GOAL SETTING THEORY IN ACTION

by

STACY COKER CARR

Approved:

Andrew L. Grunzke, Ph.D
Dissertation Committee Chair

Date

Carol A. Isaac, PT, Ph.D.
Dissertation Committee Member

Date

Rebecca Z. Grunzke, Ph.D.
Dissertation Committee Member

Date

Sharon Augustine, Ph.D.
Chair, Teacher Education, Macon

Date

Jane West, Ed.D.
Director of Doctoral Studies, Tift College Education

Date

Keith E. Howard, Ph.D.
Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

Date
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends. I would not have been able to make it through the last three years without your love and support. It has been a long and tumultuous road in which I have not always been at my best. My family and friends have listened to my crying, complaining, and endless threats to quit. I especially want to thank my husband Morris, who has been my rock throughout this process. You are my best friend and soul mate, and I would be lost without you by my side every step of the way. Thank you to my son Evan for enduring this through the entirety of your middle school years. I have missed many sporting events and practices due to my school commitments, and you never complained about my absence and only expressed that you missed me. I love both of you more than you can imagine and would never have been able to complete this goal without you. Thank you to my parents, my sister Shannon, my brother Brian, in-laws, and friends for listening to my endless complaints and for your love and support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my committee members for their support and guidance throughout this process. I would like to thank Dr. Andrew Grunzke for agreeing to be the chair of my committee and leading the process with much needed feedback and reassurance when I was unsure of what I was doing. Without his support from the beginning to the end, I would not have been able to achieve this goal.

Thank you to Dr. Carol Isaac for agreeing to be my Methodologist. I will never forget the relief I felt when you took the time on a Friday afternoon to talk me through the process of choosing my topic. Thank you for always answering my questions, emails, texts, and talking me off the ledge many times. Your support was invaluable to me, and I will always be grateful. Thank you to Dr. Rebecca Grunzke for agreeing to be the third member of my committee. Your support was greatly appreciated as well as all of the wonderful ideas and encouragement as to where this research could lead.

Thank you to the many esteemed professors at Mercer University who supported our cohort throughout the last three years. I especially appreciate Dr. Vincent Youngbauer for being a consistent presence and advocate for our cohort. His guidance, support, and sense of humor got us through some very trying semesters. Thank you to Dr. Anne Hathaway for recommending Dr. Grunzke as my chair, and for being the toughest professor I have ever encountered. You made us all stronger. Thank you to Dr.
Bruce Sliger for being the most generous professor that I encountered. Your kindness and willingness to go above and beyond was greatly appreciated.

Thank you to my best friend, Melanie Suk. You listened to me and encouraged me for the past three years and assured me that I could do this when I felt certain that I would never finish. Thank you to my cohort family, especially Courtney Herbert. You were my rock through the last three years, and I am so grateful that I had you to lean on. Your friendship got me through the best and worst times. We agreed from the beginning to finish this journey together, and I know that this is a friendship that will last. Thank you also to Kim Ward for being my friend and sounding board throughout each semester. I have appreciated your kindness and friendship more than you can imagine. Finally, I want to acknowledge the amazing women in this cohort. I will forever be grateful for the friendships that we cultivated over the past three years.

Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.

-Helen Keller
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Perspective</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Literacy Skills</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and Economically Disadvantaged Students</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade Slump</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency and Transitional Readers</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting Theory</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting and Elementary School</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting and Literacy</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

3. METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................ 28
   Rationale for Research Study .................................................................................. 29
   Research Questions ............................................................................................... 29
   Research Design ................................................................................................... 30
   Sample .................................................................................................................. 32
   Participants .......................................................................................................... 33
   Subjectivity Statement ......................................................................................... 34
   Validation ............................................................................................................. 35
   Data Collection ..................................................................................................... 36
      Student Focus Group Interview Questions ....................................................... 38
      Teacher Interview Questions ............................................................................ 38
      School Counselor and Principal Interview Questions ................................. 39
   IRB Approval ........................................................................................................ 40
   Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 40
   Reporting Results ............................................................................................... 42
   Summary .............................................................................................................. 42

4 RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS .............................................................................. 44
   Study Site Description ......................................................................................... 45
   Description of “Ready, Set, GOAL” ................................................................... 46
   Participant Description and Interview Protocols ............................................... 49
   Findings .............................................................................................................. 53
      Document Analysis .......................................................................................... 53
      Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups .................................................. 57
   Explanation of Themes ....................................................................................... 60
      Research Question 1 ....................................................................................... 63
         A Culture of Defining Goals ......................................................................... 63
         The Influence of Goals ................................................................................ 63
      Research Question 2 ....................................................................................... 68
         Self-Efficacy: Student Self-Empowerment ................................................ 68
         Success and Defeat ..................................................................................... 70
         Motivation: “Thinking Deeper” .................................................................... 74
         Reading Proficiency: Life Skills .................................................................... 76
   Summary .............................................................................................................. 78

5. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS ....... 80
   Implications: Major Findings ................................................................................ 81
   Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 88
   Recommendations for Future Research ............................................................ 90
   Final Thoughts .................................................................................................... 92
TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 94

APPENDICES

A  IRB APPROVAL........................................................................................................ 100

B  INFORMED CONSENT FORM.................................................................................. 102

C  STUDENT GOAL CARD EXAMPLES......................................................................... 107
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Methods and Participants</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Summary of Participants’ Teaching Experience</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student Focus Group 3(^{rd}) Grade Participants</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Student Focus Group 4(^{th}) Grade Participants</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Examples of Written Goals for 3rd and 4th Grade Students</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 3(^{rd}) Grade Student Fluency Scores</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 4th Grade Student Fluency Scores</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. List of Inductive and Deductive Themes, Emerging Interpretive Themes, and Codes that Explain the Effect of the Goal Setting Process</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 3(^{rd}) Grade Student Response to Their Feelings on Setting Goals in Reading</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. 4(^{th}) Grade Student Response to Their Feelings on Setting Goals in Reading</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. 3(^{rd}) Grade Focus Group Responses on How They Feel When They Meet a Goal</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. 4(^{th}) Grade Focus Group Responses on How the Feel When They Meet a Goal</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. 3(^{rd}) Grade Focus Group Responses to Not Meeting a Goal</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. 4(^{th}) Grade Focus Group Responses to Not Meeting a Goal</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Participant Interview Responses: Affect on Student Motivation in Reading</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Student Focus Group Responses: Feelings and Motivation</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Participant Responses: Affect on Reading Proficiency</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

STACY COKER CARR
GOAL SETTING THEORY IN ACTION
Under the direction of ANDREW GRUNZKE, Ph.D.

In education, there is a need to find strategies and tools to increase self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency in students. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of an established goal-setting process in an elementary school with a high population of economically disadvantaged students. This case study was governed by two research questions concerning the effects of goal-setting. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with faculty, focus group interviews with students, and document analysis of student goals and reading fluency scores. Using Locke’s goal-setting theory, the researcher incorporated thematic and content analysis. Three deductive interpretive themes emerged: Self-Empowerment, Thinking Deeper, and Life Skills. Three inductive interpretive themes emerged: “What You Can Be, Not What You Are; It Takes A Village; and Everyone Has A Voice. The results of this study showed that a consistent goal-setting process had a positive effect on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency when the goals are specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable, timely, and challenging.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The ability to read on grade level is an important component of a student’s educational success, and reading fluently is imperative to comprehending material (Rasinski, 2014). However, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report card (2011), two-thirds of our nation’s fourth grade students read below grade level, and this number has remained consistent for years. The number of students reading on grade level is even worse among eighth grade students. The statistics for African American students is even more dismal, with only 18 percent of fourth graders scoring at or above grade level (NAEP, 2015). Students who qualified for free and reduced lunch did score slightly higher in fourth grade from 2013 to the 2015 school year, while eighth grade scores continued to fall (NAEP, 2015). Students in the United States continue to fall behind in attaining basic grade-level reading skills, affecting their ability to perform adequately in required subject areas in secondary education and beyond.

By definition, fluency is the ability to read with appropriate speed, accuracy, and proper expression (WETA, 2015). Although there is growing evidence that shows the importance of fluency in reading, annual surveys of literacy experts consistently identify reading fluency instruction as a less important approach to increasing reading scores (Rasinski, 2012). Dis-fluent readers are characteristically slow, labored, inexpressive, and unenthusiastic while reading, resulting in inefficient reading, frustration, and lack of
comprehension (Rasinski, 2002). Furthermore, less fluent readers are far less likely to read in or outside of class when given the opportunity (Rasinski, 2002). If research shows that reading dis-fluently causes frustration, inefficiency, and a lack of comprehension, then a focus on becoming a more fluent reader may be a solution to the grade-level reading problem. Research shows that fluent readers are more motivated to read independently, acquire new vocabulary, and comprehend more of the text (Rasinski, 2002).

According to a Scholastic survey conducted in 2006, 40 percent of students between the ages of five and eight read every day, but by fourth grade, that statistic drops to 29 percent. Harvard psychologist Jeanne S. Chall (1921-1999) described this as the “fourth-grade slump.” There have been various reasons given in literature for the phenomenon. One of the reasons consistently attributed to this slump is the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” in the middle elementary grades. If reading fluently is a barrier at this stage, then reading to learn will be almost impossible, leading to students falling further behind each year. Another cause of the fourth-grade slump might be that students become more susceptible to peer influence during this developmental stage in their lives. On-going experiments, called conformity studies by child psychologists, have been conducted since the late nineteenth century and have found that, during this time in preadolescence, children become strongly influenced by their peers and are even willing to perform poorly in order to fit in (Torrance, 1968; Goodwin, 2011). The experiment conducted by noted child psychologist E. Paul Torrance is perhaps more interesting. In Torrance’s conformity study, students in third grade were given a challenging word problem to complete and were told that they could
seek the help of a teacher, parent, or peer. The same word problem was given to fourth grade students with the same directions. Observations showed that the third grade students sought the help of an adult fifty percent of the time and the help of peers less than twenty percent. The numbers were reversed for the fourth grade students, who sought the help of their peers nearly fifty percent of the time and that of adults less than twenty percent of the time. The third and fourth grade years are a delicate age of self-discovery and influence that requires attention. Educators can address peer influences by cultivating a positive school culture in which students feel peer pressure to do well in school rather than failing (Goodwin, 2011).

Psychologist Edwin Locke’s various studies on goal setting theory show that performance is enhanced when goals direct attention, effort, persistence, and development of strategy (2013). Locke found that attention to the specificity of the goal and difficulty level had a direct effect on performance. Goal setting theory continues to be among the most popular and influential theories of motivation and performance, but has been used on a limited basis in an academic setting (Locke & Lathan, 2013). Locke’s development of goal setting theory mainly focused on group goal setting in business and higher education. However, results from his studies can be beneficial in all educational settings. Students in one particular study reported that self-setting goals increased their academic performance, motivation, and propensity for self-reflection. (Travers, Morissano, & Locke, 2015). They further reported that meeting goals gave them a feeling of “flow” and motivated them to set higher goals with the next academic feat (Travers, Morissano, & Locke, 2015). This study will explore the process and results
Problem Statement

Reading fluency is an imperative step in students reading on grade level and is often neglected in a teacher’s repertoire of lesson planning (Rasinski, 2014). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report card (2011), only 36% of fourth grade students read at or above grade level on nationally normed tests. A study conducted by Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) states that there is a phenomenon at this level deemed “the 4th grade slump”. The Chall study led to several follow-up studies of the fourth-grade slump that attribute this phenomenon to several factors such as a transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” during this age, as well as the issue of a rise in peer influence (Goodwin, 2011). Students who are not ready for this transition often fall behind permanently. It is vital to find strategies to help students stay motivated to read in order to attain grade level reading proficiency for success in all subject areas. The strategy of goal setting was chosen based on research that suggests short term or proximal goals improve a student’s self-efficacy, motivation, and academic performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). This qualitative case study examined the use of goal setting and its effect on students’ self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the implementation of consistent student goal setting and its impact on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading fluency in a Title I elementary school in a rural community with a high population of economically disadvantaged students. Further examination of school
culture and environment in regards to the goal setting process within this school was also conducted through individual interviews with the principal, school counselor, and a third and fourth grade teacher; focus group interviews with third and fourth grade students; and document analysis of written goals and reading fluency scores.

Research Questions

In an effort to conduct an in-depth investigation of reading fluency in the context of a school with an economically disadvantaged and minority population that has adopted a model of goal setting, this study utilized a qualitative case study approach to examine characteristics in an elementary school through the lens of goal setting theory. The study was governed by the following research questions:

RQ1. How has the implementation of goal setting influenced student reading proficiency?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of faculty and students in relation to the effect that goal setting has had on self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency?

Theoretical Perspective

According to Crotty (1998), the four basic elements of research design are methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology. In social research texts, the bulk of discussion and much of the terminology relate in one way or another to these four elements, and their purpose is to ensure a soundness of our research and make its outcomes convincing (Crotty, 1998). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the impact that goal-setting had on third and fourth grade students’ self-efficacy, motivation, and performance in reading fluency.
A theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology within a study (Crotty, 1998). Edwin Locke’s goal-setting theory was used as the theoretical perspective of this study. Locke’s goal-setting theory suggests that goals are associated with enhanced performance because they mobilize effort, direct attention, and encourage persistence and strategy development (Locke & Latham, 1990). Locke also concluded that the difficulty and specificity of the task was a good predictor of performance. His research found that in order for goals to be effective and instill motivation, they need to have clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and complexity (1990).

Procedures

This qualitative study utilized a case study methodology. Creswell (2007) states that case study research “involves the study of an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system” (p.73). In this case study, the researcher sought to explore how goal setting impacted student self-efficacy, motivation, and academic progress in reading with 3rd and 4th grade students in a rural, Title I elementary school. This school was chosen due to the fact that they have employed and sustained a goal setting routine for at least five years. The researcher used multiple sources of information through interviews with building leadership and teachers, focus groups with students, and a document analysis of reading fluency scores and written goals. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) identify interviews as “a cultivation of conversational skills that most adult humans possess by virtue” (p. 4). The research interview provides professional conversation where knowledge is formulated by interaction (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). Focus group interviews were conducted as a research method. Focus groups are defined as “a
carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger, 1994). Two focus groups consisting of a mix of struggling and non-struggling reading students enrolled in the third and fourth grades was analyzed for common themes. Individual interviews with the principal, school counselor, third grade teacher, and fourth grade teacher explored the goal setting process and its perceived affect on student self-efficacy and motivation, and document analysis of student goals and reading fluency data were examined for the affects pertaining to academic achievement. In this study, the researcher attempted to follow Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) case study approach that examined the problem, the context, the issues, and the “lessons learned.”

Significance of the Study

Implementing Locke’s goal-setting theory could discourage the phenomena known as the “fourth grade slump”. According to surveys, 40% of students between the ages of five and eight read every day, but by fourth grade, that statistic drops to 29% (Scholastic Inc, 2006). With the growing evidence that shows the importance of fluency in reading and the surveys that identify reading fluency instruction as lacking in elementary classrooms (Rasinski, 2012), it is imperative to find strategies to improve performance, self-efficacy, and motivation for students in the areas of reading. According to the NAEP report card (2011), only 36% of fourth grade students read at or above grade level on nationally normed tests. This study sought to explore how one under-privileged elementary school implemented a consistent goal-setting initiative with its student population. The findings in this study provided teachers, parents, and administration with results that demonstrate goal setting as a viable strategy to use with
struggling reading students in third and fourth grades. Interviews with other stakeholders such as the principal, school counselor, teachers, and students assisted the researcher with an examination of the effects of goal setting on the environment and culture of the school as well.

