EXAMINING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER'S LEARNING

ABOUT LITERACY INSTRUCTION

by

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This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory to my brother and my best friend, Joe M. Brandon, Jr. He taught me one of the best lessons of this life…to walk in faith, not live in fear.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994) was to understand how teacher perceptions of their knowledge, practice and students' knowledge change in a professional development learning opportunity that is based on their background knowledge in literacy instruction and what is determined to be their zone of proximal development. This study will explore the impact of context-specific professional experiences on teacher attitudes and perceptions of student learning. Based on a theoretical framework of Balanced Literacy (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996; Short, 1999; Taylor and Pearson, 2002), job-embedded professional development (Bransford, Brown, Donovan, & Pellegrino, 2003; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey, 2003; Showers & Joyce, 1996, Yoon, 2007), and scaffolding and Zone of Proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), this study will answer the questions: 1) How will teachers' perceptions of knowledge about literacy instruction change over time? 2) What will take place in teachers' perceptions of their practice when they have participated in embedded, contextual professional development? 3) Which supports (coaching, self-assessments, contextual teaching), if any, will teachers perceive were the most effective in helping them implement the literacy strategies and theories from the professional development opportunities? and 4) What are the teachers' perceptions of the children's learning as readers and writers?

Nine teachers participated in a balanced literacy plus professional development. This case study focused on two of those teachers and their experiences within the professional development. Focus group interviews, individual interviews, self-

assessments, and teacher reflection logs were collected throughout the ten-week

study. The process of analyzing the data was organizing, coding, synthesizing and

looking for patterns as part of the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967;

LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Strategies to enhance the quality of data included

triangulation and respondent validation. The study revealed teachers perceived the

following: 1) their knowledge increased in literacy instruction with the support of

coaching and modeling, 2) the modeling of lessons was valuable in their practice, and 3)

their students grew as readers and writers.

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INTRODUCTION

Professional development is the bridge to knowledge teachers acquire in their pre-service work to the effective, daily practice in the classrooms. According to Allington (2002), good teaching would not be difficult with support from local districts upon teachers leaving pre-service work and entering the teaching profession. Continuous and layered learning is necessary for teachers to strengthen their practice in promoting literacy in the classroom. Professional development is the vehicle used in schools to advance this learning.

According to a study by Allington (2002), exemplary teachers were knowledgeable and confident in the best practices for literacy, and were able to look at new educational trends with a critical, educated eye. These teachers stayed grounded in tried and true literacy frameworks rather than following the newest educational trends. Vygotsky (1978) teaches us what students can do with help and support from teachers; when they are introduced to a new concept, they can eventually act with independence. Teachers should be taught using that same philosophy. Vygotsky (1978) discusses the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which allows educators to determine a child's instructional level and then teach directly to that level.

Professional development can be defined as ongoing learning opportunities that are available to teachers through their school or school district (National Commission on

Teaching and America's Future, n.d.). According to Guskey (2002), professional development programs are systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students.

As early as the 1700s, the English colonists used the apprentice model to educate adults in America. This tradition, adapted from Great Britain, would serve as a foundation for training many early English men and children in a variety of trades. An apprentice model, whether it was voluntary or compulsory, was the practice of the apprentice's being bound to his master in order to learn a trade (Seybolt, 1969). Under the apprentice model, the understood agreement was the apprentice would do faithful service while the master would instruct in his trade. This model is similar to the student teaching model that is in use today with pre-service teachers.

Dewey (1902) emphasized the growth of the individual. He believed in inquiry learning, and, more importantly, he believed in producing citizens who could participate in and contribute to a democratic society. Dewey (1902) stressed the importance of reflection and critical thinking in regards to learning from an experience. He also discussed that content should be presented in a way that would allow learners to make connections between new information and prior knowledge and experiences (Dewey, 1902). This idea capitalizes on connections teachers are able to make with knowledge they gained in school and everyday teaching experiences in the classroom.

Lindeman (1961) contributed to the topic of adult learning around 1926. He advocated for textbooks and teachers to be placed in the secondary role with primary attention given to the student. Lindeman also believed that experience was the textbook

of the adult learner and grounded his work in the belief that rigid formulae on pedagogy had no place in the adult learning process. He argued adult learning should be guided by discussions and conversations of teachers and not driven by textbooks.

Adult learners gained attention in the 70s and 80s when Knowles (1990) referred to them as a neglected species. He stated there were several assumptions to be made about adult learners and included the following: adult motivation to learn is manifested through needs and interests, adult learning is being viewed as lifelong learning, adult learning is grounded in experience as a main source, adults need to be self-directed in order to learn, and the differences in adult learning increased with age. The work of Knowles was built around the theory of andragogy. He summarizes the theory with four main assumptions: change in self-concept, the role of experience, a readiness to learn, and an orientation to learning (Knowles, 1990).

The social constructivist theory developed by Vygotsky emphasized that learning should begin in the social world (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's theory was grounded in the belief that what a child can do with support today includes being enabled to handle tomorrow independently. He declared that multiple interactions and opportunities to engage in activities that were just beyond what they are capable of doing independently would result in independent success for these individuals at a later time. The constructivist view as related to professional development advances teachers in their learning in any content area. This theory reflecting teacher-coach interaction through professional development is described in Clay and Cazden's (1990) work. In this study, adults were directly involved in learning new skills with support of skilled and

knowledgeable professionals. The new skills learned were taught using scaffolding, which is directly related to the work of Vygotsky.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that learning is not situated in acquisition but in the opportunities for learners to participate in real performances. They maintained that learning should be a social activity and should include opportunities for practice. Amendum (2014) explained situated learning theory to be learning embedded in activities and situations rather than the transfer of knowledge from one person to another. This transfer of knowledge referred to by Amendum is similar to the professional development educators experience today in the United States.

According to Guskey (2002), high-quality professional development is the driving force of every school improvement proposal written by districts. He stated policy makers should recognize schools are no better than the teachers employed within the schools. Guskey argued that historically professional development programs have been proven to be ineffective due to two main factors: the motivation of teachers to engage in the professional development and the process by which the change occurs.

Guskey (2002) also argued teachers believe becoming a better teacher means enhancing student learning. They attributed their success based on students' behaviors and activities, not in their own practice as defined by Harootunian and Yarger (1981). Thus, what attracts teachers to professional development opportunities is their belief that the learning will benefit the students by expanding their knowledge and subject matter and promote student achievement. Teachers also reported attending professional development to gain practical and specific ideas that could be used immediately in their classrooms (Guskey, 2002).

Professional development of teachers has historically been viewed as a way to improve teacher effectiveness and grow student achievement. According to Trotter (2006), teachers should be given freedom to study what motivates and interests them in their field.

Pilot Inquiry

In the fall of 2015, I facilitated a mixed methods pilot study at a local elementary school. I focused on overall balanced literacy professional development with teachers in grades K-4. I also concentrated on teacher growth and attitudes about their learning and their beliefs about student learning.

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of literacy professional development on teacher attitudes and knowledge of the reading components of balanced literacy. This study is important because the pre-test data were used to specifically determine what components of literacy would be taught based on the teachers' pre-existing knowledge in the area of balanced literacy. Data from the teacher interviews were then used to guide the next steps in the learning process for teachers. This model is grounded in the theory of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978). Teachers were taught based on current practice, what they could do with help and support currently as a teacher, and with additional training and coaching what they would be able to later take ownership of in their own teaching practice.

The primary research questions for the pilot inquiry were as follows: a) How do teachers' attitudes toward balanced literacy qualitatively change across year-long professional development? b) How does teachers' knowledge of balanced literacy change across year-long professional development? In the study, a pre- and post-test were given and scored with a researcher-created rubric. Qualitative data of interviews were collected at various times across the study.

The review of the literature indicates that teachers seek professional development to enhance student learning. Much attention was given to professional development in schools, but there was no evidence to show that teachers' knowledge was being reviewed prior to professional development and then tailoring the learning to teachers' areas of need. This mixed methods study addressed one quantitative and one qualitative question. The quantitative question was this: How does teachers' knowledge of balanced literacy change across year-long professional development? The qualitative question was this: How do teachers' attitudes of balanced literacy qualitatively change across year-long professional development?

By considering these questions, I attempted to show the effectiveness of professional development based on a teacher's prior knowledge through a researcher-created measure and qualitative measures. The researcher-created pre- and post-tests helped to show areas where teachers were knowledgeable of balanced literacy components and areas where the professional development should be focused. By using these data and tailoring the professional development sessions to needs within grade-level groups, the teachers were able to effectively learn the components in balanced literacy. This success was demonstrated by in the significant growth shown in the post-test data.

The attitudes of the teachers in the pre-test data demonstrated that teachers saw a need for instruction on comprehension strategies for themselves as educators. Based on these data, sessions were provided specifically for comprehension strategy work in the genre of fiction and nonfiction. Teachers were also provided professional development in read-alouds and guided reading with embedded strategies for teaching comprehension through these components. In the post-test reflections, a theme evolved that student learning has increased in the area of comprehension strategies.

The reflections also showed that teachers moved from thinking only about components of balanced literacy to being intentional teachers of literacy. Themes emerged around intentionality of language, teaching, and reflection from the pre- to post-test reflection. Prior to the professional development intentionality was not mentioned in any of the data collected.

As a result of the pilot study, I learned several things. First, I found the teachers were not very willing to write details in the opened ended pre- and post-assessments. This knowledge led me to use a Likert Scale literacy self-assessment in the current study (see Appendix A.). The information gained also led me to establish protocols and follow-up focus group interviews as another data collection source.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how teacher perceptions and knowledge change in a professional development learning opportunity that is based on their background knowledge in literacy instruction and what is determined to be their

zone of proximal development. This study will explore the impact of context-specific professional experiences on teacher attitudes.

Rationale for the Study

This study is especially relevant with the urgency around literacy and preparing teachers within the United States. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a national agency that reports what our students know and can do across subject areas. According to the Nation's Report Card, in 2015, only a staggering 36% of students in the fourth grade scored at or above proficient in reading (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015). Recent discussion by the Tennessee Department of Education (2016) provided results that less than half of the third- and fourth-graders in the state of Tennessee are reading on grade level based on state tests. The state Department argues this is an unacceptable outcome in a state that has prided itself on being the fastest-improving in the nation. State officials go on to report the achievement gaps are also striking: only one-third of economically disadvantaged students and just one in every five of our students with disabilities achieve proficiency by the end of third grade. English learners are trailing their native peers.

As researchers look at the impact of professional development through time, many ask themselves the question, "What is the most effective professional development for classroom teachers today?" The purpose of this study was to explore a balanced literacy classroom-embedded professional development approach to teacher training. This study will add an element of background knowledge, feedback, and reflection in order to tailor the professional development content to the knowledge of the teachers. The study analyzed its effectiveness qualitatively through a phenomenological design.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How might teachers' perceptions of knowledge about literacy instruction change over time?

2. What will take place in teachers' perceptions of their practice when they have participated in embedded, contextual professional development?

3. Which supports (coaching and self-assessments), if any, will the teachers perceive were the most effective in helping them implement the literacy strategies and theories from the professional development opportunities?

4. What will be the teachers' perceptions of children's performance as readers and writers?

Significance

In the current situation of our nation and more specifically our state as it relates to reading, it is crucial that teachers be educated on literacy and the current, most effective, methods and strategies of teaching reading and writing to students. Professional development based on current teacher knowledge and research is the driving force to empower teachers to be effective in their practice of literacy instruction in classrooms. My goal as a researcher is to look at teacher knowledge and attitudes to promote student learning in reading and writing.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, information on the background and history of the problem, the research questions, and the relevance and rationale. Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature. Chapter 3 outlines the methods and procedures of the study. It provides educational information regarding methods used to gather data and a description of the materials used. Chapter 4 provides the findings of the data. Chapter 5 offers the conclusions, limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to two key topics of this study: balanced literacy and job-embedded professional development. First, the description of balanced literacy is discussed, and limitations surrounding the topic are explored. Controversial issues surrounding balanced literacy are examined. Research on job-embedded professional development was reviewed with an emphasis on the following areas: coaching, modeling, contextual teaching, and scaffolding. Table 1 shows the structure and framework of this literature review.

