research Question 7 of the product phase was answered by applying a *t* test to the MAP percentile reading achievement data and SRI LEXILE data on each student to determine if there was a significant change in the reading growth of students after the application of the "read to learn" program. The average growth of the sample group was then determined to measure if there was a significant difference in growth that could be attributed to the application. This analysis was done by conducting a statistical analysis utilizing a *t* test to decide if there was a significant difference in LEXILE level average, thus indicating the application's impact on the students' growth with regard to text complexity. The data were recorded in a table format and indicated the growth variance, the minimum variance to be considered significant, and if the change was great enough to be considered significant (see Sample Table 12).

Sample Table 12

Product: LEXILE Growth Significance

LEXILE *t* Stat:
Minimum variance for significance (*t* Critical):
Is this considered significant?

***T*-test statistical analysis.** This research utilized a *t* test to analyze the data from the pre and postadministration of the MAP assessment. The *t* test was utilized to assess whether the groups of test scores were statistically significantly different. The group in this particular study was the same population in the same environments but after an

application of a “read to learn” model was applied. To be concise, the *t* test compared the statistical significance of the difference in reading growth of the same students at different points in their academic careers as well as in different learning environments. The *t* test was appropriate for this research because it was utilized to compare the means of two different sets of data; for instance, and in this case, comparing scores of a pre and postassessment for a sample exposed to a different treatment in a different learning environment. The *t* test was appropriate for analyzing the posttest experimental design and although this research aimed to measure the same populations, the sample is exposed to an application within the learning environment. The program was evaluated for effectiveness by analyzing quantitative data according to specific reading data and the significance of the comparative difference between the two groups.

One of the features of utilizing the *t* test was that it not only compared the mean scores between the groups but also compared the variability within each of the mean scores. This allowed the data to be more accurate and paint a more complete picture. This is because the *t* test determined the difference between the mean scores relative to the variability of these scores.

When the statistical analysis formula was calculated, a ratio was utilized. The numerator in this ratio was the difference between the two mean scores (average scores). The denominator in this ratio was to accurately measure and take into account the variability of the scores. This created the signal-to-noise ratio that allowed the researcher to more accurately analyze the difference between the groups.

To calculate the signal, the difference between the mean scores was calculated. However to calculate the noise, the variance between the scores was measured. This was where the standard error was calculated (noise). The total extent of variance was added

together and divided by the total number of participants. Then these values were added together and the square root was taken, thus giving a calculated value for standard error.

Once these values were calculated, the *t*-test formula was utilized to calculate the significance of the *t* value. Once the *t* value was calculated (whether positive or negative), the value was referenced to a table of significance to indicate whether the ratio value was a chance finding or if it was significant. For this to be measured, a risk level (alpha level) has to be set, and the typical alpha level is .05. This indicated that five of 100 times there would be a significant difference found even if none exists (by chance). Once the alpha level and the *t* value were determined, the degrees of freedom (df) was the only variable left to determine before analysis of the significance was determined. This variable was calculated by the sum of participants in the study minus two. Once the alpha level, the df, and the *t* value were calculated, a standard table of significance was utilized to determine if the *t* value was large enough to be considered significant.

Sample Population

The study utilized a stratified sampling technique to determine the participants. A stratified sample is a subset of students who share at least one specific characteristic. The students in the sample population had to meet more than one certain criterion for inclusion in this study. The participants for this sample were limited by different categories of criteria. The first category was that the students were in Grades 9 and 10 and attended the alternative school setting. The next was that the students ended the school year with pre and postreading MAP assessment and SRI measurement to measure their growth during the year that they attended the alternative school. This criterion was essential to determine the growth in LEXILE level and reading achievement as measured by the initial pretest and subsequent posttest on the Scholastic SRI assessment as well as

the MAP assessment for students participating in the experimental treatment ("read to learn" model that consists of daily "read to learn" and SSSR for pleasure). Lastly, the sample population was further limited to students who met these other criteria and who also had a minimum of 12 weeks attending the alternative school, thus being exposed to the application. These criteria were needed to adequately measure the growth made by individual students in the alternative school that employed the "read to learn" model.

Conclusion

This chapter summarized the techniques for the collection of data to properly evaluate the implementation of a "read to learn" model at an alternative school called the Last Chance Academy. Through a series of qualitative and quantitative measures, the program was evaluated according to Stufflebeam's CIPP model that evaluates four specific components: context, input, process and product. Each of the data from these categories was then analyzed to evaluate the program's components to monitor the rationale for the model, the competing strategies, and fidelity of implementation as well as if the program met its intended objectives.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This study was a program evaluation to determine the impact of a "read to learn" model on the reading levels of a group of students who had deficits in reading at an alternative school. The "read to learn" model consisted of two primary components: an online content area reading component for course credits and a SSSR component to address reading fluency and reading motivation. This model was selected because its specific features met the needs of both the alternative school program and the designated student population. When selecting the model, the district committee took several issues into consideration such as the fluidity of the student body, the wide variety of reading levels and learning skills of the students who participated in the program, and a limited budget to get the program implemented. Initial assessments of the district indicated that the "read to learn" model addressed these specific parameters because it created a personalized system that could be very flexible with regards to the pace of the students, the variety of class opportunities, and the minimal staffing resources that were needed for full implementation. However, the district did not initially assess questions about the effectiveness of the "read to learn" model on the academic reading levels of participating students. Specifically, did the model implemented by the district have the additional benefit of raising students' reading levels while it also addressed the high school credit needs of participating high school students? These are students who were in need of an educational opportunity to gain some type of high school credential. By utilizing Stufflebeam's CIPP model, this program evaluation was designed to assess the overall effectiveness and viability of the "read to learn" model on the reading levels of students in a particular alternative school setting. The evaluation was intended for "delineating,

obtaining, reporting and applying descriptive and judgmental information" about the "read to learn" model's merit, worth, probability, and significance (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014, p. 14). The evaluation also provided guidance on future decision making, accountability, dissemination, and increased understanding of the "read to learn" model for the alternative school setting. To adequately gauge the impact of the "read to learn" program, qualitative and quantitative evidences were gathered. Qualitative evidence was gathered from multiple interviews from building-level staff as well as district office staff responsible for the design and implementation of the model. Common themes that were determined by multiple mentions during the interviews were analyzed from the interview responses to evaluate the context, input, and process of the model. Quantitative data were analyzed in the product component of the program evaluation. These data were generated from nationally normed reading assessments with students who participated in reading as the primary mode of learning in all content areas for a minimum of 12 weeks and who participated in daily SSSR for leisure. The growth in reading LEXILE levels and overall reading achievement as measured by the nationally normed MAP assessment and the SRI were examined. Ultimately, this program evaluation determined the impact of the "read to learn" that included an online curriculum and a self-selected reading application on these alternative school students' overall reading growth.

Data Analysis

Context evaluation. The context of the study assessed the needs, assets, and problems within a defined environment (Stufflebeam, 2005). In the portion of the evaluation, the researcher sought to determine the following:

1. What was the rationale for the "read to learn" model including both the online content reading and the SSSR?

To partially answer Research Question 1, Table 13 illustrates the answers generated from interviews of district-level staff regarding the online content reading component of the "read to learn" model. School-level staff had no context for the selection of the online curriculum model because it was selected prior to their being hired for the program. Therefore, five people from the central office who were involved in the initial research and development of the alternative program were interviewed. These individuals included the Director of Instructional Technology and Professional Development (listed in Table 13 as I.T. Director), a former school-level principal, the Executive Director of Student Services (listed in Table 13 as S.S. Director), the Executive Director of Secondary Schools (listed in Table 13 as Secondary Director), and the Superintendent of Schools. Each individual was interviewed in a one-to-one format and was asked what role they played in the design and implementation of the "read to learn" model, what research was completed to determine the model, what specific reasons existed for the selection of an online curriculum (specifically the Apex curriculum), what the vision of the program was, and whether the alternative school model that was ultimately implemented met the expectations of the vision (Appendix A).

Responses from these individuals provided the answer to Research Question 1 in the context of the program evaluation as it related to the rationale for the online content area reading component of the "read to learn" model. Table 13 indicates the pervasive themes provided in the interview, the person(s) who cited the theme, and the frequency of each cited theme. If more than one interviewee provided a similar statement, it was summarized by the researcher into a thematic statement. Themes are statements that are shared on more than one occasion during the interview. If one interviewee only provided a statement that the researcher considered significant, it was presented for information in

the discussion below the table but was not considered a significant theme.

Table 13

Context Evaluation: Rationale for "Read to Learn" Model (online curriculum)

Themes	Person Reporting	Frequency
Flexibility of place for content	I.T. Director, principal, Secondary Director	3
Flexibility of pace of content	I.T. Director, principal, S.S. Director, Superintendent	4
Affordability and flexibility for Staffing the program	Principal, Secondary Director, Superintendent	3
Engaging and rigorous content	I.T. Director, Secondary Director, Superintendent	3
Variety of presentation modalities to differentiate learning	I.T. Director, principal, S.S. Director, Secondary Director	4
Convenience of predesigned content allowed teachers to focus on customizing learning	I.T. Director, principal, Secondary Director, Superintendent	4

Some answers provided by the five interviewees were single answers that could not be categorized into the themes above. The I.T. Director described as part of his rationale that the online content provided numerous opportunities for students to reread, relearn, and reassess throughout the learning process. The Student Services Director noted that the online curriculum in this "read to learn" model was already used successfully in the district in another setting, which increased the credibility of the approach.