Limitations

Qualitative cases studies are an appropriate choice of methodology when a person is found to be interesting or intriguing (Saldana, 2015). Case studies provide rich thick descriptions, but also may not be generalizable due to the small sample size. This study employed the use of multiple methods of data collection to develop an understanding of goal setting in an elementary school. The researcher conducted interviews with the principal, counselor, and teachers; focus group interviews with students, and an analysis of written goals and reading fluency documents to ensure an in-depth understanding of the school and its stakeholders.

The results of this study included voluntary participation from participants and are subject to the limitations of the collection methods and types of questions used. The findings were limited by the perception and accuracy of its participants. The multiple formats of data collection assisted in reducing these limitations and clarifying questions were asked of participants during interviews.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was the researcher’s decision to select one elementary school as the site of study. The school selected has a high population of economically disadvantaged students and was located in a rural community with a high minority
population. The researcher chose to focus on third and fourth grade students only, in order to relate information to the phenomena of the fourth grade slump.

Definition of Terms

The study of goal-setting theory and the influence that goals have on reading proficiency and the perceptions of faculty and students included the following definition of terms.

Goal-Setting Theory — Goal-setting theory suggests that goals are associated with enhanced performance because they mobilize effort, direct attention, and encourage persistence and strategy development (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Fourth grade slump — A phenomenon in which fourth grade students who previously were reading on grade level and reading with frequency experience a drop in performance and motivation to read (Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin, 1990).

Conformity Studies — On-going experiments conducted since the late 19th century and have found that during this time in preadolescence, children become strongly influenced by their peers and are even willing to perform poorly in order to fit in (Torrance, 1968, Goodwin, 2011).

SES — This acronym stands for “Socio-Economic Status”. The factors that are usually considered in establishing SES are income, occupation, education, neighborhood, and political power. For each of these five factors, the consideration of how fixed each one is also contributes to SES (Brogan, 2009).

SMART Goal — This acronym has been used since the 1980s as a method and guide for setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely (Doran, 1981).
Title I — Formerly known as Chapter 1, is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and is the foundation of the federal commitment to closing the achievement gap between low-income and other students (NAEYC, n.d.).

Summary

In summary, reading fluently is crucial to comprehending material and is an important component to a student’s educational success (Rasinski, 2014). It is imperative to find strategies to improve performance, self-efficacy, and motivation for students in the areas of reading. The researcher expounded on Locke’s theory of goal-setting and Chall’s “fourth-grade slump”. The purpose of the current study was to explore the implementation and results of a goal setting initiative in a rural, high poverty elementary school that has utilized the theory of goal setting for more than five years. The researcher utilized a qualitative case study methodology to answer the research questions of how the implementation of goal setting influenced reading proficiency, and the perceptions of faculty and students in relation to the effect that goal setting has had on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. The researcher interviewed stakeholders such as the principal, school counselor, teachers, and students, and also examined documents such as reading fluency scores and written student goals in order to answer the aforementioned research questions.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark. – Michelangelo, 1475-1564

The focus of the present study was to examine the implementation of a goal setting system with third and fourth grade students. The researcher wanted to know how the implemented goals affected reading fluency of struggling readers in the third and fourth grades, as well as the perceptions of students and faculty as to how goal setting affected student self-efficacy and motivation in regards to their reading skills. The researcher conducted individual interviews with the principal, school counselor, third grade teacher, and a fourth grade teacher; focus group interviews with struggling and non-struggling students, and document analysis of reading fluency scores and written goals.

The researcher chose to examine the case study through the epistemological lens of constructivism. Constructivism emerged in the late 1960s with the work of Jean Piaget who first used the expression “constructivist epistemology.” Jean Piaget’s theory of learning incorporated the components of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation occurs when new experiences are meshed with the old, and accommodations involve reframing the world and new experiences into the mental capacity already present (McLeod, 2009). Piaget’s constructivist theory addresses how learning occurs rather than what influences learning. Researchers Dewey, Vgotsky, and
Bruner have been associated with this epistemology, but roots can be traced back to Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Aristotle in which students were encouraged to find flaw in their own thinking, and teachers were facilitators of learning rather than disseminators of knowledge. Although there are various forms of constructivism, all hold the basic belief that knowledge and meaning is not just given, it is constructed based on human experiences and reflection. Inquiry is key to the constructivist learning theory and students should be challenged to take ownership for their learning and become critical thinkers.

Elementary Literacy Skills

Literacy skills include all skills needed for the development of reading and writing (Bainbridge, 2016). Included would be an awareness of print, the sounds of language, and the relationship between letters and sounds (Bainbridge, 2016). It is important to recognize that literacy acquisition in the early elementary grades focuses on children learning the foundational skills required to engage meaningfully with text. The five components of reading instruction are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Phonemic awareness is the knowledge that words are made up of a combination of individual sounds (NRP, 2000). However, phonemic awareness is much more than just recognizing sounds. The student must be able to orally blend the sounds together to make words and then take them apart again. Whereas phonemic awareness is oral, phonics is the relationship between letters and sounds, as it relates to written words (NRP, 2000). Phonics skills are essential when students are exposed to unknown words within text. A weak phonics foundation is considered the number one reason that children have difficulty learning to read (NRP, 2000). Fluency is
the ability to read text accurately and smoothly in pacing, intonation, and expression (NRP, 2000). Vocabulary is increased through direct and indirect instruction and as a child’s ability to read increases, so does the number of words they need to know (NRP, 2000). Comprehension is the intentional thinking process that occurs as we read, and is ultimately, what reading is all about (NRP, 2000). Most literacy instruction during the pre-kindergarten through second grade includes activities to teach phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, although the fluency and comprehension skills are often secondary focus areas to the building of phonics and vocabulary skills (Watson, 2014).

As children move into the upper elementary grades, the focus shifts to reading to learn content, over learning to read. Phonological processing is not usually addressed very often, if at all, during grades three through five. Phonics is usually integrated into the vocabulary instruction and fluency and comprehension become the focus. Children in the upper elementary grades should spend the majority of their literacy block engaging in connected texts and reading a wide variety of narrative and informational books fluently. They should be encouraged to connect their reading and writing by citing textual evidence when summarizing the information learned.

Harvard professor Jeanne Chall was one of the first researchers to describe reading as a developmental process. Chall’s model of reading development views reading as a compilation of abilities and skills that change with development (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). Reading development is divided into five stages and factors influencing reading achievement may differ with development. While there are five stages, Chall does note that a Stage 0 exists and would be considered “Prereading”,}
spanning from birth to age 6. This stage actually covers the greatest amount of time and changes than any of the other stages. This stage is the beginning of children growing in their control over various aspects of language syntax, words, rhyme, and alliteration.

Stage 1 is “Initial Reading and Decoding” and typically occurs in grades 1-2, or ages 6-7. Children begin to understand that an arbitrary set of letters are associated with specific sounds that make up specific words. This stage has also been referred to as a guessing and memory game depending on the chosen instructional strategy as either sight or phonics based. With the end of this stage comes insight concerning the nature of spelling.

Stage 2 is referred to as “Confirmation, Fluency, Ungluing From Print” and occurs in grades 2-3, or ages 7-8. This stage essentially consolidates what was learned in stage 1. At this stage, the student becomes more comfortable utilizing basic phonics knowledge, and learning more complex phonics elements to gain fluency and speed with familiar stories. Stage 3 is entitled “Reading for Learning the New” and spans from age 8-14 and grades 4-8. In this stage the learner utilizes reading skills to attain new knowledge. Essentially, the learner is still limited in background knowledge, vocabulary, and cognitive abilities. Children still have a singular viewpoint while reading during this stage and skills are best developed through the use of materials that are clear in their purpose, with limited technical complexities.

Stage 4 is “Multiple Viewpoints” and spans from age 14-18. In this stage, students read from multiple viewpoints and increase their ability to think critically about what they read and understand on a deeper level. Experience with various subjects such as history and politics would be found at this stage. Finally, Stage 5 is referred as
“Construction and Reconstruction” and is considered college or age 18 and above. A reader at this stage has a level of maturity and experience that allows them to understand what to read and what not to read within a text. A student at this level is able to construct their own viewpoint of what they have read, as well as analyze the viewpoints of others. Chall states that whether or not all people reach stage 5 reading, even after four years of college, is open to study (Chall, 1983). However, the development of reading simply must begin with learning to read and then reading to learn.

Literacy and Economically Disadvantaged Students

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), fifty-one percent, and over twenty-five million students in public school are economically disadvantaged. For the first time in fifty years, there are more poor students in public school (Layton, 2015). Research shows that there are virtually no poor districts in the United States in which the students are performing at the national average (Reardon, 2011). Studies have shown that being affluent or poor is the strongest predictor in academic achievement (Reardon, 2011). Economically disadvantaged students begin school with a deficit in home support, rich experiences, vocabulary, and background knowledge (Layton, 2015). The average low-income student begins kindergarten with a listening vocabulary of 3,000 words, while more affluent students begin kindergarten with an average of 20,000 words (Hetzel & Soto-Hinman, 2007). Most students are worried about their basic needs being met over whether or not they are going to take a test that day.

For economically disadvantaged students, parental literacy involvement at home can have an effect on student literacy (Hattie, 2009; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011, Hemmerechts et al, 2017). Parental literacy involvement entails exposure to storybooks,
vocabulary, reading and printing words, and parental teaching of the alphabet (Sénéchal, 2006; Hemmerechts et al, 2017). With exposure to these activities, a positive development of attitudes towards the importance of reading starts before students begin primary school.

Children from families with a higher SES tend to develop more positive attitudes towards reading in general and therefore, later academic skills are positively affected (Lutz Klauda, 2009; Rowe, 1991; Hemmerechts et al, 2017). According to one study, there is a difference in the development of attitudes towards reading depending on parental involvement before the student enters school, as opposed to once school attendance begins (Hemmerechts et al, 2017). Later parental involvement is less prevalent with higher SES students because they tend to enter school with skills that are more aligned to the academic goals of the school and therefore, require less intervention from parents when it comes to homework and literacy in general (Hemmerechts et al, 2017). Students with low SES tend to enter school with lower skills and attitudes towards reading, and are subject to needing more help and intervention (Hemmerechts et al, 2017). When the struggle with reading begins, positive attitudes towards reading decreases. A focus on parental involvement in the primary years of school and prior to school beginning is crucial to establishing higher levels of literacy in economically disadvantaged students. According to Mol (2011), establishing reading routines before the age of 2 can provide children with a variety of rich linguistic experiences and language development. Parental education in lower income schools and communities is crucial because parents tend to provide the home environment that they were raised
Research suggests that when low SES students become parents, they will continue the cycle of a low literacy home environment (Brannon, 2012).

Fourth Grade Slump

Reading is generally cited as the most important skill in determining academic achievement, because it is basic to acquiring other needed skills for success (Stockard, 2010; Murphy, 2004). Economically disadvantaged students appear to face challenges in attaining higher levels of academic achievement that can lead to future economical and occupational success in adulthood (Stockard, 2010). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report card states that only 36% of fourth grade students read at or above grade level on nationally normed tests (2010). A 2006 Scholastic Inc. survey noted that 40% of students between the ages of five and eight read every day, but that number dips to 29% by the fourth grade. Economically disadvantaged children approach the achievement levels of their more privileged peers in earlier grades, but the gap begins to widen in the later elementary years (Stockard, 2010).

A study conducted by Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) states that there is a phenomenon deemed “the 4th grade slump”. The “4th grade slump” is defined as a dip in reading scores closely associated with a shift from basic decoding and word recognition to development of fluency and comprehension, or from “learning to read”, to “reading to learn” between 3rd and 4th grade. Students that are not ready for this transition often fall behind permanently. The Chall study found that the slump was worse with economically disadvantaged children who often enter school with lower levels of pre-reading skills and exposure to rich vocabulary. Although the cognitive abilities of these students were consistent with the norm, literacy development lagged far behind that of their peers.
(Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). The Chall study found that economically disadvantaged students performed on par with their peers in grades 2 and 3, and differences between above-average and below-average students on reading tests were small. The most significant change began in fourth grade. For the below-average readers, the slump began earlier with greater intensity. Reading levels for these students declined to an average of two years below grade level on reading tests by the time they reached sixth and seventh grade. For the above-average readers, the slump was less intense and did not begin to show until sixth grade with many of the students remaining on or above grade level. The difference in fluency between the above average and below average readers was considerable. The above average readers in grades 2 through 7 were all fluent, while most of the below-average students were disfluent (Chall, 1990). Chall concluded that one of the reasons that economically disadvantaged students in grade 4 had difficulty with harder texts was a lack of vocabulary and fluency, particularly with below-average students. Chall found that disfluent students tend to read less due to the difficulty they face with reading comprehension. The study found that structure and challenge in regards to materials used for instruction had a strong positive influence on primary and intermediate grades. The study also concluded that there were certain conditions in the home that greatly benefited students, but were not as common, such as higher educational and literacy attainment of the parents and parental interest in the educational achievement of their children (Chall, 1990). Parents were less likely to be able to help their children once they were in fourth grade and beyond. Due to these factors being beyond the school’s control, it is even more important that the school assumes the role of literacy development of low-income students in grades 4-7.
Fluency and Transitional Readers

Transitional readers are defined as those readers who are moving from learning to read to reading to learn. If proper support is not given to these readers in fluency and automaticity during this transition, there is an increased risk in experiencing the fourth grade slump. To read fluently is defined as the ability to read most words in context quickly, accurately, automatically, and with appropriate expression (Cunningham, 2004). Although reading fluency has often been dismissed and overlooked as an important component of effective reading instruction, fluency continues to be essential for success in learning to read (Rasinski, 2014). Over the past 30 years, a growing body of evidence has demonstrated the link between both components of fluency and proficient and meaningful reading. Patricia Cunningham states that one of the major ways in which we become fluent readers is by reading something over several times. The first time we read, most of our attention is on identifying the words. The second time, our brain puts the phrases together into meaningful units, and the third time, we read more rapidly, effortlessly and expressively. Various activities such as teacher modeling, choral reading, silent sustained reading for pleasure, and echo reading can be useful interventions in enhancing fluency. Transitional readers have typically developed basic reading skills and are ready to explore different genres and experience reading as an engaging activity.

Lack of fluency tends to lower a student’s motivation to read for pleasure, and as a result, overall reading achievement suffers. The more reading a student does outside of what is mandatory at school, the higher the reading achievement (Chall, 1990). The
earlier students begin to slip, the farther behind they fall. Students seldom right themselves after this fall without specialized help.

A study completed by the Anne E. Casey Foundation found the following dismal statistics to reiterate the importance of reading achievement. In 2007, nearly 6.2 million young people (16% of the 16-24 age group) were high school dropouts. Every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated $260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity. High school dropouts also are more likely than those who graduate to either be arrested or have a child while still a teenager, both of which incur additional financial and social costs. In addition, community colleges and other institutions of higher education spend considerable time and resources on remedial coursework for students who are not prepared for post-secondary education despite having a high school diploma (AECF, 2010).

