

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ON  
INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF FOUR  
TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine how NCLB has impacted the instructional focus in Title I elementary schools and to examine what instructional methods are in place in these schools to prepare students for the Alabama Reading and Math Test. This case study was focused on Title I elementary schools that made AYP for 2 consecutive years, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 and the perceptions of teachers with more than 6 years of experience.

This case study included four Title I elementary schools and 12 elementary teachers who taught in these schools. Sources of data included interviews, observations and field notes, and documents. Data were examined from the schools, and themes that were organized to provide answers to the research questions.

Results revealed that teachers spent more time on subjects that were tested on the ARMT and used a combination of research-based instructional methods and test preparation strategies to prepare students for the ARMT. Teachers perceived the results of the ARMT as being helpful in planning and a good indicator of school success, but it was not a reliable indicator of individual student learning.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, high-stakes testing has taken the forefront in efforts to improve the academic performance of students (Spohn, 2008). Sanctions and rewards have been put in place to force school systems to address the learning needs of all students by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), signed into law by President George W. Bush in January 2002. Each state was required to develop a system of accountability, including consequences for poor performance. By having penalties and rewards linked to test performance, it was thought that educational reform would take place to increase academic achievement (Aldridge, 2003; Amrein & Berliner, 2002). The aims of NCLB were to increase standards and to better align curriculum, instruction, and assessment in U.S. schools, to increase the achievement of students from a variety of demographic groups including disabled students, English language learners, and those from racial and ethnic minorities as well as students faced with economic disadvantages (Gamoran, 2007). In order to receive federal aid, states established standards for student performance in math and reading achievement in third through eighth grades and in high school. At least 95% of students had to take the assessment. There were also specific requirements as to the number of disabled students required to take assessments, currently set at 3%. English language learners had to take assessments within 2 years of arriving in the United States. Failure to meet the achievement requirements resulted in sanctions ranging from tutoring and school transfers to closing and restructuring schools.

Use of assessments for monitoring the effectiveness of instructional programs and comparing schools and teachers began in the later half of the 19th century. The Stanford Achievement Test, originally published in 1923, was the first standardized achievement test battery (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002). Between World War II and the 1960s, the primary function of testing was to assess students and to evaluate curriculum in the schools. After the 1960s, the establishment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) played a major role in using assessments to monitor academic achievement. NAEP focused its attention on assessments that represented youth nationally. According to Amrein and Berliner (2002), NAEP scores were used to determine whether achievement increased after high-stakes were attached to assessments in Grades 1-8. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) established the federal Title I compensatory education program and required it to be evaluated. Standardized achievement tests became the chief means of monitoring the program which proved to be a key step in the use of tests for monitoring and accountability (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002).

In the 1970s, students were required to pass basic-skills tests as part of the rapid spread of minimum competency testing programs. They were used most often as requirements for graduation and in a few cases for promotion between grades. This movement was believed to have made students and teachers more accountable for their performance on minimum competency tests. According to Hamilton and Koretz (2002), this changed the focus from testing being used to provide information about performance to the use of testing as a means to generate changes in educational practice. The education reform movement of the 1980s centered on the perceived weaknesses of the American education system. The decline in aggregate test scores beginning in the 1960s continued and somewhat intensified. NAEP reported that many students

were failing to master basic skills. Other studies compared American students to other nations and indicated unfavorable results.

*A Nation at Risk* (1983) was one of the most notable publications that called for reforms in education and sparked a nationwide movement that increased the use of standardized tests for accountability and tied results to serious consequences for students and educators (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002). The National Commission on Education's position was that schools in the United States were underperforming when compared to other industrialized countries. This put the United States' global superiority in jeopardy. The commission recommended that states begin to address this issue by instituting higher standards and holding schools accountable if they were not being met (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which included mandates for states and school districts to have all students meeting grade level proficiency requirements by the year 2013-2014. The new measures called for states to implement state-level content, and performance standards focused on higher-order thinking skills (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002). Instead of enriched instruction, critics argued that teachers began to focus on undesirable forms of test preparation, which indicated increased test scores but not necessarily improvement in achievement.

### Statement of the Problem

With the current pressures of NCLB, many school districts were looking for ways to increase student achievement among various disaggregated groups of students. According to Cobb and White (2006), there was growing evidence to suggest that some effects of increased accountability were proving detrimental to instruction and children, especially to those in low socioeconomic and minority schools (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Guisbond & Neil, 2004;

Howard, 2005). Teachers in low socioeconomic schools usually had a list of things for students to master, which caused several limits to the daily learning experiences and which often displaced meaningful and creative curricula (Howard, 2005). Narrowing of the curriculum and a reduction in the variety of instructional methods have been cited as some of the results of high-stakes testing (Berliner & Nichols, 2008; Cawelti, 2006). In a study conducted by the Center on Education Policy (2008) to look at the shifts in instructional time for various elementary school subjects, 62% of school districts have increased the amount of time spent in language arts and math since the year 2002 when NCLB was enacted. Coaching students to do better by focusing instruction on incidental aspects of standardized tests was an increasing concern of teachers. This also caused non-tested subjects to receive less attention (Stecher, 2002). With increased pressure for low socioeconomic schools to perform on state-mandated tests, some critics feared that NCLB forced teachers to spend more time on test-prep and “drill-and-kill” exercises rather than on authentic teaching and learning (Fusarelli, 2004).

Title I schools stood to suffer most if students did not perform well on state-mandated assessments. Sanctions from NCLB included publishing information about schools to the public with parents having the option to transfer their students to better performing schools. Staff members could eventually be replaced if a school continually failed to make AYP. According to Flashman and Philips(2007), critics have argued that test-based accountability policies encourage teachers and administrators to focus too much attention on improving tested skills, while other types of skills not tested were ignored (Hamilton, Stecher, & Klein, 2002; Jacob, 2005; Koretz, 2002). Although teachers in low and high income schools shared many of the same critiques of NCLB, teachers and students in low income schools had less power to resist the mandates and were monitored to a greater degree than teachers in high income schools. The teachers in high

income schools had more latitude to teach in less prescriptive ways because their students continued to make AYP (McCarthy, 2008). Schools were challenged to develop an understanding of accountability and assessments, and to develop test preparation practices and identify implications associated with testing strategies. Educators had to find appropriate test preparation methods that allowed students to engage in research-based instructional strategies and also addressed insufficient test-taking skills.

### Purpose of the Study

Although several studies have been conducted on the effects of high-stakes testing on instructional methods in schools, few have focused on the effects of NCLB on the instructional methods in low socioeconomic schools. This study addressed that void by examining how the instructional focus was structured in preparing students for the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) in four Title I elementary schools that made AYP during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. Schools are faced with increased pressure to perform well on standardized assessments in order to avoid sanctions from NLCB. Low socioeconomic schools are faced with more pressure because these students are typically bound to academic underachievement. Low achieving schools typically have high concentrations of students from poverty and a high number of Latino and African American students. Several problems have been noted at high-poverty schools that tend to have an impact on student achievement such as absenteeism and student mobility (Pogrow, 2006). According to a study conducted by McNeil and Valenzuela in 2001, several schools serving poor and minority students in Texas indicated that these students learned to write only the same kind of essay that was required on the state test. They were also asked to focus reading short passages that paralleled the format on the state test.

Alabama has met the requirements of NCLB by establishing the ARMT as one of its measures to determine whether or not students meet content standards in Grades 3-8. One purpose of this study was to examine how the instructional focus in Title I elementary schools has changed as a result of the NCLB and what instructional methods are in place to prepare students for the ARMT. An additional purpose was to investigate how teachers in these Title I elementary schools prioritize instructional methods and strategies for school success on the ARMT. A final purpose was to examine how the teachers perceived the results of the ARMT as an indicator of school success.

#### Significance of the Study

This study was significant because it provided insight as to whether teachers in “successful” low socioeconomic schools used authentic instruction and test-prep instruction to meet the demands of making AYP or taught to the test by focusing only on those things they knew were going to be tested (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). According to Spohn (2008), teachers spent hours making students memorize facts, drilling students on test-taking strategies, and rehearsing test protocols. This approach caused the curriculum to be constrained and denied students the opportunities to learn subjects other than those tested. For example, in a study conducted in 2001 by Taylor, Shepard, Kinner, and Rosenthal, teachers reported that elements of the curriculum were eliminated because it was not tested on the state-mandated assessment. They also reported that the number of labs, fieldtrips, and extended projects were reduced to spend more instructional time on reading and writing. The discrepancy between authentic instruction and instruction to meet the demands of NCLB had a major impact on low socioeconomic schools struggling to avoid the sanctions of not making AYP. In addition, this study was significant

because it added to the research on the effect of high-stakes testing on instructional practices in low socioeconomic elementary schools from the perspective of Title I teachers, including how teachers in Title I elementary schools prepare students for high-stakes tests.

### Theoretical Framework

Today's education system is dominated by assessments and high expectations for student results. The way we measure success and the way to improve schools have changed. According to Wong and Nicotera (2007), traditional methods of educational practices have not met the needs of many students. The problems we face today cannot be solved with a focus on single dimensions, but with a "comprehensive, process-oriented, school-improvement framework" (p. 24). Educational accountability provides a framework for defining how schools can function to improve student academic achievement with its focus on challenging academic standards, curriculum, instructional practices, and student outcomes.

Wong and Nicotera (2007) presented a framework of educational accountability similar to Weiss and his associates who suggested that three channels, curriculum, teacher development, and assessment and accountability, influence the education system. Each is interactive and impacts teachers and their practices directly. Wong and Nicotera viewed educational accountability as a "reform initiative with components that work through each of the three core channels to bring about improvements in instructional practices and student learning" (p. 26). Educational accountability depends on all of the attention being directed at improving instructional practices by influencing roles and responsibilities, academic standards, assessments, and accountability mechanisms. The four key assumptions of results-driven accountability explored by Wong and Nicotera to bring about improvements in student performance are as

follows: (1) allocate commensurate authority and flexibility to the school level to make educational changes, (2) establish clear goals for academic and performance standards, (3) provide valid and reliable information to make educational decisions, and (4) facilitate the motivation for change through a combination of pressures and support.

The first assumption by Wong and Nicotera (2007) maintained that educators at the school level receive the authority and flexibility to make necessary improvements in instructional practices. This creates a form of reciprocal accountability because educators receive authority and flexibility in exchange for producing results. Educators must believe that they have direct control over the factors they are asked to change. The second assumption is associated with setting clear goals for academic and performance standards. Goals must be centered on aligning curriculum, instruction, and student assessment to high-quality academic standards for teachers to have the capacity to make changes to their instructional practices to improve student learning and performance. The goals must be the same and must be clear for all stakeholders including policymakers, administrators, and teachers. The third assumption in this educational accountability model presented by Wong and Nicotera assumed that educators are provided with valid and reliable information about student performance in order to be able to make effective instructional decisions for improving student learning. This assumption depends on the education system's ability to measure appropriate indicators of school quality, to report results accurately, and to be relevant to the practice of teaching and learning. The final assumption behind educational accountability is that added pressure on individuals and schools will motivate them to make changes that result in improvements in student performance. Wong and Nicotera posited that "putting pressure on schools in the form of mandates, high-stakes decisions, sanctions, and consequences alone is not educational accountability and will not bring about large-scale

improvement in schools” (p. 28). When the focus is on pressure, it neglects the importance of providing support to educators and schools and assumes that individuals and schools are unwilling to participate.

Wong and Nicotera’s (2007) description of the theory supporting educational accountability emphasizes the logic of educational accountability for school improvement. High expectations and quality education for all students must be at the forefront, and all efforts must be focused on the core components that influence the educational system to change instructional practices that will improve student performance. Clear goals must be set for academic standards and performance, and educators must receive accurate information that can be used to change instructional practices. Pressure and support must be balanced to motivate educators.

### Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions using a qualitative case study approach:

1. How do teachers report that accountability has influenced instructional methods?
2. What research-based instructional methods and test preparation methods are in place in Title I elementary schools that make AYP?
3. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools prioritize instructional methods and strategies to prepare students for the ARMT?
4. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools perceive the results on the ARMT as an indicator of student learning?
5. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools perceive the results on the ARMT as an indicator of school success?

## Definition of Terms

*Accountability*--under NCLB stipulates that states must develop performance-based accountability systems; define and measure adequate yearly progress for student performance; and apply sanctions to districts and schools that fail to meet AYP goals (retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/publications/310873.html>).

*NCLB*--No Child Left Behind Act of 2001; signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush.

*ARMT*--Alabama Reading and Math Test; based on the Alabama course of study for reading and math (2005 Alabama Interpretive Guide).

*AYP*--Adequate Yearly Progress; used to describe if a school or school district has met its annual accountability goals (2005 Alabama Interpretive Guide)

*High-stakes tests*--tests from which results are used to make significant educational decisions about schools, teachers, administrators, and students (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

*Research-based instruction*--instruction based on research-based methods and strategies that have proven to be successful.

*Title I School*--School with more than 35% of its students qualifying for free or reduced lunch and which receives federal funds to supplement services to students.

## Assumption

All teachers were willing to participate and were truthful regarding their instructional practices.

### Limitations of the Study

1. The study investigated Title I schools in two school districts.
2. The study only looked at Title I schools that have made AYP during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years.
3. The case study approach limits findings to the particular sites in the study and may not be generalized to other sites.

### Researcher Positionality

Before being promoted to principal of a Title I elementary school, I was a math teacher at a middle school for 6 years. I then became the assistant principal at a middle school. Both middle schools served students in Grades 6-8. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch was about 20%. In July, 2006, I became the principal of a Title I elementary school with approximately 420 students and a 90% free or reduced lunch population. The previous principal retired after being at the school for 15 years. During her tenure the school achieved numerous successes in terms of student achievement. It had some of the highest writing scores in the district and made AYP each year. Most of the teachers had taught at the school for several years and were aware of the challenges of working at a Title I school.