The second part of Research Question1 asked what the rationale was for the "read to learn" model as it applied to the SSSR component. Table 14 lists the responses

provided by the school-level staff who were responsible for the development of the SSSR component of the "read to learn" model. These individuals included the director of the alternative school and four teachers in the program. The four teachers interviewed were full-time employees and represented each content area (listed in Table 14 as Teacher 1–math, Teacher 2–science, Teacher 3–social studies, Teacher 4–English). All school-level individuals were interviewed in a one-to-one format (Appendix B).

Table 14 indicates the common responses provided in the interview, the person(s) who cited the theme, and the frequency of responses. If more than one interviewee provided a similar statement, it was summarized into one thematic statement by the researcher. If only a single interviewee provided a statement, it was presented for information below the table but was not considered as a significant theme.

Table 14

Context Evaluation: Rationale for "Read to Learn" Model (SSSR)

Theme	Person Reporting	Frequency
Used in previous setting	Director, Teacher 1, Teacher 2 Teacher 4	4
Extended time to read more helped kids learn to read better	Director, Teacher 3, Teacher 4	3
Encouraged choice in reading	Director, Teacher 4	2
Allowed teachers to model reading	Director, Teacher 2, Teacher 4	3
Encouraged reading for pleasure	Director, Teacher 2, Teacher 3 Teacher 4	4

Some answers provided by the interviewees were single answers and were not represented on the table. For example, Teacher 3 (social studies) indicated that he

believed a strong rationale for the SSSR model was to provide the alternative school students with an opportunity to read that they would otherwise not have because the majority did not have access to high interest books on their level in the home.

Input evaluation. In Stufflebeam's (2005) model, input analysis has been used to assess the competing strategies, work plans, and budget considerations for the selected approach (Stufflebeam, 2005). In this program evaluation, the input analysis sought to determine the following key research questions.

2. Were other "read to learn" options explored, and, if so, why was this particular online curriculum selected?
3. What were the unique features about this "read to learn" model?

Table 15 indicates the common responses provided in the interview, the person(s) who cited the theme, and the frequency of responses. If more than one interviewee provided a similar statement, it was summarized into one thematic statement by the researcher. Table 15 illustrates the answers provided by district-level administrators on the considerations for other competing online curriculum vendors in the original design and development of the "read to learn" model for this alternative school setting. School-level staff members were not a part of the original selection on the online curriculum vendor that comprised this school's "read to learn" model. Therefore, the five district-level administrators' responses were considered for this question. Each administrator was interviewed in a one-to-one setting and was asked what research was conducted by the district on different online curriculum vendors and what specific attributes of the Apex curriculum led to its selection (Appendix A). Table 15 indicates the pervasive themes provided in the interview, the person(s) who cited the theme, and the number of persons giving similar comments was cited. If more than one interviewee provided a

similar statement, it was summarized by the researcher into a thematic statement. If one interviewee only provided a statement, it was presented for information below the table but was not considered a significant theme.

Table 15

Input Evaluation: Other Online "Read to Learn" Models Explored & Selection of Apex

Theme	Person Reporting	Frequency
Other programs reviewed included WebCT, Blackboard, NovaNet, Plato	I.T. Director, Secondary Director, S.S. Director, Principal	4
Apex–ease of use	I.T. Director, Secondary Director	2
Apex–self-paced and mastery-based	I.T. Director, Secondary Director,	2
Apex–quality and rigor of content	I.T. Director, Principal, Secondary Director,	3
Apex–breadth of courses offered	I.T. Director, Principal, Secondary Director	3
Apex–access to training and familiarity with vendor	Principal, S.S. Director, Superintendent	3

Some answers provided by the interviewees were single answers and were not represented on the table. For example, the principal noted in her interview that the cost of Apex and its alignment to current course syllabi in the traditional school environment were important factors in the ultimate selection of this online "read to learn" vendor. The Director of Secondary Schools noted that the online curriculum was necessary in this "read to learn" model because it offered immediate feedback for incorrect answers, multiple versions of quizzes and tests, and opportunities for relearning and retesting

within the learning management system. The superintendent noted that the district consulted with the League of Innovative Schools as a resource to determine if the use of an online curriculum in the alternative school setting was appropriate. In fact, this body of educators also endorsed the use of the Apex curriculum.

To answer Research Question 3 regarding specific unique characteristics of this "read to learn" model, interviews with school-level staff were conducted. Each staff member including the alternative school director and four content-area teachers (listed in Table 16 as Teacher 1–math, Teacher 2–science, Teacher 3–social studies, Teacher 4–English) were interviewed in a one-to-one format. Additionally, each was asked if there were specific notable traits of the "read to learn" model implemented at the alternative school setting. Though the interview questions were designed to note and explore unique traits of the "read to learn" model, many of the interviewees compared the "read to learn" model to the model implemented in the traditional school setting. In answering this primary question, the staff had to consider the differences in both components of the "read to learn" model (i.e., the online curriculum delivery to learn content and the SSSR). Table 16 indicates the pervasive themes that show the difference in the "read to learn" model, the person(s) who cited the theme, and the frequency of each cited theme. If more than one interviewee provided a similar statement, it was summarized by the researcher into a thematic statement. For clarity and organizational purposes, Table 16 provides a separate breakdown on the interviewees' responses as they related to the online reading and the SSSR components of the "read to learn" model.

Table 16

Differences in the "Read to Learn" Model and the Traditional Classroom Model

Online Reading Component: Themes	Person Reporting	Frequency
Students had to read more	Director, Teacher 2 Teacher 4	3
Teachers acted as facilitators/tutors not stand-and-deliver content providers	Director, Teacher 1, Teacher 4	3
Model was differentiated to fit the range in students' skills and needs	Director, Teacher 1, Teacher 3, Teacher 4	4
SSSR Component: Themes	**Persons Reporting**	**Frequency**
Better fidelity of implementation due to small class size	Director, Teacher 1, Teacher 4	3
Greater flexibility in the schedule increased success	Teacher 2, Teacher 3	2

Process evaluation. In Stufflebeam's (2005) model, the process evaluation has been used to assess the implementation of the program being evaluated. In this program evaluation, the researcher sought to determine how the "read to learn" model was implemented and what, if any, changes were needed if the program were replicated. The key research questions in the process evaluation were as follows:

4. Was the "read to learn" model implemented with consistency and fidelity?
5. What would be done differently if the "read to learn" model were replicated?

Both process questions were answered using qualitative data collected through

staff and administrative interviews at the school level. District-level administrator interviews were not appropriate to assess the day-to-day implementation of the "read to learn" model. Information for each process question was collected through face-to-face interviews. Answers to the questions were recorded verbatim and summarized into common statements. The frequency of these statements was calculated and reported.

For question 4 that investigated the fidelity and consistency of the "read to learn" training and implementation, the following interview questions were asked of school-based staff. Interview questions 1-10 were related to the quality of training. Those questions were (1) Describe how the faculty was prepared for this program; (2) Who conducted the training; (3) How many times have you had opportunities to participate in training; (4) Would you have liked more training on the model; (5) Were the trainers adequately prepared to deliver quality instruction; (6) Was the training theoretical or application-based; (7) Were other resources available to assist you with learning and, if so, what kind; (8) Was the staff engaged in the training; (9) Were there opportunities to ask questions before, during, and after implementation; and (10) Was there effective two-way communication when questions were asked? Interview questions 11-16 were related to the quality and consistency of implementation. Those questions were (11) Was the implementation of the program impacted by practical/instructional problems? If so, can you list some; (12) Were there environmental factors that inhibited the implementation of the "read to learn" model; (13) Did the application of the "read to learn" model increase your workload? How so; (14) Were there problems with utilizing the program; (15) Was the "read to learn" model difficult to learn and implement? If so, which parts were difficult; and (16) Was instruction continuous throughout implementation or did it end after the initial training?

Table 17 indicates the common themes provided in the interview with regard to the quality and consistency of the training for the "read to learn" model in its totality (both the online curriculum and the SSSR), the person(s) who cited the theme, and the frequency of each cited theme. Table 17 summarizes the participants' answers to questions 1-10 (see Appendix B). If more than one interviewee provided a similar statement, it was summarized by the researcher into a thematic statement. If one interviewee only provided a statement, it was presented for information below the table but was not considered a significant theme. All answers provided in Table 17 were coded to designate who gave the response including the director of the alternative school, Teacher 1–math, Teacher 2–science, Teacher 3–social studies, and Teacher 4–English.