Table 1

Literature Review Map

Balanced Literacy	• Description • Link to instruction	To document a need for balanced literacy within a language arts block.
Job-Embedded Professional Development	• Coaching • Contextual Teaching • Scaffolding	To document effective use of professional development using coaching, modeling, contextual teaching, and scaffolding.

Many researchers have sought to measure and understand the effectiveness of professional development on teaching practice. A growing body of research continues to look for the most effective strategies for training teachers. To consider the best practices for professional development in education, an exhaustive review of the research was conducted.

Inclusion Criteria

The studies for this review were chosen based on several criteria. First, to establish confidence in the quality of the studies, only studies published in peer- reviewed journals were included. No unpublished doctoral dissertations were selected. These were excluded due to the conflicting opinions surrounding grey literature (Moyer, Schneider, Knapp-Oliver & Sohl, 2010). An electronic search was conducted using the *PsychINFO* database. The search was conducted using the search terms professional development for teachers and literacy. The search produced 228 studies. Only studies from Pre-K to 6th grade were included. Studies focusing on fidelity and implementation of a specific literacy program were eliminated. Web-based coaching programs and science content area studies were excluded, as well as studies solely addressing educational mandates, teacher candidates, and school needs. Studies using participants with exceptionalities (e.g. gifted students, students with dyslexia) were also excluded.

Balanced Literacy

The term balanced literacy first originated from California school district in 1996 (California Department of Education, 1996). In the field of education, there are multiple broad definitions of a balanced literacy approach. This approach to reading and writing instruction is described in many textbooks and district literacy initiatives. The point of balanced literacy instruction is to achieve a balance of reading and writing, thus creating independence in students' learning of literacy.

Over the past few decades, much debate has ensued regarding the most effective way to teach literacy. Often coined the reading wars (Adams, 1990), two sides argued what they considered the best approach to literacy instruction. On one side, skills-based explicit instruction that promoted systematic phonics instruction was considered the most effective approach. This bottom-up approach encouraged the learning of the alphabet, letter sounds, and blending prior to moving on to words and meaning (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). On the other side, a more meaning-based, top-down approach was said to be the best way. This holistic method encouraged exploration and experimentation with reading and writing. Students were not required to know their letters and sounds, and were encouraged to learn reading through listening to and understanding stories (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013).

After years of literacy wars, most researchers and educators have agreed upon a balance between these two sides, thus again, the term *balanced literacy*. Both methodologies have merit, and it is the interaction of the two sides that help create the perfect learning environment for new readers and writers. "As such, most educators

would suggest that literacy instruction should promote the interaction between the skill-based aspects of reading (e.g. phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, letter–sound association) and the meaning-based aspects of reading (e.g. vocabulary, comprehension)" (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013, p. 15).

According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), balanced literacy instruction supports multiple environments. It is grounded in the philosophical belief assuming reading and writing achievement are developed through teacher-directed instruction, modeling, and scaffolded opportunities. Classrooms following the model of balanced literacy instruction are composed of a framework of components that follow a gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). This model uses an *I do, we do, you do* approach to learning. An educator's ultimate goal is to scaffold children into reading and writing independence through the use of modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. The components of this model include read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading and writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Short, 1999). Also within this framework, word study, phonics, and phonemic awareness instruction are included. The balanced literacy framework is set up so that teachers can differentiate and meet learners at their individual reading and writing levels.

Balanced literacy is an approach to instruction and a philosophy of the teacher, making it difficult to accurately analyze the effectiveness. In other words, it is difficult to say what outside factors could affect learning outcomes.

Link to Instruction in Balanced Literacy

Research suggests a successful balanced literacy program must incorporate a balance of teacher-directed instruction (including teacher modeling of skills, strategies,

and active and strategic processes) and student-centered activities (Au, Caroll & Scheu, 1997; Freppon & Dahl, 1998; Pressley, Rankin & Yokoi, 1996; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Short (1999) suggests that essential components of literacy should mirror principles of effective learning and teaching. She argues that, while young readers need guided reading, predictable text, and shared reading approaches, these opportunities do not always give opportunities to practice meaning. Hence, students need the balance of read-alouds and opportunities to practice in guided reading - a balance of both components. Therefore, well-implemented balanced literacy programs must include elements of linking literacy experiences to those in the real world as well as opportunities for students to practice these experiences (Asselin, 1999). To best achieve this goal, research suggests that teachers need to do the following: a) emphasize reading, writing, and literature by providing long, uninterrupted periods of successful reading every day; b) create a positive, reinforcing, cooperative environment in the classroom; c) set high but realistic expectations for all students; and d) thoroughly integrate reading and writing across the curriculum (Asselin, 1999; Pressley, Morrow, Block, Allington, & Wharton-McDonald, 1988). Elements and components of the balanced literacy framework have been identified by the research, which has set the guidelines for districts and curriculum developers.

Taylor and Pearson (2002) analyzed the research on improving literacy achievement for students who are at risk for failure due to high poverty. Their conclusion emphasized that both instructional (classroom teacher) and organizational (school-wide supports) levels should aspire to improve literacy. They found effective literacy teachers provided good classroom management and provided scaffolded balanced literacy

instruction with a focus on explicit skills and authentic opportunities to read and write and to discuss the text. Effective schools provided a collaborative learning environment, shared the responsibility for student learning, reached out to families, and supported the learning of teachers and students. Freppon and Dahl (1998) argue there are some limitations of balanced literacy, including the mixed messages around what teachers are to teach and how specifically to teach it. In addition, because balanced literacy is an approach to instruction and not a prescribed or scripted program, it is often difficult to analyze the effectiveness of student achievement.

This study drew upon all parts of the balanced literacy framework. The research from Allington (2002) and Short (1999) have helped me formulate the aspects of balanced literacy that I consider to be of utmost importance in the classroom. Readers in this study will experience instructional approaches that consider a balanced approach to reading instruction. It will specifically consider a balanced approach where students are provided authentic opportunities to read and write. These approaches may impact students to make sense of literacy in authentic ways with a focus on meaning (Short, 1999). Balanced literacy research documents a need for balanced literacy in K-4 classrooms. In addition, this study will lend a more in-depth focus on two main components of the balanced literacy framework: 1) Interactive Read-Alouds and 2) Guided Reading.

Interactive Read-Alouds

Interactive read-alouds is a component of the balanced literacy framework in which a teacher sets aside time to read orally to students on a consistent basis from texts above their independent reading level but at their listening level. Fountas and Pinnell

(2006) describe the process as both the teacher and the students as active and processors of the text. Interactive read-alouds differ slightly from a traditional read-alouds.   A traditional read-alouds is done mostly for enjoyment, it tends to create an atmosphere of passive learning; it is used mostly for student to create listening skills and comprehension is checked at the end of the story. During an interactive read-alouds there is a clear focus and intentionality to the strategy being taught, an environment is created where students are active participants in their thinking and learning; and students are developing both listening skills and oral language through turn and talk (Calkins, 2001).

Calkins (2001) describes reasons we read aloud. These are as follows: to start the day, to mentor students in thinking processes that are present during proficient reading, to introduce students to new text structures and genres, to support reading strategies, to introduce a new theme or genre, to model and support a comprehension strategy, to teach a mini-lesson and to support other content areas within the curriculum. Another value to the interactive read-alouds is that is "it levels the playing field, ensuring that all learners experience rich, engaging text that are age and grade appropriate, regardless of their independent or instructional reading level. All students can think and talk about the text even if they can't read it for themselves" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2006, p. 4).

Guided Reading

Reading is a fantastically complicated process, the mechanism of which are largely invisible to an observer (Clay, 1991, 1993, 2005). In fact, reading is so complex that educational researchers still do not absolutely understand how it works. Guided reading is a component of balanced literacy in which small groups of children are building together to work at their instructional reading level with the teacher to guide and

support them in being strategic readers. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggest that guided reading allows students to develop reading strategies in a socially supported setting as they encounter text at increasing levels of difficulty. Students using similar processes at similar text levels are grouped together for instruction. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) describe guided reading as teaching toward a child's individual strengths so they can further their learning goals. They go on to explain that books are intentionally selected with the readers in mind so that students are able to move through more challenging texts. Guided reading follows a very specific and structured format. During the guided reading lesson, all readers are actively engaged in processing the texts and attending to meaning before, during and after the reading. "The purpose of guided reading is to enable children to use and develop strategies 'on the run' " (Fountas and Pinnell, 2012, p. 2). The point of guided reading is "for children to take on novel texts, read them at once with a minimum of support, and read many of them again and again for independence and fluency" (Fountas and Pinnell, 2012, p. 2).

Burkins and Croft (2010) explain to effectively teach guided reading, it helps to understand the reading process and the ways in which a reader accesses and integrates information from multiple cues to reach comprehension. Teaching guided reading is about looking closely at the reader and what processes the reader is using to work through and comprehend a text. Guided reading is not about teaching books and listening to children read. It is not about prompting for strategies or about leveling texts or students. It is first and foremost about developing in students reading processes that are efficient, or what Clay (1993) refers to as *a smoothly operating reading system*.

Professional Development

Professional development is the learning provided to teachers by schools, districts, and external sources to further their knowledge in the field of teaching and learning. When defining professional development, it is necessary to analyze its effects on improving professional practice and producing effective student achievement. Education is a constantly changing profession. According to Bransford, Brown, Donovan, and Pellegrino (2003), if teachers intend to remain current in best practice and research-based instruction while preparing for a more diverse group of learners, they must continue to seek knowledge and acquire teaching skills. Darling-Hammond (1997) stated that educational reform efforts in the United States could not succeed without teachers assuming new roles as educators that look drastically different than what has been seen in the past. Bransford, Brown, Donovan, and Pellegrino (2003) suggests there are several ways in which teachers learn: (1) from their own practice, (2) from interactions with teachers or a mentor so to speak, (3) from teacher educators in schools and districts, (4) by entering a graduate degree program, and (5) from being in a parent role they learn about moral and social development. He argues that, since teachers learn from such a wide range of sources, it is often difficult to assess the effectiveness of learning. In the United States, school districts spend only one to three percent of their budget on professional development for teachers. According to Kearns (1988), this lack of investment in personnel would be unheard of in the corporate world or education systems in other countries.

According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), the content of professional development can make the difference between simply providing a forum for

teachers to talk and enhancing and expanding teacher competencies. In addition, professional development opportunities that focus on student learning and support teachers in developing pedagogical skills to teach specific content has a high impact on student learning (Blank, Alas, & Smith, 2008; Wenglinsky, 2000). Currently, stakeholders are interested in whether professional development investments are beneficial. Researchers at the American Institute of Research analyzed over thirteen hundred studies of professional development (Yoon, 2007). Their work sought to answer the following questions: (1) What do we really know about the relationship between professional development and improvements in student learning? (2) What evidence validates that relationship, and how trustworthy is that evidence? (3) What does that evidence tell us about the characteristics of truly effective professional development activities? Within these studies with professional development, characteristics were compared, and various measures used to identify effectiveness. Of the 1,367 studies, only nine met the criteria as having credible evidence as set forth by What Works Clearinghouse (the organization that is charged with providing educators, policy makers, researchers, and the public with scientific evidence about *what works* in education) (n.d.). Out of Yoon's work (2007) came the following requirements for professional development: 1) concentration on pedagogy and curriculum issues; 2) analysis of content learned by students; 3) use of practices supported by existing researcher; 4) assurance of collaboration; 5) delivery in school and classroom settings; and 6) active monitoring of student activities.

Guskey (2003) cited other problems revolving around the same research; most of the studies indicate adequate time (a period of six weeks or longer) and resources.