During my first 2 years, we were visited by the state superintendent as well as the regional department of education supervisor. Although we maintained AYP status, test scores began to fall slightly. In 2008, fifth grade student scores from the Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing were the lowest they had been in the past 5 years. This caused concern for me and the faculty. Scores on the ARMT and SAT10 were lower for third and fifth grade than they were in previous years. Being the instructional leader of the school, I started to have discussions with the

faculty about their instructional practices. Many of them tried to justify the scores by saying that the students were not motivated. When asked about their instructional methods, many responded by saying that they did what they have always done, spent several weeks before the test drilling students. This method may have worked in the past, but clearly was not successful with our most recent test scores. I began to ask if we have authentic researched-based instruction and still prepare our students to be successful on standardized assessments.

This study was guided by my interest in how NCLB has influenced instructional practices in Title I schools and how I can use the information from the study to continue to improve student achievement. The case study approach was used to gather information on the instructional practices of teachers in Title I schools that have made AYP for the last 2 years. This approach allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of how teachers prepared students for the ARMT.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 provides the review of the literature pertaining to Alabama's adequate yearly progress model, the impact of NCLB on instructional practices, and teacher perceptions of NCLB accountability. Chapter 3 describes the case study methodology and procedures for data collection. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, responses to the research questions, and implications for principals in low socioeconomic schools.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Numerous studies have investigated the effects of high-stakes testing on instructional practices. The majority of the studies gathered information from teachers and administrators by using a variety of sources including surveys, interviews, observations, and various combinations. The research from these studies yielded both positive and negative results.

This first section of this chapter reviews the history of state-mandated testing and accountability as well as NCLB. The next section looks at the accountability plan for Alabama. The final section summarizes findings from research conducted on the impact of NCLB accountability and state-mandated testing on instructional practices and teacher perceptions of state-mandated testing.

#### History of Testing and Accountability

According to Linn (2000), assessment and accountability have played a prominent role in education reform during the last 50 years. Starting with World War II, several reform measures have taken place that involved using testing as a means of assessing some part of the education process. Tests were important tools used for selecting students for higher education and for identifying students for gifted programs for high schools. In the mid-1960s, considerable attention was focused on compensatory education “in recognition of the large disparities in educational opportunities and in student performance” (p. 5). In the later half of the century, tests were used for a variety of purposes including monitoring the effectiveness of instructional

programs and comparing schools and teachers, starting with the Stanford Achievement Test in 1923 (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002). Using assessments to monitor academic achievement began with the establishment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the 1960s.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) established the federal Title I compensatory education program and required that it be evaluated. Title I programs were evaluated with standardized achievement tests. According to Hamilton and Koretz (2002), this was viewed as a “key step toward the use of tests as monitoring and accountability devices” (p. 16). Federal legislation required a national test of student achievement, NAEP, to include specific data on student performance in the academic content areas of reading, writing, and math (Wong & Nicotera, 2007). The Improving America’s Act (IASA) of 1994 established a Title I program to help disadvantaged students meet the increasingly high academic standards. IASA shifted from procedural compliance to more flexibility in Title I program requirements for greater accountability for student performance. States were allowed to develop a system of challenging academic content and student performance standards as well as to define annual yearly progress goals for students. According to Wong and Nicotera (2007), IASA promoted effective teaching practices and extended learning time for low-performing students instead of pull-out Title I programs. States were now provided with the flexibility to “make instructional, structural, and fiscal changes to achieve academic and student performance standards.” (p. 8). In 2002, President George Bush signed the NCLB Act of 2001 intensifying federal mandates for results-driven and high-stakes education. NCLB’s intent was to improve academic achievement for all students by improving state accountability systems, requiring clearly defined statewide standards for academic proficiency.

## No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

On January 8, 2002, George Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). It was a comprehensive education law that increased federal funding to states by almost 25%. According to Yell and Drasgow (2005), NCLB also represented an unprecedented increase in the federal government's role in education. Increases in mandates and requirements of states, school districts, and public schools made NCLB the most significant expansion of the federal government in education in the nation's history. The primary purpose of NCLB was to "ensure that students in every public school achieve important learning goals while being educated in safe classrooms by well-prepared teachers" (p. 8). It required school districts to assume the responsibility of ensuring that all students reach 100% proficiency by the year 2013-2014. States were required to administer tests to all students in public schools and to set proficiency standards that would progressively increase. If proficiency standards were not met, sanctions and corrective actions were to be applied (NCLB, 2001).

NCLB required states to (a) ensure that highly qualified teachers are in every classroom, (b) use research-based practices as the foundation of instruction, (c) develop tests to assess students so that data-driven decisions become an integral part of the educational system, and (d) hold schools accountable for the performance of all students. This required a major shift in the way educators thought about public schooling. Educators were under pressure to increase the achievement levels of all students, narrow test score gaps between different groups of students, and to ensure that all teachers were highly qualified (Yell & Glasgow, 2005). In order to receive federal funding, states developed accountability plans and submitted them to the United States Department of Education. The plans specified the state's procedures for reporting school performance and how the schools and school districts were held accountable for increasing

student achievement. Academic standards were developed and tests devised to assess students' knowledge and skills in reading and math in Grades 3-8.

State tests were used to compare performances of schools against the standards for proficiency. Data from tests were disaggregated and reported for students who were economically disadvantaged, disabled, limited English proficient, and from ethnic minority groups. This ensured that no subgroup of students would be excluded from a states' accountability system. Annual report cards were issued to the public, providing stakeholders with information to compare performances of schools against state standards. States developed a definition for adequate yearly progress (AYP) to use each year to determine if schools and school districts were meeting the state standards at a pace quickly enough to allow them to have 100% of the students proficient by the deadline of 2013-2014. According to Yell and Drasgow (2005), AYP was the minimum level of improvement that schools had to achieve each year. If schools did not meet AYP, they were considered "low performing." Schools and school districts that met or exceeded state proficiency standards were eligible to receive academic achievement awards. The rewards were determined by the states and often consisted of public commendations and recognition.

NCLB required states to develop and implement statewide assessments that were aligned to state standards in reading-language arts, math, and eventually science. The purpose of these assessments was to measure how well students were progressing toward meeting yearly goals for AYP. States also had to have at least 95% of their students participate in the statewide assessment testing. This included 95% of students in each subgroup (i.e., racial and ethnic minority, economically disadvantaged, disabled, and limited English proficient). If a school had a subgroup that was too small to be statistically significant, that group's test scores were not

disaggregated, but they would have to be reported in terms of achievement levels on the standards. States assessed reading-language arts and math annually in Grades 3 through 8 and once in Grades 10 and 12. Science assessments were also required for the same grade spans. According to NCLB (2002), if schools failed to make AYP for 2 consecutive years, they were “identified for improvement.” These schools were provided technical assistance that enabled administrators to address the specific problems that led to the school being identified. A 2-year improvement plan is developed in conjunction with parents and outside experts. The improvement plan included how the school planned to improve academically, incorporated research-based strategies, notification and involvement of parents, used 10% of its Title I funds for professional development, instituted a new teacher mentoring program, and, if necessary, implemented activities outside the regular school day. The plan also involved the core academic subjects that had the greatest possibility of raising student achievement for students to meet the proficiency standards.

There were specific sanctions for schools that did not make AYP. States published and disseminated information to parents, teachers, and the community. If a school failed to make AYP for 2 consecutive years, the state continued to provide technical assistance. Parents were given the option of transferring their child to another public school within the district, with the district providing transportation. If the school made AYP for 2 consecutive years, the “in need of improvement” designation was removed. The students attending the choice option school could continue to do so until they finished the top grade in the school. If a school failed to make AYP for 3 consecutive years, the school was required to offer research-based and high quality supplemental educational services in addition to instruction during the school day. States provided a list of service providers to parents as well as annual notice about how they could

obtain these supplemental services. If a school failed to make AYP for the fourth consecutive year, it was designated as needing corrective action. These corrective actions included one of the following: (a) replace the school staff members responsible for the school failing to make AYP; (b) implement a research-based curriculum, including professional development activities; (c) decrease management authority significantly at the school level; (d) appoint an outside expert to advise the school; (e) extend the school year or school day; or (f) restructure the school internally. For schools that failed to make AYP for 5 consecutive years, one or more of the following occurred: (a) reopen the school as a public charter school; (b) replace all or most of the school's staff, including the principal; (c) enter into a contract with an entity to operate the school; (d) turn over the operation of the school to the state; and/or (e) implement other major restructuring arrangements that are consistent with NCLB.

According to Graner (2004) and associates, the standards associated with NCLB represented an unprecedented challenge for schools in the United States. NCLB served as the most rigorous and exacting of standards-based strategies because it mandated that all students demonstrate annual yearly progress. It sent a clear signal that standards had been set, student achievement had to be measured against the standards, and rewards and sanctions were in place to change behaviors and promote improvements (Hamilton & Stecher, 2004).

#### The Accountability Plan for Alabama

According to the 2005 Interpretive Guide for the state of Alabama, a state law was passed in 1995 requiring that a nationally normed achievement test be administered in Grades 3-11. The results were used to identify schools in need of improvement. Based on the results of scores from the Stanford Achievement Test, schools were identified as being in “alert, caution, and clear” (p.

3). In 2000, another state law was passed that gave the State Board of Education the authority to determine the assessment and accountability programs for Alabama. A Test Advisory Committee was appointed to make recommendations for assessment and accountability programs. During this time the NCLB Act, which called for criterion-referenced achievement tests to be administered in Grades 3-8 and at least once at the high school level, was in the process of being drafted. These assessments were also to be used for “determining adequate yearly progress” (p.

3). A resolution was passed on July 9, 2002, where long-range assessment plans and principles were outlined. The resulting accountability program was in compliance with NCLB and the Code of Alabama (1975), Chapter 16-6B-1-3 but would not go into effect until 2003-2004. Meanwhile, an interim accountability plan was put into place for the school years 2001 and 2002.

In 2003, Alabama’s original Consolidated State Application, with amendments, for NCLB funds was approved. The revised plan described accountability-related rewards and sanctions for Alabama’s public schools and local education agencies (LEA). Alabama’s system of academic standards, assessments, and accountability applies to all LEAs and all schools, without regard to whether the LEA or school receives Title I funds. All are subject to meeting the state’s definition of AYP for achievement of all students and the following subgroups: (1) economically disadvantaged students, (2) students from major racial and ethnic groups, (3) special education students, and (4) limited-English proficient students. According to the Alabama Rewards and Sanctions Plan developed in 2005, “the fundamental purpose of the system of rewards and sanctions is to support and encourage schools so that all students meet or exceed proficiency on the state’s academic content and student academic achievement standards” (p. 1).

Alabama developed the 2005 Interpretive Guide to help educators, concerned citizens, public officials, and the media to understand the complex changes to comply with NCLB accountability standards. The Alabama State Department of Education used assessment results from spring 2005 assessments to determine starting points or baselines for Grades 3, 5, and 7 reading and Grades 3, 5, 7, and 8 mathematics (2005 Interpretive Guide). Yearly target goals or annual measurable objectives are established to determine whether schools or school systems are making adequate yearly progress toward meeting the 2013-2014 school year requirement of NCLB for 100% of students performing at the “proficient” level in reading and mathematics.

Alabama used several components to determine whether or not a school or school system makes AYP for NCLB. All student group scores must meet or exceed the state’s annual measurable objectives for reading and mathematics. NCLB requires the inclusion of the following groups in determining AYP: special education students, major racial/ethnic groups (American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and White), students with limited-English proficiency, and economically disadvantages (free/reduced meals) (2005 Alabama Interpretive Guide). The number of students a group must have to yield statistically reliable data for proficiency AYP determinations is 40 students. If a group contains less than 40 students, the proficiency index will not be applied to that group. Despite the fact that all students must be tested, only students enrolled for a full academic year are included in calculations for determining whether or not the proficiency goal has been met. Students are considered enrolled for a full academic year if they were enrolled as of October 1 and enrolled on the first day of the state testing window. Alabama uses attendance rates as an additional academic indicator in elementary and middle schools. According to the 2005 Interpretive Guide, schools or school systems must have a 95% attendance rate or improve the attendance rate from the previous year.

NCLB stipulates that the graduation rate be used with the additional academic indicator for high schools. This component is met by having a 10% dropout rate or by improving the rate from the previous year. The final component for making AYP in Alabama is for each group to have at least a 95% participation rate on assessments.

The Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT), the reading and mathematics subject-area test of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), and the reading and mathematics goals of the Alabama Alternative Assessment (AAA) are used to determine AYP for NCLB in Alabama. According to the 2005 Interpretive Guide, the ARMT consists of

selected items from the Stanford Achievement Test, Tenth Edition (Stanford 10) that match the Alabama course of study in reading and mathematics, plus additional test items that, when added to the selected Stanford 10 questions, give complete coverage of the content contained in those courses of study. (p. 7)

Students in Grades 3-8 take the ARMT and students in Grade 11 take the AHSGE. The AAA is administered to special education students who are unable to participate in general state assessments, with or without accommodations.

According to the Alabama Department of Education (2009), the primary purposes of the ARMT are to assess students' mastery of state content standards in reading and mathematics, to report individual and group performance, to report relative strengths and weaknesses of individuals and groups, and to provide data to study changes in performance over time. The ARMT is a criterion-referenced test that consists of selected items from the SAT10, which matches the Alabama state content standards in reading and mathematics. Additional items on the assessment have been included to ensure that all content standards are fully covered. The ARMT is 100% aligned with the Alabama state content standards, but students must take Stanford 10 Word Study Skills, Stanford 10 Reading Vocabulary, Stanford 10 Reading Comprehension, and the ARMT Part 2 Reading subtest to receive an ARMT reading score.