Table 17

Process Evaluation: Quality and Consistency of Training for the "Read to Learn" Model

Themes	Person Reporting	Frequency
Multiple training opportunities were provided (face to face, webinars, email)	Director, Teachers 1, 2, 3,4	5
Training was explicit and focused on teacher proficiency with the model	Director, Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Quality of training was good	Director, Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4	5
More training was needed on adolescent learning theory, reading, and accommodations	Director, Teachers 2, 4	3
No more training needed on model	Teachers 1, 3	2
Training was balanced with hands-on application and theory	Director, Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Ongoing training was collaborative	Director, Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Staff was engaged in training	Director, Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Opportunities to ask questions were provided before, during, and after	Director, Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Teachers felt they were proficient	Director, Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4	5

Some answers provided by the interviewees were single answers and were not represented on the table. For example, teacher 3 felt that a key piece to the training for the "read to learn" model was the direction and vision for increasing the amount of student reading. Teacher 1 felt that she did not need additional training because she was

well versed in all the parts of the “read to learn” curriculum. Consequently, she also reported that she did not seek out additional training opportunities and did not ask any follow-up questions after training. Teacher 1 also felt that only part of the staff was engaged in the training. Finally, teacher 2 also felt that he had to do much of his training independently, which he preferred to group training.

Table 18 indicates the common themes provided in the interview with regard to the quality and consistency of the implementation for the “read to learn” model in its totality (both the online curriculum and the SSSR), the person(s) who cited the theme, and the frequency of each cited theme. Table 18 summarizes the participants’ answers to questions 11-16 (see Appendix B). If more than one interviewee provided a similar statement, it was summarized by the researcher into a thematic statement. If one interviewee only provided a statement, it was presented for information below the table but was not considered a significant theme. All answers provided in Table 18 were coded to designate who gave the response including the director of the alternative school, Teacher 1–math, Teacher 2–science, Teacher 3–social studies, and Teacher 4–English.

Table 18

Process Evaluation: Quality and Consistency of Implementation for the "Read to Learn" Model

Themes	Person Reporting	Frequency
Institutional issues impacted implementation (funding, personnel, internet)	Director, Teacher 3, 4	3
Environmental issues impacted implementation (student home life, attendance, ability, behavior)	Director, Teacher 1, 2, 4	4
Implementation changed workload rather than increased/decreased	Director, Teacher 1, 3, 4	4
Model was easy to implement	Director, Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Common buy-in to vision impacted implementation	Director, Teacher 4	2
Collaboration continued in the implementation phase	Director, Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4	5

Some answers provided by the interviewees were singleton answers and were not represented on the table. For example, teacher 2 reported that no environmental issues with students impacted implementation; however, he qualified that response by saying that students were "more engaged in the model when they had choice in reading" during the SSSR portion of the program. He also differed from other teacher respondents by saying that the "read to learn" model decreased his workload rather than simply changing it. He stated that students were "more settled in the 'read to learn' work format because they were able to see how they could be successful." Teacher 3 commented that the program was easy to implement; however, one part of the program he found difficult was

in determining when students were not able to comprehend the content they were reading. On the whole, he found it more difficult to gauge when students did not understand in the "read to learn" model. Finally, teacher 1 was represented in Table 18 as indicating that the model was easy to learn, but she qualified that response by saying that the model provided a level of flexibility that was very different from what she was prepared for. She reported that the flexibility allowed teachers to focus on individual student needs.

Research Question 5 sought to determine the sustainability of the "read to learn" model after initial training and implementation of the program. Additionally, this research question asked what changes would be necessary in the training and implementation of the "read to learn" model in order for the model to be replicated. In this portion of the process evaluation, the researcher asked the following interview questions of the school-level administration and staff: (1) Do you consider yourself competent in delivering the "read to learn" model, (2) Was it the training or the utilization of the "read to learn" model that made you proficient, (3) Are you proficient enough to train new faculty on the "read to learn" model, and (4) Is the "read to learn" model sustainable? Table 19 indicates the themes related to these four interview questions, the respondents who reported each theme, and the frequency of each cited theme.

Table 19

Process Evaluation: Sustainability of the "Read to Learn" Model

Theme	Person Reported	Frequency
Staff had a high level of proficiency with the model	Director, Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4	5 5
A combination of training and use of the model created proficiency	Director, Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Staff is equipped to train new staff on the model	Director, Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Model is sustainable because of good training and implementation	Director, Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4	5

Product evaluation. Product evaluation assessed the outcomes of the selected approach (Stufflebeam, 2005). In Stufflebeam's (2005) model, the product evaluation has been used to assess the overall effectiveness of the "read to learn" model. In this program evaluation, the researcher sought to determine how the "read to learn" model achieved the desired outcomes that the original design and development plan set out to achieve. The key research questions in the product evaluation were as follows:

6. What impact did the "read to learn" model have on MAP reading scores of students?
7. What were the changes in LEXILE scores of students exposed to the "read to learn" model?

Both product questions were answered using quantitative data. Specifically, question 6 was answered by evaluating MAP reading achievement scores, and question 7 was measured by calculating SRI reading LEXILE levels. To analyze the first product

question, Research Question 6, the researcher utilized the MAP assessment data in the form of an RIT band and provided the researcher with a nationally normed score indicative of the students' reading achievement levels. Student achievement data on the MAP assessment was measured on a spring 2013 to spring 2014 administration.

Table 20 illustrates the scores of the pre and posttest RIT band scores according to an assigned student code. In addition, Table 20 shows the students' percentiles for both of these assessments.

Table 20

Product: Reading Achievement Alternative Setting: RIT Score, Percentile, & Growth

Code	Spring RIT Pretest	Spring RIT Posttest	Change	Percentile Pretest	Percentile Posttest	Change
1	220	221	+1	44	45	+1
2	220	231	+11	44	67	+23
3	214	212	-2	29	25	-4
4	204	206	+2	12	14	+2
5	222	196	-26	48	5	-43
6	231	213	-18	78	25	-53
7	214	214	0	31	29	-2
8	212	204	-8	24	12	-12
9	226	223	-3	67	50	-17
10	232	216	-16	80	33	-47
11	224	239	-15	54	82	+28
12	207	212	+5	19	25	+6
13	226	219	-7	60	39	-21
14	223	221	-2	52	45	-7
15	207	201	-6	15	9	-6
16	221	215	-6	54	30	-24
17	212	229	+17	16	65	+49
18	208	213	+5	17	26	+9
19	152	193	+41	1	3	+2
20	208	193	-15	21	2	-19
21	228	228	0	62	60	-2
22	202	237	+35	10	78	+68
23	223	202	-21	50	10	-40
24	223	220	+7	52	41	-11
25	213	216	+3	33	24	-9
26	212	223	+11	30	48	+18
27	206	212	+6	17	25	+8
28	194	192	-2	4	3	-1
29	210	212	+2	23	25	+2

Note. Average RIT/percentile Change .655172 Rit / -3.86207 percentile.

Table 21

RIT Growth Significance

RIT $t_{(28)}$ Stat: -0.24325

$P_{(T \leq t)}$ two-tail = .809584

Minimum variance for significance (t Critical two-tail): 2.048407

Is this considered significant? No

Since P>.05, Retain the Null Hypothesis

Table 22

RIT %tile Significance

RIT %tile $t_{(28)}$ Stat: .817255478

$P_{(T \leq t)}$ two-tail = 0.420682344

Minimum variance for significance (t Critical two-tail): 2.04840

Is this considered significant? No

Since P>.05, Retain the Null Hypothesis

For question 7, the SRI was utilized to assess student LEXILE data. The Scholastic SRI assessment data were also recorded in the form of a pre and postassessment. This assessment measures the sample of students' LEXILE levels. The LEXILE levels indicate the students' abilities to understand more complex texts. The researcher had a smaller sample for this data because the assessment is only offered at the end of the school year. Only 13 of the students who had been administered the pretest were still present at the end of the year to take the posttest. Table 23 indicates the scores

of the pre and posttest assessments according to student code. The codes did not correlate with the student codes in the earlier tables.

Table 23

Student LEXILE Change

Student Code – LEXILE	Lexile Prescore	Lexile Postscore	Change
1	1156	1125	31
2	489	587	98
3	611	655	44
4	1285	1176	-109
5	736	1111	375
6	758	889	131
7	989	940	-48
8	1179	1036	-143
9	867	1095	228
10	1162	1307	145
11	854	796	-58
12	1133	1078	-55
13	449	316	-133
Average LEXILE Change for Sample:			34.07692

Table 24

LEXILE Growth Significance

LEXILE $t_{(12)}$ Stat: . -0.794465

$P_{(T \leq t)}$ two-tail = 0.442354

Minimum variance for significance (t Critical two-tail): 2.178813

Is this considered significant? No

Since P>.05, Retain the Null Hypothesis

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data gathered for the CIPP program evaluation were gathered utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods. There were four categories of Stufflebeam's model that were included in the evaluation: context, input, process, and product. Researching and gathering data on seven research questions provided the criterion to evaluate the impact of the "read to learn" model. For the context, input, and process portions of the evaluation, district- and school-level staff were interviewed and common themes were gathered. For the product portion of the evaluation, a quantitative measure was instituted. The quantitative data were gathered from a pretest/posttest administration of MAP and SRI assessments. From these beginning and ending scores, change and significance were calculated.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

This study was a program evaluation to determine the impact of a "read to learn" application on the reading levels of a population of students at an alternative school. By utilizing Stufflebeam's CIPP model, the evaluation indicated the effectiveness and viability of this specific "read to learn" model as it was implemented in this alternative school setting. The program evaluation utilized a process of delineating, obtaining, reporting, and applying descriptive and perceptual data about the subject's merit, worth, probability, and significance. Its goal was to guide decision making and support accountability, as well as disseminate effective practices and increase understanding of the program (Stufflebeam, 2005). The evaluation examined four specific components that included context, input, process, and products of the model. In evaluating these categories, both qualitative and quantitative evidences were gathered. Qualitative evidence was generated from interviews with building-level administrators and staff as well as district office administrators responsible for the design and development of the program. From these interview transcripts, common themes were extrapolated and analyzed to provide a picture of the context, input, and process of the model. Quantitative data comprised primarily of specific reading measures applied to students who were exposed to reading as the primary mode of learning in all content areas for a minimum of 12 weeks, and those who participated in the daily SSSR were analyzed to measure the product or outputs of the "read to learn" model. The growth in reading LEXILE levels and overall reading achievement as measured by the nationally normed MAP and the Scholastic SRI assessment indicated the level of impact the "read to learn" model had on student reading achievement.