Early success in reading is key to unlocking a lifetime of reading habits and academic success (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Students who read well are more likely to read often, enhancing their vocabulary and general knowledge. Students who are unable to move beyond the transitional reading stage are less likely to reach their learning potential (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). When students are unable to read fluently, they chose to read less and avoid challenging material (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990).

**Goal Setting Theory**

Goal setting theory was chosen as the theoretical perspective for this study based on research that suggests short term or proximal goals have an affect on self-efficacy, motivation, and performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). Psychologists Edwin Locke and
Gary Latham spent four decades researching goal setting and task motivation. They began their research on goal setting theory in the 1960s and posited that employees are motivated by goals and feedback. Locke’s various studies on goal setting theory show that performance is further enhanced when goals direct attention, effort, persistence, and development of strategy (2013). Locke found that attention to the specificity of the goal and difficulty level had a direct effect on performance. Locke found that there were five principles to successful goal setting: clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity (Locke, 2002).

Clarity of the goal refers to a clearly defined and measurable goal. In order for the goal to be attainable, it needs to be as specific as possible, preferably with a timeline for completion. Next, the goal must be challenging. It needs to be difficult enough but still attainable in order to motivate the person that is working towards the goal. Commitment refers to a level of effort given. Locke and Latham (2002) suggest that sharing one’s goal increases accountability in meeting the goal. Goals of an organization are not always the goal of an individual (Locke & Lathan, 2013). Feedback should be given to, and by, the person working towards the goal. Finally, task complexity should be considered as well. A goal that is too complex or difficult may need to be broken in to parts and resources and sufficient time be made available.

Locke’s research found that goals affect performance through four mechanisms. First, goals direct attention and effort towards activities that are relevant to the goal. Activities or actions that are not related to the goal are given less attention. Locke stated that the effect occurs both cognitively and behaviorally (2002). For example, students that were given specific feedback on their performance on a driving test improved their
performance on the tasks for which they had goals, but not on other tasks unrelated to their goals (2002). Second, goals can be energizing. High goals can lead to greater effort as opposed to low set goals. Third, goals affect persistence when participants are allowed to control the time they spend on the task (2002). Locke found that when faced with a harder goal, participants would work more intensely for a shorter amount of time, or slowly and less intensely on an extended amount of time allotted. A tight deadline led to a more rapid work pace (LaPorte & Nath, 1976; Locke & Latham, 2002). The fourth mechanism states that goals affect action indirectly by leading the participant to discover and/or use task-relevant knowledge and strategies (Wood & Locke, 1990; Locke & Latham, 2002). For example, a logger who is asked to set a goal in cutting more logs will use their skill based knowledge in order to plan their effort and persist until the goal is attained (Latham & Kinne, 1974; Locke & Latham, 2002).

Although goal setting theory is not limited, it has been primarily implemented and researched in the area of motivation in the work place. Specific and difficult goals have been shown to increase performance in over 100 different tasks involving over 40,000 participants in laboratories, field settings, and organizations (Locke & Latham, 2002). Goal setting theory has been found to be one of the most valid and practical theories of employee motivation both individually, and in group settings (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Goal Setting and Elementary School

Although goal setting theory continues to be among the most popular and influential theories of motivation and performance, it has been used on a limited basis in an academic setting (Locke & Lathan, 2013). There is a lack of extensive literature
reflecting its formal use in an elementary setting, however, there is literature in regards to goal setting and self-regulated learning; as well as the use of SMART goals.

Self-regulated learning involves goal-directed activities that students initiate, modify, and reflect upon (Zimmerman, 1989). One particular study of students in higher education reported that self-setting goals increased their academic performance, motivation, and propensity for self-reflection. (Travers, Morissano, & Locke, 2015). They further reported that meeting goals gave them a feeling of “flow” and motivated them to set higher goals with the next academic task (Travers, Morissano, & Locke, 2015). As researched by Schunk, self-efficacy and goal setting are affected by judging, observing, and reacting to ones performance (Schunk, 1990). When students perceived positive progress with their goals, there was an increase in self-efficacy, motivation, and a feeling that they could accomplish their goal, which led to the process of increasing the difficulty level of the goal. Schunk found that setting upper and lower goal limits, as well as utilizing games, contracts, and conferences were useful strategies that could be employed by teachers (Schunk, 1990).

Feedback is one of the most influential factors on student learning and achievement (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). However, the type of feedback given can either be positive or negative. Descriptive feedback that is specific to the task, the process utilized to fulfill the task, and self regulation is much more effective than feedback that focuses on praise with no information in regards to the learning. Hattie stated that feedback given from student to teacher is the most powerful because it allows the teacher to see learning from the student’s point of view. Hattie also posited that students are most accurate when predicting how they will perform. When students don’t
care how they perform, they may not assess their performance or put forth effort to improve (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1990). Personal value in the goal makes a difference as well. Hattie also states that feedback from teacher to student is important in that it can encourage students to progress towards more challenging goals. However, student’s who attributed their success to teacher assistance showed lower self-efficacy and were less likely to set more challenging goals (Schunk, 1990).

It is generally accepted that the term, SMART goals, was first introduced in the business world in the 1980’s by George T. Doran, a consultant and Director of Corporate Planning for a water company in Spokane, Washington (Doran, 1981). SMART is an acronym that has changed meaning over time, but generally tied to the five criteria of Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. Doran stated that managers were often confused by all of the verbage from seminars, conferences, meetings, consultants, and literature, and that the SMART acronym provided a framework for results to be achieved (Doran, 1981). Many people think that all five criteria must be present in a goal, but Doran states that the suggested acronym does not require that all five criteria be present and that everything worth achieving is not necessarily measurable (Doran, 1981). Although popular in the business world, this method of goal setting was not widely used in the educational setting until the implementation of school improvement plans and balanced score cards (Conzemium & O’Neill, 2006). SMART goals provide an easy framework to use and it prompts people in to clearly considering and defining goals as they are being set (Conzemium & O’Neill, 2006). However, they are often set and then forgotten as school’s get back to the day to day business of education (Conzemium & O’Neill, 2006).
Goal Setting and Literacy

Goal setting theory suggests that goals are associated with enhanced performance because they initiate effort, direct attention, and encourage persistence and strategy development (Locke & Latham, 1990). Author Maryellen Weimer (2013) states that teachers have to do more than teach the content and big ideas of understanding. They have to teach students how to think, problem solve, evaluate, analyze arguments, generate questions, and reflect (Chick & Taylor, 2013). This higher-level thinking requires metacognitive skills. For goal setting to be useful in the school setting with adolescents, it requires teaching students how to evaluate, generate, and reflect on goals.

Schunk and Rice (1987, 1989, 1990) performed a study in which they taught remedial readers a reading comprehension strategy for answering questions. Students either received no goal at all, a product goal of answering questions, or a process goal of learning to use a specific strategy. Schunk and Rice found that students who received the product and process goals had a higher level of self-efficacy than the non-goal students. Process skill students demonstrated higher skill levels and placed a greater emphasis on the importance of becoming a better reader than the product-goal students. Schunk and Rice stated the importance of these findings because poor readers have low expectations for success. If students believe they can become better readers, they are more likely to focus on regulating their behaviors to help accomplish the goal (Paris & Wixson, 1986; Schunk, 1990).

In the Schunk and Rice study, the researchers referenced a study by Gaa (1973) in regards to goal-conferencing with students. Gaa assigned students to three different groups: goal-setting conferences, conferences without goals, and no conferences. The
goal-conference group met weekly with the researcher and selected a skill they would attempt to accomplish and were given feedback in regard to the previous week’s performance. The group that had conferencing without goals received general information about the material covered and what material would be covered next. Results found that the students with goals and conferencing attained the highest level of reading achievement and mastery of the set goals, and demonstrated a higher level of responsibility for their successes than children that had not set goals (Gaa, 1979; Schunk, 1990). Conferencing was found to be useful in providing students with control over their learning, which led to a higher level of self-efficacy (Schunk, 1989; Schunk, 1990).

Summary

In this chapter, the author discussed the epistemological lens of constructivism and an overview of its history and reasoning for use in this case study. Constructivism holds the belief that knowledge is not just given, it is constructed through our experiences and reflection upon those experiences. The author further reviewed the components of literacy, and the importance of fluency instruction. When students struggle with fluency, they tend to choose less challenging material or avoid reading altogether. This can lead to the phenomena of the “fourth grade slump”. The review of literature in this chapter provided evidence of the existence and causes of the “fourth grade slump”.

The author also discussed goal setting theory and provided evidence of the positive effect that goal setting can have on student performance, motivation, and self-efficacy when the goals are specific, challenging, and monitored. Poor readers have low expectations for success and conferencing with students and giving feedback on performance is one of the most influential factors on student achievement (Hattie and
Timperley, 2007). If students believe that they can make improvements, they are more likely to focus on the specific behaviors to accomplish that goal (Schunk, 1990).

While researchers do know what happens around fourth grade that makes reading more difficult, viable solutions to the issue are still vague. The development of reading simply must begin with learning to read and then reading to learn. Understanding the possibilities that goal setting can pose to economically disadvantaged students under the guidance of their teachers is the focus of this study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The majority of students who exhibit reading problems in the third grade, will continue to struggle with reading their whole lives (Bruhn & Watt, 2012). Reading fluently is an imperative step in a student’s ability to read on grade level (Rasinski, 2014), and only a dismal 36 percent of fourth grade students are meeting this goal (NAEP, 2011). Dis-fluent readers are characteristically slow, labored, inexpressive, and unenthusiastic while reading, which results in inefficient reading, frustration, and lack of comprehension (Rasinski, 2002). It is crucial to find strategies to improve performance, self-efficacy, and motivation for students in the areas of reading, and Locke’s goal setting theory suggests that short term or proximal goals improve student self-efficacy, motivation, and academic performance (2002).

This case study explored the implementation of a consistent student goal-setting process and its influence on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency in a Title I elementary school in a rural community with a high economically disadvantaged and minority population. Further examination of school culture and environment in regards to the goal setting process within this school was also conducted through individual interviews with the principal, school counselor, third grade teacher, and fourth grade teacher; focus group interviews with students, and document analysis of reading fluency scores and written goals. This chapter outlined the process and the procedures implemented to obtain and analyze the data for this study of consistent and explicit goal
setting with third and fourth grade students. In the subsequent sections, the following information was discussed: rationale for conducting this study, participant population, the sample for this study, the role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, context, provisions for trustworthiness, risks and protection of participants’ confidentiality, and summary of the process.

Rationale for Research Study

The researcher used a case study approach to collect and analyze qualitative data. Qualitative research is conducted when the variables of a problem or issue are not easily measured (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The qualitative inquiry approach begins with assumptions of theoretical frameworks to address the understandings groups or individuals give to a social problem (Creswell, 2013). The researcher explored an elementary school with a high economically disadvantaged and minority population that has implemented a goal setting program for at least five years. A case study approach was utilized to provide an in-depth understanding of a small number of cases in their real-life context (Creswell, 2013, Yin, 2009). A case study is an appropriate means of data collection for this study because the researcher was interested in understanding the influence that goal setting has had on student reading proficiency, self-efficacy, and motivation, as well as stakeholder perceptions of the impact.

Research Questions

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach to conduct an in-depth investigation of an elementary school through the lens of goal setting theory. The study was governed by the following research questions:
RQ1. How has the implementation of goal setting influenced student reading proficiency?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of faculty and students in relation to the effect that goal setting has had on self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency?

Research Design

According to Crotty (1998), the four basic elements of research design are methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology. In social research texts, the bulk of discussion and much of the terminology relate in one way or another to these four elements, and their purpose is to ensure a soundness of our research and make its outcomes convincing (Crotty, 1998). This section addressed the four elements chosen to collect and analyze data and supported why the approach used was the best mechanism for addressing the research problem (Crotty, 1998).

The epistemology was described by Crotty (1998) as the “theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology” (p.3), or “how we know what we know”. For the purposes of this study, the researcher chose constructivism as the most appropriate epistemological lens. Constructivism is defined as how one constructs an understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Crotty, 1998).

A theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology within a study (Crotty, 1998). Edwin Locke’s goal-setting theory was used as the theoretical perspective of this study. Locke’s (1990) goal-setting theory suggests that goals are associated with enhanced performance because they mobilize effort, direct attention, and encourage persistence and strategy development. Locke found that the
difficulty and specificity of the task was a good predictor of performance. His research found that in order for goals to be effective and instill motivation, they need to have clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and complexity (Locke, 1990).

This qualitative study utilized a case study methodology. Creswell (2007) states that case study research “involves the study of an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system” (p.73). In this study, the researcher attempted to follow Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) case study approach that examined the problem, the context, the issues, and the “lessons learned.”

Crotty defined research methods as the techniques or procedures used to gather or analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis (Crotty, 1998). Researchers triangulate among different sources of data to enhance accuracy of their study (Creswell 2008). The researcher used a combination of individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis. Qualitative interviews are performed in order to become familiar with the interpretations and experiences of the participant (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) explains the interviewer is responsible for the quality of the information garnered from an interview. This researcher was guided by two research questions and conducted semi-structured interviews with the principal, counselor, third grade teacher, and fourth grade teacher. The semi-structured interviews provided professional conversations where knowledge is formulated by interaction (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009).

Krueger (1994) defines focus group interviews as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. The focus group interviews for this study were conducted with
struggling and non-struggling reading students in the third and fourth grades. The students were identified by their teachers and have written goals that focus on reading proficiency. Focus group interviews allowed the participants to listen to each other’s responses and add to the original response (Patton, 2002). The focus group interview allows the researcher the opportunity to identify divergent and convergent viewpoints of the participants (Patton, 2002).

An analysis of documents provides rich data in qualitative research and is useful in the triangulation of data (Patton, 2002). Yin (2014) maintains documentation is relevant to most case studies and is important to data collection. Document analysis allows the researcher to review data that can not be heard or observed by the researcher (Patton, 2002). In order to ensure a triangulation of data, document analysis of goals that have been written by the students and reading fluency data were examined for the affects pertaining to reading proficiency.

Sample

This case study used purposeful sampling, which is a technique widely used in qualitative research for selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Whether the methodology employed is quantitative or qualitative, sampling methods are intended to maximize efficiency and validity (Morse, 2009). As Creswell states (2011), this involves identifying individuals or groups who are knowledgeable about or have experienced a phenomenon of interest. Knowledge, experience, and availability, a willingness to participate, and the ability to articulate experiences in a reflective manner are important factors in conducting research interviews (Bernard, 2002).
The elementary school in this study was chosen because it has implemented a consistent goal setting process for at least five years. The school is comprised of approximately 660 students and has Title I status due to 80 percent of its population receiving free and reduced lunch. The school has a minority population of 50 percent. In this case study, the researcher set out to explore how goal setting impacted student motivation, self-efficacy, and academic progress in reading with third and fourth grade students.

Purposeful sampling of students who have been identified by their teachers as reading below, on, or above grade level in third and fourth grades was used to identify the relationship between goal setting and self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. Qualitative methods also place primary emphasis on saturation, which is the process of obtaining a comprehensive understanding by continuing to sample until no new substantive information is acquired (Miles, 1994).