Students must take the Stanford 10 Mathematics Procedures, Mathematics Problem Solving, and the ARMT Part 2 Mathematics subtest to receive an ARMT mathematics score. Alabama uses the results for accountability for Grades 3-8 in meeting one of the requirements of the NCLB legislation.

In 2002, the Alabama State Board of Education adopted academic achievement standards to define how well students are mastering the state's academic content standards at grade level (2005 Interpretive Guide). Four academic achievement levels were developed: Level IV--exceeds academic content standards, Level III--meets academic content standards, Level II--partially meets academic content standards, and Level I--does not meet academic content standards. Schools must meet the participation rate and annual measurable objectives in reading, participation rate and annual measurable objectives in mathematics, and must meet additional academic indicator(s). Alabama uses the term "school improvement" to describe whether a school or school system has met its accountability goals over time. It is based on the current year and prior year's performance. For identification as a school or school system in school improvement, a school must miss AYP in the same component for 2 consecutive years. The school system is considered to be in school improvement if it does not make AYP in the same component across all three grade spans for 2 consecutive years. The components for school improvement are reading, mathematics, or additional academic indicators. Grade spans for school systems for school improvement include a 3-5 grade span, a 6-8 grade span, and a high school span. Once in school improvement, it takes 2 years of making AYP to move out of school improvement. A school or school system's school improvement status is the status on which sanctions are based.

Alabama instituted a system of rewards and sanctions in accordance with NCLB to hold local educational agencies and public school accountable to student achievement and AYP (Rewards and Sanctions Plan, 2005). All local education agencies and schools are subject to meeting the requirements of AYP for achievement of all students and the following subgroups: (1) economically disadvantaged students, (2) students from major racial and ethnic groups, (3) special education students, and (4) limited-English proficient students. Title I, Section 1111(b)(1) requires accountability plans to include rewards and sanctions as well as academic achievement awards to recognize schools that significantly close the achievement gap between subgroups of students or that exceed their AYP for 2 or more consecutive years.

#### Accountability's Impact on Instructional Practices

According to Stecher (2002), researchers began to investigate teachers' reaction to external assessments because of the changes that occurred in the uses of large-scale testing in the 1980s and 1990s. The implementation of statewide, test-based accountability in the 1990s prompted renewed interest on the effects of testing on teaching. There has been much debate about what constitutes an appropriate form of assessment designed to meet tough content standards in a political climate which demands accountability in education.

Sloane and Kelly (2003) identified two areas of tension coming from trying to use testing to respond to the goals of "learning important content to internationally accepted standards and knowing how schools and students rank locally, statewide, and even nationally" (p. 13). Whether used for purposes of ranking, norming, or some form of cognitive diagnosis, tests provided a form of evidence to support certain claims by groups. The evidence suggested that large-scale

high-stakes testing has brought about changes within schools and classrooms, both positive and negative.

### *Positive Impact on Instructional Practices*

Several case studies have indicated that high-stakes testing encouraged teachers to change their instructional practices in positive ways when innovative forms of assessments were included. According to Stecher (2002), teachers were able to provide students with better information about their own knowledge and skills because educators were able to disseminate specific information to students about their performance on tests. Teachers were also able to better diagnose the needs of individual students by identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses. High-stakes testing allowed teachers to identify content not mastered by students and redirect instruction. Educators were also able to align instruction and curriculum to standards. Another positive effect of high-stakes testing identified by Stecher was that teachers participated in professional development to improve instruction.

In 2006, the Wisconsin Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development conducted a statewide survey to quantify the instructional costs of expanded NCLB testing and to capture the perceptions of education leaders. Thirty-six percent of the respondents stated that testing provided useful data to help measure student success. Twenty-one percent cited an increased focus on when and how standards were taught. Another 20% indicated that they had an increased awareness of subgroups (Frontier, Pheifer, & Zellmer, 2006).

Clarke and his associates conducted a study for the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy in 2003. The goal of the study was to identify the effects of state level standards-based reform on teaching and learning. They paid particular attention to the state test

and the stakes associated with the state test in Michigan, Kansas, and Massachusetts. The participants in the study were 360 educators from the three states. Results showed that between one-half and three-fourths of the educators expressed neutral to positive opinions about their state standards, mentioning that they encountered greater consistency in the curriculum across schools and an increase in the emphasis on problem solving and writing. In all three states, elementary teachers reported that the greatest impact of state standards was on classroom practice. They were twice as likely as their high school counterparts to indicate that state standards had changed their curriculum in positive ways. Some of the perceived positive effects from the teachers included the removal of unneeded content, a renewed emphasis on important content, and the addition of important topics previously not taught.

Nance (1998) conducted a study that examined how teachers changed their instructional practices in response to high-stakes performance assessments in Washington State. Through interviews and questionnaires conducted at an elementary school, he reported that teachers used higher-level thinking questions and modeled class assessments to resemble the format of tests. Teachers reportedly used test results to help with planning for instruction. They used the newly aligned district curriculum guide to direct the content of their lessons, and they used the format of the WASL to design instruction for student tasks and assessments. These were all reported by the teachers as having a positive impact on their instructional practices.

### *Negative Impact on Instructional Practices*

Although there are very few research studies on the impact of NCLB on the instructional practices in Title I schools, several studies have reported on accountability's impact on instructional methods. The majority of research reports that accountability appears to have a

negative impact on instruction by pressuring teachers to focus on tested subjects (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Spohn, 2008; Vogler, 2008). The Center on Education Policy (2006) reported a majority of school districts in their study made shifts in instructional time for language arts and mathematics since NLCB took effect in 2002. Districts that increased time for language arts and math reportedly decreased time in other subjects such as social studies, science, art, music, recess, and lunch.

Several critics of NCLB have argued that accountability policies have created unintended negative consequences. Clarke (2003) and his associates identified several negative factors associated with tests and accountability, including reduced instructional creativity, increased preparation for tests, less depth of content coverage, and a sequence in the curriculum that was inappropriate for some students. In the same study they conducted for the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy that identified some positive consequences, some concerns about the negative effects that testing had on classroom practice were also reported, some of which included the use of developmentally inappropriate materials and pace, curriculum narrowing, and decreased flexibility. They identified other negative effects such as narrowing of the curriculum, overemphasizing certain topics at the expense of others, and an overcrowded curriculum.

According to a study conducted in 2003 by the National Board of Educational Testing and Public Policy, teachers in schools with high-stakes consequences indicated that they spent more time on instruction in subjects that were tested on state assessments and less time on non-core subjects such as fine arts, physical education, and classroom enrichment activities. The study examined the relationship between the two levels of accountability, stakes for districts, schools, and/or teachers and stakes for students, and the effect of state testing programs on

classroom practices as witnessed by classroom teachers who experience it firsthand. Elementary teachers indicated that they had increased time spent on tested instructional areas to a greater degree than high school teachers.

Phillips and Flashman (2007) argued that accountability policies took the joy out of teaching by “forcing creative teachers to replace their innovative teaching strategies and materials with a lockstep curriculum focused solely on improving tested skills” (p. 47). Frontier et al. (2006) identified several instructional costs for the state of Wisconsin associated with NCLB, including loss of instructional time in administering tests, fiscal costs to have tests shipped and scored, and narrowing of the curriculum. In 2004-2005, students in Wisconsin spent a total of 1.4 million hours taking state tests when they fully implemented NCLB testing for Grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10. This figure did not include the time spent distributing and collecting materials, taking practice tests, giving instruction, and addressing other logistics of testing. Secretaries spent an average of 91 hours preparing labels and distributing test booklets. Paraprofessionals spent an average of 102 hours engaged in duties ranging from facilitating small groups of test-takers to assisting teachers with whole-class testing. Several schools had to modify schedules and adjust staffing needs for several days.

Spohn (2008) investigated the condition of arts education in the Ribbon Valley School District in Ohio, under NCLB, by obtaining teacher perspectives, and found that instructional time for music and other non-tested subjects was reduced to make more time for math and language arts instruction. Changes in instructional strategies in Ribbon Valley began in 2002 with aligning classroom practices to the Ohio state standards as well as an increase in instructional time in math, science, social studies, and language arts.

McCarthy (2008) studied the impact of NCLB on 18 teachers' writing instruction and attitudes toward writing in high and low income schools. The argument of her study was that teachers in low- and high-income schools share many of the same critiques of NCLB, but teachers in low-income schools are not in a position to resist the law. They are monitored to a greater degree than teachers in high-income schools and have little latitude to teach writing in less prescriptive ways because their students struggle to make AYP. She found that most of the teachers in low-income schools indicated that NCLB had forced them to focus more on standardized testing and spent more time on test preparation, eliminating subjects such as social studies or recess, and allowed less creativity in instruction. Students in these schools saw a loss of recess and decreases in art and social studies. Teachers in high-income schools believed that NCLB has not affected their instruction because they were teaching in high-performing schools. They were confident that their students would succeed almost without intervention.

Clarke (2003) and his colleagues conducted a study to identify the effects of state-level standards-based reform on teaching and learning, paying particular attention to state tests and associated stakes in Kansas, Michigan, and Massachusetts. Their study revealed that elementary teachers were almost twice as likely as high school teachers to indicate that state standards had changed their classroom curriculum in positive ways. Teachers from all three states indicated that preparing for state tests involved having to remove content resulting in a narrowing of the curriculum, an overemphasis on certain topics at the expense of others, and an overcrowded curriculum.

Pedulla (2003) and his associates conducted a national survey about the perceived effects of state-mandated testing programs on teaching and learning for the National Board of Educational Testing and Public Policy. Approximately 58% of elementary teachers, 59% of

middle school teachers, and 50% of high school teachers from the study reported that the content of their classroom tests mirrored their state tests. Furthermore, 49% of elementary teachers, 48% of middle school teachers, and 38% of high school teachers reported that their tests were in the same format as state tests. In terms of student achievement, only 18% of elementary teachers, 17% of middle school teachers, and 18% of high school teachers indicated that they believed state-mandated test results accurately reflect the quality of education received by students. Additionally, 38% of elementary teachers, 40% of middle school teachers, and 44% of high school teachers reported that teachers in their schools found ways to raise state-mandated test scores without really improving student learning. When asked about the influence of testing on pedagogical practices, 83% of teachers in states with high stakes for their district and students indicated that time on basic skills had increased, and 81% spent more time on problems that were likely to appear on the test.

Darling-Hammond (2007) identified several consequences of NCLB, one being that schools with large numbers of students of color and students with the greatest needs usually have the least qualified teachers and aides that are not properly trained. She argued that the goal of 100% proficiency for all students by 2014 was impossible because norm-referenced tests, which were increasingly adopted by states, define 50% of students as below the cut-off score by definition. She also believed that the achievement proficiency was too steep and made it unrealistic. Schools that served English language learners and special needs students were further penalized when they could not meet targets for subgroups.

McCaslin (2006) studied students in Grades 3-5 in both affluent and poverty schools and found that students who attend poverty schools took schooling seriously but had anxiety because of challenges being too high, too immediate, and too consequential. Marx and Harris (2006)

argued that accountability has left very little room for science instruction because teachers spend more time with reading and math instruction. This caused concern that the science curriculum that emphasized scientific thinking and reasoning within the real-world context would only benefit upper-class students because tests were constructed to measure narrow science standards. According to the Center on Education Policy (2007), 62% of schools surveyed indicated that they had increased their focus to reading and math and 44% had cut social studies, art, science, and recess and devoted more time to tested subjects.

Finnigan and Gross (2007) found that teacher motivation to increase their effort on behalf of students decreased in schools that continued to struggle academically on accountability tests. Valli and Buese (2007) found that there was little evidence that teachers' instruction improved when they were asked to assume increased tasks both in number and in scope. They also experienced higher levels of stress at the same time their personal relationships with students suffered. Harper, Platt, Naranjo, and Boynton (2007) interviewed 52 experienced ESL teachers. The teachers in the study reported that reading dominated their curriculum and left little time for other language arts, and scripted reading programs limited their ability to address the needs of individual students.

Nichols and Berliner (2007) conducted a study of 25 states and found that academic performance did not improve because of the pressure created by high-stakes testing, but teachers' instruction and student motivation were negatively affected. Afflerbach (2005) identified several problems associated with high-stakes testing and reading achievement including confining the reading curriculum, alienating teachers, and disrupting high quality teaching. Hillocks (2002) found that teachers' instruction and students' attitudes were negatively affected by high-stakes writing tests. Ketter and Pool (2001) found that emphasizing on test preparation seemed to lessen

teachers' abilities to reflect on individual students. They also found that students became disengaged because the high-stakes tests did not consider their personal and cultural backgrounds.

Several studies have addressed how NCLB mandates have had negative consequences on the curriculum, including teachers devoting time to test preparation strategies as opposed to content (McNeil, 2000; Patterson, 2002). Federal legislation has complicated the broader viewpoint that schools reflect the needs of society by an imbalance that denies students access to a high quality curriculum (Cawelti, 2006).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how the instructional focus was structured in preparing students for the ARMT in four Title I elementary schools that have made AYP for the last 2 years. The four schools in this study have made AYP by meeting the performance standards on the ARMT as well as the attendance requirements mandated by NCLB.

Specifically, this study explored how teachers in these elementary schools balanced research-based instructional methods with test-taking skills. In addition, I investigated how these teachers prioritized instructional methods and strategies for school success. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers report that accountability has influenced instructional methods?
2. What research-based instructional methods and test preparation methods are in place in Title I elementary schools that make AYP?
3. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools prioritize instructional methods and strategies to prepare students for the ARMT?
4. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools perceive the results on the ARMT as an indicator of student learning?
5. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools perceive the results on the ARMT as an indicator of school success?

