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The purpose of this study was to understand general education teachers' experiences with a school-wide effort to increase the use of evidence-based teaching practices that were highlighted through a professional development workshop in evidence-based reading instruction. A qualitative case study method was used to describe the experiences of five kindergarten and first grade teachers with a professional development program that was part of a school improvement initiative in early reading. The conceptual framework for this study combined a constructivist approach to understanding teachers' experiences with an interpretivist approach based on a theoretical model of school change. The sample of participants for this study included two groups of participants: five, K-1 general elementary teachers from a rural elementary school and five instructional leaders working in the district where that school is located. The three data sources for this study were documents, interviews, and anecdotal field notes. The researcher used pattern matching, the preferred strategies for case study analysis. Coding procedures and a data analysis plan provided categories of information which formed the basis of the emerging themes of the study. Four recurring topics emerged from the analysis of the data. Theme 1: Teachers are committed professionals. Theme 2: Teachers do what they know how to do. Theme 3: Job-embedded professional development is essential for school change. Theme 4: Effective leaders provide high expectations and support. The implications of these findings for future practice and research are discussed.

A CASE STUDY OF AN INITIATIVE TO INCREASE GENERAL EDUCATORS'

USE OF EVIDENCE BASED READING INSTRUCTION

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reading is fundamental to individuals' academic (Torgesen, 2009) and life success (Krezmien & Mulcahy, 2008). Children who do not receive effective instruction in early reading are at-risk academically, exhibiting chronic school failure (Brown, Palinscar, & Purcell, 1986; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Not only does reading contribute to school success, but also it matters in life. Low reading achievement can have serious long-term individual, economic, and social consequences (Barton, 2000; Berman, 2009; Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto & Sum, 2007; Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007).

This dissertation study explores persistent reading failure through the lived experiences of five K-1 teachers working in a rural elementary school during a school improvement initiative to improve reading. First, an overview of reading failure at the national and state levels is described. Second, information about national and state reading initiatives is shared. The first research question investigates the participants' experiences with a professional development program intended to promote evidence-based reading instruction as part of school and district improvement in early reading outcomes. The second research question attempts to understand the teachers' experiences implementing evidence-based strategies in reading by exploring the context in which the teachers work. Michael Fullan's (2010) model of school change is the lens through which the teachers' experiences are interpreted. A constructivist/interpretivist approach allowed

the researcher to (a) understand the meaning teachers made of their own experiences and (b) make sense of the teachers' lived experiences using information about the wider context of school change and the factors therein that may have affected the teachers' experiences. The study adds to the literature because it documents the lived experiences of school change in a small rural school from multiple perspectives.

Statement of the Problem

Reading failure is a persistent and unresolved educational problem. Longitudinal studies of long-term development of reading skills indicate that children who are struggling readers in 3rd grade do not tend to catch up to a level commensurate with their peers (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Fletcher, & Shaywitz, 1996; Juel, 1988; Vaughn et al., 2003). Francis et al (1996) found that 74% of children who exhibited reading deficits in third grade demonstrated larger deficits in 9th grade. The *Matthew effect* (Stanovich, 1986) in reading evidenced in Francis et al's (1996) study and others establishes clearly that without early intervention and effective reading instruction, children who experience early reading failure are likely to be caught in a vicious cycle of chronic school failure.

Statistics on Reading Failure.

Evidence confirming the scope of school-age students' reading failure can be found in the most recent statistics. Only 31% of public school 8th graders are proficient readers as determined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) standard for their grade level (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). Nearly 25% of 4th through 12th graders have reading levels below NAEP's minimum standard for their grade level (Lee, Grigg & Donahue, 2007). Further, 20 to 30 percent of all students will not learn to

read without effective reading instruction (Lyon, 1995; Shaywitz, Fletcher, & Shaywitz, 1994; Torgesen, 2000). Even with the best reading instruction available, 2%-6% of children will find it extremely difficult to learn to read for reasons related to their cognitive, linguistic, or social-emotional development (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998; Torgesen, 2000).

National and State Reading Initiatives

Considering the deleterious effects of reading failure on individuals, schools, and society, it is not surprising that in 1997 members of Congress asked the Director of the National Institutes of Child Health and Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health to work with the Secretary of Education to convene the National Reading Panel (NRP) to identify best practices for early reading instruction. (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2000). Members of the NRP (2000) identified over 100,000 reading studies for this purpose. Then, based on criteria derived from Snow, Burns, & Griffin's (1998) work with the National Research Council (NRC), they determined the specific reading topics that should be investigated. Limiting its review of the literature to experimental or quasi-experimental studies published in peer-reviewed English-language journals, panel members reviewed only those studies wherein researchers directly investigated children's reading development in the age/grade range preschool to Grade 12 (National Reading Panel, 2000). The report of the National Reading Panel was released in 2000. The findings of this report became the basis for the Reading First legislation in Title I of the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which later became known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Antunez, 2002). Reading First

was the catalyst for national and state level initiatives to improve student outcomes in reading.

National Reading Initiatives

The goal of Reading First was to teach all children to read by third grade. Legislators fueled this mandate by funding only programs deemed *scientific, or research-based*. This directive meant that students were to be provided with "systematic, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension" (Antunez, 2002). Reading First funds were granted to states in 2002 and 2003 and were to be dispersed preferentially to districts and schools with the highest needs (i.e., low reading achievement, high poverty status) (Gamse, Bloom, Kemple, & Jacob 2008). Between 2002 and 2007, states used this funding to attempt to improve students' reading performance in 5880 schools housed in 1809 school districts across the country (Gamse, Bloom, Kemple, & Jacob, 2008). The lasting effect that Reading First had on early reading instruction and student achievement is unclear. Gamse et al.'s (2008) evaluation of Reading First outcomes reported that Reading First appeared to benefit teachers but did not lead to improved outcomes for students on assessments of reading comprehension Critics of the Gamse et al. report suggest that the findings overemphasized reading comprehension and did not account for student growth in other key areas of reading including phonics and phonemic awareness (Stern, 2008).

North Carolina Reading Initiatives

North Carolina was awarded a Reading First grant of $160 million dollars for a five year period 2004-2009; (NCDPIa, n.d.). Funds were used to implement an 80-hour

professional development (known as NCREADS) workshop in 97 schools across 34

districts. Eligibility was based on a needs assessment, calculation of poverty level, and

student achievement. The goal of the NC Reading First initiative was to align instruction

with what is known about scientifically-based reading instruction in phonemic awareness,

phonics, vocabulary fluency, and comprehension (Wilkins, 2007). Activities included: (a)

the development of the NCREADS professional development program; (b) identification

of evidence-based reading instruction programs and materials for all early elementary

students; and (c) evidence-based intervention programs for children who struggle to

learn to read in the early grades. NC Reading First activities did not result in significant

changes in student reading outcomes (Wilkins, 2007).

Since 2000, the North Carolina State Improvement Program (NCSIP) has been

working to increase instructional quality in reading and math for students with

disabilities. The North Carolina State Improvement Project II is a personnel development

program funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) that evolved from

the initial North Carolina State Improvement Grant (NCSIP) which ran from 2000-2006.

Activities in reading focused on identifying research-based strategies and professional

development activities designed to build teachers' capacity for teaching reading to

students with disabilities. During the final year of the initial NCSIP program, a

partnership was formed with the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), thus

creating NCSIP II. NCSIP II is focused on translating research to practice by using the

findings of the initial NCSIP grant to develop and implement the research-based

professional development program, *Teaching Students with Persistent Reading Problems.*

The professional development program includes a 5-day workshop, *Foundations of Reading,* as well as the provision of ongoing self-directed learning from online resources. Although funded through an OSEP State Personnel Development Grant for students in special education, professional development efforts under NCSIP II include general education teachers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand general education teachers' experiences with a school wide effort to increase the use of evidence-based teaching practices that were highlighted by a professional development workshop in evidence-based reading instruction. The researcher interpreted the teachers' experiences implementing strategies covered in the workshop through a theoretical lens that took into account the teachers' current classroom context, the professional development they received, and the way their school was organized to accommodate change within an atmosphere of high-stakes accountability. The purpose of the interpretive approach was to better understand the factors involved in implementing evidence-based reading practices in schools as seen through the eyes of classroom teachers.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are teacher participants' experiences with the *Foundations of Reading* (RF) professional development program related to participants' experiences teaching reading in multi-tier general education K-1 classrooms?

2. What factors explain the relationship between teacher participants' experiences with the Foundations of Reading (RF) professional development program and participants' experiences teaching reading in multi-tier general education K-1 classrooms?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Teacher effectiveness is an ongoing concern for teachers, parents, administrators, researchers, and policy makers (Bates & Burbank; 2008; Duncan, 2009; 2001; Raths & Lyman, 2003; Reschly, Holdheide, Behrstock, & Weber, 2009). Effective teachers make a difference in student learning and student achievement (Reschly, Holdheide, Behrstock, & Weber, 2009; Wright, Horn, & Saunders, 1997). Nye, Konstantinopolous, & Hedges (2004) reviewed the existing literature and estimated that teacher effectiveness explains approximately 20% of variation in student achievement. Although there are no easy answers when it comes to identifying specific characteristics to differentiate effective teachers from their less effective colleagues (Reschly & Wood-Garnett, 2009), research suggests that teachers' content knowledge (Andrew, Cobb, & Giampietro, 2005; Corcoran & Evans, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2000) and use of effective instructional practices (Raudenbush, 2009; Stichter, Lewis, Whittaker, Richter, Johnson, & Trussell, 2009) contribute significantly to teachers' effectiveness, particularly with at-risk students (Lyon, Fletcher, Shaywitz, Torgesen, Wood, et al., 2001; Reschly et al., 2009).

The conceptual framework for this study combined a constructivist approach to understanding teachers' experiences with an interpretivist approach based on a theoretical model of school change (Creswell, 2009). The constructivist perspective emphasizes

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asking the teacher participants to make meaning of their experiences with the school change in the context of the relationship between professional development and reading instruction. The interpretivist approach allowed the researcher to triangulate multiple sources of data, including the teachers' perspectives, and use a theoretical model of school change to understand those experiences. Thus, the researcher was able to interpret the teachers' experiences in the broader social context of teaching within the environment of high stakes school change. The advantage of using a system level model of school change to interpret the teachers' experiences is this approach allows the researcher to describe the complexities associated with the experience of trying to enact effective instruction and illuminates the extent to which systemic factors (professional development and leadership) beyond individual teachers' control may influence the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Additionally, describing and interpreting the teachers' experiences through a systems-level theoretical lens introduces a hint of accountability for high quality, evidence-based practice at all levels of a school system working to improve student outcomes instead of the more common practice of holding teachers accountable for delivering effective instruction to all students regardless of the systemic factors that may promote or impede their ability to do so (US DOE, 2010). This constructivist/interpretivist approach included the paradigm assumptions of an emerging design, a context-dependent inquiry, and inductive data analysis (Creswell, 2009).

Approach

A qualitative case study method was used to describe the experiences of five kindergarten and first grade teachers with a professional development program that was

part of a school improvement initiative in early reading. Viewed through the theoretical lens of school change, the case study was used to interpret the teachers' experiences and describe the complexity of the school change context in which teachers enact their pedagogy. The study was framed around (a) its research questions; (b) its propositions, (c) its unit(s) of analysis; (d) the logic linking the data to the propositions; and (e) the criteria for interpreting the findings as suggested by Yin (1994).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be used (Kurtts, 1998):

Evidence-based Reading Instruction. A model of instruction for teaching the 5 areas of reading that is systematic, explicit, engages students meaningfully and effectively using research-based pedagogy (Bursuck & Damer, 2011).

Foundations of Reading (RF). Professional development program that includes 12 training units beginning with a review of the research literature that justifies the content of the program (Lilley, 2006).

General education. The classroom setting in which students receive education from a teacher who is licensed in elementary education but not special education (Kurtts, 1998).

North Carolina State Improvement Plan II (NCSIP II). A personnel development program funded by the Office of Special Education Programs that evolved from the initial North Carolina State Improvement Grant (NCSIP II) which ran from 2000-2006. The purpose is to improve the quality and effectiveness of the reading instruction that students with disabilities receive in general education classrooms by providing high

quality professional development in the use of evidence-based practices in reading to general educators (NCSIP, n.d.)

Reading First. Reading First is a federal education program in the United States mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act and administered by the U.S. Department of Education. The program requires that schools funded by Reading First use scientifically-based reading instruction (Gamse et al., 2008).

Research-based pedagogy. Evidence-based instructional enhancements that provide the consistency, predictability, and structure students need to be successful (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). These enhancements include advance organizers, unison responding, effective signals, efficient use of teacher talk, perky pace, my turn-together-your turn teaching format, cumulative review, systematic error correction, teaching to success, and a student motivational system..

Small group reading instruction: Small, flexible instructional groups designed to meet the specific needs of the students assigned to them. Groups vary in terms of: size; days per week each group receives instruction; the number of minutes per day; degree of lesson structure; and content and skill level of the students (Kosanovich, Ladinsky, Nelson & Torgesen, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

Why America's school children experience chronic reading failure has been the subject of numerous research studies (Allington, 1984; Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996; Juel, 1988; Shaywitz et al., 1999; Torgesen, 2004; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). Foorman & Torgesesn (2001) ascertained, however, that the reasons

children are at-risk is less important than the quality of reading instruction they receive. Because students who are at-risk for reading failure acquire skills at a slower rate or pace than students who are not, they need to receive more direct, explicit instruction along with increased opportunities to practice to achieve success (Foorman & Torgeson, 2001). Significant negative academic, personal, and social consequences are associated with reading failure. During the past several decades, policy makers have launched several state and federal initiatives to improve reading outcomes for children, particularly children who live in poverty, are English language learners, and/or who have disabilities. Yet, reading failure remains a persistent and unresolved educational problem (NAEP, 2007).

One widely recognized approach intended to reduce reading failure is to increase teachers' knowledge and practice of effective instructional practices by providing them with professional development. There is little precedent in the literature for exploring general education teachers' experiences *after* they attend a professional development program and return to their classrooms. Further, few studies describe and interpret teachers' experiences with professional development and effective instruction through the wider lens of school change. In addition, many professional development and school change studies are intervention studies and thus are highly controlled. This study adds to the school improvement literature because it documents teachers' experiences with school improvement efforts in which the researcher had no input or control. The study simply documents and attempts to explain what happened. As such, it may provide insight into what occurs in districts and classrooms when no one is looking. Finally, the study extends the idea of accountability for effective education to key areas of the education system, namely, professional developers and school leaders, a perspective largely absent from

the literature. As such, the study expands the discourse pertaining to effective instruction, professional development, and school improvement in a socio-political climate of high-stakes accountability. This line of inquiry is not only timely but also important. Achieving improved educational outcomes, especially in reading, for all students is a national priority. The academic literature has not yet fully informed these efforts accordingly.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The researcher attempted to ensure the rigor of the investigation and to maximize both internal and external validity. However, like all applied research, the study did have several delimitations and limitations.

Delimitations

The study relied on a purposive sample of 5 K-1 general education teachers working in the same rural elementary during the 2010-2011 school year. It is not possible to determine the extent to which obtained results may represent teachers who differ from the participants along many dimensions, including the following: region of country, district characteristics, student demographics, teacher demographics, grade levels, different professional development programs, and years of experience. That is, the reality of these participants' experiences may not be comparable with others in similar situations. In addition, The small number of participants and the lack of diversity among the participants and their students limit the transferability of these findings to other situations (Creswell, 2009). Findings from the investigation should be considered within the context of knowledge about teachers' experiences in the wider context of professional development and school change.

Limitations

  The researcher spent nearly 200 hours over 18 weeks in the teacher participants' classrooms and came to be regarded as a member of the school community. In her role as a volunteer in these kindergarten and first grade classrooms, the researcher developed personal relationships with the teacher participants as well as other adults in the school, and of course, the students. Thus, the researcher may not have the objectivity of an outside observer.

  The researcher's bias towards the importance of evidence-based practices in reading, professional development, and school change may have influenced her perceptions of what happens when teachers are held accountable for employing evidence-based practices to improve student reading achievement. The researcher's background as a public school special education teacher, a co-teacher, and a reading specialist may have also influenced her perceptions and interpretations of teachers' experiences.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers in today's general education classrooms work in an environment of unprecedented accountability for student achievement. The latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act mandates that general educators educate all children to a level of academic achievement that makes college a realistic and attainable goal (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). More children with disabilities than ever before are served in the general education classroom (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2007), and the law is clear that the general education classroom is the preferred educational environment for all children (IDEA, 2004). Much has been learned in the last decade about best practices to create inclusive classrooms where teachers are prepared to support the diverse learning needs of their students (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010). However, much work remains. Superficial reforms are insufficient to create the sustainable organizational changes required for truly inclusive schools (Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005). School reform efforts must focus on organizational transformation, the deliberate restructuring of roles, processes, and objectives in order to meet goals that were previously considered unattainable.

This qualitative study documents five K-1 teachers' experiences with a school improvement initiative to increase evidence-based early reading instruction in general education classrooms. As a context for understanding the problem, a review of the

literature was conducted in several related areas. Specifically, it examined (a) multi-tier reading instruction in early elementary classrooms; (b) evidence-based practices in early reading instruction; (c) effective teacher preparation and professional development practices; and (d) characteristics of organizational transformation that support lasting school change.

Multi-Tier Reading Instruction in Early Elementary Classrooms

Many students continue to experience reading failure, including students who are at-risk or have disabilities (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue) results indicate that while overall reading scores have improved slightly in the last 17 years, little progress has been made towards closing the achievement gap between White and Black students; further the increase in the number of students who scored at the proficient level is also relatively small (4th grade) or nonexistent (8th grade) (Manzo & Cavanaugh, 2007). Despite political and empirical support for providing evidence-based reading instruction to all children, students with disabilities and students who are at-risk continue to lag behind their peers in reading. Research also suggests that despite increased accountability and scrutiny, students who are most at-risk for academic failure are also those least likely to receive effective reading instruction (Stichter, Stormont, & Lewis, 2008).

Promising Practice in Multi-Tier Implementation: Response-to-Intervention

One promising approach to reducing reading failure is a multi-tiered decision making framework known as Response-to-Intervention (RTI), a comprehensive early detection and prevention strategy designed to identify and provide support for struggling

readers at the first sign of difficulty (Connor, Morrison, & Underwood, 2007; Coyne &

Harn, 2006; Deno et al., 2009; Gersten et al, 2009; Mehta, Foorman, Branum-Martin, &

Taylor, 2005; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005; Vadasy, Sanders, & Abbott,

2008; Wilber & Cushman, 2006). RTI is best understood as a multi-tier framework or a

strategic approach for supporting children who are at-risk (due to disabilities,

socioeconomic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency) for school failure before

they fall behind (Coyne & Harn, 2006; Feifer, 2008; Schmitt & Wodrich, 2008; Wilber &

Cushman, 2006). RTI originally was intended as an alternative assessment model for

evaluating children for learning disabilities (Coyne & Harn, 2006). However, RTI has

evolved from just a special education identification tool to a general education

instructional practice (Kavale & Spalding, 2008). As such, RTI is changing the way

general educators work (Hoover & Patton, 2008).

  Two approaches to RTI. Generally, RTI systems include three or four

increasingly intensive instructional "tiers" into which children are placed, often using a

team-based problem-solving process. Data from progress monitoring assessments are

used to determine students' responses to instruction and also to identify children who

need additional instructional interventions (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). Research-based

universal screening measures are used to determine students' progress in response to

instruction and intervention (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). AIMSweb (http://aimsweb.com).

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Skills (DIBELS://dibels.uoregon.edu/measures/psf.php)

Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS; http:pals.virginia.edu), and Texas

Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI; http://www.tpri.org) are the four assessment batteries

most commonly used for universal screening in RtI systems (Bursuck & Damer, 2011).

AIMSweb was the universal screening assessment used in this study. Students move

through the increasingly intensive tiers of instructional intervention based on their

performance on regularly- scheduled, research- validated measures. There are two

approaches to RTI implementation: the standard treatment protocol approach (Fuchs,

Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003) and the problem solving approach (Marston, Muyskens,,

Lau, & Canter, 2003). The features of these two RTI approaches are described next.

North Carolina is using the Problem Solving Approach in its RTI implementation.

Standard treatment protocol approach (STPA). In the STPA, all students

participate in universal screenings to identify students who are at-risk for academic

failure. In Tier 1, all students receive evidence-based instruction. Students who are at-risk

for failure participate in frequent progress monitoring to assess their performance in

response to the instruction and to identify their rates of improvement. When students do

not make adequate progress in Tier 1, they proceed to Tier 2 where a standard decision

making protocol is used to make instructional decisions. Students with similar needs

receive one standard research-validated intervention which is delivered in a

predetermined format that can address multiple skill sets. The standardization of the

decision making process and the intervention is intended to make it easier to monitor and

ensure the fidelity of the intervention implementation (IRIS, 2007). If students do not

demonstrate an adequate response to Tier 2 interventions, they progress to Tier 3 and

possibly Tier 4 (depending on individual state RTI plans) for increasingly intensive

intervention and more frequent progress monitoring (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). Students

who do not make adequate progress in the tertiary tier of the local RTI plan (Tier 3 or Tier 4 depending on district or state) are referred for special education evaluation (IRIS, 2007). Throughout the RTI process, students who show adequate Response-to-Intervention may continue in the tier that is effective or may have a reduction in the intensity of services based progress monitoring assessments.

Problem solving approach (PSA). The PSA is similar to the standard treatment protocol approach (STPA) with the major difference located in Tier 2 (IRIS, 2007). As in the STPA, in the PSA, all students participate in universal screening to identify students who are potentially struggling. All students also receive evidence-based instruction in Tier 1 and frequent progress monitoring occurs for students whose performance on the universal screening measure indicates they may be at-risk for academic failure. Students who do not make adequate progress in Tier 1 move to Tier 2. Unlike the standardized intervention approach used in the STPA, however, Tier 2 in the PSA is highly individualized (Case, Speece, & Molloy, 2003). In the PSA, a teacher makes instructional decisions based on individual students' performance. The team considers data from a variety of sources, including hearing and vision data, social history, and classroom performance, in addition to student performance on curriculum-based assessments. Once the team has identified an academic problem based on all data, the team develops, implements, and evaluates a plan to address the identified problem. The team chooses interventions for the student from a variety of possible evidence-based interventions; these interventions are flexible and individualized to meet students' individual situations and needs. The team monitors student progress during the intervention period. If the

student does not make adequate progress in Tier 2, the team can decide to try another

intervention or move the student into Tier 3. Once students are in Tier 3, the PSA follows

the same process as the STPA (IRIS, 2007). North Carolina uses a four-level problem

solving approach to identify elementary school children who are at-risk for academic

failure in the areas of reading, math, and behavior. This study focused only on core

reading instruction, that is, instruction that all children in the general education classroom

receive as part of the least intensive tier of the NC RTI model.

Regardless of differences between the PSA and STPA, or the nuances of

individual state plans (e.g., the NC Response to Instruction Problem Solving framework),

data-based decision making, collaboration and evidence-based instruction are the

cornerstones of effective RTI implementations (Fuchs, 2007; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007;

Gersten et al., 2009; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007).

Evidence-based instruction for all children, all the time has the potential to

improve outcomes for students who are at-risk without requiring additional support or

interventions (Gersten et al., 2009). Although there is no clear or simple definition of

"evidence-based instruction," in reading, it is generally understood to mean systematic,

explicit instruction in the 5 key areas identified by the National Reading Panel (2000)

and the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), including phonemic awareness, phonics,

fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010).

The successful implementation of RTI requires extensive knowledge and skill on

the part of classroom teachers (Bursuck, Damer, & Smallwood, 2008; NJCLD, 2005;

Gerber, 2005; Podell & Tournaki, 2007). The next section identifies the critical elements

of effective early reading instruction that all children must receive in the general education classroom from the core reading curriculum.

Effective Early Reading Instruction

Although researchers generally agree about what constitutes approaches known as "evidence-based practices" in reading (Foorman, Brier, & Fletcher, 2003), the extent to which the constituent components of these approaches have direct empirical support in isolation is more limited (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009). For example, systematic explicit phonics is effective in general for teaching early word reading skills, yet issues such as the order in which sounds are taught, the use of multisensory techniques, or whether to practice reading using leveled or decodable books lack direct empirical support. Therefore , while there is cumulative evidence that systematic, explicit teaching of reading is evidence-based (National Reading Panel, 2000; National Literacy Panel, 2008), many of the specific components of systematic, explicit approaches discussed in this section would be more accurately termed promising practices. Although these components are described in isolation, for the most part, they have not been researched in isolation.

The following methods were employed to identify evidence-based practices in reading. First, an electronic search of EBSCO was completed using the search terms "effective instruction", "reading", "evidence-based". The 151 results consisted of 29 empirical studies, 25 metanalyses and literature reviews, 45 descriptive articles, and 52 other articles including opinion columns, book reviews, study commentary, and similar pieces not relevant to this study. As expected, systematic, explicit reading approaches

were referenced as either primary or secondary sources across the empirical, review, and descriptive studies.

Essential Content of Effective Reading Programs

The National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) and The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2008) evaluated thousands of studies of early reading to determine what skills or skill areas teachers should target for instruction. In both panel syntheses, 5 key skill areas were identified as essential for effective reading instruction (NELP, 2009; NRP, 2000). These areas are: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Brief descriptions of the key components of each of these five skill areas follow.

Phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the smallest units of sound in spoken language (Ball & Blachman, 1991; O'Connor, Notari-Syvenson, & Vadasy, 1996; Passenger, Stuart, & Terrell, 2000). In both the NRP (2000) and the NELP (2009) findings, phonemic awareness was the most highly predictive indicator of later student decoding ability. Thus, phonemic awareness is an essential part of a beginning reading program (Badian, 2001, Ball & Blachman, 1991). A key understanding is that phonemic awareness is not the same as phonics; phonemic awareness is strictly oral while phonics involves the mapping of sounds to letters. Before children can map sounds to letters they must be able to hear the individual sounds and produce and manipulate them, and hence the need for phonemic awareness (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). Phonemic awareness skills do not often develop naturally in children who are at-risk or who have disabilities (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). As a result, these children

need systematic, explicit instruction in two phonemic awareness skills in particular: segmenting, which involves the breaking up of words into their individual sounds, and blending, putting individual sounds together to form words (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Hecht, Burgess, Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 2000). Phonemic awareness instruction in general education reading programs needs to be examined carefully for fidelity, as it can be incidental, with little direct instruction in blending and segmenting provided (Moats, 2007).

  Phonics and the Alphabetic Principle. To become proficient readers, children must achieve the alphabetic principle, the understanding that there are "systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds" (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). Once children have the alphabetic principle they are able to identify and remember words accurately and automatically (Foorman, Francis, Novy, & Lieberman, 1991; Oudeans, 2003). Phonics is an instructional approach that helps children attain alphabetic principle by teaching sound-symbol relationships in a sequence that facilitates accurate, automatic word decoding as soon as possible. Like phonemic awareness, phonics skills do not come naturally to students who are at-risk or who have disabilities (Coyne, Zipoli, & Ruby, 2006; Fielding-Barnsley, 1997; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Thus, the careful teaching of phonics is an essential part of an effective reading program (Bursuck & Damer, 2011; O'Connor, Jenkins, & Slocum, 1995; NRP, 2000). Phonics instruction in general education may not be explicit enough, encourage students to guess at words, provide little systematic presentation of sound-symbol relationships, and avoid phonic readers that allow students to apply their sounding skills (Moats, 2007). These are all

indications of a lack of evidence-based instruction in phonics and point to the need for careful observation of classroom practices when making decisions about students within a multi-tier framework.

Reading fluency. Reading fluency is the ability to read connected text accurately, quickly, and with expression (Therrien, Gormley, & Kubin, 2006; Webre, 2005). Students who are not fluent readers spend so much time and effort decoding individual words that they may be unable to construct either the concrete or abstract thoughts the text represent (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). Students who are at-risk or have disabilities often need explicit instruction and frequent opportunities to practice skills that lead to reading fluency. Even students who have alphabetic principle may not develop reading fluency on their own (Bursuck & Damer, 2011; Speece & Ritchey, 2005).

Despite its importance, however, effective fluency instruction is often overlooked or left out of reading instruction for all students (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005; Moats, 2007). Partly, this is due to the popular belief that independent silent reading practice is sufficient to build students' reading fluency. Although intuitively appealing, there is little evidence to suggest that allowing students to read silently and independently without immediate corrective feedback has any positive effect on their reading fluency (O'Connor, White, & Swanson, 2007; Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, Wisebaker, Kuhn, Strauss, & Morris, 2006; Welsch, 2006). Guided repeated oral reading activities appear to increase reading fluency (Mandlebaum, Hodges, & Meisenheimer, 2007; Therrien, Gormley, & Kubin, 2006), particularly in younger children (Edmonds et al., 2009).

Vocabulary. Vocabulary knowledge is critically important to comprehension (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Biemiller, 2001; Cunningham, 2006). Although much vocabulary is acquired indirectly-though conversations with other people, being read to, or independent reading, students who are at-risk often have fewer vocabulary-rich life experiences than other children and therefore need direct vocabulary instruction to become successful readers (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Biemiller, 2001; Coyne, McCoach, & Kapp, 2007). Although vocabulary knowledge alone is insufficient for proficient reading, more complex language skills such as grammar, spelling, and comprehension depend on students having adequate vocabulary knowledge (Medo & Ryder, 1993; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Effective, evidence-based vocabulary instruction has several easily identifiable characteristics that are important to look for when determining if students have had appropriate instruction. Evidence-based vocabulary instruction emphasizes direct teaching of important, useful, and difficult words as well as strategies for deciphering word meanings independently using context, word parts, and tools such as dictionaries (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Vocabulary instruction in general education may include reading aloud by the teacher with unstructured discussions and little direct instruction and practice of new vocabulary (Moats, 2007). Again, failure to provide vocabulary instruction that is systematic and explicit emphasizes the need for the careful scrutiny of general education instruction before making decisions about struggling readers.

Reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is widely recognized and accepted as the end goal or purpose for reading instruction, and it is dependent on student

competence in the other four areas of reading discussed previously. Students with good

reading comprehension read purposefully and actively engage with or think about what

they are reading (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2000; Rand Reading Study Group, 2002).

For school-age children a substantial body of research indicates that there are multiple

research-based reading comprehension strategies, including: (a) activating background

knowledge to make meaning of the text (NRP, 2000), (b) asking questions while reading

(Baumann, Seifert-Kessell, & Jones, 1992; Capelli & Markham, 1982), (c) drawing

conclusions from text (NRP, 2000), (d) making reasonable predictions Armbruster et al.,

2000), (e) summarizing the meaning of text (Bursuck & Damer, 2011); Carnine et al,

2009), (f) building awareness of what they do and do not understand about text during

reading (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007), and (g) using text

structures to derive meaning from text (Dymock, 2005; Dymock; 2007; Spires, Gallini, &

Riggsbee, 1992). Reading comprehension instruction in general education may not teach

the structures of narrative and expository text explicitly, nor model or practice

comprehension skills in a planned progression (Moats, 2007).

As implied in this section, it is not enough to merely address the 5 areas of

reading within a reading program. In order for students who are at-risk or who have

disabilities to acquire skills, they need to be taught systematically and explicitly using

empirically-based instructional design principles and instructional enhancements. In the

next section, information is presented that can be used to understand classroom reading

instruction from a pedagogical perspective. There is significant empirical support for

research based pedagocy despite its limited adoption in general education classrooms

(Reis, McCoach, Coyne, Schreiber, Eckert, & Gubbins, 2007; Ryder, Burton, & Silberg, 2006; Ware, 2002).

Research-Based Reading Pedagogy

Research-based reading instruction should include complete coverage of the 5 areas of reading and should be delivered using empirically validated pedagogical tools. In this section, pedagogical strategies to enhance reading instruction are described. These instructional enhancements (Bursuck & Damer, 2011) are research-based and provide the consistency, predictability, and structure students who are at-risk or have disabilities need to be successful (Bursuck et al., 2004; Bursuck & Damer, 2010; Stichter et al., 2009). Thus, they are important to consider when deciding whether or not a student has been taught to read effectively. Key methods of enhancing instruction to be described include: advance organizers, unison responses, perky pace, efficient use of teacher talk, systematic error correction, teaching to success, and motivational strategies (Bursuck & Damer, 2011; Stichter, et al., 2009).

Advance organizers. Advance organizers help establish an instructional environment that is predictable and comfortable for students by explicitly stating prior to each lesson what will be learned, why it is being learned, and behavioral expectations (Marzano & Marzano, 2003; Swanson, Hoskyn & Lee, 1999). Advance organizers can be visual or oral, and are also vehicles for achieving strategic integration and for priming background knowledge.

Unison responses. For students who are at-risk or have disabilities, the provision of appropriate practice maximizes engagement and ultimately learning (Kern & Clemens,

2007). Unison response is a key component of evidence-based instruction because its use maximizes students' opportunities to practice new skills and review previously learned skills (Carnine et al., 2011). Traditional individual turn-taking, particularly during large group instruction, the major grouping arrangement used in general education classrooms (Stichter et al., 2009), reduces both the number of students who get to practice a skill and the number of times all students get to practice. Signals to cue unison responses allow the teacher to call all students to attention, provide them with thinking time, and then observe to monitor students' participation and accuracy. Signals vary with different instructional skills and tasks, but within each skill or task effective signals are clear, predictable, and consistently delivered (Bursuck & Damer, 2011; Carnine et al., 2011). While unison response is not the sole way of having students respond during reading, it has been shown to be efficient and effective.

Efficient teacher talk and perky pace. Efficient teacher talk is a concept that seems relatively simple in theory but is often difficult in practice. Effective teachers are purposeful and deliberate when speaking to students. Those who use concise statements in language students understand are more likely to get students' attention (Kern & Clemens, 2007; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986). A perky pace during instruction can also increase students' learning (Englert, Tarrant, & Mariage, 1992) as students are more likely to attend to instruction that is enthusiastically presented and moves smoothly from one activity to the next.

My Turn-Together-Your Turn. The My Turn-Together-Your Turn format in explicit instruction (Archer, 1995) scaffolds students as they are learning new content.

The initial stage (My Turn) is an explicit teacher demonstration followed by the second

stage (Together) in which the teacher practices the skill with students until they are able

to do it alone. Finally, students do the skill independently (Your Turn) while teachers

closely monitor students' performance in order to provide immediate corrective feedback

that will prevent students from practicing the skill incorrectly. Effective teachers do not

underestimate the amount of modeling and practice that students who are at-risk or who

have disabilities may need to master individual skills.

Cumulative review. Students who are at-risk or who have disabilities often have

problems retaining what they have learned (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). While the failure to

retain information often results when a skill or concept is not adequately taught in the

first place, retention problems can be reduced when reading instruction includes

structured opportunities to recall or apply previously taught information. Cumulative

review is the process of repeatedly working with instructed material in meaningful and

appropriate ways (Simmons, Kame'eniu, Coyne, & Chard, 2007). Effective review in

early reading instruction is more than just rote memorization or rehearsal, it must: (a)

facilitate students performing the task or skill automatically and correctly, (b) occur

repeatedly over time, (c) integrate previously learned and less complex information into

more complex tasks over time, and (d) vary to encourage students understanding of the

information and its generalizability across tasks and applications (Carnine et al., 20109;

Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001). In evidence-based instruction, teachers

monitor students' progress and document students' performance during review. This

information can inform instruction and if necessary indicate which skills need to be retaught because students can no longer perform them at the mastery level.

Systematic error correction. Students make mistakes no matter how systematic and explicit teachers' instruction is. In fact, evidence suggests that even during an effective lesson students answer correctly approximately 80% of the time (McEwan & Damer, 2000). Systematic error correction allows for immediate corrective feedback: As soon as students make an error, the teacher immediately models the correct skill or answer, guides the students to the correct response, and asks the same question again so students have the opportunity to answer the question correctly. The teacher also returns to the question later in the same lesson to confirm that students are able to answer the question or perform the skill correctly. Systematic error corrections are an important part of effective instruction (Carnine et al., 2010; Bursuck & Damer, 2011).

Teaching to success. Teaching to success (mastery learning) is critically important for students who are at-risk or have disabilities. Research indicates that most children will learn from evidence-based instruction if they have sufficient time to do so (Ornstein & Lasley, 2004). Unfortunately, teachers, even effective teachers who understand evidence-based reading and know how to teach using systematic, explicit instruction, often feel pressure to move through a preset curriculum at a predetermined rate or pace whether or not all of their students have mastered skills and concepts (Bursuck, Damer & Smallwood, 2008). This is particularly true in Tier 1 general education classes during the current era of accountability and high stakes assessment that have occasioned the increased use of pacing guides. Certainly RTI's use of universal

screening and progress monitoring data to guide decision-making can help. Indeed, it may be difficult to move on to the next unit or skill when a high proportion of students in the class show that they are performing in the at-risk range. Nonetheless, the extent to which teachers teach to success is an important variable to consider when gauging the quality of instruction.

Student motivational system. Students who are at-risk often enter school with fewer appropriate social and academic skills. Thus, learning can be difficult at first, even when teachers provide systematic, explicit instruction. During evidence-based instruction, teachers typically reinforce appropriate behavior using a 3- to-1 or 4-to-1 ratio of positive to corrective feedback (McEwan & Damer, 2000), providing specific praise for behavior, as well as tokens or points as needed (Haager, Gersten, Baker, & Graves, 2001). Of course student motivational systems work best in classrooms where routines and a classroom management plan are evident, the teacher effectively redirects and proactively addresses behavior, and the teacher creates a warm and supportive environment for student learning (Baker et al., 2001). It is difficult to make the case for evidence-based instruction in the absence of an effective classroom management system.

Preparing Teachers for Effective Reading Instruction

Teachers use a wide range of methods to teach reading. Some are highly effective and evidence-based. The consistent lack of growth in reading proficiency among US students, however, suggests that many teachers are not using methods that are consistent with what is known about best practices in reading instruction (NAEP, 2009). In their study of two schools piloting RTI, Bursuck & Smallwood (2009) found gaps in teacher

knowledge in critical areas related to RTI implementation including scientifically-based instruction, data-based decision making, and collaborative practice. While inservice professional development is the focus of this study, teachers' preservice preparation also needs to be considered

Pre-Service Teacher Preparation

Teachers and schools are not solely responsible for the crisis of reading failure in this country. A review of the literature reveals several key topics in pre-service teacher education that warrant ongoing attention and concern. The quality of teacher preparation programs varies significantly (Darling Hammond, 2006; Liston, Borko, & Whitcomb, 2008; Reschly, 2009) and many teacher preparation programs do not offer reading methods courses that include research-based pedagogy (Smartt & Reschly, 2007; Reschly, 2009; Walsh, Glaser, & Dunne-Wilcox, 2006). Although students at-risk are increasingly served in the general education classroom (U.S.Department of Education, 2007) general education programs often fail to concentrate on instructional methods for students who are at-risk (Brownell, Ross, Colón & McCallum, 2005; Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006) and often do not include pedagogy that works for students who struggle learning to read (Simmons, Kameenui, Coyne, & Chard, 2007). General education teachers may not include research-based pedagogy in their reading instruction because they do not know what is effective reading instruction or how to use empirically-validated assessments of early reading skills to accurately estimate children's current skills and their progress in response to instruction (Eckert, Dunn, & Ardoin, 2006; Flynn & Rahbar, 1998; Graney, 2008; Haney & Evans, 1999; Peverly & Kitzen, 1998; Spector,

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2005). The situation is not considerably better in special education teacher preparation.

Smartt & Reschly (2009) recently found that preparation programs for special educators also showed gaps in presenting evidence-based practices in reading to pre-service teachers. In addition to high quality pre-service preparation, teachers also require ongoing, high quality professional development to achieve and maintain effective, high quality professional practice, job satisfaction, and longevity in the profession (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Professional development is the focus of the next section.

Professional Development

Professional development means "a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (Hirsch, 2009, p. 12). To meet the demands of working in dynamic, complex, highly stressful environments, teachers, like all professionals, must have access to high quality professional learning opportunities throughout their careers (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Fullan, 2010; Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, & Herman, 1999; Hirsh, 2009; Taylor & Labarre, 2006). High quality professional development is also a key indicator of organizational transformation and the emergence of collaborative culture (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Professional development research. Traditionally, professional development has been delivered to teachers as one-time in-service workshops that feature an outside expert lecturing on a content area or topic with perhaps a few learning activities thrown in to

keep things interesting (Fullan, 2010). Only 18 percent of teachers feel that professional

development connects to their personal teaching situations or experiences (National

Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2001). Five to ten percent of teachers implement

practices or ideas learned in traditional professional development (Joyce & Showers,

2002). Ten to fifteen percent of teachers report that professional development includes

ongoing support or materials to be used in their classrooms (NCES, 2001). Thus, it is not

surprising that only 12-27 percent of teachers reported that professional development

significantly improved their teaching practices (NCES, 2001).

While much traditional professional development does not produce lasting

changes in teachers' instructional behavior (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010), some

professional development approaches positively affect teacher practice and have

demonstrated small but significant effects on student achievement (Wallace, 2009).

Thus, the important question is this: What are the essential characteristics of effective

professional development for teachers, especially teachers of early reading? To answer

this question, an electronic search using the terms "professional development",

"teachers", "research", "reading", and "instruction" identified 27 key studies.

Traditional professional development. Generally perceived as a "training"

model rather than a continuing education model, traditional professional development

emphasizes teachers' acquisition of specific skills in order to enact specific practices

(Little, 1994). Teachers' learning activities may take place in or outside of their school

but are removed from instruction, removed from their students, and often linked to

reform efforts or mandates (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010; Liston,

Borko, & Whitcomb, 2008). Traditional professional development approaches mistakenly

frame ineffective reading instruction as a teacher knowledge problem (Rolla, Arias,

Villers & Snow, 2006; Rosks, Jaroseqich, Lenhart, & Collins, 2007; Spear-Swerling,

Brucker, Owen, & Alfano, 2005). In the traditional professional development paradigm,

researchers are the producers of knowledge and teachers are consumers of research.

Teachers are told what research says are effective practices and the assumption is that

teachers can then use these effective practices in their own classrooms with little or no

change in the implementation (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). This view of professional

development does not acknowledge the importance of context and teachers' experiences

(Friend & Cook, 2010; Fullan, 2010; L'Allier, Elish-Piper, Bean, 2010) and is largely

responsible for its failure to promote lasting positive changes in teachers effectiveness or

student learning (Gawande, 2006; Guskey, 2003; Lang & Fox, 2003, Richardson, 2003;

Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). While teacher knowledge matters, ongoing support and

immediate feedback are essential as teachers learn to transfer knowledge to practice

(Podhajski, Maher, Natan, & Sammans, 2009).

Effective practices for professional development in reading are documented in the

literature (Meier & Sullivan, 2004; Wixson & Yochan, 2004; Vaughan & Coleman,

2004): The essential feature of effective professional development in reading is that it is

job-embedded; thus, the professional development contextualizes teachers' learning

about evidence-based reading instruction in their own classrooms. Job-embedded

professional development can promote changes in teachers' use of evidence-based

practices during reading instruction (Bursuck, Smith, Munk, Damer, Mehlig, & Lenz, 2004; Spear-Swerling, Brucker, Owen & Alfano, 2005).

Effective professional development. Three major reviews of the literature on professional development (Darling Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009) agree on the following essential characteristics of effective professional development: (a) deepens teachers content knowledge; (b) helps teachers connect content knowledge to their students' needs; (c) facilitates active learning in authentic contexts; (d) has coherence with school, district, state, and national goals; (e) is collaborative and collegial; and (f) provides sustained support for teachers' ongoing learning over time. Collaborative professional development is particularly effective (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Waldron & McLeskey (2010) synthesized the literature on collaborative professional development and identified characteristics that are similar to findings in the three previously described reviews. Collaborative professional development (a) is coherent and focused; (b) addresses instructional practices and content knowledge that improve student outcomes; (c) is built upon the practices and beliefs of teachers, ensuring high levels of teacher buy-in; (d) is school-based, job- embedded, and long- term; (e) provides extensive follow-up (e.g., coaching) in teachers' classrooms; and (f) is actively supported by the school administration (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). These characteristics are only possible in a job-embedded model of professional development. In fact, job-embeddedness is a defining characteristic across school reform models that require increases in teachers' learning and the use of evidence-based instructional practices to promote change. These

models include professional learning communities, mentoring , book study groups,

action research and professional coaching for teachers (Curry, 2008, Darling-Hammond

& Richardson, 2009; L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; Podhajski, Maher, Natan, &

Sammons, 2009). Professional development that includes the traditional elements of

theory and demonstration with guided practice, immediate corrective feedback, and

coaching produces the largest effect sizes for increasing teachers' knowledge and skills

but also produces significantly larger effect sizes for transfer of training to the teachers'

classroom practice (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Killion & Harrison, 2006). Without

effective professional development, teachers cannot grow professionally and do not learn

the skills they need to effectively teach students, including students who are at-risk for

reading failure, in general education classrooms (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; McLeskey &

Waldron, 2002a, Waldron & McLeskey, 2010)

Social and political pressure for increased teacher effectiveness is part of a larger

movement in school reform. Multi-tier classrooms, effective reading instruction, and

professional development are three key aspects of lasting school reform and school

improvement. However, nothing less than organizational transformation will allow

lasting, meaningful, positive school improvement to become a reality. The next section

describes a theory of organizational change.

Organizational Transformation

Professionals working together to solve problems and improve student outcomes

has been a defining characteristic of special education practice since the passage of

Public Law 94-142 in 1975 (Friend & Cook, 1990). Collaborative problem solving is a

key indicator of effective, productive organizations across professional disciplines beyond education, including business, non-profit, entertainment, and technology (Bennis & Biederman, 1997). More than 20 years of research indicate that organizational structures that promote collaboration are predictive of and necessary to effective school reform (Friend & Cook, 1990; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Implementing meaningful and lasting school reforms to increase teacher effectiveness and improve student learning (e.g., reading instruction) requires specific organizational characteristics that support professional development, professional longevity, and innovation, and job satisfaction (Dufor, Eaker, & Many, 2006). Effective and sustainable changes in teachers' instructional practice require thoughtfully designed organizational structures, reflective leadership, and data-driven decision making (Gawande, 2006; Schecter & Tischler, 2007).

Overview of Ineffective School Reform

Historically, school leadership and organizational structures have valued compliance and worked to maintain bureaucratic structures (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Skrtic, 1995). Despite 40 years of school reform many teachers have difficulty meeting students' diverse learning needs in the general education classroom because reform efforts have focused narrowly on minor adjustments to traditional organizational models rather than committing to dramatic restructuring of the traditional hierarchies and leadership (Fullan, 1995; 2007; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Too often, reform efforts focus on delineating power structures in schools and defining the rules for decision making with little meaningful emphasis on pedagogy or organizational structures that

directly influence classroom practice (Fullan, 1995). Policy has been created with little

input from practitioners and at levels of bureaucracy far removed from classrooms

(Gawande, 2006). Problem solving is oriented toward preserving the bureaucratic status

quo rather than meaningful organizational change (Zins & Illback, 2007). Increased

competition for jobs and wealth in an increasingly global economy (Friedman, 2005) has

resulted in a renewed interest in and mandates for accountability (Darling-Hammond,

2010; Hersi, 2010). State testing has become a reform in and of itself, rather than as

measures of the extent to which changes in practice have reformed or changed

educational outcomes (Sergiovanni, 2000). Accountability measures feed the

bureaucratic need for mechanisms of compliance; however, these measures offer little

insight into what students learn or pragmatic benefits students receive from their

education (Johnson, 2006).

Overview of Effective School Reform

Effective reform efforts are designed from the perspective of those at the bottom

of the organizational pyramid (Glaser, 1998). Deming (1993) recognized the value of

empowering workers to identify and solve problems. The problem solving model in RTI

is similar to Deming's emphasis on quality culture (Friend & Cook, 2010; Glasser, 1998;

Waldron & McLeskey, 2010): Front line personnel can and should be empowered to

solve problems because they have the most direct contact with the aspects of the problem

that are within the school's control, namely instructional quality (Fullan, 2010). The

literature indicates that in effective school reform efforts and model demonstration

projects, organizational structures and processes empower teachers to make decisions

about instructional methods, progress monitoring, and intervention (Bursuck et al., 2004; McInerney, 2003; McLeskey & Waldron, 2000).

Collaboration is an essential characteristic of multi-tier problem solving models, effective instruction in an RTI framework, and effective professional development. Therefore, it is expected that a research based theory of organizational transformation would rely heavily on collaboration. In fact, McLeskey & Waldron's (2010) review of the literature on comprehensive school reform found that collaboration is critically important to successful school reform efforts. It is not surprising that Michael Fullan's (2010) theory of school change is grounded in collaborative practice at all levels of the educational bureaucracy. A justification for using the theory and a thorough description of the theory follows. Fullan's (2010) theory is the lens through which participants' experiences with an initiative to increase effective reading instruction as part of a larger school improvement effort to implement RTI will be viewed.

Overview of Fullan's (2010) Theory: Six Secrets of Organizational Change

Theories are tools used to make sense of the real world (Maxwell, 2006; Strauss, 1995). Good theories offer practical insight and guidance in complex situations, never assume certainty, and can be applied in multiple contexts (Fullan, 2010).

Studies of teacher practice and professional learning require theoretical frameworks that account for teachers' experiences and the wider context in which teachers work (Leko & Brownell, 2011; Zeichner, 2005). As a system-level rather than an individual-level theory Fullan's work acknowledges the complex experience of being a 21st century teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Systems-level theory allows

researchers to understand individuals' experiences in relation to the contextual whole

(Gawande, 2006; Patton, 2002). Fullan's theory is useful to this dissertation study

because it "illuminates" the complexity of school change and thus provides a detailed

background for understanding individual teachers' experiences (Maxwell, 2005, p. 43).

Description of the Six Secrets of Change

The theory, *Six Secrets of Change* (SSOC) is based on empirical research in

education and business. Five assumptions underpin the theory. First, it is a theory that

applies to large-scale reform. Second, the six components are synergistic and do not have

the same predictive or explanatory value if taken in isolation. Third, the ideas are heavily

nuanced, and thus it is necessary to reflect and apply the ideas to a complex situation in

order to fully appreciate their meaning and value. Fourth, the secrets motivate people to

buy into organizational change. Fifth, all six secrets must be dynamically integrated:

Effective systems work on all six secrets, at all levels, all of the time (Fullan, 2010).

Finally, Fullan describes the theory as a framework for evaluating current organizational

practice and a tool to guide future action. In this study of data collected from multiple

sources, the theory was used to understand why teachers may have experienced the

reading initiative as they did. The next sections describe in detail the components (Fullan

calls them "secrets") of Fullan's (2010) theory of organizational change and provide

research support for each component.

Secret one: Love your employees. The idea of investing in employee happiness

is grounded in the stakeholder relationship management (SRM) model (Freeman, 1984).

The model predicts that giving equal attention and value to all stakeholders' (customers,

employees, investors, partners, and society) interests produces greater financial results than those obtained with the traditional stakeholder model that focuses on shareholder above and beyond all other stakeholders. Financial returns support the SRM theory. Between 1996 and 2006, for-profit business that attended equally to all stakeholders outperformed the S&P 500 by an 8-to-1 ratio (Sisodia, Wolfe, & Sheth, 2007). Toyota (Liker, 2004), Southwest Airlines, and Whole Foods (Sisodia et al., 2007) are well known corporate examples of companies who use the SRM to great success.