Participants

The participants of this study were the principal, counselor, a third and fourth grade teacher, and third and fourth grade students that were identified by their teachers as either reading below, on, or above grade level, but were setting goals. Although there were no specific rules concerning how many people should be in a focus group, researchers suggest between six and ten people (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). For the purposes of this study, the researcher had between four and eight students in the student focus group. The researcher requested parental interviews, but only one parent responded to the request, therefore, the researcher chose not to interview parents for this study.
In order to ensure ethical practice, the researcher secured IRB approval from Mercer University. The researcher obtained approval from the school district, as well as the participants before conducting the research. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and advised that there were no foreseeable risks associated with the study. Additionally, the participants completed an informed consent form. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher omitted the names of the state in which the school is located; as well as assigned pseudonyms to the district, the school, and all participants involved in the study.

Subjectivity Statement

For Creswell (2007), the researcher is a key instrument in the design of qualitative research. The researcher facilitates the flow of the conversation, identifies cues, and sets the respondents at ease (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003, Chenail, 2011). The researcher has two years of experience in an accredited Ph.D. program, as well as nineteen years’ experience as an elementary teacher and Instructional Coach, providing a foundation in the area of reading fluency in the elementary school setting. As a second grade teacher for ten years, I remember discussing goals with my students that mainly centered on a reading program that we used called Accelerated Reader (AR). The students had a set number of points to earn in order to meet their goal and gain the reward of going to a party with other students that had also met their reading goal. I recall helping my students set the goal and monitored them in reaching the goal, but I never taught them how to reflect on their goal or ask them how they felt once they met the goal. I also did not help them set goals in other areas. In my role as an Instructional Coach I have observed this practice in other classrooms, but it has been limited to reaching the AR
goals or math fluency goals, and has also not included the reflection process. In hindsight, I feel as though I should have included goal setting more often and in a more pervasive manner, and feel compelled to encourage my colleagues to do the same. In order to mitigate personal bias in this study, the researcher will utilize verification procedures such as peer review and debriefing. According to Glesne (1999), having peers and research associates provide input and reflection on work, will aid in mitigating research bias.

Validation

Validity in qualitative research entails establishing an appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data (Leung, 2015). Guba (1985) identified four criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In order to establish credibility, the researcher used case study as an established research method. Crotty defines research methods as the techniques or procedures used to gather or analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis (Crotty, 1998). Researchers triangulate among different sources of data to enhance accuracy of their study (Creswell, 2008). In order to triangulate the data in this study, the researcher used multiple sources of information through semi-structured interviews with building leadership and teachers, focus group interviews with students, and document analysis of reading fluency scores and written goals. Creswell (2013) states that member checking is necessary for credibility of the qualitative research study. Member checking provides participants the opportunity to review transcripts, data, analyses and interpretations for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). The researcher provided participants with copies of the interpreted data
once analysis is complete. Members will be allowed to clarify and provide feedback in regards to the data they provided.

Transferability of qualitative research is incumbent upon the person who wishes to “transfer” the results to a different context or situation (Merriam, 2009). In order to ensure transferability the researcher provided rich thick description. The data collected in this study allowed for detailed description from multiple perspectives of the goal setting process through the lens of the building leadership, teachers, and students.

In order to ensure dependability, the researcher described the setting, any changes that occurred, and how they occurred. Implementation of over-lapping methods such as interviews and document analysis allow for the study to be replicated.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to “confirmability” in qualitative research as the degree to which the researcher can demonstrate the neutrality of the research interpretations. The researcher conducted a confirmability audit by going back to the original sources in transcripts, documents, and notes to ensure that the data and their interpretation were connected to the original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Collection

As Creswell states (2013), an integral component of a case study is in-depth understanding of a case, which can be provided through the collection of multiple data sources. Researchers triangulate among different sources of data to enhance accuracy of their study (Creswell, 2008). In order to triangulate the data in this study, the researcher used multiple sources of information through semi-structured interviews with building leadership and teachers, focus group interviews with students, and document analysis of reading fluency scores and written goals. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), case
study data must be analyzed as they are collected. Each interview and focus group interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed after data collection.

All participants were provided with written formal consent before they participated in the research study. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with the principal, counselor, a third and fourth grade teacher, to better understand the implementation of the goal setting process over the past five years. Merriam (1998) suggests that qualitative design is emergent and must be analyzed as it is being collected due to the researcher not always knowing every person to be interviewed ahead of time, the questions to be asked, or where to look next. Focus group interviews were conducted with students in a place convenient to them so that they were more comfortable answering questions in a group of their peers. The students were chosen by teachers with the criteria being that some of the students chosen were currently reading below grade level, some on or above grade level, and that students have set reading goals. Semi-structured interviews were planned by phone with parents of those students that participated in the student focus group, however, only one parent responded to the researcher’s request. Therefore, those interviews were not conducted. The individual and focus group interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, which was password protected. All recordings were deleted after transcription and analysis were completed. Document analysis of the reading goals that students personally set and the reading fluency scores were analyzed to determine an increase in relation to the goal that was set by the student.
The following interview questions were utilized with the individual and focus group interviews. The rest of the interview questions were semi-structured in nature and emerged as the conversation unfolded.

Student Focus Group Interview Questions
IQ1. How do you define the word “goal”?
IQ2. How do you feel about setting goals in reading?
IQ3. What kind of goals have you set and met? What goals haven’t you met? Why?
IQ4. How did meeting a goal make you feel? How did it make you feel if you didn’t meet a goal?
IQ5. Do you think all students should set goals, Why or Why not?
IQ6. Is there anything about goal setting at your school that you would change?
IQ7. How do your friends feel about setting goals in reading?
IQ8. Who do you talk to about your goals and how does it make you feel to discuss them?

Teacher Interview Questions
IQ1. How do you define the word “goal”?
IQ2. How do you feel about setting goals in reading?
IQ3. Can you give me some background about the goal setting process at your school?
IQ4. Should goal setting be a requirement in schools, why or why not?
IQ5. What kind of effect has goal setting had on motivating your students to become better readers? Can you give examples?
IQ6. What role does a teacher have in the goal setting process with students?
IQ7. How do you define self-efficacy and has goal setting had any affect on student self-efficacy?

IQ8. Do you think all students should set goals, Why or Why not?

IQ9. Can you give examples of anything you would change pertaining to goal setting at your school?

IQ10. Is there anything you would like to add?

School Counselor and Principal Interview Questions

IQ1. How do you define the word “goal”?

IQ2. How do you feel about setting goals in reading?

IQ3. Can you give me some background about the goal setting process at your school? How do you perceive it?

IQ4. Should goal setting be a requirement in schools?

IQ5. Do you think goals motivate your students to become better readers? Can you give examples?

IQ6. What role does a teacher have in the goal setting process with students?

IQ7. Has goal setting had any affect on student self-efficacy?

IQ8. What feedback have you received from parents pertaining to the goal setting process and reading?

IQ9. Do you think all students should set goals? Why or Why not?

IQ10. Is there anything about goal setting at your school that you would change?

IQ11. Is there anything you would like to add?
IRB Approval

The institutional review board (IRB) of both the researcher’s home institution and the selected site were critical in gaining permission to conduct the research. Before any data collection began, the researcher obtained approval for the study from Mercer University's Institutional Review board (IRB). Then approval was sought from the selected site's IRB. Data was kept in a password protected secure computer.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear, Gliksman, 1997, Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The researcher used NVivo, a computer software program, to organize and code data for themes that emerged both inductively and deductively. A process of thematic analysis was conducted which involved reducing the text, exploring the text, and integrating the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Data from the individual interviews and focus groups were coded using a systematic line-by-line coding, incorporating both an inductive and deductive approach (Boyatzis, 1998, Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The researcher used an inductive approach to create code categories as the data was analyzed and interpreted. The coding process utilized Boyatzis’ inductive approach of recognizing an important moment and encoding it prior to a process of interpretation (1998). A “good code” is one that captures qualitative richness of the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998, p.1). The deductive thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999), involved a prior template of codes, complemented by the research questions. Both inductive and deductive codes were
placed in an iterative cycle of data collection, analysis, and comparison in order to establish coherence until unifying and recurrent themes emerged.

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is emergent and the process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic. The data collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis were closely analyzed through the lens of goal-setting theory and constructivism. The data was initially divided into three deductive codes of self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. As data was coded, the researcher considered the relationship of the codes and themes to goal-setting theory.

According to Suter (2011), notes or memos are often used in qualitative research to record thoughts and ideas about the codes during the data collection and analysis process. Suter states that this process assists the researcher in sorting data, defining their properties, and discovering the relationship among categories (2011). For the purposes of this study, the researcher utilized six steps in coding the data as described by Fereday, and adapted from Boyatzis and Crabtree and Miller (Boyatzis, 1998, Crabtree and Miller, 1999, Fereday, 2006). The first step is developing a code manual, which is the process of creating a template for codes in order to manage and organize data. Use of a template will provide a clear trail of evidence for the credibility of the study (Fereday, 2006). The second stage is testing the reliability of the codes. This can be done by asking a colleague to code the data so that results can be compared to the predetermined template. The third stage is summarizing data and identifying initial themes. Boyatzis (1998) describes this process as entering information into your subconscious as well as consciously processing the information. The fourth stage is applying the template of
codes and additional coding. The fifth stage is connecting the codes and identifying themes. The sixth and final stage is corroborating and legitimating coded themes. According to Fereday (2006), this final stage illustrates the process of further clustering the themes that were previously identified from the coded text.

Reporting Results

Creswell states (2013) that a fundamental element of conducting a case study is providing extensive narrative description of the case and its context. In an effort to establish trustworthiness, the researcher triangulated the data for transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam, 1998, Yin, 2009). A detailed description of the case in narrative form was presented in Chapter 4. The researcher presented explanations of codes derived from the thematic and content analysis. The researcher presented the questions and answers to the research questions based on the thematic analysis in the form of quotations from the participants. The site and participants will be assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the research design and methodology that was used to study the case of a goal setting initiative that has been in place for at least five years, and its effect on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. This study followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) case study approach by examining the problem, the context, the issues, and the lessons learned. For the purposes of this study, the researcher was guided by two research questions that were viewed through the epistemological lens of constructivism and the theoretical perspective of Locke’s goal setting theory. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the principal,
counselor, teachers; focus group interviews with students in third and fourth grades; and
document analysis of written goals and reading fluency data. Interviews and focus
groups were coded using a systematic line-by-line, open-ended, thematic analysis to
discern patterns in the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Purposeful sampling of students that
have been identified by their teachers as having set goals for improvement in reading
were used to identify the relationship between goal setting and self-efficacy, and
motivation, and reading proficiency.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher had between four and eight students
in the student focus group and planned for a corresponding parent in the semi-structured
interviews. The parent interviews were not conducted due to non-participation. The
researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with a third grade teacher, fourth grade
teacher, counselor, and principal. In order to ensure ethical practice, the researcher
secured IRB approval from Mercer University. The researcher also obtained approval
from the school district, as well as the participants before conducting the research.

In order to ensure transferability the researcher provided rich thick description in
order for comparisons to be made. The data collected in this study allowed for detailed
description from multiple perspectives of the goal setting process through the lens of the
building leadership, faculty, and students. The researcher reported the results in a
detailed narrative form.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

A qualitative case study was conducted to explore the effect that a consistent goal-setting process had on motivation, self-efficacy, and reading achievement of third- and fourth-grade students in a rural, economically disadvantaged elementary school. This study explored the goal setting process during the 2017-2018 school year and sought to examine how a goal setting process has influenced reading achievement, as well as the perceptions of the faculty and students in regards to goal setting and student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. The study was governed by the following research questions:

RQ1. How has the implementation of goal setting influenced student reading proficiency?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of faculty and students in relation to the effect that goal setting has had on self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency?

Data analysis results are presented in this chapter. An examination of the school in this case study consisted of interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Participant profiles are presented, as well as rich, thick description of the goal setting program, and an analysis of the interview data, including participant excerpts. Finally, major themes are presented and described.
Study Site Description

The school in this case was selected based on its high population of economically disadvantaged students and has used an established goal setting process for at least five years. The school is located in a rural community. For the purposes of anonymity, the school will be given the pseudonym of Wilson Elementary. Wilson Elementary is located in the economically disadvantaged side of a small town. Wilson Elementary is one of four elementary schools in the small county, and was established in 2010. Prior to 2010, the school was divided into a primary school of Pre-K through second grade, and an elementary school consisting of third through fifth grade. Each site had a principal and shared an assistant principal. In 2010, the school sites were combined and moved to a new building on the same campus. This transition presented the new principal, counselor, and merging staffs with many challenges. The faculty and staff had to not only develop a relationship with one another, but also reach consensus on expectations and norms.

The faculty is comprised of thirty-nine certified teachers, twenty-one of whom hold advanced degrees. With 76% of the student population being economically disadvantaged, Wilson Elementary is a Title I school with a population of 740 students in grades Kindergarten through five. Due to the transient nature of the student population, the numbers fluctuate quite a bit throughout the year as students move in and out of school district. The majority of the school population is white (57.9%) and African American (37.1%) with a balance between males (49.6%) and females (50.4%). Currently, there are 52 special education students, 35 gifted, and 5 English Language Learners.
Description of “Ready, Set, GOAL”

The following description of Ready, Set, GOAL was derived from interviews with the counselor, as well as from document analysis of her presentation about the goal setting process that she created in 2009. The goal setting process, coined “Ready, Set, GOAL” was initiated through a process stemming from a county counselors’ meeting that she attended in 2008. The meeting topics were in regards to how to motivate students and increase self-efficacy through the use of student goal setting and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2007). The counselor collaborated with other counselors in the county on student motivation, a common topic of concern. The counselor has continued to present this information at professional learning opportunities for faculty and parents since the goal setting process came into existence in 2009. The presentation provides faculty and parents with goal setting objectives and strategies to use with students, as well as research on the positive effect that setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound) goals can have on a student’s self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement (Conzemium & O’Neill, 2006). This presentation was used to both inform and garner much-needed support from the faculty and parents in order for implementation of the process to be successful. Since the implementation of the goal setting process, the school has shown an increase in standardized test scores in the areas of Reading and Math, which has resulted in meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and removal from the status of a Focus School. The Georgia Department of Education defines a Focus School as a Title I school that has not adequately closed the achievement gap of the lowest 10% of the student population.
The stated objectives of the goal setting program from the counselor’s presentation based off the counselor’s research and meeting were:

- To continue to bring academic success to the forefront of student awareness, and to increase the belief of the value of education among all students.
- To help children understand the feeling of success.
- To understand that effort and perseverance are necessary for success.
- To help children understand the goal-setting process, including breaking goals into smaller parts and practicing to achieve a goal.
- To create a positive impact on student achievement through the process of setting and meeting goals tied to academic standards.
- To award improvements toward goals, as well as final mastery.
- To afford the feeling of success to all students.

