

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Effective Literacy Instructional Strategies in High Academic Growth Classrooms

STUDENT: Kathryn Jessup

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Instruction – the interaction that takes place between students, teachers, and content – is the foundation in which learning occurs. Effective literacy instruction considers the instructional strategies and foundational teaching components utilized by effective and highly effective teachers during literacy in classrooms of high academic growth. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to (1) determine which instructional strategies and foundational components were found to be the most prevalent in classrooms of teachers with high student achievement growth, and (2) learn how highly effective and effective teachers describe effective instruction in literacy.

In order to better understand the use of instructional strategies and foundational components, twenty-one elementary teachers from the Hessville School District were selected to be part of this study. These teachers were chosen due to the high achievement growth demonstrated by their students using DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) data over a period of two years or more. Through the analysis of teacher interviews and classroom observation, several compelling findings emerged. The mid-career teachers (7 – 11

years of experience) provided instruction at a higher quality than veteran or new teachers. However, the newest teachers (0 – 6 years) demonstrated the highest instructional quality for classroom management – a foundational component that is stressed by instructional coaches and in beginning teacher professional development. Classroom management and student engagement are foundational teaching components which were evaluated during all classroom observations. Additionally, these components were also rated in the top 4 for instructional quality. The most veteran teachers (18 – 37 years) utilized more instructional strategies on a more frequent basis than less experienced teachers. Teachers rated as effective demonstrated higher scores of instructional quality than those teachers rated highly effective on the Hessville School District teacher evaluation tool which evaluates teachers on the domains of instruction, professional responsibilities, classroom environment, and planning and preparing for learning. This study supports the use of various instructional strategies with teachers of varying experience in different settings.