Fullan also provides an example of SRM in practice from the educational literature based on his work with the Ontario education system. Since implementing policy that makes a strong commitment to respect teachers and invest in their professional development in 2003, the system has realized positive results. Using data from three-year cohort samples, it appears that teacher attrition declined from 22-33 % in the 1990s to 7.5 % by 2003 (McIntyre, 2006), while student achievement in literacy and math improved 10 percent or more across the system. While the data are correlational and inconclusive, they suggest that investing in and caring about employees is associated with positive effects for the system as a whole and student achievement.

Successful organizations invest in and value employees. Sirota, Mischkind, & Meltzer's (2005) study of millions of employees in multiple sectors of the economy suggest that three factors in particular are important for employee engagement and productivity: fair treatment, conditions that allow employees to be successful, and camaraderie. Successful organizations also invest in their employees' continuous professional growth. Investment helps employees find meaning in their work and enjoy

meaningful relationships with colleagues and the larger organization (Fullan, 2010).

Likewise, effective school systems value employees as much as children and parents

because the quality of the system depends on the quality of the teachers (Barber &

Mourshed, 2007). Citing negative case examples from the Memphis City School District

and New York City District 2, as well as positive case examples from Ontario and

England, Fullan (2010) demonstrates that low morale and low job satisfaction among

teachers is strongly associated with low student performance while high employee

satisfaction and happiness is associated with improved student performance. Fullan is

clear that he is not talking about superficial programs or instrumental initiatives that are

designed to "show" employees how important they are. The way that successful

organizations, for-profit businesses and school systems alike "love" their employees is to

deliberately, thoughtfully, and reflectively create conditions that allow employees to be

successful.

   Secret two: Connect peers with purpose. Successful organizations foster

collaborative problem solving (Taylor & LaBarre, 2006). This aspect of the theory is

consistent with 20 years of school change research indicating that collaboration is

essential for lasting school change (Friend, 1990; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Suroweicki (2004) concluded that groups that value diverse opinions and deliberately

include people with various types and levels of expertise are better at solving problems in

complex situations than are individual experts or groups made up of individuals who

have a shared specific area of expertise. Certain conditions support positive, purposeful

peer interactions: (1) the values of the organizations and individuals are aligned; (2)

information and knowledge about effective practices are easily available and widely

shared; and (3) ineffective action can be detected and effective practices can be

consolidated (Fullan, 2010). In other words, successful organizations create conditions in

which employees share the same vision of success, have easy access to information about

what works, can identify problems without fear, and see success as the work of

collaborative efforts rather than individuals. Fullan (2010) offers examples from the

Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership in which highly- performing, low-performing,

and non-improving schools receive resources and support without stigmatizing schools

that are struggling. Similarly, another group of high-performing and non-improving

schools voluntarily joined a network to participate in collaborative problem solving. The

network is structured so that successes and failures of individual schools are attributed to

the work of the partnership as a whole rather than the individual schools (Fullan, 2010).

Although these are high level concepts and ideas, the fact that they are also

carefully nuanced is important. Organizations that deeply understand what motivates and

inspires their employees are more successful than companies that do not have this

connection to their workers (Mangin, 2007; Taylor & LaBarre, 2006). In these

companies, knowledge is valued. Employees seek knowledge and want to know what

works best. Individuals are not singled out for praise or blame. The group learns from the

collective knowledge and growth of its individual members and this learning is focused

on working effectively to maximize positive outcomes. People feel connected to the

larger organization and self-identify as part of the larger whole (Taylor & LeBarre). Good

leaders connect peers to purpose and enable collaborative practice.

Effective school leaders enable collaboration when they articulate the vision for their organization and bring together those individuals best equipped to bring that vision to fruition (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Building and district-level leaders who understand the need for collaboration understand and meet teachers' pragmatic needs and shield teachers from bureaucratic interference with the work of the classroom (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Scribner, Hager, & Warne, 2002). Leaders who understand collaboration know that high quality, competent teachers who have the tools they need to do their jobs do not need to be micro-managed in order to assure accountability for student achievement (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Secret three: Capacity building prevails. Fullan (2010) defines capacity as (a) individuals possessing and continuing to develop knowledge and skills (Collins, 2001); (b) the ability of institutions to attract and use resources (time, ideas, expertise, money) wisely; and (c) a commitment to getting important things done collectively and continuously over time. Organizations that build capacity value learning and create space for people to make mistakes or fail at something without fear of punishment (Bennis & Biedermann, 1997; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Fear motivates people to act but it is an ineffective change agent because it motivates people to focus on short term gains rather than long term success (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Fear encourages employees to focus on solving easy problems while merely describing larger, more difficult yet arguably more important ones (Pfeffer, 2007). The point of facilitating effective collaboration is to leverage the wisdom of the crowd (Suroweicki, 2007). Accountability matters. Transformational organizations foster employees' sense of

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personal accountability to the organization's success, in part by hiring good people: Good leaders know that you have to get the "right people on the bus" (Collins, 2001).

Successful for-profit companies focus on hiring individuals with the capacity to be good team players (Liker & Meier. 2007; Sisodia, et al., 2007; Taylor & LaBarre, 2006). While there are fewer empirical examples in the education literature, Barber & Mourshed (2007) report similar results. Drawing from an international sample including countries that participate in the OECD's PISA assessment in literacy and math and other school districts, such as Boston, school systems that were high performing or improved significantly on standardized assessments of literacy and math (a) had more talented people become teachers; (2) developed better teachers and administrators; and (c) were better able to ensure that teachers were prepared to differentiate instruction and provide early intervention for individual, school, and system- level underperformance (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Jane West (Council for Exceptional Children-Teacher Education Division, 2010) points out that by comparison, the very top performers in this sample include school systems (Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea) with significantly smaller school systems, less socio-economic diversity among students, and greater selectivity and tracking in academic programs than comparison samples such as the United States and Great Britain. Nonetheless, the data suggest that hiring and cultivating talented employees who are good at working collaboratively benefits students.

Secret four: Learning is the work. Successful organizations integrate the precision needed for consistent performance with the innovation and new learning needed for continuous improvement (Deming, 1993; Fullan, 2010; Gawande, 2006). Toyota is

the classic example of an organization where learning is the work. Consistency, doing the same thing every time, is critically important in manufacturing. However, Liker & Meier (2007) report that improving performance is an integral part of the corporate culture of Toyota. In other words, consistently expecting and valuing innovation is part of the Toyota mindset that contributes to its lasting success.

Standardizing basic tasks so that they can be implemented with a minimum of expenditure of resources while maximizing the results of those tasks can free individuals to think about how to improve the overall work of the organization, including their personal role within it (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Gawande, 2007). Introducing precision into teaching and learning requires teachers to be more rather than less thoughtful and engaged in their work (Bursuck et al., 2004; Bursuck & Damer, 2011; Fullan et al., 2006; Gersten et al;, 2009). Differentiating the content and intensity of instruction to meet specific students' diverse learning needs in the general education classroom requires teachers to connect everything they know about each of their students to all that they know about effective instruction and then plan and deliver instruction accordingly. Far from "deskilling" teachers (Dutro, 2010), effective reading instruction requires significantly more skill and support than one-size-fits-all instruction. Interstingly, the educational literature is rife with articles/comments criticizing commercial reading programs that are highly prescribed and often use scripted teaching formats to deliver instruction in specific skill areas (MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, & Palma, 2004; Shannon, 1987). Indeed, the standardized practice of scripted teaching comprises a tool that teachers can use to ensure that students who are struggling receive

precise instruction that empirical research indicates is effective (Simmons et al., 2007; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). Further, the precision, efficiency, and effectiveness of scripted teaching formats for early reading instruction with children who are at-risk for reading failure can free teachers to focus their professional energy on learning to improve other areas of instructional practice to further benefit students'.

Successful organizations know that learning happens best in context because learning is the job (Liker & Meier, 2007; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Sisodia et al., 2007). As previously discussed, in schools, professional development is often a good way to ensure that change never happens (Cole, 2004) because traditional professional development does not promote lasting change. Effective professional development to promote lasting organizational change in schools must be job-embedded and supported over time.

Secret five: Transparency rules. Organizational transparency often depends on collecting and using data to make decisions. Data-driven decision making is essential to effective reading instruction in multi-tier classrooms (Bursuck & Damer, 2011); results matter. Assessment helps teachers understand where children are in comparison to where they should be. These data also help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses so as to target the weak areas for instruction. However, focusing solely on the final outcome of instruction, for example the end of grade test or the year end performance benchmark, is insufficient; schools must also know how to use data to monitor progress and plan instruction (Fuchs et al., 2006; Gersten et al., 2009). Transparency means collecting the right data and the right amount of data to understand what is happening at

any point or level of the organization (Shirley & Hargreaves, 2006). Collecting too much or repetitive data contributes to overwork with little benefit (Fullan, 2010).

The use of data allows organizations to be transparent and continuously improve in five specific ways (Sisodia, 2007). First, data allow the organization to track its own performance across time and compare itself to its statistical peers as well as to an absolute standard. Second, data help the organization set ambitious, realistic goals based on the current starting point. Third, data help organizations build capacity by identifying effective practices within and external to the organization. Fourth, yearly performance data are important, but data trends across time are more accurate for long- term planning and decision making. Fifth, negative data are acknowledged and addressed but are not used to punish, stigmatize or blame (Fullan, 2010). Effective organizations known that the only goal or reason for data collection is to promote learning and continuous improvement (Liker & Meier, 2007).

Secret six: Systems learn. Successful organizations learn continuously. One of the most important lessons successful organizations, including schools, must learn is to focus on the organization instead of the individual leader (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Gawande, 2007; Mangin, 2007). Effective organizations focus on continuous improvement (Deming, 1993) and collaborative practice (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). Systems learn when they can enact all of the previous five secrets yet still recognize that in a complex world there is little certainty (Friedman, 2005).

Leaders facilitate excellence when they concern themselves with the details that allow the team to carry out its work. Great leaders are intermediaries who prevent the

legitimate needs of the bureaucracy from interfering with the work of the collaborative

team (Collins, 2001). The function of the bureaucracy in transformational organizations

is to support the collaborative team's work that will achieve leaders' visions. Groups

function best when leaders, who generally are not experts in specifics of the discipline,

protect and shield members from the pressures and interferences of bureaucracy

(Sindelar, Shearer, Yendel-Hoppey, Liebert, 2006; Bennis & Biederman, 1997).

Bureaucratic functions should include (a)providing resources; (b) organizing workflow

and schedules that allow team members uninterrupted time to collaborate; (c) meeting the

needs team members identify rather than those assumed by the bureaucracy who are not

part of the collaborative group; and (d) working to minimize the amount of tangential

regulatory business required of collaborative team members as part of their day- to- day

work (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Sergiovanni, 2004). Having established an

organization that values all stakeholders equally promotes collaboration, builds capacity,

focuses on learning, and is transparent, effective leaders know that the organization as a

whole is responsible for success and that the definition of success must emerge from

within the organization (Fullan, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2004).

Rationale for the Study's Propositions

The areas of the literature review, including (a) evidence of the need for multi-

tier classrooms in early elementary reading instruction; (b) best practices in effective

early reading instruction; (c) preparing teachers for effective reading instruction; and (d)

characteristics of organizational transformation that support lasting school change

provide the rationale for the study's propositions. The propositions set forth by the study are these:

1. General education teachers need to provide effective early reading instruction to students with diverse learning needs. Research-based pedagogy in the five key areas of reading (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) exists, but its implementation in classrooms that often take a different approach is challenging.

2. Early elementary teachers may not be prepared at the pre-service level to implement evidence-based practices in beginning reading; hence the need for ongoing, high quality, job-embedded professional development to learn and integrate research-based pedagogy into their instructional practice.

3. School change activities, including initiatives to increase teacher effectiveness in early reading instruction, require specific organizational characteristics and leadership. These organizational characteristics include (a) the creation of conditions that enable teachers to be successful; (b) collaborative problem solving, (c) continuous improvement; (d) innovation for total quality; (e) data-driven decision making, and (f) systems that reflect and learn.

4. School change theory (Fullan, 2010) can be used to understand teachers' experiences with an initiative to increase effective reading instruction in general elementary classrooms.

These propositions are supported by the literature and suggest that it is unreasonable to expect teachers to learn to implement research-based reading

instruction if the nature of current instruction, professional development activities and school change initiatives do not reflect best practices in each of these areas. There is sufficient literature on effective professional development practice and effective organizational change to inform these efforts. Research-based change initiatives must reflect the research-base at all levels of the initiative. The structure, content, and delivery of professional development must reflect best practices in structure, content, and delivery. The larger school system must reflect an understanding of and progress toward becoming a transformational organization before any lasting improvement or reform can be expected to develop in teachers' classrooms. Otherwise efforts to reform early reading instruction in general education will not be successful.

The purpose of this study is to understand teachers' experiences with a school reform effort to increase the presence of evidence-based instruction in early reading. To gain this understanding, it was necessary to look not only at the resulting teachers' instructional behaviors and student outcomes, but also at the nature of their current reading practice and the professional development in which teachers participated. The study adds incrementally to the literature on school change in that it (a) documents the lived experiences of a school change process that is independent of researcher manipulation or control, and (b) captured the experiences as they happened. Much of the literature on school change and especially studies of RTI and reading instruction are experimental or quasi-experimental studies in which researchers manipulate key variable and measure

the results or studies that retroactively seek to understand a previously occurring

intervention. This naturalistic study allowed the researcher and the reader to a

glimpse of what school change might really look like in practice, without active

involvement from researchers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between professional development and classroom instruction through the experiences of five rural elementary K-1 teachers' experiences teaching reading in multi-tier classrooms after attending the Foundations of Reading (RF) professional development in evidence-based reading instruction. This chapter includes the rationale for using a qualitative case study design, background information on the participants, a description of the context for the study, a description of the Foundations of Reading (RF) program, a summary of data collection methods for each data source, and a description of procedures to analyze data (Kurtts, 1998). The purpose of the interpretive approach was to better understand the factors involved in changing over to research-based reading practices in schools as seen through the eyes of classroom teachers. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are teacher participants' experiences with the Foundations of Reading (RF) professional development program related to participants' experiences teaching reading in multi-tier general education K-1 classrooms?

2. What factors explain the relationship between teacher participants' experiences with the Foundations of Reading (RF) professional development program and participants' experiences teaching reading in multi-tier general education K-1 classrooms?

Rationale and Overview

A qualitative case study method was used to describe the experiences of five K-1 general education teachers as they taught reading in multi-tier classrooms after participating in a professional development program devoted to evidence-based reading instruction. The case study was used to identify and describe factors that influenced the participants' experiences teaching reading after attending a professional development workshop in evidence-based reading instruction. The qualitative case study method was selected because the approach allows the researcher to "(a) explain complex causal links in real-life interventions, (b) describe the real-life context in which the intervention has occurred, (c) describe the intervention itself, [and] (d) explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes" (Kurtts, 1998; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2009).

The study was conducted using a pragmatic (Creswell, 2009) case study approach with the: research questions, propositions, unit of analysis, logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Kurtts, 1998; Yin, 2009). The research questions, which guide the focus of the study, are presented in Chapter 1 and in the beginning of this chapter. The propositions of the study are presented in Chapter 2 as

they correspond with the literature review. The unit of analysis for the study was the group of five K-1 general education teachers who participated in the "Foundations of Reading" school improvement effort to improve reading instruction (Yin, 2009).

Relationships between the data and the propositions were established through pattern matching and coding. Thus, the data analysis provided categories of information that emerged as themes in the study. The criteria for interpreting the findings were based on the emergent themes. Construct validity was established through multiple data sources by establishing a chain of evidence, and by member checks (Maxwell, 2005) in which feedback was obtained from participants after they had opportunities to review the emerging themes (Kurtts, 1998; Yin, 2009). Internal validity was tested through the search for recurrent patterns in multiple data sources (Kurtts, 1998; Trellis, 1997; Yin, 2009). The study findings have limited generalizability; however, external validity was tested through careful documentation of all discussions related to the themes that emerged from multiple data sources. Reliability was demonstrated through the case study protocol, use of a second reader to confirm the findings, and the researcher's position statements (Creswell, 2007).

Design

To answer the research questions, the researcher used a single-case holistic case study design (Yin, 2009). The study included descriptive observation (Spradley, 1980) of teacher participants' reading instruction, participant interviews (Merriam, 2001; Spradley, 1980), and document review (Merriam, 2001).

Single-case

The single-case design is appropriate to investigate conditions of "an everyday or common place situation" (Yin, 2009). The single-case design is also appropriate in "revelatory" (Yin, 2009) situations. These are situations in which the researcher has an opportunity to explore situations that are difficult to access (Yin, 2009). The study meets both criteria. First, the study explores the relationship among school improvement, professional development, and instruction. All teachers are required to participate in professional development activities in order to maintain their teaching certifications and most professional development activities address instructional practices. Second, the researcher had ongoing, embedded access to the teacher participants as they worked in their classrooms which allowed the researcher to learn about complexities of the participants' everyday experiences.

Holistic. Holistic design is appropriate when there is a single unit of analysis (Yin, 2009). The group of 5 teacher participants was the unit of analysis in this study. The study included descriptive observation (Spradley, 1980) of what the teacher participants did to teach reading to learners with diverse needs in their general education elementary K-1 classrooms, teacher participant interviews and focus groups (Merriam, 2001; Spradley, 1980), document review (Merriam, 2001), and interviews with the building and system level personnel who developed, implemented, and administered school improvement plans related to early reading instruction.

Summary

  This study was centered on understanding teachers' experiences of school and system-wide efforts to improve early reading instruction in K-1 general education classrooms. As part of school and district improvement plans, all participants attended a professional development program on evidence-based reading instruction, *Foundations of Reading* (RF). Data collection and analysis that began with early reading instruction necessarily evolved to include information about the school and the district. Understanding the contextual factors was essential to understanding the participants' experiences teaching reading as part of their rural elementary school's implementation of the North Carolina Response-to-Intervention framework.

<div align="center">

Sample

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  One of the cornerstones of qualitative research is the uniqueness of each research setting (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002). The researcher's purpose is to describe a specific context in depth, not to generalize to other contexts or populations (Merriam, 2001). Representativeness in qualitative research is less important than the researcher's ability to gather information about the participants and their setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009). The sample of participants for this study included two groups of participants: teachers and other district personnel. The teacher participants were a purposive sample of 5 K-1 general education teachers working at Stone Elementary School in a rural school system during the 2010-2011 school year. The purposive sample of other district personnel participants included the principal at Stone Elementary School, the director of Exceptional Children's Programs for the district who oversees the RF

professional development program, the school psychologist at Stone Elementary school who provided teacher participants with ongoing support for interpreting benchmark assessment data in reading, the curriculum coach at Stone Elementary who organized and administered the staff development program for all faculty, a district level trainer who delivered the RF professional development program, and the Asst. Superintendent of Curriculum who is actively involved in the district improvement plan as it relates to reading instruction.

For the purposes of the study, the participants could be of any age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation. However, the entire sample (teachers and other participants) was comprised of White females who ranged from their early 20s to their late 50s and had a range of teaching experiences. Only teachers who attended the RF professional development were considered for the study. The only exclusionary criterion for the study was that participants could not be coerced to participate in the study as research ethics forbid coercion.

Participant Recruitment

The researcher worked with the Director of Exceptional Children's Programs (DEC) in Rowan Salisbury Schools and a RF trainer to contact the principals of the schools whose teachers attended the RF program in June, 2010. The RF trainer invited principals to a meeting with the researcher to discuss participation in the study. Three principals attended the meeting. All three principals were interested in the researcher inviting their teachers to participate. During the meeting it became apparent that one principal's teachers were not eligible because her teachers had not completed the entire

RF program during June, 2010. Of the remaining two principals, one had two eligible teachers and the other had five eligible teachers. The logistics of data collection for the study imposed limits on how often the researcher could visit the research site to collect data. Thus, it was decided that the researcher would focus recruiting efforts at the school with the largest number of eligible teachers, Stone Elementary.

The researcher visited Stone Elementary School to meet potential teacher participants. During the visit the principal gave her a tour and introduced her to the eligible teachers. The researcher arranged to meet with each eligible teacher individually to discuss their interest in the project. At these meetings with the teachers, the researcher explained the research study and details of compensation, risks, and benefits to the participants. Teachers were told that participation would involve approximately 15 weekly classroom-based, informal observations of teachers' reading instruction in their general education classrooms. Teachers were also informed that the researcher would like to observe other activities related to teachers' instruction such as staff development meetings, planning times, and student assessment days. Additionally, the researcher explained that she might ask to examine instructional materials, lesson plans, and other documents that might emerge over the course of the study that would help the researcher understand the teachers' experiences teaching reading in their own classrooms. All teachers were told that they would not receive any financial or material compensation for participating in the study but that the researcher was willing to act as a "volunteer" in their classrooms while she was observing. Finally, teachers were told that they would each participate in a single brief (less than one hour) interview at some point during the

study to discuss their experiences with the RF professional development and teaching reading. All five teachers agreed to participate in the study.

All other district personnel participants were recruited directly by the researcher using email. She contacted the principal of the participating school, the school psychologist, the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, and the Director of Exceptional Children's Programs in Rockwood School System. The researcher explained the study to each potential participant and invited them to participate in individual interviews for the purpose of understanding the context in which the teachers were working. Each person was informed of the amount of time that would likely be needed (30 minutes to one hour) so that they could plan accordingly. The researcher explained that the interviews would be scheduled at the participant's convenience in a location that worked best for the participants. Potential participants were informed that no compensation would be provided for participating in the study. All individuals who were approached agreed to participate.

Description of participants

Each of the five teacher participants was a fully certified elementary education teacher who had attended traditional teacher education programs at colleges and universities in North Carolina. All teacher participants had Bachelors' degrees in elementary education; one of the teachers had a Master's degrees. One of the participants was a National Board Certified Teacher. Two of the participants were in their fourth year of teaching; the remaining three participants had 28- 33 years of teaching experience. All participants had taught kindergarten or first grade for the majority of their careers. Three

of the participants began their careers as teaching assistants because certified positions were not available when they were looking for jobs. One had been a Title I reading teacher for 13 years, a fourth grade teacher for a year, and had been in first grade for the last fifteen years. All but one of the participants had worked only in this district. The two least experienced teachers had only taught in this school. Of the remaining three (more experienced) teachers, one had only taught at this school, one had only taught in this county and had been at this school for over 20 years. The remaining teacher had taught in this school for nearly 20 years. Among these three more experienced teachers, each had taken short (1-5 year) breaks to have children early in their careers. Thus, they either started their tenure at this school upon reentry to the workforce and remained, or they began their careers in the school and then left the profession briefly to have children and had to take positions in other districts upon reentering the workforce until their current positions were available at Stone.

The teacher participants had varying knowledge of and training in reading theory and pedagogy. Two of the participants had previous training in Orton Gillingham reading methods and reported incorporating these methods into their general education reading instruction for all students. All participants reported that their teacher preparation courses only briefly addressed reading theory and methods. All participants reported wanting to teach reading to all students in their classrooms. None of the participants had college or university level coursework in teaching students with disabilities nor did any have advanced academic coursework in teaching reading.

The other district personnel participants were identified because of their roles facilitating professional development to increase effective reading instruction in Stone Elementary and/or all Rockwood elementary schools. Following is a brief description of each district personnel participant.

The principal at Stone Elementary school has over 20 years experience in public education. She taught high school English for 11 years and has been a Principal since 2000. She has an M. Ed. in Educational Leadership. She has been recognized as Teacher of the Year and Principal of the Year at the local, district, and regional levels. She is in her fourth year at Stone Elementary. Prior to her tenure at Stone, she was principal at a high- poverty rural elementary school in a neighboring county.

The school psychologist at Stone Elementary School has an M.Ed. in school psychology and has worked in the district for her entire career, ten years. She is responsible, along with several colleagues, for the RTI implementation in reading and math at the 8 participating elementary schools in the district. Her responsibilities include managing the AIMSweb data system, providing teachers with evidence-based interventions for students moving through the RTI process at Stone, and helping teachers monitor student progress, interpret data, and make instructional decisions.

The curriculum coach at Stone Elementary is a former elementary teacher. She has been at Stone for several years. Much of her professional experience is working with grades 3-5. She has an M.Ed. in literacy. Her primary responsibility is providing professional development to teachers in reading and math. She attended the RF

professional development but is not responsible for supporting the integration of the RF content into teachers' instruction at Stone.

The Director of Exceptional Children's Programs has an Ed. D. in school administration. Before coming to this district, she worked as an EC teacher, EC facilitator, and assistant principal in a large urban district in the state. She was also principal of a private school for students with learning disabilities. She works closely with the school psychologist to implement RTI in reading and math at the 8 participating elementary schools in the district. Among her many responsibilities, she administers the NCSIP II grant in her county. RF is part of the NCSIP II project and therefore under her direction.

The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction has been in her current position for five years. She works with the EC Director on the NC SIP II grant, RTI, and Reading Foundations. Previously, she held a similar position in a larger, more urban county in a different part of the state, and was a principal. She has an Ed. D. in school administration.

The instructional specialist has an M. Ed. in special education and a certificate in instructional technology. She has worked as a special educator and instructional specialist in three districts in the state over the last eleven years. Her professional responsibilities include developing, implementing, and evaluating the impact of professional development programs related to special education for all teachers in the county. She is a certified trainer for *Foundations of Reading*, and she provided training at the workshop the teacher participants in this study attended.

Context of the Study

As a North Carolina "School of Progress with high growth", Stone is positioned as a high -performing school located in a low- performing county (NCDPI, n.d.). The "school of progress" designation indicates that at least 60% of students performed at grade level on the 2009-10 high stakes assessments. "High Growth" indicates that growth in student learning exceeded the amount of growth that is expected in one year (NCDPI, n.d.). Overall, Stone outperformed district and state norms in reading and math on the 2009-2010 NC high stakes performance assessments. In particular, Stone's students in the economically disadvantaged and Hispanic subgroups exceeded the district and state levels of performance. In the subgroups, White, not economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities, Stone's performance was better than district norms but fell short of state norms. Stone did not have enough Black, American Indian, Asian Pacific Islander, or Limited English Proficient to form subgroups in these categories (NCDPI, n.d.). The school made adequate yearly progress (AYP) and met 13 out of 13 AYP goals (NCDPI, n.d.).