Details of Ready, Set, GOAL are differentiated by grade levels. All students in Kindergarten through Fifth grade are involved in the process and actually complete a goal-setting card for the goals they set. For Kindergarten through second grade, goals are primarily teacher guided. Some examples of goals in reading may be to master a certain number of sight words, make an A on a spelling test, or to read a certain number of books. Goals are made in a variety of subject areas and can also include behavior or health related goals. Students at this level are trained as to the definition of a goal and why one should make them. Teachers check on progress towards their goals weekly. Students at this age earn “book bag bling”. These are bracelets that are hung on book bags and students earn different colored beads to place on the bracelets. One bead is earned per goal that the student achieves.
For third through fifth grade students, SMART goals are introduced. Students are trained as to what each letter of SMART stands for in their goal card and teachers spend time discussing with students how goals can be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. At this level, students have more independence in choosing their goals. The teacher may dictate that everyone has to make a reading goal, but students are also free to choose other goals as well. For third through fifth grade, students do not earn book bag bling, but rather pencils, special erasers and other office type supplies. Leadership skills are also highlighted at this age level. As part of the goal process, fourth grade students are given the opportunity to be a part of the “goal patrol.” The Goal Patrol is made up of students who are in charge of checking the student goal cards for completion, and handing out the prizes to the students. This process takes place every Thursday morning in the library under the supervision of the counselor. The fourth grade students are trained on how to encourage students. They are prompted to ask students if they met their goal and to congratulate them on their success and to wish them good luck on their next goal.

School wide goals are set each month and are introduced with what the counselor refers to as “a mindset statement.” An example of a mindset statement is “I like to challenge myself.” The corresponding school-wide goal for the month was to meet a thousand goals. At the end of each goal checking session, the counselor collects the student goal cards and keeps a spreadsheet of how many goals are met per grade level. The cards are also color coded by the content area that the goal is set. For example, reading goals may be on yellow cards. At the end of the year, the school has a celebration and reveals how many goals were met for the year.
Participant Description and Interview Protocols

The table below provides a description of the tools used and the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Methods and Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency Scores</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual interviews were conducted with the principal, counselor, and a third and fourth grade teacher. Interviews with each participant were semi-structured and open-ended in order to provide opportunity for the development of further questions and clarification as needed. Semi-structured interviews provide reliable, comparative qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). They are beneficial because they allow for questions to be prepared ahead of time, yet allow the interviewee the freedom to express ones views on the topic (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

All of the individual interviews took place at the school, after student dismissal for the day and they ranged from twenty-two to thirty-five minutes. The principal and counselor interviews took place in both of their offices, and the teacher interviews took place in their classrooms. Both teachers have taught at Wilson Elementary their entire professional careers. They were chosen for this study based on the suggestion of the counselor and principal because they were both known to fully implement the goal
setting process with enthusiasm. Both the principal and counselor have been employed at other schools and counties.

The principal, Mrs. Martin, is a female and has over twenty-five years of experience at various levels of education from high school to elementary. She has been the principal of this elementary school for eight years. Although she was not principal during the inception of the goal setting process, she has supported the continuation of the program. The interview with the principal took place in her office and lasted thirty-four minutes.

The counselor, Mrs. Morris, has been in practice as a counselor since 1992, and at Wilson Elementary for the past fourteen years. The school’s counseling program is a “recognized ASCA model program” (RAMP) by the American School Counselor Association, continuously since 2009. Mrs. Morris was instrumental in obtaining RAMP certification for her school. This certification is prestigious and is described as moving a school’s counseling program to the next level (ASCA, 2017). Mrs. Morris started “Ready, Set, GOAL” and is involved in the continued professional learning for teachers and students in regards to implementation of the program.

The fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Bailey, has taught for eight years, all of which have been in fourth grade at this school. She currently holds a certification in gifted education and teaches a fourth grade class comprised of a mixture of gifted and regular education students.

The third grade teacher, Miss Andrews, is a first year teacher and has a dual degree in Early Childhood and Special Education from a local university. She was also a
student in the county from first grade through twelfth grade and has strong ties to the community. She is currently pursuing her Master’s degree.

The same set of semi-structured interview questions were used for all of the faculty interviews. The questions, listed in Chapter 3, were open-ended and semi-structured. Pseudonyms were used for all faculty members, students, and locations in order to ensure confidentiality. The table below provides a summary of the participant’s professional experience and current roles.

Table 2
Summary of Participants’ Teaching Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Current Role</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Martin</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Morris</td>
<td>25 years RAMP</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Andrews</td>
<td>1st year teacher;</td>
<td>3rd Grade Teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Bailey</td>
<td>8 years teaching;</td>
<td>4th Grade Teacher</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gifted certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two focus group interviews with students were conducted. Each focus group was comprised of students selected by their teachers with the criteria given by the researcher to choose a balance of struggling and non-struggling readers. Struggling readers would be defined as those students reading below grade level, while non-struggling would be students who are reading at or above grade level as determined by their teacher. One focus group was comprised of third grade students and one group was comprised of fourth grade students. The third grade focus group consisted of six students. The
The interview took place in the school conference room and lasted approximately twenty-one minutes. The fourth-grade focus group included seven students, took place in the conference room, and lasted twenty-three minutes. Both focus groups were asked the same set of open-ended, semi-structured interview questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. All of the individual and focus group interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for codes and themes using NVivo qualitative computer software package. A process of thematic analysis was conducted which involved reducing the text, exploring the text, and integrating the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Codes were grouped into emergent themes, both inductively and deductively, and then analyzed and interpreted through the lens of goal-setting theory. The tables below provide focus group participant information.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Focus Group 3rd Grade Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4
*Student Focus Group 4th Grade Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breanna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>On Grade Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nic</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to mitigate personal bias, the researcher utilized verification procedures such as peer review and debriefing. The researcher had a peer and research associate provide input and reflection on the work (Glesne, 1999). Member checking was utilized to verify the interview transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviewees were emailed a copy of their transcribed interview and given an opportunity to review and provide feedback and clarification of their interview.

**Findings**

**Document Analysis**

Besides reviewing the documents that illustrated the “Ready, Set, Goal” process, the researcher analyzed the students’ written goals and the fluency scores in order to ensure a triangulation of the data (Creswell, 2008). Document analysis of the written goals involved collecting and reading the hand written goal cards for the third and fourth grade students. An analysis of the goal cards revealed that there was a focus on reading
and that students had met their reading goals to date (see Appendix C). Examples of the
goals met by students in the third grade focus groups are as follows:

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Goals Set</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade Students</td>
<td>Ryan: I want to pass my AR test on Percy Jackson and the Olympians with 100%. I will read every night for 15 minutes and I want to meet the goal by December 14, 2017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jason: I want to increase my AR level from 5.1 to 6.2 and I will read every night for 20 minutes to reach my goal by December 14, 2017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Damon: I will increase my fluency from 100 words per minute to 135 words per minute by the winter test. I will practice reading every day for 15 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kelly: I want to increase my reading level from a 4.3 to a 5.0. I will talk to an adult about what I read and I will make this goal by December 14, 2017.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Fourth Grade Students | Mason: I want to increase my reading level from a 3.0. I will read every day for 20 minutes and will meet my goal in two weeks. |
|                       | Jimmy: I want to pass my class by studying. |
|                       | Nic: I want to increase my reading level from 3.2 to 3.5 by reading 25 minutes every day. I will meet this goal next Thursday. |
|                       | Amber: I want to finish my AR chapter book by reading every night for homework and I will meet this goal in two weeks. |
|                       | Breanna: I will increase my fluency from 124 to 150 on the winter fluency screener by practicing reading every day for 15 minutes. |
|                       | Bryan: I will read two chapter books this month by reading at least 25 minutes every night. |
It should be noted that all but one of the students’ goals had measures of either “how much” or “how often” in their narratives. The students’ goals were deductively coded as appropriate with elements of specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART). These students’ goals were aligned with Locke’s (1990) theory as they are all associated with enhanced performance as they indicate effort, direct attention, and encourage persistence and strategy development.

Student fluency scores were derived from a screener that was given to all students in the fall, winter, and spring quarters. The administered screener was obtained from the universal screener program that the county used called G.R.A.S.P. (Georgia RESA Assessment of Student Progress). All elementary students in the county are given the fluency screener, along with other screeners, three times a year; fall, winter, and spring. The data that is gathered from these screeners is used to plan intervention groups and determines whether a student is reading on grade level or not, and in need of extra support. Students in third-grade should have a minimum, or cut score of 110 words per minute (G.R.A.S.P., 2013). A fourth-grade student should have a minimum, or cut score of 140 words per minute (G.R.A.S.P., 2013). Below are tables listing student fluency scores.
The researcher analyzed the fluency screener data in Tables 6 and 7, and found that the participants in third- and fourth-grade showed growth with the exception of one fourth-grade student, Jose, who was already reading well above grade level. Teachers
identified student’s reading levels based on classroom performance. It should be noted that based on fluency scores, Jimmy, a gifted fourth-grade student, reads above grade level, but did not meet the cut score and showed very little growth on the winter screener. The teacher’s explanation for this was “although Jimmy is gifted, he has also been diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder but is not medicated. He is currently a distracted, slow reader and is unmotivated to increase his fluency score.” Nic is identified as a below grade level reader, but scored well above the Fall cut score and showed quite a bit of growth. The teacher’s explanation was “Nic has great fluency, but struggles with comprehension and, therefore, is considered a below grade level reader.” In the fall, two third-graders were below the cut score, two were right at the cut score, and two students were above the cut score. In the fall, four of the fourth-graders were below the cut score, and three were well above the cut score. Only one third-grader and two fourth-graders had not met the minimum cut score by the winter administration.

Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups

In order to provide the reader with rich, thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the interview data, excerpts will be directly quoted and shared in this section. The four adult participants were asked similar questions, included in chapter 3. The focus group interviews were asked the same set of questions, with some probing questions as the conversation unfolded, typically done with focus group methods (Krueger, 1994).

Each interview opened with questions to establish rapport. The researcher asked each participant their name, position, and how long they had been employed at the school. Prior to the focus group interviews, the researcher had a casual conversation about what to expect in the interview and were told that they would be asked a series of
questions about their thoughts and feelings about setting goals and that there were no wrong answers.

Initial line-by-line coding was completed with deductive and inductive analysis. The researcher confirmed the deductive themes of Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Reading Proficiency as being effected by the goal setting process. The themes with their emerging interpretation derived from the line-by-line coding are listed in Table 8. Themes of “Success and Defeat,” “Culture,” and “Actions and Improvements” were derived from the process of inductive thematic analysis. Emerging interpretive themes were derived from an analysis of the codes and quotes by the participants. Table 8 provides a list of the inductive and deductive themes and the research question that corresponds to the theme. Codes and emerging interpretive themes are listed as well.

Table 8
List of Inductive and Deductive Themes, Emerging Interpretive Themes, and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deductive Themes</th>
<th>Emerging Interpretive Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>SELF EMPOWERMENT</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>THINKING DEEPER</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Achieve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aspire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rewards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SMART</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Proficiency RQ1 &amp; 2</th>
<th>LIFE SKILLS</th>
<th>Reading influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meaningful Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Differentiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Necessary Grow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inductive Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success and Defeat RQ2</th>
<th>“WHAT YOU CAN BE, NOT WHAT YOU ARE”</th>
<th>Success and Defeat Delayed Gratification Barriers Perseverance Ownership Stretch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture RQ1&amp;2</td>
<td>IT TAKES A VILLAGE</td>
<td>Culture Teacher buy-in Feedback Inspire Student Leadership Modeling Coaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions &amp; Improvements RQ1&amp;2</th>
<th>EVERYONE HAS A VOICE</th>
<th>Actions &amp; Improvements Teacher’s Roll Training Celebration Tracking Monitor Parent Involvement Incentives Time Coaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Codes will be in italics, emerging interpretive themes will be in quotations, inductive and deductive themes will have the first letter capitalized.*
Explanation of Themes

The Ready, Set, GOAL process has provided Wilson Elementary with an opportunity to encourage and monitor their students’ use of goal setting and see the effects in student self-efficacy, motivation, and academic growth. Through the process of thematic analysis, the researcher was able to search for both inductive and deductive themes within the goal setting phenomenon (Gereday & Muir-Chochrane, 2006). Data from the individual interviews and focus groups were coded using line-by-line coding. The researcher began with the predetermined deductive themes of Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Reading Proficiency. Themes of Success and Defeat, Culture, and Actions and Improvements were derived from the process of inductive analysis. Themes and codes are listed in Table 7. The following is a description of interpretive emerging themes, inductive and deductive themes, and codes.

“Self Empowerment” was the interpretive emerging theme of the deductive theme of Self-Efficacy. Interpretive data produced codes such as confidence, pride, self advocacy, and empowerment when describing how students felt about goal setting. The epistemological lens used for this case study was constructivism. Constructivism is situated in the belief that knowledge and meaning are not just given, it is constructed based on human experiences and reflection (Crotty, 1998). Based on Piaget’s theory of learning, inquiry is key to student learning and students should be challenged to take ownership of their learning.

The interpretive emerging theme of “Thinking Deeper” was derived from the adult interviews in which codes such as motivation, achieve, aspire, possibilities, rewards, and SMART were used. The interviewees, in particular the principal, described
goal setting as a means to encourage students to “Think Deeper” about the set goals and about their learning in general. The interpretive theme of “Life Skills” was derived from the adult interviews and the student focus groups as well. The interviews consisted of codes such as critical, necessary, meaningful, and grow to describe why one would set goals. The interviewees suggested that there should be challenge, variety, balance, and differentiation when choosing goals. In particular, the principal suggested that the act of setting goals develops a life skill that can carry over into other areas of a person’s life beyond academia.

The interpretive emerging theme of “What You Can Be, Not What You Are” was derived from the inductive theme of Success and Defeat. The principal and counselor responses focused greatly on the barrier of economically disadvantaged households and the effect that it can have on the academic and social growth of students. This was an important theme throughout the case study. The principal felt strongly that goal setting is particularly important for students in poverty and stated “students in poverty can get overwhelmed with circumstances and we have to help them see what they can be, not what you are as a life skill”. This statement compliments the importance of teaching students delayed gratification in order to develop stretch and perseverance when working towards life goals. The focus group student interviews highlighted the code of ownership within this theme when students discussed their feelings of Success and Defeat when they met or didn’t meet goals.

The interpretive emerging theme of “It Takes A Village” developed from the inductive theme of Culture. The adult interviews produced codes such as teacher buy-in, feedback, inspire, student leadership, modeling, and coaching when describing the goal
setting process and the important rolls, responsibilities, and actions of the teachers, counselor, parents, and students that in combination, creates a Culture that it takes all of these participants working together in order for the goal setting process to be successful and effective. The student’s roll as a leader both in the goal patrol capacity, and in the classroom with their peers, the teachers and counselor providing feedback, coaching, and modeling, all help to inspire the students to achieve their goals and illustrates the theme of “It Takes A Village.”

“Everyone Has A Voice” is the interpretive emerging theme of Actions and Improvements. All participants were asked a final question as to what they would change or improve upon with the current goal setting process at Wilson Elementary. This theme emerged from the analysis of interviews that produced codes such as training, coaching, teacher’s roll, tracking, and monitor in regards to Actions and Improvements that should take place in the current goal setting process. The principal and counselor focused on the current strengths of the teacher’s roll, but also on the need to track and monitor the success of the process on a larger scale school-wide. The two teacher interviews suggested that an increase in parental involvement and more time dedicated to individual coaching and feedback given to students was an area of Action and Improvement. Celebration was a code that was present in all interviews. Students wanted more input in changing the rewards and incentives, and the adults wanted to increase the celebration activities, as well as the tracking of goals, at the end of the year. All of the adults made reference to a need in increasing parental involvement, but all were unsure as to how to improve upon this beyond what they have already done. The interviews demonstrated that the participants were eager to make improvements and had given thought to their ideas.
The adult interviewees expressed that they were interested to see what the students would like to do differently.

