CASE STUDY OF A LITERACY STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: CHANGE IN PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES OF TWO PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

A Dissertation by JAMES BUMGARNER

Submitted to the Graduate School at Appalachian State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

> December 2013 Educational Leadership Doctoral Program Reich College of Education

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Abstract

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This is a narrative account, a story, of the impact an early literacy professional development initiative had on a school, told through the voices of two teachers in the school who participated in the program. Interviews were used to elicit statements from two early-grades teachers about their beliefs and practices and change to those beliefs and practices after participating in meaningful professional development. A rural, North Carolina school district with low reading scores had sought staff development assistance from a reading department in a neighboring university. The resulting teacher-training model included a semester-long beginning reading methods course in the fall, followed by a semester-long reading practicum in the spring. In the practicum, each participating teacher (N = 25) tutored two struggling readers under the close supervision of a clinical supervisor. The tutoring methods used by the teachers had been introduced in the previous methods course and were reviewed again in a seminar connected to the practicum. In this way, the teachers were able to reflect on their teaching and discuss ways that they could transfer what they were learning in the practicum back to their classroom practice.

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In this study, the two participating teachers, one experienced and one relatively inexperienced, were interviewed two times by the author. The first interview was conducted one year after the teachers had completed the training, with the second interview coming a full year later. The interviews had two purposes: (a) to document the teachers' reactions to the staff development initiative, and (b) to determine possible changes in the way the teachers thought about beginning reading and taught the subject in their classrooms. (*Note*: The principal of the school in which the two teachers taught was also interviewed in order to gain her perspective on the effects of the staff development.)

Themes emerging from the interview data revealed that the teachers had changed their classroom reading instruction in three important areas. First, they increased their reliance on informal assessments (passage reading, phonics, and spelling). Second, based on their increased competence in assessment, both teachers were better able to differentiate reading instruction, forming flexible reading groups and pacing instruction effectively for individual children. Third, both teachers greatly increased the amount of contextual reading (at the correct level) that their students did during the school day.

The positive pedagogical changes reflected in the teacher interviews can be attributed to the following logic, which is prominent in the professional development literature (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 1986): (a) The teachers had the opportunity *to put new ideas into action* in a controlled, supportive context (the practicum); (b) as the teachers saw their practicum students learning to read in the one-to-one situation, they gained confidence in the assessment and instructional strategies they were using; and (c) this confidence, in turn, bolstered their willingness (*their courage*) to try the new techniques back in their own classrooms.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The word "change" echoes in the ears of today's educators, much of the time referring to elaborate plans that are discussed and created in meetings of high-level administrators or legislators. Yet too often, necessary actions to implement change are not taken, and little change actually occurs as a result. Talk, mission statements, and planning by themselves do not engineer the kind of change that is transformative for teachers, students, and schools. This limited implementation of desired change has been referred to as the Knowing-Doing Gap and, according to Pfeffer and Sutton (2000), is the result of a myriad of ineffective management practices. They maintain that deliberate, simple actions toward real problems affect change more than elaborate conceptual statements and plans.

The public school systems in North Carolina have been asked to respond to legislative demands for change, including more accountability of teaching and student learning, especially in literacy. A tangible example of new pressures placed on public school teachers and administrators is a law passed by the North Carolina General Assembly called the *Excellent Public Schools Act of 2012*. Of particular importance is the K-3 literacy initiative entitled *The North Carolina Read to Achieve Program*, which is being put into place to ensure children entering grade four are reading on grade level (Excellent Public Schools Act, 2012). Third graders who do not score in the proficient range on the language arts portion of the standardized end-of-grade tests will be in danger of being retained.

At the same time that this kind of pressure is forced on teachers and administrators, the North Carolina state legislature in the 2013 session passed laws to strip extra pay for

teachers with advanced education degrees, to eliminate tenure, to reduce the number of teachers' assistants in schools, and to increase class size. *Do more with less* seems to be the mantra of this decade. As a result, public school administrators, principals, and superintendents are seeking help to improve literacy teaching and learning in their schools, and any meaningful help must involve school change.

School change can be procedural and shallow, or significant and deep. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) explained these levels of change as first- and second-order change. First-order change is what most people commonly associate with school systems. These are structural changes like schedule adjustments, staff evaluation instruments, and assessment systems. However, such changes rarely impact student performance (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). On the other hand, deep change significantly alters systems but is hard to achieve: Deep and significant change that improves student achievement requires cultural shifts in schools. A cultural shift such as this is the product of a collective focus on new knowledge and skills, gained over an extended period of time (DuFour et al., 2008).

This dissertation is a story, a narrative account of school change that was deep, that was transformative, and one that I experienced directly. My goal in this study is to tell this story through the voices of two teachers and a principal at one school in the school district where I worked, in fact, the very school where I served as the Title I reading teacher. We were all involved in a professional development project aimed at improving early reading instruction and student learning. The project was intense and focused, and it interjected knowledge of reading development, assessment, and instruction into our school system over the course of two years. I observed the change in early literacy instruction in the school district that followed the professional development, and I observed, first hand, the change

that occurred in two teachers' instruction in the school where I was the Title I reading teacher. In addition, the students' scores on reading assessments indicated that they were performing better than students from years before. My own experience with this professional development project convinced me that change that really mattered for our school was actually occurring. So, the story I attempt to tell is why and how this early literacy professional development project impacted these teachers and this school.

I use a qualitative lens and a case study design to explore the sense two teachers and their principal made of the early literacy professional development that we all experienced. A way to make sense of our experiences is to cast them in narrative or story form (Bruner, 1990, 2003). Gee, Michaels, and O'Connor (1992) frame this as *sensemaking* in discourse, and Nussbaum (1998) extolls the virtues of creating the *narrative imagination*. In his book, *The Call of Stories* (1990), Robert Coles recounts how, during medical residence supervisory sessions, Dr. Ludwig pressed Coles to let the patients' stories speak for themselves without imposing preconceived abstractions on them:

The people who come to see us bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We have to remember that what we hear is *their* story. (p. 7)

In this dissertation, I aim to bring the teachers' voices into the story directly, honoring their sensemaking of the transformative experience of the early literacy professional development.

I employed semistructured interviews conducted over time (Fontana & Fey, 1994), with space for open-ended follow up questions. Interview questions can be used to elicit conversational narrative responses (Riessman, 1993):

Telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity, one of the first forms of discourse we learn as children (Nelson, 1989) and used throughout the life course by people of all social backgrounds in a wide array of settings. . . .

Research interviews are no exception. (p. 3)

These are the methods I use to produce a qualitative account of the impact of early literacy professional development (Swanson & Chapman, 1994) on the professional lives of two teachers in one school.

Identification of the Issue

How a *single* school system attempts to implement instructional change is a topic worthy of study. The present study considers a major change initiative in a rural North Carolina school district. This district identified an important curricular area (beginning reading instruction) and developed a strategic change process aimed at a long-term solution.

The school district is similar to many other districts in the piedmont region of North Carolina. The system has 14 schools, eight of which are elementary schools serving grades kindergarten through six. The total student population consists of approximately 6000 students, with roughly half receiving free or reduced lunch services. As with any school system in North Carolina, the teachers had received many professional development "workshops" over the years, with little lasting effect.

Initial concerns about early literacy. In 2007 the district hired a new superintendent who had over 25 years of experience as an educational administrator. Shortly

after, he hired me as his Title I reading director for the school district. As the new superintendent looked at standardized test data, talked with building principals and teachers, and observed in classrooms, he became alarmed that student achievement in the county was declining. He explained to me that the district had fairly low expectations for students' learning. He stated that reading assessment was a problem, as was consistency of reading instruction across schools. The superintendent acknowledged that there were some skilled teachers in the district, but not enough; moreover, there seemed to be little concern about helping teachers get better at their jobs (Superintendent, personal communication, May 2009).

Data confirm observations. Shortly after assuming the position of Title I director in the superintendent's second year, I learned that the school district had been unsuccessful in meeting Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements in reading and was therefore sanctioned and assigned a "needs improvement" status by the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This status required the district to use a set percentage of Title I funds for staff development initiatives that would help resolve the literacy concerns. Additionally, four of the elementary schools were required to offer supplemental services, in which outside private companies came into the schools after school hours to provide tutoring services to struggling readers. The superintendent asked me, the Title I director, to examine whatever data were available and construct a picture of where the district stood and how it could improve in literacy achievement.

Data available consisted of the state End-of-Grade (EOG) tests administered in grades three through eight. These data were summative but did show historical trends in AYP sanctions and the decline in literacy performance that eventually placed the district in

the "needs improvement" status. Also available were locally administered running record (or informal reading inventory) data for kindergarten through second grade.

The informal reading data, obtained three times per year, were supposed to help in identifying early the students (grades kindergarten through second) who were at risk of reading failure. However, these test results were weak in several ways. First, the assessors recorded reading accuracy but not rate of reading. Reading rate (or fluency) is an important measure when assessing late first- and second-grade readers (see Morris et al., 2011). Second, several administrators told me that some assessors actually gave children multiple tries on the same passage so they could obtain a passing score. These informal test data were eventually sent to the central office where they were sorted, sometimes analyzed, and then filed away.

Despite weaknesses in the assessment procedures, the running records overall were a predictor of future reading success. That is, if a child performed poorly on the end-of-first grade assessment, he or she generally experienced difficulty with reading in the second grade. The running records clearly showed that a sizable percentage of students (perhaps 40%) were not entering grade three with a solid reading foundation. This undoubtedly led to the school district's poor performance on the end-of-third-grade state reading test. When shown the standardized and informal reading data across several years, the superintendent expressed little surprise. He acknowledged that the data were persuasive and called for some type of corrective action.

District Level Staff Development Plan

In his second year, the superintendent set up a literacy committee to examine the data and develop a plan of action. The literacy committee was charged to examine the five best

districts in the country and see what they were doing. Members were to analyze how the district could adopt the best parts of other programs and implement them. Also, the committee was to examine the research on best reading practices and report its findings. The superintendent was an active participant in the literacy committee meetings and often "pushed back" at early ideas, stating that he wanted the committee to examine several different approaches to what was a complex problem.

Through a series of meetings, a decision was reached that the district needed a tailored, long-term training initiative. The literacy committee concluded that the district's primary-grade (kindergarten through third) teachers didn't have the knowledge level necessary to teach the *lower-achieving* students. The teachers lacked skills in assessment, reading methods, and proper use of materials. Also, the committee agreed that short-term staff development sessions would not be sufficient to address the issue. At this point, committee members began to examine the best possible and most practical sources of staff development.

The committee explored the staff development offerings of several area colleges and universities. After two months of work, the committee determined that the reading program at Appalachian State University (ASU), a comprehensive university 60 miles to the west, would be best able to deliver a long-term staff development program. The ASU plan was to present a series of courses across two years that would target kindergarten through second-grade teachers. In Year 1, there would be a beginning reading methods course, an assessment course, and a teaching practicum. In Year 2, a yearlong writing workshop, tailored to individual grades (kindergarten through second), would be offered.

The literacy committee's final recommendation (i.e., the ASU staff development plan) was submitted to and approved by an administrative team comprised of principals and central office personnel. The plan was then presented to the Board of Education, whose members gave unanimous approval. Next, the literacy committee went to each elementary school and presented the staff development plan, that is, the proposed series of graduate reading courses. The goal of the program was for the teachers to become expert teachers of beginning reading and writing. The 18 hours of graduate reading courses would be paid for by the school district, and teachers who successfully completed the series of courses would be certified as reading specialists.

Twenty-five teachers from eight elementary schools volunteered as the first cohort starting in the fall of 2009. Twenty-two of the 25 teachers were from kindergarten, grade one, and grade two, along with three teachers who served in resource/intervention programs. In addition, the superintendent enrolled in the program and became an active student participant in the cohort training process. The faculty development included sessions for the elementary school principals from the district.

The Present Study

The present study is a story of how this early literacy professional development initiative impacted one school in the district as evidenced by the voices of the school's principal and two teachers involved in the professional development. Since I was also a participant in the faculty development, my interpretation of the significance and meaning behind the teachers' voices will impact the story I tell. In crafting this story, I will endeavor to present as much of the story as possible in the teachers' own words.

There are a number of existing studies on professional development for teachers of reading. However, these studies are limited in their explanations of the kind and amount of training that is necessary to produce significant change in teacher behavior and student performance. Studies are needed that propose structures and processes that encourage teachers to adopt new pedagogical practices. Such studies need to explain specific training processes and then document the extent to which participating teachers use the new knowledge in their daily classroom teaching.

Shulman (1986) addressed the complexity of changing teachers' pedagogical practices by suggesting that pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge must fuse into what he terms *pedagogical content knowledge*—a complex understanding of the relationships among what students know already, what they are taught, and how they are taught. This knowledge enables teachers to understand developmental differences between children in the same classroom: when children are ready for the next developmental step in literacy, when they are not, what instructional steps make most sense given what a child already knows, and so on. To be effective early literacy instruction requires teachers to gain this type of knowledge. Kindergarten through second grade teachers make important instructional decisions many times each day; they can do this effectively only to the extent that they have fully developed pedagogical content knowledge.

The present study adds to the school change literature by describing an early literacy staff development initiative in a rural North Carolina county. The goal of the staff development program was to increase the pedagogical content knowledge of the participating teachers and thereby positively affect the reading performance of kindergarten through second grade students in the school district. The major goal of the present study is to

tell this story by documenting evidence to address the following research question: Based on the teachers' participation in the staff development initiative, how did their beliefs and classroom practices regarding the teaching of reading change over a two-year period?

In the chapters that follow I will present a review of relevant literature on school change and professional development in reading instruction (Chapter Two), a description of the research design and methods used in this study (Chapter Three), a report of the findings (Chapter Four), and a summary and discussion of the results of the research (Chapter Five).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

School change is at the heart of this dissertation, which is a narrative account of how and why an early literacy professional development initiative that was deep and transformative impacted two teachers from the same school. The professional development project was focused and intense, and interjected knowledge of reading development, assessment, and instruction into the school system. I observed the change in early literacy instruction in the school district as well as the change that occurred in two teachers' instruction in the school where I worked. Thus, this study is a story of how this early literacy professional development initiative impacted one school in the district as evidenced by the voices of the school's principal and two teachers involved in the professional development initiative.

This chapter is devoted to reviewing the relevant literature on school change. I begin with a discussion about the difficulties and complexities of creating school change that is transformative and lasting. This section is followed by a discussion of school change that has the potential to impact reading instruction and learning. I also present an argument that reading instruction change can result from meaningful reading practicum experiences. I end with a summary of the present study.

School Change is Complex and Difficult

For school change to be meaningful and lasting, it must be significant and deep rather than just procedural (Marzano et al., 2005). This kind of change significantly alters

systems but is hard to achieve (DuFour et al., 2008). Shulman (1986) noted that changing teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors is necessary for meaningful school change to occur. He also noted the complexity of changing teachers' pedagogical practices by describing what he terms *pedagogical content knowledge* (Shulman, 1987), which is a complex understandings of the relations among what and how you are teaching and what your students know already and the materials you have available to use. Scholars all agree that this kind of systemic change is complex and very difficult to engineer (Fullan, 2005, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Guskey, 1986; Schön, 1987; Supovitz, 2006). I turn next to a discussion of components of change followed by effective professional development.

Necessary components for school change. Administrative directives and decisions do not necessarily propel schools to change. For real change to occur, teachers must be learning in adaptive school cultures. Fullan (2005) describes school change as complex and multi-dimensional and therefore difficult to attain. The process of change requires an understanding that "deep learning" is needed at all levels of the system. Deep learning changes a dysfunctional culture into a culture that solves difficult problems in a collaborative environment (Fullan, 2005).