## Use of Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research is considered by Merriam (1998) as an “umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible.” (p. 5). She described five characteristics that cut across all forms of qualitative methods. They included the following:

1. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork.
4. Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy.
5. The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. (pp. 6-8)

According to Merriam (1998), an interest in wanting to know more about the field of education and improving the practice of educators can often be approached through qualitative research design. Research that is focused on understanding, discovery, and insight from the point of view from those being studied can offer the greatest significant “contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p. 1). When choosing a study design, the philosophical foundations underlying the type of research must be understood. Merriam (1998) posited that “qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning in context and requires a data collections instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data” (p. 1). She also described three basic forms of educational research: positivist, interpretive, and critical. In positivist forms of research, the object, phenomenon, or delivery system that is to be studied is education or schooling (Merriam, 1998). Reality is considered to be stable and measurable, and knowledge is gained through scientific and experimental research. In interpretive research, education is a process, and school is the lived experience. Using an inductive, hypothesis, or theory mode of inquiry helps to understand the meaning of the process or experience. This allows for multiple realities to be constructed socially by individuals. Critical research considers education to be a

“social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation” (p. 4).

Knowledge generated from this research mode is an ideological critique of power, privilege, and oppression in areas of educational practice.

Creswell (2007) argued that qualitative research “begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social and human problem” (p. 37). Emphasis is placed on the process of research flowing from philosophical assumptions to the procedures involved in studying social or human problems. Creswell identified several characteristics associated with qualitative research. One characteristic includes a natural setting where researchers tend to collect data in the field. This allows the issue or problem under study to be experienced at the site of the participant. Information is gathered by actually talking to the people involved and observing them within their context. Another characteristic of qualitative research identified by Creswell is that the researchers collect the data themselves by examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. They do not rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by others. Qualitative research involves the researcher gathering and reviewing multiple forms of data, organizing them into categories or themes that cut across all data sources. Qualitative researchers build patterns or themes from the bottom up by organizing data in abstract units of information by working back and forth between themes and the data until they establish a comprehensive set of themes. The researcher keeps the focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue. The research process is emergent, and the questions may change, the forms of data may shift, and the subjects studied may be modified. Creswell argued that qualitative researchers often use a lens such as concept of culture, central to ethnography, or gender, racial, or class differences to view their

subjects. Researchers make interpretations about what they see, hear, and understand and try to develop a complex picture of the problem by reporting multiple perspectives, identifying many factors involved in the situation, and sketching the larger picture that emerges.

Stainback and Stainback (1988) used qualitative research as a generic term to describe investigative methodologies that are also considered as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field research, or participant-observer. The investigator enters the lives of the individuals being studied as naturally as possible. The researcher must listen to what is said, observe what is done, ask questions when appropriate, and participate in activities when possible. There is also a considerable amount of time spent analyzing documents. Stainback and Stainback argued that qualitative research allows you to gain “an increased understanding of the ideas, feelings, motives, and beliefs behind people’s actions” (pp. 4-5). It is oriented toward searching for interpretations people give to events and situations in their environment. The focus of the qualitative researcher is on the insider’s viewpoint and tries to gain a firsthand experience by observing or participating in the activities.

Creswell (2007) reviewed five approaches to qualitative research. They include narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnographic research, and case study. Narrative research involves experiences being expressed in loved and told stories of individuals. Implementing this type of research consists of studying one or two individuals, gathering data through collecting stories, reporting experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences. A phenomenological study describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals and focuses on describing what the participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The main purpose is to reduce the experiences of individuals to a description of the universal essence. Grounded theory involves generating or discovering a

theory of a process, action, or interaction based on the views of the participants. According to Creswell, this type of research was developed by Glaser and Strauss because they felt that theories used in research were inappropriate for participants being studied. The ethnography study focuses on an entire cultural group by investigating and interpreting the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and languages. This type of research involves extended observations of the group where the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the participants. Case study research involves an issue being explored through one or more cases within a bounded system such as a setting or context. Creswell views case study as a “methodology, a type of design in qualitative research, or an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry” (p. 73). The investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems through detailed, in-depth data collection that involves multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and themes bounded by the case.

### Case Study Approach

A case study format was used to gain an in-depth understanding of what teachers in four Title I elementary schools in local school districts do to prepare students for the ARMT. In particular, the instructional strategies were investigated as well as how these teachers prioritized instructional methods throughout the school year. According to Merriam (1998), the case study method is used when the “interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (p. 19). Case studies are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community. Yinn (2003) described a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially

when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). He went on to say that the case study inquiry method is all-encompassing because it covers the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to analyzing data.

Yinn (2003) described five components that are especially important for case studies:

1. a study’s questions
2. its proposition, if any
3. its unit(s) of analysis
4. the logic linking the data to the propositions, and
5. the criteria for interpreting the findings. (p. 21)

Questions should be formed in terms of “who,” “what,” “where,” “how,” and why.” The case study method is most appropriate for questions that ask “how” and “why.” Propositions or purpose directs attention to what is to be examined within the scope of the study. Propositions tell you where to look for relevant evidence and reflect important theoretical issues. Yin argued that the unit of analysis is related to the initial research questions and defines what the “case” is. It may be an individual, a group of individuals, an event, or an entity. The unit of analysis can be revisited as a result of discoveries coming from data collection as the process unfolds. Yin goes on to say that linking data to propositions and interpreting the findings are the least developed in case studies.

Creswell (2007) identified several procedures for conducting case studies relying primarily on the approach used by Stake (1995). First, the researcher must determine if a case study is appropriate for the study by clearly identifying cases with boundaries and seeking an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases. The next step is for the researcher to identify the case or cases. It can be single or collective, multi-sited or within-site, focused on an issue or a case. The data collection is extensive and draws on multiple sources of information. They may include observations, interviews, and documents. Once the data are

collected, the researcher must analyze it by possibly identifying issues within each case and then looking for common themes that transcend the cases (Yinn, 2003). According to Merriam (1998), the analysis should be rich in the context of the setting and should provide a detailed description of the case or cases followed by a thematic analysis across the cases. The final phase should contain a report from the researcher on the meaning of the case.

#### Permission to Conduct the Study

A letter was submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. I also received approval from the superintendent and principals to conduct the study in four of the Title I elementary schools. Participation by the teachers was voluntary, and they were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix A) prior to data collection.

#### Access to the Sites

Four Title I elementary schools in Alabama that made AYP for the past 2 years were chosen because of their convenient location to gain access to sites. I contacted the superintendent of the school district and asked for permission to conduct the study of four of the Title I schools. Each principal was contacted by phone and a follow-up letter was sent explaining the study and its purpose. The principals were asked to nominate at least three to five teachers to participate in the study. Once nominations were received, I contacted the teachers by email for participation, and I explained the purpose of the study. Those who agreed to participate were asked to sign a consent form for the research study (see Appendix A).

## Participants

The 12 participants in this study were teachers chosen from four Title I elementary schools in Alabama. The teachers in this study have all taught for at least 6 years in elementary schools and currently teach in Grades 3-5. They were recommended by their principals as being effective in preparing students for the ARMT.

## Data Collection

A case study approach was used to examine how teachers in Title I schools that have made AYP for the past 2 years prepare students for the ARMT. The schools were selected through a purposeful sample of convenience. I gathered information from the Alabama State Department of Education about Title I schools that made AYP for the past 2 years. Of the 30 Title I elementary schools that met the criteria, 4 were identified for participation in this study.

The case study approach for this research design had four parts: (1) meet with principal to discuss the purpose of the study and to gather names of possible teachers to participate in the study, (2) conduct face-to-face interviews with teachers through site visits, (3) conduct classroom observations and document analysis, and (4) complete follow-up interviews by email or phone calls with teachers.

Four of the Title I school principals were contacted by telephone and given information about the study. I set up a meeting with the principals to give them more information about the purpose of the study and to get permission for their school to be included. After they agreed for the school to participate, they were asked to provide the names of three to six teachers in their school who have taught for at least 6 years, and who they feel effectively prepare students for the ARMT. The idea was to have three teachers from each school participate in the study for a total

of 12 participants. After receiving the names of teachers from the principal, I contacted them by email giving information about the study and asking for their permission to participate in the study.

### *Interviews*

Interviews were scheduled with the 12 teachers who agreed to participate. I met with them in their classrooms for about 20 minutes. Eight of the interviews were conducted during the teachers' planning period, and the other four were conducted after school. Before the interview, I explained the purpose of the study and had each teacher sign the IRB consent form. Each was given a copy to keep for their records. They were asked a series of questions (Appendix B) about their instructional methods and strategies when preparing students for the ARMT. I audio-taped 10 of the interviews and took notes for the remaining 2 because the participants chose not to be recorded. At the conclusion of the interviews, I scheduled a return visit for a classroom observation. I scheduled the class observations within 2 weeks of the interview. After listening and transcribing the interviews, five of the teachers were contacted for clarification of some of their responses.

### *Observations and Field Notes*

I returned to each school site 1 week after the teacher interviews to observe the teachers' instructional methods and to gather additional field notes. I signed in at the office, and the secretaries notified the teachers. Class observations were scheduled during the teachers' reading or math classes. I entered the classes and sat in the back of the room to keep from distracting the students. Two of the teachers introduced me only as a visitor. The others did not make any

introductions and continued without interruption when I entered the room. I made a sketch of the classroom and noted the number of students in the room. I took anecdotal notes on the teachers and students. I noted any materials that were being used during the lesson as well as student work that was posted on the bulletin board or walls. When I completed the observation, I made additional notes about the school, including what was on the walls in the hallway.

### *Documentation*

The next data collection method was document analysis. After completing teacher interviews and class observations, I met with the principals to collect a sampling of lesson plans from the teachers who participated in the study. The lesson plans ranged from dates beginning in August and continuing through January. The lesson plans were used to substantiate the themes and codes that emerged from the interviews and site visits. Prior to the interviews and class observations, I gathered information from the schools' report cards for the 2007-2008 school year and the last 2 years' AYP reports from the Alabama Department of Education's website.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved several steps that led to making sense out of the text and image data. The data must be prepared for analysis, and the researcher must conduct different analyses to develop a deeper understanding of the data to make an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2003). The data analysis began with organizing and preparing the data for analysis. I gathered ARMT scores for Title I schools for the past 2 years from the Alabama State Department of Education website.

### *Interviews*

After visiting the sites and conducting interviews, I immediately transcribed interviews. I played the audio-taped interviews and stopped every few seconds to record what was said verbatim. After all 12 interviews were transcribed, I read through all of them to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on the overall meaning. I especially focused on the general ideas generated by the participants. I wrote notes in the margins to help keep track of major ideas. I organized the notes into chunks to start the coding process. I took the list, went back to the data and abbreviated the topics as codes, writing the codes next to the appropriate segment from the text from the interviews. I then used the most descriptive wording from the topics and turned them into categories.

### *Observations and Field Notes*

I read through all of the data from the observations and field notes from visits to the schools to get a sense of the information and its overall meaning. I wrote notes in the margins to help generate my thoughts and ideas. I made a list of the ideas and clustered them into chunks in order to identify major topics or categories.

### *Documentation*

I collected lesson plans from the principal at each school. The lesson plans ranged in dates from August 2009 through March, 2010. I organized the lesson plans based on the month they were written. In particular, I noted objectives and learning goals in the four major academic areas, mathematics, reading, science, and social studies.

With multiple data sources available, triangulation was used to discover repeating ideas, themes, and theoretical narratives. The information from these three sources was coded to generate a description of the setting and people as well as categories or themes for analysis. The themes that were generated were used to shape a general description of the schools involved in the study. Narrative passages were used to convey the findings of the analysis. The final phase of the analysis involved making an interpretation of the data. In particular, I was looking for similarities between the schools in this case study and findings from the literature to compare instructional strategies used for preparing students for standardized tests.

### Data Credibility

According to Merriam (1998), all research should produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. Research results must be trustworthy to the extent that there is some accounting for their validity and reliability. Qualitative studies must provide the reader with enough detail to show that the author's conclusion makes sense (Firestone, 1987).

Internal validity was addressed by using the following strategies:

1. Triangulation of data--Data were collected through multiple sources including interviews, observations and field notes, and document analysis.
2. Peer examination--a doctoral student served as a peer examiner.
3. Member checking--Information was communicated back to participants to determine accuracy of responses.

The primary strategy used to ensure external validity was the provision of rich, thick, detailed descriptions used to transport readers to the setting and to give anyone interested in transferability a solid framework for comparison (Creswell, 2003). Reliability was ensured by

providing a detailed account of the focus of the study, the researcher's role, the participants' position and basis for selection, and how the data were collected. Triangulation or multiple methods of data collection and analysis were used. Data collection and analysis strategies were reported in detail to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methods used in this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Four schools were selected for this study. Each school was given a pseudo name to keep its identity confidential: Hidden Valley Elementary School, Pine Valley Elementary School, Pleasant Valley Elementary School, and Sunshine Elementary School. One purpose of this research was to examine how the instructional focus in Title I elementary schools has changed as a result of NCLB and what instructional methods are in place to prepare students for the ARMT. Additional purposes were to investigate how teachers in Title I elementary schools prioritize instructional methods and strategies for school success on the ARMT as well as to examine how teachers perceived the results of the ARMT as an indicator of school success. This chapter presents the data collected and the analysis of the data used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers report that accountability has influenced instructional methods?
2. What researched-based instructional methods and test preparation methods are in place in Title I elementary schools that make AYP?
3. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools prioritize instructional methods and strategies to prepare students for the ARMT?
4. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools perceive the results on the ARMT as an indicator of student learning?
5. How do teachers in Title I elementary schools perceive the results on the ARMT as an indicator of school success?

Interviews were conducted during the month of January and February at each of the elementary schools. I visited each teacher in their classroom during their planning period. Interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. After the interviews were completed, I returned to the schools to observe teachers in their classrooms. Observations were conducted during the months of January, February, and March. Timing was important because the ARMT was given during the third week of March. I wanted to conduct the observations prior to testing. During the classroom observations, I took anecdotal notes on the instructional methods used by the teacher as well as materials in the classroom and on the walls. I also collected a sampling of lesson plans from the principal.