Research Question 1: How has the implementation of goal setting influenced student reading proficiency?

A Culture of Defining Goals. The themes of Reading Proficiency, Culture, and Actions & Improvements were illustrated by the participant’s definitions of goals and how setting goals has influenced reading proficiency. The researcher found common definitions that were pervasive through the school indicating a Culture in which goals and reading proficiency are important. The principal and the fourth grade teacher stated that “a goal is something that you want to attain or meet and can be in any area”. The counselor stated, “it is anything you want to be able to do. It can be school related or not, but just something you are interested in”. The third grade teacher said that a goal is something that you work to *achieve*. For the third grade focus group, one student began talking and the other students used the same verbiage as the first student and stated “goals are something you want to *achieve* or make”. The fourth grade students also stated that a goal is something that you want to *achieve* or that you are aiming to improve on. The fourth graders did state that a goal is a *challenge*, which was different than any of the other interviews. All of the groups used the code *achieve* in their description. This showed that there is a common use of vocabulary and ideas when it comes to the definition of the word goal. It also established that there is a Culture in the school that goals could be related and set in any area of a person’s life, not just in an academic area.

The Influence of Goals. In terms of how goal setting influenced reading, the principal stated the following:
I think you have to set goals in everything. I think that goals should be part of life. I think you should always have something that you reach for, something that you *aspire* for. I think that if you don't, you aren't growing. So I think that goals should be set in every area of your life. With reading, there needs to be different kinds of goals. I don't think that reading goals should always be how quickly I can read a book, or I don't think they should always be how many words I can get or how many books I can read. Nothing wrong with those goals, but sometimes reading goals should be just reading a book for pleasure, or reading a book that takes me to a different genre, something I'm uncomfortable with. I think one time when I went to the beach, my goal that summer was to read something different, So I thought, I'll read a classic, and I read William Faulkner. You need to develop yourself, but you also need to help children learn to develop different types of goals as well. Often our students' goals deal with making a certain percentage on an Accelerated Reader (AR) quiz or reading a certain number of words or books, and those are a great place for them to start, but I think as they mature, you help them to expand how they look at goals.

The principal believed that setting goals is important in reading, but that the focus should not be only to increase fluency, but should move towards a *focus* on the enjoyment of reading and teaching students to *challenge* themselves with a variety of genres. The principal’s statement indicated that reading goals should be *differentiated*, and consist of *variety* and *balance* in their purpose. This is consistent with the interpretive emerging themes of “Life Skills.” The principal further illustrated the importance of goals as “Life Skills” when she stated “goal setting is teaching students a
“Life Skill” they can carry on beyond school”. Goal setting prompts students in “Thinking Deeper” about reading. Codes such as achieve, aspire, and possibilities were derived from the principal and counselor’s interview and further illustrated the interpretive emerging theme of “Life Skills”. The principal stated that reading goals were critical to increasing Reading Proficiency and should be a priority. The principal also stated that the teacher’s role is important in teaching students how to set goals and discussed the use of SMART goals in grades third through fifth. This illustrated the interpretive theme of “Everyone Has A Voice” and the deductive theme of Culture. The adult interviews highlighted codes such as teacher buy-in, feedback, and the importance of the teacher’s role in coaching, modeling, and inspiring students in the process.

The counselor made a similar statement in regards to reading goals:

I think it's critical for them to set goals in reading. A lot of the younger kids set sight word goals. A teacher wanted me to come by and speak with a student that met her goal of 165 sight words and she was so proud. A lot of the goals I think that kids feel most comfortable setting have to do with reading. We're really focused on reading here, this year, not only at the school, but the county end also. I think it's important here in elementary school to have reading goals. I was walking with a boy over to my office today and I had to take him out of class, he really struggles with reading and acts out some times. I said, "What were you doing?" And he said, "Well, we were working on reading." And so, we talked about learning to read is hard sometimes, the learning part, but once you know how to read, the whole world is there for you.
The counselor also discussed the use of SMART goals and stated that it is the foundation of their goal setting process with the students in grades third through fifth. An illustration of Actions & Improvements is the use of the student goal setting cards which has a specific place for these criteria so that the students can stay focused on those areas and complete each section demonstrating the interpretive theme “Thinking Deeper”. The principal and counselor were in agreement that the goal setting process is critical and necessary in the area of reading and there is a Culture among teachers and students that goals should be made in the area of reading.

The third grade and fourth grade teacher suggested that goal setting influenced reading as a part of tracking. The third grade teacher stated: “I think they're necessary in order to grow, in order to see the kids grow. In order for the students to monitor their growth, they have to set goals”. The fourth grade teacher stated, “I think setting goals in reading is very helpful. I teach them about how to make a SMART goal. It is to be reasonable, timely, and measurable. I try to make sure all of my students have those components.” The teacher statements consisted of codes that demonstrated goal setting as a “Life Skill” and an opportunity in “Thinking Deeper.”

Although the teacher responses were not as lengthy as the principal and counselor, they were both in alignment with the principal and counselor as far as the importance of goal setting in reading. They illustrated how they had been trained and how they train their students, continually creating Actions & Improvements. Both stated that they felt that setting goals in reading was necessary and helpful to a child’s growth towards proficiency in reading.
The third grade and fourth grade student focus groups illustrated their feelings on setting goals in reading demonstrating its importance as a “Life Skill,” and their responses are recorded in the tables below.

Table 9
3rd Grade Student Response to Their Feelings on Setting Goals in Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>It makes me feel great because it makes me feel like I can read more books, take more AR tests, get more points, and then get rewarded for it at the end of the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Reading goals make me feel like I'm gonna get to read a higher level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>I can read a ton of words in a minute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Goals help because you need some practice in reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon</td>
<td>I can set a SMART goal and it helps me get to a higher reading level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10
4th Grade Student Response to Their Feelings on Setting Goals in Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>I like setting goals in reading, 'cause you know, I like reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nic</td>
<td>I also feel really, really good because I also like reading books a bunch. I'm actually on the book &quot;Wonder.&quot; It's a big book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>I really don't go to set goals in reading, because I am already very excelling in reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>Good, 'cause I'm a good reader, and I know that I'll be able to get that goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>Reading goals helps kids, when they're trying to meet a goal, raise their fluency and helps them encourage others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both student focus groups made statements about goals helping them become better readers and more reading proficient. They were aware that the purpose of the goal setting was to help them improve, and therefore, build confidence. Only one fourth grade student, Jimmy, stated that he did not set reading goals because he already excelled in that
area and did not need to make any goals. Most of the students related the purpose of the reading goals was to improve their reading level and to be able to read higher level books and provide challenge.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of faculty and students in relation to the effect that goal setting has had on self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency?

Self-Efficacy: Student Self-Empowerment. In order to address this research question, the researcher divided the question into separate themes of Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Reading Proficiency and then grouped the responses by faculty and focus groups. The principal and counselor both agreed on how goal setting effected student self-efficacy.

Oh yes. I think our children are empowered by it. I think it builds their self confidence, and it builds their understanding of where they are academically. You can move forward without understanding where you are academically; that's possible. But the possibility of moving to a greater mastery is there if you understand your process along the way. It’s that development of the total person.

The counselor echoed the principal’s statement and added:

Oh yes. You can just see it when you talk to them about it. And I’m always there at the goal party, and the kids are smiling. They feel good about themselves when they fill up their ring or their card. They are real excited. This one little boy, who is a special education student, is in a class that it is really heavily involved in Ready, Set, GOAL. He has filled up two rings already this year and he is just beside himself with pride. I think for students, how he feels about himself and his
ability really means something. Goal setting affects how the students feel about themselves and how they feel about their ability to perform and be successful.

Both the principal and the counselor stated that they felt that the goal setting process had a profound influence on student Self-Efficacy. They illustrated the codes of confidence, empowerment, pride, and self-advocacy. Both participants used words such as empowered, excitement, possibility, and pride to describe how the students felt after meeting the reading goals they set. Overall, both the principal and the counselor felt that goal setting affected how student’s felt about themselves and their ability. The counselor stated that they wanted the students to “get a taste of success” and to garner a feeling of “I can do this.” Both the principal and the counselor felt that it was important for the students to set realistic goals in order to be successful and that this was largely connected to the teacher guiding the process with the SMART goal model.

Both of the classroom teachers were asked if goal setting had an effect on student self-efficacy. The third grade teacher stated:

At the beginning of the year, we have to really teach them those steps of setting a goal. You have to say, "Okay, you can't just say, 'I'm going to read this book.'" That's not specific, so you teach them, what does being specific mean, and then you teach them what does it mean to be measurable? How do I measure a goal? What does it mean by time? Why do I have to do it in a certain time? And that does make them have a sense of self-efficacy. They are able to understand why they are setting goals.

The fourth grade teacher stated the following in regards to the question, has goal setting had an effect on student self-efficacy?
Yes. I see students becoming independent. I like to see my students working to be independent and to be self-advocates. When they need help, I want them to ask for help. If they are good at something, then I want them to help others. We teach them about how to make a SMART goal. It is to be reasonable, timely, and measurable. I try to make sure all of my students have those components. We keep our goal cards on the wall and I ask them if they've met them. They're allowed to make academic goals, reading goals, health goals; any kind of goal they want. Sometimes it's not eating dessert or exercising.

Although both teachers did not have as lengthy explanations as the principal and counselor in regards to how students feel, they both mentioned the importance of utilizing the SMART goal method and emphasized that students set reasonable goals. The fourth grade teacher stated “the goal setting process has made my students more independent and has had a positive effect on my students becoming self-advocates”. The third grade teacher also stated the importance of setting SMART goals “I have to teach students the importance of understanding each aspect of SMART and why it is important to follow those steps”. The third grade teacher tied the student’s self-efficacy to understanding why they are setting goals, while the fourth grade teacher tied self-efficacy to a student’s independence, ability to be helpful to others, and becoming a self-advocate.

Success and Defeat. Both student focus groups were asked how they felt when they met their goals and how they felt when they didn’t meet them. The researcher wanted to explore the perceptions of students when they met goals, as well as when they did not meet goals. The following tables consist of third and fourth grade student responses in regards to how they felt when they met a goal.
Table 11
3rd Grade Focus Group Responses on How They Feel When They Meet a Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>It feels…..excellent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>It made me feel curious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon</td>
<td>It made me feel proud of myself cause I made a goal that I knew I could.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>It makes me feel smart and confident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>It makes me feel great and proud of myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12
4th Grade Focus Group Responses on How They Feel When They Meet a Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>Excited, but it depends which goal it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>One that's really hard is more exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>Nothing, really</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breanna</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nic</td>
<td>It made me feel happy because I had to write a goal, and it said that I wanted to make 100 on my math. And I made 100, and I felt good about that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Super excited because I finished a ginormous book by a certain time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the students felt a sense of happiness and excitement when they met a goal that they had set. The third grade students used words that illustrated the themes of Self-Efficacy, Reading Proficiency, and Motivation. The use of words such as proud, smart, and confident resonated throughout both interviews. The fourth grade students’ excitement seemed to be contingent on the level of challenge that they felt from the goal. One student stated that “it depended on what kind of goal” and another student reiterated this opinion and stated “I like to achieve harder goals”. Students were more excited if the
goal was harder. This further illustrates Self-Efficacy and Success and Defeat themes. Some students like to be stretched and this suggested them developing “Life Skills” to overcome barriers to develop perseverance. A third grade student stated that he was proud of himself because he knew he could meet the goal. Only one student, Jimmy, stated that he really didn’t have a sense of good feelings from meeting goals, as he is a gifted student and he felt that he already excelled in this area.

The other part of this question pertained to the feelings that the students got when they did not meet a goal. The following tables contain excerpts from their interviews that are aligned with the Success and Defeat theme.

Table 13
3rd Grade Focus Group Responses to Not Meeting a Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>I feel sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>I didn’t feel confident anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon</td>
<td>Well it depends if I wasn't even putting the work out. I feel disappointed in myself, but if I was, I'd still admit it wouldn't make me sad and mad because that just means I just need to try harder next time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Mad at myself because I didn’t meet it yet, but it takes practice before you can get it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14
4th Grade Focus Group Responses to Not Meeting a Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>Disappointed. It makes you disappointed in yourself because you've been working hard, but you haven't been working hard enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breanna</td>
<td>I don't like it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>I feel disappointed too, just because ... I don't know. But I just feel disappointed in myself because I didn't make my goal until maybe Thursday and then I finally made my goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nic</td>
<td>It makes me feel disappointed because I'm almost there, then it just stops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>It makes me feel not that much like anything. I just keep on trying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>It makes me happy because then I get more tries to try to get the goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>I’ve never not made the goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both focus groups had similar feelings when they did not meet their set goals. Although some students liked the challenge, most students in both groups felt disappointed, sad, and angry. However, when the researcher asked if they were mad or angry with anyone else such as their teacher or parents, all of the students stated that they were disappointed, mad, or angry with themselves only. When asked why they didn’t make the goal, the students made statements such as “I need to work harder next time” and that they were happy to get more opportunities to meet the goal. None of the students blamed anyone for not meeting the goals and all of the failed goals were attributed to lack of hard work on the student’s part. Only one student, a gifted student, stated that he had never failed to meet a goal. In the theme of Success and Defeat, students took ownership of their performance on the goals and in some cases, noted that there was a process to goal setting and not meeting the goal did not mean that the work was over. This demonstrated
that some students were developing *stretch* and *perseverance* by continuing to work towards a failed goal.

Motivation: “Thinking Deeper.” The second part of research question two pertained to student Motivation and Reading Proficiency. The question asked the perceptions of faculty and students in regards to how goal setting affected student motivation. The faculty participants were asked if they felt that goals have motivated students to become better readers. The following table shows the responses of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 15</th>
<th>Participant Interview Responses: Affect on Student Motivation in Reading?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>I do because I think it's <em>motivated</em> them to work towards something and when the teachers guide them, particularly the young ones, when they guide them with the reading goals, a lot of the younger kids have goals towards sight towards, AR tests or some of those type things that deal with reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>A lot of the goals are about reading. I think it is something that the students feel comfortable doing. That’s partly why they are <em>motivated</em> to set a goal in that area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Students get <em>excited</em> about being rewarded for goals so that has <em>motivated</em> them. Even if it's just a stamp on that card. So it does motivate them to read more, or to reach that goal, so they can be rewarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade Teacher</td>
<td>If they're intrinsically <em>motivated</em> I think it is a very heavy thing. I also think that goal-setting from parents is important. I have a student in my class right now whose mom expects her to read two books and to take two AR tests a week, that's pretty extreme, because in my class I expect my students to read chapter books. I'm wanting more ... I want them thinking deeper about reading. I want more than quantity at this age. And I've noticed that's a hard transition for us.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The principal stated that with teacher guidance, students are motivated to work towards something. Although reading is not the only focus in the goal setting process, many of the goals set are in the area of reading. The counselor stated that her perception is that student’s are motivated to set goals in areas that they are comfortable with and a lot of the time, that area is in reading. Both the principal and the counselor statements illustrated the theme of Actions & Improvements by stating the importance of the teacher’s role in coaching when it comes to guiding students in the goal setting process. The third grade teacher’s statement “goal setting has motivated a lot of students because they like the rewards that are involved” illustrates the theme of Motivation. The fourth grade teacher suggested that “intrinsic motivation was important for students” and that “parents play a huge role in student goal setting”, illustrating the theme of Actions & Improvements. She stated “some of my parents place a high importance on their children setting reading goals and often want them to set higher goals than the teacher’s expectation”. When the researcher asked the teacher if she felt that it was unnecessary or too much pressure for the students, the teacher stated “I feel that it was good for the parents to have high expectations for the students”, suggesting that parent involvement plays a significant roll in the goal setting process. All four of the faculty members suggested that goal setting did increase student motivation and that they had all noticed a marked increase in goals being set in the area of reading. This illustrated the theme of Motivation and Reading Proficiency. Many of the students were motivated by the sense of pride, confidence, and challenge that they received from meeting the goals, as well as the rewards they received. The teacher statements about parental involvement, student ownership in their goals, combined with the principal and counselor statements regarding
the teacher's roll, illustrate the interpretive emerging theme that “It Takes A Village” for the goal setting process to be most successful.