In conjunction with deep learning, a certain type of school culture is required for significant change. Rosenholtz (1991) observed this in schools characterized as having *non-routine technical cultures*. In these cultures, teachers held themselves to high professional goals. They viewed professional development as an important way to steadily update and improve their knowledge base. Participation in professional development events, both in and out of district, required use of the teachers' personal time and resources. Schools with this culture were considered "moving." In contrast were schools characterized as having a

routine technical culture. This culture viewed student learning as largely determined by outside events not controlled by the teacher. Teachers viewed teaching as a task that required routines and effective classroom control. Teachers in a routine technical culture had minimal plans for professional growth. This routine technical culture resulted in schools that Rosenholtz considered "stuck"; student achievement was well below that of "moving" schools.

School change is complicated, but it begins with tangible plans and ideas. There is no single answer for successful change. However, a consistent theme is that significant school change cannot occur without knowledgeable teachers. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) argue that teacher learning is vital to school success:

It is impossible to accomplish the deep purposes of student learning unless teachers are continuous learners themselves. . . . Time invested in teachers' learning, if integrated with the development of a collaborative culture, is time that ultimately pays off for student learning. (pp. 48-49)

Improvement in instruction increases student achievement, but such improvement must be meaningful and in-depth. Fullan (2007) argued that changes in actual practice must occur along three dimensions: materials, teaching approaches, and beliefs, in other words, "in what *people do and think*" (p. 37). Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (2004) looked at how effective teachers compared to less effective teachers in large and small classrooms as well as high and low SES environments. The researchers concluded that effective teachers were knowledgeable of content and practices, and they produced better results. To produce such effective teachers, some form of professional development is needed.

Effective professional development. Professional development activities normally focus on teachers gaining more knowledge, but too often the knowledge is shallow and unfocused. Effective professional development actually improves teachers' abilities to teach and is not a short-term effort. Such professional development is defined by its ability to show a "demonstrable impact on student learning" (Guskey, 2009, p. 226).

Improving teachers' pedagogy is an early, necessary key to successful change. Fullan (2007) explained how it is that there is more variation in student achievement in a single school than there is across a group of schools. This variation occurs because of differences in teacher effectiveness: The more effective teachers in a school have higher student achievement. The goal then is to improve the consistency of effective teaching in a given school. This is not easy to do. As the change process begins, most participants are not sure how to improve. At this point they need experiences that show success. Learning by doing, while experiencing success, can change teachers' beliefs in their practice and bolster their feelings of self-efficacy. In turn, if teachers in a school are learning together, school-wide instruction will improve in consistency.

School leaders (e.g., curriculum coordinators, principals) are responsible for providing professional development. If the goal is to improve student achievement in any content or skill area, then professional development must be structured to reduce inconsistency in teaching practices. Marzano et al. (2005), in a meta-analysis, determined that school leaders have many responsibilities, and a major one is providing resources including professional development. Results of 17 studies involving 571 schools showed that a .25 correlation existed between the school leader providing necessary resources and student achievement. Fullan (2005) described change strategies of several successful school

districts; in each was a common professional development thread focusing on instructional improvement. Finally, Supovitz (2006) chronicled the successful change process for Duval County (FL) schools. The district provided several supports, one of which was high quality professional development aimed at improving student performance. The professional development focused on mastery of content and was intensive and sustained across time.

Change Needed in Teachers' Knowledge of Reading

The field of reading education needs a professional development model that (a) builds teacher competence, (b) reduces variability in instruction within schools, and (c) improves student achievement. There are many reasons given for poor reading performance. Factors beyond the school can certainly influence reading achievement. For example, poverty and language differences can negatively affect reading success (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). However, evidence indicates that ineffective instruction is the leading cause for reading failure (Lyon & Weiser, 2009). Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998) stated:

A critical element for preventing reading difficulties in young children is the teacher. Central to achieving the goal of primary prevention of reading difficulties is the teacher's knowledge base and experience, as well as the support provided to the teacher: each of these may vary according to where the teacher is in his or her professional development and his or her role in the school. (p. 329)

Moats (2009b) argued that many teachers are not prepared to teach those students most in need of reading help. Stressing the need for more teacher knowledge, Moats (2009b) explained that current educational policies and funding practices continue to focus on programs, school organization, and student test scores—not on teachers and the professional development they need in order to succeed.

Preservice training in reading is not adequate. Colleges are not preparing preservice teachers for classroom demands regarding the teaching of reading (Lyon & Weiser, 2009; Spear-Swerling, 2009). Lyon and Weiser (2009) report that most preservice teachers receive little formal instruction in reading development and reading disorders, and that the average undergraduate is required to complete just two reading courses prior to graduation. All too often the cry from the beginning classroom teacher is, "I wasn't prepared to teach reading." The National Reading Panel report (NRP, 2000) concluded that the current teacher education process does not produce adequate achievement in students. Preservice programs generally do not provide the hands-on practice that teachers of reading require, particularly if they are to help those children who struggle. Also, the teacher certification process does not meet actual workplace requirements. The certification examinations that are designed to measure essential content and pedagogical competencies are not matched with current research (Lyon & Weiser, 2009).

Researchers have questioned if teachers are able to calibrate their reading knowledge with their teaching abilities. In other words, they questioned whether teachers can identify areas where their content knowledge is strong and then work to improve areas where more knowledge is needed (Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004; Spear-Swerling, 2009). Cunningham et al. assessed 722 teachers' knowledge in the domains of children's literature, phonemic awareness, and phonics. Findings revealed that the teachers were not very proficient in the three domains tested, and that they lacked awareness of their own areas of need. Cunningham et al. concluded:

Neither experience nor expertise alone appears to confer on teachers an accurate sense of what they do and do not know. . . . [Results show] that the knowledge base

of many K-3 teachers is not aligned with the large and convergent body of research demonstrating the key role that component processes such as phoneme awareness and the alphabetic principle play in learning to read. (p. 161)

Spear-Swerling (2009) found a similar lack of knowledge with prospective special education teachers. Such results have led many experts to call for more staff development in the area of reading instruction.

Increasing in-service teachers' knowledge of reading. Snow et al. (1998) explained how *extensive* teacher training is critical to produce effective reading instruction. Rather than look at teacher training as a one-time event (e.g., a conference presentation or an after-school workshop), these researchers stressed that teacher preparation in reading instruction must be a long-term, developmental process. The process begins with undergraduate preparation and continues with professional schooling along with field experiences. Moats (2009a) described how state and federal policies are changing in support of using multi-tiered instruction and preventive interventions. The goal is to improve and restructure the process that identifies children for special education services. However, for such instructional policies to be effective, capable, well-trained teachers must implement them. Moats argued that learning to teach reading well requires a substantial amount of time, a fact seldom acknowledged in current calls for reform.

Allington (2009), advocating for teacher expertise, stressed that the teacher is the most important component in preventing reading difficulties in young children. He recommended that schools hire as many certified reading specialists as needed to provide expert intervention to every struggling reader. Lyon and Weiser (2009) made a similar point, arguing that "teacher effectiveness is the most important factor in the growth of student

achievement not only in reading but in mathematics and other content areas as well" (p. 476). They further stated:

To incorporate explicit skills, such as phonics instruction with vocabulary and comprehension strategies during language arts blocks, teachers need to be taught specific, evidence-based strategies in their college courses and during effective professional development. (p. 479)

As previously described, effective professional development builds pedagogical skills based on theory. An effective teacher of reading has a wide range of knowledge and skills including an understanding of how reading develops, underlying language processes (e.g., phonology, syntax, and semantics), and an assortment of assessment and instructional practices. A basic understanding of reading terminology is not sufficient. In addition, teachers need to know how the components work together in proficient reading and how to teach them in an integrated fashion (Lyon & Weiser, 2009). Expert reading teachers are focused on results, and they know that one instructional approach is not equally beneficial for all students.

Allington (2002), in reporting findings of lengthy observations and interviews of excellent first- and fourth-grade teachers, summarized their practices. He used six "T's"—Time, Texts, Teaching, Talk, Tasks, and Testing. Allington (2002) explained that effective reading teachers devote a major portion of the day to reading and writing instruction, a larger amount of time than is normally allotted in the school schedule. Their students have access to many interesting books leveled to their ability. These teachers use direct, explicit instruction with lots of modeling. Classroom talk is student-centered and limited in the question-answer dialogues that usually dominate classroom discourse. Worksheets and end-

of-story questions usually are not used. Academic tasks are lengthier and integrate other content areas into the reading lessons. Evaluation is formative and based on on-going student progress rather than on summative, norm-based tests.

Of note, most of the teachers Allington (2002) observed went against district-mandated pacing guides and materials. He emphasized that, "Effective teachers manage to produce better achievement, regardless of the curriculum materials, pedagogical approach, or reading program they use" (p. 742). Such expert skills and practices are only learned through study and experience. Professional development that helps to develop such skills is a necessary requirement for producing effective teachers of reading.

Taylor (2008) proposed that effective classroom reading instruction is the critical part of an effective intervention process. She stated that effective interventions involve teachers making sound instructional choices and not just following scripted lessons. To do this, teachers need to have a clear purpose for their instruction and sufficient time for its delivery. A working knowledge of reading results (data) and what they mean (or prescribe) is necessary. Taylor, in concluding her review, stressed that an effective intervention program "requires long-term, school-based professional development in which teachers learn together about research-based practices, support each other as they implement new strategies and techniques, and reflect on their teaching to become even more effective" (p. 22).

In summary, teachers of reading must know the grade-level curriculum, effective assessment and teaching strategies, and the characteristics of their students. Understanding how to effectively use methods and materials requires ongoing, in-service training.

Outcomes of in-service training for teachers of reading. Knowing that teachers need additional knowledge in reading instruction has resulted in research that explores the best methods to improve this knowledge. Several studies have examined how professional development programs—and the associated delivery methods—have impacted classroom reading instruction. For example, the Institute of Education Sciences conducted a large randomized study that examined the effects of professional development on student outcomes on standardized tests. The study results were based on a two year professional development program. The participants were 270 grade two teachers in 90 schools (Quint, 2011).

The professional development training was based on *Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling* (LETRS), a program developed by Moats (Garet et al., 2008). This training covered the five pillars of reading instruction advocated by the National Reading Panel report (NRP, 2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The instruction was in-depth and provided over 40 hours of extensive training to second-grade teachers. The teachers receiving the professional development were divided into two groups: one half received the training only, and the other half received the training plus an in-school coach to assist in implementation of skills in the classroom. The two groups were monitored during the school year that followed the summer training sessions. This was also the school year in which the in-school coaching occurred.

After one year, both groups (training and training plus mentor) were compared to control groups, which only received their district's normal professional development. Garet et al. (2008) summarized results that were based on district standardized tests:

Although there were positive impacts on teacher's knowledge of scientifically-based reading instruction and one of the three instructional practices promoted by the PD study, neither PD intervention resulted in significantly higher student test scores at the end of the one-year treatment. (p. viii)

In addition, the coaching intervention did not seem to effectively influence classroom implementation because there were no statistically significant achievement differences between the two groups (coach and no coach).

In closing, the MDRC report noted that changes in teacher knowledge and practice needed to be considerably greater if they were to significantly impact student achievement.

Quint (2011) stated:

Given the finding that very substantial changes in practice are necessary to bring about student improvement, a fundamental design lesson of the two professional development interventions that were examined may be that more than one year of professional development is needed to produce large and lasting change. (p. 25)

A large professional development initiative was the Early Literacy Learning
Initiative (ELLI) at Ohio State University (Williams, 1998). The purpose of ELLI was to
have school-based literacy coordinators (or "in-house" experts) train and assist teachers in
the improvement of classroom reading instruction. The literacy coordinators participated in
a yearlong course that included 6 weeks of start-up training at a university and follow-up
professional development at regular intervals. During the year, coordinators learned reading
theory, scaffolded learning based on Clay's sensitive teaching concept, and flexible
grouping. The coordinators were then assigned to elementary schools to conduct staff
development for teachers in grades kindergarten through second.

Since the ELLI was considered long-term, it had some specific requirements.

Participating schools were required to purchase classroom book collections as well as sets of leveled books for guided reading instruction. In addition, all participating schools had a "safety net" that required all at-risk first graders to receive tutoring in Reading Recovery.

ELLI eventually grew to include 177 schools in 20 states (Williams, 1998).

Examining five schools tested the effects of the ELLI model. The selected schools were involved in the program for at least four years and had followed the program as it was envisioned. The model of having a well-trained supervisor assisting teachers for extended periods showed positive results. Four of the five schools reported positive gains in literacy as rated on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GRT). Unfortunately, the study did not include a control group, making it difficult to interpret the significance of the achievement gains. The research report recommended that literacy coordinators be assigned to only one school and be specifically devoted to teacher support. Additionally, the report recommended more reading and writing practice by students, as well as possibly more training for the literacy coordinator (Williams, 1998).

Finally, in a small-scale study, Podhajski, Mather, Nathan, and Simmons (2009) asked if the building of teachers' capacity in instruction of basic skills would lead to higher student achievement. This study involved just four teachers, two from grade one, one from grade two, and a teacher from a grade one through two combination class. Each teacher received 35 hours of training as part of a professional development program called TIME (Training in Instructional Methods of Efficacy). This program focused on extensive phonics, phonemic awareness, and fluency instruction, as well as assessment and instructional delivery methods. Additionally, the four teachers were assigned a mentor (once per month

for 10 months) to observe and assist in classroom implementation of skills taught during the training sessions.

In Podhajski et al. (2009) the targeted teachers were compared to a control group closely matched in educational levels and experience. Student achievement was measured with DIBELS data, the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), and the Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE). Findings showed that explicit instruction in basic reading components was effective when carried out by well-trained teachers. This study was limited because of the number of teachers (four in the training group and three in the control group) and the fact that the students were not well matched based on SES data (the control groups students were more advantaged on SES data). However, the overall conclusion was that professional development in explicit teaching methods is needed for both regular and special education teachers.

In summation, studies of professional development in the teaching of reading have been limited in number and scope. Although the studies have varied in size, methods, and outcomes, indications are that reading professional development must be delivered for a substantial amount of time. Additionally, for the professional development instruction to be effective, the training must be highly structured, in-depth, and led by an expert teacher of reading.

The Reading Practicum: A Specific Type of Staff Development

To date, the most impressive, and certainly most intensive, model for training reading teachers is Reading Recovery, a program developed in New Zealand in the 1970s by the developmental psychologist, Marie Clay (1993). In Reading Recovery, instructors undergo intensive, "hands-on" training in which they tutor a struggling reader for a full year

under the guidance of an expert supervisor. This training establishes a well-learned set of pedagogical practices, or a "tool set." The skills learned are not prescriptive but rather adaptive. They allow teachers to (a) skillfully preplan lessons and (b) make informed, on-the-run decisions during a lesson. Both abilities are necessary when tutoring children who experience difficulties in learning to read. As teachers build this knowledge base, they become better versed in effective teaching practices, which, in turn, leads to more flexibility in lesson delivery (Bryk, 2009; Hammond, 2009). Research studies have clearly established the effectiveness of Reading Recovery in preventing reading failure in the grade one year (see Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1994; Schwartz, 2005; Shanahan & Barr, 1995).

Reading Recovery is an example of *practicum training* (Morris, 2009; Schön, 1987). In the next section I take a step back to consider more broadly the nature and power of the practicum approach to training reading teachers.