However, some are controversial issues indicating that there is no relationship between time and professional development. In other words, there is no relationship between the amount of time teachers spent in professional development settings and the effectiveness of the professional development. For professional development to be effective, proper organization of time structures, and purposeful directives are required. Unfortunately, policy-makers in the education sector are interested in statements that provide solutions to produce effective professional development and are not necessarily interested in the time structures necessary to make this effective.

Carlisle and Berebitsky (2011) conducted a study in which they compared the attitudes and perceptions of first grade teachers who experienced professional development. The focus of the study was Reading First teachers. There were 43 participants in the study. The study looked at the differences when the teachers received the professional development and those who did not. The study looked specifically at their attitudes toward professional development, their instruction, and student outcomes. The teachers with the coaches as follow up to the professional development differed in instruction and their student showed higher gains in word decoding.

Another research study of professional development conducted in Pennsylvania, examined K-3 teachers who volunteered to participate for one year in professional development project which included a summer institute, Saturday workshops, and work at the school site with a professional development leader (Swan, 2003). District and building level leaders supported the project. Strategies lessons were modeling for the teachers with an explanation of the theory behind the strategy being modeled. Following the demonstration lessons, participants were provided with opportunities for coaching. In

addition to the modeled lessons and discussions, when the teachers were in session in schools, a literacy coach visited the classrooms twice each month to model, observe, assist, and plan with teachers. The collaboration among the participants was an integral piece to the study. Teachers kept journal and reflection notes throughout the process of the study. The conclusions indicated collaboration and the gaining of peer relationships throughout the study. The conclusions also indicated the teachers had informed decision-making, reflection and increased collaboration as a result of the study.

A New York City district's literacy initiative produced a study in which some themes emerged between how the children's literacy learning and how teachers learn to teach (Stein & D'Amico, 2002). The theory and framework of balanced literacy provided a framework for this initiative with a focus on moving from theory to practice. As a part of the professional development supportive assistance from on-site staff developers was provided to the teachers, which was similar to the assistance given to students through balanced literacy instruction. The professional development was embedded in the practice of teaching. The findings of this study showed that adults learn in much the same way that children learn. Stein and D'Amico (2002) argue the need for the gradual release model and Zone of Proximal development. The study revealed the complexity in teaching the teachers the framework and components of balanced literacy. Outcomes of the study recommended best practices for training teaches in balanced literacy. These included: time, support, practice, and knowledge of theory.

Teacher Effectiveness

There exist some characteristics of professional development that affect teaching practices. Various researchers have investigated teaching in classroom environments and programs that are designed for improving learning and teaching as well as the experiences of teachers in regards to types of and quality of professional development. Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002) conducted a study on professional development and effects on teacher instruction. A sample of 207 teachers in 30 schools was used to determine the characteristics of professional development and how it affected teaching practices using science and mathematics. The data from longitudinal teacher surveys were analyzed. The surveys were administered and analyzed over three consecutive years. The study found that professional development that emphasizes specified instructional practices leads to increased utilization of such practices among teachers in classroom. The study further indicated that features like provision of room for active learning, coherence, and content focus leads to increased professional development on teacher instructions. The results of the study also suggested that technology helps in professional development if used for participatory roles by teachers and students in a similar department, school, or grade level (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon & Birman, 2002). The study is reliable since it used a large sample appropriate for generalizations. However, there are limitations because the study focused solely on math.

When looking at teacher effectiveness, we must also look at whether or not the teachers are actually using the knowledge gained from professional development. A three-year mixed methods study conducted by Correnti (2007) analyzed literature logs that were administered to teachers. The logs were used over three consecutive six-week

blocks of time. Teachers were also given a questionnaire that was scored on a Likert scale meant to capture their judgments about the professional development (see Appendix A). The primary interest of the study was the degree to which teachers were given professional development with a focus on comprehension and writing instruction. The study revealed that teachers receiving the professional development in comprehension offered 10% more comprehension instruction than teachers who did not receive the professional development. In addition, the study revealed that teachers receiving intense professional development in writing offered 13% more writing instruction than those not receiving the professional development. This study provides some insight that teachers were in fact using the knowledge gained; however, the study does not reveal what information the teachers had prior to the professional development and does not provide any extra support to the teacher for internalizing the knowledge such as follow-up coaching.

Effects on Student Achievement

According to Allington (2002), quality teaching that entails preparations made by teachers, professional development, and improvement of the effectiveness of teachers in classrooms is central to improving the quality of education in primary schools. He goes on to discuss how good teaching far outweighs textbooks and programs when it comes to student achievement. Allington (2002) argues that school leaders would benefit from looking at the way we are educating teachers once they leave their pre-service work in order to directly benefit student learning.

As discussed in Blank and Alas (2009), The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) was funded by National Science Foundation to conduct an analysis of

how the use of a science and mathematics content focus as a form of teachers'

development affects teaching and learning. The analysis concentrated on studies dealing

with professional development among K-12 teachers teaching mathematics and science.

A sample of 16 studies was analyzed, consisting of reports, dissertations, and journal

articles in mathematics and science areas in elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The averaged effect size among the studies was two (Blank & Alas, 2009). The analysis

indicated that there is evidence to support the idea that teacher professional development

has positive effects on performance of the students. There was a positive relationship

between professional development programs and student outcomes.

Job Embedded Professional Development

Many outside factors overlap and influence professional development. These can

be anything from teacher background knowledge to the quality of the professional

development. However, the main intervening variables of consideration include

characteristics of the practitioners, characteristics of the learners, program factors, and

system characteristics of professional development (Belzer 2003; St. Clair and Belzer,

2003). Guskey (2002) states five main levels useful for evaluating professional

development: 1) reactions of the participants, 2) learning of the participants, 3) support

and change in the organization, 4) utilization of knowledge and skills by the participants,

and 5) student learning outcomes.

Job-embedded professional learning, on the other hand, refers to teacher learning

that (1) is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice, (2) occurs regularly, (3) consists of

teachers analyzing students' learning and finding solutions to immediate problems of

practice, and (4) is aligned with student standards, school curricula, and school

improvement goals (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hawley & Valli, 2000; Hirsh, 2009). As such, job-embedded professional learning is more likely to be learner centered, knowledge centered, community centered, and assessment centered than other forms of professional development. Hirsh (2009) defines job-embedded learning as teacher learning which 1) occur regularly, 2) is based on daily teaching routines, 3) where teachers evaluate learning of the students and offer immediate solutions to current problems, and 4) is in line with standards of the students and school curriculum. Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, and Jacques (2012) argue that job-embedded professional learning is centered on the learner, knowledge, community, and assessment, and has an impact on performance of students and quality of teaching.

Coaching and Adult Learning

Gallucci (2008) conducted a case study where research participants consisted of literacy coaches, teachers, and administrators. Interview data was used, and the effectiveness of the professional development was analyzed in-depth. Gallucci argued that teachers report their learning to be enhanced by on the job professional development. Limitations to the study included the interruptions caused by unforeseen daily routines. Teachers without quality experience in professional development did not seem to reflect effective results with students. For continuous improvements, there was a need for increased quality of professional learning involving all educators in elementary and secondary schools. For effective professional learning, it is necessary for educators to involve experts to help in addressing specific requirements regarding schools and student performance improvement objectives (Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, & Jacques, 2012).

Adult learning methods include coaching, accelerated learning, timely training, and guided design. With a coaching method, practitioners with more knowledge and experience attempt to transfer their expertise to those with little experience (Leat, Lofthouse & Wilcock, 2006). It encompasses goal planning and setting in teams, information sharing and modeling by the coach, collecting and practicing information by the learners, coach feedback and evaluation of the experiences of the learners. Some schools have used coaching as a method of adult learning. Various researchers have conducted investigations to determine if peer coaching can help improve teaching strategies.

Lynch and Ferguson (2010) examined the perceptions of elementary literacy coaches to determine their roles, beliefs, and practices. Thirteen literacy coaches were interviewed regarding their day to day literacy coaching. The study identified the following three major topics in participants' statements: coaches' role, barriers to effective literacy coaching, and overcoming barriers. Barriers that limited the effectiveness of coaches in their role included the amount of time available to work with teachers and limited resource materials. Some coaches developed ways to overcome these barriers, and some made suggestions for personal and systemic changes to improve literacy coaching.

Showers and Joyce's (1996) research highlighted how peer coaching had evolved with time. They go on to discuss barriers to coaching being that many members of the school facility offered the coaching. Many times, it was a supervisor or curriculum director. Because coaches have so many aspects of the school day under their workload, the coaching was often not at the forefront of their work. Study teams often use peer-

coaching help in staff development and support the implementation of new teaching

techniques (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Showers and Joyce (1996) also suggested that

schools failed to ensure that educators received adequate training when learning new

techniques and then applying the techniques effectively while in the classroom setting. If

teachers can implement new skills and strategies together, they help each other with the

accurate implementation of the respective skills and strategies. They can also offer

suggestions to each other to help in facilitating smoother transition when utilizing new

skills and strategies.

Showers and Joyce (1996) created detailed analyses of staff development that

specifically concentrated on teaching techniques and curriculum development. They

indicated that 10% of the teachers implemented the material learned in professional

development settings. Transfer rates were also low for individuals who had volunteered

for training, implying that, even though various teachers may voluntarily go to seminars,

workshops, coaching sessions, curriculum development, and other professional

development programs, they do not necessarily utilize what is learned. There could be

numerous reasons to account for this problem. Showers and Joyce (1996) hypothesized

that teachers who attempted to master new curriculum and teaching techniques would

need continuous technical help at the classroom level.

Leat, Lofthouse and Wilcock (2006) identified the complexities that interfere with

coaching as reduced focus on coaching. On the other hand, the focus often becomes on

evaluative measures rather than actually coaching a teacher to change his/her practice. As

a result, coaching becomes ineffective, and teacher shifts do not take place. According to

Showers and Joyce (1996), teachers have to learn when to utilize new practices and the

way to utilize them to align with the needs of different students, curricular objectives, and settings. Without coaching, transfer may fail especially if the teachers are learning new skills. Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, and Bolhuis (2009) indicated that most researchers have increasingly accepted that professional learning is regarded as a social enterprise, where professionals depend on the expertise and support from others to incorporate new innovative practices. Phillips and Glickman (1991) outline a coaching program that incorporated cognitive growth. There was a sample of 22 teachers who participated in four professional development sessions. During the sessions, they were required to learn problem solving skills, observation skills, nondirective interpersonal skills, and collaborative interpersonal skills. In every session, demonstrations, lectures, conference role-playing, practice observations, outside readings, and provision of discussion and reflection opportunities were included. Coaching partners participated in four different coaching cycles. Each cycle entailed a pre-conference, classroom observation, post-observation conference, and a follow-up session. Each teacher acted as a coach in two cycles and was in turn coached in the other remaining two cycles. The instructor and participants participated in group debriefing sessions at the end of every coaching cycle. Phillips and Glickman measured the conceptual levels of the subjects before and after the program using interview data and survey data. They found there was a significant increase in the conceptual levels of teachers at end of the program. This kind of exploratory research shows that stimulation of teacher growth toward higher developmental levels is possible (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2007) and thus demonstrates the significance of professional development that includes an intentional focus on coaching within the classroom.

Contextual Teaching

Contextual teaching is described as a methodology of teaching that connects academic concepts to real-world situations and encourages students to see how what they learn relates to their lives (Berns and Erickson, 2001; Lynch & Padilla, 2000). Thus, they are not only connecting reading and writing authentic literacy opportunities but also linking these concepts to tasks that are practiced every day in the real world using literacy. In addition, contextual teaching integrates the social constructivist philosophy of Dewey and Boydston (2008) and the brain-based learning theory of Jensen (1988), which bridges the gap between academic concepts and real world applications.

According to Harwell (2003), professional development needs to be contextual in nature. It should be content-focused, showing the knowledge of teachers and how to build on it while linking this back to real world situations. Professional development provided should aim at changing behaviors of the teachers so as to improve the performance of students. Leaders in the education sector are required to create professional learning that improves on teaching processes in classroom environments (Harwell, 2003).