Reading Proficiency: Life Skills. Students were asked how they felt about setting goals in reading and if it motivated them to work harder. This interview question touched on both themes of Motivation and Reading Proficiency. Below is the table of student responses to this question.

Table 16
Student Focus Group Responses: Feelings and Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Grade Students</th>
<th>Jason: Yes, because it will make you feel smarter that you can like practice, and keep on practicing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ryan: I would change my reading level because I want to be a higher level?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jack: It makes me feel like I can read more books, take more AR tests, get more points, and then get rewarded for it at the end of the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade Students</td>
<td>Mason: I feel good about it because it makes me want to work harder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nic: It makes me make better grades in reading so I like it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bryan: I know I’ll be able to make that goal because I’m a good reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breanna: I want to make a 90 or 100 on my next AR test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jimmy: Honestly, it makes me feel nothing, 'cause I've always completed the goal, the last time that I set for myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jose: Sometimes it’s pretty boring. You just stand in line for a card.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In response to this question, all the third-grade students stated that they would make their goals harder and at a higher reading level, demonstrating their need for challenge and meaningful goals. Many of them were motivated to increase their points in order to get the reward of going to a reading party at the end of the year. Students liked feeling smart and felt that setting goals in reading made them better reading students. Fourth grade students made similar statements in regards to being motivated to work harder in the area of reading. However, some of their statements differed from third grade students and some of the students felt bored with the process and therefore, unmotivated to set higher reading goals. The students suggested that the rewards needed to be changed and more celebration should occur when meeting the goals. One student, Jimmy, stated that “the cards are boring and we just stood in line.” The student made suggestions of having different rewards rather than a pencil or eraser and he did not like standing in line to get his card stamped. The gifted students in the fourth-grade group also made statements of being bored rather than motivated. These statements illustrated the theme of “Actions & Improvements” and that the students are craving some variety and input in the incentive process.
Table 17  
*Participant Responses: Affect on Reading Proficiency?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Students take the reading goals seriously and are working hard to meet them. They really do work towards them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Sometimes the goal is about the action or doing something to increase reading such as reading for an extra fifteen minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade Teacher</td>
<td>I have a struggling reader who has really taken to the goal setting. She's a hard worker, but she struggles so we've been doing a lot of that with goal setting and every time she meets a goal she just gets ecstatic. And it makes her want to go further. And she's actually bumped up a level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade Teacher</td>
<td>Right now we're reading some chapter books in my classroom, and the kids are pretty stoked. We finish one as a class and they want to keep reading more chapter books. Goals are set to read higher levels of chapter books.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All four faculty participants gave statements that setting goals in reading had a hand in students becoming more proficient readers. Students demonstrated *focus*, *challenge*, and were *empowered* to set goals to increase their reading level by increasing the amount of challenging books they read, increasing their fluency rate, and improving performance on the Accelerated Reader tests that they took after reading each book. The fourth grade teacher also commented on how helpful parents can be in encouraging students to read more books at a higher level, illustrating the benefit of *parent involvement*.

**Summary**

The researcher conducted a qualitative case study to explore the goal setting process and its effect on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency in an economically disadvantaged elementary school. The selected site has the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students in the small county that it is situated
within. In order to ensure a triangulation of the data, the researcher conducted individual interviews, focus group interviews, and data analysis of written goals and fluency scores. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to the site and all participants to ensure confidentiality. A description of the site and participants is included in the chapter. A detailed discussion of the findings from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis are included in this chapter as well.

This case study was guided by two research questions. The findings from this study were derived from the thematic analysis of the interviews with the principal, counselor, teachers, and third and fourth grade students, as well as document analysis. Line-by-line coding of the interviews produced inductive and deductive themes that addressed the perceptions of the faculty and students in regard to the goal setting process’s affect on self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. The study also addressed how goal setting influenced reading proficiency by document analysis of written goals and fluency scores. Deductive themes identified were: Self-Efficacy, Motivation and Reading Proficiency. Inductive themes identified were: Success and Defeat, Culture, and Actions & Improvements.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of an established goal setting process in an elementary school with a high population of economically disadvantaged students. The researcher used a qualitative case study methodology and was governed by two research questions.

RQ1. How has the implementation of goal setting influenced student reading proficiency?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of faculty and students in relation to the effect that goal setting has had on student self-efficacy, motivation, reading proficiency?

Data was triangulated through individual interviews with faculty, focus group interviews with students, and document analysis of written goals and fluency scores.

The theoretical perspective used for this study was Goal-Setting Theory. According to Locke & Latham (1990), goals are associated with increased performance because they mobilize effort, direct attention, and encourage persistence and strategy development. According to research, goals should have clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and complexity in order to be effective and instill motivation (Locke, 1990). The researcher used the epistemological lens of constructivism. In constructivism,
meaning is not discovered. It is constructed or created through human experiences (Crotty, 1998). Crotty states that even in relation to the same phenomenon people may construct meaning in different ways.

Chapter One introduced the reader to the purpose of the study, the theoretical perspective to be used, implications, delimitations, and the significance of the study. Chapter Two gave an in-depth review of the literature pertaining to goal-setting theory, the fourth-grade slump, elementary literacy skills, and literacy and economically disadvantaged students. Chapter Three provided the researcher’s methodology, including the rationale for the selection of the site, participants, and the data collection process. Chapter Four examined and analyzed the data that was collected from the individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis.

Implications: Major Findings

An analysis of the major findings assisted the researcher in developing responses to the research questions. Data from interviews with the principal, counselor, third-grade teacher, fourth-grade teacher, focus group interviews with third and fourth-grade students who were both struggling and non-struggling readers, and document analysis of fluency scores and written goals contributed to the overall story of how the goal setting process works in an elementary school with a high population of economically disadvantaged students. A process of thematic analysis was conducted which involved reducing the text, exploring the text, and integrating the text into inductive and deductive themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Integrating emerging themes and codes were derived from the analyzed data. The findings resulted in three deductive themes of Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Reading Proficiency; and three inductive themes of Success and Defeat,
Culture, and Actions & Improvements. The data was then connected and analyzed through the lens of goal setting theory. The researcher concluded that there were four (4) major findings resulting from the study:

1. Goal setting can have a positive effect on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency if the goals are specific, attainable, timely, and challenging.

2. Feedback and coaching with students impact the success of the goal setting process.

3. Students should take ownership of their goal results.

4. Goal setting is a life skill that should carry over into all areas of a student’s life.

A review of literature supports the importance of focusing on literacy with economically disadvantaged students in the transition between third and fourth grade. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report card states that only 36% of fourth grade students read at or above grade level on nationally normed tests (2010). In the transition between third and fourth, students are moving from learning to read to reading to learn (Chall, 1990). Students who are not ready for this transition often fall further behind. The Chall study named this “the 4th grade slump” and found this slump was worse with economically disadvantaged students (Chall, 1990). An analysis of the interviews and documents revealed several points in relation to how goal setting has influenced student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency at Wilson Elementary, a Title I school with a high population of economically disadvantaged students.

The principal and counselor expressed that setting goals in reading is critical and necessary and that there is a culture among the teachers and students that setting goals in
reading is important. Both teachers felt that reading was crucial to all subjects and that setting goals in reading was necessary to student growth. The counselor and teachers stated that although students were not required to set goals in the area of reading, they do set them because of the importance of reading in the culture of the school. Document analysis of the fluency scores and written goal cards reveals that setting reading goals has had a positive influence on reading proficiency at Wilson Elementary. Fluency scores for the focus group participants increased for all students with the exception of one fourth grader, however, that student was already reading well above grade level. Student written goals showed that the students were making reading goals regularly and they were mainly focused on increasing the numbers of books read and their scores on comprehension, fluency, and reading level tests. Focus group interviews revealed that the students were eager to discuss the goal setting process at Wilson Elementary, the goals that they made, their feelings about goals in general, and suggestions for improvement. The researcher noted that there was not a significant difference in participation of the discussion between the third and fourth graders, or between the struggling and non-struggling readers. The only significant difference was that the gifted student, Jimmy, was not positive about the experience. A low achieving third grade student, Kelly, made several inappropriate responses to questions with how tired she was and put her head on the table on several occasions.

All four of the faculty members referenced the importance of introducing the students to SMART goals. They felt that students using SMART goals as their goal setting process would yield better results. SMART guides the students into making their goals specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. A review of literature found
that Locke’s goal-setting theory (2013) states that performance is enhanced when goals direct attention, effort, persistence, and development of strategy. Locke found that there were five principles to successful goal setting: clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity (Locke, 2002). Wilson Elementary utilizing the SMART process for goal setting in grades third through fifth addresses characteristics of Locke’s goal setting suggestions. Having students use SMART provides a focus on clarity (Specific) and commitment (Timely). Challenge is addressed through guiding students to choose an attainable and realistic goal.

Setting reading goals had a positive influence on student self-efficacy and motivation. Students were highly motivated to continue increasing their level of reading. They felt a sense of pride when the reading level increased, and they got to read harder chapter books. Locke’s goal setting theory suggests that ambitious goals lead to greater effort than more easily obtained goals high goals (2002). Locke found that when faced with harder goals, participants would work more intensely for a shorter amount of time, or slowly and less intensely on an extended amount of time allotted (2002). Therefore, students should be guided to break more challenging goals in to smaller parts for shorter amounts of time. One particular study reported that meeting goals gave students a feeling of “flow” and motivated them to set higher goals with the next academic task (Travers, Morissano, & Locke, 2015). When students perceived positive progress with goals, there was a sense of increased self-efficacy, motivation, and a feeling that they could accomplish their goal, which led to the process of increasing the difficulty level (Shunk, 1990). Students at Wilson Elementary expressed that meeting their goals gave them a feeling of happiness and confidence, especially when it was a difficult goal to
accomplish. One fourth grade student said “I feel very excited when I meet a really hard goal like finishing a ginormous book by a certain date.” A third grade student stated “When you set hard goals, you’ll feel confident and proud of yourself like you could do more than what you thought you could do”. The third grade teacher stated “I have a struggling reader who has really taken to the goal setting. She's a hard worker, but she struggles so we've been doing a lot of that with goal setting and every time she meets a goal she just gets ecstatic. It makes her want to go further and she's actually bumped up a level.” The fourth grade teacher made a similar statement in her children’s excitement in making and meeting goals. She expressed that the class would read a novel together and students were excited to continue to read more works from the same author. This prompted students to strive for higher reading levels. When students met a challenging goal, they were motivated to continue setting higher goals for themselves.

The second finding from the data analysis was that feedback and coaching with students, impacts the success of the goal setting process. A review of literature supports that feedback and coaching is an important factor in the success of goal setting. Feedback is one of the most influential factors on student learning and achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, the type of feedback given can either be positive or negative. Descriptive feedback that is specific to the task, the process utilized to fulfill the task, and self-regulation is much more effective than feedback that focuses on praise not directed at specific aspects of student learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). At Wilson Elementary, the students receive praise-related feedback from their peers in the Goal Patrol. According to Hattie’s research, this may not be effective in furthering the goal setting process, but interview feedback from the counselor and teachers does support
that the goal patrol experience has cultivated student leadership skills in the participating students. The fourth grade teacher noted that she has noticed that students are working on their own goals, but are also helping others achieve their goals as well through discussion of the goals and words of encouragement. Locke and Latham (2013) suggest that sharing one’s goal increases accountability in meeting the goal. Feedback should be given to, and by, the person working towards the goal (Locke & Latham, 2013). Hattie stated that feedback given from student to teacher is the most powerful because it allows the teacher to see learning from the student’s point of view (2007). The teachers and counselor at Wilson Elementary do coach the students and give descriptive feedback when the students are creating their SMART goals. Interviews with the teachers and counselor demonstrated that the teachers model what it means to have an attainable, realistic, and timely goal, and give students examples of each through the use of the goal cards. The third grade teacher discussed the guiding questions that she uses with her student in which she clarifies and explains words such as attainable and timely. The goal setting cards that the students have to fill out prompt them to address each of these areas. Hattie also suggested that feedback from teacher to student is important in that it can encourage students to progress towards more challenging goals (2007). However, the literature suggest that students who attributed their success to teacher assistance showed lower self-efficacy and were less likely to set more challenging goals (Shunk, 1990). This supports the role of the teacher to be more of a coach rather than a dictator when it comes to setting goals. The data suggests that the teacher’s role at Wilson Elementary is to guide students in the process rather than leading the students with teacher-determined goals. The student and teacher interviews indicated that the students were the ones
setting the goals rather than the teachers. The literature review revealed a study that found students who had goals and conferenced with teachers attained the highest level of reading achievement and mastery of the set goals. The students demonstrated a higher level of responsibility for their successes than children who had not set goals (Gaa, 1979; Schunk, 1990). Conferencing was found to be useful in providing students with control over their learning, which led to a higher level of self-efficacy (Schunk, 1989; Schunk, 1990).

The third finding from this study is that students should take ownership of their goal results. Locke and Latham’s (2002) goal setting theory states that sharing one’s goal increases accountability and ownership in meeting the goal. A review of the data analysis suggests that students took ownership of their goal results at Wilson Elementary. The researcher found that all of the students interviewed took responsibility for their goal results and had suggestions for how to improve upon their performance, most of which consisted of continuing to work harder on the unmet goal. Students taking ownership of their work illustrates the epistemological lens of constructivism. Constructivism has roots in Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Aristotle, who held the belief that teachers should be facilitators of learning, rather than disseminators of knowledge. The teachers not requiring reading goals, but rather facilitating the process of goal setting with students allowed the students to have more ownership in the process and, in a sense, construct their own knowledge of the goal setting process and therefore, taking ownership of the goal results as well.

The fourth and final finding from the data analysis is that goal setting is a life skill that should carry over in to all areas of a student’s life. Reading is generally cited as the
most important skill in determining academic achievement, because it is foundational to acquiring other needed skills for success (Stockard, 2010; Murphy, 2004). Economically disadvantaged students begin school with a deficit in home support, rich experiences, vocabulary, and background knowledge (Layton, 2015). The average low-income student begins kindergarten with a listening vocabulary of 3,000 words, while more affluent students begin kindergarten with an average of 20,000 words (Hetzel & Soto-Hinman, 2006). Studies have shown that being affluent or poor is the strongest predictor in academic achievement (Reardon, 2011). With the deficits and hardships that economically disadvantaged students already face, encouraging and teaching students to set goals, particularly in reading, is a life skill that can carry into all areas of their lives and future. Interviews with the adults at Wilson Elementary revealed that there is a culture that goal setting should be in all areas of one’s life. The principal stated that the students have difficult circumstances to overcome that are common among impoverished students. Having a focus on setting goals for the future is a way in which to help students see the possibilities of what they can become, rather than focusing on the dismal circumstances that they may be faced with now.