Developing expertise through a reading practicum. Effectively teaching reading, particularly to students who experience difficulty, is often described as an art. This art can be observed in the experienced, talented teacher. An observer can see that such a teacher is effective with struggling readers, but the observer, even a skillful one, is often unable to explain why. It is as if the teacher possesses a dynamic set of pedagogical processes that are quickly accessed during instruction with little conscious thought. Something natural and elegant is occurring in his or her classroom. A reading practicum setting is an ideal learning environment to gain and become competent with the skills that are necessary to improve student reading achievement.

Earlier I argued that teachers usually enter the profession without the required knowledge base necessary to teach reading, especially to children who experience difficulty. Young teachers learn from their initial classroom experiences, eventually building routines that enable them to teach most (75% or more) of their students to read. However, they frequently are not successful with their lowest readers. Some teachers, certainly a minority, do learn through experience (or trial and error) how to help at-risk readers. However, there is a pedagogical knowledge "gap" between teachers who have routines that work only for average-achieving readers and their colleagues who can diversify instruction to reach low-achieving readers. The problem facing reformers or change agents is how to help less-skilled teachers become more effective in teaching children who struggle with the reading process.

Students who struggle in learning to read require steady, structured instruction delivered by a skilled teacher. A skilled teacher delivers instruction by the calculated use of materials, questions, and constant adjustments. This process of instructional delivery requires detailed prior knowledge, as well as an ability to adjust to new situations using the "tools" currently available. Schön (1987) describes this as the use of *knowledge-in-action*. Skilled reading teachers adjust to new situations using knowledge grounded in theory and skills learned through practice.

A skilled teacher's instruction is more an art than the implementation of a prescribed program or a set of predetermined methods. Such a teacher knows the developmental process of reading and how it unfolds differently for individual students. Such a teacher confronts, adjusts, and navigates the instructional terrain with a seemingly effortless capability. This adaptive, reflective ability is tacit. The teacher "feels" her move is right. She knows it is grounded in sound practice based on previous successful experiences. This type

of teacher is able to reflect on the move and make adjustments to better hone his/her instruction. This ability, termed reflection-in-action by Schön (1987), cannot be taught, but it can be acquired in the proper situation, i.e., a practicum.

A *practicum* is a context designed to produce a skilled practitioner. Such a training model is grounded in theory, but, more important, the practicum makes the training relevant to the real-world situations experienced by the participants. A reading practicum is designed to help teachers develop the skills and confidence necessary in teaching struggling readers. A key element of the practicum is activity (in this case, tutoring) supervised by an expert. The expert models, explains, and questions a teacher as he or she teaches one child. In this way understanding is developed by *doing* the activity and reflecting on one's performance with a coach (Morris, 2011).

The Appalachian State University reading practicum. Each year, the reading program at Appalachian State University (Boone, NC) conducts practicum courses for teachers, both on and off campus. Normally about 20 graduate students participate in the off-campus practicum, in which classes are held twice per week. The practicum is "supervised" by a reading professor who is assisted by skilled reading specialists (doctoral students or local reading teachers in the community). The professor and his/her supervisor team each monitor five tutor-child pairs per hour. The structure of the reading practicum is built around a group of graduate students working one-to-one with struggling readers from a local school. The children come for tutoring sessions twice a week, one hour each session (Morris, 2008).

The core of the ASU practicum is (a) a careful assessment to establish the student's reading instructional level and (b) a dynamic lesson plan. The reading part of the assessment

involves the child attempting to read a series of leveled passages. A reading instructional level is determined based on criteria of oral reading accuracy, rate, and comprehension. A leveled spelling assessment is administered to determine an entry position for phonics and word study instruction.

The lesson plan addresses the components of a balanced literacy program. Guided reading, word study (phonics), fluency, writing, and a read-to activity are included in the lesson plan. Graduate students are introduced to the lesson plan during a reading methods course during the previous semester, but they do not use the lesson plan until the practicum semester.

Each component of the lesson plan is addressed during tutoring sessions. Guided reading in an appropriately leveled text comprises the bulk of the lesson. Word study, using word sort cards and activities, is modeled and practiced. Fluency activities are introduced and monitored for progress. Writing is conducted for both instructional and diagnostic purposes.

During one-hour seminars that accompany the reading practicum, issues such as assessment, materials, diversifying instruction through grouping, and stages of reading development are explored. During the seminars teachers and supervisors also brief the cases of individual children they are currently tutoring. This practice lends a powerful, real-world quality to the practicum experience.

Schön (1987) would view the ASU program as a practicum. In this setting, students are learning a skill set in order to do a craft; i.e., to teach reading. The teacher-in-training enters the process without a clear understanding of what is to be learned. He or she possesses a prior set of teaching routines, but in the practicum setting these routines may not

work with a struggling reader. There is a need to adjust instruction but the teacher may not know how to proceed. His or her own theory-in-action is brought into question.

This is where the coach comes in. The coach, an expert practitioner, knows the process and skills that will enable a teacher to effectively teach reading to a struggling student. Furthermore, the coach is able to break down the process into components, to model and explain the specific skills that are needed in a given situation. Along with modeling and performance feedback, the coach builds a dialogue that enables both coach and teacher to mutually reflect on what is being observed and learned. As the teacher works with the struggling reader, the coach creates a circumstance where the teacher-in-training can reflect in action. This *reflection-in-action* will eventually enable the teacher to be flexible in his or her use of new knowledge and thus better meet the teaching demands that are encountered (Schön, 1987). Importantly, what is learned in a practicum—new skills and the ability to use them in a flexible manner—transfers to other teaching contexts.

In summary, the reading practicum incorporates many elements necessary for school change. Change occurs through reflective action because behaviors and emotions have to change before beliefs and practices will change. Teachers need to act in new ways, and understand them, before they gain insights and feelings that support the new beliefs (Fullan, 2007). A practicum experience allows this to unfold through a process of modeling, trying it out on your own, and then receiving feedback on how it has worked. Such a process develops skills that are adaptive and flexible for use with larger groups (Morris, 2011). As teachers work with individual students they gain an understanding of the developmental reading process. In experiencing the command of, and responsibility for, a single student's

learning, the teacher sees possibilities for using his or her newly-won knowledge and skills in other reading situations.

Researchers note that teachers need to have many skill sets to be effective (Allington, 2002; Beswick & Sloat, 2006; Snow et al., 1998). In a reading practicum a teacher learns how to carefully guide the reading progress of a child who is struggling. Along with new teaching techniques, the teacher learns how to carefully increase the difficulty level of the reading materials being used, both contextual and phonics-based (Morris, 2011). The learning that occurs in this tutoring environment can be transferred into other school settings. Morris (2011) explained:

What is not fully recognized is that the intensive teacher training that accompanies these [practicum] interventions can help improve instruction for struggling readers throughout the school day—in the regular classroom, the Title I resource room, and the after-school tutoring program. (p. 57)

The Present Study

The present study adds to the school change literature by *documenting* the kind and amount of change that became evident in the beliefs and practices of two participating teachers from one school after experiencing an effective early literacy professional development program. The present study follows two kindergarten through second grade teachers in a single school after they had completed a one-semester beginning reading methods class and a one-semester reading practicum. The study addresses the following question: *Based on the teachers' participation in the staff development initiative, how did their beliefs and classroom practices regarding the teaching of reading change over a two-year period?*

Chapter 3: Methodology

The chapter describes the research design, participants, school community, staff development initiative in early literacy, data collection, role of the researcher, and data analysis for this study, which seeks to uncover how an early literacy professional development experience impacted two teachers' beliefs and attitudes about their teaching and their students' learning. This narrative account is told in the voices of the teachers and their principal.

Research Design

This case study is a narrative account of how an early literacy professional development initiative impacted one school in a North Carolina school district as evidenced by the voices of two teachers involved in the professional development experience and their principal. The goal of the staff development program was to increase the pedagogical content knowledge of the participating teachers and thereby positively affect the reading performance of kindergarten through second grade students in the school district. I was also a participant in the faculty development and experienced first hand the power of the staff development to transform teacher knowledge and instruction. Furthermore, as the Title I teacher at the school where these teachers worked, I saw the reading scores of their students improve after the early literacy professional development. Thus, the major goal of the present study became *documenting* the kind and amount of change that became evident in the beliefs and practices of these two teachers.

I use a qualitative lens (Patton, 1990) and a case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008) to explore the sense these two teachers and their principal made of the early literacy professional development that we all experienced. Case study is a qualitative method (Erickson, 1986) that enables one to generate theory from practice (Merseth, 1996; Shulman, 1992; Sykes & Bird, 1992), and has been used in literacy research to understand how teachers think and reason about classroom practices (Alvermann et al., 1996; Harrington, 1999; Levin, 1999; Moje & Wade, 1997; Wade, 2000). Yin (2003) notes that a case study approach is especially appropriate when the focus of research is to understand *how* and *why* something has occurred. The unit of analysis—the case—in this study is the impact of an early literacy professional development program on beliefs and attitudes of two teachers who experienced the staff development program.

Bruner (1990, 2003) argues the narrative or story form is a powerful way for humans to make sense of their experiences. Hollins and Guzman argued that teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes are "filters through which their practices, strategies, actions, interpretations, and decisions are made" (p. 482). Capturing teachers' sensemaking (Gee et al., 1992) through their own words has potential to reveal such knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Dinkleman; 2003; Wade, Fauske, & Thompson, 2008). In this study, I aim to bring the teachers' voices into the story directly, honoring their sensemaking of the transformative experience of an early literacy professional development initiative. Since I was also a participant in the faculty development, my interpretation of the significance and meaning behind the teachers' voices will impact the story I tell. I will present as much of the story as possible in the teachers' own words to counter my own bias.

Semistructured interviews conducted over time (Fontana & Fey, 1994) and openended follow up questions were used to elicit conversational narrative responses (Riessman, 1993). These methods resulted in a qualitative evaluation of the impact of the early literacy professional development experience (Swanson & Chapman, 1994) on the professional lives of two teachers in one school.

Study Participants

Primary participants in this study were two elementary grade teachers who were involved in the district-wide, staff development on early literacy. One represented a seasoned and experienced teacher and the other a novice teacher. They were the only teachers in this school who experienced the staff development besides me. A third teacher who also participated in the staff development moved to another school to assume the duties of assistant principal before data collection began. The two remaining participants, therefore, were selected because they taught in the same school, the school where I also served as Title I reading teacher. I had established good working relationships and trust with these teachers, and I felt they would be candid and honest with me in discussing the value of the early literacy professional development. Indeed, these teachers were willing to answer questions, offer personal information, and discuss the faculty development in depth.

Ms. A (pseudonym), a grade one teacher, had over 16 years of teaching experience. All of her teaching experience had been in grade one. Her classes averaged around 20 students per year, with approximately 50% receiving free or reduced lunch. There were also several ELL students in Ms. A's class each year. Ms. A volunteered to participate in the district-wide literacy initiative. She planned to complete the five-course staff development

program, but did not plan to continue with the classes necessary to complete a MA degree in reading.

Ms. B (pseudonym) was selected for this study because of her limited teaching experience. When Ms. B entered the staff development program, she was beginning her third year of teaching. She taught kindergarten during her first year, taught a kindergarten through grade one combination class during her second year, and taught second grade her third year. Ms. B's class sizes range from 15-20 students, and she too served a large number of children who receive free and reduced lunch and/or were labeled ELL. Ms. B also volunteered for the staff development literacy initiative, considering it an opportunity to obtain a master's degree at a low cost.

The school principal was also a study participant. The principal did not participate in the staff development training; however, she observed and interacted with both Ms. A and Ms. B during their training year. The interview was conducted with the school's principal to obtain her view of the school before, during, and one year after the start of the district-wide staff development initiative. This school was the principal's first principalship position, and she had been assigned to this school for three years. The principal interview was conducted concurrently with the initial interviews of the two teachers who are the focus of this study. The principal's observations, as well as the reading scores from students in the two teachers' classrooms serve to triangulate the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

School and Community

The school where the two teachers work is in a rural community and serves grades kindergarten through six. The community is 15 miles from a large urban area, but is still an agrarian community where the roads are lined with fields of corn and tobacco. The school's

population is approximately 300 students with over half receiving free-reduced lunch services. The school has 22 teachers, all considered highly qualified, and teacher turnover rate is only 10 %. Forty-six percent of the faculty members have more than ten years of experience and only 18 % have three or fewer years of experience. The school is designated as a "school of progress," meaning that greater than 60 percent of the students are considered to be performing on grade level in reading. This criterion is based on the state DPI accountability model (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011).

Description of the Staff Development Initiative

The two teachers and I participated in an early literacy staff development initiative that impacted the teachers, me, and the school where we worked. In this section, I will describe the first year of this experience, which consisted of a semester long course in the fall followed by a practicum experience in the spring.

Reading materials. As part of the district-wide early reading initiative, the ASU faculty required the district to invest in reading materials that would support the staff development program. The materials consisted of small, leveled books and a phonics series (sets of word sort cards) that would be used by the participating teachers in their schools. The books were a major portion of the materials used in guided reading instruction during the reading practicum. The book lists were provided by the ASU faculty, who stated that the books were well written, excellent for both sight word and vocabulary development, and generally of high interest to young children. The books were leveled 1–9, with a Level 1 being a very simple pattern book for use with an emergent reader and a Level 9 being appropriate for a late first-grade reader. Such a range of books was necessary for the instruction of struggling readers in the K–2 classrooms.

The books were published by the Rigby and Wright Group publishing companies. Each recommended title was purchased as a package of six books so that each title could be used for small-group guided reading instruction, or individually in one-to-one settings. The books were to be shared between two teachers; thus the books would need to be strategically located in each school so both teachers had easy access to them each day. Logistically, this meant that each school would receive one set of books, with the two larger elementary schools receiving two sets because these schools had four participating teachers. The cost for each complete set of leveled books was approximately \$5,270, and the total cost to the district was \$52,693.

Beginning reading methods class. The school district's staff development literacy initiative began in the fall of 2009. The first ASU course was a typical methods class that focused on how to teach beginning reading. In a class of 26 students (including the superintendent), the ASU professor presented lectures on the history of beginning reading instruction, the developmental steps in learning to read, and the importance of a balanced instructional approach (e.g., contextual reading, phonics, and writing). The professor explained and modeled specific procedures for *assessing* beginning reading and for *teaching* reading, phonics, and writing. Furthermore, he discussed a plan, or model, for managing small instructional groups in the classroom.

Originally, this introductory methods course was to be followed in the spring semester by a more in-depth course on the assessment and correction of reading problems.

The teaching practicum was to follow in the summer. However, shortly into the initial methods class, the professor approached the school superintendent and recommended that the training schedule be modified. The professor believed that the reading practicum needed

to occur sooner: during the spring semester rather than in the summer. He explained that the teachers needed to work directly with children if they were to learn and internalize the methods and processes that were being presented in the methods class. The superintendent agreed to the change in the training schedule, and the practicum was moved up and conducted during the spring semester of 2010.

The reading practicum. The reading practicum class involved the graduate students (Kindergarten through grade two teachers) working one-to-one with struggling readers from the local schools. The teachers and children were originally matched by reading level. That is, a kindergarten teacher worked with a child who was an emergent or beginning reader, even if the student was in the first or second grade. A second grade teacher was originally placed with a more advanced reader who was still below grade level in reading ability. Halfway through the practicum semester (i.e., after 12 lessons), the teachers were rotated among the students so that they could experience working with a student who was at an entirely different reading level. This switching of children afforded the teachers an opportunity to observe and better understand the developmental nature of reading.