This study focused on one issue, how NCLB has impacted instructional practices in Title I elementary schools. Four Title I elementary schools, Hidden Valley Elementary School, Pine Valley Elementary School, Pleasant Valley Elementary School, and Sunshine Valley Elementary School, were chosen in this case study. These schools were located in two school districts. A brief profile is presented, which provides information about the setting, demographics, school population, the school's performance on the ARMT for the past 2 years, and participants from each school.

### Hidden Valley Elementary School

Hidden Valley Elementary School is located in a small residential neighborhood in Alabama. During the 2008-2009 school year, the average daily membership was 302 students. Approximately 41.1% of the students were White, 37.4% were African American, 18.5% were Hispanic, and 3% were of other nationalities. Sixty-three percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

During the 2007-2008 school year, Hidden Valley Elementary School met 17 out of 17 goals on its AYP report (Table 1). The reading proficiency index for all students was 16.41. African American students had a proficiency index of 13.98, Hispanic students had a proficiency index of 15.86, and White students had a proficiency index of 19.23. The index for free/reduced lunch students was 13.36. The math proficiency for all students was 17.93. African American students had a math proficiency index of 10.16, Hispanic students were 25.43, and White students were 24.70. The proficiency index for free/reduced lunch students was 15.08. The additional academic indicator for 2007-2008 was 96%.

Hidden Valley Elementary School met 17 out of 17 goals on its AYP report for 2008-2009 (Table 2). The reading proficiency index for all students was slightly lower than the previous year at 14.68. African American students' proficiency index was at 13.78, Hispanic students had a proficiency index of 10.64, and White students had a proficiency of 16.06. Free/reduced lunch students had a proficiency index of 12.49 in reading. In math, all students were at 15.13, which was lower than the previous year. African American and Hispanic students had a proficiency index of 10.04 and 18.64, respectively. White students scored at 21.73. The proficiency index for free/reduced lunch students in math was 9.69. The additional academic indicator for attendance was 98%.

Table 1

*Hidden Valley Elementary School 2007-2008 AYP Report*

AYP Status		This school met 17 goals out of 17 (100%)		
Reading				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	16.41	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	~	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No Data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	~	N/A	~	N/A
Black	100	Yes	13.98	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	15.86	N/A
White	100	Yes	19.23	Yes
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	13.36	Yes
Math				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	17.93	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	~	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	~	N/A	~	N/A
Black	100	Yes	10.16	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	25.43	N/A
White	100	Yes	24.70	Yes
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	15.08	Yes
Additional Academic Indicator – Attendance Rate				
Made AYP	Attendance rate goal = 95%		Met additional academic indicator	
All Students	96%		Yes	

*Note.* ~ = Fewer than 10 students, NA = Not applicable (for subgroups), fewer than 40 students.

According to the ARMT report in 2007-2008 (Table 3), third graders scored 90% proficient in reading and 70% proficient in math. This was slightly higher than scores in the ARMT report for 2008-2009 (Table 4), which were 87.80% and 69.05%, respectively. Fourth

graders were 85.19% proficient in reading and 64.29% proficient in math, while fifth graders were 82.98% proficient in reading and 80.85% proficient in math during the 2007-2008 school year. In 2008-2009, fourth graders were 91.66% proficient in reading and 77.77% proficient in math.

Table 2

*Hidden Valley Elementary School 2008-2009 AYP Report*

AYP Status	This school met 17 goals out of 17 (100%)			
	Reading			
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	14.68	Yes
Special Education	~	N/A	~	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	~	N/A	~	N/A
Asian/Pacific Islander	~	N/A	~	N/A
Black	100	Yes	13.78	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	10.64	N/A
White	100	Yes	16.06	Yes
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	12.49	Yes
	Math			
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	15.13	Yes
Special Education	~	N/A	~	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	~	N/A	~	N/A
Asian/Pacific Islander	~	N/A	~	N/A
Black	100	Yes	10.04	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	18.64	N/A
White	100	Yes	21.73	Yes
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	9.69	Yes
Additional Academic Indicator – Attendance Rate				
Made AYP	Attendance rate goal = 95%		Met additional academic indicator	
All Students	98%		Yes	

*Note.* ~ = Fewer than 10 students, NA = Not applicable (for subgroups), fewer than 40 students.

Table 3

*Hidden Valley Elementary School: 2007-2008 ARMT Proficiency Percentages*

Grade	Reading	Math
Grade 3	90.00%	70.00%
Grade 4	85.19%	64.29%
Grade 5	82.98%	80.85%

Table 4

*Hidden Valley Elementary School: 2008-2009 ARMT Proficiency Percentages*

Grade	Reading	Math
Grade 3	87.80%	69.05%
Grade 4	91.66%	77.77%
Grade 5	91.49%	89.36%

*Participants from Hidden Valley Elementary School*

Ms. A is a White female who teaches fourth grade. She has been teaching for 7 years total. During the interview, she shared that she thought that she would end up teaching kindergarten or first grade, but was drawn to upper elementary when she was completing her student internship. She explained that she “really enjoyed the history and the science and teaching critical thinking skills.” At the time of the interview, she was expecting her first child in a couple of months.

Ms. B is a White female and has been teaching at Hidden Valley Elementary for 14 years. She began working as a co-op student in the 11th grade at a local high school. While there, she worked as a receptionist and became interested in a teaching career. After completing high school, she pursued teaching when she enrolled in college.

Mr. C is a White male and teaches fourth grade. He's been at Hidden Valley Elementary for 7 years. He completed an undergraduate degree in psychology. He said that he enjoyed working with children more than adults and pursued a Master's degree in education. Before being hired, he worked as a substitute teacher at Hidden Valley Elementary.

### Pine Valley Elementary School

Pine Valley Elementary School is nestled in a small rural community in Alabama. The current facility was built in 1956 with renovations to the library in 2000 and the office and lunchroom in 2004. They currently have one portable classroom.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, the average daily membership was 308 students with 26 certified teachers, one counselor, one media specialist, and one principal. Of the total student population, 68.5% were African American, 22.5% were White, 7.1% were Hispanic, and 2.2% were identified as multi-national. Economically disadvantaged students made up 80.6% of the population. The 2008-2009 attendance rate was 96.16%.

In 2007-2008, Pine Valley Elementary School met 15 of its 15 goals to make AYP. All students had a proficiency index of 11.02 in reading (Table 5). Special education students had a proficiency index of -3.19, African American students were at 10.33, and White students were at 11.16. There were no data for Hispanic students because there were fewer than 10 enrolled in third through fifth grade. Students on free or reduced lunch had a reading proficiency of 8.39.

All students had a proficiency index of 16.73 in math in 2007-2008. Special education students were at -5.38, African American students were at 13.81, and White students had a proficiency index of 21.76. Students on free or reduced lunch had a proficiency index of 13.55. The attendance rate was 98%.

Table 5

*Pine Valley Elementary School: 2007-2008 AYP Report*

AYP Status	This school met 15 goals out of 15 (100%)			
Reading				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	11.02	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	-3.19	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	100	Yes	10.33	Yes
Hispanic	~	N/A	~	N/A
White	100	Yes	11.16	N/A
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	8.39	Yes
Math				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	16.73	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	-5.38	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	100	Yes	13.81	Yes
Hispanic	~	N/A	~	N/A
White	100	Yes	21.76	N/A
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	13.55	Yes
Additional Academic Indicator--Attendance Rate				
Made AYP	Attendance rate goal = 95%		Met additional academic indicator	
All Students	98%		Yes	

*Note.* ~ = Fewer than 10 students, NA = Not applicable (for subgroups), fewer than 40 students.

Student performance on the 2008-2009 AYP report (Table 6) was slightly lower in reading for all students than in 2007-2008, with a proficiency index of 6.52. Special education students had a proficiency index of -16.41, with African Americans at 1.82, Hispanics at 7.55, and White students at 15.78. Free and reduced students had a proficiency of 4.84 in reading. The

student performance in math for 2008-2009 was much lower than in the previous year. All students had a proficiency index of 6.83, with special education students having -22.74 proficiency. African American students were at 0.77, Hispanics at 23.09, and White students at 14.44. Free and reduced students' proficiency was 2.85. The attendance rate was 97%.

Table 6

*Pine Valley Elementary School: 2008-2009 AYP Report*

AYP Status	This school met 15 goals out of 15 (100%)			
Reading				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	6.52	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	-16.41	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	100	Yes	1.82	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	7.55	N/A
White	100	Yes	15.78	Yes
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	4.84	Yes
Math				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	6.83	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	-22.74	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	100	Yes	0.77	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	23.09	N/A
White	100	Yes	14.44	Yes
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	2.85	Yes
Additional Academic Indicator--Attendance Rate				
Made AYP	Attendance rate goal = 95%		Met additional academic indicator	
All Students	97		Yes	

Note. ~ = Fewer than 10 students, NA = Not applicable (for subgroups), fewer than 40 students.

In 2007-2008, 76.93% of third graders were proficient in reading on the ARMT (Table 7). Fourth graders were 74.42% proficient in reading, with fifth graders at 85%. In math, 73.08% of third graders, 72.10% of fourth graders, and 65% of fifth graders were proficient. In 2008-2009, 73.13% of third graders were proficient in reading and 50.74% were proficient in math (Table 8). Fourth graders were 77.96% proficient in reading and 78.06% in math. Finally, 71.43% of fifth graders were proficient in reading, with 71.43% proficient in math.

Table 7

*Pine Valley Elementary School: 2007-2008 ARMT Proficiency Percentages*

Grade	Reading	Math
Grade 3	76.93%	73.08%
Grade 4	74.42%	72.10%
Grade 5	85.00%	65.00%

Table 8

*Pine Valley Elementary School: 2008-2009 ARMT Proficiency Percentages*

	Reading	Math
Grade 3	73.13%	50.74%
Grade 4	77.96%	78.06%
Grade 5	71.43%	71.43%

*Participants from Pine Valley Elementary School*

Ms. D is a White female and has been a teacher at Pine Valley Elementary School for 10 years. She has a total of 17 years of teaching. Her first degree was in language pathology where she taught in a self-contained class with severely language impaired students in Florida. She

went to graduate school to get her Masters' degree and became certified in early childhood education.

Ms. E is a White female and teaches fourth grade at Pine Valley Elementary School. She has 20 years of total teaching experience, with 15 at her current school. When she was in high school she participated in a distributive education program that allowed her to attend school for half a day and work the other half. She chose to work at her previous elementary school and fell in love with teaching.

Ms. F is an African American female who teaches fifth grade at Pine Valley Elementary School. She has been a teacher at Pine Valley for 12 years and has taught third, fourth, and fifth grades. She has always wanted to be teacher. When she younger, she would "play school" with her younger sister.

#### Pleasant Valley Elementary School

Pleasant Valley Elementary has 36 teachers, one counselor, one principal, one assistant principal, and one librarian. The average daily attendance in 2009 was 96%. The African American student population was 79%, White students made up 10%, and Hispanics made up 11%. The number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch was 78%.

During the 2007-2008 school year, Pleasant Valley Elementary School met 17 out of 17 goals to make AYP (Table 9). All students had a proficiency goal of 6.43 in reading. Special education students had a proficiency index of -17.48. African American and Hispanic students had a proficiency index of 5.39 and 19.15, respectively. White students had a proficiency of 4.25. Free and reduced lunch students had a proficiency index of 5.82. The proficiency index in math for all students was 11.79, which was slightly higher than reading. Special education

students were at -10.10. Free and reduced lunch students were at 11.32. African Americans were at 10.00, with Hispanics and White students at 27.31 and 16.75, respectively. The participation rate for attendance was 96%.

Table 9

*Pleasant Valley Elementary School: 2007-2008 AYP Report*

AYP Status		This school met 17 goals out of 17 (100%)		
Reading				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	6.43	Yes
Special Education	100	Yes	-17.48	Yes (2%)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	~	N/A	~	N/A
Black	100	Yes	5.39	Yes
Hispanic	100	Yes	19.15	N/A
White	100	N/A	4.25	N/A
Limited English Proficient	No data	No data	No data	No data
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	5.82	Yes
Math				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	11.79	Yes
Special Education	100	Yes	-10.10	Yes(CI)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	~	N/A	~	N/A
Black	100	Yes	10.00	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	27.31	N/A
White	100	N/A	16.75	N/A
Limited English Proficient	No data	No data	No data	No data
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	11.32	Yes
Additional Academic Indicator--Attendance Rate				
Made AYP	Attendance Rate Goal = 95%		Met Additional Academic Indicator	
All Students	96		Yes	

*Note.* ~ = Fewer than 10 students, NA = Not applicable (for subgroups), fewer than 40 students.

In 2008-2009, Pleasant Valley met 13 out of 13 goals to make AYP (Table 10). All students had proficiency index of 7.24 in reading and 13.46 in math. The proficiency index for special education students was -17.17 in reading and -11.92 in math. African American students had a proficiency index of 6.40 in reading, with Hispanics at 9.00 and White students at 12.54. In math, the proficiency index was 12.72 for African Americans, 16.28 for White students, and 16.46 for Hispanics. The proficiency indexes for free and reduced lunch students were 5.72 for reading and 12.41 for math.

According to the results of the 2007-2008 ARMT (Table 11), Pleasant Valley Elementary School's third graders were 87.14% proficient in reading and 55.71% proficient in math. Fourth graders were 59.32% proficient in reading and 57.63% in math. Fifth graders scored 74.24% proficient in reading and 87.87% in math. In 2008-2009, Pleasant Valley scored slightly lower in all areas of the ARMT (Table 12) except third and fourth grade math. Third graders were 77.59% proficient in reading and 82.76% in math. Fourth graders were 73.33% proficient in reading and 61.66% in math. Fifth graders were 71.42% proficient in reading and 77.55% in math.