Wood, Cobb, and Yackel (1990) investigated a teacher of a second-grade classroom. The focus was specifically to look at the contextual teaching in mathematics. The data collection methods were interview data from the teacher, ethnographic researcher field notes, as well as videotaped lessons. The teacher's role in the study was to implement contextual teaching in mathematics. Results indicated the teacher readily admitted she had not allowed for students to think and talk through math in real life situations in the past. She reported having seen an increase in student engagement and their ability to solve problems as a result of implementing these practices. Interestingly,

the research also revealed at the end of the study, the teacher felt the contextual teaching was beneficial while delivering math instruction but was not necessary for students to be successful in reading.

A qualitative study conducted by Costello (2012), who was a teacher-researcher, concluded students need to be engaged in a balanced approach where contextual teaching and learning are emphasized. In this study, Costello (2012) used teacher notes and journaling to record reading levels and reading successes among students. He used the journals to also record student actions in reading. The results indicated that in some cases the levels helped students to better process as readers and writers, but the most effective readers were able to make meaning of the text in a contextual way. Contextual teaching should be the basis for professional development process (Harwell, 2003). With contextual teaching, information is delivered using useful and familiar contexts. It is beneficial since it considers learning as a process that occurs as a result of students processing new information using familiar references. According to Dewey and Boydston (2008), contextual teaching is analogous to brain functioning. Learners are able to comprehend the content by relating to experiences in life, experiencing, applying new information to real world examples, cooperating with other learners, and transferring new knowledge or information. Efficient professional development involves providing opportunities for all the participants to learn using classroom contexts. Hence, contextual teaching incorporated in professional development is an effective method for changing the behavior of teachers, which in turn helps in improving student behaviors. Professional development that incorporated contextual teaching enhances teacher interactions, and gives room for trial of new behaviors among teachers (Harwell, 2003).

Scaffolding/Gradual Release

It is known from the literature that working within the ZPD is an effective way of instruction, as well as individualizing and differentiating learning. Vygotsky (1978) defines zone of proximal development as the distance between the level of actual development (depends on independent problem solving) and potential development level (depends on adult collaboration or guidance to solve problems). The actual development level of a given child indicates matured functions. In such cases, a child is independent in its operations. The ZPD defines immature functions that are yet to mature.

In the Vygotsky theory (1978), the ZDP equips educators and psychologists with a framework to comprehend the internal course of development. The framework considers completed maturation and cycle processes and functional processes in early stages of formation. Hence, the use of ZPD allows separation of the immediate future of a child from dynamic developmental state. This allows for both matured developments and maturing developments. Mental development of children may be determined only after clarifications between actual development levels and ZPD.

The professional development should meet the teachers in their zone of proximal development, building from what they know to what they do not know. It should be a social interaction, learning from a more knowledgeable other, with specific feedback. It is evident that the learning rate varies from one learner to another (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky considers learning as a social process. Hence, the author stresses on the role language and dialogue plays in cognitive growth. Exposing the learners to new material using oral literature does not guarantee collaboration with their peers nor does it guarantee true learning. For the concept of ZPD to be implemented effectively, educators,

together with psychologists, have to work together by analyzing internal development processes stimulated by teaching and are useful for follow up learning. Theoretically, teaching is the process through which human knowledge and cognitive methods are socially elaborated to evoke learning using actual developmental levels. Professional intervention programs should not focus on psychological processes, but rather on contemporary and future capabilities and functions (Vygotsky, 1978).

This research has demonstrated that it is highly significant to include professional embedded development in the classroom (Allington, 2002; Showers and Joyce, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Based upon the work of Allington (2002), Short (1999), Vygotsky (1978), and Guskey (2002), this study utilized coaching, contextual teaching, and an intentional use of scaffolds. Research demonstrates that these features of professional development are essential in creating professional development that makes a real impact on teachers' and students' learning.

In conclusion, when these studies were examined together, three common themes emerged from the literature. These themes indicate that professional development is most effective when 1) a pre-assessment of teacher knowledge is included in the professional development, 2) a combination of whole group professional development and one-on-one coaching and mentoring within the classroom context is used, and 3) feedback and reflection are used to address next steps in professional development.

Each of these tenets was found within the literature, but no single study included all three elements. Furthermore, no study specifically tailored the professional development content to compliment the results of the pre-assessment and individualize and differentiate the literacy and coaching content to the teachers. This study seeks to

combine each of the three themes found to be significant to professional development and

teacher learning, but also add the unique factor of individualizing the literacy content to

the knowledge of the teachers. Figure 1 represents the integration of the literature to form

the present study.
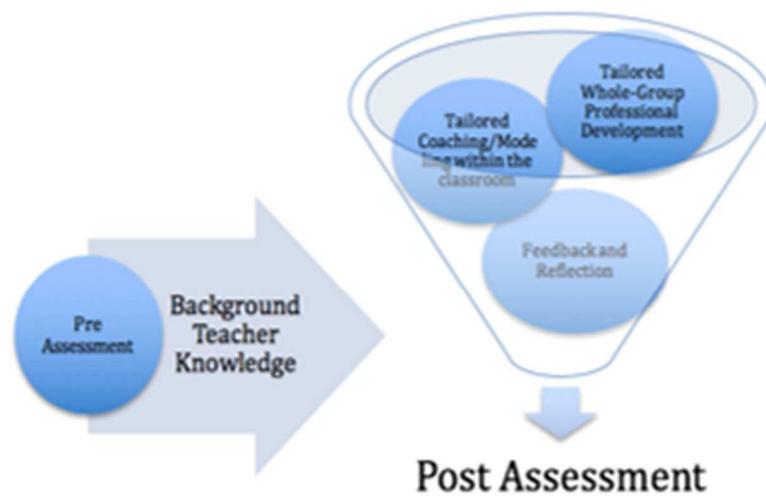
Figure 1 Integration of the Literature to Inform Present Study

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative methodology to better understand and fully describe the perceptions and experiences of teachers in elementary classrooms experiencing literacy professional development, coaching, modeling, and feedback. Qualitative researchers attempt to describe the process by which people understand. In addition, qualitative researchers attempt to tell the story over time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Brantlinger, Jimenez, Pugach, and Richardson (2005), a person's interpretations and reactions to their current situations are what qualitative research attempts to capture over time. Qualitative research is used to discover personal stories and perspectives and allow the researcher to highlight and interpret subjects and events rather than to control a set of variables and test a hypothesis (Merriam, 1988). This study used case study as its research methodology. It included a variety of data generation techniques to highlight the teachers' voices in their classroom setting.

Case Study

A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, program, single subject, institution, or particular event (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994). However, it varies in complexity. This case study focused on teachers' perceptions in an elementary school setting. It described the experiences and perceptions of teachers in relation to the

professional development and coaching. The case study focused specifically on teachers'
perceptions of student achievement in reading and writing. Using a case study allowed
for in-depth descriptions and interpretations, which allowed for a detailed account of the
data collected for this study.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher took on several different roles. She conducted pre- and post-
interviews and selectively transcribed the interviews; she provided the professional
development sessions; and provided individualized coaching within the classroom
setting. The researcher was an active participant within this study. Bogdan and Biklen
(1998) describe this as entering the world of the people the researcher will study, getting
to know them and systematically keeping a detailed written account of what is heard and
observed. Becoming a member of this setting was necessary for the researcher to conduct
this study in a very specific and natural way. As a result of the multiple roles in this
study, the researcher worked diligently to be transparent in the research methodology to
ensure credibility and validity.

The researcher is a certified literacy expert who has earned a certificate in the
Literacy Collaborative initiative. This was a two-year non-degree program offered at
Georgia State University. Literacy Collaborative is a nationally recognized,
comprehensive school literacy model based on the award-winning work by reading
experts such as Fountas, Pinnell, Clay, and Calkins. The key components of the Literacy
Collaborative model include: on-site professional development, leading to the creation of
a school leadership team, and a research-based literacy instructional model. The literacy
model is based on language and literacy development research, and it encompasses a

student-centered approach emphasizing language development and student talk as the foundation for reading and writing. The Literacy Collaborative instructional model includes systematic teaching of the essential components of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language development as outlined in the Tennessee State Standards.

Because the researcher wanted to be a close part of the research setting, she selected only the primary grades in an elementary school to conduct the study. Additionally, the researcher has been a teacher in this area for many years prior to this study, therefore a school was specifically selected where the researcher had not been previously employed. The researcher was an outsider to this particular community of adult learners and elementary teachers. The researcher committed to the principal to working with this school for one full year to provide professional development to the faculty. Considering the potential bias of the researcher as participant, she used self-assessment for teachers to determine their progress within the professional development. In addition, she made the research process transparent across the study by continually reflecting upon teaching practices within professional development, research methodology, and interactions with the participants in this study. The researcher entered this setting with an open mind and flexible thinking and did not attempt to establish any relationship with teachers prior to the beginning of this study so that she could gain natural and objective data as teachers were interviewed.

The role of the researcher in this natural inquiry was that of recorder, observer, interpreter, and analyzer of the story told by the participants. According to Marshall and Rossman (1998), the relationship between researcher and participants needs a high level

of trust, open-mindedness, and mutual collaboration. The relationship between researcher and participants was made clear and outlined for the participants.

Procedure

The study began at the beginning of the 2016-17 school year in September and ended the middle of December. The participants included teachers, administrators, and the literacy coach in a local elementary school. The teachers included four kindergarten teachers, one first grade teacher, and one second grade teacher. The literacy coach serves the entire faculty. Although the principal and assistant principal serve the entire school; one of them is focused on primary (K-2) and the other one focuses mainly on grades 3-6. The outcomes of this study are the perceived impact of the professional development on nine participants who engaged in the professional development group. More specifically, this study examined the impact of modeling, coaching and contextual teaching on two kindergarten teachers through case study research.

Background Information

Meadow Hill Elementary School

Meadow Hill Elementary School (pseudonym) is a small public elementary school located in Middle Tennessee. The school is considered to be an urban school. This school attempts to provide quality education to students in grades Pre-K through 5th grade. There are 790 students in the school with 50 teachers. Of the 50 teachers, 16 of

these are K-2 grade teachers and nine of them participated in the study. The average class size is 20 students.   Approximately 80 percent of the school population participates in the free or reduced lunch program. Less than 10 percent of the students are considered to be English Language Learners.

Meadow Hill Elementary School has many programs in place to provide support to students. The school has an intervention plan in place where students are provided intervention and remediation when needed. Special Education services are also provided in the form of pull out and inclusion depending on the specific needs of the learner. Meadow Hill Elementary is a "Leader In Me" school. "The Leader In Me" is Franklin Covey's whole school transformation process. This process teaches 21st century leadership and life skills to students and creates a culture of student empowerment based on the idea that every child can be a leader (Covey, Covey, Summers, & Hatch, 2014). All teachers have been trained in this program.

The study focused on the nine participants during the professional development sessions and focus group interviews. The study focused specifically on two teachers for in-depth coaching and modeling for the case study. These teachers included six classroom teachers in grades K-1, one literacy leader, and two administrators. The participants had in the range of three to twenty years of experience in education. Three participants had a B.S., four held a M.Ed., and one a doctorate. Prior to the professional development sessions and following the sessions, all participants had the opportunity to reflect in journals and participate in the interviews.

The Story of Two Teachers

Introduction of Mrs. Smith-Kindergarten Teacher

Mrs. Smith (pseudonym) is a kindergarten teacher at Meadow Hill Elementary School.   She is currently in her eleventh year of teaching. Her experience includes five years of teaching fourth grade and the remainder of her career has been with kindergarten students. Mrs. Smith holds a B. S. in Elementary Education and currently needs three more courses to have a completed Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction.   Mrs. Smith explained her philosophy of teaching as follows:

Every child can learn, just on a different day, in a different way. Children need a predictable structure and routine. They need to have a clear purpose. It's necessary for teachers to be purposeful in language and to model explicit expectations. Students need an environment with a comfort level to take risks and to try new strategies (Mrs. Smith, final interview).