The practicum began with the tutor conducting an informal reading assessment on her student. This inventory consisted of leveled reading passages, a spelling inventory and, if necessary, an informal assessment of print awareness and alphabet knowledge. The initial assessment enabled the teacher to determine her student's instructional reading level and stage of phonics knowledge. From this information the tutor developed a lesson plan that was used to (a) instruct the child and (b) help the teacher record and reflect on the student's ongoing progress. This lesson plan consisted of five parts: guided reading, word study, fluency, writing, and being read to by the teacher (Morris, 2005).

During the practicum, each tutor was paired with a supervisor. This supervisor was either a reading doctoral student or a reading teacher from the school district who had masters-level training. The supervisors had academic training and classroom experience that enabled them to work well with both children and teachers. The supervisor's role was to monitor five tutor/tutee pairs as they worked during a one-hour period. Then the supervisor helped each of his or her teachers reflect back on the current lesson and plan the next one. This was accomplished by referring to various reading strategies and methods that had been introduced during the previous semester's methods class. The supervisor's main concern was to ensure that the tutor had the student at the appropriate instructional level for contextual reading and phonics instruction. Each supervisor assisted with selecting reading materials and also modeled or demonstrated parts of the lesson plan when appropriate.

As the tutor gained confidence with parts of the lesson plan, the supervisor introduced more strategies for the tutor to use and incorporate into their tutoring.

Importantly, the supervisor guided the tutor in materials selection and encouraged the tutor to experiment and adjust instruction based on her individual student's needs.

After each lesson, the tutor produced short, written reflections on each section of the lesson plan (e.g., guided reading, word study, fluency activity). This reflection was then read by the supervisor, which allowed a dialogue to begin. The tutor had taught the lesson, the supervisor had observed it, and thus they could talk about what had happened. The resulting dialogue was invaluable to the teacher-in-training; it also assured that the instruction for the individual children was "on track."

After each tutoring session (twice weekly), the teachers gathered for a seminar. This class time provided the opportunity to examine case studies (Barnes, Christensen, & Hansen,

1994). Individual teachers and supervisors provided a diagnostic profile of a particular student in their group. This profile would include the assessment, the initial lesson plan, and any modifications to the plan that had been introduced over time. The professor would then highlight significant aspects of the case, suggest possible modifications, and offer a prognosis. These briefings allowed teachers to broaden their knowledge base by seeing cases of struggling readers in the practicum that might be different from the student they were currently tutoring.

An additional part of the practicum seminar was a short lecture by the professor. The lecture often included a specific issue that had emerged during tutoring that day that the professor wanted to share with the whole group. In his lectures, the professor also addressed how the teachers could transfer what was being learned in the one-to-one teaching practicum into small-group instruction in the classroom. Transfer topics included assessment, small-group instruction, literacy centers, and time management.

This practicum and accompanying seminar amounted to a detailed and structured learning experience. The one-to-one tutoring of a child under the supervision of a coach allowed the participating teachers to develop and refine specific pedagogical skills. The seminars then brought theory and practice together, allowing the teachers to both broaden and deepen what they were learning.

Data Collection

Semistructured interviews (Fontana & Fey, 1994) and open-ended questions were used to elicit statements (Riessman, 1993) by the two teachers and the principal about the impact of the early literacy professional development on the teaching and learning of the teachers' students. Two sets of interviews were conducted over time: the first, one year after

the early literacy professional development and the second a year later. The interviews were conducted one-on-one—just me and one interviewee—and were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Prior to being used with the two teachers in this study, the interview questions were piloted with two other teachers from another school who also went through the staff development experience. These interviews were used to refine the interview questions for clarity but responses were not included in data analysis.

The initial interview (Interview 1). The study participants, Ms. A and Ms. B, were interviewed one year after they had completed the methods course and the semester-long reading practicum. The school's principal was also interviewed at this Year 1 juncture. Interview 1 (see Appendix A.1, Interview [1] for Teachers, Spring, 2011) was semistructured and designed to allow each teacher to speak freely about her experience. Such a semistructured interview allowed the participant to answer questions in his or her own words, to "explore in some depth [his or her] experiences, motivations, and reasoning" (Drever, 1995, p. 1). Responses could be lengthy, and the interviewer could ask probing questions to help expand and clarify answers. The dual purpose of Interview 1 was to (a) help the teachers make meaning of what they had experienced and (b) help the interviewer understand and document the meaning that the teachers had constructed (Fogg, 2000). The participants were given the interview questions approximately 48 hours in advance, so they could review them and make both mental and written notes for use during the interview. During the interview, the interviewer used pre-planned probe questions to elicit more information and open-ended questions when appropriate.

Interview 1 explored the teachers' general feelings about the district-wide staff development initiative, as well as having them comment on their historical view of the

school's literacy program. Next, the interview explored the teachers' instructional methods *prior* to the formal staff development initiative. Interview 1 continued by questioning the teachers about their reasons for participating in the staff development initiative, their specific reactions to the training, and any modifications to their classroom reading instruction that could be attributed the training.

The interview of the principal (see Appendix A.2, Interview for Principal, Spring, 2011) was also conducted as a semistructured interview. The purpose of this interview was to (a) obtain the principal's historical perspective on the school's academic performance and (b) allow the principal to comment on any observed changes in Ms. A's and Ms. B's teaching.

Follow-up interview (Interview 2). The crux of this study was to interview these same teachers at a point approximately one year after the initial interview. Interview 2 (see Appendix A.3, Interview [2] for Teachers, Spring 2012) used a similar format that allowed the teachers to have the questions in advance, encouraged them to speak freely, and allowed for probing of their responses when appropriate. Interview 2 was less in-depth and focused more on specific changes in practice that had occurred since the completion of the reading practicum. Participant responses from Interview 2 were compared to Interview 1 responses in an effort to determine changes in themes, beliefs, practices, and perceptions of student reading achievement.

Student reading achievement data. Before the staff development initiative, outsiders assessed early literacy in the district. This process was noted by the administration to be unreliable. As the teachers in the staff development cohort became more competent in assessing reading, the school district allowed them to assess their own students. The

resulting data, which were now more reliable, were collected three times per year for kindergarten, first- and second-grade students. The data were collected in a running record format and included measures of oral reading accuracy, rate (words per minute), and comprehension. The results were verified by the school's administration and reading specialists for accuracy. These data are reported in this study.

Role of the Researcher and Ethical Considerations

I worked in the same school as the two teachers and principal interviewed in this study. In addition, I also participated in the staff development initiative. The close working relationship I had with two teachers established trust and allowed the teachers to be forthcoming in their responses to my questions. Having experienced the same professional development initiative enabled me to hone in on critical dimensions of this experience and better understand descriptions and comments made by the two teachers. Despite these strengths, potential bias is a danger in these situations because the researcher interprets the meaning of the teachers' comments. My positive experience of the early literacy professional development influenced the questions I asked and may have influenced the way in which I interpreted the teachers' responses. I present as much as possible the findings from this study in the teachers' words to address this kind of potential bias (Merriam, 1998). I also have used pseudonyms to honor the confidentiality of the participants. Audio recording the interviews added accuracy to the data collection.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Data collected included teacher and principal responses to the interviews, notes taken during the interviews, and reading achievement data of the teachers' students, collected by

the teachers over three years. The teachers were given the interview questions 48 hours before the interview to allow them time to reflect on the questions.

Analysis of Interviews. I created field texts through the selective use of interview segments (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), which were analyzed for themes and checked for consistency across interviews (within and between the participants). The transcriptions were checked against the recordings for accuracy, and then the transcriptions were read multiple times and were coded for emerging themes (Glesne, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A theme (to be coded) required at least three references in the transcripts of a teacher. The themed analysis, which compared a given teacher's responses over a two-year period, allowed for a determination of consistency or change in the teacher's pedagogical beliefs and practices. Patterns over time were noted as well as patterns between teachers. Emerging themes were then used to select quotes from the teachers that represented the themes. I tried to minimize inserting my interpretations into the results reported in Chapter 4, letting the teachers' voices speak for themselves.

Achievement data. Reading performance data (means and standard deviations) in the two teachers' classrooms were obtained and compared longitudinally. These data represent the grade levels of students' reading performance as measured by an informal reading inventory (Morris, 2008). Collecting and examining these data allowed me to determine possible achievement change across time. These data are summarized and discussed in Chapter 4.

Summary

This case study reports on the narrative responses of two teachers from a single school in North Carolina who experienced an early literacy staff development initiative.

Included are responses from their principal and reading data from their students. By all accounts the professional development was transformative for these teachers and the school district as a whole. The qualitative data from these interviews attempts to reveal how and why this early literacy professional development experience impacted these teachers. Chapter 4 reports on the data from semistructured interviews and open-ended questions; quotes from the teachers are used to present the emerging themes from the interviews. I limit my interpretation of these quotes in Chapter 4, placing more emphasis on the teachers' voices. In Chapter 5, I offer more interpretation of these data.

Chapter Four: Findings

This case study seeks to understand the change in two teachers' beliefs and attitudes about teaching reading. To minimize possible interviewer bias on reporting themes that emerged from the interviews, I present quotes from the teachers with as little interpretation of those quotes as possible. I save my interpretation of the meaning behind the quotes for the discussion in Chapter 5.

Results of the grade one students' reading performance are reported in Table 1. Data represent reading levels of grade one: Levels 1–16 represent the range of development expected in grade one and Levels 17 and above are considered appropriate for grade two. The results show, across three school years, reading gains made by the children from the beginning (fall) to the end (spring) of first grade. It is clear from looking at the table that, on average, both Ms. A's and Ms. B's children were reading at or above grade level (Level 16) when completing first grade. The only exception is Ms. A's 2009-10 scores, yet her students made a full 10 levels of reading growth (5 to 15) that year. Note how the means improve with little variation in the standard deviations. These data reveal that all of the children improved, not just the more able readers; if the lower readers had not improved, then the standard deviations would have increased. All in all, these reading scores show impressive positive student growth. Nonetheless, the major goal of this interview study was to document changes in the teachers' beliefs and practices. The remainder of this section will address this issue.

Table 1.

Reading Achievement Levels in the Two Teachers' Classrooms Across 3 Years

Grade	Year	Fall Reading	ng Level	Spring Read	ling Level
	Ms. A's Reading Scores				
		mean	(s.d.)	mean	(s.d.)
First (N=17)	2009-10	5ª	(5)	15	(7)
First (N=18)	2010-11	7	(5)	18	(8)
First (N=17)	2011-12	8	(6)	18	(5)
		Ms. B's Re	eading Sco	ores ^b	
First (N=12)	2009-10	8	(5)	20	(6)
First (N=6)	2011-12	12	(7)	17	(8)

^a Reading levels range from early-first grade (Level 1) to late-first grade (Level 16). Levels 17 and above indicate a second-grade reading level.

Interview 1: School Performance and Teacher Practices Before the Staff Development Initiative

This first section reports results from the first interview when asked about school performance and teacher practices before the staff development experience. This is a retrospective interview technique that researchers have found to be accurate and valid (Berney & Blaine, 1997). In this section I begin with the principal followed by Ms. A and B.

^b Ms. B taught a combination classroom (K-1) one of the years; only the first-grade reading scores are reported in the table.

Principal's perspective. The research setting is a rural elementary school (K-6) with a population of approximately 300 students. The school receives federal Title I services based on a free-reduced lunch percentage of greater than 60 percent. The school has an ELL population of 40 or more students.

The interview began with questions about the school's performance prior to the district staff development initiative. The principal stated that the school had recently received a low score on the most recent statewide testing (2009-2010) for grades three through six. She explained that the school had previously been assigned an "in improvement" status, which required the district to assist the school in developing a school-wide improvement program. Additionally, the school had been forced to offer a school choice option, which meant that parents could request to transfer their children to a neighboring higher-performing school.

During the interview, the principal was asked how she evaluated the school's literacy performance at this early point in her principalship. Her comments were based on her analysis of the school's reading data and regular observations of classroom instruction.

Asked if she believed the sanction levels were an accurate assessment of the school, she replied, "For the most part, yes. . . . Not long after being here I did realize that we had a big problem on our hands." She explained that the school had not been moving in a positive direction; it was just maintaining the status quo. "[The data] was about the same as the year before and a couple of years before. . . based on as far back as I looked, which was about three years or so. . . it was low" (Interview 1, April 2011).

When queried about what types of performance data she had considered, the principal offered that, in addition to the standardized test data, she had concerns with the

quality of the informal reading assessment data obtained in kindergarten through grade two.

She clarified this concern:

The [informal data] was not correct, and when I say that, I mean my data was showing that I had the majority of my kids close to 98-100%, on grade level leaving second grade, but when they took the third grade [EOG] pretest, our pretest results were coming in at like 20% or 30%, so I knew there was something off in the [informal assessment] data. (Interview 1, April 2011)

The principal emphasized that the informal literacy (Kindergarten through two) data were very unreliable. The data could not be used for predictive purposes, and they could not be used for planning interventions. This state of affairs, the principal believed, hampered preparations toward any improvement process.

A follow-up question asked about the principal's major areas of concern as she began her tenure. She stated that the poor quality of early literacy instruction was affecting later student performance on the third-grade, statewide standardized reading tests. She continued: "A lot of them [Kindergarten through two teachers] didn't know where their kids were or what to do with them. I found that, as a result of this, too many kids were identified EC (exceptional Children) . . . that may not have been the way if we had better instruction." She clarified by drawing on her observations of classroom instruction:

I saw a lot of round-robin reading early on, and little word study during the instructional blocks. . . . [The teachers] were trying hard but because of lack of knowledge they were not doing very well . . . there was not enough time reading, not enough time in text. (Interview 1, April 2011)

When asked if she believed her staff had the technical skills needed to improve reading instruction, the principal responded, "probably not, some . . . a few, but not all." When asked about options she had tried to improve instruction, the principal stated that she had started a before- and after-school tutoring program as well as a series of "peer walks." These peer walks (or visits) allowed less knowledgeable teachers to observe stronger teachers and were accompanied by follow-up discussions about practices and strategies that had been observed. The principal also mentioned the use of computer-based intervention programs like SuccessMaker, Study Island, and Waterford, emphasizing that "We were told to use [these programs], and that these would bring up the scores and help kids learn." In summation, the principal stated, "I knew there was a problem, but I didn't know a lot about how to fix it and what to do." When asked about her personal support of the district-wide staff development initiative, the principal responded, "I fully supported the [professional development] initiative, and I was so thankful for it . . . because I knew I needed to do something, but I didn't have a good handle on exactly what I needed to do" (Interview 1, April 2011).

This principal eventually obtained three training spots for her school and had three teachers volunteer to participate. Two of the teachers, Ms. A and Ms. B, are the subjects of this research. The third teacher left the school to become an assistant principal at another elementary school within the district. Ms. A and Ms. B were interviewed in a similar manner to establish a *before*, *during*, and *after* perspective of their literacy instructional practices and beliefs.

Ms. A.'s background and early practices. Ms. A had been at the school for more than five years. She had been a grade one teacher for 16 years. Of note, the month prior to

the first interview, the school's faculty had nominated Ms. A as the school's Teacher of the Year. When the first interview was conducted, Ms. A had completed her first year of training and was enrolled in the second year of the staff development initiative. She was pleased with the training and believed the district's resources had been put to good use, which she characterized as "a great use . . . money well spent."