Stone served 507 students in the 2009-2010 school year. The school had 33 classroom teachers, 97% of whom were fully licensed, and these included 4 National Board Certified Teachers. One hundred percent of classes were taught by highly qualified teachers and 70% of teachers had 4 or more years of experience; forty-nine percent had more than ten years of experience. Eighteen percent of teachers had advanced degrees.

The teacher turnover rate is 4% compared to 9% in the district and 11% across the state (NCDPI, n.d.).

Stone is located in a rural county according to the U. S. Office of Rural Health Policy (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), which follows federal policy and assigns rural designation to all areas not identified as a metropolitan area by the US Census. (HRSA, 2009). The county has a population of 140,798 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The county is predominately White, with less cultural and linguistic diversity than either North Carolina or the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The median income in the county is lower than the state and national median incomes and the percentage of people living below the poverty line in the county is slightly higher than state and national percentages (U. S. Census Bureau, 2009). Slightly fewer people in the county finish high school than in NC or the US, and a much lower percentage of the population in the county have completed a bachelors degree or beyond than in the state or the nation (US Census Bureau, 2009). All teacher participants are residents in the county where Stone is located; thus, the study participants are probably not representative of the wider population of teachers in North Carolina or the United States.

Components of the Foundations of Reading (RF) Professional Development Program

The Foundations of Reading (RF) professional development program is a project funded through the North Carolina State Improvement Project II (NCSIPII). The NCSIPII is a personnel development program funded by the Office of Special Education Programs that evolved from the initial North Carolina State Improvement Grant (NCSIP

II, n.d.) which ran from 2000-2006. The RF professional development program has been used across the state. It includes twelve training units based on a review of the research literature that justifies the content of the program. Ninety-one Reading Foundation training events have served 1,942 participants (NCSIPII, n.d.) NCSIP classified the Foundations of Reading professional development program as one that provides teachers with information about research-based reading instruction.

The purpose of the RF program is to "develop the instructional competencies of school personnel to effectively teach students with persistent reading problems as well as to select and implement comprehensive reading programs within their schools" (NCDPI, 2009). The program focuses on preparing teachers to work with students who demonstrate persistent problems learning to read, especially students with disabilities who receive reading instruction in general education classrooms.

Overview

RF consists of 12 instructional units (9 trainer-led multi-media presentations and 3 homework projects) that present research-based information about reading development and reading instruction. Materials include an online multi-media text and a series of Power Point slides. Learning tasks include a series of "Table Talk" discussion questions and three projects. The projects require participants to (a) create a brief staff development program, including slides to educate their building colleagues about the findings of the national reading panel, (b) assess a student who is at-risk for reading failure and develop an instructional plan; and (c) select and review a reading program using the RF *Guidelines for Selecting an Effective* Program and develop a written report. More details

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about these homework assignments are available in Appendix D. All participant products are evaluated against RF rubrics. Participants have an opportunity to redo unsatisfactory products. The content of the nine units covered all five areas of reading instruction identified in the Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000), assessment practices, and data-driven instruction. Each unit included objectives and competencies that described what workshop participants should have learned from each unit. Detailed descriptions of the content, objectives, and competencies are available in Appendix D.

Course materials. The RF professional development program (also called course or workshop) materials consist of (a) an online text that students are to use independently as a primary source of information (NCSIPII, n.d.) and (b) Power Point slides that were developed to enhance the information presented in the online text. Trainers are directed to provide workshop participants with handouts of the slides and to lead participants' discussions of these slides. The trainers also prepared a resource table with a variety of books, pamphlets, and sample course materials related to the five key areas of reading (NRP, 2000) for participants to browse during breaks in the sessions. The list of materials that should be included on the resource table is included in the trainer's manual and participants in the *RF* workshop have access to the resource list via the online text (NCSIPII, n.d.)

Foundations of Reading **course delivery.** The RF training is delivered to teachers in a large group face-to-face format. The trainer manual describes RF as a "thirty-hour course that will require participants to complete readings and activities, which are designed to increase knowledge and strengthen skills in teaching students who

struggle with reading and spelling" (NCDPI, 2009). Although specific timetables for scheduling and delivering the course are not prescribed, the trainer's manual recommends that the course be presented as a series of workshops (each covering one or more units) spread out at intervals across a semester or school year. The rationale for delivering the course materials over an extended period of time is to allow participants opportunities to read the online text and other materials (NCDPI, 2009). Several model schedules are offered. These include (a) five sessions of 6 hours each spread over several months; (b) multiple shorter sessions (e.g. 10 sessions of 3 hours each) spread over several months; (c) three sessions of 1.5 to 2 days each. The teachers who were the participants in this study attended five sessions of 6 hours each spread across two weeks during June, 2010. The researcher observed the sessions that the participants attended. A second course (same content, different group) was also presented in June, 2010 that the participants did not attend. The researcher observed that session as well. The researcher attended the course twice to ensure that she had thorough knowledge of the course content and the teachers' experiences. Participants had not yet been recruited for this study and the researcher did not have IRB approval to collect observation data during the June, 2010 courses. Thus, the information presented about the June, 2010 course delivery has been reconstructed from the interview with the RF trainer participant in this study. The interview took place after all IRB recruitment procedures were approved.

During the June, 2010 course, four trainers presented over the five days. Each trainer was responsible for presenting on two or more units. Each unit was presented by one trainer. A pre-test of course participants was administered at the beginning of the first

day. The pre-test assessed participants' knowledge of the topics covered in the workshop. The presentations consisted of a small group discussion at the beginning of the daily session followed by Power Point presentations of the slides for each unit. Unit presentations lasted from 1-3 hours per unit. Within each unit, course participants were required to take part in small group discussions called "Table Talk" (NCDPI, 2009). These discussions were based on a series of "Forum Discussion Questions" (NCDPI, 2009). The stated purpose of the questions is to direct participants to use the online text resources. (NCDPI, 2009). Because many of the questions require participants to view online video, participants could only answer the questions if they had laptops with wireless internet connection during the workshop. The trainer's role in the Table Talk sessions is "to review the questions and provide feedback as necessary (e.g., to correct misunderstandings)" (NCDPI, 2009). The goal of the course was to increase teachers' knowledge of research-based reading instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers in general education classrooms.

Competencies. Course objectives and competencies for each RF instructional unit are described in the trainer's manual and are presented in Appendix D.

Required tasks. In order to receive CEUs for completing the course, RF requires participants to complete several learning tasks. Descriptions of the required learning tasks are presented in Appendix E. Three of the five participants received CEUs for the course because they satisfactorily completed the required learning tasks. Two of the five participants' learning tasks were rated as unsatisfactory by the district RF trainers who evaluated them. The learning tasks were returned to these two teachers who were advised

to redo the tasks. Upon completion, the teachers could resubmit their tasks for reevaluation and then receive the CEU credits. Both teachers decided not to resubmit.

Methods of Data Collection

The three data sources for this study were (a) documents, which included *Foundations of Reading* training and participant materials, the Stone school improvement plan, teachers' lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessment data; (b) transcriptions of digital audio recordings from interviews, (c) anecdotal field notes from classroom observations, staff meetings, and informal discussions with participants. The anecdotal field notes and the interview data were the primary sources of data. The documents were used to triangulate data from these two primary sources. Rubrics were developed to interpret the content of the data sources in the following areas: effective early reading instruction, professional development, and school change. The rubric for effective early reading instruction evidence-based reading instruction is grounded in Bursuck & Damer's (2011) framework for preparing teachers to deliver effective reading instruction to students with diverse learning needs in multi-tier general education classrooms. In this study, professional development practices and content were compared to best practices identified in three major reviews of the professional development literature (Darling Hammond & Richardson, 2010 ; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009). Finally, a rubric for school change was developed based on Michael Fullan's (2010) evidence-based framework for organizational transformation. The literature base for each rubric is described in Chapter 2 and the rubrics are available in Appendix A.

Documents

Documents were collected from a several sources and each document was examined to determine its alignment with the research questions. The documents were identified with one or more of the three high level categories discussed in Chapter 2. The three categories were: (a) reading instruction, (b) professional development, (c) school change Rubrics for each category were developed based on the literature and each document was compared to the appropriate rubric. Rubrics are available in Appendix A The researcher worked with university faculty to develop the rubrics that were used to examine the documents

Foundations of Reading **(RF) materials:** The trainer's manual and participant materials were examined using the professional development rubric (Appendix A). The materials were not examined using the reading rubric because in order to be part of the NC SIP grant the program had been already vetted and identified as a professional development course in research based reading instruction. Specifically, the researcher examined the trainers' instructions and guidelines, competencies and objectives, and required tasks to identify elements of evidence-based practices in professional development.

School improvement plan: The school improvement plan was examined using the school change rubric. The rubric was based on Fullan's (2010) model of organizational transformation (Appendix A).

Lesson plans. Weekly lesson plans were collected from the teacher participants and were examined for evidence of research based reading instruction using the reading

instruction rubric (Appendix A). The researcher looked through the lesson plan and identified and described all instructional activities that corresponded to the 5 key areas of reading. The researcher also identified and described all evidence-based instructional strategies that were used during lessons. The reading rubric was developed using Bursuck & Damer's (2011) model of research-based reading instruction in multi-tier classrooms. The researcher compared the lesson plan data to the anecdotal field notes and informal reading instructional analysis form data that were based on classroom observation in order to triangulate the data.

Instructional materials: A variety of instructional materials were collected from the teachers during the study. These include instructional activities used in the classrooms during reading instruction as well as information on the *Wilson Fundations* reading program, *Children's Progress* computer based assessment program, and *Waterford Lab* computer-based learning modules. The researcher used the reading instruction rubric (Appendix A) to examine these materials for evidence that they addressed the 5 key areas of reading (NRP, 2000) and/or use of evidence-based instructional strategies (Bursuck & Damer, 2011). The researcher also used reports from the Florida Center for Reading Research (Robinson & Wahl, 2004; VanSciver & Grek, 2004), and technical reports for commercial programs (CPAA, n.d.). In particular, information about programs' effectiveness and reliability were obtained from these external sources.

Assessment data. Deidentified, aggregated student performance data from the Fall and Winter AIMSweb administrations were obtained for each teacher's class as a whole. These data were summarized holistically and used to describe teachers'

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experiences with teaching reading during the study. The assessment data were integrated into the reporting of results.

Interviews

Interview data collection included open-ended interviews with each teacher participant (Appendix B) as well as open-ended interviews with district personnel participants. These personnel included the building principal, school psychologists, Reading Foundations trainers, building Curriculum Coordinator, the Assistant Superintendant for Curriculum, and the Director of Exceptional Children's Programs. Probes were used to elicit information about their experiences teaching reading and the *Foundations of Reading* program (teachers) or with reading instruction at Stone and in the district as well as the *Foundations of Reading* program. Although all participants were asked a core group of questions to determine their knowledge and beliefs about reading instruction and the RF program, targeted probes were also used to used understand individual participant's unique roles and responsibilities (Maxwell, 2005). All interview protocols are included in Appendix B.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher and the research assistant examined the transcriptions for reliability of emerging themes (Kurtts, 1998; Yin, 2009). These themes were used to triangulate the data obtained from the document review and the anecdotal field notes.

Anecdotal Field Notes

Documenting the experience of observing can take various forms (Merriam, 2001) and can range from continuous, to roughly sketched notes, to not recording

anything at all during an observation (Merriam, 2001). The researcher dictated her field notes at the end of each day's observations using Merriam's (1998) and Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) recommendations. To ensure the validity and reliability of the dictations field notes were recorded immediately at the end of each day of observation and the researcher used the field note dictation prompts (Appendix C) to guide the dictation. The digitally recorded dictations were transcribed using the speech to text software package, Dragon Naturally Speaking Mobile Premier 11. The observations were organized according to Merriam's (1998) guidelines for observational field notes and Spradley's (1980) approach to descriptive observation; thus the dictation included: (a) verbal descriptions of the setting, the people, and the activities; (b) the substance of what people said (Merriam, 2001); and (c) observer comments and impressions (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2001; Spradley, 1980).

The researcher described the instruction (group size, duration of instruction, student responses to instruction (behavioral and affective), teachers and other adults' responses to instruction (behavioral and affective), and discussed how the instruction is or is not consistent with the Bursuck & Damer (2011) framework. The researcher also described the salient features of the setting (physical layout of the classrooms, number of adults, significant features of classroom culture, usual and unusual occurrences, number of students, demographics). Bursuck and Damer's (2010)'s framework of evidence-based reading instruction in multi-tier classrooms was used to organize my observation field notes and the corresponding reading instruction rubric (Appendix A). The rubric allows the researcher to document the following:

(a) Content of Instruction: 5 key areas of reading-phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension; (b) Instructional Methods: Use of the 10 teaching enhancements to teach these 5 key areas; advance organizers, unison responding, effective signals, efficient use of teacher talk, perky pace, my turn-together-your turn teaching format, cumulative review, systematic error correction, teaching to success, and student motivational system.

The field note observational protocol (Appendix C) was a tool to organize the researchers' personal note taking. It was not validated for wider use. In addition to the reading instruction, field notes also documented the researcher's impressions and reactions to observations in situ (Shank, 2006). Thus, the transcripts also provided a rich source of data from which themes emerged that were related to reading instruction and school change. Data from the field notes were used to triangulate findings from the document review and interview data.

Analysis of Data

The researcher used pattern matching, the preferred strategies for case study analysis (Yin, 2009). Coding procedures and a data analysis plan provided categories of information which formed the basis of the emerging themes of the study (Creswell, 2009). The following steps were used in the coding procedures:

(1) Classifying data into preliminary, general categories.

(2) Grouping of data into categories of developing themes.

(3) Reexamining data to look for clarification of categories of information.

(4) Establishing reliability with a second reader with 100% agreement on

emerging themes (Kurtts, 1998; Yin, 2009).

Data were collected from each data source and analyzed, and the emerging themes

allowed the researcher to triangulate the data. Reoccurring topics became themes and

data were arranged to give meaning to the study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

As a single case study, the researcher and research assistant established reliability

with consensus of final decisions, judgments, and conclusions relative to the findings

from all data sources (Kurtts, 1998; Parrish, 2010; Yin, 2009). The research assistant was

a doctoral student who was knowledgeable about reading instruction in multi-tier

classrooms, professional development, and school change. The research assistant

analyzed 30% of the field notes and interview transcriptions, using the same methods as

the researcher (Parrish, 2010). The researcher and the research assistant discussed their

findings until a goal of 100% inter-rater reliability was achieved (Parrish, 2010). The

researcher used member checks with 100% of the participants to establish reliability for

the themes that emerged from the (a) document analysis of the Foundations of Reading

program materials, the school and district improvement plans, and lesson plans, (b) field

notes, and (c) interviews (Merrian, 1997). Participants indicated 100% agreement with all

themes.

Validity

       The greatest threat to the validity of this project is researcher bias. As Maxwell

(2005), Merriam (1997), Spradley (1980), and Schram (2006) advise, the researcher

maintained a clearly identified running dialogue with herself throughout data collection

and analysis. Using the research assistant as a second reader allowed the researcher to

compare interpretations of the data. The second reader was also asked to analyze the

interview questions in the transcripts to provide feedback on the extent to which the

researcher may have been leading the participants to a particular response. *A priori*, the

researcher determined that interviews in which the researcher was clearly influencing the

participant's responses would be excluded altogether or, included in the overall synthesis

if the researcher and second reader could agree that they were similar enough to other

participants' responses that the researcher's influence was unlikely to have significantly

changed the outcome. The second reader did not identify instances in which the

researcher was clearly influencing the participants' responses

       The other major threat to validity in this study is the nature of the researcher's

relationship with the participants. The researcher spent nearly 200 hours with the

participants over the course of the study. Much of that time was spent working as a

volunteer in their classrooms. Thus, the researcher knew the participants very well as

individuals by the time data collection was complete. The depth of these relationships

established the trust that allowed the participants to be comfortable enough to grant

access to all aspects of their reading instruction. The potential bias related to the

researcher being embedded in the context is a legitimate concern, yet a significant

amount of data was collected because of the interactions between the researcher and participants (Kurtts, 1998). Insider status allows the researcher to gain a valuable perspective that allows the researcher to produce a well-rounded, "accurate" portrayal of case study phenomenon (Kurtts, 1998; Yin, 2009). The use of research -based rubrics for data analysis, triangulation of the data among multiple data sources, the use of a second coder, and member checks reduced these threats to validity.

Summary

A qualitative case study method was used to describe the experiences of five K-1 general education teachers as they taught reading in multi-tier classrooms after participating in a professional development program devoted to evidence-based reading instruction that was part of school and system-wide improvement plans. Viewed through the lenses of evidence-based reading instruction, effective professional development practices and school change (Fullan, 2010), the case study was used to identify and describe factors that influenced the participants' experiences and describe how multiple system and building level school improvement affected teachers' professional experiences teaching students with diverse learning needs in general education classrooms. The qualitative case study method was selected because the approach allows the researcher to (a) explain complex relationships in applied settings, (b) describe the real-life context in which the research has occurred, (c) describe actual interventions, (d) explore research situations in which have no clear set of outcomes(Kurtts, 1998; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2009). Data analysis included pattern matching (Yin, 2009). The researcher and research assistant established reliability through consensus on final decisions,

judgments, and conclusions regarding interpretations of the data (Kurtts, 1998; Parrish, 2010). Participants completed member checks to establish the accuracy of the findings and to confirm the researcher's interpretation of the data (Kurtts, 1998; Parrish, 2010; Yin, 2009).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand general education teachers'

experiences with a professional development workshop in research-based reading

instruction. The researcher interpreted the teachers' experiences implementing strategies

covered in the workshop through a theoretical lens that took into account the teachers'

current classroom context, the professional development they received, and the way their

school was organized to accommodate change within an atmosphere of high-stakes

accountability. The purpose of the interpretive approach was to better understand the

factors involved in changing over to research-based reading practices in schools as seen

through the eyes of classroom teachers. Five early elementary teachers (three

kindergarten teachers and two first grade teachers), one elementary principal, one

curriculum coach, and four central office personnel (Director of Exceptional Children's

Services, Exceptional Children's Services Program Specialist, Assistant Superintendent

for Curriculum and Instruction, and School Psychologist), participated in the study. The

researcher conducted approximately 35-40 hours of participant observation in each

teacher participant's classroom. The researcher also observed approximately 40 hours of

weekly staff development meetings, and 20 hours of other school activities including

faculty meetings, student support team meetings, faculty committee meetings, and

teacher planning meetings.

Data were collected from (a) documents, which included *Foundations of Reading* training and participant materials, the Stone school improvement plan, the district improvement plan, teachers' lesson plans, and universal screening assessment data; (b) transcriptions of digital audio recordings from interviews, and (c) anecdotal field notes from classroom observations, staff meetings, and informal discussions with participants. The anecdotal field notes and the interview transcripts were the primary sources of data. Documents were used to triangulate interpretations from these primary sources. Yin's (2009) guidelines were used to analyze the data in the following manner.

The researcher used pattern matching to examine the data. Coding procedures formed the basis of the emerging themes of the study (Creswell, 2009; Mirriam, 1997). The coding procedures began with (a) classifying data into preliminary, general categories within each data source, (b) grouping of data into categories of developing themes within each data source, (c) grouping of data into categories across data sources, (d) reexamining data to look for clarification of categories of information; (e) establishment of reliability with a second reader with 100% consensus on emerging themes for field note observation data and interview data; (f) member checks with participants to establish reliability of the emerging categories across all data; and (g) a second round of member checks with participants to establish reliability of the emerging themes after all participants verified the accuracy of the categories (Merriam, 1997).

Results are reported under each emerging theme with supporting data sources. Data sources were (a) documents which included *Foundations of Reading* training materials, teachers' lesson plans, school and district improvement plans and

miscellaneous documents that were given to teachers during staff development meetings and faculty meetings; (b) anecdotal field notes; (c) interview transcripts.

Four recurring topics emerged from the analysis of the data; these themes are presented in the order that fits the narrative that emerged from the teachers' experiences. Theme 1: Teachers are committed professionals. Theme 2: Teachers do what they know how to do. Theme 3: Job-embedded professional development is essential for school change. Theme Four: Effective leaders provide high expectations and support. The results which follow have been organized to show how the participants' experiences related to teach of these themes as reflected in information gathered from the data sources of the study. For example, in presenting Theme 1: Teachers are committed professionals, the discussion will demonstrate how the anecdotal field notes and participant interviews revealed this information. This procedure is repeated until each emergent theme has been discussed and the data supporting the emergence of the themes have been reported (Kurtts, 1998; Yin, 2009). All participants work in the same rural school system and are known to one another. Thus, there were concerns about how to ensure participants' confidentiality if participants were identified by professional role instead of by name. For example, because all data were collected in a single school, identifying the school principal would clearly identify that participant to all other participants. Furthermore, because the teachers are well known to one another and the other participants, the researcher was concerned that consistently identifying individual teachers by some marker (number, letter, or other) would make it easy for other participants to figure out individual teachers' identities. Thus, the researcher has labeled all participants as either

"teacher" or "instructional leader" only when reporting interview data. Because the themes are based on aggregated data from multiple sources, the specific identities beyond the roles of teacher or instructional leader do not add value to the study and do pose potential risks for the individual participants. Speaker's roles were indicated at the end of each data point in order to clarify which professional perspective was represented by those data. Additionally, the data sources are labeled to indicate if the information came from documents, field notes or interviews to ensure that readers can differentiate between the researcher's reporting of events and the participants' own descriptions of their lived experiences. Given the amount of qualitative data included in this chapter, the researcher chose to use these labels to maximize readability and narrative flow.

Teachers are Committed Professionals

The ways in which the five teacher participants enacted their professional practice suggested that these participants are hard-working, committed professionals. Three sub-themes emerged from the data to support this theme: (a) a commitment to children, (b) continuous improvement and (c) collaboration. Each subtheme is described and supported with data from anecdotal field notes, teacher interviews, and interviews with other participants.

Children First

Children clearly come first in this rural elementary school. The following excerpt from field notes recorded on the first day of data collection offers a powerful example of teachers' commitment to children and families.

I arrived at (the teacher's) room at 8:10. Teacher was in the doorway of her classroom. She was handing a stack of towels and toiletries to the school nurse and introducing the nurse to a little girl. After the nurse left with the towels and the little girl, (the teacher) explained to me that the child and her mother were living in the mother's car and the little girl had not been bathed in several days. The school social worker had scheduled a meeting with the mother later that afternoon to discuss her options (Field Notes, October 7, 2010).

Throughout the study, the field notes repeatedly document similar occurrences such as teachers buying food to keep in the classroom to make sure all children have a morning and afternoon snack every day, collecting and packing backpacks of food for children to take home on the weekends, providing financial assistance to parents who ask for help paying a bill, and collecting coats and blankets to distribute directly to children and families in the school. Teachers also purchased or made many of their own instructional materials. Teachers were asked what they believed people would be surprised to know about teachers and schools.

Outside money, just what we spend on our own to purchase materials, especially now when budgets are so tight that they can't purchase what we need, it is the little things that we need to work with our kids (Interview, Teacher).

The teachers' commitment to children's academic success is also documented in the field notes. Most days the teacher participants are at school by 6:30 or 7:00 am and rarely leave before 4:30 or 5:00 pm. Teachers worked throughout the summer and over holidays to keep up with their non-teaching professional responsibilities. During the interview, one teacher explained why tasks such as grading and planning should not take place while they have children in the classroom.

There's gonna be days when the kids come to school like that and they are gonna be like "ughh, I don't want to learn anything today" but you know you have to model for them that you just kind of plug on so that they really get that mindset that I've really gotta get up and move on today, as far as this school, the administration wants what's best for kids and wants the kids actively involved and when I say actively involved that means that me as a teacher, I should be doing something with kids when they are here and not expecting them to be over there doing something by themselves while I'm resting (laugh) or grading papers…Kids need adult interactions, so many of them don't get good interactions at home, where are they gonna get it if they don't get it here from a teacher (Interview, Teacher).

All teacher participants report working at home to identify teaching resources they can use to be successful.

It varies just depending on what I've got going on at home but being that I don't have any kids at home anymore, it's real easy to get in there in the evening and spend two or three hours you know looking or making something (Interview, Teacher).

Other school personnel recognize the teacher's commitment to students and to innovation as indicated in the following excerpt from an interview with, an instructional leader.

…she loves a challenge, if there's something that maybe somebody else can't figure out, she'll sit right there and figure it out or, if you find a new website and you tell her about it, she will go home and get on that website and if, if ,if its something that really appeals to her, and she'll have stuff downloaded and printed and using it in her centers and I mean, if she's just, she wants those new ideas, those new things, and you know, she's wherever she gets if from, she's willing to look at it, and try, it and share it with everybody else…. and it doesn't work, she'll just keep on, you know, until she finds something that does…The teachers push themselves to identify new materials and new instructional tools that will help their students (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Continuous Improvement

The teachers in this study were interested in refining and improving their practice. Although all of the teachers' reported feeling overwhelmed at times by their many professional responsibilities and obligations, all teacher participants believed in continuous improvement and were interested in learning new ways to do their jobs. The field notes indicate that the teachers appreciated opportunities to learn to use technology more effectively in their classrooms. "I felt like I could do anything with technology when (she) was in the school" (Field Notes, December 5)

The teachers also believed in ongoing professional learning. The field notes document that much of the instructional materials teachers use are teacher- made and customized for the needs of the students in their classrooms. Interview data confirm this.