Table 10

*Pleasant Valley Elementary School: 2008-2009 AYP Report*

AYP Status	This school met 13 goals out of 13 (100%)			
Reading				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	7.24	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	-17.17	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	100	Yes	6.40	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	9.00	N/A
White	100	N/A	12.54	N/A
Limited English Proficient	100	N/A	4.54	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	5.72	Yes
Math				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	13.46	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	-11.92	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	100	Yes	12.72	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	16.28	N/A
White	100	N/A	16.46	N/A
Limited English Proficient	100	N/A	12.23	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	12.41	Yes
Additional Academic Indicator--Attendance Rate				
Made AYP	Attendance Rate Goal = 95%		Met Additional Academic Indicator	
All Students	96		Yes	

*Note.* ~ = Fewer than 10 students, NA = Not applicable (for subgroups), fewer than 40 students.

Table 11

*Pleasant Valley Elementary School: 2007-2008 ARMT Proficiency Percentages*

Grade	Reading	Math
Grade 3	87.14%	55.71%
Grade 4	59.32%	57.63%
Grade 5	74.24%	87.87%

Table 12

*Pleasant Valley Elementary School: 2008-2009 ARMT Proficiency Percentages*

Grade	Reading	Math
Grade 3	77.59%	82.76%
Grade 4	73.33%	61.66%
Grade 5	71.42%	77.55%

*Participants from Pleasant Valley Elementary School*

Ms. G is a fifth grade teacher at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. She is in her sixth year of teaching. She has also taught third grade. She came from a family of teachers, beginning with her grandmother. She has always wanted to be a teacher to help carry on the family tradition.

Ms. H has been teaching for 11 years. She has been a teacher at Pleasant Valley Elementary for 5 years. She was not sure if she wanted to be teacher until she started working as a preschool teacher. She said she fell in love with teaching when she saw the “lights” come on with her preschoolers.

Ms. I is an African American who teaches fifth grade. She thought that she would be a pediatrician when she was younger. After taking a couple of biology courses, she decided that

medicine was not for her. She still wanted to work with children, so she decided to become a teacher.

### Sunshine Valley Elementary School

Sunshine Valley Elementary School had a total of 439 students in 2009. African Americans made up 91% of the population, Whites made 2%, and Hispanics made up the remaining 7%. The total number of students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch was 90%.

Sunshine Valley Elementary School met 13 out of 13 goals in its 2007-2008 AYP Report (Table 13). All students had a proficiency index of 4.53 in reading and 8.41 in math. Special education students had a proficiency index of -21.64 in reading and -18.00 in math. African American students scored a 4.02 in reading and 7.99 in math. Students on free and reduced lunch scored 3.89 in reading and 7.43 in math.

In the 2008-2009 AYP Report (Table 14), Sunshine Valley met 15 out of 15 goals to make AYP. All students had a 3.08 proficiency index in reading and -0.26 in math. Special education students had a proficiency index of -30.18 in reading and -39.18 in math. African American students' proficiency index was 2.41 in reading and -0.80 in math. Students on free or reduced lunch had a proficiency index of 3.10 in reading and -0.62 in math.

Sunshine Valley Elementary School's 2007-2008 ARMT Report (Table 15) showed that 67.16% of third graders were proficient in reading and 53.73% were proficient in math. Fourth graders were 62.69% proficient in reading and 64.18% in math. Fifth graders scored higher in reading with 63.24% proficient and lower in math with 52.94% proficient.

Table 13

*Sunshine Valley Elementary School: 2007-2008 AYP Report*

AYP Status		This school met 13 goals out of 13 (100%)		
Reading				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	4.53	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	-21.64	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	N/A	No data	N/A
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	N/A	No data	N/A
Black	99	Yes	4.02	Yes
Hispanic	~	N/A	~	N/A
White	~	N/A	~	N/A
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	99	Yes	3.89	Yes
Math				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	8.41	Yes
Special Education	100	N/A	-18.00	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	No data	No data	No data	No data
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	99	Yes	7.99	Yes
Hispanic	~	N/A	~	N/A
White	~	N/A	~	N/A
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	99	Yes	7.43	Yes
Additional Academic Indicator--Attendance Rate				
Made AYP	Attendance Rate Goal = 95%		Met Additional Academic Indicator	
All Students	97		Yes	

*Note.* ~ = Fewer than 10 students, NA = Not applicable (for subgroups), fewer than 40 students.

Table 14

*Sunshine Valley Elementary School: 2008-2009 AYP Report*

AYP Status	This school met 15 goals out of 15 (100%)			
Reading				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	3.08	Yes
Special Education	100	Yes	-30.18	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	~	N/A	~	N/A
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	100	Yes	2.41	Yes
Hispanic	100	N/A	~	N/A
White	~	N/A	~	N/A
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	3.10	Yes
Math				
	Percent participation goal = 95%	Met participation goal	Proficiency index goal = 0.00	Met proficiency goal
All Students	100	Yes	-0.26	Yes(CI)
Special Education	100	Yes	-39.18	N/A
American Indian/Alaskan Native	~	N/A	~	N/A
Asian/Pacific Islander	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black	100	Yes	-0.80	Yes(CI)
Hispanic	100	N/A	~	N/A
White	~	N/A	~	N/A
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free/Reduced Meals	100	Yes	-0.62	Yes(CI)
Additional Academic Indicator--Attendance Rate				
Made AYP	Attendance Rate Goal = 95%		Met Additional Academic Indicator	
All Students	97		Yes	

*Note.* ~ = Fewer than 10 students, NA = Not applicable (for subgroups), fewer than 40 students.

Table 15

*Sunshine Valley Elementary School: 2007-2008 ARMT Proficiency Percentages*

Grade	Reading	Math
Grade 3	67.16%	53.73%
Grade 4	62.69%	64.18%
Grade 5	63.24%	52.94%

In 2008-2009, third grade students were 70.73% proficient in reading and 40.96% proficient in math (Table 16). Fourth graders were 69.23% proficient in reading and 64.62% in math. Fifth graders were 65.72% proficient in reading and 54.28% in math. The Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) for the 2008-2009 school year in reading for fourth graders was 77% and math was 72% (Table 17). The AMO for fifth grade reading was 81% and math was 71%.

Table 16

*Sunshine Valley Elementary School: 2008-2009 ARMT Proficiency Percentages*

Grade	Reading	Math%
Grade 3	70.73%	40.96%
Grade 4	69.23%	64.62%
Grade 5	65.72%	54.28

Table 17

*Reading and Math: Annual Measurable Objectives*

Reading: % of Proficient Students											
Grade	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Grade 3		73	73	77	77	81	85	88	9	96	100
Grade 4	68	68	73	73	77	77	82	86	91	95	100
Grade 5		73	73	77	77	81	85	88	92	96	100
Grade 6	74	74	78	78	81	81	85	89	93	96	100
Grade 7		63	63	68	68	74	79	84	89	95	100
Grade 8	43	43	51	51	59	59	67	76	84	92	100
Grade 11	81	81	84	84	86	86	89	92	95	97	100

  

Math : % of Proficient Students											
Grade	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Grade 3		63	63	68	68	74	79	84	89	95	100
Grade 4	61	61	67	67	72	72	78	83	89	94	100
Grade 5		59	59	65	65	71	77	82	88	94	100
Grade 6	39	39	48	48	56	56	65	74	83	91	100
Grade 7		40	40	49	49	57	66	74	83	91	100
Grade 8		48	48	55	55	63	70	78	85	93	100
Grade 11	68	68	68	73	77	77	82	86	91	95	100

*Participants from Sunshine Valley Elementary School*

Ms. J is a fourth grade teacher at Sunshine Valley Elementary School. She is White and has been teaching for 8 years. She has taught kindergarten, second grade, and fourth grade. After working in a daycare while a freshman in college, she decided to become an elementary teacher.

Ms. K is a fourth grade teacher at Sunshine Valley Elementary School. She is African American and has been teaching for 20 years. She has taught fourth grade and fifth grade. She became a teacher because she received a teacher education scholarship when she graduated from high school.

Ms. L is an African American who teaches third grade at Sunshine Valley Elementary School. She has been teaching for 10 years and has taught kindergarten, second grade, and third grade. Her ninth grade English teacher influenced her to become a teacher.

## Themes

### *Themes from Interviews*

Several themes emerged from the interview data (Table 18): (1) focus on standards, (2) focus on test format, (3) use of test preparation materials, (4) pacing/timing of test preparation strategies, and (5) use of data for instruction.

Table 18

### *Themes from Interviews*

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Theme 1	Focus on course of study standards
Theme 2	Focus on test format
Theme 3	Use of test preparation materials
Theme 4	Pacing/timing of test preparation strategies
Theme 5	Use of data to make instructional decisions

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Theme 1: Focus on standards. During the interview process, all three teachers at Hidden Valley Elementary talked about how they focused instruction on the course of study standards. It was evident that they reviewed the standards from the Alabama Course of Study, especially in reading and mathematics. Ms. A stated that “we are more standards based now than we were when I first started teaching.” She also mentioned that there was a lot of pressure to make sure that they covered all of the information and that each standard was addressed. Ms. B reported that she originally completed lesson plans by looking at textbooks and going through them lesson by lesson to make sure that they matched the standards. After NCLB was enacted, she looked at the standards and brought in resources to match. Ms. I stated that everything she did centered on the Alabama Course of Study Objectives. She said it “drives instruction, especially in reading and math.” When asked how her approach to instruction has changed since NCLB, Ms. L said

that her instruction was more directed at the state learning objectives. They provided a “road map” and it had to be followed in order to prepare the students for the ARMT.

Theme 2: Focus on test format. All of the teachers in the study commented about making sure students were familiar with the test format. Ms. A said that students should have “plenty of practice with the different format.” She felt that if students have been “exposed to the format of the test, they will be more prepared and more confident.” Ms. B stated that she does a lot with practice tests and tries to copy things. She said that she practices test-taking skills throughout the school year and presents it to students in “the test-taking format.” When asked what advice she would give to colleagues on how to prepare students for the ARMT, she said that she would tell them to “get the ARMT manual and the materials on line to have an idea of the exact vocabulary and how the items are presented.” She stated that students should “practice, practice, practice” because students would be more comfortable if they have seen something similar or just like what they are going to have. Ms. D said that she used Study Island to help prepare her students for the ARMT. Study Island helped to give the students practice on the format of questions that were on the ARMT and practice on test-taking skills. Ms. F said that she took the math questions that were on the ARMT style response and used them in her class throughout the school year. She practiced with her students on how to write in a box and pulled them in small groups to give more practice on how to respond to open-ended questions. Ms. K practiced open-ended questions that come with the class reading series. She explained to students what the score of 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4 represented on the ARMT and gave examples of each. She also incorporated the language of the ARMT in her everyday teaching to keep from getting “tripped up.”

Theme 3: Use of test prep materials. One thing that stood out from the interviews at was the use of test prep materials. Ms. D said that they have used ARMT Coach materials with the

students for years. The ARMT Coach materials are specifically designed to mirror the format of the ARMT. She said “I really love those. I have broken them down into 3 or 4 group and they will bring up their ARMT Coach books and we will work in a small group.” Ms. E said that she uses the ARMT Coach materials because “they have to learn to write in a box.” She went on to say that this helps third graders because they are just beginning to learn to take tests. Ms. G used ARMT Coach materials as well. She also made up Power Math packets for students to use that contained the same question format as on the ARMT. Her students took the Power Math twice a week. Ms. J used what she called “test prep games” to review with students. It was used primarily to review skills and terminology. Ms. L administered Thinklink assessments three times during the year to give students more practice with the test format.

Theme 4: Pacing/timing of test prep strategies. In order to provide students with adequate practice on the test format, test prep strategies were paced throughout the school year. At the beginning of the year, students are introduced to the format and to ways to answer test questions. Ms. D said that she “takes the math questions that we have on an ARMT style response and we use those in class throughout the year.” Ms. E’s approach is similar to that of Ms. D. She stated that she “starts at the beginning of the year by going over questions that are similar to the ARMT.” As it gets closer to the test, she said that “more time is set aside for to go over examples that are similar to the test.” She tries to make sure that students are given several examples.

Theme 5: Use of data for instruction. The teachers were familiar with student performance on the previous ARMT. Ms. D said that she reviewed all data that she had on students. She said she felt that her school was more data driven since NCLB. She said she uses the data to determine which students will need intervention. During the interview she stated that “the children that we know are struggling can start getting help at the first of the year in

small groups in the mornings and afternoons, depending on the area of need.” Ms. E and F stated that they reviewed data to help guide instruction, especially at the beginning of the year. This gave them valuable information about where the students were at the beginning of the year. Students were placed in small groups for instruction based on data from the previous year. As time went by, students were often regrouped as the teachers met to review data.

*Themes from Observations and Field Notes*

The following themes emerged from data gathered from the class observation and field notes: (1) instruction in testing techniques, (2) cooperative learning, (3) student reflective practices, and (4) active participation of students (Table 19).

Table 19

*Themes from Observations and Field Notes*

Theme 1	Instruction in testing techniques
Theme 2	Cooperative learning
Theme 3	Student reflective practices
Theme 4	Active participation of students

Theme 1: Instruction in testing techniques. During the class observations, this theme was evident in all three of the classrooms. Ms. G was working with her students in small groups. Each student had a worksheet. She told them to underline where the passage talked about the tree in the story. She then told them to look for key words like “story” and “building” and to read each sentence before it and after it. Students used highlighters to underline the words. After this exercise, they returned to their seats and were handed a Power Math packet. Ms. G set the timer and told them to begin working. She told them to try to see if they got choice A. If not, she told

them to see if they got choice B, then choice C. At the end of the exercise, she told the students to “check all answers even if A is the first answer.”

Ms. G gave each student a grid response sheet. She read the directions and told the students that “these are the directions you are going to see for every open-ended response.” She also told them to show all of their work and to make sure anyone can read it. As she went over the problem, she pointed to key words posted on the cabinet door. The following were written: subtract – minus, take away, difference, how many left, how many more; add – sum, total together.