When asked about her understanding of her school's literacy performance, Ms. A replied, "I first realized we [the school] were somewhat below in reading and, as time went on, I realized we were really falling behind and struggling . . . as far as not reaching those benchmarks with the state and federal guidelines." A follow-up question asked how the school's performance compared to Ms. A's classroom assessments. She replied, "I was seeing a real struggle, a lot of my students, despite a lot of instruction and a lot of reading, they were not leaving on grade level" (Interview 1, April 2011).

Ms. A was asked how she evaluated her student's reading performance prior to the staff development initiative. She responded in an unsure tone, saying that the school had some running record data that were periodically given to the teachers and then the teachers would sometimes compare these data to each other's class data. She elaborated, "We didn't really do anything with those scores other than just let everyone know this is kind of how we left off last year." A follow-up question asked about the reading materials and instructional techniques that were used in the school. Ms. A explained that most of the teachers were using the district-adopted basal and that the teachers she associated with did some small-group instruction. She could not specify the type of instruction. "I would say more on the basal because that was the material we had. I can't speak to what the instruction was, I don't know if it was round robin. I did not do round robin" (Interview 1, April, 2011).

Ms. A stated that prior to the district staff development initiative her most memorable reading professional development was participation in a series of district-level workshops. These workshops employed an outside consultant who provided suggestions about how "to manage small groups, how to manage centers, how to personalize spelling instruction, and how to really manage your time so that you can get the most out of every minute." The workshops were one-day events. Additionally, Ms. A had participated in a training activity where she had learned about phonics instruction. She explained the training as "that little strategy with the little colored chips, where you teach sounds with the colored chips . . . but that was so many years ago I can't even remember the name" (Interview 1, April 2011).

Ms. A was then asked to describe her classroom reading instruction before she began the district literacy initiative. Earlier in the interview she had explained that at her previous school the principal had directed them to move from whole-group to small-group instruction for reading. "Basically we were told to; there wasn't any research, just that the principal said you will do small group-instruction." She stressed that she felt comfortable in grouping her students for small-group instruction. She explained that the basal was her primary reading source and that her guided reading instruction occurred in ability groups. Ms. A stated that she felt comfortable in establishing and managing her reading groups because she had done it for many years. However, she said that she was not always certain about her ability to pace instruction, that is, to advance students when they are ready to advance. "I didn't always know what to do with certain [students] . . . like if you ever had a student who excelled and you had to move him, so that might be a little tricky" (Interview 1, April 2011).

Ms. A stated that she taught phonics in a whole group. She elaborated on the sequence of the instruction: "We always started with short vowels and went to whatever's next . . . blends, diagraphs . . . then we went to long vowels and that just went on throughout the year." As for phonics materials, she used a program from her previous school and, in that program, "everybody is working on a chore everyday" (Interview 1, April 2011).

Ms. A was asked how she used data to understand literacy issues in her classroom. She responded, "[I] don't think I really spent time examining data. Maybe I would receive information from my school, or do a workshop, or hear the latest; but I didn't necessarily base what I did on any data per se." However, she remarked that she did use running records (informal reading assessments) and that she "did her own before I arrived at this school, but now they do it for us. . . ." (Interview 1, April 2011).

Ms. B.'s background and early practices. Ms. B was completing her third year of teaching during the first interview. She had taught kindergarten, a kindergarten-grade one combination class, and was currently teaching grade two. In this interview, Ms. B was reflecting on her experience during the training year, when she taught the kindergarten-grade one classroom.

The interviewer began by asking Ms. B about her understanding of the school's overall literacy program. Her evaluation of the school's literacy instruction was frank and to the point. She believed that everyone else knew what they were doing except her! When asked about the school's reading performance, she responded that she had little understanding of it, but she believed that the school "had a majority of our students proficient in reading, but that wasn't where we [the school] needed to be; there were still

students falling below the benchmarks." She also stated that there was a lot of inconsistency in the school's literacy program:

People kind of did what they had always done, but I don't think the teachers collaborated a lot on their literacy instruction. I know that I did not feel like I was [doing good instruction] at that time. I was doing the best that I could . . . but I was not [doing well]. (Interview 1, May 2011)

When asked if the school's overall reading performance matched her own classroom observations, Ms. B replied, "They were right on . . . I always have about 3-5 students . . . who don't reach the benchmarks, and that is anywhere from 25-30% of my class." When asked about the school's focus on literacy in regard to time, materials and data, Ms. B responded that "Nobody ever really talked to me about my data except when running records came back. I did not use informal assessments in the classroom; I'm not sure if other teachers were using them or not" (Interview 1, May 2011).

When asked about previous staff development opportunities, Ms. B vaguely remembered some district-wide "running record" training during her second year of teaching. Also, she had gone to a district-wide literacy workshop, but did not find it very helpful. She explained that she had received some phonics instruction during her undergraduate program, but that she "couldn't really tell you the difference between phonics and phonemic awareness or the five elements of literacy" (Interview 1, May 2011).

Ms. B's frankness continued as the interview moved to questions about her classroom practices. She described her instruction as being "mostly teacher directed," meaning that her instruction was comprised mostly of whole-group reading and writing. She commented that she had tried to vary her approach to reading instruction by using resources

from the school's leveled text library, but she explained that she did not really understand the process of incorporating leveled books into her classroom instruction. She did use the running record data she received from the school to help her find materials for the students. She described her reading instruction as follows:

I didn't know anything about assessing my kids or running records, so I would just give them a book on the level that I thought they were on. If it was too hard I would move them down, if it was just right I would leave them there, and if it was too easy I would move them up . . . that was the best that I did. (Interview 1, May 2011)

Because most of Ms. B's classroom reading time was dedicated to whole-group instruction, she did not use guided reading groups during her first years of teaching. She stated, "I didn't know how to properly conduct those lessons . . . honestly, I don't even know how my kids learned to read." Asked about how she conducted phonics lessons, she explained that she used a program called *Fundations*. This instruction was done in a whole group as well, and she emphasized that she "didn't even have the *Fundations* training until just last year" (Interview 1, May 2011).

Interview 1: Teacher Beliefs and Practices 1 Year After the Staff Development Initiative

This section reports results from the first interview when the teachers were asked about school performance and teacher practices after the staff development experience. In this section I begin with Ms. A and B and followed by the principal.

Ms. A's reflections on the first year of staff development. Ms. A was asked how the training had specifically affected her ability to deliver reading instruction. She responded that she had already been doing some of the things that she had learned in the training, but

now she had a better understanding of reading instruction. She was better "at putting everything together and kind of performing what I had already been doing, but in a new way a better way." A probe question asked her to clarify this "better way." She explained that the practicum had allowed her to practice and really understand the techniques that had been presented in the first [methods] course (Interview 1, April 2011).

Ms. A stated that she believed that both courses—the methods class and the reading practicum—were a necessary part of the training. "One without the other [wouldn't work], because you would get the information, and if you didn't actually practice it, you may just shelve it away like we do with a lot of our workshops." She believed that the two-course process had allowed her to gain experience as well as confidence. This confidence allowed her to carry the training back to her classroom. She described the change as follows:

[In the practicum] I was actually doing what I had been taught [in the methods course] . . . and I saw how my practicum student excelled. So by me practicing with one student, I could go right back to my classroom . . . I was braver with my small groups and said [to myself], I know this and it works and the kids like it. I feel that I'm just a much better teacher of reading than I ever have been . . . I wouldn't trade what I have learned. (Interview 1, April 2011)

Ms. A was asked about areas of reading instruction that she felt needed to be changed or enhanced while she was engaged in the first year of training. She stated that she was already doing small groups before receiving the training, but now she was "way more flexible about how long individual students stay in a given group—how they move in and out of groups." Ms. A also explained how she had changed her word study (or phonics) program:

I don't do phonics anymore in whole group. I do the word study in small groups at their ability level. Some children [a group] might be in short vowels; some may be in long and short vowels. It is individualized with that group. (Interview 1, April 2011) When asked about changes in phonics materials, Ms. A said she was now using the ASU word sort cards that were furnished by the district, and that word sorts were now the basis of her phonics program. Other changes in her reading block included more read alouds to the whole class as well as additional literacy centers, some of which included poetry and rhyming activities. When asked for more information or explanation about the training's effect on her teaching, Ms. A quickly responded: "The number one thing that I knew right away from class was that I needed to change my materials. I had to get rid of that basal, get in the right materials, and keep them [the students] moving through those." Along with this change she added that she was doing more contextual reading by having "more time spent reading on the right level." Ms. A explained her guided reading process:

We [reading group] meet together, [and] introduce a new book and they read the book. Of course we picture walk and all that, then they do word study and then their rereads . . . and then we're done Sometimes you have to tweak a little bit for time, but I'm doing the same thing that I learned. (Interview 1, April 2011)

Her description of the guided reading lesson led to a question about Ms. A's use of informal running record data in assisting with the guided reading instruction. She explained that the data gave her valuable information; it helped her be more "aware of things I need to do for my students . . . how I constantly need to be updating what I am doing. So, if I see a student that may need more contextual reading then I make the time." She indicated that the use of the informal running record data now enabled her to discuss strategies with other

teachers that could help her students. She remarked that this had helped with staff communications, "There's been more collaborative sort of stuff" (Interview 1, April 2011).

As a final question, Ms. A was asked if she made any changes to her daily routine of teaching reading during her first year of training. She stated that she was much more aware of time devoted to literacy work during the school day. She described how she really tried to manage her time more efficiently and how she uses the entire reading block [120 minutes]. She explained:

I start first thing in the morning with self-selected reading and then we go into small groups with literacy centers. Instead of doing maybe small group or reading groups or literacy time 3 days a week, I've really tried to—I mean there's a few days you can't do it [holiday schedule or field trips]—but I try to make that literacy block happen every single day, like nothing is going to bump that out . . . if you lose it, they lose it. (Interview 1, April 2011)

Ms. B's reflections on the first year of staff development. Ms. B reported that the professional development training had been good for her and worth the effort. She stated that she had had to make a lot of changes in her personal life, but "if I had not done this [training] I don't know where my career would be today; it has changed me as a professional" (Interview 1, May 2011).

Ms. B was asked how the first year of the staff development initiative had affected her ability to teach reading in her kindergarten through grade one classroom. She responded with a list that included assessment, materials, placement, and phonics instruction. She explained how learning to assess students' reading abilities had helped her be more effective and efficient in grouping students for reading instruction:

I now could figure out specifically where they were . . . not only their reading level, but I could tell where their weaknesses were. With the kindergartners and the first graders that I had, I could see who . . . I specifically [could tell] who could track [printed words] and who could not. Through assessment, I learned about my first graders' fluency [its importance]. I learned how to read their different kinds of errors to see what specifically they needed to work on. (Interview 1, May 2011)

Ms. B explained that the process of categorizing children's reading levels as being *independent*, *instructional*, or *frustration* became the most important concept she had learned. This new understanding allowed her to refine and better match the materials with the students. "I learned a lot about the levels of books and how to pull them according to the right instructional level." She finished her answer by stating, "I also learned about word study and spelling groups and implementing that in my classroom as well" (Interview 1, May 2011).

The interviewer asked Ms. B about areas of her classroom instruction that she felt needed to be changed or enhanced during the first year of training. She responded that the major area that needed improvement was her guided reading instruction. Her response captured the emotion, "Definitely guided reading! That was the biggest thing because . . . I was not meeting my kids where they were and [I] wasn't giving them the appropriate reading instruction." She now realized that her previous whole-group reading instruction wasn't effective:

I needed to cut down on the whole-group instruction. I realized last year that the whole-group reading thing that I was able to justify before, now I don't feel like it is a good use of time. The whole-group reading instruction is basically out for now . . .

and that was the majority of my instruction before the training. (Interview 1, May 2011)

Asked about word study or phonics instruction, Ms. B first responded with a reflective question to herself, "Word study, using spelling inventories to see where my kids are lacking?" She continued:

It never occurred to me that they [the students] would be able to improve with spelling and word study, like they do in reading, not because it wasn't there . . . , but because I didn't see it. I didn't know what a word sort was, manipulating words [by category]. I knew about make-a-word with magnetic letters, but as far as kids sorting and looking for patterns on their own and being on different developmental levels, I didn't know anything about that before these courses. (Interview 1, May 2011)

When asked about informal assessments. Ms. B explained that she had learned a great deal about assessing young children's reading. She now was able to use assessments in a formative manner. "Just sitting down with a kid at my table and taking out my timer and just saying read this book for me, and then do a real quick running record to find out [how accurate and fast she is] . . . when she is ready to move and when she is not." Ms. B added how she had learned how to calculate accuracy and reading rates as well as spelling and comprehension performance, and that these were now part of her assessment program. She summarized by saying, "I didn't know what those things were before these courses" (Interview 1, May 2011).

Ms. B. was asked how she used data to guide classroom instruction. She explained that she assessed spelling every quarter to assist in grouping for phonics instruction. More revealing was how she made the data more formative in use:

I use running records when we have those during the year, but I do [assessments] about every 2 to 4 weeks . . . the little informal ones where I just sit down with a kid and do a real quick check of their reading level. My groups are dynamic and flexible. I move them and change them [students] as I need to. (Interview 1, May 2011)

In response to a series of questions about changes she had made to her classroom instruction during the year of training, Ms. B explained that she had shifted away from the basal and was now almost totally using the school's leveled-text library. She emphasized that the leveled-text library was now her main resource because, "my classroom library, I go through it so quickly!"

Finally, Ms. B was asked to comment on her overall perception of the first year of staff development:

I don't even know how [the training] could have been more effective because it changed the way I teach reading; it changed the way I teach writing; it changed the way I teach spelling. Everything in my literacy block changed. . . . I was able to see, even though I didn't know before, that my instruction was kind of pitiful, *because I just didn't know*. (Interview 1, May 2011)

When queried about the appropriateness of the course sequence (methods course followed by the practicum), Ms. B agreed with the sequence, explaining how the methods course exposed her to new concepts and strategies that she then took back to the classroom for practice. Later, she could discuss her new learning with her peers at future classes. When asked about the importance of the practicum, she stated that the one-on-one teaching with a supervisor was critical to her learning. "I could say to the supervisor: Come over and watch this or what do you think? It was like that—intense, almost what I think I would give to a

child in my classroom who needs individual attention—I got what I needed." (Interview 1, May 2011)

Principal's reflections on first year of staff development. The principal observed the teachers as they participated in the first year of the staff development initiative. Since she was their direct supervisor, she was asked to provide her perspective on the first year of training (the methods course and the reading practicum) and explain how she believed it had affected the participating teachers.

The principal stated there had been positive changes in the teachers' classroom instruction and described how they were using the school's leveled-text library more than they had in the past. She believed that the increased use of leveled texts encouraged teacher conversations about having students at the correct level of reading materials during guided reading lessons. Additionally, the principal observed that assessment was now a larger part of the conversations between her and the teachers. She emphasized that only a few months into the training, she "started seeing growth in the kids," along with the teachers being excited about their new knowledge of reading instruction. She said that the teachers were coming to her and telling her that they "didn't really know how to teach reading until [they] had gone through the training" (Interview 1, April 2011).

The interview narrowed into more specific aspects of change the principal was describing. She stated she "definitely saw more use of leveled texts...and [instruction] that got them in the correct material." She commented that "right now, 2 years in, I don't see these teachers using the basal or a lot of whole-group instruction or workbooks or worksheets . . . not with these folks" (Interview 1, April 2011).

The principal expressed how excited she was about the data collection that was occurring in the participating teachers' classrooms. She noted that participating teachers were using data to make changes in their reading groups as well as using them to assist in selecting reading materials. She reported:

[The teachers] know where the kids are, how to get them in the appropriate levels of material, and how to make changes [in reading groups] by moving kids in and out of groups as they move up a level or if they need to stay in a level for more time.