> I have a list of different places. I know Kelly's kindergarten is one place I like to go to, that's where I get a lot of those games from, she has it set up where you can go in and change the words you are working on so if you want to make the game with cvc words you can do that and then go back and change them to sight words if that's what you're working on, last year I had a group of kids where I was working on the two vowels walking together so I made a game with that, I even last year, with my top 2 groups worked on words with silent e at the end, I just made you know, games based on what I was working on, because you know….that's what the kids need, once they're introduced to the rule they just need practice, they don't really realize when they are playing a game that they are practicing, or what they're doing….(Interview, Teacher).

Teachers used the staff development to discuss instructional challenges and to identify new ways to approach students' instructional needs in the classrooms. The interest in collaboration is another indicator of the teachers' professional commitment.

Collaboration

Teachers met together for one hour a week of team planning time and 70 minutes a week of staff development. During these meetings teacher shared materials and ideas, asked questions and requested assistance, as well providing one another with social and emotional support through the ups and downs associated with teaching. An excerpt from the field notes describing one meeting provides an example of the collaborative problem solving observed during a team planning meeting.

> They analyzed the Venn diagram question and were able to explain very succinctly and very clearly that the problem was there were too many characteristics of the objects the kids were being asked to sort, and because the kids did not have very much, if any, experience with the Venn diagram, they just had no idea what to do. The team used the rest of the time to find activities they could use on their Smart Board that would help them to work on the concept of Venn diagram. The team also discussed how to communicate with the administration that it is a problem that this concept is assessed when it is not on the current or previous year's standard course of study. Finally, one teacher mentioned that she had spent 45 minutes on the phone with a very upset parent over the fact that a particular student had "failed" this portion of the benchmark when clearly the concept had not yet been taught. The rest of the team listened and empathized. Before they left, the team decided that two members would work on finding and developing activities for the Venn diagram using the Smart Board and two members would work with the curriculum coach to identify additional, "fun" activities the team could use to reinforce the concept. Finally, the team representative to the curriculum committee agreed to raise the team's concerns at the next curriculum committee meeting and ask if other grade levels had ideas for things they should be doing to teach this concept to students. (Field Notes, December 10).

Both teams to which the teacher participants were attached enacted this collaborative approach to their professional practice. Experienced teachers voiced a sense of responsibility to share with and support newer teachers, while newer teachers expressed their gratitude for the more experienced teachers' willingness to share.

(a teacher) last year told me, she said "you know (teacher) you really need to step out of here, you really need to go see what's going on because it's not happening, what you think it is," and I think, you know, that the girls would do it if they knew… really experienced teacher who is willing to share, you know I don't care but there's some people that if they do something they don't want to share it with anybody but you know, I don't mind, if it works, you try it and it may work for you and it may not, you know, I don't know, um, I do think they have to be willing to share (Interview, Teacher).

I think we got training last year but basically (the teacher) just told us how it works… in there it says to tap with their fingers but with kindergarten (teacher) showed us that its easier for them to tap down their arm because I can barely do the finger thing (laughs) if you blend it, how are you supposed to do that, are you supposed to snap? (Interview, Teacher).

People think these kids are babies and that they can't do what we have them do. That's something I really learned from (a teacher), that there is so much we can get them to do …if it wasn't for (a teacher), I would have probably ran out of here screaming because it just wasn't at all what I expected it to be. But she was a life saver. (Interview, Teacher).

Every teacher participant was active in school improvement activities including planning field trips, working with the PTSA, and serving on committees such as the curriculum committee, the school improvement team, student assistance team, and student intervention team. The teachers also participated in district level initiatives such as the annual technology fair, peer training for Reading 3D (a computer based assessment system), served as guest speakers at local colleges, and were active in professional organizations. These activities are further evidence of teachers' commitment, interest in continuous improvement, and collaboration. One teacher participant described her activities with a professional organization.

I'm affiliated with the [professional organization], we influence how reading is taught…We've been hearing this, all about the national panel and got Orton trained and all this kind of stuff, but all the teachers that I hobnobbed with are EC teachers– you know this, and in private schools, So it was kind of weird to have this regular ed teacher who wanted, you know, wanted to know more and, you know, that kind of thing. So I have thoroughly enjoyed, you know, that stint. But now it's gotten into, it's gotten into our, our system, into our classrooms. (Interview, Teacher).

These interview data are consistent with data from other interviews and the field notes that suggest that teachers in this study have significant power to influence policy and practice. An implication is that teachers' in this study are empowered to enact school improvement and school change. The extent to which teachers' instructional behaviors and instructional choices promote school improvement, however, appears to be directly related to teachers' knowledge.

Teachers Do What They Know How To Do

The five teacher participants in this study were observed during their reading/literacy instructional blocks. Data from anecdotal field notes, teacher interviews, and review of the teachers' lesson plans indicate that the teachers' knowledge about evidence-based reading practices as well as their knowledge of reading theory influenced these teachers' instructional choices. Although there were minor differences in content, in general all five teacher participants structured their reading instruction similarly. Descriptions of the teachers' commonly used instructional practices were based on the aggregated field note and interview data. These descriptions were triangulated using the lesson plans and are embedded in the following sections that describe the instructional practices used to teach each of the 5 key areas of reading (NRP, 2000).

Theory and Practice

  Phonics. Teachers in this study clearly understood the importance of phonics

instruction and knew how to teach phonics to early readers. When teachers and

instructional leaders were asked to talk about the five key areas of reading, all teachers

were able to accurately describe why phonics is important.

> …letter sounds and letters are the basis for their reading and their writing, and
> their speaking because we say those words and we drill it so much and Fundations
> has been great for that (Interview, Instructional Leader).

  All of the teachers used a commercial program (Wilson Fundations) or

commercial approach (Orton Gillingham) to teach phonics. The teachers used the

research based instructional strategies that were embedded within these programs to teach

phonics skills to their students. Both Orton Gillingham and Wilson Fundations delineate

an instructional sequence for introducing new letter sounds. These programs also show

teachers how to use systematic, explicit evidence-based instructional strategies such as

cumulative review, My Turn-Together-Your Turn, and unison responding, to teach

phonics to children. The teachers' lesson plans document which letter sounds and

spelling patterns were taught each week and also document that the teachers are using

these commercial programs' guidelines, practices, and activities to plan this part of their

literacy instruction. The anecdotal field notes indicate that research-based phonics

instruction was observed in all classrooms.

  Phonemic awareness. Few data indicate that teachers provided instruction,

evidence-based or otherwise, in the other four key areas of reading: phonemic awareness,

fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. A review of the lesson plans tells the same

story. The anecdotal field notes indicate that phonemic awareness was occasionally

addressed when children were asked to isolate a sound during spelling (first grade) or

play a rhyming game (kindergarten). Overall, however, no instruction in the fundamental

skills of blending or segmenting was recorded in the anecdotal field notes and no

evidence of blending or segmenting instruction was found in the lesson plans. During the

interviews, each teacher was asked to describe how she taught phonemic awareness.

Their answers follow:

> …we do have Fundations this year, which I have been very pleased with that. (Interview, Teacher).

> I feel like Fundations does so much with phonemic awareness…in the beginning it starts off with introducing a letter or two a week which is very different because we were used to doing with Zoophonics like five or six a day so you would really introduce the letter, the picture, and the sound and we went a lot more in depth with how to form the letters which is different from Zoophonics which didn't have a writing piece and that was just left for us (Interview, Teacher).

> …well we have our new program, Fundations, this year, which is really good, it's taken us from day 1, it spells it out lessons, and right now we're doing like, building cvc words and segmenting and stuff so the kids are getting that extra practice as far as phonics, I do writers workshop and I model for them to sound out words and connecting the letter and the sound for the writing (Interview, Teacher).

> Phonic, phonics and the phonemic awareness again, all those, we, we cover all those in our guided reading groups, small groups, but we also have skill groups and our spelling group with our assistant, so she covers a lot of, I mean we have activities and hands-on kinds of things with our kids.(Interview, Teacher).

…everything gets covered every day (Interview, Teacher).

When asked, teachers did not describe how they teach phonemic awareness in their classrooms. There is little in their answers to indicate that they clearly understand what phonemic awareness is. Furthermore, instructional leaders reported that universal screening data indicate that phonemic awareness instruction is not effective.

> I know that in [district] we do not teach phonemic awareness we just don't teach it (Interview, Instructional Leader).

> I think it was eye opening to her to present the data that [another instructional specialist] and I put together, and going "do you know what we look like in this county" just for a specific reading task like phonemic awareness do you see where we are, I think we were at like 30-something percent. (Interview, Instructional Leader).

However, the teachers who are using the Fundations program believe that it provides phonemic awareness instruction. In fact, Fundations does not explicitly teach the phonemic awareness activities, segmenting and blending, until children are beginning to spell. At that point in the instructional sequence, teachers to begin showing students how to break words apart to identify the sounds, match the sounds to the letter, and then write the letter. This instruction did not begin until late December. Field notes from kindergarten observations documented instructional activities that required students to manipulate, sound out, and read CVC word as early as October. Because teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of phonemic awareness, either in theory or in practice, when students struggled with CVC word tasks, the teachers did not recognize that some

students were having difficulty because of their inability to perform basic phonemic

awareness tasks of isolating and manipulating the sounds of spoken language.

Vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Similarly, the aggregated data did

not indicate significant teacher knowledge about vocabulary, comprehension, or fluency.

> Well to me, kindergarten is going to be the phonics and phonemic awareness, those are the two things we really need to work on in kindergarten (Interview, Teacher).

> Okay, for comprehension I haven't done a whole lot as far as in my literacy groups yet cause some of them are just getting into books but as far as doing read-alouds, we'll kind of talk about stuff, I need to get better about it, I just forget, like read a book and I'll kind of talk about what I thought the moral of the story is or whatever but its kind of hard for me to remember to talk about here's what happened next so I really need to do more with them as far as that…and what are the others?... fluency-yeah, fluency just the more they practice reading, right now they're not very fluent because they are learning to sound out words, and the more sight words they learn will help with that too and right now our homework is getting ready to be, we're going to have spelling tests on Fridays…I think we have like three a week, and they do different little activities with them throughout the week like typing them on the computer, and rainbow words, and that really helped the group last year to learn to read and spell those 25 high frequency words that they need to learn in kindergarten and it really helped with their reading and their writing as they learned to spell using those sight words I think their fluency will come along as they learn those … and what was it, you said vocabulary… I mean we really do a lot with vocabulary, as far as, I'll talk to them about the words that are in the stories we're reading what does that word mean, what's that word remind you of, and when I'm doing read alouds I'll ask them if anyone knows what that word means to see if someone has a background knowledge of that word and if nobody knows then I'll try to explain it to them. (Interview, Teacher).

> So we're actually practicing the skill that we are learning and spelling and, and the vocabulary, the comprehension, the fluency, the, you know, all that stuff we're talking about that we, we need to incorporate in that. And then maybe the next day we would, we would re-read that story. The next day we might pull the basal. If we have time we pull the basal that, you know, at the end of that lesson. I know we do some writing, we do vocabulary, we do spelling, reading and

writing. And then they practice the skill that we've taught and we might pull in some other skills like our working on synonyms right now so we might pull synonyms out of the — you know, out of the little reader. And, of course, then we integrate it with our basal. I mean we pull our basal in, and is that what you want, I mean – and other literature (Interview, Teacher).

When the teachers were asked to describe how they taught vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency to their students, the teachers did not do so. These findings are consistent with the emerging theme; teacher knowledge influences teacher practice. Teachers did not articulate theoretical knowledge of vocabulary, fluency, or comprehension areas and the field notes and lesson plans do not document evidence-based instruction in vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. It is important to note, however, that these areas may have been addressed in content area instruction or other activities that the researcher did not observe and that the teachers did not think to describe. Thus, it is not clear to what extent or in what contexts the teachers in this study may have provided instruction in vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency.

Interestingly, the second reader of these data noticed that the anecdotal field notes and the lesson plans do not document instances of planned teacher oral read-alouds which are the natural medium for vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency instruction with pre-alphabetic readers. The researcher and second reader concluded that teachers' knowledge of theory and evidence-based practice in comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency is limited, based on these data. This conclusion is supported by the following data collected during the interview with an instructional leader in which she describes the school's problem solving process.

When they come to tier 3 and they write down what they are receiving in the core I ask them "What does your reading look like, how are you addressing these 5 areas" some teachers [snaps her fingers briskly to indicate automaticity] other teachers "we do small groups" [Instructional leader] "Can you tell me about those small groups" [teacher] "Well I have a group over here, a group over here, and a group over here." "[Instructional leader] "what are you doing with the children, how are you using, how are you incorporating what the National Reading Panel suggests that you do" and some of the teachers have a hard time. Some of the teachers also say things but don't act upon them (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Finally, universal screening data from Fall and Winter AIMSweb administrations (email communications, Instructional Leader to researcher, February 14, 2011) show that 10% to 40% of students in the five teacher participants' classes performed below the school and district benchmark targets on the mid-year AIMSweb assessments of early reading skills. Although these results alone were a cause for concern, the school and district do not compare their students' performances to benchmark targets based on national norm samples because the national norm targets are significantly higher. The instructional leaders explained that comparing local students to national norms would result in too many students looking like they need Tier 2 intervention. Thus, at this point the real value of the assessment program at the school is to indicate that there is clearly a problem with the Tier 1 reading program. When students' performance on early reading skills are compared to national norm targets, the percentages of students in each class who were below benchmark ranged from 25-100 percent in early reading skills including phonemic segmentation fluency, letter naming fluency, letter sound fluency, and nonsense word fluency. However, although their performance was below the national benchmark scores for the most recent benchmark testing period, student performance was best on the Nonsense Word Fluency assessment which is a measure of phonics

knowledge. This result corroborates the researcher's conclusions that students are

receiving phonics instruction. Students' poor performance on phonemic segmentation

fluency is consistent with the other data that indicate that students do not receive

phonemic awareness instruction. Students learn what they are taught.

Instructional Decision Making

The data are similar when it comes to teachers' instructional decision making.

The school was in its second year of a grassroots RTI implementation. Thus, many

assessment data were collected. The instructional leaders expressed intention was that

these data would inform intervention groupings and instructional practices for

interventions.

> We use AIMS web for benchmarking three times a year. We try to look at all the
> pieces and figure out and that's why they are given a data sheet that they are
> supposed to be filling out. Each child has three, three lines, fall, winter, and spring
> and across it you're supposed to have all of your information; if it's AIMSweb,
> Children's Progress, if its DRAs, grades. So, you indicate all those and you
> should be able to see if that's consistent or if it's not. If it's not, we need to figure
> out what is the true strengths and weaknesses of that child… it needs to be
> flexible groupings, this is not something that is static and is gonna stay, you know
> if this child is in this group, they're not gonna stay there all year… we need to
> continually use your data to say we're making progress in this area now we're
> gonna move to the more difficult one (Interview, Instructional Leader).

In their own classrooms, however, teachers reported using DRA scores and

teacher judgment to form their instructional groups

> ….those are flexible groups. I usually don't flex mine, unless there's something
> pretty, pretty demonstrative. I, I wait until the, this, this now this next quarter, I'll
> regroup. After DRAs and after, you know, I've seen how they have progressed
> we, we'll adjust and flex, you know, so – some will move up, some may move
> down (Interview, Teacher).

The field note data indicate that during the two quarters the researcher was observing and gathering data in these five classrooms, one student in one of the five classrooms was moved between groups. The field notes indicate that when asked about the move, the teacher reported that he had "worked hard" and was ready to move up. Otherwise, the field note data do not suggest that teachers are using assessment data to form their instructional groups or to move children between instructional groups.

The interview data offered insight into teachers' decision making processes when planning instruction. Teachers were asked how they choose materials for the reading instruction.

> I just look at my leveled readers and see what I think they'll be successful at and sometimes we even play games over here, with a certain skill, and now that my kids are coming along, like my top group, we'll start working on different skills, like the silent e, um making the vowel say its name, when two vowels are walking the first one does the talking deal, we'll start working on different skills, um, but yeah, I kind of just look at my leveled readers and see what I think they're good at. The first day if I see that book's too hard, I just plan day by day, I don't plan by the week. (Interview, Teacher).

> We just find the books that we think are good for right now and we just pull from that whatever skills we are working on right now, whatever skills we feel like they need. Because I might do the same book with all of my groups but I might not be working on the same skill. Like with my lower group, we might be doing concept of print but my higher groups we're reading, it just depends on their level….(Interview, Teacher).

> It depends because like my top group has skipped, skipped a book and I skip around. …'Cause we don't follow each – that's not your bible. That, that's a guide. We use, we use the stories. We love the literature that comes out of the basal….– but – and, and also we use a lot of our guided , I mean our, what's the word? Uh, decodable….– and they follow it. They really pretty much – our spelling system follows our – we, basically I guess follow that Orton sequence….

> And then maybe the next day we would, we would re-read that story. The next
> day we might pull the basal. If we have time we pull the basal that, you know, at
> the end of that lesson.(Interview, Teacher).

The interview data suggest that teachers do not use a systematic approach to

planning for evidence-based reading instruction or use research-based assessment data

when making instructional decisions in their general education classrooms

Field note data raised questions about how teachers were planning the

instructional activities for the literacy centers that did not involve teacher-led guided

reading. The researcher noted on several occasions that the other centers did not seem to

correspond to the students' instructional levels and did not appear to be significantly

differentiated. Major activities included worksheets, independent writing, and coloring

activities. Lesson plans did not offer insight into how the activities, instructional goals, or

materials in the centers were related to the phonics instruction and reading levels of the

different instructional groups within each class. Thus, teachers were asked to describe

how centers were related to reading instruction and how teachers' differentiated

instruction within these centers for groups with different skill levels and knowledge of

reading.

> I know we do some writing, we do vocabulary, we do spelling, reading and
> writing. And then they practice the skill that we've taught and we might pull in
> some other skills like our working on synonyms right now so we might pull
> synonyms out of the basal….we might do something else with, you know, pull in
> the base, just use the base one, use a lot of the vocabulary and lot of the skills out
> of the basal to do that. So, the (lowest performing group) I might just have them
> do that, that de– that decodable reading all week long… And, I mean, they just
> need that drill, drill, drill and repetition, repetition, repetition, so those kids need
> to see it more and do more with it.(Interview, Teacher).

Simple is best. I have four stations, and it's like with first grade you have a skill, you have a spelling skill, and you revolve, your centers for that week are going to revolve around the spelling center. It's gonna revolve around those words and around that skill that you're teaching. Plus you focus on a skill that you're working on, whether it be contractions, compound words, and you have to realize that they all can't do, now sometimes we have, like if we have a center on contractions, there's color-coded cards that the top group has and the middle, and then that bottom group because — you know, some centers they can all do the same, but, you know, like at a writing you make, you expect more from your top group — than your bottom group, but some they can do the same, have the same expectations, and others you have to adjust (Interview, Teacher).

Sometimes the centers are dead on with what I'm doing and sometimes they differ. Sometimes they might leave me and have something else to do at the next center and sometimes it's just another skill that we've already taught and they can practice independently….we have a lot of cvc games. (Interview, Teacher).

Most of those centers, (a teacher) and her team before developed most of those centers, so we get them from her, but yeah, it seems to be that they work for all areas of kids, but which my low groups don't go to those centers because we only have four rotations so they stay with (instructional assistant) for 30 minutes so that's two rotations, and (instructional assistant) for fifteen and me for fifteen. I mean we kind of wish they were getting that independent practice but at the same time, it's great that they are getting all that one-on-one adult time because they have other times through-out the day that they are getting to work independently… So, like we're working on the sight words "can" and "you". So she might have the sentence "can you see a _____" and they might finish the sentence with a word from each child and then she writes it on the chart and they might practice reading those sentences and then the next day um they cut 'em apart, (the instructional assistant) writes them on a piece of paper and they cut them apart and they have to put their sentence in order and they might have to change with someone else, just practicing getting the capital letter at the beginning and the punctuation at the end, words so they make sense, that goes on for four days, I only do literacy for four days, and then on the last day they glue them down on paper and illustrate their sentence. So they are getting extra practice with sentence structure, reading the sight words, that kind of thing. (Interview, Teacher).

During the interviews, the teachers did not clearly describe how their center activities were related to the reading instruction or how they differentiated instruction within the centers for groups with different skill levels and knowledge of reading, Data collected in the field notes suggested that worksheets were often used to cover concepts from the standard course of study. Several times over the course of the study, the researcher noted concerns in the field notes that center activities required students to (a) read directions that were clearly beyond their current reading level, (b) use academic skills they did not possess such as using a dictionary, or (c) emphasized skills such as drawing, coloring, or decorating that the researcher believed were not effective uses of instructional time. Although the teachers described differentiation strategies such as color coding materials for different groups and assigning instructional assistants to work with the lowest performing groups, the researcher did not observe these practices or see evidence of these practices in the lesson plans or instructional materials. These data suggested to the researcher that the teachers did not know how to either integrate evidence-based practices in reading instruction into their literacy centers or effectively differentiate instruction within the literacy centers using evidence-based instructional practices.

However, teachers did learn to implement a different evidence-based school improvement initiative; the researcher observed teachers learning how to use the RTI process. A key difference between the teachers' instructional decision making in their general education classrooms and their work with planning interventions as part of RTI was the job-embedded support they received for the RTI decision making process. The

anecdotal field note and interview data document that teachers learned how to use assessment data to move children between tiers of intervention as part of the RTI process. The school psychologist used a monthly staff development meeting to teach the grade level teams how to implement RTI. During the meetings Beth, the school psychologist, showed each individual teacher a printout of her students' latest scores on the most recent universal screening assessments and then guided each teacher through the process of identifying the children that needed to be looked at more carefully based on the data. Beth then helped each teacher determine what level of intervention the child needed and why, helped the teacher document that decision, assisted the teacher in choosing an evidence-based intervention, and ensured the teacher knew how and when to monitor and document student progress. The school psychologist conducted this meeting every month and the teachers' knowledge of and comfort with the RTI process appeared to increase over time. Field note data suggest that the teachers appreciated opportunities for guided practice with immediate feedback.

> What the teachers liked about (instructional leader) and RTI is that it makes their student assistance teams meeting really quick and efficient because a teacher will bring a child to assistance team and there's classroom data, there are children's progress data, and now there's the AIMSweb data that the assistance team looks at and based on that they are able to make instructional recommendations for interventions which (instructional leaders) have already assembled. They hand that over to the teacher and say try this for four weeks, monitor the progress, and then come back and we'll make a decision about what to do next, and so the process of student assistance team is actually much smoother, much quicker, and much more efficient and the teachers, according to (a teacher), find that they're actually getting something really useful out of that process, and then (a teacher) also told me that all of that is documented in a student's folder which follows that student across their matriculation to higher grades so that, for instance, (a teacher) had a student that they did some assistance team intervention stuff with last year who went into second grade and based on his performance at the beginning of the

year in second grade on the AIMSweb and the data that were collected last year this student is now receiving additional attention and perhaps some small group intervention.(Field Notes, November 10).

The observed differences in teachers' knowledge of RTI versus knowledge of reading suggest that these teachers are willing and able to integrate new information and practices into their teaching and professional decision making once they know how to do so. A significant difference between the RTI implementation in the school and the use of evidence-based reading instruction in general education was the extent to which these two school improvement initiatives were job-embedded. The RTI implementation was supported with ongoing guidance and applied practice using actual information from the teachers' day-to-day teaching experience. The evidence-based reading instructional initiative did not provide teachers with a similar level of support. Thus, a third theme that emerged from these data involves the need to provide teachers with job-embedded support if the goal is to change teachers' professional practice.

Job-embedded Professional Development is Essential for School Improvement

The teachers in this study were willing to learn new things and develop new skills. Indeed, these teachers repeatedly expressed their beliefs that professionals can always improve their practice and should be willing to try new things. Professional development is embedded in the school culture as is the belief that professional development can be an agent of school change.

> … staff development every week that – get that done, get that just in time training and make sure that they're always learning and implementing, learning and implementing and make sure that's tacked up and so we started doing that and, I

don't know how else to get it implemented without showing people, training people as to what we want (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Two sub-themes emerged from the aggregated data. First, all participants believed that effective staff development needs to be job-embedded. Second, the professional development workshop associated with the school improvement initiative in reading, *Foundations of Reading*, is not yet job-embedded.

Effective Staff Development is Job-Embedded

All participants, teachers and others, expressed the belief that staff development should directly relate to teachers' experiences in their classrooms. The district improvement plan lists the following objectives as part of its goal to "recruit, train, and retain highly qualified professionals". The first is "Support district literacy initiatives through research-based professional development for beginning teachers in order to ensure success in the classroom setting.. The second is "Provide professional development that supports data-driven instruction for teachers and administrators." (District Improvement Plan, 2010-20111). The school improvement plan describes the following challenge:

> The challenge for all staff is to move from a traditional approach to teacher, to the incorporation of a facilitator model using practices such as balanced literacy…curriculum differentiation…in order to prepare students with competencies and skills needed to compete and excel in the 21st century (School Improvement Plan, 2008-2011).

To address this challenge, the school improvement plan indicates that "Staff development

will be offered onsite in reading, math, and technology strategies and differentiation"

(School Improvement Plan, 2008-2011).

All teachers received 70 minutes of staff development each week. These meetings

take place during the work day when children are in specials. Topics covered during the

weekly staff development included technology, RTI, math, and differentiation. Each topic

was covered one week a month. Data from the field notes describe the following staff

development meetings on the topics of technology and RTI.

> I sat through the staff development again and this time the technology coordinator
> was showing them a web crawler or a search engine that's been approved that is
> filtered and so they'll actually be able to use it in their classrooms with their kids
> on their computers and on their Smart Boards to look for things (Field Notes,
> December 1).