Context evaluation. The context of the study assessed the needs, assets, and problems within a defined environment (Stufflebeam, 2005). The program evaluation analyzed the following research question related to the context analysis.

Research Question 1. What was the rationale for the "read to learn" model including both the online content reading and the SSSR?

There were two distinct components of the "read to learn" model (the online content area reading and the SSSR for pleasure). Each component of the "read to learn" program was developed and implemented from a specific need based on the identified alternative school population. Both components were analyzed under the context of the phrase "read to learn" model within a single research question. This research question determined the initial rationale for the "read to learn" model in the alternative school. The question was answered by interviews from district administration and school-level staff. The district-level administrators developed the school and the "read to learn" program out of necessity for a group of students who were continuing to fall through the cracks of the traditional high school program. These students were represented in the 2008 data (the year the program was conceived) by a relatively high dropout rate at 5.3% and significant expulsion numbers at 195 students removed from school for disciplinary reasons. These data ultimately negatively impacted the graduation rates at the traditional high schools within the district where the Last Chance Academy resided. The district's graduation rate (which included three individual high schools) was 62.6% before the development of the program. The district graduation rate was significantly lower than national graduation rates, which have hovered around 70% for the last decade. Not surprisingly, students who have been pushed out of school due to escalating discipline problems contributed significantly to the lower than hoped for national graduation

statistics (Barton, 2005). Accordingly, the Last Chance Academy was designed to provide an intervention for the students in the district who were also being routinely pushed out of school due to expulsion for repeated or severe discipline problems and/or crimes in the community. These data established the quantitative need for the alternative program and created the initial context for the design and development of the Last Chance Academy and the "read to learn" model within.

First, to help determine the answer to the context question, the staff were asked for their rationale for selection of an online curriculum to deliver the academic content at the alternative school program. The rationale for the selection of an online content provider (i.e., the curriculum) was illustrated by frequency of comments that surfaced through the interviews. The first and most critical element of this selection as stated from district administrators' interviews stemmed from experience with online delivery models with at-risk students. The district had already employed a similar model of an online curriculum platform in a different educational venue and had experienced successful results with student use of the program. Answers from three district administrators (60%) indicated that an online curriculum was the best vehicle to address the populations' needs at the alternative school setting because of the fluidity of the students in and out of the program at various points in the school year, the spectrum of deficiencies exhibited by the students across the different courses offered, the wide range of courses needed for graduation, and the limited staff in the core content areas available at the alternative school due to budget constraints. In a typical scenario at the alternative school, the students entered the program whenever they were expelled from school; they came from several different grades and schools; they entered at different places in the curriculum; and they had different needs for courses based on their individual understanding of

content. For these reasons, a self-paced, well-articulated curriculum across the four major content areas (English, math, science, and social studies) was needed to accommodate the students who entered and exited the program at different times. The typical stand-and-deliver method would have been ineffective and inadequate to meet the needs of the students in this scenario. Several specific reasons for instituting an online curriculum surfaced through the interviews. From those interviewed, three themes that surfaced with a frequency of 80% of the district-level interviewed were flexibility of pace of content, variety of presentation modalities, and convenience of predesigned content allowed teachers to focus on customizing the learning.

The slightly less frequent answers (60%) were flexibility of place and affordable and engaging content. The goal was to personalize the learning by adding some flexibility; the venue was modified; and the students were able to work at home, with tutors, at the afterschool teen center, or wherever they chose to continue with their studies. Leading researchers of online learning programs have maintained that online content has the potential to be more engaging to students because today's high school learners are digital natives and already have an affinity for technology (Tapscott, 1998). With regard to affordability, staffing in the alternative school was also a determining factor for the selection of the online "read to learn" curriculum model. The "read to learn" model allowed a platform to offer targeted, individualized instruction with a limited budget as it related to staffing needs. For example, one English teacher could effectively teach English 1, English 2, English 3, and English 4 within one classroom setting in a highly personalized and differentiated manner with an online curriculum. This approach and schedule would have been virtually impossible in a traditional stand-and-deliver face-to-face model.

Though there were outliers reported in the district interviews such as the students' abilities to reread material through online curriculum and the success of the model in another school, the overarching theme regarding why the "read to learn" model was selected by the administration was to provide an affordable option that created a more individualized experience for students. This model worked for a group of students who needed a differentiated approach to learning and a different teaching method than was taking place in the traditional school environment.

The literature review on the use of online curriculum for alternative school students indicated that these attributes were critical to address the fluidity and transience of alternative school students (Watson & Gemin, 2008). According to Watson and Gemin (2008), an additional benefit was that many districts have begun to offer online credit recovery programs to at-risk students in alternative schools to help these students catch up or even get ahead in the race to graduation. The model was also selected because of the wide range of skills and content knowledge demonstrated by the alternative school student population. The features of the online curriculum model allowed the staff to address the various skill sets and needs of students on an individual basis. The individualization provided in the online system created opportunities for the students to exhibit mastery of content as they moved through the courses and only worked on those sections for which they showed a weakness in knowledge and skills. Ultimately, the district office staff inquired with other professionals across the state where online programs were being implemented in alternative school settings and discovered that this option was highly recommended and had been utilized in many other districts to meet a similar need. Prior validation of the online curriculum combined with the needs of the alternative school students made the selection of an online delivery

model an effective choice because it had already been tested and proven to work with at-risk students within the district. For example, students who were designated to have some at-risk factors had already been successful in that they were more likely to pass courses in the virtual program for credit recovery. This validates the research by Archambault et al. (2010), Ash (2010), Desai et al. (2008), and Watson and Gemin (2008) when they stated that the way we educate students has forever changed due to the influence of virtual platforms in the United States. In fact, previous research in the district of the Last Chance Academy showed the subgroup of reduced lunch had a log-odds ratio of 4.532:1. This means the odds were that at-risk students were 4.5 times more likely to pass the course than full-pay students (Huckabee, 2010). The poverty level and lunch status is highly correlated to students who typically participate in an alternative school. These data were instrumental in the decision to select this model for the Last Chance Academy. In addition, this further illustrates that Marzano's (2003) findings that virtual and traditional environments still contain the best practices needed to help students be successful in learning environments.

Further, this question inquired whether or not there was a need to add the SSSR into the "read to learn" model. The themes, which surfaced from the school-level staff interviews of those who implemented the daily SSSR, indicated that each teacher recognized a need for additional reading interventions through the baseline MAP and SRI reading inventory data. This need was also evidenced by teacher observation of the students working on Apex which showed a distinct need for the students due to the lack of their reading motivation and overt reading deficiencies. The teachers noticed that the students were exhibiting frustration with the content. The students often spoke of their lack of interest in reading. The teachers also spoke of how the students had difficulty

understanding many of the more complex terms and passages that the content offered. The curriculum framework at Last Chance Academy required students to read daily in order to learn content for course credits. This reading did not, in and of itself, address the reading motivation or reading fluency of students. The addition of the self-selected SSR component created a model that had more than one purpose. This addition was to impact students' reading enjoyment and fluency as well as give them confidence in being able to adequately navigate and utilize the online curriculum. The most frequent response (80%) was that the model had been shown to work in other venues and that the model encouraged reading for pleasure. The staff had experiences with watching this model. Staff at the Last Chance Academy reported that they were trying to ignite some passion for reading within the student body by allowing them to choose books they enjoyed on a daily basis. Krashen (2004) continued to find this was true when discussing reading habits of adolescent students. When analyzing work habits, language usage, and other positive academic habits, Krashen stated that exposure to reading has a positive impact on students' academic skill sets. This was evidenced by being mentioned by two of the school-level teachers who were partners in the development and implementation of the "read to learn" model. From the teacher observations, the English teacher suggested trying a method that she had utilized in her previous middle school placement. Through a collaborative design approach, the staff worked together to develop an SSSR period called DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time. As a team, the staff implemented a DEAR period each day. The entire staff ultimately bought into and embraced the DEAR period and implemented it across the school. The next most frequent response (60%) stated that this would help kids learn to read better and ultimately help them learn all academics better and that the SSSR time gave the staff an opportunity to model reading

for the students. This further validates the research by Allen (2000) when she spoke of clocking reading mileage. Further, this allowed the students to be able to be connected to the reading. Allington (2002) called this approach managed choice. The ability of the students to self-select the reading greatly increased their interest and ultimately increased the amount of literature that the students were able to be exposed to.