Mrs. Smith's Classroom

Mrs. Smith has 19 children in her classroom.   The class consists of 10 boys and nine girls. Mrs. Smith uses positive reinforcement in her classroom as a behavior management strategy. She conducts the majority of her phonemic awareness, phonics, reading and writing lessons in a whole group format. The classroom has a rug area with an easel where whole group and read-aloud lessons take place. There are desks in the classroom arranged in groups of four or five students. Bookshelves line the walls of the classroom and are filled with teacher resource materials. There is a kidney shaped table in the classroom with chairs around the table. Mrs. Smith has her teacher resources and

student folders on the table. The students' classroom supplies are organized in tubs near the desks and are shared and utilized in a community sharing fashion.

The alphabet and other academic charts are posted high on the wall of the classroom. There are two white board areas in the classroom with a schedule posted, standards and objectives and sight words and letters to be taught for the week. There is a projector located on Mrs. Smith's desk that she uses to display sight words and letters during instructional time. During work time in the classroom, Mrs. Smith walks around and provides individualized help to students. Technology is also utilized with students working on Ipads as they finish assigned tasks.

Introduction of Mrs. Black-Kindergarten Teacher

Mrs. Black (pseudonym) is a kindergarten teacher at Meadow Hill Elementary. She is currently in her sixth year of teaching. Her experience includes pre-school and kindergarten teaching placements. This is her second year in a kindergarten classroom. She holds a B.S. is in Early Childhood Education with a Pre-3 Special Education Endorsement. Mrs. Black shared her philosophy of education as follows:

> My philosophy as an early childhood educator is that all children can learn. It is a matter of figuring out how they are motivated. Each child has a special need at one time or another whether it is academically or they had a bad morning or their shoes are too tight. Each child needs to have their needs met and academics may not be the most important every moment of every day. I teach the whole child. My classroom is a community. They learn to respect each other and me as I respect them and their opinions even if we disagree. I believe having their trust is huge and once they trust you, they will let you teach them. My babies have a choice in the room at times to empower them that they are as much a part of their learning as I am. They learn through play and that is challenged when others have different philosophies. Oftentimes students are expected to perform academically when we have yet to care for them socially. It is challenging to have developmentally appropriate practice when the expectations are not appropriate. I feel very passionate about early childhood and how we are not

allowing them to develop appropriately due to all of the outside pressures. (Mrs. Black, final interview)

Mrs. Black's Classroom

Mrs. Black has 19 students in her classroom. She has 10 boys and nine girls. The room is arranged in table groups. There are centers arranged around the room with many manipulatives, games and books for the students to use. These include magnetic letters, beads, blocks, along with many others. There is a white board area in the classroom covered with sight words and letter of the week and the letters that have been covered in previous weeks. There is a carpet area with a rocking chair where the children sit during the read-aloud. Whole group instruction is done from a projector with students seated at their desks. Mrs. Black provides s positive reinforcement as well as corrective statements as classroom management techniques. The alphabet and other academic charts are posted high on the wall of the classroom.

Setting

The research site for this study was a small public elementary school. Located in Middle Tennessee, this school attempts to provide quality education to students in grades Pre-K through 5th grade. There are 790 students in the school with 50 teachers. Of the 50 teachers, 16 of these are K-2 grade teachers who were invited to participate in this research study. Nine teachers agreed to participate in the professional development. The participants were selected based on the study being focused on the primary grade teachers. The average class size is 20 students.

Participants

There were nine participants in this study. The data from interviews, documents, and field notes were analyzed for these participants as well as closely analyzing two case study teachers over a ten-week period. The teachers were selected on a voluntary basis upon participating in the professional development session.

Data Collection and Sources

The researcher worked closely with the principal and curriculum coordinator to schedule time and parameters for conducting professional development. Pre-interview data and teacher self-assessment around literacy instruction guided and determined the specific professional development sessions that were taught. This study was conducted over a ten-week period with professional development being taught, follow-up coaching, modeling, feedback, and interviews. Ten weeks allowed for three professional development sessions with seven full weeks of coaching contact with the teachers (see Appendix B). Prior to the coaching, individual interviews will be conducted and further teacher self-assessments (see Appendix C) will be carried out. In order to investigate the research questions posed in this study, five data sources were used: focus group interview, individual interviews, observations, field notes, and teacher self-assessments. See Table 2 for the outline of the study.

Table 2

Research Questions, Data Collection, and Data Analysis Description

Research Questions	Data Collection	Data to be Analyzed
1) How does teachers' perceptions of their knowledge change over time?	Focus Group Interviews Individual Interviews Self-Assessments Teacher Reflection Logs	Teacher thoughts articulated through interviews, observations during modeling and coaching (transcripts of recordings and researcher field notes from journal)
2) What happens in teachers' perceptions of their practice when they have participated in embedded, contextual professional development?	Focus Group Interviews Individual Interviews Self-Assessments	Teacher thoughts articulated through interviews (transcripts of recordings)
3) Which supports (coaching and self-assessments), if any, the teachers felt were the most effective in helping them implement the strategies and theories from the professional development opportunities.	Focus Group Interviews Individual Interviews Self-Assessments Teacher Reflection Logs	Teacher thoughts articulated through interviews and teacher reflection logs (transcripts of recordings)
4) What are the teachers' perceptions of children's performance as readers and writers?	Focus Group Interviews Individual Interviews Self-Assessments Teacher Reflection Logs	Teacher thoughts articulated through interviews and teacher reflection logs (transcripts of recordings)

Group Interviews

Group interviews with the nine participants were used to structure dialogue among participants around literacy instruction. According to Seidman (2013), there is an in-depth based interview that tells the life history. Within this approach, the researcher used primarily open-ended questions. The major task of the researcher was to build on and make explorations of the participants' responses to those questions. These focus group interviews were guided by a set of questions set forth by the researcher (see Appendix D). The purpose of the focus group interviews was to stimulate talk and provide for participants to feel comfortable in speaking about literacy in the school setting. This data source was selected to provide a safe place for participants to speak about literacy knowledge and to give the researcher background of the teacher perceptions. The researcher conducted the pre/post interviews. It was imperative that the researcher actively heard the stories from the participants first hand so that the research could focus on creating need based professional development (see Appendix C).

Individual Interviews

The format of the individual interviews was the same as the focus group interviews. The individual interviews were conducted with the prior coaching and modeling opportunities and after. The questions were guided by the participant's responses in the focus group interview and by natural happenings of the coaching and modeling. The purpose of the individual interviews was to gain a deeper more precise understanding of the participant's perceptions. The settings for the individual interviews was held in the teacher's classroom with the teacher and researcher sitting in close proximity and not in a formal manner. The teachers were provided with opportunities to

attend the interviews when they are available and were not required to attend at pre-determined times. The individual interview was audiotaped as granted permission by the participants, and the researcher summarized the notes at the end of the interview and asked each participant to assess the accuracy. Short informal interviews were also conducted as the researcher coached and provided feedback to the participants. Transcripts of the recordings were selectively transcribed. This data source was selected to take a deeper in-depth look at the participant's perceptions and attitudes.

Coaching and Field Notes

Literacy coaching is defined by Toll (2014) as a category of instructional coaching that directly relates to literacy. In addition, coaching would be defined as rooted in the needs, interest, and concerns of the teacher, based on ongoing feedback and conversations (immediate feedback) while focused and adapted to the style and pace of the teacher. The coaching process occurred during the process of the study (Toll, 2014). Toll (2014) also discusses within contextual professional development, coaches will often work directly with teacher within her own classroom to model new learning in a lesson. The modeling is simply the teacher demonstrating the entire lesson and the teacher being able to watch and observe the practice.

This study utilized coaching, modeling, and immediate feedback. Within this study, the frequency of coaching was three to four times per week depending on the participant's willingness to have the researcher in the classroom setting. The coaching and field notes included teachers' lesson plans, teaching, and interactions with students. Short, informal interviews were conducted after coaching sessions to provide new perspectives to the interpretations of teacher behaviors. This data source was selected to

bring researcher perspectives into the story. While the interviews provided the participants' point of view, the coaching sessions and field notes provided the researcher's point of view. The coaching was a side-by-side coaching model where the teacher and researcher were collaborative in delivering the instruction to the students. Because this is a collaborative effort within the moment and ongoing support to the teacher, this served to reduce the teachers feeling they were being observed or judged. In addition, the researcher did not have evaluative power in the self-assessments.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment was used to monitor participant's perceptions of their current knowledge and their development over time. According to Ross and Bruce (2007), self-assessment is a powerful technique used for self-improvement. They go on to argue that self-assessment is an instrument that can be used for professional growth. Self-assessments contribute to teachers' attitudes and views about their ability to bring about student learning. Ross and Bruce (2007) argue teachers who perceive they have been successful, regardless of the accuracy of their judgment, expect to be successful. In other words, teachers who expect to be successful set higher goals for themselves. Participants in this study self-assessed before and after the study. This data source was selected as a way to control for researcher bias about how the teachers were responding to the professional development since there were many different roles of the researcher. This method also served to increase validity within the study.

Table 3

Professional Development Opportunities

Professional Development Lesson Plan #1 - Session 1

Dissertation Study

Focus: Gradual Release Model and Comprehension Strategies
Read Aloud: Each Kindness
Pre-Assessment: Listing the comprehension strategies
What the Experts Say: tea part quotes, power point, discussion
What Does It Look Like? Rick's Reader's Workshop Video
How Do I Get Started? Handout, comprehension strategies

The model used for this professional development intervention was based on a three-part structure, specifically designed to help teachers take research from the best teaching practices. Each new topic started with *what the experts say*. This included some type of reading from experts in the field of the topic being studied. This work from the experts set the foundation for the *why* behind best practices. The next section is called *what does it look like*. After teachers had an opportunity to learn from the experts in the field, they were given a glance at what the idea looks like in the real world through videos or model lessons. It seemed to made a difference when the teachers could experience something in practice as opposed to only hearing about it. Lastly, the teachers move to *how do I get started*. In this final step, the teachers participated in a detailed guideline of what it looked like to get started with the practice. In other words, how do I try this in my classroom tomorrow? This framework allows for participants to remain deeply connected to the literature in the field while connecting to practical strategies and

classroom implementation (Parish & Taylor, personal communication, October 13, 2000). While there were other professional development models available, the one chosen for this study seemed most beneficial in connecting theory to practice for this group of teachers.

During the introduction within the professional development, teachers were initially asked to list the six comprehension strategies and how they teach these strategies to their students. Effective individual comprehension discussed by Duke and Pearson (2002) are prediction/prior knowledge, student think-alouds, text structure, visualizing, summarizing, and questions/questioning. Duke and Pearson's comprehension strategy work was most closely aligned to the comprehension strategies being used by the district's scope and sequence. While there is a sizable amount of research around comprehension strategies, the ones chosen were specific to the needs of the group of participants as well as principal requests to follow district scope and sequence in this particular study. Of the nine participants, two were able to name all the comprehension strategies. The remaining participants could list two or three comprehension strategies.

The professional development session began with some quotes from leading experts in the field to build and activate background knowledge for the topic. These experts included Clay (1991), Fountas and Pinnell (2016), Keene (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997), and Stahl (2004). The major theme of the quotes focused on comprehension being a multi-faceted work that happens with children as they read. The quotes were chosen to provide teachers an opportunity to begin thinking about what some experts in the field say about comprehension strategies. The teachers each had quote to think about and read and then they partnered with other participants to discuss other quotes. After about ten

minutes of reading and discussing with one another, the participants were able to discuss as a whole group some overall learning and connections.

A PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix E) was used to share, teach and provide some video example of theory and practice of comprehension strategies and the gradual release model. A visual image was shared to inform the participants of each component of the balanced literacy framework and how they relate to the gradual release model. A short video clip of Nell Duke discussing comprehension strategies with young readers was included in the PowerPoint (see Appendix E). Finally, the participants viewed a read-aloud lesson with a comprehension strategy being taught and modeled for children through a read-aloud.