> I got to sit in on the RTI trainings for the two different teams, and what happened
> was an EC teacher was there during staff development time who had obviously
> been trained, who knew how to use the AIMS web data, and she had asked the
> different teams to come to their staff development time and bring their folders and
> any kids that they had in the process and that they had questions about… (a
> teacher) had a kid that she had that looked like he or she was at high risk for
> academic failure based on classroom performance, and it was the kid that had
> shown up from out of state and without any records, and they were considering
> putting this kid back in kindergarten. And so she had done phonemic
> segmentation fluency, letter sound fluency, letter naming fluency and nonsense
> word fluency with this kid and all of the scores were totally within the normal
> range, except for letter naming fluency, which is a test of lexical recall or working
> memory rather than kid skill or knowledge and that was really low, so what's
> happening is that kid's recall struggles are making the rest of his or her reading
> performance look really bad, and they were getting ready to stick this kid back in
> kindergarten. And so it was very exciting to actually see the RTI process working
> because the data clearly indicate that the kid has the necessary skills to learn to
> read, he or she just isn't pulling that information out of mind quickly enough to
> decode fluently. The teacher was surprised and clearly relieved not to have to

send this kid back to kindergarten. They decided that the teacher would go to the student assistance team meeting to get some interventions to try with the student to work on letter naming fluency (Field Notes, November 17).

These field note excerpts were representative of the job embedded professional development that occurred during weekly staff development meetings. The teachers received expert guidance and support as they learn to integrate new technology and new ways of looking at children and teaching into their existing professional practice. Staff development included lessons teachers used to instruct the standard course of study and were based on data gathered from current students teachers worked with every day in their own classrooms. The connections between the technology, the research, and the practice were explicit and systematic. Teachers could ask question and offer suggestions, as well as give and receive feedback. An instructional leader described the regular monthly schedule for the different topics allowed the school leadership and staff development facilitators to constantly adapt the staff development to meet the teachers' emerging professional needs in the four areas of focus, technology, math, reading, and differentiation.

> …now it's the culture of our school that we do – that we have ongoing training and that we roll out things in a way that makes sense. You roll it out and you implement it. And we look for it. And we fix it. It's not, if this is not quite how you do it, then, you know, you, you tweak it. You work on it and you practice it and that, in my experience that's the only way to make, to make a, to make a change happen in school (Interview, Instructional Leader).

As previously noted in the discussion of Theme 2, the aggregated data suggested that teachers did not have significant knowledge about four of the five essential areas of

early reading instruction. These data also suggested that teachers were not providing differentiated, evidence-based reading instruction in their general education classrooms. Phonics was the only area in which teachers consistently demonstrated theoretical knowledge and was also the only area in which teachers were observed using any evidence-based reading instructional practices. All five teachers used commercially developed programs to teach phonics using systematic, explicit evidence-based instruction. While these commercial programs were not designed to provide comprehensive literacy instruction, an important finding is that the one area in which the teachers provided effective instruction was the one area covered by the programs. This finding may indicate that teachers in this study would provide evidence-based instruction in all of the areas of reading if they had a reading program that included systematic, explicit instruction in these areas. Indeed, based on the aggregated data, including the AIMSweb universal screening data provided by the school psychologist, it appears that the commercial reading programs used provided teachers with the support they needed to understand the importance of phonics instruction and how to integrate the evidence-based practices into their instruction.

Instructional leaders explained that he district, however, has not adopted a single evidence-based program in early reading instruction for use in all general education classrooms. Instead, multiple programs of varying quality are used in different elementary schools across the county. As a result, there was a lack of consistency in the quality of reading instruction within the county.

I think we've got Letter Land out there, we've got Fundations, Corrective Reading, Reading Mastery, Language!, we have too much of a lot of things, too much can be just as detrimental as not enough… We don't have one single curriculum for a baseline across all of our elementary schools, of saying hey look, this does have a good amount of the five components or this one is good but we need to supplement in this area because we're missing something in this portion of it or we're not hitting the vocabulary well, what can we supplement that wise if we're not sure it's a completely strong mixture. We'll do the training piece of it but I think it's going to have to come from higher up of of ensuring the programs that are in place will complement the components that all children need (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Wilson Fundations was bought for all the EC teachers in the elementary schools…. We're gonna finish up training this spring and next year it'll be mandated for EC teachers, but I can't mandate for regular ed…. We've got some that won't use *Corrective Reading* and *Reading Mastery* and we've got some that, you know, we just do guided reading and we've got …*ZooPhonics*…that's probably one of our biggest issues is there's no, you know – a program …you know, district-wide…. – because especially here, kids seem to change schools a lot and do different things (Interview, Instructional Leader).

To address these challenges and to increase teachers' knowledge of evidence-based reading instruction, the Director of Exceptional Children's Services worked with the district administrators to give all K-2 general education teachers, EC teachers, Title 1 teachers, and curriculum coaches working in RTI schools opportunities to participate in the Foundations of Reading (RF) training developed under the OSEP funded North Carolina State Improvement Grant. Details about the (RF) program are described in Chapter 2. The researcher did not evaluate the content of the RF workshop because the NC State Improvement Project has designated RF as a research-based professional development program in reading instruction (NCSIP, n.d.). There is little clarity, however, about what aspects of the program are evidence-based. The reading content is evidence-based but the manner in which teachers are prepared to use the reading content

in their classrooms is not. The data in this study suggest, however, that at present the

implementation of RF in this district is not job-embedded which may explain why

teachers who attended the workshop did not articulate knowledge about four of the five

key areas of reading and were not observed using more evidence-based reading

instruction in their classrooms.

Foundations of Reading **was not sufficiently job-embedded**

All five teacher participants volunteered to attend the five day RF training in June,

2010. Other participants in the study including the curriculum coach participant, school

psychologist, principal, and EC Director also attended the RF training in the last two

years. The instructional specialist is a certified trainer for RF and was involved with these

trainings. Three sub-themes emerged from the data that suggest in its current

implementation, the RF professional development is not sufficiently job-embedded to

affect instructional practice. These are relevance, guided practice, and coaching.

Relevance. The teachers were asked to discuss their thoughts on their experiences

with the RF workshop. Although all teachers believed the content was important and

helpful for teachers to know, these kindergarten and first grade teachers questioned the

extent to which they could use much of this information in their own classrooms.

> um…I think, I definitely picked up some things that were beneficial as far as the
> sounds and the placement in the mouth and the sounds that are closed, open, I
> mean I forget all the terms really, good, I mean I never was taught that stuff in
> college, just liked brushed on, we took like one reading course, so I've just kind
> of learned as I've gone along so it was good to learn some new information, some
> things I felt like weren't relevant to kindergarten, it might be good for upper grade
> teachers or middle school teachers, as far as certain words being Greek or Anglo
> Saxon..saxlon?,,,saxon. I can't say it, Anglo Saxon (laugh), but that's not really
> useful for me in kindergarten but I may move to a different grade level one day so

it might help but yeah, as far as that I thought was good. Some stuff was stuff I already knew or stuff that's really not relevant necessarily, 'cause kindergarten is really different from say second grade (Interview, Teacher).

….I know that the district has, um, I know that we have the state programs that we have adopted but…um, I don't know how to put this, … And, I think a lot of times when we are making those adoptions, it has to be county wide, and a lot of times I think that we are looking at what is best in a second or third grade….I think it would be good if we can make, you know, choices on what's best for the kindergarten level, you know what's best for first grade level, instead of it having it be the same thing for all levels….(Interview, Teacher).

The foundations was a lot…and I do use some of it like the mouth placement and tongue placement but I really felt like it was really geared toward first grade and second grade and maybe higher because a lot of that stuff, especially like the word origins, our kindergartners are not going to do things like that (Interview, Teacher).

A review of the *Foundations of Reading* training materials and required assignments yielded data that were consistent with the teachers' concerns about the training's relevance to their teaching situations. To receive all 5 CEU credits, participants had to identify a student who was struggling in early reading skills, assess the student using a sample assessment developed for use as part of the RF training, use these data to diagnose the student's instructional needs, write goals and objectives to address the student's needs, and make evidence-based instructional recommendations (Foundations of Reading Trainer's Manual, 2009). An instructional leader explained,

They'll get the 3 credits for sitting through the workshop, which is what the state says if you are going to come in and observe the class you will get the three credits, but if you are going to do the homework and all that stuff you will get the five… but the expectation was that they would do the homework and do it to a level that shows that they grasped the material and could go back and utilize the skills taught in their classroom (Interview, Instructional Leader).

The assignment was due by September 30, 2010. Early kindergartners typically

do not have sufficient experience with early reading to be appropriate for this project

because they have not yet received instruction. Thus, the kindergarten teachers assessed

first grade students in order to complete the project by the deadline. Although the

kindergarten teachers successfully completed the project and received their CEUs, data in

the researcher's field notes indicate that they did not believe the project had much to do

with the way they instruct or assess or plan for reading instruction in their kindergarten

classrooms. Data from the document review of the RF trainer's manual raise further

questions about the relevance the training had for the teacher participants.

> Make sure they [workshop participants] understand that it [the assessment
> required for the project] is a **sample** [emphasis in original] of items that are
> similar to those found on other tests and NOT [emphasis in original] a complete
> test. The BSRA [sample assessment] was developed for use as part of the
> Foundation training to provide practice in evaluating students. Actual tests that
> are appropriate for use with students are described on the CD and in the handout
> (Foundations of Reading Trainers' Manual Unit 4 Slides and Notes, n.d.).

The teachers had access to AIMSweb materials and data in their school and were learning

to use these tools as part of their RTI implementation. It is possible that allowing teachers

to complete the student assessment project using one of their own students and authentic

materials from their lived professional experiences may have improved the relevance the

teachers' found in the training.

During the training all participants were shown slides and received handouts

explaining how to complete the assessment project. Trainers also shared a completed

sample project with the teacher participants during the summer workshop. Teachers also

had access to information about student assessment and writing goals and objectives via the online text that is available to all workshop participants. However, some teachers felt that the workshop would be improved by more explicit guided practice.

Guided practice. The Foundations of Reading program consists of approximately 30 hours of face-to-face contact with workshop participants in an interactive workshop format. The workshop materials are comprised of approximately 750 slides, an online text, and approximately 30 pages of supplemental handouts that include materials for in-class activities, resource lists, and examples of evidence-based practices in assessment and instruction. Participants have to complete discussion questions based upon the unit topics, which provide participants the opportunity to take the material to a deeper level of understanding (Interview, Instructional specialist). All workshop participants were required to complete 3 homework projects to receive five CEU credits for the workshop. Participants were expected to complete the work needed to receive all five CEUs. If participants did not complete the homework they will still receive 3 CEUs for sitting through the entire workshop. The homework assignments included the following (a) review a commercial reading program, (b) assess an at-risk student using the RF developed *Basic Reading Skills Assessment* (BRSA) and develop an instructional plan (including goals and objectives) based on the examples provided in the RF participant slides and materials; and (c) create materials to share information about the findings of the NRP with people at school. Participants received written feedback on these homework assignments and had opportunity to correct and resubmit assignments if the initial products were not acceptable (Foundations of Reading Trainers Manual, 2009).

The interview data revealed conflicting perceptions of the extent to which teachers' felt prepared and supported to complete the homework assignments successfully. The teachers' expressed concerns about the volume of material and the instructional approaches used during the workshop.

> I thought it went really fast this summertime. I mean I just thought they just kind of, if I hadn't had the background that I have, I don't think I could've absorbed. I, I don't think I could've absorbed it, the way they threw it at us and they really, you know, and when things were challenged, I don't think they – I know that there were a lot of teachers in there that were lost. I mean I just don't think they, we just didn't get that theory in college (Interview, Teacher).

> [They] needed more demonstrations. Too fast, that's again, throwing something out there and not taking time with it… It seems like we were always given more information — we were given the information and the ideas and, and, but you know, these are ideas and things that we have tried to push forever, and nobody listens (Interview, Teacher).

Teachers also expressed that they did not have adequate support to feel confident completing the assignments.

> The teachers are finished with their RF hw assignments and submitted them on time…they told me that they have no idea if what they did was good enough or right but that it took forever ….(Field Notes, October 10).

> ….that's not something you can throw at people. I mean, it takes baby steps, you know? Or I don't know, let people practice what they're learning and, I mean I'll tell you, taking that child, I have assessed I don't know how many countless. We've, we've assessed kids forever and ever and ever and ever, and my paper wasn't pleasing to them. I just, and there were no comments, kind of like national boards, you know, they don't give you feedback, which is something you always give your students. You try to give them feedback so they know, you know, and have a point of reference, so they know next time not to do it that way or to do it that way or whatever, but no, I was just told to do Section this, this and this over again and resubmit it (Interview, Teacher).

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On the other hand, instructional leaders expressed beliefs that the workshop provided

adequate support for participants to be successful and learn from the activities.

> …we provide a lot of feedback on what they're missing, it's not just, you know, checks and minuses, it's really, you know, you really need a little bit more assistance with this. What we've offered is that the first and third Wednesday of every month, (another trainer) and I are here for help sessions. Normally we're here with a lot of EC paperwork but we also want to provide assistance as well. We say if there is an area you are stuck in come sit with us and we'll work through whatever it is or strategy you're struggling with and look at your assessments and figure out what it would be like to work with students who have this difficulty, if they are really struggling, because we do know that in five days it is a ton of information to put you know into it, that if they want to come back and just sit in on a session, you know if you need to hear units five and six again, we'd love to have you back to sit through it again if that is what you need and we've had one or two people to come back and do that. There are opportunities. ….The biggest thing for us is not to nail then on the homework, its making sure that they are going to go back and implement the things with fidelity, because we want to make sure that kids are going to get the best instruction possible (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Three of the five teacher participants successfully completed the homework

assignments and received 5 CEUS. Two of the five teacher participants did not

successfully complete the homework assignments and received 3 CEUs. The contrast

between the teachers' and the instructional specialist's perspectives on the guidance and

support available to workshop participants as they completed the assignments intended to

help teachers apply the workshop content in their classrooms may explain to some extent

the findings presented earlier; namely, teachers do not demonstrate knowledge of or use

evidence-based instruction in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and

fluency. The interview data suggested that teacher participants desired more guided

practice than the district trainers for RF were able to provide. However, the *Foundations*

of Reading professional development program did include a coaching component. It's

impact is described in the next section. .

Coaching. As written, the *Foundations of Reading* program included three or

more on-site visits to each participant. These visits were supposed to be conducted by

certified RF trainers and were to occur in the year after participants attended the

workshop. The purpose for the visits is to check the fidelity of teachers' implementation

of commercially available, evidence-based reading programs (*Foundations of Reading*

Trainer's Manual, 2009). A personnel issue resulted in a significant delay in this

component of the RF program such that no on-site visits occurred during the 18 weeks of

data collection for this study.

> We had a person… who was supposed to be doing that and (we) thought was
> doing that and (we were) monitoring and it turned out they weren't doing that –
> so we're now revamping and working on who's going to be doing that, but yes,
> they should have been (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Although the visits should have occurred, a positive outcome of the delay was that the RF

trainers used the delay as an opportunity to customize this part of the program based on

the resources and needs in their county.

> …we have a meeting on February 4th, it is an RTI meeting, where we're going to
> train, we can't do it alone but we need our principals and coaches to know what to
> look for in Reading Foundations as well. They've all been trained, we trained
> them last summer and those that couldn't come last summer we trained at the
> beginning of the fall so all administrators, elementary and middle, have been
> trained, so what we're going to do is February 4th is we're going to go through an
> observation form, and what to look for, strategies, we've got a video tape that
> we're in the process of creating right now with mistakes kind of thrown into it and
> we're gonna let them observe the tape and we're going to walk them through it
> and then we've got an observation schedule laid out, and this is just for the RTI

schools right now, we're gonna roll out a schedule for three observations for the spring, one will be done by us, one will be done by title 1 because they're going…they just need to finish up the training, they've gone through everything but being observed teaching the class so they are almost there, and one by an administrator in their building, so they'll have three observations so, that coaching piece will come and I think that with those, it's gonna improve with the restructuring of it. (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Anecdotal field notes and a document review of the checklist that the training personnel developed suggest that these visits may eventually extend beyond simple "fidelity checks".

…the intention is to use the sessions to have discussions about what teachers are doing well and identify areas where teachers will benefit from additional guidance and support. The decision to have administrators conduct one of the visits may make it easier for teachers to access the resources they need to fully integrate evidence-based reading instruction into their practices. So far they have only developed checklists for Wilson Fundations so any coaching that happens is going to be limited to (a) the phonics instruction and (b) the teachers that use that program. But as [the instructional specialist] said, it's a start…. (Field Notes, January 28, 2011).

Multiple sources of data supported the following statement: teachers, administrators, and central office personnel who participated in this study believed that staff development was critically important to teachers' ability to enact effective instructional practice. At the time data collection ended, there were needs that clearly should be addressed. Overall, however these data suggested to the researcher that job-embedded staff development for Reading Foundations is a work in progress in this county. Leaders are aware of teachers' needs and want to support them.

I think that teachers feel supported with resources and educational leaders in their building that can help get them the things that they need to be successful (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Effective Leaders Provide High Expectations and Support

Leadership is essential to effective and lasting school change. (Fullan, 2010) The teachers and other participants in this study agreed on the qualities effective leaders possess although there were some differences in how participants experienced leadership and school change during the study. Discussion of the results that support this theme are organized in the following manner. First, data are presented that demonstrate the participants' shared beliefs that leaders have high expectation, and support employees. Second, data that describe some participants' perspectives on the leadership in this school and district are described. Next, a differing perspective on the leadership teachers experienced during this study is shared. Finally, leaders' responses to these conflicting stories are shared.

High Expectations, and Support

One of the first things the researcher noticed about the leadership in the school system was its openness and willingness to investigate its own processes. The researcher broached the possibility of a collaborative research project in the spring of 2010. The response was immediate and positive. The researcher was invited to meet with the Director of Exceptional Children's Services and to present the topic to the leadership team comprised of principals of RTI schools and central office personnel who were responsible for the RTI implementation. The researcher was invited to attend the *Foundations of Reading* trainings during June, 2010. RTI principals were invited to

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collaborate with the researcher and three immediately volunteered to do so. It should be

noted that the only contribution the researcher or the project would make to participating

schools and the district was information. No other resources, training, or benefits were to

be provided. District and school personnel had to perform a background check,

coordinate meetings, and provide access to the researcher to facilitate the study

procedures. The researcher interprets these data as indicators of district leaders'

commitment to transparency in the school improvement process. Further evidence of

transparency as an organizational priority was apparent in the fact that teachers and

leaders agreed on the characteristics of effective school leadership. Teachers and

instructional leaders in this study believed that school change requires leaders who have

high expectations and support teachers. Interview data and document review support this

claim.

> How do you effect change, how do you, how do you make a culture come and so much of that – it can be learned but so much of it is again is within the individual's capacity to , to motivate, to inspire, to, to be, to have vision and, and passion and so you have to have that in combination with the – of a managerial sense (Interview, Instructional Leader).

> I know at [Stone] we have a really strong leader there and [Principal] does a really good job with empowering teachers with not only resources but skills and she's very hands-on about that. She's very much about training her teachers to use best practices and to use data in meaningful ways and she really has embraced our goals for teachers and kids in [district] (Interview, Instructional Leader).

> She [the principal] knows it's not about us. Not saying that she doesn't care about us, because she does and she's constantly making sure that we're feeling okay about how things are going and it's about the kids and she's for the kids and if that means making somebody mad it doesn't matter because it isn't about them. (Interview, Teacher).

…the big five: Common attributes of effectiveness-rigor, quality, hard work, homework, time on task (Faculty meeting handout, October 2010).

Well, I think some of the things is because we should be focusing so much on growth, but even if the test scores, like say they're Level 3, you know, have conversations about but why aren't they Level 4. Or, you know, look at the growth and you know even if they make enough growth to stay a 3 from year to year to year, you know, if the average growth in the school is seven or eight points and even those kids who are doing fine are still only making two or three points of growth, enough to stay a 3 but not the growth that they should be making based on the average, that would be where I would start the conversation with the teacher. Is that it's, you know, we want to do the most for every child out there and that has been a challenge out there, is if kids are doing fine they just don't really offer them more challenging work. So one of the things we've talked about when you're providing those intervention times for kids who are struggling is that needs to be a time of enrichment for kids who are not struggling but who could be challenged to do more (Interview, Instructional Leader).

I think as far as school improvement district wise, we've been really focusing in [district] on language arts and math, you know those are the two areas we have really been focusing on, you know, giving us opportunities to have workshops, um either off campus or even through our literacy coaches you know, to help with those areas within our classrooms…I think that what they're doing, trying to um get out ideas and things to teachers in the most efficient way that they can…(Interview, Teacher).

These data support the researcher's conclusion that teachers and other participants agree that effective leaders of school improvement have high expectations and support teachers as they work to meet them. The data also suggest that although the teachers and other participants agree on these issues, the implementation is sometimes difficult. Miscommunications between teachers and leaders resulted in conflicts that sometimes left teachers feeling unsupported. The next two sections describe differences in perceptions of amount and type of support teachers wanted and needed to enact change.

Leadership Perspectives

The instructional leaders involved with the school improvement initiatives in reading in the district believe teachers have significant power to influence policy and practice. As such, leaders are committed to building teachers' capacity to deliver evidence-based instruction in reading to all students. The teachers in this study were most directly influenced by the leadership activities of their school principal. Central office leadership agreed that building level principals drive school improvement and school change through the support they offer teachers.

> So we're trying to build strength and capacity with that as well. Our, our teacher in our Title 1 programs, all of them have been trained in Orton Gillingham as well as Reading Foundations and then we have eight schools now that are – have been trained in our RTI process. So and then the other thing we offer java-like meetings for our principals every month and they always have an instructional focus. We work with them with data, we work with them with looking at the resources they have and how to best use those. We look at how to support them with improving instruction that they're building, is always the focus of those meetings (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Thus, the researcher focused on data related to the principal's leadership in the school where the teacher participants experienced the school improvement initiatives in early reading.

> My organizations, they're flat. Everybody knows they have a major part…I give them responsibilities…I notice what they do ... whatever anybody does here, teachers, assistants, custodians, bus drivers, they all have such a vital piece … I want to hear what they have to say about how do their job…a lot of that model comes from business. But, a lot of that just comes from respecting people (Interview, Instructional Leader).

… you keep asking the people who do the job, to solve problems for you and you're going to get a better solution, …. you can't take people and put them in a box…. you have to try to spread their mojo around somehow…you just have to really take care of those kind of teachers, and you let them do their thing… (Interview, Instructional Leader).

The data also indicate that the principal believes that leaders show people what is

expected and help them become successful.

…and during that meeting [principal] was describing the new rigor and relevance document and really emphasizing the sense of urgency that there is no time to waste. She also told them that she "walks around the halls in the afternoons and sometimes just wants to clench her fists and scream" because she is so frustrated by what she sees going on in classrooms after lunch. Her perception is that teachers are not making the best use of instructional time. She also told them that she expected instruction to continue up to the last minute before the holidays. She said that she wants them to incorporate their "fun holiday activities" into the standard course of study and that she does not want to hear about any teams spending a week making Christmas ornaments like last year…(Field Notes, October 28, 2010).

It's so important when you tell a person what to expect, that you articulate what you want exactly and train them …on how to meet your expectation…. …teachers are not 'tall children'…they're professionals at the highest level…you already see them that way, and then they can start to see themselves that way. Really good teachers crave that kind of environment (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Data from some of the teachers and other participants provided information about

the principal's belief in the importance of data-driven decision making and reflection and

how this approach supported teachers' professional growth and practice.

…we need to continually use our data to say we're making progress in this area now we're going move to the more difficult one… we look at where we're struggling across the school year… where is our instruction dipping… we did find out that the curriculum wasn't beefed up in the winter, from Fall to Spring. It was

fine from Fall to Winter then it dropped off, so that's what we're trying to address…it's a long process… (Interview, Instructional Leader).

…we try things and if this is not quite how you do it, then we tweak it. We work on it and practice it and that, in my experience that's the only way to make to make a change happen in school … (Interview, Instructional Leader).

….we triangulate… we try to look at all the pieces and figure out…each child has three, three lines, fall, winter, and spring and across it you have all of your information; if its AIMSweb, Children's progress, if its DRAs, grades. Then we are able to see if that's consistent or if it's not. If it's not, we need to figure out what are the true strengths and needs that child has and address them…. (Interview, Teacher).

She uses everything based on the data, so by using that stuff in the early grades, the children's progress in the Aims web, it really does show where the kids had deficits even though, you know – "Oh yeah, they're making all A's." Well, why are they making all A's, but they're showing below expectations in these basic early reading skills… (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Several of the teachers, including relatively new and very experienced teachers,

appreciated the principal's leadership and felt that she was empowering and supportive.

…I don't know what I would have done, …all I had to do was go to (the principal) and say 'I don't feel like I know what I'm doing, say in literacy', and (the principal) said, go, get something for your kids to do that your assistant can handle on her own and go watch your mentor…(Interview, Teacher).

I think she's way above, just from what I hear, I think she's a much better leader, gets more out of us, than other leaders… she knows, she knows what's going on all over the school and with the kids, and with the teachers and the other people that work here… when she got here in late January, and when she got here it was like the world just came together, it was really a blessing (Interview, Teacher).

I think in the building they are very supportive of teachers and from this school the administration is here for what is best for the kids, which is I think, the way it should be…(Interview, Teacher).

...during the staff development time, the principal, came into the meeting to talk to (teacher) about an incident (teacher) had had with a parent. The principal documented the entire conversation, supported (teacher), called the parent and told the parent that while the parent was always welcome to come eat with her children, attend school functions, volunteer, and attend conferences, she was not to talk to anyone at the school about anything except for the principal. The principal told the teachers that she told the mother that she was not allowed to talk to the teachers or staff because she was verbally abusive to them. Later the school secretary came into the meeting (the principal was not in there and apparently the secretary did not know the principal had already been there) and the school secretary told the same story in exactly the same way the principal told it. I was really impressed because the principal did not say anything ugly or judgmental about the parent and did not gossip. She just matter-of-factly conveyed the information and was very clear that she supported her teachers (Field Notes, October 13).