(Interview 1, April 2011)

When asked about materials these teachers were now requesting, the principal said that they wanted more leveled reading material. She explained that the teachers "realized we didn't have enough of a [specific] level, and they wanted more content books because they realized the textbook was not working for most readers" (Interview 1, April 2011).

Asked if she felt the training was what the school needed, she responded that it was a positive experience for both the school and the teachers. She explained that she "truly believed it was saving our [the school's] kids and that we are better today because of it." She verified this perception by detailing her method for classroom observations:

I keep a list of all our students and their levels of where they are . . . I almost have it memorized now When I walk into a classroom I can look at the book [the student is reading] and, if it's not that level, I can have a conversation with the teacher. (Interview 1, April 2011)

The principal elaborated on the effectiveness of the first year of training by explaining that, from her experience, most staff development events are not effective. The teachers go to the training and receive the information. They then come back to the

classroom and never use the training. However, based on her observations, this training was different because she could "actually see the changes . . . the effectiveness . . . the data was showing it." She felt the data was now reliable enough for her to monitor and track growth in the students' reading levels. The principal was very positive. She commented that the training had "definitely been worth our time because kids are learning more and our teachers know what to do now and how to teach reading That has made changes and it has shown" (Interview 1, April 2011).

In summary, in the initial interview one year after the training, the two teachers and the principal were very positive about the staff development initiative. Teachers had gained additional knowledge and were adopting new practices into their classroom instruction.

They were using data in a more formative manner, they were incorporating leveled materials into their reading groups, and they were more flexible in their grouping of students. Both teachers commented that they were stronger teachers and were better able to meet the needs of a more diverse set of students. The principal noticed and approved of these changes in teacher behavior and student performance.

Interview 2: Beliefs and Practices 2 Years After the Staff Development Initiative

The information gleaned from the first interviews was used when the second set of interviews were conducted approximately one year later. The second set of interviews again used semistructured responses that allowed the interviewees to speak freely. The interviewer used structured probes to obtain additional information and clarification. The interviewer was free to ask follow-up questions if the teacher's response offered an opportunity to obtain additional information about either beliefs or practices in the teaching of reading.

Ms. A's continuance and change. Ms. A, a veteran teacher of more than 16 years, had attended various reading workshops throughout her career. These workshops, which were designed to explain and support a balanced approach to reading instruction, were often daylong events. However, the workshop structure did not allow Ms. A the opportunity to experiment with or fully implement the intended strategies and practices. Conversely, evidence from Interview 1 indicated that the focused staff development initiative in her county had helped Ms. A refine her beliefs and practices concerning the teaching of reading. This refinement is better understood by considering three "instructional change" themes that emerged from the first interview with Ms. A.

First, Ms. A. became more reliant on the formative data she obtained in conducting informal reading assessments. These assessments were characterized as both structured and unstructured, meaning some of the assessments were planned as part of an assessment schedule, while others were conducted as part of everyday observations of student behaviors.

Second, Ms. A became more flexible in how she organized and conducted her reading program. She more readily moved students in and out of reading groups.

Additionally, she began to pace individual student's reading instruction based on her observations and the results of formative assessments.

Third, Ms. A had developed a greater awareness of the interrelationships that exist among the components of a balanced literacy program. This was evidenced in how she revised literacy centers, restructured methods for phonics instruction, and managed the literacy block to incorporate new activities as well as to include more contextual reading. These three themes were further expanded and supported during Interview 2.

In the second interview, one year later, I found a more relaxed Ms. A. She was confident, she laughed more, and her responses were longer than those in the first interview. Ms. A continued to be positive about the staff development literacy initiative, emphasizing that the program had made her a better teacher of reading. She called it a workshop initially, but then corrected herself, "So it's the best workshop, but not a workshop, it's the best training I have ever received" (Interview 2, June 2012).

Themes from Interview 1 again became evident. Ms. A stated that she continued to rely heavily on data from informal reading assessments. When asked about uses of quantitative and qualitative data, she explained that she still used a formal running record and that she looked at the data at the beginning of the year. However, she stressed that she was much more dependent on daily formative assessments. "I hear them read daily, that's kind of my little informal thing that I do. Mostly I do it during the year, mostly informal, but then when we do the formal running records, then I try to pace with that." When asked if she felt the informal data were representative of her students' reading levels, Ms. A quickly answered "Yes!" She detailed her process of doing informal assessments:

I am watching the student. I am listening to the student. If he is my student, I pretty much know what he can and can't do. So, when he is reading I'm tuning into that. I know what to expect. So, if I hear slowness, the pace of their reading, then I'm like, oh no [Ms. A continued]: We now know what we are doing. You can't do instruction unless you know where you're supposed to start. The key is that you have to have knowledge of what to listen for; what to look for. I feel I am better in that way. I now know what a first grader is supposed to sound like at level 9-10 or level 15-16, or, if they are at that level, [how to recognize] if there is an issue. For

example, if they're not flowing in their [reading], then I'm going to tune into that and realize that I need to take them back. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Flexibility in conducting guided reading lessons was still an important theme for Ms.

A. In Interview 2, she explained how small-group instruction had always been part of her instructional program; however, she now she expressed more confidence in her ability to move students in and out of instructional groups and attributed this ability to the training.

She referred to how the reading practicum was one-to-one, but she then took the information and practices back to the classroom.

Ms. A explained that her real issue had been her ability to "run those groups effectively". Her practices following the training were more refined. She stated:

I am more fluid with them [students]. I am making more changes as the kids move up or if they need to move down. I feel like now I am more aware of when I need to move them [students] in and out of those levels. I was always using small group, but now I feel like my small-group instruction has gotten better. Last year [first year after the training] I felt like I was still learning how to move my groups. This year I feel really confident that I have my kids in the right groups; I am able to move them. So that's kind of another practicum that I did myself. It's like you did your student teaching [the year after the practicum], and now I'm in my first year of teaching. (Interview 2, June 2012)

From her comments, clearly Ms. A had become more confident in pacing her students' reading instruction. Moreover, her confidence, and presumably her effectiveness, seemed to be increasing with each passing year.

Along with assessment and flexibility in pacing instruction, a third theme in Ms. A's first interview had been the interrelationship of components (or activities) in a balanced reading program. This third theme was still prominent in the second interview. Various instructional components had evolved in Ms. A's classroom over the two years since the teacher training initiative: read alouds, reading materials, and phonics instruction.

Wanting to provide her students with increased exposure to written language structures and vocabulary, Ms. A began using a listening center to expose her first graders to poetry and nonfiction books. She also changed her strategy for reading aloud to her students:

It used to be that I would pick thematic books to read aloud. It's Halloween, so let's read a Halloween book. But now I'm trying to make sure that I select books that will have concepts [vocabulary] that maybe they [students] need some exposure to, but they may not be able to get anyplace else. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Ms. A commented on changes in her use of instructional materials:

I used to be a pretty strict basal [reader] user, and that is fine if your basal is good, but some basals are not good. [During the training] I realized that the first book in my basal was all phonics; it was all decodable and it held them back totally. I was keeping [my students] back until they could read it. Now I just exclusively go with leveled texts because that is more appropriate. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Ms. A explained that, during the training year, she did not have the recommended leveled texts in her classroom. She had them the next year and learned to use them. "Now," she said, "I start off day one teaching that way . . . in small groups with my [leveled] materials."

When queried about phonics instruction, Ms. A began by saying that was one of the biggest instructional changes she had made: moving from whole-group phonics instruction

to teaching phonics in the small reading groups. She then mentioned her plans to modify her instruction in the future:

[Last year] I started off all of my first graders with short vowels, even if they were high readers, just to make sure. The year before that I kind of skipped over the [isolated] short vowels and quickly and got into long vowel/short vowel [contrasts]. But it hurt them . . . I went too fast. So, I think that's probably going to be my [next] area of work . . . how to pace the word study and how to make sure that I don't move too fast or too slow. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Ms. A had incorporated what she had learned about phonics in the training into her daily classroom routine. Now she was prepared to go a step further, modifying or refining her phonics instruction to meet the needs of different groups of children.

An overarching concern expressed by Ms. A in the second interview was the need for more time spent reading. She stated:

We're reading a lot more, probably, three or four times more. I just know they have to read a lot. So any minute we can squeeze in during literacy time, and in between times, we're reading. (Interview 2, June 2012)

One change, less evident in Interview 1 but clearly present in Interview 2, was the growth in Ms. A's self-confidence. This self-confidence seemed to have emerged from (a) Ms. A's contributing role in her school's literacy program and (b) from the personal successes she had witnessed in her classroom. In Interview 1, when Ms. A was asked about her school's literacy program, she was unsure what to say. When asked about the school's literacy program a year later she responded differently:

We [teachers] are talking about our students. We are talking about strategies together . . . those data days are giving us ideas. I can see where my students were with me and then 3 years later [I can see] where they are now. So I feel like because of that, our instruction is sharper, it's tighter. I think we are on the same page. (Interview 2, June 2012)

A follow-up question asked Ms. A about school-wide reading interventions. She explained that the school now had better data on the students, and that the data helped in the communication process. "There is accountability now, so somebody is asking, what else can I do for this student? And somebody else will respond: I've tried this, why don't you do this?" Ms. A. explained how this change in the school culture had empowered her as a teacher:

I think we have been given the power in the classroom; we have been given the ability now to know if a student needs help, and we can help them one-on-one if we need to. We can pull them and give them extra reads. We can get our teacher assistant and say this student really needs help, and I want you to work with him every day. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Ms. A offered several recommendations for school-wide improvement:

I teach first grade. I want more from the kindergarten teachers than just reading scores, [for example] what are you seeing with writing? Where are your kids in reading? Where are they in word study; how did they work through that information? (Interview 2, June 2012)

She viewed literacy as much more than just reading and believed that to be effective, she needed more detail. This broader understanding of literacy instruction and connections with the school's literacy program clearly emerged in Ms. A's second interview.

Ms. A's confidence in her own teaching was also clearly expressed. At the beginning of Interview 2, Ms. A quickly categorized her current class by *reading levels*. She described her class as "kind of an average break of students, some lows, some mediums, and a few highs; so kind of a good split of a variety of instructional levels." Her knowledge of reading (or instructional) levels was further displayed when she commented:

Not all my students are on grade level [this year], but when I listen to them read, even if they are not reading on grade level, they are reading well [at their level]. In other words, they are not struggling with words; it sounds like a reader should. [Ms. A continued] They read, they enjoy reading, and they're confident at it, and I can tell you when I hear them read that they are better readers because they're getting better instruction. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Ms. A's self-confidence was even more telling when she was asked how she planned to approach the upcoming year. She replied, "When I get my kids, I am going to tune my small groups to the students that I have. I'm going to, of course, do the same instruction, but it will be geared to my new kids' needs . . . I know that I am helping children; I know that I'm not going to let anybody fall through the cracks" (Interview 2, June 2012).

Ms. B's continuance and change. At the time of Interview 2, Ms. B was no longer an inexperienced teacher. She was sure of herself and of her ability to deliver effective reading instruction. Her responses were shorter and more concise than responses from the

first interview. She commented on the topic being discussed using a technical vocabulary more specific to reading instruction.

Asked if her opinion of the staff development initiative had changed, Ms. B laughed and mentioned her initial resentment at the amount of time involved. She then offered her current view: "But at the same time I was eager because I knew that I needed the help, and it has changed my life." A follow-up question asked how she now viewed her school's early literacy program. She responded:

[Before] we all just kind of did our own thing, and we were [all] doing different things. I think now, particularly in literacy, we are all kind of on the same page. We are using the same lesson plans for guided reading, and we are kind of organizing our literacy block in the same way. (Interview 2, June 2012)

The first interview with Ms. B revealed some significant "instructional change" themes in her delivery of reading instruction. For example, she (a) developed a working knowledge of reading assessments; (b) began to use small-group, as opposed to whole-group, guided reading instruction; and (c) refined her approach toward phonics instruction. These changes continued to be prominent in the second interview. Regarding informal reading assessments, Ms. B explained:

[I know] even more about assessing my kids now than I did last year at this time. Each year I develop a little bit more, and [I] understand more about the assessments and what they mean. . . . My data is how I group my kids initially; it's how I regroup my kids when I need to. It's how I determine if my kids are ready to move to the next reading level, or the next level in word study. It is basically data driven, my instruction is data driven. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Responding to a follow-up question, Ms. B expressed her confidence in her assessment ability:

When I did my assessments this last time, I had two [students] that I started assessing. They barely made it, but they were so close. I knew that when I went back and listened, that it was going to be right on the line. You can just hear it. . . . (Interview 2, June 2012)

Ms. B was also using informal reading assessments more frequently in her classroom. This had improved her ability to pace the reading instruction. When asked how she knew when to advance students to a more difficult reading level, she explained:

You can do a quick oral assessment on a new book. Just give them 100 words or 200 words and then time them. If they are reading primer or above, you can time [the reading rate], check for self-corrections, check for accuracy, check for comprehension . . . and if they are really, really strong or above those benchmarks then you know. [She continued] But you can't just say they are meeting the data requirements so they are ready to move on. You have to also use your teacher judgment and put those together [data and judgment]. You can 'feel it.' A good teacher can feel when they're reading [well]. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Ms. B had transitioned from a teacher who rarely, if ever, used informal reading data to one who now based both material selection and instruction on the results of informal assessments. This formative process of conducting informal reading assessments enabled Ms. B to carefully monitor her students' ongoing progress.

Ms. B was asked about reading strategies and interventions introduced during the practicum and if they were still part of her instructional program. She explained that the practicum was the setting where she had learned how to implement a balanced literacy plan.

[It] was only through doing it with those kids [in the practicum] that I learned the lesson. I saw just how powerful it was. I was also able to understand how I could just bring it back and do it with my guided reading groups. It didn't just have to be [a one-to-one] intervention. It could just be regular classroom instruction. (Interview 2, June 2012)

In the second interview, Ms. B returned to the small-group guided reading instruction "theme" that had been important in Interview 1. She discussed guided reading several times during the second interview, recalling that she had not used differentiated reading groups during her initial years of teaching. Ms. B was now comfortable with running small reading groups in her class. She stated, "Once I had learned how to do them and what their purpose was . . . I changed a lot that first year. I now can change groups and reassess formally and informally, and just keep moving the kids" (Interview 2, June 2012).

Later, when asked about changes in her instruction, Ms. B again spoke about guided reading, but this time regarding the reading materials she uses. She stated that before the training she had used some leveled texts that were part of the school's adopted basal series. She now rarely used the basal materials:

Not because they're worthless, and they're good for kids once they've reached a certain level. They can go back and use those books for independent reading. But I don't feel like they [basal-leveled readers] have a strong base of high frequency words, especially for the lower levels. The stories don't flow well. The kids can't

relate to them as much. So I don't use them as much as [our school's] leveled-text library. (Interview 2, June 2012)

By the second interview, Ms. B had further modified her phonics instruction, a third theme from Interview 1. She described her reasons:

I need to maximize my time and my assistant's time. [The children's] word study groups may not be the same as their reading groups. For example, they may be better spellers than they are readers, or vice versa. Word study is done separately, partly because of the way that the time works out in the classroom. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Ms. B's refined understanding of word study—that phonics and spelling go together—was reflected in her instructional approach. By teaching targeted word patterns in small phonics/spelling groups, she was able to differentiate instruction while saving valuable classroom time.