On the day I visited Ms. H’s class, she was working with students on making predictions. She told them to think about what they talked about last week with context clues by using the four strategies they used with unfamiliar words. She gave out a worksheet that students had completed the day before. The worksheet had several multiple choice problems on it. Before she reviewed the problems, she told them that they had to eliminate the ones they know are not correct as she read each question. She also told them to look for context clues when they came to words that they did not understand.

Ms. I went through an exercise with her students on how to make a chart from a table. She told her students that they had to know the five things that “they” were looking for when making charts. She asked the students to name them as she wrote them on the board. During the lesson, she was very specific on what steps students were to follow. Students were given gridded paper to use for the example. Ms. I went through each step and students checked their papers. At the end of the review, students were given an ARMT Grade 4 Mathematics Packet, which contained samples from the ARMT Annotated Packet.

Theme 2: Cooperative learning. All of the teachers at Pleasant Valley Elementary School had their desks arranged in groups of four or five students. During the interview, Ms. G said that she did numerous partner activities with students and paired them up. On the day I observed her class, students were working in several areas of the room. Two students were in the reading station, six students were at the listening center, a volunteer was working with three students, and Ms. G was working with five students at a table in the back of the room.

Ms. H stated that she used cooperative learning in math and science. She also stated that she used NAEP passages with small groups in reading. During the class observation, students were paired together at tables. They had several opportunities to work together by turning and talking. This method was used by several of the teachers as a way to involve students in active participation.

Theme 3: Student reflective practices. During my visit to Ms. J's class, she was working with students in small groups. She started class by telling the students that she needed to work with some of them in small group or test prep because there were some students that needed help. While meeting with the groups, she told the other students to read silently until their group was called. When she assembled the group on the carpet, she told them to take out their test prep packets from the day before. Ms. J had them read the directions. She then asked, "What are you thinking about when you look at the number on the right and left?" She paused for a few seconds. She called on a student to respond. She then asked the students what would happen if the first digits in the number were the same. She told students to talk about what they were doing. She also told them several times to "think out loud."

When I visited Ms. K's class, she was reviewing a math lesson on percents, fractions, and graphs. She reviewed how to rename a fraction as a percent. She also reviewed basic percents

and fractions. For example, she told them that 25% was equivalent to the fraction one-fourth and that 50% was equivalent to one-half. She told students to look at the example and asked them if there were more cloudy days or sunny days. She told them not to answer out loud but to “tell their brain.” She went over a few more examples and then asked students to take out their math journals. They were instructed to write down something “new” that they learned. She also told them to write about what they still wanted to know about the lesson.

Theme 4: Active participation of students. Most of the teachers involved the students in the learning process. Students were actively engaged in activities during my observations. Ms. J was questioning students as she was meeting with them on the carpet, during the day I observed her class. Other students were actively working either at their desks or reading with a partner. During my observation of Ms. K’s reading class, she used cooperative learning and “turn and talk” with students during reading and math. Ms. L had her students working on coordinate planes. She had a large pad on the floor and had students to stand on it. Each had to give the coordinates of their location. Lesson plans showed that several lessons involved students sharing their thoughts through “turn and talk.”

*Themes from Documentation*

An analysis of the lesson plans produced two themes (Table 20): (1) focus on standards from the Alabama Course of Study, and (2) focus on tested subjects.

Table 20

*Themes from Documentation*

Theme 1	Focus on standards from the Alabama Course of Study
Theme 2	Focus on tested subjects

Theme 1: Focus on standards from the Alabama Course of Study. A review of lesson plans indicated that teachers focused on standards. All of the teachers in this study identified their objectives from the Alabama Course of Study. Although the format of the lesson plans varied among the teachers, each of them identified a focused objective. For example, Ms. A's lesson plans were coordinated with objectives from the Alabama Course of Study and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE). She noted when an objective was also covered on the AHSGE by writing "AHSGE" next to it. Mr. C's lesson plans indicated objectives for each subject. He also included the Alabama Course of Study standards.

Theme 2: Focus on tested subjects. An analysis of lesson plans also revealed that reading and math became more of a focus the closer it came to students taking the ARMT. Ms. B put "need more time for math" and listed the skills that were being covered during social studies. Ms. D's lesson plans, during the month of January through March, revealed that she spent more time in reading and math than she did in other subjects. Social studies was integrated with reading instead of being taught separately, like it was from August through December. Ms. F altered her schedule in her lesson plans. She extended her time for reading and math after January. She made comments under social studies that it was integrated with reading. She indicated that time was set aside for "ARMT review."

### Summary

Several themes were derived from interviews, observations and field notes, and document review. Themes from interviews included a focus on course of study standards and a focus on test format. Teachers stated that they spent a lot of time focusing on the course of study standards for reading and math. One plausible explanation is that the ARMT is based on the standards

listed in the course of study and teachers aligned their instructional focus with those standards. Administrators expected teachers to teach from the course of study and to use it as a “road map.” Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the use of test preparation materials. Teachers utilized a variety of purchased and teacher-made assessments and workbooks to familiarize students with similar test items that were on the ARMT. Most of the teachers in this study used the ARMT specifications for reading and math because it gave examples and practice items for them to use with students. A final theme from the interviews was the teachers’ use of student data to guide instruction. Teachers formed small groups of students with similar instructional needs based on assessment data from the previous year’s ARMT scores or grade level assessments to address skills not mastered. This allowed teachers to identify specific learning deficits and provide additional practice and review prior to the administration of the ARMT.

The review of classroom observations and field notes yielded several themes that gave insight on how teachers use instructional strategies to prepare students for the ARMT. One theme from classroom observations and field notes in this study was that teachers instructed students in testing techniques by making sure that students knew how to answer test questions. Students were taught how to underline key words that related to the question and to look for key words in passages. Highlighters were used to help students identify words that were important to answering questions. Students were also taught to check all possible multiple choice answers even after they thought they had the correct one and how to eliminate the ones they knew were incorrect. Students were instructed on how to write their responses on a gridded response sheet. Several examples were given to students from charts and graphs. Students were shown how to locate information as well as how to make a chart from a given set of information. Students

worked together cooperatively to complete assignments. They were taught to reflect on their thinking. Teachers would ask students to think about what they were thinking by using “think aloud” protocols and to talk about what they were doing when working on problems. Students wrote about their learning in their journals. The themes from documentation indicated that teachers focused on the standards from the Alabama Course of Study and spent more time on reading and math the closer it came to administer the ARMT. Teachers altered schedules and spent more time on “ARMT review” prior to the administration of the ARMT.

The themes derived from the observations and documents supported information gained from interviews. During the interviews, teachers reported that they used a variety of instructional methods including cooperative learning, active student participation, and coaching in test prep strategies. They also reported that they focused objectives from the Alabama Course of Study. The data gathered from observations and documents indicated that teachers used several instructional methods with students as they prepared them for the ARMT. Students shared ideas with each other, used active participation techniques such as “turn and talk,” and completed activities in small groups. Objectives listed in lesson plans centered on objectives from the Alabama Course of Study. Lesson plans indicated that teachers spent more time on tested subjects as the administration of the ARMT approached.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of how NCLB has impacted instructional practices in four Title I elementary schools that made AYP for 2 consecutive years. The study was guided by investigating how the instructional focus in these schools has changed as a result of NCLB and what instructional methods are in place to prepare students for the ARMT. I examined how the teachers prioritized instructional methods and strategies for school success on the ARMT. Finally, I investigated how the teachers perceived the results of the ARMT as an indicator of school success. Five research questions guided this study. This chapter summarizes the study according to the research questions and provides implications and recommendations for practice.

#### Findings Related to the Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do teachers report that accountability has influenced instructional methods? Teachers at the Title I schools in this study reported that accountability influenced their instructional practices in several ways, both positive and negative. Teachers were more focused on the standards from the course of study, especially for reading and math, in planning their lessons. Teachers were more focused on individual student learning and planned lessons and activities to differentiate learning based on student data. Because teachers were more aware of the performance of subgroups, they were able to utilize the data to help plan for ways to meet the needs of students. These findings were similar to a study conducted by Nance (1998)

where teachers altered their instructional practices in response to assessment performance. Teachers were able to better assess where students were academically and address weaknesses (Stecher, 2000). Teachers were more familiar with the content in the Alabama Course of Study and aligned their instruction with the objectives and standards that were covered on the ARMT and used test results to plan for instruction (Nance, 1998). Similar to the study by Nance in 1998, teachers in this study reportedly used test results to help with planning for instruction, aligned the content of their lessons to that of the state curriculum, and used the format of the ARMT to design instruction for students.

Teachers in this study reported that preparation for the ARMT caused them to spend less time on non-tested subjects by spending more time preparing students on the format of the test. According to a study conducted by the Center on Education Policy in 2006, school districts increased time spent for language arts and math and decreased time spent on social studies, science, art, music, and recess. One plausible explanation for this may be that teachers felt pressured to make sure that students performed well on the assessments to avoid sanctions from NCLB (Alabama Interpretive Guide, 2005). Yell and Glasgow (2005) reported that because educators felt pressured to increase the achievement levels of all students, they spent more time on reading and math and less time on subjects that were not tested.

Very little time was allowed for what teachers considered “fun” activities. This was supported by research conducted by Phillips and Flashman (2007) that accountability policies forced teachers to replace innovative teaching strategies and to focus on improving test scores. Teachers made sure that students were familiar with the format of the ARMT by providing similar practice questions. Several teachers reported that they had to make sure that students knew the format of the test and what to expect. They tried to avoid “surprises” by providing a

variety of test preparation materials that mirrored the test format. Teachers reported that they were spending more time analyzing data. They reviewed student data when they received the results of the ARMT in the fall of each year. They used the data to identify student strengths and weaknesses, as well as implications for their own instruction.

Research Question 2: What research-based instructional methods and test preparation methods are in place in Title I elementary schools that make AYP? NCLB (2001) encouraged teachers to use research-based practices as the foundation of their instruction. The schools in this study used a variety of instructional methods with students. Each participant used some form of cooperative learning and questioning. Students were often seated in groups of four or five. Desks were arranged to allow for students to easily communicate with each other for “turn and talk” activities. Teachers often asked “why” or “how” questions, allowing students to give more in-depth answers. Teachers provided verbal feedback to students for immediate clarification of misleading ideas. Students were able to organize their thoughts by using graphic organizers. This allowed for concepts such as plots, compare and contrast, and identifying similarities and differences to be evaluated. This was evident not only in lesson plans, but also class observations and interviews. Teachers used a variety of test preparation methods to prepare students for the ARMT, including extended practice in form and format of standardized tests, coaching students on how to respond to multiple choice items, gridded responses and open-ended prompts, using test prep materials such as ARMT Coach and Buckledown, and using clones of test items. Although these methods were integrated throughout the school year, they became more intense toward the administration of the ARMT.

Phillips and Flashman (2007) argued that accountability forced teachers to replace innovative teaching strategies with methods focused solely on improving tested skills. Although

the teachers in this study used a variety of instructional methods, they were mostly focused on improving student achievement. Very little time, if any, was used for activities that allowed students to discover meanings and to investigate topics outside of tested subjects and skills. Only after the ARMT was administered were teachers able to plan “fun” activities that were not related to test preparation for the ARMT. Because of the pressure caused by increased demands on accountability tests and a rising annual measurable objective in reading and math, teachers place more emphasis on preparing students specifically for the ARMT. Most of the common test preparation activities reported by Pedulla (2003) and his colleagues in a study conducted on Texas teachers was demonstrating how to mark the answer sheet correctly, providing test-taking tips, teaching test-taking skills, and using commercial test-preparation materials and tests from previous years for practice (Assaf, Hoffman, & Paris, 2001).

Research Question 3: How do teachers in Title I elementary schools prioritize instructional methods and strategies to prepare students for the ARMT? The participants in this study indicated that they started early in the school year preparing students for the ARMT. They reviewed the previous years’ ARMT results early in the fall and used the data to identify strengths and weakness for students and for their own instruction. They used assessment information to set priorities and to put students in small groups to begin to address academic skills. The participants started test preparation strategies in the fall instead of waiting until the spring when the ARMT was administered. As the testing date came closer, they would increase and intensify instruction on the test format for the ARMT. Researched-based strategies, such as feedback, cooperative learning groups, graphic organizers, and practice and review, were utilized all year and intertwined with other skills needed to prepare students for the ARMT. Formative assessments given throughout the school year assisted teachers with determining which students

and which skills needed additional practice and review. Depending on the results, teachers had to find additional time in their schedule to plan for small group lessons and instruction. As a result, non-test subjects received less attention.

According to a study conducted by Spohn (2008), on the condition of arts education in Ribbon Valley School District in Ohio, the instructional time for music and other non-tested subjects was reduced in order to make more time for math and language arts. Clarke (2003) and his associates reported that accountability testing reduced instructional creativity and increased time on test preparation. The results from this study support the research that teachers utilize their instructional time by focusing on tested subjects. Although the teachers in this study began test preparation early, they spent the majority of their instructional time sharpening test-taking skills throughout the school year.

Research Question 4: How do teachers in Title I elementary schools perceive the results on the ARMT as an indicator of student learning? Although teachers in this study found the results of the ARMT extremely helpful in planning and identifying strengths and weaknesses in students and instruction, participants did not feel that the results of the ARMT gave a true indication of the degree of student learning. It was one indicator, but several other factors had to be taken into account. For example, Ms. B stated that “some students tend to perform better on classroom assessments than on the ARMT.” Other students performed well on the ARMT but grades on the report cards indicate below average performance. Many of the participants indicated that student success should not depend on one assessment. Mr. D stated that “we should look at how students performs on classroom assessments, not just on the ARMT.” Although the results were important for whether or not a school made AYP, it was not a true indicator of overall student success. These results supported the research presented by Kinner

(2001) and associates when they conducted a study of Colorado teachers to examine the effects of standards, the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), and school report cards, on instruction and test-related practices and found that teachers believed that the results reported on the CSAP were not a good representation of what students know. Teachers in Kinner's study stated that the CSAP did not offer a comprehensive vision of what schools offered. Similar to the CSAP, the ARMT does not measure student growth throughout the school year. To get a true picture of whether or not students are achieving, teachers supported formative assessments throughout the school year in addition to the ARMT to assess student growth. For example, Ms H said "we need to look at the whole student, not just one test. How did these students perform during the school year and on report cards?"