However, a second narrative also emerged from the teacher data. Some teachers were overwhelmed and questioned the level of support they received from the leadership.

Dissenting Voices

Like all organizations, Stone struggled to implement practices that would result in lasting organizational change and these changes were stressful to the staff. The principal was aware of the situation.

...sometimes they'll say, and you've heard them say, we don't think we can ever do anything good enough. We don't think we can ever be good enough (Interview, Instructional Leader).

The aggregated data suggested that teachers had difficulty prioritizing their responsibilities and wanted more guidance when learning to implement new initiatives. These stressors sometimes affected teachers' morale..

[Teacher]said she feels like all of the good teachers who are working hard and who are doing their jobs are being punished because there are a few teachers in the school who aren't doing things right, who aren't working hard, who aren't trying to meet the needs of their students and she asked [principal], was told " if I saw rigor every time I walked into the classroom, then I could throw this paper away" and I get where [principal] is coming from, but I think that it ended up really hurting this teacher's feelings because this teacher said, "I feel like I'm being punished and all I'm trying to do is do it right" and then she started to cry and so the morale is a serious, serious problem and really distressing when I think about all of the good stuff that I see in those classrooms and how dedicated and knowledgeable these teachers are. Additionally, this does address the issue of multiple initiatives going on in the system at the same time. As Teacher said, "you don't put a whole sandwich in your mouth to eat it, you take bites of it, a little bit a time" and I love that analogy. I think that that just captures what these teachers feel that they are just having somebody cram an entire sandwich down their throat which they would be delighted to eat, one bite at a time (Field Notes, October 20, 2010).

Some teachers were often unsure what was expected of them and were frustrated by that

uncertainty.

> This is the first year I have felt like I haven't known what I'm doing in my classroom. But, you know what? I'm the kind of person that likes to think things out and, and, and, and, and reflect on my teaching and then go back and, you know, maybe tweak it or do something different or, or keep doing the same thing 'cause that really worked. But, it's almost like I'm flying by the seat of my pants. Taught for 30 years and I'm feeling like that. Now there's something wrong with this picture (Interview, Teacher).

> I don't know, it's probably just because it's new and I'm old but I have two RTI folders over there that I have not started working out of. And I guess, in my mind's eye, I know that this child is struggling so I just automatically go ahead and do something to help him, and to me that's just extra paperwork that I've got to write it down and say what I'm doing, so I just struggle with that and I don't know why and I've just had a hard time with that…and plus it's just too, you have to devote so many minutes per week saying that they're getting that extra, and you know I just think that my kids are probably all getting that extra just about every day, and I'm thinking in my mind and it's just another, and just another consuming piece of paperwork to say that I have done my best with that child…

and I just struggle with, I don't know, I get teary eyed when I think about it (Interview, Teacher).

The data tell a story about the complexity of change at Stone Elementary School. On one hand, there is a commitment to increasing instructional effectiveness in order to better serve children. On the other hand, however, these data indicate that teachers experienced doubts about their professional competence and were challenged by the emphasis on changing instructional practice.

> ….[teacher] again was talking at the end of the day in the parking lot at this point and she said, "You know, I'm going to retire soon and I really don't want to end my career feeling like I'm going out as a failure. I want to feel like I did for most of my career where I felt really competent and really good at my job and I knew how to meet the demands that were placed on me. I don't want to go out feeling like I lost it at some point and feeling like a failure." (Field Notes, 10/26).

As with everything else these data convey, the difficulties teachers and leaders experienced indicate the difficulty and pain that are part of the process of transformation. School leaders know, to some extent, of these difficulties and work to understand and respect teachers' needs while simultaneously pushing teachers to grow, change, and move forward.

Leaders' Responses

The data suggest that leaders were aware of the challenges that some teachers experienced. Leaders' responses were two-fold: First, leaders worked to understand the nature of the problem and the effect it had on teachers. Second, leaders indicated ongoing efforts to achieve balance between high expectations and support, particularly for experienced teachers.

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I think they, like anybody, think change is difficult and I think so much has happened in the last, you know, ten years with the implementation of No Child Left Behind, the paradigm has changed. You know, the focus is no longer so much on proficiency and for 80 percent or 70 percent and that's okay. The focus is now on not only proficiency for all but what about those who aren't making it? And for many people their paradigm has changed. They're still – they struggle with what to do with the at-risk student so it does – it is stressful for them because they may not – they may have some things in their bag of tricks but they don't use those things as often as they do the things that they've been doing for a very long period of time (Interview, Instructional Leader).

So it's been a challenge. It's really stretched me and made me really question and I probably did it wrong, you know, probably –I- did it totally wrong…they [the teachers] could be helped by some more, you know — some more leadership. But I don't, you, you, getting them to believe, I think really getting them to believe. They seem to believe they know everything, and yet I don't think they think they do. I think they don't have any confidence at all to step outside the box. I don't think they have the confidence to do that (Interview, Instructional Leader).

The focus has really been transformational because it has been not only us building the capacity of our assistant principals to move into principal positions but also very much a coaching model for our principals in terms of working with them as instructional leaders and seeing their role very differently. Previously I think very much the focus was on managerial.(Interview, Instructional Leader).

If someone is not fitting within the organization, or they're not as good as you want them to be; they might even be mediocre but we don't – what do I know about standards. I don't want standard. What, that's not what I want….excellence is in the small digress of tweaking and taking away, taking away just the right amount of, making things flexible enough, but not so flexible they fall apart …. (Interview, Instructional Leader).

Thus, at the end of this project, the researcher was left with a snapshot that captured a brief moment in the ongoing process of school improvement and change.

Summary

Answering the first research question of this study was straightforward. How do teachers experience a school improvement initiative in evidence-based reading instruction? Simply put, the teachers did not experience the staff development workshop, *Foundations of Reading,* as anything that was particularly relevant or helpful to their practice. There was no evidence that the teachers' knowledge or use of evidence-based practice increased after attending the workshops or participating in the homework activities. Teachers used evidence-based practices in phonics and had knowledge about phonics after attending the workshop. It is not possible, however, to establish a causal relationship between the workshops and the teachers' knowledge or practice. The teachers had access to evidence-based reading programs and materials apart from the workshop that clearly describe how to systematically and explicitly teach phonics using evidence-based instruction that included unison responding and cumulative review. The teachers' descriptions of how they make instructional decisions suggest that access to these instructional programs alone may have been sufficient to produce their knowledge and result in their use of evidence-based practice.

Answers to the second research question regarding what factors explain teachers' experiences with a school improvement initiative in evidence-based reading, are complex and are addressed by the four themes that emerged from the data. The first theme, *teachers are committed professionals,* provides essential information about the specific participants in this study. The teachers work hard to be successful and have strong desire to do the right things for children. The second theme, *teacher knowledge influences*

teacher practice, explains teachers' decisions and instructional practices. If leaders want

to change teachers' practice, teachers need to know what to do. The third theme, *job-*

embedded professional development, involves how to change what teachers do; teacher

participants respond to professional development that is grounded in their classrooms and

provides ongoing guided practice and support. The fourth theme, *effective leaders*

provide high expectations and support, described teachers' lived experiences with the

leaders who were guiding them as they enacted their teaching practice in a culture of

change.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this case study was to understand general education teachers'
experiences with school change. In this case study, the context for understanding those
experiences was grounded in a professional development initiative to increase general
educators' use of evidence–based reading instruction in general education classrooms.
Five K-1 general education teachers and six instructional leaders at the school and district
levels participated in the study. Data collection included approximately 200 total hours of
participant observations in the five teachers' classrooms. Approximately 60 additional
hours of observation data were collected during other school activities including staff
development, faculty meetings, committee meetings, instructional planning periods, and
community events. Data for this research included documents, anecdotal field notes, and
interviews.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The research study described how general education teachers experienced school
improvement initiatives meant to increase evidence-based reading instruction. The data
documented teachers' instructional behaviors during their literacy instructional block.
However, the data also offered a window into the teachers' lived experiences and
reflected the extent to which the structure and quality of professional development
opportunities and school leadership practices influence teachers' instructional behaviors.

The complexities of enacting school change were revealed through the descriptions of the participants lived experiences.

Results of the study suggested four emerging themes. Theme 1: Teachers are committed professionals. Theme 2: Teacher's do what they know how to do. Theme 3: Job-embedded professional development is essential for school change. Theme 4: Effective leaders provide high expectations and support. Based on the participants' experiences, the following discussion interprets these findings through the lenses of evidence-based reading instruction, effective professional development practices, and characteristics of effective school change leadership that have been previously described in Chapter 2. The study also raised many questions that should be explored in future research; these questions are included in the discussion throughout the chapter.

Theme 1: Teachers are Committed Professionals

The teachers in this study embraced their responsibilities to provide high quality instruction to all students in their classrooms. This theme is simple but important because it helped the researcher understand that errors and omissions in practice did not result from resistance or apathy. All of the teacher data speak to the care and concern the teachers had for their students. The teachers viewed themselves as professionals who knew what they were doing in their classrooms. This understanding helped the researcher conclude that teachers truly did not know what to do to enact evidence-based practices in their classrooms. Because the researcher believed that the problem did not lie in the teachers' commitment or professional identities, she was able to widen the focus of the research and look for contextual factors that could help explain why teachers were not

actively engaged in evidence-based reading practices, despite the centrality of evidence-based practices to school's change efforts. The realization that the teachers were committed professionals helped the researcher identify professional development and change leadership as two essential elements in understanding the outcome of the school initiative to increase teachers' use of evidence-based reading instruction. This finding differs from much of the accountability literature in which teacher commitment has been linked to teacher effectiveness.

Accountability debates in education are complicated. On one hand, there is the logical desire to identify and extend effective instructional practices and also to recognize and reward effective practitioners (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). On the other hand, blame and punitive consequences are often attached to ineffective teachers and schools (NCLB). Data and the effective use thereof are essential to effective accountability systems, and these data are often used to stigmatize teachers with low student performance (Ofoegbu, 2004). Much of the accountability literature has attempted to link teacher effectiveness to teachers' commitment (Finnegan & Gross, 2007). The implication of this approach is that teachers who are not effective lack commitment and/or ability (Ofoegbu, 2004). Accountability systems established under NCLB (2001), including value added teacher evaluation systems (Ladd & Walsh, 2002), assumed that incentivizing student outcomes would increase teachers' commitment to effective instructional practice (Carnoy & Loeb, 2004; Center on Education Policy, 2007; Haney, 2000). However, evidence in the literature suggests that when value judgments about teachers' character and work ethic are conflated with judgments about the value of

their instruction, teachers' commitment to their professional practice decreases (Abelmann, Elmore, Even, Kenyon, & Marshall, 1999). Furthermore, the literature suggests that the sanctions associated with punitive accountability systems discourage effective (presumably committed) teachers and school leaders from working in low-performing schools (Ladd & Walsh, 2002). Unfortunately, the issue is more than some of the literature suggests. Studies in the accountability literature that explicitly described high or adequate baseline levels of teacher motivation were not identified.

The assumption that ineffective teachers are not committed teachers is also found in the school leadership literature. Liethwood and Jantzi's (2005) review of the last 20 years of educational leadership literature investigated leadership in transformational organizational. The review did not include studies where teachers were assumed or described as having high levels of commitment. The five studies that explicitly addressed teacher commitment focused on leadership practices to increase teacher commitment. Although Ingersoll (2007) and others (Geijsel, Sleegers, Liethwood, & Jantzi, 2003) advise educational leaders that accountability systems often fail to recognize teacher commitment, no studies have been located to explicitly describe how educational leaders can leverage existing high levels of teacher commitment to improve instructional practices in transformational organizations.

The assumption that ineffective practice is associated with low commitment may interfere with school improvement initiatives if teachers are made to feel threatened or defensive. All teacher participants in this sample shared high levels of commitment to teaching and to children. Also, all teacher participants shared relatively low levels of

knowledge about reading and limited use of effective instructional practices.

Interestingly, the teachers did not all share the perception that efforts to measure their effectiveness and improve their practice challenged their levels of professional commitment. The researcher was not able to determine why or how the two groups of teachers differed and how these differences resulted in some teachers feeling secure and valued while others felt their professionalism and commitment were called into question by the school improvement efforts in reading. Understanding those differences is an important area for future research. The teachers who believed their professionalism and commitment were questioned perceived leadership directives about their professional practices as threatening and responded with fear. Although fear is associated with short-term changes in behavior, it does not promote the collaborative practice that is a hallmark of lasting school improvement (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010) and is not sufficiently motivating to effect lasting positive changes in practice (Fullan, 2010). During data analysis the researcher speculated that the teachers who felt their commitment was not recognized became increasingly disengaged with the wider school community and participated in school change initiatives only to the extent required to comply with the principal's explicit expectations. Unfortunately, the data the researcher had collected were inadequate to thoroughly answer these questions. The researcher speculated repeatedly in her field notes about what might happen if these threatened teachers were overtly and deliberately recognized for their commitment and longstanding service to the profession. Would such recognition help these teachers become more open to feedback

about their instructional practices? Unfortunately, the literature provides little evidence to guide practice in this area.

The current study makes incremental contributions to the literature in two areas. First, the findings indicate that high levels of teacher commitment do not ensure effective instruction. This finding creates a research context in which is it possible to explicitly recognize teachers' commitment while finding ways to improve their instructional practice and creates a strengths-based perspective that is largely missing from the accountability literature. Second, teachers' use of ineffective instruction does not necessarily suggest low levels of teacher commitment. This finding also reduces the emphasis on the deficit perspective that much of the educational leadership literature defaults to when looking at teacher commitment and school improvement. Future research should also explore how and why teachers who are similar in many important characteristics (age, experience, culture, and training) experience school improvement efforts so differently as happened in this study. What is clear, however, is that recognizing teachers' commitment and professionalism while also recognizing widespread ineffective instructional practices, forced the researcher in this study to investigate alternative explanations. Discussion of an important alternative hypothesis follows. In this study, the researcher learned that teachers do not think in terms of effective or ineffective practice when enacting their daily pedagogy. Instead, teachers in this study made instructional decisions based on the instructional practices they knew how to enact and the resources that were available to them as well as their perceptions, data-driven or otherwise, of their students' needs.

Theme 2: Teacher's Do What They Know How To Do

Relationships between teachers' knowledge and teachers' instructional decision making have been investigated extensively (Brownell et al., 2009; McCutchen, Abbott, et al., 2002; McCutchen & Berninger, 1999; McCutchen, Harry, et al., 2002; Piasta, Connor, Fishman, & Morrison, 2009). A substantial number of teacher knowledge studies explore ways to increase teachers' knowledge of effective instruction in order to increase teachers' use of effective instructional practices with their students (Brownell et al., 2009). Although research questions and foci may differ between studies, the teacher knowledge literature is grounded in the belief that increased domain knowledge increases the likelihood that teachers will engage that knowledge when making instructional decisions (Alexander & Judy, 1988).

In this study, teachers' domain-specific knowledge or lack thereof was apparent in the instructional practices teachers used and their instructional decision making, Some of the instruction that teachers delivered was evidence-based (e.g., the effective phonics instruction delivered via prescriptive commercial programs), and teachers described this instruction as effective. The AIMSweb data support this point: Students who received this evidence-based instruction learned phonics showed greater gains in phonics learning than in the other early reading skills that the AIMSweb assessments measure. Interestingly, while the teachers were able to deliver effective phonics instruction, the interview data revealed a surprising lack of theoretical knowledge in all areas of reading, including phonics, and this was in spite of the fact that theoretical information was provided to the teachers in the Foundations of Reading workshop. This finding raises

important questions about what domain specific knowledge teachers need in order to deliver effective instruction. Must teachers have extensive theoretical knowledge to make effective instructional decisions and deliver effective instruction? The literature suggests that effective school reforms provide teachers with highly specific instructional practices in targeted, delimited curricular areas (Correnti & Rowan, 2007; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009). Is it enough to simply provide teachers with evidence-based prescriptive instructional programs and make sure they can implement them with fidelity? Although there are no easy answers to such a complex question, the data in this study concur with findings in the literature; in some cases the answer may be yes (McIntyre, Powell, Coots, Jones, Powers, Deeters, & Petrosko, 2005). The school change literature emphasizes that teachers are more likely to change their instructional practices when it is easy to do so (Snyder, Bolin & Zumwalt, 1992). The teachers in this study found the prescriptive programs easy to use and did not mind using them.

Nonetheless, prescriptive instructional programs are controversial (McClain, Zhao, Bowen, & Schmitt, 2006). Much of the debate, however, appears to focus on concerns that programs that explicitly describe to teachers how they should deliver instruction to students, somehow "deskill" teachers and devalue their professional practice (McClain et al., 2006). Indeed, the act of teaching in its entirety is complex and cannot be reduced to a prescribed list of practices and scripted responses that will address all students' educational needs (Carpenter, Blanton, Cobb, Franke, Kaput, & McClain, 2004). However, acknowledging the complexities of teaching in 21st century classrooms seems to strengthen the case for providing teachers with tools that research indicates are

effective instructional practices for teaching specific early reading skills. In other words, given the demands on teachers and all of the variables in the typical classroom environment that affect student achievement that are beyond teachers' control, why not simplify instructional decision making where it is possible and beneficial to teachers and students? Do committed, professional teachers feel devalued and deprofessionalized by such tools as Wilson Fundations and Orton Gillingham? The teacher participants in this study, albeit a limited sample, did not feel this way, far from it. As described in Chapter 4, the teachers in this study reported that they relied on and were grateful for these prescribed programs because they knew how to use them (Snyder Bolin, & Zumwalk, 1992), and the teachers believed (correctly) that the programs were effective because they were research-based.

An examination of practices in fields outside of education is instructive. Few would argue that flying an airplane, practicing emergency medicine, or constructing a building are any less complex than teaching a child to read. Yet these are fields in which prescribed, evidence-based procedures are routinely used to ensure quality, efficacy, and safety. There is no evidence that asking physicians to follow an evidence-based diagnostic checklist to assess and treat patients' basic needs in the emergency room in any way diminishes physicians' capacity to perform other, less clear-cut job responsibilities (Gawande, 2006; 2009). Indeed, leading medical researchers argue that patient care is enhanced because resources previously spent on a "guess and check" approach can be reallocated and available for situations that require more creative problem solving (Cooper, Newbower, & Kitz, 1984). So too, promoting teachers'

knowledge of and access to effective prescriptive programs may result in increased use of effective instruction as was the case in this study. The precise role that prescribed reading programs should play in efforts to increase evidence-based reading practices is obviously an important topic for future research which should include the following. First, do teachers sustain evidence-based practices once they learn to use them? Second, can the problem solving strategies teachers learn to implement in prescriptive programs generalize to instruction outside of the prescribed program? How can teachers be prepared to teach key areas of early reading for which there are no prescribed programs such as comprehension and fluency? One thing is certain; the data from this study and the literature concur that teachers learn to use instructional practices by enacting these practices in their own classrooms (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Thus, helping teachers know how to use effective instructional practices, within prescriptive programs or otherwise, requires job-embedded professional development.

Theme Three: Effective Professional Development is Job-Embedded

An examination of the *Foundations of Reading* workshop through a lens based on the literature that describe characteristics of research-based professional development helps explain why teachers did not demonstrate knowledge or use of evidence-based reading instruction after attending the *Foundations of Reading* workshop.

The professional development program, *Foundations of Reading,* is a content-driven workshop. Research on professional development suggests that content- based workshops are unlikely to result in meaningful teacher learning or chances in teacher practice (Killion, 2006). *Foundations of Reading* (*RF*) did not meet the criteria for

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effective professional development (Darling Hammond & Richardson, 2010; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009). After examining the data and the results, the researcher concluded that a major reason for *RF*'s failure to influence teachers' knowledge or practice was the lack of job-embeddedness in two important areas. First, the workshop focused on identifying and solving problems for individual children but did not then explain how that process integrates into planning for the larger general education classroom. The emphasis on individual children is not consistent with general educators' experiences and responsibilities for teaching large numbers of children (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Therefore, the teachers in this study may have benefitted from modifications to that workshop that showed them how to implement evidence-based practices in their K-1 classrooms (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Moats, 2007). Second, the teachers did not receive coaching, guidance, or feedback related to their use of evidence-based reading instruction in their general education classrooms (Bursuck, Smith, Munk, Damer, Mehlig, & Lenz, 2004; Killion & Harrison, 2006).

As described in Chapter 4**,** teachers never received feedback about the evidence base, or lack thereof, in their reading instruction, including teaching and planning (Moats, 2007). This was due at least in part to the lack of knowledge on the part of the instructional leaders, who are essential to the effectiveness of professional development efforts (Knight, 2009) For example, the instructional leaders did not recognize the lack of evidence-based instruction in the literacy center activities (Moats, 2007). Of interest, though, is that the school did provide ongoing job-embedded support in RTI

implementation and it was effective! Indeed, as described in Chapter 4, teachers received ongoing job-embedded support to use assessment data and evidence-based instructional interventions to address students' learning needs as part of the district RTI initiative. Teachers had access to experts in their school building who offered opportunities for ongoing guided practice. Although the implementation was imperfect, overall, it appeared that with job-embedded support teachers began to learn about the process and gain basic conceptual understanding of how to use the various tools and processes that were part of their school's RTI implementation. The fact that job-embedded support for RTI was provided and effective suggests that the capacity existed in the school to provide effective, job-embedded professional development for reading instruction if leaders decide to do so.

The researcher wondered why instructional coaching to provide job-embedded support for reading instruction was not more of a priority. Although speculative at best, the researcher did identify several factors that may have influenced the lack of job-embedded support for the evidence-based reading initiative. First, there appeared to be a lack of collaboration between general education and special education at the central office level. *RF* is a special education professional development workshop, delivered by special education staff and paid for with special education funds. The curriculum coaches (who are considered part of general education) received the *RF* training but were not asked to support evidence-based reading instruction in the schools. This was unfortunate, since, as previously indicated, *RF* training did not always apply to general education classrooms. *RF* could have benefited from someone with background in general

education helping to make the content more applicable. The researcher asked about the role of the curriculum coaches several times during the study and never received an official explanation as to why they were not providing coaching in *RF*. Over time the researcher came to believe that there was a lack of support for *RF* among key general education leadership, but the researcher was not able to confirm this suspicion. The National Association of School Directors of Special Education suggest that a common barrier to school improvement and district-wide implementation of evidence-based reading instruction is the belief that data-driven instructional decision making is not a general education responsibility (NASDSE, 2008). In retrospect, a shortcoming of the study is that the researcher did not interview the general education leadership at the central office. Future research should include leadership from special and general education, even if the general education leadership does not appear to be directly involved in the implementation. A second potential barrier to the provision of job-embedded coaching was the apparent lack of knowledge about evidence-based reading instruction among the instructional leadership at the school level. Moats (2007) explained that teachers must learn to be critical consumers of instruction in order to be in order to be effective teachers of reading. It seems logical that this would also be important for instructional leaders. Practices that were not evidence-based were observed regularly in the teacher participants' reading instruction, but instructional leaders did not express awareness or concern about these practices. While it may be unrealistic to expect building level instructional leaders to become experts in evidence-based reading given their myriad responsibilities, school change and increased instructional effectiveness

depend on effective leadership particularly building leadership level (Hallinger, Bickman, Davis, 1996; Fullan, 2007;(Mangin, 2007; Scribner, Hager, & Warne, 2001). Thus, alternative approaches to increasing school-level capacity to support teachers' incremental, job-embedded learning of evidence-based reading instruction are needed. (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky (2005). The literature is clear that collaborative professional development is a very effective means of provided job-embedded professional support (Boudah, Blair, & Mitchell, 2003; Garet et al., 2001; Joyce & Showers, 2002; McLeskey & Waldron, 2010). Future research may explore ways to support instructional leaders' implementation of collaborative professional development at the building level in order to increase capacity to deliver evidence-based reading instruction in their building. Several effective collaborative professional development processes identified in the literature that may be of particular merit include professional learning communities, mentoring, book study groups, action research and peer coaching for teachers (Curry, 2008, Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010; Podhajski, Maher, Natan, & Sammons, 2009).

Another important area for future research is to determine what essential knowledge about evidence-based instruction school leaders must possess in order to support change initiatives that ultimately improve student outcomes. Finally, it would be helpful to identify exemplars in order to document what effective building level instructional leaders do to help teachers learn to discriminate between evidence-based and other common forms of reading instruction, and enact evidence-based instructional decision making and practices in reading (Friend & Cook, 2010) A key finding that

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emerged from the study, however, is that teachers depend on and want effective leaders who are capable of leading change initiatives (Fullan, 2007), the topic of the next section.

Theme Four: Effective leaders provide high expectations and support

There is more to changing teachers' instructional practices than just job-embedded professional development (Cole, 2004). During the study, the researcher began to understand the importance of school leadership and systems-level characteristics that are essential for accomplishing the organizational changes needed to fully enact evidence-based practices. One of the interesting results in this study was the extent to which teachers and instructional leaders agreed on the qualities effective leaders possess. The teachers and instructional leaders clearly articulated that effective leaders provide high expectations for employees and support employees' efforts to achieve the goals. Because the data in this study document the experiences of a school in the midst of the change process, the implementation of evidence-based practices as it relates to leadership and school change is interpreted using Michael Fullan's (2010) empirically-validated model involving the six secrets of school change.

Love your employees. Overall, the data presented in Chapter 4 suggest that the instructional leaders who participated in this study led in a manner that was consistent with Fullan's (2010) description of "loving" employees. The instructional leaders described themselves as investing in employees and supporting teachers by giving them responsibilities in their own areas of expertise and empowering them to solve problems on their own (Sirota, Mischkind, & Meltzer, 2005). This view of leadership is consistent with the practice of lead-management, an approach to management in which a leader's

primary responsibility is to facilitate conditions that build capacity such that employees produce quality outcomes on their own and without having to submit to an external authority that rewards compliance and punishes the lack thereof (Deming, 1986; Glaser, 1998). The fact that the professional development was not effective is an issue related to capacity building that will be explored later in this chapter.