Along with honoring the Interview 1 "change" themes of assessment, guided reading, and phonics, Ms. B, in Interview 2, also emphasized the importance of contextual reading practice. She stated that, more than ever, she realized the importance of beginning readers *rereading texts*. "Quality improves the more they reread." And Ms. B offered a guiding principal for her reading block: "Make sure that they are reading as much as possible . . . more books, always more books for my classroom" (Interview 2, June 2012).

It should be kept in mind that Ms. B, a third-year teacher, entered the staff development initiative with minimal understanding of how to teach reading. During Interview 1 she explained how learning the strategies and processes had helped her become more effective in the teaching of reading. However, a skill that wasn't explicitly taught

during the training initiative emerged during Interview 2. Ms. B had become better at structuring and managing a classroom for effective reading instruction. This management skill was evident when Ms. B discussed how she had adapted the reading training in her own classroom:

It all has to go together. You just can't do the guided reading part, or just the writing ... you've got to be using best practice all around in your instruction. It has all got to work together. It has to have a flow to it. (Interview 2, June 2012)

When Ms. B was asked about additional changes made during the year since the first interview, she proudly replied that she had been able to manage the literacy block to make more time for reading:

I have stolen more time this year because I didn't have any students who went out during the I/E [Intervention/Enhancement] block, so that became an extension of my literacy block. I was able to run literacy centers and guided reading groups for a full hour and twenty minutes without being interrupted! (Interview 2, June 2012)

She emphasized how structure and organization for the teaching of reading is dynamic and without set boundaries. "You have to know where to go next, when to move your kids, how to reassess them, how reading aloud and writing is going to affect their ability to read" (Interview 2, June 2012). Ms. B's new sense of organization and management had clearly helped her confidence:

I know now how to teach, like from the beginning of the year to the end. I can start with assessment, and then I can organize them [students] into groups. Then I can provide [materials] for my instruction. I can change groups and reassess formally and informally and just keep moving the kids. (Interview 2, June 2012)

When asked how she could improve next year, she stated, "Number one, I think I can improve just by keeping on doing it, because every year is going to have its own challenges. I never know what specific reading struggles will be in my classroom." However, there was no mention about being unable to meet them.

The fervor of Ms. B's second interview might best be summarized by her response to the question: How do you view your current students' reading ability?

They're good readers! The numbers don't lie...I could have told you before the assessments. I have never had reading scores as good as I have this year. Last year's were good, but this year's [scores] are great. I mean . . . I don't attribute that just to myself, that's a team effort. I have been provided with the support I needed to make that happen. (Interview 2, June 2012)

Summary

The two interview responses from Ms. A and Ms. B revealed much similarity between the *sensemaking* of these teachers after they experienced the early literacy professional development initiative. Three major themes about these teachers' instruction became evident as both discussed: (a) an increase and reliance on informal assessments learned in the staff development sessions; (b) an increase in differentiated instruction; and (c) an increase in their students' reading of connected text at appropriate levels. These themes align with the pedagogical principles of the early literacy professional development. Taken together, it seems these interview responses provide evidence of a shift in pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) for these two teachers, resulting from the early literacy professional development experience. I discuss these ideas further as well as the limitations and implications of this study in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

This case study examined narrative data from two teachers who experienced the effects of a school change initiative. The goal of the staff development initiative was an important one: to improve the quality of primary-grade reading instruction across a rural, North Carolina school district. Semistructured interviews and open-ended questions were used to elicit information about how and why this early literacy professional development initiative affected two teachers' beliefs and attitudes about reading instruction. In this final section, I briefly review major theoretical assumptions that underlie such staff development endeavors and comment on how this particular training affected two participating teachers from the same school. Limitations of this study as well as implications also are addressed.

The Need for a Change Initiative

Shortly after accepting a superintendent's position in a rural piedmont North

Carolina school district, an experienced administrator realized that he had a district-wide

problem in early literacy education. The superintendent believed that ineffective reading
instruction in the early grades was negatively impacting later overall district performance.

To develop a solution, he gathered a group of experienced administrators and asked them to
examine different literacy interventions and professional development programs. The
group's mission was to design an improvement plan: The overarching goal was to improve
primary-grade teachers' ability to deliver effective reading instruction and thereby increase
the young children's potential to learn in future grades.

The administrative group analyzed historical data trends, shared past experiences, and discussed their observations of classroom reading instruction. The group concluded that the district needed a long-term professional development initiative focusing on early literacy instruction. After investigating various plans of action, the administrative group recommended that the school district partner with a regional university to provide quality staff development in how to teach reading to their primary-grade teachers. The staff development initiative was structured to produce positive systemic change in how early reading was to be taught in the district.

Theoretical Perspectives on Professional Development

School change has many levels and meanings, but if an instructional change initiative is to be successful, effective teacher training has to be a key component of the change process. Fullan (2005) described "school change" as being a difficult and a long-term process that requires teachers to engage in activities that result in *deep learning*; that is, learning that makes a real difference in teachers' knowledge and beliefs, confidence, and performance. The deep learning that can occur via effective professional development has the potential to overcome the institutional inertia that often prevents positive school change (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998).

A guiding principal of effective professional development is that it makes a teacher more knowledgeable about the subject they are teaching. Guskey (1986) explained that effective staff development should result in changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs, changes in classroom practices, and changes in the learning outcomes of students.

Additionally, he stressed that effective staff development must give teachers "practical ideas that can be efficiently used to directly enhance desired learning outcomes in students" (p. 6).

Snow et al. (2005), in discussing teacher training for reading instruction, explained that effective training has to be long-term and incorporate the developmental processes of literacy acquisition. They described effective training programs in reading as ones that "stay the course" and focus on specific problems that teachers face each day. Such programs "involve dedicated study, planning, and reflection related to a specific focus" (p. 221). Snow et al. also stressed that effective training programs for reading instruction incorporate both coursework and clinical experiences.

The aforementioned tenets of effective professional development are not easy to implement in the real world of schools. One way to think about the problem is to consider the goals of teacher development; what is it, exactly, that the training is attempting to change? Shulman's (1986) model of a teacher's *knowledge base* addresses this question. He identified three categories of teacher knowledge: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and curricular knowledge. However, his central contribution, at least to the current discussion, is the idea of *pedagogical content knowledge*: "a special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding" (p. 8). According to Shulman (1987), improvements in a teacher's pedagogical content knowledge improves instruction, and only when this type of knowledge is improved can a teacher "transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students" (p. 15).

Pedagogical content knowledge, which needs to be sophisticated and adaptive, allows teachers to function in novel and uncertain situations dictated by student differences, curriculum changes, and institutional mandates. Notice that this is similar to Schön's (1987)

notion of professionals having to operate in "indeterminate zones of practice," zones that are successfully negotiated by a knowledge base that is part theory (content) and part craft (action). In the present staff development study, a reading *methods course* and a *practicum* were the vehicles for improving the pedagogical content knowledge and craft knowledge of the participating teachers.

The Staff Development Initiative

The staff development initiative consisted of graduate-level reading courses tailored for teachers in the primary grades (kindergarten through two). The training included a reading methods course in the fall that employed a developmental perspective to examine the relationships between methods (e.g., guided reading, writing, phonics) and materials (e.g., level books, basal readers, word sort cards) in teaching beginning reading. The participating teachers were required to complete assigned readings, practice newly taught strategies in their classrooms, and conduct various individual assessments. Participants from each school were given easy access to a series of quality leveled books (purchased by the school district expressly for this program), and each teacher was provided a classroom set of word cards to carry out the phonics methodology (word sort) introduced in the course.

In the fall methods course, the teachers gained content knowledge or knowledge *about* teaching reading. In the spring, they participated in a semester-long reading *practicum* in which they gained craft knowledge or knowledge of *how to* teach reading. In the practicum, each teacher taught two different struggling readers, twice weekly, under the close supervision of a reading specialist. In addition, a one hour seminar connected to the practicum helped the teachers think about transferring what they were learning in the one-on-one tutoring context back to small-group instruction in their respective classrooms.

The practicum or clinical setting allowed the teachers to see the developmental reading process up close. Each teacher administered an informal assessment at the beginning of the spring semester, interpreted the results, and, with the supervisor's assistance, developed an appropriate lesson plan for the child. As the teacher worked one-on-one with the child each week, a supervisor observed the lessons, always ready to provide encouragement and support or advice if needed. This practicum structure allowed the teacher to observe a learner closely over time, realizing that it was she, herself, who was pacing or adjusting the instruction based on the child's progress. It is in this controlled, supportive context that one has a chance to develop craft knowledge, in this case, knowledge of how to help a struggling reader progress.

Changes in Teacher Knowledge, Beliefs, and Practices

This narrative case study investigated the changes in pedagogical beliefs and practices of two primary-grade teachers who participated in a yearlong staff development program. The interviews revealed that Ms. A and Ms. B each changed their teaching of reading in three significant ways. First, both teachers increased their reliance on informal reading assessments to help guide instruction. Second, both Ms. A and Ms. B refined their instruction by differentiating guided reading lessons and phonics instruction according to student needs or ability levels. Third, both teachers gained an awareness of the importance of "time spent reading text" and changed their classroom routines to allow for more contextual reading practice.

Informal assessment. Both teachers increased their frequency of conducting informal reading assessments. At the beginning of the training, Ms. A explained that she knew how to conduct running record assessments but stated that she "didn't necessarily base

what [she] did on any data per se" (Interview 1, April 2011). Ms. B stated frankly that she "did not use assessments in the classroom" and that she "didn't know anything about assessing [her] kids or running records" (Interview 1, May 2011).

As both teachers described instructional changes resulting from their participation in the training, informal reading assessment emerged as an important "change" theme. Ms. A commented that running record data made her more "aware of things [she needed] to do for her students," made her more aware that she "constantly [needed] to be updating what [she was] doing" (Interview 1, April 2011). Ms. B explained that informal assessment made her a more effective teacher. She stated that she could now "figure out specifically where [her students] were, but [she] could also tell where their weaknesses were" (Interview 1, May 2011). Comments in Interview 1 clearly showed that informal assessment, which was stressed in the training initiative, had become part of the teachers' daily practices and that assessment data was helping to guide their reading instruction.

A year later in Interview 2, both teachers continued to embrace informal assessment as a major change in their teaching of reading. Ms. A stated that she had to "hear them read daily. . . . You can't do instruction unless you know where you're supposed to start. The key is that you have to have knowledge of what to listen for; what to look for. I feel I am better in that way" (Interview 2, June 2012). Ms. B, in Interview 2, stated that she was more capable in conducting assessments: "Each year I get a little better." She discussed how her instruction was more data driven, but also based on teacher judgment: "You can feel it. A good teacher can feel when they're reading [well]" (Interview 2, June 2012). Thus, the Year 2 interviews showed that the teachers had become more knowledgeable and confident in using informal reading assessments, a major goal of the staff development initiative.

Differentiating instruction. Based on their increased competence in administering and interpreting informal assessments, both Ms. A and Ms. B were better able to differentiate reading instruction in their respective classrooms. At the beginning of the staff development training Ms. A was conducting small-group guided reading; Ms. B was doing whole-group instruction. Both teachers were teaching phonics in a whole-group context. As the training progressed, both teachers adjusted their reading instruction to better accommodate students' needs, that is, to teach individual children at the appropriate reading level.

In Interview 1, Ms. A explained that, due to the training, she was now more flexible in moving students in and out of groups to better pace their instruction. She stopped using the district-adopted basal reader and adopted the newly purchased leveled texts as her primary resource for guided reading. She explained that she had to get her students "in the right materials." Ms. A adopted the word sort approach (emphasized in the training) as her phonics instruction and shifted from whole-group to small-group instruction so that she could teach children phonics at the appropriate developmental level (e.g., beginning consonants, short vowels, vowel patterns).

Ms. B explained in Interview 1 that discontinuing whole-group reading instruction had been a major adjustment for her. She stated that before she was "not meeting [her] kids where they were and wasn't giving them the appropriate reading instruction," but now she had learned how to match her students with the correct level of book. She also commented as to why she revised her whole-group word study of phonics instruction: "It never occurred to me that my students would be able to improve with spelling and word recognition if I differentiated their word study instruction" (Interview 1, May 2011).

After a second year of adjustment and experimentation, both teachers continued to differentiate and refine their instruction practices in guided reading and word study. This became apparent in Interview 2. Ms. A, for example, expressed a need to continue to refine her small-group phonics instruction, explaining that in the previous year she had paced the instruction too quickly, particularly for the slower learners. She said, "I am now working on how to pace the word study and how to make sure that I don't move too fast or too slow" (Interview 2, June 2012).

In Interview 2, Ms. B expressed a clearer understanding of small-group reading instruction: "I reassess informally, change groups, and just keep moving the kids." In the second year after the training, Ms. B also restructured her literacy block to have word study taught apart from guided reading. She explained that students in the same reading group sometimes had different word study needs, and that separating the two instructional activities (guided reading and word study) better accommodated the time block that she had to teach reading.

Increasing the amount of contextual reading. Reflecting on the first year of training (Interview 1), Ms. A stated that her students were now doing more contextual reading, and that she was having "them spend more time reading on the right level." She addressed time management by stating, "I try to make that literacy block happen every single day, like nothing is going to bump that out . . . if you lose it, they lose it" (Interview 1, April 2011). Though not as emphatic as Ms. A, Ms. B explained in Interview 1 that she had revised her entire program to incorporate more reading opportunities. She commented, "Everything in my literacy block changed . . . I was able to see, even though I didn't know

before, that my instruction was kind of pitiful" (Interview 1, May 2011). This reorganization allowed for more contextual reading practice at the students' instructional levels.

After another year of teaching, both teachers placed an even greater emphasis on the volume or amount of contextual reading in their respective reading programs. In interview 2, Ms. A stressed that she was reading "three or four times more" than before [the training], and that "any minute we can squeeze in during literacy time, and in between times, we're reading" (Interview 2, June 2012). Ms. B discussed reading volume as well, and mentioned the necessity of frequent rereading of books because "quality improves the more they reread." Ms. B's commitment to more reading time was reified in her statement that she "always needed more books for her classroom" (Interview 2, June 2012).

The aforementioned reliance on formative assessment, differentiation of instruction, and extensive contextual reading are widely acknowledged as elements of effective reading instruction. Morrow, Tracey, Woo, and Pressley (1999) studied the expert performance of exemplary first-grade teachers of reading. In this yearlong study, the teachers were observed, interviewed, and responded to questionnaires. Results were then used to determine categories of practice that these exemplary teachers displayed. To summarize, the teachers' classrooms in the Morrow et al. (1999) study were inviting, literacy-rich environments.

Word walls, literacy centers, and various kinds of reading materials were readily accessible. Guided reading lessons were structured and well planned. The teachers scheduled the school day so that children read extensively, including guided reading in ability-leveled groups, partner reading, independent free-choice reading, and being read to by the teacher. Each of the teachers in the study taught phonics, conducted writing workshops on a daily basis, and

helped his or her students make "connections" across subject matter and skill areas. Lastly, the teachers were skillful at classroom management.

Using the criteria described in Morrow et al. (1999), it is fair to say that Ms. A and Ms. B used their staff development training to become more effective teachers of reading. Both teachers learned a sophisticated skill set (the why, when, and how of instruction) that assisted them in the craft of teaching reading.

Changes in Level of Teacher Expertise

According to Snow et al. (2005), "learning to teach is a process in which expertise develops over time and is marked by increasing sophistication of and control over a complex and multifaceted knowledge base" (p. 206). This expertise is on a continuum comprised of five levels: (a) declarative, (b) situated, (c) stable-procedural, (d) expert-adaptive, and (e) reflective. While the knowledge base of novice teacher is largely in the declarative and situated domains, the knowledge base of a master teacher is in the expert-adaptive and reflective domains. The five levels of expertise identified by Snow et al. are dynamic and continue to adjust in both quality and quantity as a teacher, with experience and study, becomes a more sophisticated practitioner.