The addition of the SSSR model used at the Last Chance Academy was consistent with national research on best practices for reading interventions with adolescent struggling readers. Allington (2001), who served on the National Reading Panel, indicated in his extensive reading research that students need at least 90 minutes per day of reading on their independent reading level to improve their reading fluency and increase their LEXILE level. He maintained that students two or more grade levels behind their peers who read only at their frustration level, which describes most high school academic content area reading, will not improve their overall reading ability because they do not comprehend the texts they are reading (Allington, 2011).

In conclusion, the qualitative data regarding the context of the "read to learn" model at the Last Chance Academy were supported by sound and valid research on best practices in alternative school design and adolescent reading theory. The rationale for implementing the alternative school model was out of necessity to address the lower than expected graduation, dropout, and inflated expulsion data. However, the context of selecting the specific academic delivery system in the form of an online curriculum was successful in providing the program with the personalization, flexibility, and ability to target student deficiencies that have been presented repeatedly in the research literature on blended learning approaches. In addition, this model alleviated some of the personnel concerns by being able to offer a very personalized approach at a lower financial impact

to the district. The final component of the context evaluation was the addition of the SSSR component. Each of the participants in the implementation and design advocated for the addition of this component indicating that there was collective buy-in and a collective belief that the school needed to address reading motivation and reading fluency for the students in the school. The model did provide significantly more reading time for students to address fluency and motivation that was consistent with the research conducted by Allington (2011) and Allen (2000) on improving adolescent reading performance.

Input evaluation. The input evaluation assessed competing strategies and work plans of the selected approach (Stufflebeam, 2005). The research questions in this portion of the study asked the following:

Research Question 2. Were other online "read to learn" models explored and, if so, why was Apex selected?

Research Question 3. What were the unique features about this "read to learn" model?

The input component of the program evaluation analyzed two separate questions centered around the significant attributes of the online curriculum and the differences in this model compared to curriculum models students were exposed to elsewhere. The input section of the evaluation had the purpose of helping other schools be able to replicate the model and also understand what type of attributes would need to be present to adequately implement the model evaluated here. Most of the interviewees made references or comparisons to the atmosphere or environment in a typical high school classroom environment. Research Question 2 specifically asked why this curriculum vendor (Apex) was selected over other possible models. Of the five district-level

employees, four district-level staff members (80%) made the original decision on Apex; therefore, those interview responses were deemed most relevant (see appendix A). The most frequent answer from the district staff (80%) was that other options had been considered such as Plato, WebCT, Blackboard, and NovaNet. Other questions to district-level staff examined why Apex was more appealing than the multiple other providers explored (Plato, WebCT, Blackboard, NovaNet). When questioned about the unique characteristics offered by the selected online program, as evidenced by commonalities in their answers, Apex offered a wider breadth of courses for high-achieving and low-achieving students. The common responses indicated that this was a significant factor in its selection. In addition, two of five (40%), the Director of Instructional Technology and Staff Development and the Director of Secondary Education, mentioned the scaffold structure of the Apex curriculum in terms of how the information was presented to students within this online program (Diego, 2012). Also, three interviewees (60%) stated the rigor of the Apex curriculum as a strong attribute for this content provider. The district felt that more rigorous content would engage and challenge students in the blended learning environment of the alternative school. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Apex courses had already shown archival data as evidence to illustrate the Apex online learning vehicle to be a successful approach to deliver content in another credit recovery program within the district. For 6 years, the school district utilized the Apex curriculum to accelerate promotion and decrease retention. In this program, students obtained high school credits when a similar model was utilized during summer school programs. As reported from the interview with the former Director of Secondary Education, from 2008-2010, the district utilized Apex as the curriculum for a credit recovery blended learning model. The district had strong initial success with students

learning the content through a blended learning approach as evidenced by over 200 credits needed for graduation recovered by students at each school site during this period (Huckabee, personal communication, 2014). Formal research to measure the effectiveness of blended learning curricula was conducted on the Apex online delivery model within the district in 2010. The evidence at that time indicated that the Apex online curriculum as a form of content delivery was very successful for a variety of students from various subgroups. The study quantified the success the district recognized in 2008 as it considered Apex for the Last Chance Academy. The 2010 study focused on the use of an online curriculum with at-risk students and indicated that 98% of 417 students across multiple courses in three high school settings made an average mean gain of 38 points from pretest to posttest on the online curriculum (Huckabee, 2010). Further, 86% of the 417 credit recovery students made enough gains to ultimately pass the course with a 70% or high in the blended learning environment using online curriculum (Huckabee, 2010). These students were very similar to the students attending the Last Chance Academy. The Last Chance Academy served students with a consistent 90% free/reduced lunch rate which clearly makes it a school that serves the underprivileged. Further, this validates the research by Watson and Gemin (2008) that stated this is a common approach to allow students who are behind an opportunity to catch up in the graduation race. When comparing this online delivery model to the students researched by Huckabee (2010), the subgroups of students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds consistently performed better with this delivery technique. This further validates that the “read to learn” model not only was appropriate for the transient situation of the students attending this alternative school, but it also suited the academic needs of the students attending the Last Chance Academy.

There were other themes that surfaced from individual interviews on the selection of Apex such as the ease of use, self-paced learning, and personalized approach of the Apex program. These attributes were consistent with research conducted by Huckabee (2010) on Apex as an effective online learning platform in which similar at-risk student high school users of the online curriculum reported that "the environment matched their learning style" (p. 119), "they preferred to work alone and at their own pace" (p. 119), and "the step-by-step instructional format helped them learn" (p. 119). A seminal study conducted by Picciano and Seaman (2007) through the Sloan Consortium found that K-12 online learning platforms have grown in popularity across the country because they provide a way to support a wide range of student needs from those who need extra help to those who need to recover course credits, to those who want to advance their learning. Overall, the district staff who selected Apex felt that it met the criteria needed to address the curriculum and learning needs of students at the Last Chance Academy.

Research Question 3 focused on the specific unique features about this "read to learn" model. These were typically conveyed as the differences of the online curriculum environment from the traditional classroom environment at the home high schools. The school-level interview participants noted many easily distinguishable characteristics. First, the alternative school director and all of the teachers interviewed stated that the model in this particular school was unique for many reasons. Initially, and with the most frequency (80%), the interviewees stated that the model fit the diverse range of skills for the student body by offering the flexibility and self-paced curriculum. Three of the teachers interviewed and the director noted that the learning was self-paced and allowed the students to move more quickly or more slowly if needed. This allowed the students to read through their own academic content and illustrate mastery when they were

capable of doing so. The same three teachers commented that the traditional school format moved the students through the curriculum at the same pace that presented difficulty in adapting to allow the students more or less time to master the material. The next three most frequent answers (60%) were that the students were able to read more, teachers can be facilitators instead of instructors, and fidelity was increased due to the small class sizes. This program utilized the online curriculum as the primary source of information with the teachers as facilitators and enhancers of the curriculum. The teachers were there to assist the students as they navigated the online curriculum, but the traditional stand-and-delver method did not exist in this alternative program at the Last Chance Academy. Two staff members (40%) also mentioned that the schedule flexibility allowed this implementation to be successful. They stated that there were very few high schools across the state that provided a schedule flexible enough to offer an SSSR time in their daily schedule. This model was a more common vehicle utilized in the elementary and middle school settings.

In conclusion, information provided from the building-level and district-level interviews was consistent with research on best practices for selecting and using an online curriculum delivery model in the alternative school environment. The "read to learn" model did meet many of the National Dropout Prevention Center's six characteristics that appear to be the predominant profile for successful alternative schools mentioned in Chapter 2 (Cash, Dynarski, Hefner-Packer, Koetke, & Raywid, 2010). By delivering the academic content via electronic vehicle, the students gained additional benefits. As researched by the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), "electronic texts that incorporate hyperlinks and hypermedia . . . required skills and abilities beyond those required for the comprehension of conventional, linear print" (p. 14). Further, the State

Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA, 2008) published a study on the key benefits of online learning platforms. One of the chief benefits cited by this study was the ability of online learning models to better differentiate for students who were not a match for the traditional brick and mortar school buildings and traditional learning delivery model. The reason for the better match was reinforced by Tapscott (1998) who described today's digital savvy learners as seekers of curriculum who are self-directed and self-paced. The Apex curriculum allowed students to work at their own pace, relearn and reassess when they were not successful in the curriculum, and seek help from teachers as facilitators when they needed extra help. The flexibility of this "read to learn" model combined with the school's flexible schedule to further address reading deficiencies in the SSSR period (DEAR) significantly differentiated this program's model from the traditional school model where the reading levels of high school students have been largely ignored.

Process evaluation. Process evaluation assessed the implementation of the application being evaluated (Stufflebeam, 2005). In this portion of the study, the program research questions were as follows:

Research Question 4. Was the "read to learn" model implemented with consistency and fidelity?

Research Question 5. What would be done differently if this intervention were replicated?