At the end of the professional development, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, reflect on the learning, and share next steps in the response logs.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), data analysis is the process of organizing data. Each phase of data analysis was designed to make the process manageable. Group and individual interviews were analyzed for interpretive and emerging themes as they evolved from the written transcriptions and audio recordings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The written observation notes were analyzed for categories of knowledge and instructional practice to gain more insight of teacher's perceptions and behaviors after the professional development and coaching took place. The process of analyzing the data was organizing, coding, synthesizing, and looking for patterns as part of the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LeCompte & Schensul,

1999). Identifying themes that emerge from the data into categories was the last phase of the process. Initial categories emerged from each piece of data. After several passes through the data, the researcher merged the categories into finer categories. The researcher then triangulated the data in looking for categories that were common across all types of data collected for this study.

Coding Process

The focus group and individual interviews, researcher observations, and teacher response logs were coded according to processes consistent with grounded theory. First, the data were labeled through open-coding. Open-coding means that as the data were read repeatedly, patterns in the teachers' responses emerged, and words and phrases for focus became apparent. The open-codes were then organized by themes into axial-codes before the selective-codes were identified (Creswell, 2013). Across the teacher response logs, the interviews and follow-up questions, and researcher observations, 37 open-codes developed, 26 axial-codes, and 11 selective-codes. Appendix F provides a complete list of open-, axial-, and selective-codes. To illustrate the coding process further with an example, teachers responded in the focus interview that *scope and sequence* was a priority in planning for instruction in reading, so *scope and sequence* became an open category. Then in individual interviews, *scope and sequence* emerged again as did teaching in isolation at the skill level, so this finding was added through the process of axial-coding. Details were added to the emerging categories, and through the coaching and modeling process with follow-up interviews, response logs, and researcher notes, big pictures, and integration emerged to the assertion that *integration of skills* and *seeing the big picture* were of significant interest to the participants.

Ethical Issues

The ethics of research using human subjects was considered throughout this research study. Issues that were addressed included: informed consent and protection of informants from harm. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), these issues attempted to ensure that participants enter the research study voluntarily and they were exposed to any risk that would be greater than the gains. Each participant's willingness to participate was validated by a consent form. Finally, each participant's privacy was ensured by the use of pseudonyms.

Credibility

According to Patton (2002), credibility in qualitative research refers to three elements:

> Rigorous teachings and methods for collecting data that are carefully analyzed, credibility of the researcher which is dependent on training, experience, previous work, status and presentation of self; and fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, and holistic thinking. (pp. 552-533)

The researcher began contacting the participants at the beginning of the school year when the consent forms were signed. This ensured that relationships were made prior to the professional development sessions and coaching and classroom observations. This ongoing contact reinforced the credibility of this research. After reviewing case study research methodology, the researcher conducted the interviews in this study. In an effort to create a valid and transparent study, she continually reflected upon her actions as a researcher and as a literacy educator that delivers professional development. She provided opportunities within the professional development for anonymous feedback. In addition, the researcher worked to create a safe space for participants to honestly share

what they needed as a teacher in regards to professional development. This creation of safe space was part of the researcher's training as a certified literacy teacher educator and she has been using this approach as a literacy coach for the past ten years.

Each of the previous sections laid out specifically the methodology and plan for this study. As a qualitative researcher, she remained committed to a transparent methodology in order to allow this study to be replicated in future research. She remained committed to an open view of what might appear in the data. Consistency and transparency in the plan set forth expectations for quality research and data collection.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study that focused on teacher professional learning. The study was an in-depth look at participants' perceptions of change knowledge around balanced literacy, their perceptions of practice and their perceptions of their students. This research project provided professional development in a balanced approach to teaching reading and writing specifically focused on the needs of the elementary teachers determined by the literacy self-assessment. The professional development focused on research-based theory and practice in literacy and was supported by instructional modeling, literacy coaching, and contextual teaching. Teachers were provided opportunities within the professional development to reflect, ask questions, identify needs, and request additional modeling and/or coaching.

Study Findings

The outcomes of the study respond to the following four research questions and within these questions four major themes emerged are shown in the table below:

Table 4

Emerging Themes

Research Question	Emerging Theme
How might teachers perceive their knowledge about literacy instruction changed over time?	The participants perceived their knowledge to change when instructed in literacy. The participants also realized they were unaware they had more things to learn.
What will take place in teacher perceptions of their practice when they have participated in embedded contextual professional development?	Teachers felt a sense of self-efficacy and could see the big picture of literacy instruction rather than teaching in isolation.
Which will teachers perceive were the most effective in helping them implement the literacy strategies and theories from the professional development opportunities?	Participants believed modeling, coaching, and the immediate in the moment feedback to be the most valuable support.
What will be the teachers' perceptions of their students' performance as readers and writers?	Participants perceive the students to demonstrate a growth in skills and to have more ownership of their learning.

Self-Assessment and Professional Development

All nine participants in this study completed a literacy self-assessment. The self-assessment was a Likert scale. The participants were asked to answer a series of questions based upon a five-point scale. These questions focused on components of the balanced literacy framework. The self-assessment data showed two areas of need according to the teacher's assessment of themselves as teachers of literacy. The two areas of need were as follows:

1. Gradual Release Model

2. Teaching Comprehension Strategies (referenced earlier)

Research Question 1: How Might Teachers Perceive Their Knowledge About Literacy Instruction Changed Over Time?

The literacy self-assessment, reflection logs and focus group interviews provided data related to the teacher knowledge and how the participants perceived it changed over time. As discussed previously, the literacy self-assessment showed a need for instruction in gradual release model and comprehension strategy work with young children.

The self-assessment was a critical piece to this study. In the review of the current literature, the self-assessment was missing in professional development studies. As the researcher, I wanted to look closely at how the teachers perceived their knowledge to be at the beginning of the professional development and how they perceived it changed. Throughout the study, there were parts of the self-assessment that seemed to show more growth than others and teachers felt they learned and changed. The data also indicated that the teachers ranked themselves high in areas of literacy and realized over the course of the study they changed their thinking. In some instances, the self-assessment scores went down rather than improving. The teachers indicated in the interviews they felt they knew a lot about certain areas of literacy but once they participated in the professional development and coaching, they realized they have misconceptions.

Professional Development #1

At the beginning of the professional development session, participants were asked to make a list of the comprehension strategies based on their prior knowledge in their reflection log and reflect on how they teach these within their classroom. Six out of nine participants could only name two or less strategies. Three of the participants were able to

name three or four strategies and no one was able to name all six comprehension

strategies. Many of the answers reflected skills as comprehension strategies. For

example, cause and effect, compare and contrast, main idea and author's purpose were

listed as comprehension strategies. Others listed instructional strategies and components

of the balanced literacy framework as comprehension strategies. Some of these strategies

and skills included guided reading, close reading, think-alouds, and read-alouds. This

data from the reflection logs supported the data teacher reported earlier on the self-

assessment.

Upon completing the professional development, a focus group interview was

conducted and participants indicated a desire to learn more about comprehension

strategies and also indicated some learning had taken place. One participant stated, "I

used to feel it was necessary to teach comprehension strategies in isolation but now I

know that modeling with an interactive read-aloud is the key to including those strategies.

Another participant responded, "I used to always get strategies and skills confused, now I

understand the difference."

The focus group interview indicated a need for more instruction on teaching and

modeling comprehension strategies. The teachers were asked, "After today's session on

comprehension strategies, what is standing in your way of teaching this to children, if

anything." The responses indicated a desire for more instruction on using the

comprehension strategies in read-alouds. The participants stated they felt their children

couldn't comprehend well due to not having good background knowledge and lack of

having been read to at home. During the focus group interview participants also said they

needed more support with the following in order to be successful in teaching

comprehension:

1.   Read-alouds

2.   Shared reading

3.   Modeling thinking through think-alouds

4.   Turn and talk

This was the first data that was in contradiction of the self-assessment. On the

self-assessment, participants ranked interactive read-alouds as one of the top components

they felt knowledgeable in teaching.

Change in knowledge data specifically emerged over the six weeks in working

with Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Black. The Likert scale allowed the participants to rate their

knowledge with 1 being no knowledge at all and 5 being highly knowledgeable. Both

teachers perceived their knowledge to increase in gradual release model, guided reading,

interactive read-alouds, and small group instruction. These were specific areas covered

in professional development as well as follow up coaching and modeling.   In Writer's

Workshop, both teachers perceived their knowledge to decrease. When asked in an

interview session, why they believed this to be true, both teachers agreed and commented

that they didn't realized they didn't understand how to teach writer's workshop and

writing until they were involved in literacy conversations during the study about writing.

Both teachers indicated writing to be a future area of need in their classrooms. Mrs.

Smith scored herself lower in many areas on the self-assessment from the beginning of

the study to the end. She stated, "Until I had the professional development and the in the

moment learning and coaching, I didn't realize how much there was about literacy

instruction that I didn't know." The self-assessment data is shown in the table below:

Table 5

Pre/Post Self-Assessment Data

Question	Mrs. Smith		Mrs. Black	
	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment
Rate your overall knowledge of literacy instruction.	4	3	4	3
Rate your knowledge about the gradual release model and the Zone of Proximal Development as it relates to literacy instruction.	1	4	2	5
Rate your knowledge of informal running records.	4	1	3	4
Rate your knowledge pertaining to small group instruction in reading.	3	4	4	5
Rate your knowledge about guided reading.	3	4	3	4
Rate your knowledge about Writers Workshop.	3	2	3	2
Rate your knowledge about vocabulary instruction.	4	3	3	3
Rate your knowledge about phonemic awareness	4	3	4	5
Rate your knowledge about comprehension strategy instruction	3	4	2	4
Rate your knowledge about phonics instruction	4	3	4	4
Rate your overall knowledge about differentiation	4	3	3	5
Rate your knowledge about fluency.	3	3	4	4
Rate your knowledge about interactive read-aloud.	3	4	4	5
Rate your knowledge in interactive and shared writing.	3	3	2	3
Rate your knowledge in writing across the content areas.	3	2	3	3
Rate your knowledge in moving readers forward based on assessment data.	4	3	2	4

Research Question 2: What Will Take Place In Teacher Perceptions of Their Practice When They Have Participated in Embedded Contextual Professional Development?

Upon completion of the coding phase of the study, themes began to emerge from the data. The researcher wanted to look closely for patterns in the participants' responses regarding their perceptions of their practice. The interview and observational data indicated some interrelating themes (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005) between the participants. These themes indicated they felt a sense of self-efficacy and they perceived themselves to see the big picture of literacy instruction with intentionality rather than teaching in isolation.

Focus Group Interview Data

During the focus groups, participants indicated they did not feel like they were intentional in teaching comprehension strategies. They were provided an opportunity to rate how intentional they were with comprehension strategy instruction during different parts of the literacy block. None of the participants indicated they felt successful in teaching comprehension strategies in any part of the day. During the interview, they were also asked about explicit instruction with comprehension strategy and all of them agreed they informally teach comprehension strategies. When asked to elaborate or give examples, they listed the following: mention a strategy during read-alouds, use author studies to teach strategies, use writing prompts, use phonics tubs, and reading to children.