The majority of the teacher and leader participants in this study expressed feeling empowered to make decisions and supported by their supervisors. The business literature suggests that employees who feel valued and supported are more productive and more engaged in solving problems (Liker, 2004; Sisodia, Wolfe, & Sheth, 2007). While the literature is undecided about the extent to which job-satisfaction and job-performance are correlated in education (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001), perceived poor working conditions appear to be at least indirectly related to eventual teacher attrition (Billingsley, 2004). Two of the teachers in the study described the essential qualities of effective leadership in ways that were consistent with the other teacher and instructional leader participants but did not feel that they received those supports from the current leadership. The researcher was unable to determine exactly why these two teachers' experiences and perceptions differed from the other teacher participants. Perhaps these two teachers had personal characteristics that were inconsistent with a lead management approach or with organizational change in general. Future research should explore the extent to which individual teacher characteristics may support and threaten cultural changes within school improvement initiatives.

It would also be interesting to investigate the potential impact of the leadership practices and philosophies of central leadership on the school change process. In analyzing the data the researcher realized that all but one of the building-level instructional leaders was relatively new to the district and all of them viewed central office as an established bureaucracy staffed by individuals who had worked in the district for many years. The researcher suspected that there may have been clear divisions in philosophy, power, and practice between the "old guard" (researcher's characterization) of power among the district's senior leadership and the recently hired leadership brought in to improve practice through change. Unfortunately, the researcher did not collect data that would allow her to describe the complexities of competing interests and leadership approaches in the district.

Connect peers with purpose. Collaboration is considered a key indicator of effective, productive organizations across professional disciplines beyond education, including business, non-profit, entertainment, and technology (Bennis & Biederman, 1997). Organizational structures that promote collaboration are predictive of and necessary to effective school reform (Friend & Cook, 1990). The evidence in the data reported here of effective informal collaborations between teachers and some instructional leaders suggest that more formalized collaborative processes in professional development may be relatively easy to introduce, at least at the school level. However, formal efforts to promote collaborative problem solving will require a significant investment in knowledge building about evidence-based reading instruction and evidence-based decision making to ensure that the required conditions of voluntariness,

parity, mutual goal setting, shared responsibility, shared resources, and shared

accountability (Friend & Cook, 2010) are present. During the study it was apparent that

the instructional leaders were making the instructional decisions related to the RTI

problem solving process. Unfortunately, neither teachers nor instructional leaders knew

enough about reading to recognize that some of these instructional decisions were

incorrect and not evidence-based. The teachers were responsible for delivering

instructional interventions in reading based on data that they did not understand. The

researcher believed that teachers would also be held accountable for the success or failure

of these instructional interventions. These conditions in which group members have

unequal power and are making poor decisions based on questionable evidence are

unlikely to succeed and would likely jeopardize future efforts to build the collaborative

culture that is so important to lasting school improvement (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fullan,

Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005) Such difficulties may be common in schools and districts that

are struggling to enact transformational school change on their own. Future research

should focus on how effective leaders and teachers recover from initial errors that may

threaten future collaborative practice.

Capacity building prevails. The instructional leaders involved with the school

change initiative in evidence-based reading instruction valued professional learning. They

recognized that general education teachers did not know how to provide evidence-based

reading instruction and identified *RF* as a tool to increase teachers' knowledge which

they hoped would lead to teachers' increased use of evidence-based instructional

practices in reading. A consistent message from the instructional leadership when talking

about the challenges they must overcome to implement school change is that change is difficult and many teachers are resistant to change. Although the data indicate that the professional development did not change teachers' instructional behaviors, the researcher found no evidence that teachers were resistant to using new practices that they knew how to implement. The literature suggests that these characterizations of change as difficult and teachers as resistant are associated with ineffective professional development practices (Richardson & Placier, 2001). Leaders must employ best practices at all levels of the system that are involved in change, including organizational transformation and professional development (Fullan, 2007; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). The accountability literature tends to emphasize teachers' responsibilities to provide evidence-based instruction. Future research should explore the impact of accountability mechanisms for all instructional leaders to ensure that teachers are given a fair opportunity to change their practices. The data suggest that newly hired leaders favor increasing accountability at all levels of the bureaucracy. It is not clear how much support these new leaders have from the aforementioned "old guard". Future research should investigate the extent to which recently hired leaders are able to effect lasting changes when working with established leadership. This may be a particularly important issue for small rural school districts if the senior leadership personnel have spent much, if not all of their careers in the same district (Chance, 1993; Howley & Howley, 2005). Such inquiry would address a much needed gap in the literature of school change. No studies were located that document the ways in which change is managed in small rural school districts that independently attempt widespread school improvement initiatives. A unique

challenge to change in rural schools may be overcoming the inertia of an entrenched bureaucracy in order to build capacity because building capacity often requires significant changes to the way teaching and school leadership occur; future research should address this gap in the literature.

Learning is the work. The data indicated that the system was not able to precisely evaluate teachers' instructional performance in reading to the extent necessary to facilitate continuous improvement, the *sine-qua-non* of this particular secret The professional culture was evolving, but change was slow. Using data to evaluate and change instructional practices is not yet fully integrated and teachers still describe student performance and make instructional decisions based on "gut" feelings and guesswork. It takes time for organizations to transition to a checklist culture (Gawande, 2009) in which basic tasks (e.g. teaching and monitoring student progress in phonics and phonemic awareness) can be standardized (Liker & Meier, 2007). Just as instructional leaders must learn to more effectively evaluate the quality of teachers' instruction (Moats, 2007) leaders must also better identify professional learning needs at all levels of the system (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006). There is limited guidance in the literature about how schools become learning organizations at all levels; much of the literature in this area emphasizes teacher learning (Garet et al; 2001) which the data in the study clearly show is important but insufficient for lasting organizational change. These are important questions. Future research should seek to identify the skills and knowledge instructional leaders must possess to foster organizational knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Transparency rules. Ironically, the data suggest that the school and district emphasized gathering information at the expense of building knowledge (Brown & Dugiud, 2000). The researcher found that this particular system collected much data about students but did not know how to use those data to make effective system-level decisions about factors such as professional development and leadership practices that support teachers' increased use of evidence-based instruction in reading. This problem is described in the literature (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2005; Fullan, 2001) but few studies describe how school systems use knowledge to increase the overall effectiveness of the system (Elmore & Burney, 1999). Future research should investigate ways to increase capacity to gather data that allows schools to learn about themselves and increase coherence across the entire system (Fullan, 2001), instead of simply focusing on teachers' performance and/or student achievement out of the larger context of the organization (Garvin, 2000).

Systems learn. Fullan (2010) explained that this characteristic is a composite of the previous five characteristics plus the knowledge that there is little certainty in a complex world. At the end of data collection it was apparent that much work remained to be done before the district or school would become a system that learned. During the analysis of these data it became apparent that there is a significant gap in the empirical literature related to how schools and districts, particular small rural schools and districts that have limited access to external resources and consultant expertise, can achieve organizational transformation. Much of what is written on this topic is conceptual. Fullan (2001, 2010) offers examples from his own work with very large school districts in other

countries and a few examples from very large districts in the United States (San Diego, New York City, Memphis) that serve as proof of concept that change is possible. But studies that describe how small rural school districts operationalized these principles and use them to enact lasting positive changes were not located. Research to address this gap is critically important given the fact that nearly fifty million US students attend rural schools (NCES, 2004). The extent to which rural schools may experience unique barriers to school change is not well-described in the existing literatures on rural education or school change.

Implications

General education teachers need to provide effective early reading instruction to students with diverse learning needs. Research-based pedagogy in the five key areas of reading (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) exists, but, as this study shows, its implementation in classrooms is challenging. Therefore, there is a need for ongoing, high -quality, job-embedded professional development to support teachers and increases their effectiveness in early reading instruction. Effective school change also requires specific organizational characteristics and leadership. These organizational characteristics include (a) the creation of conditions that enable teachers to be successful (Sirota, Mischkind, & Meltzer, 2005); (b) collaborative problem solving (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010); (c) continuous improvement (Glaser; 1998; Liker & Meier, 2007); and (d) effective use of data to inform change efforts and accountability at all levels of the bureaucracy (Fullan, 2001).

Future research should explore ways to increase professional developers' and administrators' use of evidence-based practices in their particular spheres of influence because teachers depend on these resources to support their practice. Evaluating or studying teachers' instructional practices without understanding the larger organizational context in which these practices are enacted provides data that are incomplete and thus limited in usefulness.

This was a case study of how five K-1 general education teachers experienced a school change initiative in early reading instruction. The findings of this study offer insight into how professional development, school change, and teachers' instruction are interrelated, but the results cannot be generalized to other K-1 teachers, schools or districts. Further research should attempt to replicate the study in other rural schools and districts in order to determine the extent to which these results are unique to this particular setting. Additional studies might also compare the ways in which early career and late- career teachers experience school change. The research could provide valuable insights to professional developers and school leaders and allow them to work more efficiently and effectively to enact change depending on the teachers with whom they are working.

During this study, several other issues that warrant further investigation emerged. Several teacher participants had significantly negative reactions to the change processes and activities in their school while others were relatively comfortable and positive about these same events. At first it appeared that the differences between these two groups were associated with age and experiences. However, data analysis revealed that this was not

actually the case. Both more and less experienced teachers were part of the positive cohort. It would be useful to reexamine the teacher data and the literature to identify personal or professional characteristics that may make teachers more or less likely to embrace school change practices. Such analysis could inform future research into how school leaders can provide differential support to teachers based on individual strengths and needs.

Limitations

As discussed in Chapter 1 there were several limitations in this study. First, the researcher spent much time with the participants and developed relationships with children, teachers, administrators, and other instructional leaders. She also came to be regarded as a member of the school community. Thus, the researcher did not have the objectivity of an outside observer. As discussed in Chapter 1, the risk of bias was weighed against the value of insider knowledge of the context. Ultimately, the procedural integrity of the methods and data analysis were used to minimize the risk of bias from the researcher's lack of objectivity.

The researcher's bias towards the importance of evidence-based practices in reading, professional development, and school change may have influenced her perceptions of what happens when teachers are held accountable for employing evidence-based practices to improve student reading achievement. The researcher's background as a public school special education teacher, a co-teacher, and a reading specialist may have also influenced her perceptions and interpretations of teachers' experiences. Again, the

researcher used the literature to develop methods and analyze data to maximize the integrity of the data collection and the results.

The teacher participants in this study did not receive the fidelity checks that are called for in the *RF* professional development trainers' manual. The descriptions of the fidelity checks in the trainers' manual do not reflect best practices in the professional development literature, and thus were unlikely to produce substantially different outcomes had they occurred. Nonetheless, the researcher must acknowledge that the *RF* implementation observed in this study was incomplete, and thus the conclusions about the efficacy of the *RF* program have limited reliability.

Another limitation of the study is that the researcher could not confirm her speculation about the lack of collaboration among senior leadership in general and special education at the central office. Although there is nothing in the data to suggest that this lack of collaboration directly affected the teachers' instructional practices in their classrooms, as previously discussed, the lack of collaboration may have resulted in missed opportunities to provide job-embedded support for the teachers. Unknown factors may have influenced administrative decisions regarding professional development and other areas. The researcher has an incomplete knowledge of the context because the entire central office senior leadership did not participate in this study. The extent to which this incomplete knowledge of the context resulted in bias or inaccurate interpretations of the data is unknown.

Conclusion

Clearly, there are many challenges ahead for this district and its teachers, as well as for the field of education overall. Many questions remain unanswered. This small study described teachers' experiences with a change initiative in evidence-based reading instruction from multiple perspectives. The study included teachers' voices and looked at how their perceptions of change interacted with system-level factors that were beyond their control yet significantly influenced how they enacted their practice. The "fly on the wall" quality of the study allowed the researcher to describe how school change happens when no one (meaning researchers conducting intervention studies, policy makers providing resources) is looking. This view is not well represented in the literature but should be. Although the number of similar cases of school change in rural districts across the country is unknown, no evidence in these data suggest that the situation described in this study is unique. It is likely that many districts share similar experiences to those described here. Thus, studies that document and investigate change initiatives in rural schools are needed.

Education in this school and district is about good people doing hard work, making difficult decisions, and simply doing the best work they know how to do. Certainly many areas are in need of improvement and the challenges are many. Yet, despite the difficulty of the task these data documented much participant optimism and diligence, qualities associated with transformational thinking in other disciplines (Gawande, 2006) but not often described in empirical studies of school change. The role of these qualities in bringing about school change needs to be examined further in future

research. The qualities are captured in the following quotation and represent an

appropriate closing statement for this study.

> I think we've done a lot …we've had a lot to clean up, you lift up the rug and realize that it's not enough to clean up the rug on top, it's not just sweeping or vacuuming the rug on top, you lift it up and go oh my God it's not over yet and having to dig through that. …we've done a nice job in a short amount of time and we have a long way to go….we've put out some great supports and help … and now I think our focus is that we need to maintain that and really hit the instructional part and that's going to be our next focus in the years to come. We've got some great people and some really talented people…. we've got some great teachers…we're moving in the right direction, our problem is going to be that we don't extinguish the motivation and the flame we've got to do what we know is right and to do ultimately what's best for kids (Interview, Instructional Leader).

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APPENDIX A

RUBRICS FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Document Review Protocol (based on Merriam, 2001)

1. What is the history of the document?

2. When and why was it produced?

3. Who produced it?

4. For whom is the document intended?

5. What is the purpose of the document, what was the author trying to accomplish?

6. What were the author's sources of information?

7. Do other documents exists that might add to my understanding of this document?

    a. If so, are they accessible and can I have access to them?

Reading Instruction Rubric
(Based on Bursuck & Damer, 2011)

1. Highlight any of the research based practices evident in the document	
(a) 5 key areas of reading-reading-phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension	(b) teaching enhancements: advance organizers, unison responding, effective signals, efficient use of teacher talk, perky pace, my turn-together-your turn teaching format, cumulative review, systematic error correction, teaching to success, and student motivational system.

2. Describe in as much detail as possible the activity or behaviors indicated above.

3. Observations/Thoughts/ Ideas:

Professional Development Rubric

(Based on Darling Hammond & Richardson, 2010 ; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009)

1. Highlight any of the research based practices evident in the document
deepens teachers content knowledge, helps teachers connect content knowledge to their students needs, facilitates active learning in authentic context, has coherence with school, district, state, and national goals, is collaborative and collegial, and provides sustained support for teachers' ongoing learning over time; job-embedded
2. Describe in as much detail as possible the activity or behaviors indicated above.
3. Observations/Thoughts/ Ideas:

Organizational Transformation Rubric
(Based on Fullan, 2010)

1. Describe in detail any evidence of the 6 characteristics of organizational transformation					
Love your employees	Connect peers with purpose	Capacity building prevails	Learning is the work	Transparency rules	Systems learn
Comments and questions.					

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(based on Maxwell, 2005)

1. Describe your district's approach to school improvement.

    a. What is it like?

    b. What do you do?

    c. What's good about it/hard about it?

2. Describe your district's professional development program in reading.

    a. What have you learned about reading instruction?

    b. How does this apply to instruction in classrooms and schools??

    c. How does it affect teaching and students?

    d. Does the district's professional development program in reading make a difference?

         i. Why?

         ii. Examples?

3. Other questions that emerge within interviews and across the project.

APPENDIX C

FIELD NOTE DICTATION PROMPTS

(based on Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2001; Spradley, 1980)

1. Describe the setting: (group size, duration of instruction, classroom features

    including desk arrangements, stuff on the walls, equipment,)

2. Describe the people: (students, teachers, other adults in the room)

3. Describe the activities:

    a. Order of the activities
    b. Content of instruction: 5 key areas of reading-reading-phonics, phonemic
        awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension (Bursuck & Damer, 2011)
    c. Instructional methods: Use of the 10 teaching enhancements: advance
        organizers, unison responding, effective signals, efficient use of teacher
        talk, perky pace, my turn-together-your turn teaching format, cumulative
        review, systematic error correction, teaching to success, and student
        motivational system (Bursuck & Damer, 2011).
    d. Other instructional methods
    e. Other things that happen during the lesson

4. The substance of what people said

    a. Students responses to instruction
    b. Adults responses to instruction

5. Observer comments and impressions

APPENDIX D

FOUNDATIONS OF READING REQUIRED LEARNING TASKS (HOMEWORK).

Learning Task	Description
Review of Reading Program	As a team, select a reading program and review that program using *Guidelines for Selecting an Effective Program.*. You may select a program that your school system is considering, a program that you are already using, or a program that you would like to know more about. Prepare a written report stating the program selected for review as well as the reason for the selection. Respond in writing to each of the questions on the Guidelines Document.
Reading Research Report	As a team, review the National Reading Panel materials and summarize the findings in the areas of Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, and Comprehension. Make a presentation of this information to your school faculty (or other appropriate group of educators). Resrouces for this assignment include: The National Reading Panel reports (full and summary); the LD Online summary by Susan Hall; Putting Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read. This is a group task but may be done by individuals or small groups within schools.

For each presentation please provide the following information: (1) Outline of the presentation including overheads, handouts, or power point slides if used; (2) Details of the audience and setting for the meeting (include the date, time for presentation, number individuals present and their positions, type of meeting) and (3) list of the individuals who prepared and presented the information. If you prepare a PowerPoint presentation, you may submit a disc but also must include a paper copy |
| Student Assessment | Select one student who demonstrates <u>serious</u> problems with basic reading skills (word identification). [Try to select a student who will demonstrate problems in each of the areas to be evaluated since this assessment will form the basis for additional assignments. If necessary, you should test more than one student in order to find problems in each area.] Using the Basic Skills Assessment as directed, administer the following sections: Phonemic Awareness Practice Items (Segmentation and Deletion tasks); Letter sound Association Practice Items; Word Identification Practice Items (phonetically regular real words; nonsense words; irregular words), Spelling, Summarize the students' performance on the Basic Reading Skills Student Summary Sheet. Submit a <u>copy</u> of the entire assessment (including the student's spelling attempts) as well as the summary sheets.

Using the assessment information for <u>phonological awareness tasks only</u>, |

APPENDIX D

FOUNDATIONS OF READING REQUIRED LEARNING TASKS (HOMEWORK).

Learning Task	Description

summarize your students' strengths and weaknesses in this area. State an overall phonological awareness goal for your student and at least three objectives appropriate for accomplishing that goal. Write an instructional plan for achieving the goal and objectives. Provide examples of materials and methods you would use. This assignment should have the following clearly defined parts:

1. Summary of what the student can and cannot do in the area of phonological/phonemic awareness.
2. Goal and objectives for phonological and phonemic awareness instruction.
3. Instructional plan for achieving the goal and objectives

Using the assessment information for letter-sound associations and word identification only, summarize your student's strengths and weaknesses in these areas. Using that information, state and overall goal and at least three appropriate objectives for achieving that goal. Write an instructional plan for achieving that goal and objectives. The assignment should have the following three parts:
1. Summary of what student can and cannot do in the areas of letter-sound associations and word identification (decoding and irregular words).
2. Goal and objectives for these areas.
3. Instructional plan including materials and methods to be used.

Do a fluency assessment of oral text reading for a student of your choice as long as that student can read some level of text accurately. The text chosen must be at the student's instructional or independent reading level. Include the following information:
a. Description of the student (age, grade, level of reading skill, type of reading problems).
b. Description of the text used including the number of words and the level of text (if decodable text, give a level such as WRS 2.1 or J&J Reader 18: if not decodable, give approximate grade level).
c. Qualitative description of the student's oral reading (e.g., too fast, slow, fluent, choppy, read with expression, correct attention to punctuation, reread words or phrases, self corrects using the context, sounds out words, etc.).
d. Quantitative description of student's oral reading including: words

FOUNDATIONS OF READING REQUIRED LEARNING TASKS (HOMEWORK).

Learning Task	Description
	per minute, %errors, # self-corrections, types of errors (guessing based on partial letter cues, decoding but inaccurate, wild guesses, etc.). Indicate where this student is in relation to his or her peers (use the information in the CD Unit 10 about ranges of words per minute for students of different ages).
	Note: This task will be evaluated for the inclusion of each section (a-d) and for sufficient detail to provide a clear picture of the student's text reading fluency strengths and weaknesses.
	*Visit the NC SIP website for information that will help you prepare for this task

FOUNDATIONS OF READING CONTENT, OBJECTIVES, & COMPETENCIES

Unit	Topic	Content	Course Objectives and Competencies
1	Foundations of Reading	1. Purpose and Overview of Course 2.Selection of Reading Programs 3. Components of Effective Implementation	1. Understand and demonstrate the ability to use appropriate guidelines to select a research-based program of instructional materials and procedures. 2. Understand the factors that support the sustainability of research-based practices within a school. 3. Understand or help develop an implementation plan for your school or system that includes selection of a research-based reading program to be used with students with reading problems
2	Learning to Read and Spell	A National Problem and Recommended Solutions 1. Scope of the problem 2. What skilled readers/spellers do 3. Causes of severe reading difficulty 4. Instruction and the National Reading Panel	1. Able to accurately summarize the research to practice findings and principles as reported in the National Reading Panel Summary. 2. Knowledgeable about a variety of print and web-based resources that support and augment the National Reading Panel's summary of research findings for improving reading skills of students with persistent reading problems. 3. Understand the five principles of effective instruction for all students and explain these principles for others. 4. Understand the six principles of effective instruction for at-risk students and explain these to others. 5. Understand the seven principles of effective instruction for students with persistent reading problems and explain these principles to others. 6. Understand the principles of effective instruction for students with double deficits. 7. Understand the instructional sequence for teaching basic reading

FOUNDATIONS OF READING CONTENT, OBJECTIVES, & COMPETENCIES

Unit	Topic	Content	Course Objectives and Competencies
			skills.
3	The Structure of Language	1. Why is the structure of language important 2. The Phonemes of the English language 3. Learning language structure through the history of English	1. Cite and define the components that make up the structure of the English language and understand how these relate to reading instruction. 2. Define and give appropriate examples of voiced and unvoiced sounds, open and closed sounds, consonant sounds, and vowel sounds. 3. Demonstrate your knowledge of the structure of the English language by responding correctly to at least 80% of the items on the knowledge of language structures test (Appendix E).
4	Assessment of Basic Reading Skills	1. Matching instrument and purpose 2. Using the Basic Reading Skills Assessment	1. Demonstrate appropriate assessment skills including the assessment of the following areas of reading ability; phonemic awareness, letter-sound associations, decoding-using real and nonsense words, sight word recognition, spelling of regular and irregular words, accuracy and fluency of text reading. 2. Understand the steps involved in an assessment of reading comprehension
5	Teaching Phonological Awareness	1, Background, research, and terminology 2, Understanding	1. Understand the stages of the development of phonemic awareness skills and give an example illustrating each stage. 2. Understand the principles of phonemic awareness instruction and

FOUNDATIONS OF READING CONTENT, OBJECTIVES, & COMPETENCIES

Unit	Topic	Content	Course Objectives and Competencies
		phonological awareness 3. Helping students develop phonological awareness	give an example of each. 3. Provide examples of effective teaching strategies in these areas; awareness of sounds; syllable segmentation and blending; phonemic segmentation and blending; onset-rime; phoneme analysis and manipulation. 4. Demonstrate the ability to link assessment to instruction and to plan effective instruction of phonemic awareness skills for students with phonemic awareness difficulties using research validated procedures.
6	Teaching Letter-Sound Associations	1. Barriers to learning letter sounds 2. Teaching letter sounds	1. Understand the principles of teaching letter-sound associations and give examples illustrating each principle. 2. Understand the sequence of instruction that has been found tobe most effective in teaching letter-sound associations and give examples of each step. 3. Identify three strategies for teaching letter0sounds and give examples of each. 4. Demonstrate your ability to link assessment to instruction and to plan appropriate instruction in letter-sound associations to students with letter-sound association difficulties using research-validated procedures.
7	Teaching word identification and spelling	1. General principles of word identification and spelling instruction	1. Understand the principles of teaching word identification and give examples illustrating each principle. 2. Understand the sequence of instruction that has found to be most

FOUNDATIONS OF READING CONTENT, OBJECTIVES, & COMPETENCIES

Unit	Topic	Content	Course Objectives and Competencies
		2. Learning to recognize and spell words 3. 6 syllable types 4. Teaching decoding and spelling 5. Teaching irregular words	effective in teaching word identification and give examples of each step. 3. Identify five strategies for teaching word identification and give examples of each. 4. Demonstrate your ability to link assessment and to plan appropriate instruction in word identification difficulties using research validated procedures. 5. Understand the principles of teaching spelling and give examples illustrating each principle. 6. Understand the stages in the development of spelling skills. 7. Understand the sequence and content of spelling instruction that has been found to be most effective in teaching letter-sound associations and give examples of each step. 8. Identify three strategies for teaching spelling of regular words and give examples of each. 9. Identify three strategies for teaching spelling of irregular words and give examples of each.
8	Developing automaticity and fluency	1. Understanding fluency and automaticity issues 2. Instruction for fluency and automaticity	1. Understand the principles of teaching reading fluency and give examples illustrating each principle. 2. Identify five strategies for teaching reading fluency and give examples of each. 3. Demonstrate your ability to link assessment with instruction and to plan effective instruction in reading fluency to students with fluency

FOUNDATIONS OF READING CONTENT, OBJECTIVES, & COMPETENCIES

Unit	Topic	Content	Course Objectives and Competencies
			difficulties using research validated procedures.
9	Teaching Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary	1. Vocabulary instruction Processes, Research, and Effective Practices for Comprehension 2. Teaching Methods and Strategies for Comprehension	1. Understand the five factors that contribute to poor reading comprehension. 2. Understand the principles of teaching vocabulary and teaching comprehension. 3. Cite three strategies for teaching reading comprehension and give examples illustrating each strategy.