The interviews of the process component were designed to measure the fidelity of implementation. Responses to the interview questions provided the qualitative data to measure the impact of the implementation of the "read to learn" model and the quality of the training of the staff to implement the "read to learn" model. These interviews were

conducted with school-level teachers and administrators who actively implemented the "read to learn" model. District-level input was not solicited on the process component of the program evaluation. Follow-up questions delved further into the actual training and communication systems. Each teacher's response differed in the terminology he/she used, but all interview question answers were similar in the perception that they, the teachers, believed the program had been implemented as intended. The additional follow-up questions in Appendix C supported this direct claim with a variety of similarly themed responses. Specifically, each believed that the Apex curriculum was implemented with all the components of the online curriculum program and the SSSR period (DEAR) was implemented daily in a similar fashion across classrooms (100%). The teachers reported, with the same frequency, that the director completed routine classroom observations to ensure consistency. This provided an abundance of oversight and accountability. However, the program director's interview responses differed slightly from the teachers' collective views. This director, who had an English teaching background, felt that there was room for more consistency in the SSSR portion of the program. In fact, she felt that the teacher implementation of this element was not as consistent as it needed to be. She reported that the teachers initially had clear parameters for the use of the DEAR time but later became lax in ensuring that all students used the time as it was intended as evidenced by some teachers allowing the students to watch videos during this period instead of reading for pleasure. She reported observing some students who were less interested in reading and therefore less productive during the SSSR times, often reading less than they were capable of reading. She described her view that more writing assignments related to the reading were needed to increase interest as well as comprehension of the material they had selected to read. When

analyzing research, the protocol has many different names, but the overall intent is to have students read silently on a daily basis, practice reading independently, choose their own books, and not be formally assessed on the book (Gardiner, 2001). In addition, this is an approach that is highly regarded and considered effective by many experts and is endorsed by many advocates (Allington, 1975b; Hunt, 1970; McCracken, 1971; Towner & Evans, 1975). In fact, Arthur (1995) found that silent reading helped students beyond just attitudes about reading. Interestingly, she found that silent reading had benefits beyond just changing attitudes. This approach also made better overall students who were more likely to be successful in school because of better study habits and stronger work ethics. On the whole, the director in this program evaluation had a more global perspective of the implementation. As she walked from class to class, she was able to diagnose the implementation from a different perspective because she had the ability to view and observe all aspects, and the teachers were limited to their particular environment. The director acknowledged that the students were more immersed in the content reading portion of the "read to learn" model because all credits they earned from the alternative high school were gained from the online delivery mechanism.

Specific process questions regarding training and the level of feedback were solicited from teachers in their training needs to implement the "read to learn" program confidently and with fidelity. All of the teachers except the math teacher spoke of how they collaborated to share and learn best practices for using the Apex curriculum together (80%). Initial training was provided by an Apex facilitator from the home high school (who had been utilizing the platform for several years) to help set up the program in a mastery-based model. As reported by the director of the program, ongoing training was provided by the director who had also used the Apex program in another alternative

setting within the district in the past. Though the director was not a certified instructor, she had a wealth of experience with successful implementation of the Apex platform. With the SSSR portion of the "read to learn" model, the English teacher on staff was the catalyst who brought the idea to the group for consideration as a needed component to address reading motivation and fluency for the at-risk population. She implemented a DEAR period in her prior placement at a middle school. According to interview responses, the entire staff (100%) had opportunities to be involved in the planning, implementation, and modification of new concepts and ideas related to the DEAR period implemented at the Last Chance Academy. When referring to the SSSR training, each teacher stated that they had the same process, time allotment, and feedback opportunities. Because the staff was very small, there were frequent opportunities to observe one another, which encouraged and fostered collaboration on its implementation. Not all responses fit into the common themes. Some of the staff also generated outliers. For instance, it was clear from interview responses that the math teacher had the least knowledge about the SSSR period. Her response to the question of why the alternative school implemented the SSR period was simply that "the idea was generated from the director who had an English background." Other teacher responses were more aligned with theory on adolescent reading which states that students need to read for enjoyment to reignite their passion for reading and emphasize that reading could be done for enjoyment and not for just learning content (Allen, 2000). Her lack of response about reading theory as it relates to adolescents could have been related to a lack of buy-in for the SSSR period or a lack of understanding for why this component was an important element. The director's viewpoint on this issue was that the Apex content reading portion of the program was more intuitive for the content teachers at the academy while

the SSSR portion required more convincing for the staff. As such, the director's approach to this portion of the program was to allow the staff to collectively design the DEAR period with input from each staff member. The teachers spoke of how the questions and concerns were addressed in prompt and proper fashion and how this alleviated much of the confusion and angst that typically comes from implementation of new programs.

Research Question 5 was designed to examine sustainability and what modifications the staff would make if they were to implement this "read to learn" model in its entirety again. Interview answers indicated the respondents would make few modifications to the program. One teacher stated that the teachers would have liked to have had more resources (i.e., books) at the students' independent reading levels for the students to read in the SSSR period. A second suggestion made by the social studies teacher was to also institute a very involved vocabulary component into the "read to learn" model so that the students would be able to master the online content quicker and with more long-term learning of the content. A third modification was offered by the director who felt that more frequent feedback to teachers on how they could remain consistent on the DEAR protocols was needed. As reported earlier in the study, the director observed that as the year progressed, some of the teachers began to deviate slightly from the protocols put in place for SSSR and allowed some students to have too much flexibility during the SSSR time such as watching some videos instead of only concentrating on the reading.

In conclusion, the process evaluation showed that the staff perceived that the "read to learn" model was implemented with fidelity and consistency in the content reading portion of the program and with moderate fidelity in the SSSR portion of the

program. Of all of the evaluation components, the particular interview data obtained in the process portion of this evaluation had the highest level of agreement. In fact, 100% of the school-level staff mentioned 80% of the themes that were mentioned at all in interviews. Although the director, who had the advantage of seeing the program implementation across multiple classrooms, asserted the differences in the perceptions of the SSSR program, the overall perception of the process component was positive. The concerns were minimal, and if replication of the "read to learn" model were to occur, specific suggestions for more consistency regarding the SSSR protocols are needed to implement the entire "read to learn" model with fidelity and consistency. More training on adolescent reading theory and special education accommodations would be prudent; however, these are minor issues that slight modification would easily address and correct.

Product evaluation. Product evaluation assessed the outcomes of the selected approach (Stufflebeam, 2005). The program research questions related to this portion of the study were

> Research Question 6. What impact did the "read to learn" model have on the reading achievement of students as measured by MAP reading scores of students?
>
> Research Question 7. What were the changes in LEXILE scores of students exposed to the "read to learn" model?

The final component of the CIPP model of program evaluation was to evaluate the product or outcomes of the application. This phase evaluated if the program had the intended impact. To evaluate this part of the program, the researcher compared quantitative data from the pretest to the posttest on two different measures (one reaching achievement measure and one LEXILE measure) for students exposed to the model for a minimum of 12 weeks.

Question 6 sought to determine if the "read to learn" model had a significant impact on the reading achievement of participating students. The researcher utilized NWEA's MAP reading achievement measure because it had a .75 correlation to the state reading/English language arts standards. When evaluating the MAP Reading RIT band scores, the scores had a wide range of starting points indicating that students came into the program at a wide range of reading achievement levels on this nationally normed measure and a wide range of posttest ending points. There were 28 students who took the pre (spring) and post (subsequent spring) MAP reading assessment. The mean for the pretest was a 213 RIT score, indicating that the mean percentile ranking for the population percentile in reading was 25%. The mean for the postassessment was a 214 RIT score, indicating that the mean percentile ranking in reading after exposure to the program was 26%. The variance between 213 and 214 in RIT scores is 3.75. To be statistically significant, the variance needed to be 6.195 between the pre and post RIT scores. Therefore, the "read to learn" program did not have a significant impact on the reading achievement of students who participated in the program for a minimum of 12 weeks.

For the purpose of this study, reading achievement was measured in a computer-adaptive format that individually analyzed performance in specific domains of reading comprehension. The MAP reading assessment is a nationally normed tool used to compare student achievement against other students across the country. The MAP assessment tool measured students' abilities to comprehend text according to standards at particular grade levels. Because the NWEA standards have such a high correlation (.75) to the South Carolina standards, this measure was appropriate and valid. This evaluation discovered that the skills developed from the online "read to learn" model and SSSR

component had no significant effect on these areas even though the mean RIT score of the population did increase by one point. Consequently, the students did not grow enough in reading achievement in relation to their same age peers across the nation. NWEA researchers have created the RIT scales to show growth in specific reading criterion and in overall reading achievement. Even though students may have passed the course and earned a credit towards graduation by participating in the online curriculum, being immersed in a "read to learn" model did not, in and of itself, have the added bi-product of increasing overall reading achievement. Among others, one of the benefits of the "read to learn" model is that it adds a level of personalization to the learning. The more personalized and individualized the instruction is for students, the more positively they perform. This evidence was recognized at both primary and secondary levels (Langer, 2001; Nystrand, 1997; Taylor et al., 2000). Further, this approach also gives the instructor the ability to "structure tasks in ways that provide appropriate levels of challenge and support" (Roderick & Camburn, 1999, p. 336). This again is an important attribute in successfully impacting struggling students. Baumann and Duffy (1997) also stated that the one-size-fits-all method of the traditional textbook is failing time after time in the traditional school environment. Dynarski (1999) recognized this when stating that students have to have other options to be successful, and the alternative school offers schools the flexibility to meet these needs. These schools are the answer for many students because they offer the specialization needed for many of these truly at-risk students to be successful.