Research Question 5: How do teachers in Title I elementary schools perceive the results on the ARMT as an indicator of school success? Overall, participants in the study felt that the ARMT was a good indicator for school success because it focused on the standards that they were required to teach in reading and math based on the Alabama Course of Study. However, they were very concerned about the strong emphasis that was placed on the results and the pressure to try to sustain academic progress. Ms. F said that she "did not like the fact that everything was based on one test given one time during the year." Ms. J stated that "it wasn't fair to let one test decide your fate." They all agreed that teachers should be held accountable for student learning and wanted some form of measures in place. The participants felt strongly that the goal set forth by NCLB for 100% of students performing on grade level by 2014 was unrealistic and should be reexamined (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Contrary to Deal's (1985) position that teachers and administrators often use assessment scores as education's bottom line, the teachers in this study saw assessment scores as only one small piece of the puzzle that

determined school success. Ms. F stated that “we should be looking at other things, like attendance and discipline, when we talk about if schools are doing a good job.” Teachers felt that other data sources and information should be considered when deciding on what makes schools successful.

## Implications

### *Implications for Administrators*

The goals of NCLB were to increase standards; to better align curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and to increase the achievement of students from a variety of demographic groups (NCLB, 2002). The use of assessments for monitoring the effectiveness of instructional programs began several decades ago. Basic skills tests in the 1970s made teachers and students more accountable for their performance on minimum competency tests and changed the focus from testing to provide information about performance to the use of testing to generate changes in educational practice (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002). With NCLB, low socioeconomic schools were under pressure to develop an understanding of accountability, develop test preparation practices, identify implications associated with testing strategies, and find appropriate test preparation methods that combine research-based strategies and address insufficient test-taking skills. Administrators are seen as the instructional leaders and must provide teachers with the necessary support to address identified student needs as well as meet the annual measurable objectives of NCLB.

The teachers in this study indicated that accountability had influenced their instructional methods, both positively and negatively. The teachers were more focused on aligning their curriculum with the standards from the Alabama Course of Study and used student data to make

instructional decisions. Accountability pressured teachers to spend less time on non-tested subjects and to focus on the test format of the ARMT by making sure students were familiar with how to answer multiple choice and open-ended questions. Administrators must be able to provide support for teachers by being aware of the pressures teachers feel when preparing students for the ARMT. Administrators must also understand that NCLB is aimed at teachers using proven instructional practices to teach students, and teachers need ongoing professional development to expand their approach to instruction. The teachers in this study felt supported by their administrators. They knew that there were high expectations for student performance, but teachers had enough flexibility from their administrators to organize their instructional approach in ways they thought would benefit instructional outcomes. Administrators should work with teachers in reviewing and talking about student data. They should support teachers in professional development opportunities that focus on interpreting the strengths and weaknesses from data.

Teachers indicated that they viewed the results of the ARMT as one indicator of student and school success. The results of the ARMT were helpful in planning for instruction and helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses in instruction, but teachers thought that the results were not a true indicator of individual student learning. Administrators should look at other school performance data when talking to teachers about school success and the effectiveness of instructional methods. Teachers should be held accountable for student performance, but expectations should be reasonable and attainable over a given period of time.

### *Implications for Teachers*

Teachers reported that NCLB has influenced their instructional approach by causing them to be more focused on standards and individual student learning. It is important for teachers to understand where students are academically and to base their instruction on student data. The curriculum must be aligned to standards in order for teachers to effectively instruct students based on data. Teachers in this study used a variety of research-based instructional methods to prepare students for the ARMT. Students were given both verbal and non-verbal feedback about their performance on assessments. Students were allowed to work in cooperative groups. At times, groupings were based on achievement levels and at other times they were based on multi-ability levels. Teachers used graphic organizers to help students compare and contrast ideas. However, it was necessary for teachers to provide practice on the ARMT test format, including practice on how to answer multiple choice questions and open-ended questions. Teachers should prioritize instructional strategies throughout the school year by identifying strengths and weaknesses from student data. Adjustments should be made to instruction, in order to maximize learning opportunities.

Teachers were challenged to balance research-based instruction with test preparation methods. To prepare students for the ARMT, students must be taught the content from the Alabama Course of Study and must be familiar with the format of the test. With pressure from NCLB for students to meet grade level expectations, teachers were more focused on standards-based instruction and individual student learning. A variety of instructional practices must be used to meet the needs of students and to prepare them for standardized testing. After determining students' strengths and weaknesses from the data, teachers must organize instructional approaches throughout the school year that will prepare students for the ARMT.

## Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the premise by Wong and Nicotera (2007) that educational accountability is a reform initiative in which three components, curriculum, teacher development, and assessment and accountability, work together to improve instructional practices and student learning. Four key assumptions were identified to bring about improvements in student performance: (1) allocate commensurate authority and flexibility at the school level to make educational changes, (2) establish clear goals for academic and performance standards, (3) provide valid and reliable information to make educational decisions, and (4) facilitate the motivation for change through a combination of pressure and support. These assumptions were evident in this study. The four Title I schools were able to make changes at the local school level. Administrators had the authority and flexibility to adjust school schedules and to determine instructional priorities and programs based on student data. Teachers were able to make changes in their daily schedules based on student data. Schools set clear goals for the year based on student data from the previous years' ARMT scores. Teachers were able to work with students in small groups based on their academic needs.

Schools should have the flexibility and authority to make changes to their instructional programs if student performance on standardized assessments is to improve. The four Title I elementary schools in this study had the flexibility to make adjustments to instructional methods and approaches at the local school level. Strengths and weaknesses from student data should be used to establish goals for the school year and to provide an instructional focus for teachers. Student assessments should be given on a regular basis to assess how students are progressing toward the school goal. Based on the results of the assessments, goals must be adjusted and performance standards should be decided. The pressure put on schools should be to challenge

them to find a variety of instructional methods that will help teachers prepare students for standardized assessments. Schools should be supported as they look for innovative ways to improve student achievement.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of how NCLB has impacted instructional practices. I investigated how the instructional focus in Title I elementary schools had changed as a result of NCLB and what instructional methods were in place to prepare students for the ARMT. I examined how teachers in these schools prioritized instructional methods and strategies for school success on the ARMT. Finally, I investigated how teachers perceived the results of the ARMT as an indicator of school success. Several other studies have been conducted about the impact of high-stakes testing on instructional practices. My study was limited to four Title I elementary schools that made AYP during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. I conducted interviews, made observations, and reviewed documentation over a 3-month period from January until March, leading up to the administration of the ARMT. I would recommend to other researchers interested in studying the impact high-stakes testing has on instructional practices to include more schools in their study. It would also be interesting to follow teachers from the release of ARMT test data in the fall until the administration of the ARMT in the spring.

### Conclusions

This study has shown that NCLB has had both positive and negative influences on instructional methods used by teachers in Title I elementary schools when preparing students for

the ARMT. Teachers were more focused on objectives from the Alabama Course of Study and individual student learning and used student data to determine the instructional focus. Teachers spent more time on tested subjects and prioritized instructional methods based on student data throughout the school year. A combination of research-based instructional methods and test prep strategies were used to prepare students for the ARMT.

As schools and school systems continue to try to meet the expectations of NCLB, teachers must adjust their instruction based on student data. Instructional strategies will need to be prioritized based on how students are performing on formative assessments. Administrators will need to support teachers by providing a balance of pressure and support. Although the expectation that all students must reach 100% proficiency by 2013-2014 may seem unrealistic to some, we must continue to expect all students to achieve at high levels.

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APPENDIX A  
IRB CONSENT FORM

09-02-357

PHE:01DEC3:09RCVD

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS  
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying information

**Principal Investigator**      Second Investigator      Third Investigator  
Name: David Scott  
Department: Educational Leadership  
College: Education  
University: University of Alabama  
Address: 1401 Snow Hinton Drive  
Telephone: (205) 349-6102  
FAX: (205) 391-2169  
E-mail: dscott@tcss.net

**Title of Research Project:** Teacher Perceptions of the Impact of NCLB on Instructional Practices: A Case Study of Four Title I Elementary Schools

Date Printed:      Funding Source:

Type of Proposal:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New	<input type="checkbox"/> Revision	<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Exempt
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Attach a renewal application</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Attach a continuing review of studies form</div> Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page					

UA faculty or staff member signature: Rose Mary Newton

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review:       Full board       Expedited

IRB Action:

<input type="checkbox"/> Rejected	Date: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Tabled Pending Revisions	Date: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Approved Pending Revisions	Date: _____

Approved—this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 12-14-10

Items approved:

<input type="checkbox"/> Research protocol:	dated
<input type="checkbox"/> Informed consent:	dated
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruitment materials:	dated
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	dated

Approval signature [Signature] Date 12/14/09

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA**  
**Informed Consent for a Research Study**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is called Teacher Perceptions of the Impact of NCLB on Instructional Practices: A Case Study of Four Title I Elementary Schools. The study is being conducted by David Scott, a doctoral student at the University of Alabama.

Mr. Scott is being supervised by Dr. Rose Newton, a professor at the University of Alabama.

**What is this study about?**

This study is being done to find out how NCLB has impacted instructional practices in Title I elementary schools that have made AYP for the last two years.

**Why is this study important – What good will the results do?**

The knowledge from this study will help administrators and teachers to prioritize instructional strategies to prepare students for standardized tests.

**Why have I been asked to participate in this study?**

You have been asked to participate in this study because your principal recommended you as a teacher who does an exceptional job with preparing students for standardized assessments.

**How many people will be in this study?**

Twelve elementary teachers will be in this study from four different schools.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in a 20 minute audio recorded interview
- Participate in a follow-up interview for clarification, if necessary.
- Allow the researcher to observe your instructional methods

**What protocol/procedures will be used to conduct interviews and observations for this study?**

The interviews will be audio taped by the principal investigator. Study participants will have the opportunity to listen to their own taped interviews. Tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the home of the principle investigator and will be destroyed immediately after transcription (approximately one month after interviews are conducted). Participants will be given pseudonyms to be used during the interviews as well as in the final study.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 12-14-09  
EXPIRATION DATE: 12-14-10

During the study, the principal investigator will observe you in your classroom at least one time. The observation will last approximately one hour. The primary purpose of this observation is to observe the instructional methods that take place. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to review the observation notes and add additional input.

**How much time will I spend being in this study?**

Being in this study will take about 2 hours over the course of one month. This includes interviews, observation and the time needed to complete written documentation.

**Will I be paid for being in this study?**

You will not be paid for being in this study.

**Will being in this study cost me anything?**

There will be no cost to you except for your time in completing the interviews.

**Can the researcher take me out of this study?**

The researcher may take you out of this study if he feels you are no longer a viable candidate.

**What are the benefits that may happen to me if I am in this study?**

There are no known benefits to you for participating in this study.

**What are the benefits to scientists or society?**

This study will help educators prioritize instructional methods when preparing students for standardized tests.

**What are the risks (dangers or harm) to me if I am in this study?**

There are no known risks of being in this study.

**What are my rights as a participant?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary – it is your free choice. You may choose not to take part at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of any benefits you would otherwise receive.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 12-14-08  
EXPIRATION DATE: 12-14-10

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about the study, please call the investigator, David Scott, at (205) 242-4028. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Ms. Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205) 348-8461.

I have read this consent form. The study has been explained to me. I understand what I will be asked to do. I freely agree to take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Audio Taping Consent**

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only available to the investigator. The investigator will only keep the tapes for no more than three weeks and will destroy them after they have been transcribed.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audiotaped and I give permission to the researcher to record the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, my participation in this study can be audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want my participation in this study to be audiotaped.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 12-14-09  
EXPIRATION DATE: 12-14-10

Dear Prospective Participant:

You are being asked to take part in a research study that will examine how teachers in Title I schools prepare students to take the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT). You were recommended for this research study by your principal due to your effectiveness in preparing your students for the ARMT. Therefore, your participation is very important. Involvement in this study will require audio taped interviews and review of some documents produced by your office.

This is a request for voluntary participation in this study. Your responses will remain totally confidential. You, your school, and your principal will be given a pseudonym which will be recorded with all interview material related to you. Your true identity will only be kept in a locked file cabinet, and I will be the only person with access to it.

You are free not to answer any questions you find objectionable, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your interview will be conducted by David Scott, a doctoral student at The University of Alabama. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Rose Mary Newton at (205) 348-6997 or David Scott at (205) 242-4028. I hope that you will be willing to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

David Scott

---

I have read and fully understand this consent form. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project focusing on Title I teachers preparing students for the ARMT. If I have any questions, I will contact David Scott at (205) 242-4028.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Questions

### Teacher Interview Questions

1. Tell me how you became an elementary teacher.
2. I understand that your school has made AYP for the past two years. How has your approach to instruction changed since NCLB.
3. How do you incorporate research-based strategies in your instruction?
4. How do you incorporate test-taking strategies in your instruction?
5. How do you determine when to use these strategies during the school year?
6. How do you use the results of the ARMT?
7. How do you view the results of the ARMT as an indicator of student learning?
8. How do you view the results of the ARMT as an indicator of school success?
9. How do you handle the pressure to maintain your school's AYP status?
10. What advice would you give to another colleague on how to prepare students for the ARMT?
11. How has your instruction benefited from NCLB?
12. What changes would you like to see made with NCLB?