INTENTIONAL INSTRUCTION – COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

Interactive Read-Alouds (using think-aloud, then turn and talk)

Guided Reading

Target Instruction

Shared Reading

Literacy Centers
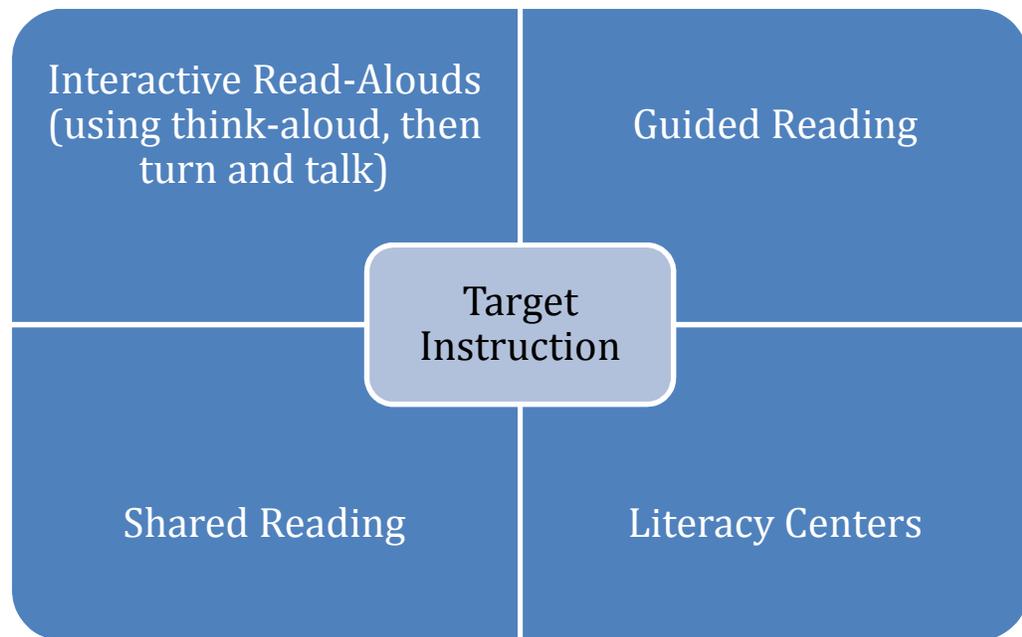
Figure 2 Intentional Instruction – Comprehension Strategies

Following the session in the focus interview, the teachers indicated the following thoughts: "I need to implement what I have learned in stations and grouping so children can comprehend." "I need to be accountable with reading comprehension." "I am thinking about guided reading groups and how to teach skills and strategies so my students will reach higher comprehension."

Data from the focus interviews indicated teacher knowledge of purpose of an interactive read-aloud were expanded. Prior to the study, a read-aloud was considered as an activity done for pleasure, listening skills, and teaching story elements such as characters and main idea. Read-alouds were perceived to be done only during transitions or during a literacy block time. Professional development sessions focused on the read-alouds as the anchor component of Balanced Literacy. Using a visual to display the framework, the professional development trained teachers on how interactive read aloud can anchor learning and should influence the teaching that goes on through the rest of the framework. The framework components are fluid and dependent on each other, not isolated. With the post-professional development, the teachers expanded their idea of interactive read-alouds. The purposes for reading became more intentional. The teachers realized that read-alouds can be used throughout the day for many different purposes. The strategies that could be taught were expanded from simple story elements to include all five components of reading (vocabulary, phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension and fluency). See Table 6.

Table 6

Professional Development Teacher Reflections About Interactive Read-Alouds

Why Do We Read Aloud to Children?	When Should We Read Aloud?	What Strategies/Ideas Can We Teach?
• Pleasure • Transitions • Teach a theme • Teach listening	• During literacy block • Morning meeting • End of day • Before lunch	• Listening • Story elements • Main idea
• Model our thinking • Model fluency • Intentional focused strategy instruction	• Content area lessons • Writer's workshop	• Super six comprehension strategies • Content area standards • Concepts about print • Phonics/PA • Fluency • Vocabulary

Two Teachers

Self-Efficacy

The interview data revealed the teachers felt empowered to make decisions within their classrooms after experiencing the professional development. Mrs. Smith stated, "All she (Maxwell) would do is say have you thought about this and that would make me consider and question what I was doing in my practice." Observational data would further support Mrs. Smith's statement of empowerment. During the first observation

during the reading block, the children were on an Ipad when they were not at the guided

reading table with Mrs. Smith. Many of them could not log on the program they were

instructed to be on and repeatedly came to the table to ask Mrs. Smith for help. Several

of the Ipads were not connected to the internet and two of them were low on power. Mrs.

Smith became very frustrated and dismissed the reading group back to the whole group

setting. During the following discussion, Mrs. Smith indicated to the researcher that she

wanted them all to work at the Ipad because that is what worked best for her. Additional

discussion focused on some ideas of young children needing an opportunity to talk and

play. Mrs. Smith was guided to the work of Vygotsky and the idea of what they can do

with help today, they can do alone tomorrow. An explanation was provided concerning

children needing opportunities to practice what they were learning in whole group and

small group. She inquired about some resources to the implement centers and those were

provided. During the classroom visits scheduled three to four times per week, the

researcher noticed Mrs. Smith was gathering lots of materials like magnetic letters, an

easel, and word cubes from the resource lab. Mrs. Smith would make statements about

the materials. For example, "I stayed after school to rearrange the furniture so that the

students could have access to write on the white board during centers." After about a

week and a half, she continued to ask me questions and inquire about centers during

literacy. Mrs. Smith would ask "Do you think these magnetic letters would be a good

thing to use for learning sight words?" and "What could we do with this easel and chalk

related to literacy?" Upon arriving in Mrs. Smith's classroom on week four of the study,

all children were in centers and she was at the guided reading table teaching. She shared

she had stayed at school late the day prior and organized and set up the centers because she realized that is what her students needed.

Mrs. Black made the following statements connected to the theme of self-efficacy: 1) "It has been so empowering because I know now it's all connected." 2) "This has empowered me to do what my kids need and shut the door." 3) "You have empowered me to make decisions as an educator."

The observational data further supported the theme of self-efficacy in that at the beginning the teachers would not try out many of the strategies without the researcher being available to model lessons, coach, and give feedback. On the days the researcher was not be in the school, they would wait to try out ideas from the professional development. As time passed and professional development evolved, the teachers began to try strategies on their own. The researcher returned to the classrooms to observe a lesson and there would be anchor charts, classroom books made by children and materials integrated into the guided reading lessons.

During the interview process, Mrs. Smith stated, "I am more confident because I feel that I'm teaching my kids in an effective way. My confidence comes from knowing that I'm doing what is right for the kids. The in the moment support and feedback helped me feel confident I could do things without failing."

Big Picture with Intentionality

When asked about how they deliver instruction in the area of literacy, the answers indicated a skill focus. Both Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Black said they teach specifically what is outlined within the scope and sequence provided by the district. Their instruction related to letter name, letter sound, and sight word focused primarily on teaching a few

letters at a time and only if the letters were listed in the scope and sequence. The letter name, letter sounds, and sight words were described as being taught in isolation and in a memorization type format. Both participants stated they were not seeing the transfer into the students' writing or in their ability to decode words. The participants also expressed a desire to understand how to teach comprehension strategies within a text and how to transfer that into leveled text at the guided reading table.

Following professional development sessions, modeled lessons and coaching opportunities were offered to the participants. Upon completion of each round of modeling and side-by-side coaching, the participants were interviewed.

Mrs. Smith expressed she felt her children should be mastering more letters and sounds but did not know how to move them forward with instruction because of the scope and sequence. She expressed a need for understanding how to help them master more letters without straying from the district expectations of the order of instruction of the letters. She stated, "I don't believe we have time to prepare and execute what the district is asking of us. They throw new materials like phonics tubs at us with limited training after school has already started." Mrs. Smith was provided with materials to read and think about focusing on letter name and letter sound instruction.   Modeled lessons conducted by the researcher, both whole group and small group on letter instruction were conducted in her classroom. She described her teaching practice in an interview by stating

> I didn't know I was, but I was teaching in a very isolated way. This shows me I can take skills and integrate them into the reading block. I was teaching one letter at a time and the children were not learning it. I was isolating the five components of literacy (phonics, fluency, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension). An example would be in the lesson where my main focus was

the skill of comparing and contrasting characters. Using the same text, I was able to review and allow children to point out capitalization of the word I, find blends we were learning and review sight words. Later during writing instruction, the we used the same shared text and went back to it to teach using diagrams in our writing of nonfiction text. The children were able to focus on how to write the nonfiction feature of a diagram because they had already heard the book during the read-alouds portion of the day. I then was able to hit all of those same skills at the guided reading table with a text on their level. Prior to this, I would have called the children to the carpet and taught all of these skills in isolation lesson by lesson. In this one literacy block, everything was connected and meaningful.

During the individual interviews, Mrs. Black described a similar concern but related to sight words. She described that children could read some of the sight words on the scope and sequence but could not then read them in text. She was provided with modeled and coached lessons. Mrs. Black stated, "I have changed how I think about teaching sight words, I still do direct instruction but also within the text they are reading."

Observational notes provided additional data relating to the isolation of skills in teaching practice. Observations one, two and three were conducted early in the study. Observation one was conducted before the teachers received any professional development, coaching, or modeling.

Mrs. Smith had the students situated on the carpet for the read-aloud of a nonfiction text. Mrs. Smith stops periodically in the reading and asks questions. She asks the question: "Are the apples sorted or organized?" She directs the children to turn and talk to their partner; most children sit in silence. She followed with a series of questions about the setting of the story and allowed for one child to respond at a time. Mrs. Smith displayed a picture from the story on the projector and sent the students to their seats and instructed them to ask a question about the picture. The children made multiple statements. She then framed a question and instructed the children to repeat

after her the question. Mrs. Smith then tells them they will practice the skill of asking

questions more on a different day (Observation 1, Mrs. Smith).

Mrs. Smith is situated at the front of the room with students seated at

individual desks. The students are show a letter on the projector and asked to repeat the

letter and locate it out of a group of letters. This format is repeated for a series of six

letters. Then letter picture cards are held up and children say sounds of letters

(Observation 3, Mrs. Smith).

Mrs. Black has students seated at desks and she is positioned at the front of the

classroom. There is a wheel posted on board at front of classroom with a spinner in the

middle. Sight words are written inside each section of the wheel. Students are provided

turns to spin the wheel and then read the sight word. Following the answer the entire

class repeats the word (Observation 2, Mrs. Black).

The teachers expressed that prior to the professional development and coaching,

they were not intentional in their practice. They discussed they were intentional in

keeping in alignment with the scope and sequence but not with their students as learners.

They also expressed they had not been intentional in materials they chose for lessons.

During the interviews following the coaching rounds and modeling of interactive read-

alouds, participants stated the following:

> I would just pick a book from that level, Mrs. Maxwell picked books according to
> what sight word content it had and what the readers needed, now I'm more
> purposeful in picking out what books they read. I know how to look at the
> assessment data and look at what my children need. (Mrs. Smith, second
> interview).

Retelling from a book we read in an interactive read-aloud has helped them learn how to retell and understand story parts without a worksheet. Now I choose a book and look at questions I can ask before I ever read the book (Mrs. Black, second interview).

I was not making any connections to skills in text. It was really isolated and kids weren't mastering it. Just within a few days they can do things with no problem. I didn't know how to balance whole group and small group and make it all connect (Mrs. Smith, third interview).

I was using worksheets from the Teacher Pay Teacher's that had no meaning. I was getting stuck in working on only one skill at a time in small groups; I believe that is what has stopped me from teaching what the children need (Mrs. Black, third interview).

Observational data provided additional evidence of the intentionality of the book choices and teaching strategies. When observed teaching guided reading groups, both teachers had some leveled text in a stack on the bookshelf located near the table. At the time of calling groups over, the teachers looked through the book and chose one for the group to read. When I inquired about how that chose the text for the readers, both teachers responded that the text was one on the child's level.

Participants were provided modeled guided reading lessons followed by coaching and reflective conversations. During the lessons, strategic actions were taught and modeled with the students as well as the parts of a guided reading lesson. Fountas and Pinnell (2016) provide us with behaviors that should be exhibited at each text level gradient. Some of these include: tracking print, using picture clues to solve words, looking through words, cross-checking with meaning, and having a known bank of sight word recognition for students. Following this round of modeling and coaching, the

teachers began to inquire more about the teaching of guided reading. Some of their

questions and wonderings are as follows:

1. How do we know which sight words students should have ownership of at a

    particular level?