On the other hand, there was improvement for some students, but it cannot necessarily be attributed to the "read to learn" application or the silent reading program. The intervention maintained students' current reading achievement levels, thus indicating

that they met their year's growth because the students succeeded in staying at their current achievement levels for the next grade level's content. The "read to learn" model was not detrimental to their growth. Additionally, the model was highly successful in meeting the other needs of the students and the staff with regard to providing a mechanism to adequately contend with fluidity of students entering and exiting the program, addressing the lack of adequate staff to offer the variety of different courses needed by students to graduate, and offering a rigorous academic curriculum for students at multiple levels.

Question 7 evaluated if the "read to learn" model had a significant impact on LEXILE scores between the preassessment and the postassessment. When evaluating the LEXILE scores of students, the scores had a wide range of starting and ending points, which also confirms the wide range of reading levels across the sample population. The scores ranged from as low as 449 LEXILE to as high as 1,179 LEXILE on the pretest and from 316 LEXILE to 1,176 LEXILE on the posttest. Due to the transiency of this student body, there were only 13 students who performed the pre and post LEXILE assessment using the SRI measure. The mean LEXILE level for the population on the pretest was an 876 LEXILE level, indicating that the average reading grade level of the population was Grade 5. The mean for the post LEXILE assessment was a 916 LEXILE score, which was also well below grade level. The mean range in the pre and posttest scores was 39.5. The *t* Stat was -0.79447. To be statistically significant (*t* Critical), the variance had to be a minimum of 2.178813. This variance also indicated no significant change that can be attributed to the "read to learn" application.

The expected LEXILE range for high school students has been defined as 1,151-1,350. For many of the students, the impact on LEXILE scores in this program, although

not great enough to bring students closer to their grade-level reading LEXILE expectations for high school students, showed significant growth for the time that students participated in the model. In other words, though there is notable growth from pre to posttests for some students, there was not enough to be able to attribute the increase in LEXILE levels to the "read to learn" application. Seven of the students scored lower on the posttest than on the pretest; the six who were higher were not high enough to make the mean change statistically significant. However, for these students, their ability to read more difficult text with fluency was positively impacted, which gave credence to Allington's (2011) assertion that reading more and specifically reading more at your independent reading level increases reading fluency. For the others who showed no growth, a host of variables may have been introduced. These became limitations that may have included apathy, poor effort, or a lack of a perception of relevance. For those who were positively impacted, the model was also supportive of Coiro's (2011) philosophy of new literacies. Coiro contended that there are increased reading demands for online reading compared to off-line reading. Therefore, more exposure to online reading has the potential to increase students' abilities to read and comprehend digital text. This increase may be critical for this generation of students who are predicted to do far more online reading as a way of life than their predecessors. The MAP assessment measured traditional reading standards on traditional literary and informational print text rather than the new literacy reading for online texts. There may have been a mismatch in the exposure to online literacy in which students were immersed through the "read to learn" model and the print literacies that were assessed on the MAP reading achievement assessment, thus accounting for the lack of significant reading growth in achievement. The standards for reading assessments were developed before this digital age. On the

other hand, some students were positively impacted by the new literacy with regards to LEXILE levels. A percentage of the students' abilities to comprehend more difficult text, as LEXILE scores indicated, were impacted positively by the online reading environment. The Internet has prompted new technologies that have changed students' abilities to comprehend informational text (Coiro, 2011). Though not for all of the sample, this research reinforced the impact of consistent online reading combined with consistent reading for pleasure at one's independent reading level on growth in the overall reading level of the student.

Additionally, Coiro's (2011) assertion that students with greater practice comprehending online text could help them compensate for lower subject-specific background knowledge was also evidenced in this population sample as students earned credits in courses for graduation.

In conclusion, the product component of this program evaluation provided insightful information regarding the impact of using a "read to learn" model in an alternative school setting that was designed primarily to ensure that students earned credits toward graduation. This study questioned whether simply moving to a "read to learn" model to gain course content credits also addressed another problem experienced by many at-risk students, low reading levels. The mean MAP gains in reading achievement were not substantial enough to be considered significant and therefore could not be attributed as a bi-product of the "read to learn" application. The LEXILE change also indicated that on average there was no statistical significant increase; however, one must still recognize the positive change for the 46% of the students who increased their abilities to decode more complex text after they were exposed to the online "read to learn" model and the SSSR model. The MAP and SRI assessments measured very

different data and skills. One could reasonably argue that with more time and exposure to this "read to learn" model, students could have shown more substantial LEXILE, RIT, and percentile gains for more of the sample group. This possibility has implications for the future use of "read to learn" models over a more significant time period with at-risk students as a way to perhaps make up substantial ground in catching students up with their grade-level peers in reading LEXILE, RIT, and percentile levels.

Though the reading impact was not statistically impacted in any of the categories measured, there was no negative impact on reading achievement. In addition, there were multiple benefits that can be attributed to the implementation of the Last Chance Academy. To meet the needs of a population of students who typically had no options, this was the original objective of the "read to learn" model at inception. The model impacted all of society by increasing the graduation rates and decreasing dropout and expulsion rates. The context of the program was to serve those students who had typically fallen through the cracks in the traditional environment because they had become disinterested and dropped out or were routinely pushed out due to significant discipline programs (Barton, 2005).

There are additional benefits of the alternative school in general. With regard to the original intent of the school model in the first place, all of the categories were impacted positively: dropout, graduation, and expulsion levels. These increases in graduation rates as well as a decrease in expulsion and dropout rates were illustrated in the district report card. There is quantitative evidence comparing the dropout, graduation, and expulsion rates before and after the program's implementation. The graduation rate of the school district increased in the years the Last Chance Academy was implemented (2008 to the present). The initial graduation rate at the year of inception

was 62.6%; the current rate reported was 79.4%. The dropout percentage saw similar positive changes. The initial dropout rate in the year of inception of the Last Chance Academy was 5.3%; the current rate was reported at 2.9%; however, the expulsion rate across the district has remained fairly constant. The number of students who were expelled from school during the year of inception was 195 students; the number in 2013 was 151 students. This number has decreased through the years of the program's existence, but the large number of students who are still being removed from the traditional schools has reinforced the continued need for this type of alternative school program.

This data cannot be solely attributed to the inception of the program, but there is no question that the Academy was a critical component in the overall positive changes within the district data recorded.

Limitations

For the purpose of this study, specific limitations may have been present including faculty and staff bias as they were responders to the interview questions. Next, the small sample population limited the ability to generalize. Additionally, student motivation was not controlled in this research. This study did not ask if the "read to learn" model was more appropriate for different subgroups within the alternative school. This study also did not ask why some of the sample performed better while some who were exposed to the same application did not. Further, the study did not seek to identify which was more effective, the traditional school model or the "read to learn" model. The last and most critical limitation was the inability to distinguish between the impact of either of the two components of the "read to learn" model. This "read to learn" model consisted of two components which included the SSSR component as well as an online

curriculum academic delivery model. This created the limitation of not being able to accurately determine which component the impact can be attributed to and a program evaluation where the "read to learn" model is viewed as a whole application instead of separating the components.

Delimitations

Within the scope of this research, it was not possible to include student opinions on educational needs such as if the students perceived the "read to learn" model to be effective and/or valued. In addition, other institutions offering similar programs, except for those within the same school district, were not adequately explored. As appropriate, future studies by the researcher may seek to expand the program evaluation with student and external sources to increase validity and to reveal needs for program improvement. Also, the time frame of the study was a minimum set of weeks (12) and was not correlated to the exact amount of time exposed to the application. Lastly, the students were not required to attend the summer school program which made up a large part of the original sample and could not be posttested due to their not being present at the time of the posttest administration.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher can identify many areas of research that should be continued or expanded. The first is that the results can be attributed to the "read to learn" model as a whole, but the distinction between the two components (SSSR or the online curriculum) of this model could be separated and researched independently. This would give a better indication of which component had the greatest impact. The question remains whether the change in reading scores can be attributed to one of these components or if it was both together that had the impact on the students. Another variable that could have

further exploration is the amount of time exposed to the application. The students in this evaluation were only exposed to the application for a minimum of 12 weeks. For further research, those students' reading scores could also be correlated to the amount of total time that the students spent exposed to the application. This could explain if there is a point of diminished returns or if the impact continues to grow with time receiving the application. Lastly, there are other types of data that should be examined; for instance, the students' attitudes toward reading, the amount of credits earned in this type of model, and the teachers' affinity or perceptions of the model as effective.

Conclusions

The overall program evaluation utilizing the CIPP model indicated that both the district's and students' needs were met in the "read to learn" model of the Last Chance Academy. The purpose of this program evaluation was to evaluate whether the program was feasible and appropriate for this group of at-risk students. First and foremost, the program served a group of students who were forcibly removed from school because of their negative behaviors. This population of students would not have been served in any school and would have made no academic gains without the program. Although the rate of course credits earned by these students was not a factor of this study, it was a significant factor in the district's improved graduation rates after the program's implementation. The most notable outcome of the program as measured by this program evaluation was its impact on some student reading levels. The "read to learn" model did not statistically impact student reading fluency or reading achievement. Though the statistical significance did not show positive impacts, it also did not show negative impacts; however, there are implications that it could have had a greater impact on reading levels if students had more time with the model.