In the present study, Ms. A, a teacher with 16 years of experience, began the training program as a stable-procedural teacher. She understood how to organize and conduct small-group instruction because "the principal said you will do small-group instruction." She used an established phonics program and "always started with short vowels and went to whatever's next in the manual" (Interview 1, April 2011). As Ms. A's knowledge and skills evolved via the staff development program, she seemed to transition into the expert-adaptive and reflective phases of expertise. Early in the training program, Ms. A realized that her

materials and instructional approach needed to be refined. During Interview 1, she commented that she was "kind of performing what I had already been doing, but in a new way...a better way" (Interview 1, April 2011). One year later in Interview 2, Ms. A described the school year immediately after training as a kind of "practicum that I did myself. It's like you did your student teaching [the first year], and now I'm in my first year of teaching." She stated that she had "been given the power in the classroom; we have been given the ability now to know if a student needs help, and we can help them one-to-one if we need to" (Interview 2, June 2012).

Ms. B, in only her third year of teaching when the training began, was clearly in the declarative and situated phases of expertise. She was initially unsure of her instructional abilities and relied, in part, on experiences from her own elementary grade years. Ms. B's reading instruction was not driven by assessment knowledge. She simply placed students in a book and made an intuitive guess as to the correctness of her decision. "If it was too hard I would move them down, if it was just right I would leave them there, and if it was too easy I would move them up" (Interview 1, May 2011). As Ms. B learned new assessment, instructional, and management strategies in the staff development program, she transitioned into the stable-procedural phase of expertise. In Interview 1, Ms. B spoke of learning how to group her students and how to place them in the proper reading materials. She now did assessments "about every two to four weeks...the little informal ones where I sit down with a kid and do a real quick check of his reading level" (Interview 1, May 2011). In Interview 2, Ms. B explained how she "changed a lot that first year." She began to understand that a literacy program has structure: "It all has to go together. You just can't do the guided

reading part, or just the writing . . . you've got to be using best practice all around in your instruction" (Interview 2, June 2102).

In summary, the more experienced Ms. A started out ahead of Ms. B on the teacher expertise continuum. Nonetheless, given the yearlong training in reading instruction, both teachers advanced their knowledge and skill to benefit the children they taught, and those they would teach in the future.

Limitations and Future Research

The purpose of this case study was to examine two teachers and their changes in beliefs and practices in the teaching of reading that occurred over a two-year timeframe. The changes were self-reported with some supporting observational data from the school's principal, backed up by improvement in students' reading scores. There is always the risk of bias in self-reported data. Interviewing a larger number of teachers who participated in the staff development would add confidence to the data reported here. Additional data from the principal interviewed in this study was not available because she was transferred to another school during the second year of the study. There were 25 participating teachers in the original cohort, and a larger representation from this group also could have provided additional data for comparisons between teachers and principals at different schools.

Some measurable student reading data was obtained and is presented in Table 1.

Quantitative reading data before the training would have shown pre- post-gains, but the reliability and validity of pre-training reading data available was questioned and thus considered unusable for this study. Comparison data of teachers not in the training initiative was not obtained since the study's focus was on teacher change in beliefs and practices and not changes in student achievement. Additional studies would be encouraged to include

control and experimental groups to explore reading data measures and comparisons as teachers experience this kind of professional development.

Implications

This case study tells the story of teacher changes in beliefs and practices in the teaching of reading as a result of their participation in an early literacy staff development initiative. The structure and delivery of this staff development initiative highlights the important role of focused, long-term structured professional development in changing teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987), which has the potential to significantly enhance participants' teaching effectiveness (Guskey, 2009; Snow et al., 2005).

Understanding this professional development structure is important for school leaders if they are to invest in improving teachers' knowledge of teaching and student learning. However, current educational interventions, for students who struggle with learning to read, seem to be following a different approach. Scripted programs that require teachers to follow predetermined sequences are becoming the norm; these programs are available for administrators to purchase off the shelves of financially invested corporate publishing companies and come with promises of scientific backing and assessment monitoring of teachers *for fidelity*. A popular curricular solution to teaching students who struggle with literacy is to place them in a technology-based reading program (often purchased as the "cure all"), where the teacher is replaced with the program. These *innovations* are eerily reminiscent of Skinnerian teaching machines (Skinner, 1958) and conjure images from Huxley's (1946) dystopia *Brave New World*. The impact of such interventions diminishes the importance of teacher expertise and judgment. Too often in schools today teacher decision-making is relegated to resolving scheduling conflicts for

these packaged programs and making sure that teaching conforms to the correct place in the predetermined curriculum. In these situations there is little room for teacher judgment and pedagogical flexibility that is inherent in Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge. In addition, there is little evidence that the expected growth in student reading performance follows from such innovation. In fact, researchers in reading education consistently have argued that teachers are the key variable in improving student learning (Allington, 2002, 2009; Lyon & Weiser, 2009; Moats, 2009b; Snow et al., 1998; Taylor, 2008), not curricular programs.

The professional development model described in this study provides structural concepts for administrators as they plan and schedule using limited financial and personnel resources. Understanding that teaching behaviors change before beliefs and practices, and that beliefs and practices will not be modified without seeing student achievement requires establishing a structure to ensure this implementation process occurs (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2009). The professional development model in this study offers such a structure.

The implications from this study are that teachers tasked with delivering reading instruction require a clear understanding of reading assessment. To develop this understanding the teachers need direct instruction in reading theory and then practice in conducting and analyzing these assessments. As the teachers gain a working knowledge of the assessment process, they also need to work with individual students in order to observe how student behaviors are reflected in the assessment data. Monitoring the fluency and comprehension of an individual student as they receive direct instruction over time allows for individual teacher reflection as well as instructional opportunities for both the teacher and student. These opportunities must be monitored and coached by an experienced teacher

of reading. This student/coach concept is essential since the teacher is learning a skill set that is also part of a craft, i.e., the teaching of reading. Along with assessment knowledge and an experienced supervisor directing individualized tutoring, the teacher must have ready access to high quality leveled reading materials. This basic framework of learning how to effectively assess reading, tutoring in a one-on-one setting with a well-trained teacher of reading, and having easy access to high quality materials served as the foundation of this study's training initiative. Implementation of this basic training model can be accomplished using in-school resources and experience. Such models require leadership in scheduling, budgeting, and personnel flexibility. However, as evident in this study, such investments in teacher training produce desired changes in pedagogical practices and content knowledge.

Concluding Comments

Understanding the process of educational change is necessary if professional development initiatives are to be successful, if they are to improve the quality of teaching in our schools. In Guskey's (1986) model of the change process, changes in teacher behaviors or practice must come first. If these changes lead to observable, positive changes in student learning, then there may follow changes in the teachers' beliefs and practices in the future. Guskey (1986) stated, "Significant change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes is likely to take place only *after* changes in student learning outcomes are evidenced" (p. 7). Fullan (2007) offered similar insights into the change process. He emphasized that change occurs internally through reflection on actions. Actions that produce learning must come first; reflecting on these actions can then produce change in teacher beliefs and practices.

The staff development initiative described in the present study was not a small endeavor. It involved eight schools, 25 teachers, and hundreds of children. By all accounts,

the training program worked and was received favorably by the participating teachers; it succeeded in raising student reading achievement in the school district, as measured by both formal and informal measures. But why did it work?

Based on the comments and reflections of two teachers who participated in the staff development, the initiative worked because it followed the basic tenets put forth in the school change or professional development literature (see Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 1986). That is, teachers, after receiving an introductory course in beginning reading instruction, had the opportunity *to put new ideas into action* in a controlled, supportive context (the practicum). They received encouragement and feedback as they tried out new techniques. As the teachers saw their practicum students learning to read in the one-to-one situation, they gained confidence in the assessment and instructional strategies they were using. This confidence, in turn, bolstered their willingness (their courage) to try the new techniques back in their own classrooms (the real test of the training program). One teacher's comment poignantly captures this phenomenon:

I saw how my practicum student excelled. So by me practicing with one student, I could go right back to my classroom . . . I was braver with my small groups and said to myself "I know this works and the kids like it," I feel that I'm just a much better teacher of reading than I ever have been. (Interview 1, April 2011)

The quote above is simply stated but profound in its implications. Change implies risk and, yes, a degree of fear. Asking a grade one teacher to change how she manages and instructs within the complex environment of a classroom of 20 children is to ask a lot. When we do ask such teachers to change, they deserve more than a one-day workshop or a new teacher's manual or a computer-based teaching program. They deserve a well thought out,

supportive, long-term staff development of the kind described in this study. Such training can make a long-term difference in the quality of teaching and the amount of learning that takes place in our schools.

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Appendix A. Interview Schedules

Appendix A.1. Interview 1 for Teachers (Spring, 2011)

Background

- 1. What grade are you currently teaching and how long have you been in this position?
 (Probe) During your career, what grades have you taught?
- 2. Briefly describe your class demographics for the last two years.

The Literacy Problem

- When you began teaching this grade, what was your understanding of the school's reading performance based on state and federal guidelines?
 (Probe) How did these school measures compare with your assessment of your own classroom's literacy performance?
- Before you began the ASU program, how did you evaluate your school's literacy instruction in the early primary grades?
 (Probe) Was there a focus on literacy with time, materials, and data?
- 3. Previous to your participation in the ASU program, what strategies and interventions did you use to address classroom literacy issues?
 - (Probe) What prior training, if any, had you received that assisted in this instruction? (Probe) Did the training involve computer-based instruction, phonics programs, adopted basal materials, leveled texts, etc,?

Instruction Prior to the Training

- 1. Before beginning the ASU training program, how would you describe your classroom literacy instruction?
 - (Probes) How did you teach guided reading [Materials used? Whole-group or small-group instruction?] How did you teach phonics? [Materials used? Whole-group or small-group instruction?]
- 2. On beginning the training, how would you rate your skill or confidence level in the following areas: finding materials, guiding reading lessons, grouping children for instruction, teaching phonics?
- 3. Before the training, what types of data, both quantitative and qualitative, did you use to guide your reading instruction?
 - (Probe) How was this data collected, and how long had you been using it?
- 4. At your school, what interventions were in place to assist the students who were struggling with reading?

Adoption of the School District's Staff Development Initiative

- 1. The school district set up a committee to study literacy instruction, and the decision was reached that K-3 teachers needed more in depth training. What was your initial reaction to this decision?
 - (Probe) Did you feel it was a real commitment or just another passing fad?
- 2. How did you feel about the funding *priority* given to the staff development initiative? (Probe) Given other needs, did you think it was a sensible use of a large amount of the school district's resources? Why or why not?
- 3. Explain why you decided to participate in the first training cohort.

(Probe) Were you influenced by the presentation (or description) of the training program at your school? Did your principal discuss your participation in the training program?

Influence of the Staff Development Initiative on the Teacher's Classroom Practice

- 1. How did your participation in the methods course and practicum influence your reading instruction in the classroom?
 - (Probe) What are some examples of changes or new procedures you began to implement?
- 2. What areas of your reading instruction did you find needed to be enhanced or changed?
 - (Probe) Assessment? Guided reading? Phonics?
- 3. Have there been any changes in the reading materials you use for instruction? (Probe) Basal or leveled texts? Commercial phonics program or word sorts?
- 4. Have there been any changes in your approach to assessment? (Probe) Increased use of informal reading or spelling assessments?

Teacher's Overall Perception of the Staff Development Initiative

- Comment on your feelings about the program's effectiveness?
 (Probe) Did the training significantly influence how you teach reading in your classroom? In what areas? [Materials, assessment, grouping, guided reading, phonics?]
- 2. Comment on the appropriateness of the two-course training sequence (methods course in the fall, practicum in the spring)?

(Probe) Were both the methods course and practicum needed? Explain why or why not.

3. Was participation in the training program worth the time and effort you invested? Explain.

(Probe) If you had to do it again, what would you request be changed? Why?

Appendix A.2. Interview for Principal (Spring, 2011)

Background

- 1. How long have you been in school administration, and how long have you been principal of this school?
- 2. Briefly describe the school's demographics.

The Literacy Problem.

- 1. When you became principal, how was the school doing in reading based on state and federal guidelines?
- 2. What types of data, both quantitative and qualitative, did you examine to better understand reading performance in the primary grades?
- 3. What was your initial evaluation of the quality of reading instruction in the primary (K–2) classrooms?
- (Probe) Did you think your teaching staff possessed the necessary skills to adequately assess and teach reading to all students? Explain.
- 4. What reading instructional programs were being used by the K-2 teachers?
- 5. What interventions were in place to assist struggling readers?
- 6. After your initial (pre-training) evaluation of student performance and teacher instruction, what were your major concerns?

Adoption of the school district's staff development initiative

- 1. The superintendent set up a committee to study reading issues in the county. Did you support this approach or would you have rather been responsible for the staff development of your individual school?
- 2. How did you feel initially about the funding *priority* given to the staff development literacy initiative in the primary grades?

3. Explain how you selected teachers from your school to participate in the first cohort of the district-wide training.

(Probe) Were any problems encountered in the selection process?

Principal's View of the Effectiveness of the Staff Development Initiative in Teaching Beginning Reading

- 1. How did your teachers' participation in the methods course and practicum affect them; what did you observe that indicated the training was helpful to them as educators?
- 2. In what specific areas of instruction did you observe change in your teachers? (Probe) Materials used, assessment, instruction?
- 3. As a building principal, what are your beliefs and feelings about the effectiveness of the teacher-training initiative?

Interview A.3. Interview 2 for Teachers (Spring 2012)

Background

- 1. Are you in the same teaching position as last year? If not, please describe the new position.
- 2. Briefly describe your class demographics for this year.

Teacher's Perceptions of the Staff Development Initiative Two Years Later

- 1. Two years after completing the ASU training, how would you now describe its influence on your teaching of reading?
- 2. How do you teach guided reading today? (What materials do you use? Is instruction whole group or in small ability groups?)
- 3. How do you teach phonics? (What materials do you use? Is instruction whole group or in small ability groups?)

- 4. How do you assess the reading skill of your students?
 (Probe) Type of assessments used? How often do you assess? Do you believe the data you obtain is truly representative of your students' reading ability?
- 5. At your school, what interventions are now in place to assist struggling readers? (Probe) Are the interventions effective? Explain.
- 6. As you look back, what were the parts of the ASU training that had the greatest influence on you as a teacher of beginning reading?

(Probes) Classroom management [grouping and time spent reading], materials, assessment, guided reading instruction, phonics instruction?

Vita

James Bumgarner is a retired naval officer who served twenty years on active duty as a line officer on several surface ships and in many leadership positions. While in the naval service, James traveled extensively throughout the Far East and developed a lifelong interest in Asian cultures.

Education is a second career for James, but one that has captured his imagination, time, and energy. Since entering the field of education, he has worked extensively in public schools both in teaching and administrative roles. James developed an interest in reading education and has pursued this as his course of study in graduate school. James is passionate about helping students become better readers and about helping teachers become better teachers of reading. His experiences and love of learning provide James with the insight that reading ability is a key to success. His desire for others to read well as a means of self-improvement continues to be a motivating force in his personal education.

James Bumgarner is a native of North Carolina. He is married to Teresa, and they live in Davie County, North Carolina. James is currently serving as an elementary school assistant principal and is finishing the requirements that will lead to him becoming an elementary school principal.