Conclusion

This study provided evidence that a pervasive goal setting process can have a perceived positive affect on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. The ability to read on grade level is an important component to a student’s educational success and reading fluently is imperative to comprehending material (Rasinski, 2014). Students in the United States continue to fall behind in attaining basic grade level reading skills, affecting their ability to perform adequately in required subject areas in secondary
education and beyond. According to a Scholastic Inc. survey conducted in 2006, 40% of students between the ages of five and eight read every day, but by fourth grade, that percentage drops to 29%. Harvard psychologist, Jeanne S. Chall (1921-1999), coined this the “fourth-grade slump.” There have been various reasons given in literature for the phenomenon. One of the reasons consistently attributed to this slump is the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” in the middle elementary grades. It is imperative for school faculty to find strategies to improve performance, self-efficacy, and motivation for students in the areas of reading in order to avoid this phenomenon.

The results from this qualitative case study will add to the body of research that is lacking in the area of goal setting in the elementary school setting. The results can be beneficial to faculty and administration in all elementary schools, not just those with a high economically disadvantaged population. This study found that Locke’s goal setting theory is a viable option in increasing reading proficiency in an elementary setting. Results from this study found that goal setting is effective when the goals consist of the characteristics of clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and text complexity (Locke, 2002). In the setting of Wilson Elementary, these characteristics came in the form of SMART goals, which provided students and teachers with a guide of making goals specific, attainable, measurable, realistic, and time-bound. Due to the culture of goal setting that was established in the school for at least five years, the students did not appear to suffer from the fourth grade slump as described in the literature. The majority of the students met the grade level cut score by the winter administration of the test. Wilson Elementary has shown substantial growth over the years in spite of their Title I status. They have consistently achieved Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) status with the
state and a removal from the status of a Focus School, both of which were great accomplishments.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation for future research is to explore ways that schools with a high population of economically disadvantaged students can increase parent participation with a goal setting process. This recommendation came from the perceived lack of parental participation in this process at Wilson Elementary. Out of the students interviewed, only one of their parents agreed to an interview. Some of the students stated that they talk to their parents about their goals, so it would be impactful to see how the parents viewed the process. It would also be interesting to see what type of reading student that the parents were and their perceptions of how goal-setting may have influenced them as a student. According to research, parental involvement is one of the most important indicators of student success. Increasing parental involvement as early in school as possibly is particularly important for economically disadvantaged students. Exploring whether they currently set goals for themselves and if they find value in their children setting goals could be an important addition to the body of research for goal-setting and economically disadvantaged students.

The second recommendation is to explore whether peer influence plays a part in the fourth grade slump phenomenon. If there is a perceived decrease in student to adult conversation and involvement at this age, investigating ways to deter this would be important research. Are students at this age more interested in their peers’ opinions than the teachers and parents in their lives, and why? What are student’s perceptions of how to improve communication with adults? The students in this interview were very
forthcoming with recommendations in improving the goal-setting process. Expanding upon the student interview questions to include more discussion of communication with their parents and how they feel about talking to their parents would be interesting.

The third recommendation for further study would be to expand upon this study and interview students and teachers in other grade levels as to how goal setting has influenced self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. This study only focused on third and fourth graders, but expanding to younger and older students could add a richness to the overall narrative of the effects of the process.

The fourth recommendation would be to further explore goal-setting as a life skill. This could be done by interviewing former students at Wilson Elementary to see how their perception and implementation of goal-setting changed once they left Wilson. Did they continue goal-setting either formal or informally? Do they set goals in other areas of their lives other than academics? What are their perceptions now of the goal-setting process that they experienced as an elementary student? Have they continued to use any of the components of the SMART method in setting their goals such as making them time-bound?

The fifth recommendation would be to investigate whether the teachers at Wilson Elementary would consider making some of the participants’ recommended changes from their current system; and doing a follow up study to explore the results of those changes. In particular, improving upon the feedback component of the process and incorporating more student conferencing both during the process and after the results of the goal. Interviewing the students and teachers concerning their perceptions of the value of this step would add to the body of research. It would also be interesting to expand this study
to other subject areas such as math to see the impact that goal-setting could have, particularly in the area of math-related anxiety.

The sixth and final recommendation would be to interview students of all ages as to what incentives and rewards motivate them to improve performance. What would they be willing to work for and why? Motivation can be such an elusive phenomena as well. In the case of the gifted student, Jimmy, what motivates a gifted underachiever? In his interview of suggested changes, he stated his displeasure with the current rewards and incentives. One of the questions that arose during the data analysis process for the researcher was what would make Jimmy happy with this process. Further research as to what would motivate a student like this could add to the research pertaining to goal-setting and gifted students.

Final Thoughts

An analysis of data from this study concluded that a goal setting process can have a positive influence on student self-efficacy, motivation, and reading proficiency. The principal’s statement that goal setting is a life skill that her students can take beyond the classroom illustrated the greatest benefit that can come from an established goal setting culture in the school. The researcher was impressed with the strong sense of self-efficacy and ownership that the students exhibited with the results of their goals. The excitement that the students displayed, particularly the third graders, was refreshing.

Based off the fluency data and the fact that all students had consistently set reading related goals and met them, may have attributed to the perceived lack of the fourth grade slump in this environment, and a positive effect on student self-efficacy and motivation. Goal setting was an established expectation without being perceived as a rule
or negative activity. Although some students appeared bored with the routine and incentives that they earned, they also conveyed excitement, empowerment, ownership, and perseverance when it came to their feelings of met and unmet goals. Wilson Elementary faculty stated that the goal setting process will continue and that they will continue looking for ways to improve their Ready, Set, Goal program to be most beneficial to their students. The recommendations for future research contained suggested improvements for the current process at Wilson Elementary, many of which were recommendations from the participant interviews.
REFERENCES


Loera, G. The association between parental involvement in reading and schooling and children’s reading engagement in Latino families. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 50, 133-155.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL
Wednesday, October 25, 2017

Ms. Stacy C. Carr
1501 Mercer University Drive
Tift College of Education
Macon, GA 31207

RE: GOAL SETTING THEORY IN ACTION (H1710273)

Dear Ms. Carr:

On behalf of Mercer University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 09-Oct-2017 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) 6, 7 per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 25-Oct-2017. The protocol expires on 24-Oct-2018. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:

I will use a qualitative case study for this research study. The participants in this study will be between 6-8 third and fourth grade students, a principal, school counselor, parents of the focus group students, and a third and fourth grade teacher. The school chosen is a Title I elementary school in a rural community with a high economically disadvantaged and minority population. The interview process will consist of face to face individual interviews with the principal, counselor, third and fourth grade teacher, focus group interviews with students, phone interviews with parents, and document analysis of written reading goals and fluency scores.

NOTE: Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and ALL accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CIM.
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization's (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."

Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone: 478-301-4101 | Email: ORC@Mercer.edu | Fax: 478-301-2329
1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, Georgia 31207-0001
GOAL SETTING THEORY IN ACTION

Parent or Guardian Informed Consent Form

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study entitled, GOAL SETTING THEORY IN ACTION. The study is being conducted by Stacy Carr, 478-301-2700, Stacy.C.Carr@live.mercer.edu, Dr. Andrew Grunzke, 904-806-0191, Grunzke_al@mercer.edu. The results will be used to further my understanding of the effect that a goal setting process has on reading fluency scores, motivation, and self-efficacy of students. Your child’s participation is voluntary. A decision to participate in the research will not affect his/her relationship with Wells Elementary, his/her relationship with other teachers, or his/her academic standing.

I. The purpose of my study is to explore:

This research study is designed to explore the effect that goal setting has on student reading fluency, motivation, and self-efficacy.

The data from this research will be used to add to the body of knowledge pertaining to goal setting and how it affects reading fluency, student motivation, and self-efficacy. The results will be used in a dissertation study that explores the perceptions of students, parents, and school personnel in relation to the effects that goal setting has on reading fluency and student motivation and self-efficacy.

II. Procedures

If you allow your child to volunteer for this study, your child will be asked to participate in a focus group interview with peers and answer interview questions pertaining to the goals they set in reading fluency. Your child’s participation will take approximately one hour.

Your child will be asked to assent to participate in this research (Assent means that your child will be asked to voluntarily participate in this research). Your child will tell the teacher they want to participate by answering YES or NO after the teacher verbally reads to your child what the research is about and what he or she will be asked to do. Students will participate in a focus group interview in which they will be asked a series of questions about setting goals in reading fluency and how it motivates them and makes them feel about their reading performance. The researcher will also look at their written goals and the reading fluency scores of the participating students.

Parent/Guardians who allow students to participate must:
Read and complete the consent form which will allow the student to participate in a focus group interview session with other students, and allow the researcher to view the
student’s written goals and reading fluency data. The focus group interview will take one hour to complete and will take place at Wells Elementary.

III. Potential Benefits to Students and/or Society

Some potential benefits for students and society will be the opportunity to add to the body of research pertaining to goal setting and the impact on reading fluency. This study may provide teachers, parents, and school personnel with results that show goal setting as a useful strategy in increasing reading skills, motivation, and self-efficacy.

IV. Potential Risk and Discomforts

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. However, if discomforts arise, the principal investigator will ensure necessary precautions are taken to protect the student from physical, social, emotional, and psychological welfare. The student may stop participating at any time.

V. Withdrawal of Participation

Your child's participation is voluntary. Your child will not be penalized or lose any benefits that he/she are otherwise entitled to if you decide that your child will not participate in this research project.

If your child decides to participate in this project, he/she may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You have the right to inspect any instrument or materials related to the proposal. Your request will be honored within a reasonable period after the request is received.

VI. Payment for Participation

Students will not be paid for their participation. There is no financial obligation for participants.

VII. Confidentiality and Data Storage

The students name and identity will remain confidential throughout the research process. The interview will be audio recorded on a password protected phone or digital voice recorder. The principal investigator will be guided by a list of predetermined interview questions and students will be given the opportunity to add any final thoughts at the end of the interview. The investigator will review the student’s written goals and reading fluency data provided by the student’s homeroom teacher. The interviews will be transcribed and the transcripts will be available for review by parents. Interview data will be stored in a password protected laptop and paper copies will be locked in a file cabinet. Stacy Carr and Dr. Andrew Grunzke will have access to the data, which will be stored in Dr. Grunzke’s office for three years after the completion of the study. All audio recordings and documents will be destroyed following the three-year minimum requirement.
Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. Your child’s name will not be associated with his or her individual responses and will be identified only by an assigned coded number. At no time will your child’s name be associated with the results of the research or shared with parents or others. Any identifying information provided by your child will never be used as part of the research or associated with the results of the study.

Your child’s responses will be stored in a locked location and will only be used for research purposes by Mercer University School. A number will identify the information that I collect from the interviews, audio files, written goals, and fluency data from your child. The list connecting participant numbers and names will also be kept in separate locked cabinets.

Questions about the Research

If you have any questions about the research, please speak with Stacy Carr (Stacy.C.Carr@live.mercer.edu) or Dr. Andrew Grunzke (Grunzke_al@mercer.edu). If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Andrew Grunzke at 904-806-0191.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research, please complete the information below:

I, [Name of Parent or Legal Guardian], grant permission to participate in this research study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Parent or Legal Guardian</th>
<th>Name of Child Participating in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Name (Print)</td>
<td>Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Print)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Signature</td>
<td>Person Obtaining Consent Signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please return to Stacy Carr as soon as possible.

In order to conduct this research, this project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you believe there is any infringement upon your child’s rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Chair at (478) 301-
4101. The IRBs are the governing bodies that are set in place to ensure responsible and safe conduct of research investigations.
APPENDIX C

STUDENT GOAL CARD EXAMPLES
My SMART Goal

(S) I want to **pass my test on the Dallas Cowboys book.**

(1) To do this, I plan to read each night for 15 minutes.

(2) The goal is to read with a 100%.

(3) Put DATE you want to meet the goal.

Name

Class

---

My SMART Goal

(S) I want to **pass my test on SHERMAN.**

(1) To do this, I plan to read each night for 15 minutes.

(2) Will this be realistic? Yes

(3) Put DATE you want to meet the goal.

Name

Class
My SMART Goal

1. I want to ___________.
   - **specific**: I want to pass my next test.
   - **measurable**: I will study for 30 minutes each day.
   - **achievable**: I will complete at least one chapter each week.
   - **realistic**: I will review my notes after class.
   - **timely**: I will complete the assignment by the due date.

2. To do this, I plan to ___________.
   - **specific**: Work on my notes during class.
   - **measurable**: Complete one chapter each week.
   - **achievable**: Read for 30 minutes each day.
   - **realistic**: Review notes after class.
   - **timely**: Submit assignment by due date.

3. Will this be realistic? **Yes**
   - I want to meet this goal by ____________.
      - **specific**: By the end of the semester.
      - **measurable**: By the end of the semester.
      - **achievable**: By the end of the semester.
      - **realistic**: By the end of the semester.
      - **timely**: By the end of the semester.

4. Name: ____________
   - Class: ____________

---

My SMART Goal

1. I want to ___________.
   - **specific**: Increase my reading level.
   - **measurable**: Current level: 3.0
   - **achievable**: Read at least one book per week.
   - **realistic**: Increase reading level by 1.0.
   - **timely**: Complete by end of semester.

2. To do this, I plan to ___________.
   - **specific**: Read at least one book per week.
   - **measurable**: Read at least one book per week.
   - **achievable**: Read at least one book per week.
   - **realistic**: Read at least one book per week.
   - **timely**: Complete by end of semester.

3. Will this be realistic? **Yes**
   - I want to meet this goal by ____________.
      - **specific**: By the end of the semester.
      - **measurable**: By the end of the semester.
      - **achievable**: By the end of the semester.
      - **realistic**: By the end of the semester.
      - **timely**: By the end of the semester.

4. Name: ____________
   - Class: ____________
My SMART Goal

(S) I want to increase my reading level M from a 4.3 to a 5.0

(M) use numbers to make it measurable

from a 4.3 to a 5.0

(A) To do this, I plan to talk to a adult about what to read

Will this be realistic? Yes No

I want to meet this goal by December 2017

(1) Put DATE you want to meet the goal.

Name

Class

My SMART Goal

(S) I want to increase my reading level

(M) use numbers to make it measurable

from a 5.1 to a 6.2

(A) To do this, I plan to read each night for 20 minutes and read higher level books.

Will this be realistic? Yes No

I want to meet this goal by December 14, 2017

(1) Put DATE you want to meet the goal.

Name

Class

My SMART Goal

(S) I want to increase my reading level.

(M) use numbers to make it measurable

from a 4.1 to a 5.3

(A) To do this, I plan to read higher leveled

Will this be realistic? Yes No

I want to meet this goal by December 2017

(1) Put DATE you want to meet the goal.

Name

Class

My SMART Goal

(S) I want to increase my reading level.

(M) use numbers to make it measurable

from a 3.2 to a 5.6

(A) To do this, I plan to read 25 minutes every day

Will this be realistic? Yes No

I want to meet this goal by December 2017

(1) Put DATE you want to meet the goal.

Name

Class