Outcomes evaluated in the context, input, process, and product phases of this evaluation have shown both the practicality and viability of the model as a whole. The district's need for the program was substantiated. The original context was shown to be valid in that the rationale for the "read to learn" model, including both the online content reading and the SSSR, had a thorough process for vetting and implementing the model. For the input, the unique features and attributes were noted and evidenced by the district-level staff. The emphasis on meeting the needs of a district and a group of at-risk students was evidenced by both the district-level staff and the school-level staff. The process portion of the evaluation, which was gauged by school staff responses, received the most consistent consensus. The evidence showed that the training and implementation were done with fidelity and consistency. The staff had an unusually high level of agreement regarding the implementation. Lastly, the product portion of the evaluation also showed no negative impacts. On the LEXILE growth measure, 46% of the students had a significant positive impact in improving their reading level after exposure to the "read to learn" model. Additionally, there were no significant negative impacts for the students who did not show improvement in LEXILE levels. While the program met the need and objectives of the original implementation with regard to impacting school district data (graduation rates and dropout rates), there was no negative impact on reading achievement and some positive impact on all measured reading scores. The district's benefits from the program on graduation rates, dropout rates, and increased reading fluency were also substantiated. Though the reading achievement was not significantly positively impacted, it also was not significantly negatively impacted. Students in the Last Chance Academy held their current level of reading achievement and did not lose ground as a result of moving out of the traditional face-to-face environment

and into the online reading model. The expulsion numbers remained constant, which indicated that though there was no change that could be attributed to the application, the need for the program still existed. In this era of accountability, school districts have continued to look for new and innovative ways to better meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the traditional school model. Programs like the Last Chance Academy have become ubiquitous for school districts across the nation. After evaluating the critical components of this alternative model, it was clear that this program using the "read to learn" model met the initial needs it set out to in the context of the program.

In addition to providing a solution with relatively low financial and time inputs on the part of the district, the "read to learn" model also reaffirmed theory and research provided in the review of literature. First, research on at-risk students and alternative school models has indicated that a more differentiated and personalized approach to learning engages more students (Cash et al., 2010). The "read to learn" model in this program utilized an online curriculum delivery system in which students could work at their own pace, seek help when needed from teachers, and work on the specific courses they needed to graduate. Additionally, the online curriculum (Apex) provided a rich instructional model that supported readers with audio (read aloud) text features, relearn and retest functions, and immediate feedback for incorrect responses. Today's students need 21st century literacies. The new literacy skill sets were examined in the review of the literature. This research further validated and evidenced a theory that Coiro (2011) also noted. She stated that students who possessed higher levels of online reading comprehension skills were better able to compensate for lower subject-specific background knowledge because they had superior skills in locating, synthesizing, evaluating, and communicating information in the online reading venue (Coiro, 2011).

This reading model was teaching students skills that are critical in today's learning environment. The SSSR component gave students choice in high interest texts. Also examined in the literature review, researchers like Allen (2000) and Allington (2011) have substantiated that students reading two or more grade levels below their peers need to read at least 90 minutes a day at their independent reading level in order to increase their reading levels. The online content reading alone would not have provided this opportunity because much of the content area reading in the online curriculum was above the students' independent reading levels. Teachers and the functionality of the online curriculum provider (Apex) provided robust support for the students in that arena. The daily SSSR component was the only place that students could read at their independent level. Several weeks of implementing this component along with the online reading component had a positive impact on some students' LEXILE and RIT levels; however, there was no overall statistically significant positive or negative impact on LEXILE or RIT levels that could be attributed to the "read to learn" program. A key question not answered in this study was why the LEXILE gains were only seen with some (46%) of the students. A future study could examine more closely the qualities and skills of the students who did or did not recognize gains in the program, such as how long they were exposed to the "read to learn" model; how low or high their initial reading level was upon entrance into the program; and specific demographic characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and the presence or absence of a reading disability. Overall, this program evaluation reinforced that the strategies and skills of a strong adolescent reading model did have positive results for these high school students. The model, when implemented with fidelity and commitment to its goals, could be replicated in other similar settings with a similar outcome of raising students' abilities to

comprehend more complex texts. This program evaluation finds the "read to learn" model at The Last Chance Academy a success. Each step in the CIPP model–context, input, process, and product–was effectively implemented and gave hope to a group of students who previously had no other options or opportunities.

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Appendix A

Last Chance Academy Teacher Interview Format

Last Chance Academy Teacher Interview Format

Interview I
These interview questions are regarding the Context, Input and Process of the "read to learn" program being studied. In addition, the questions also evaluate the addition of the daily self-selected silent reading approach. The research questions for these sections of the program evaluation of the "read to learn" model but more specifically analyze the school's rationale for creating a daily-sustained silent reading period whereby students could self-select reading material based on interest. The researcher will also interview the Director of the Alternative School program to determine the reasons and objectives for creating the daily self-selected silent reading period. This interview will focus upon selection and criteria for this selection. In addition, the interview format will inquire as to the vision of the leadership and the rationale for the expenditure associated with creating an alternative program for expelled students.

Interview Questions: (Director of the Alternative School program and the teachers at the alternative school who implemented the "read to learn" model):

1. What is you title and position?
2. What part did you play in the designing and implementation of the "read to learn" model at this alternative school?
3. What research was completed to determine the model for the program?
4. Was there a specific reason that this specific "read to learn" model was employed?
5. How was the Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) addition decided upon when choosing the reading intervention for the alternative school?
6. What was your vision for the Silent Sustained Reading Model (SSR) during the designing phase?
7. How has this reading intervention fit into your original vision?
8. Has this intervention met the expectations and needs that it was designed to meet?
9. Was the intervention worth the monetary and time expenditure that implementation required?
10. What are some notable differences of this between the application of the "read to learn" model that differ from the traditional school model.
11. Do you feel that the "read to learn" model has been implemented with consistency and fidelity? What are some of the evidences of this?
12. How were you trained for the intervention and how were your concerns or questions addressed?
13. If you could do this over again, how would you do it differently?

Appendix B

Last Chance Academy School District Administrative Interview Format

Last Chance Academy School District Administrative Interview Format

Interview II
This research question seeks to establish the district's rationale for using online curriculum through a blended approach for course delivery and specifically, its selection of Apex as the curriculum vendor for the alternative school. To adequately explore this, the researcher will interview the team of administrators that selected the online curriculum option as well as selected the Apex curriculum to be the online curriculum purchased and utilized at the alternative school. To answer research question one, the researcher will interview selected district-level staff including the Associate Superintendent for Planning and Program Support and the Director of Instructional Technology who conducted the review of various online curriculum vendors and ultimately selection of Apex. The interview questions will focus on specific reasons for selection of this platform for delivery over the other online curricula that are available. In addition, the interview format will inquire as to the vision of the leadership and the rationale for the input associated with creating an alternative program for expelled students.

Interview Questions: (District-level staff including the Associate Superintendent for Planning and Program Support and the Director of Instructional Technology who conducted the review of various online curriculum vendors and ultimately selection of Apex):

1. What is you title and position?
2. What part did you play in the designing and implementation of the Renaissance Academy?
3. What research was completed to determine the model for the program?
4. Was there a specific reason that the alternative school was equipped with an online option for content delivery?
5. How was the Apex curriculum decided upon when choosing the online delivery platform for the alternative school?
6. What was your vision for the alternative school during the designing phase?
7. How has the school and the programs that are offered in the school fit into your original vision?
8. Has this alternative school met the expectations and needs that it was designed to meet?

Appendix C

Last Chance Academy Teacher Process Follow-up Interview Format

Last Chance Academy Process Follow-up Teacher Interview Format

Interview III
These interview questions are regarding the Input and Process of the "read to learn" program being studied. The research questions for these sections of the program evaluation of the "read to learn" model are specifically to analyze the school's contribution with regards to input as well as the training and implementation goals and objectives. The researcher will also interview the Director of the Alternative School program to determine the perception of the consistency and fidelity of implementation. This interview will focus upon primarily on the inputs processes associated with implementing a "read to learn" model. In addition, the interview format will inquire as to if the "read to learn" model is achieving the objectives it was designed to deliver.

Interview Questions: (Director of the Alternative School and the teachers at the alternative school who implemented the "read to learn" model):

1. Describe how the faculty was prepared for this program?
2. Who conducted the training?
3. How many times have you had opportunities to participate in training?
4. Would you have liked more training on this model?
5. Were the trainers adequately prepared to deliver quality instruction?
6. Was the training theoretical or application-based?
7. Were other resources available to assist you after training? If so, what kind?
8. Has the process been adequately evaluated for understanding?
9. Was the staff engaged in the training?
10. Were there opportunities to ask questions before, during and after implementation?
11. Is there effective 2-way communication when questions are asked?
12. Was the implementation of the program impacted by practical/institutional problems? If so, can you list some?
13. Were there environmental factors that inhibited the implementation? If so, can you list some?
14. Did the application decrease or increase your workload? How so?
15. What were problems with utilizing the program given?
16. Was the model difficult to learn?
17. Which parts were the most difficult?
18. Was the instruction continuous throughout the process or did it end after the training?
19. Do you consider yourself competent at utilizing the "read to learn" model?
20. Was it the training or the utilization of the model that made you proficient?
21. Are you now equipped to train should new faculty be hired on how to implement a "read to learn" model?
22. Is this model sustainable? Why or why not?