2. How do we know what to plan for and teach at each text level?

3. How do we choose appropriate books for students?

4. When do we teach phonics?

5. How can we begin teaching comprehension when they cannot yet read?

Research Question 3: Which Supports (Coaching, Self-Assessments, Contextual

Teaching) Will Teachers Perceive Were the Most Effective, If Any, In Helping

Them Implement the Literacy Strategies and Theories From the Professional

Development Opportunities?

The researcher wanted to look closely at the patterns emerging surrounding the

supports. The format of the study followed a specific pattern so she wanted to be sure to

be specific with the interview questions as we discussed the process the participants

experienced.   There was not focus group interview data for this question because only

the two teachers received the extra supports of coaching, modeling and contextual

teaching. Two themes emerged from the data.

Need for Immediate Feedback

Both teachers indicated a need for immediate feedback within the interview data.

Another indication that immediate feedback was valued and desired was the fact that both

teachers, but mainly Mrs. Smith, repeatedly texted me in the evening hours and on days I was not in the building to ask questions and share reflections of her work and the progress of her students.   The teachers expressed the following thoughts:

I am so glad to see her (Maxwell), she looks closely at what my kids and what they can do and need next. I would not have gotten that had she not been right here. I could tell her things about my kids, but it would not have been nearly as effective as her coming in and doing it, it has made a world of difference (Mrs. Smith, interview 2).

The multiple scenarios that can pop up during a lesson are unpredictable and are hard to explain when you aren't in your classroom. A teacher can't recall all of the details to identify the very moments they need help or need advice until that moment comes. These moments can seem small but significant when you have a coach to lead you and guide you as you are doing it (Mrs. Smith, final interview).

She (Maxwell) checked with me and let me watch her teach, that has been so worth it. Having her there to watch me and say try, this helped me know what to do. In small groups, she helped me choose students who needed a specific skill and reassured me that I was teaching it right and to relax and not worry about being perfect but know my kids and be specific when interacting in a small group setting. It helped so much to have her there to let me know when to move to the next skill or strategy.

Modeling: How the Teaching Looks in Real Situations

In comparison to the other supports, the data indicated that modeling was considered by the participants to be the most effective. The calendar of interactions with the participants indicated more modeling than coaching opportunities. The teachers were

given the option to have lessons modeled or they could teach the lesson with the support of coaching. Teachers requested modeling more often than coaching.

I had a lot of opportunities to see where they (students) were making errors in their reading and how she (Maxwell) fixed it. The modeling has been so purposeful, not just her looking at what my kids need but seeing what I need too. The modeling and coaching have been the most helpful; I needed explicit instruction and modeling (Mrs. Smith, interview 2).

Watching you in the interactive read-alouds changed my classroom. We are always being thrown different programs with no time to plan and prepare, this was happening every day in my own classroom with my own students (Mrs. Black, final interview).

Research Question 4: What Will Be the Teachers' Perceptions of Their Students' Performance As Readers and Writers?

This question produced some interrelating themes (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005) among both teachers and how they perceived their students' performance. The teachers perceived their children to be able to do things in reading and writing they had not been able to do prior to the study.

Observational data revealed the participants were not questioning the students in such a way to allow them to reach higher level comprehension. Upon observing both teachers during the interactive read-aloud lessons, there were not many opportunities for

children to generate talk.   The teachers attempted to interact and scaffold the directions to guide students to discuss and talk about the text.

The teachers would periodically stop to ask questions within the story. Questions were closed questions with a yes or no answer. Some questions were stated and then the teacher provided the answer rather than allowing children to respond. Examples are as follows:

1) What do you think Wemberly is worried about?

2) If you felt worried before school this morning say umm hummm.

3) If you felt nervous about school say umm hummm.

4) Do you every worry?

5) Are the apples sorted or organized?

6) Did the setting change?

7) Have you ever been tired or happy at the same time?

During the final observation of both teachers, the opportunities for open- ended conversation was more available. Procedures were evident and in place. The teachers told the students which partner would talk first and there was no delay in the noise level of talk in the classroom. It was evident the procedures had been taught and modeled. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Black both used scaffolds of a think-aloud to modeling the reading work happening inside their own head.   They asked open-ended questions as opposed to yes or no questions. Some examples of the questions used are as follows:

1) What are you thinking about the elf and his decision to move around?

2) Can you predict what might happen next?

3) What are you thinking?

4)   How has your thinking changed?

5)   What would you do to solve the problem?

Students Are Able to Verbally Show Comprehension

During the interview process, the teachers indicated they could see their students

modeling understanding of text through the read-aloud. Mrs. Smith describes a change

stating,

> I used to think comprehension only happened in the upper grades, but now I
> realize that it really starts in the primary grades. Really, it's in preschool and
> kindergarten when we need to start comprehension strategies. On the last
> comprehension test, almost every child got a perfect score, but their retell is better
> than any class I have ever taught. (Mrs. Smith, Interview 1)

All I can say is they are thinkers and they have questions and now I see and hear

how they hold their partners accountable. I just had a peer observe me a few weeks ago

and the teacher said my kids did so well holding each other accountable and that it was

impressive how they used the correct terminology when they are talking about the books

they read (Mrs. Smith, final interview).

One of my students looked at an illustration of melted snow and said, "Look, Mrs.

Smith, that's where the deer was sleeping. See his fur that's left behind." That was

totally inferred and she is one of my lowest kids. I never pointed out that illustration.

They are now analyzing text and looking at all the clues to figure out everything they can

from the story without prompting (Mrs. Smith, final interview).

Mrs. Black discusses her student's show of comprehension by saying, "They can

share out more than once and I don't lose control, they are now able to verbalize what

they are thinking, and if my class can do it, then anybody's class can do it." She also

describes the use of comprehension strategy language by saying, "I think they are using

the language and showing what they understand because now I use the language with comprehension strategy work in the classroom."

Students Are Taking Ownership of Their Learning

Throughout the study, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Black both commented and discussed in the group and individual interviews they could see students taking ownership for their learning and work. Mrs. Smith discussed her children at center time during the literacy block by stating, "I love seeing them go back to a book, and all of these strategies are helping them take ownership of their learning. I was not seeing that at all before." During the interview, she was asked to elaborate and she responded by saying, "Everything (books, writing, centers, and leveled readers) is meaningful to them and that is where the other programs have been lacking."

During the interview with Mrs. Black she discussed that she perceived the students to be taking ownership of their learning and classroom products created during the literacy lessons. Mrs. Black stated, "They always erase what I write on the white board but this chart we made, they haven't erased because they constructed it, it's theirs."

Showing Growth with Skills and Strategies

The themes that emerged from the data indicated the participants perceive their students made growth with skills and strategies. Teachers repeatedly asked questions within the interview process about ways to look closely at data to drive instruction. They both expressed concern that many students were not showing growth with the letters and sounds and didn't seem to comprehend text when they read aloud to their classes. The teachers were required to look at data from a school-wide assessment and were concerned with the results. They both shared they would teach children directly related to what was

missed on the school-wide benchmarks. Following modeling and coaching related to small group and guided reading, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Black discussed the following in individual interviews:

Just at the guided reading table within the last few days, they've read new sight words, blended words, been able to write words. I did not think they could do it. They are very capable of doing a lot more than I thought they could. I know for sure I have three examples of definite students' growth already (Mrs. Smith, interview 3).

I have been using the sentence scramble. I used to wait until at least spring break, I just never knew they could do it…they can do it now. Today their writing was so in-depth, they are naturally comparing now because of what I am doing in interactive read-alouds (Mrs. Black, interview 3).

Overall four major themes emerged when looking at the interview, observational and reflection log data. After experiencing contextual embedded professional development with modeling and coaching opportunities, the participants rated their knowledge higher around the components that were directly covered in professional development. The participants perceived themselves to have a higher self-efficacy with empowerment and confidence in their work. They felt supported by the immediate and on-going coaching and feedback and the modeling of literacy practice. Finally, they perceived their students to be more confident with comprehension and felt they took ownership in their own learning.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was an attempt to merge professional development, contextual teaching with modeling and coaching with a self-assessment of teacher background knowledge. The self-assessment was designed to provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their prior knowledge and to provide information to guide and plan the professional development for the teachers so that it would be in their zone of proximal development. This chapter provides an overview of the professional development and coaching experiences of the teachers and their perceptions, discusses classroom implications as well as limitations of the study, and provides recommendations for future research in the area of contextual professional development for educators.

The design of this study emerged from a review of the literature in job embedded professional development, contextual teaching, balanced literacy, and coaching. The literature review indicated that professional development is most effective when 1) a pre-assessment of teacher knowledge is included in the professional development, 2) a combination of whole group professional development and one-on-one coaching and mentoring within the classroom context is used (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), and 3) feedback and reflection are used to address next steps in professional development (Showers & Joyce, 1996).

Each of these tenets was found within the literature, but no single study included all three elements. Furthermore, no study specifically tailored the professional

development content to compliment the results of the pre-assessment and individualize and differentiate the literacy and coaching content to the teachers' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). This study attempted to combine each of the three themes found to be significant to professional development and teacher learning.

This qualitative study addressed four questions, 1) How might teachers perceive their knowledge about literacy instruction changed over time? 2) What will take place in teacher perceptions of their practice when they have participated in embedded contextual professional development? 3) Which supports (coaching, self-assessments, contextual teaching) will teachers perceive were the most effective in helping them implement the literacy strategies and theories from the professional development opportunities? 4) What will be the teachers' perceptions of their students' performance as readers and writers? By considering these research questions as a whole, the researcher attempted to paint a picture of the effectiveness of professional development followed up with coaching based on a pre-assessment of teacher knowledge.

Exploring the data through case study allowed me to examine the teacher's perspectives of their own learning as well as their perspectives about student learning. As both the provider of professional development and coaching and the researcher, the researcher was aware of making decisions within the boundaries created by my commitment to both roles. The researcher remained focused on the questions set forth in the study. As the coach, the research often found herself driven by the needs of the teachers and their questions about instruction. The dual role of coach-researcher helped me to link literacy knowledge to practice as well as to the value of professional development opportunities provided within the study.

All professional development for this study was based on the self-assessment. The participants were provided instruction and coaching based on their background knowledge and ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers were given the opportunity to guide what they felt they most needed to learn about in order to move their practice and students forward. Research over the years has directed educators to use ZPD with students; this study indicated that teachers also benefit from being instructed within their ZPD. Unlike many pre-designed professional development experiences, there was never a pre-determined agenda for the professional development. Teachers' self-assessment and interviews guided the planning for their instruction. In addition, the classroom modeling and coaching was planned in response to teachers' emerging needs. Modeled lessons and coaching rounds followed the emerging topics and needs from the professional development sessions. This research suggests teachers learn best when we honor their background knowledge and teach in their ZPD.

Synthesis of Research Questions

How Do Teachers' Perceptions of Their Knowledge Change Over Time?

The teachers' perception of their knowledge changed over the course of the study. There was direct and specific increase in the self-assessment on the topics covered within the professional development model. Throughout the interview process, the teachers indicated they perceived to know more and better understand comprehension strategies, read-alouds, and the gradual release within literacy instruction. It was not surprising that the teachers felt they had learned and gained knowledge in these areas because the

professional development was intentional and specific to their needs based on the self-assessment as well as the focus and individual interviews. The interesting piece in the data related to this question was they perceived their knowledge to be lower in a few of the areas indicating they didn't realize they needed to know more about specific areas of the balanced literacy framework. In other words, they rated themselves high in some areas and then realized through the professional development and coaching they were not as knowledgeable as they first thought.

In addition, the principal and assistant principal interview data indicated the teacher's knowledge level had changed over time. While this data was not directly indicative of teacher perceptions of their knowledge the principal noticed a considerable change in instructional practice in the area of literacy. The principal conducted a formal evaluation of Mrs. Smith near the end of the study and stated the following, "I was amazed at the difference in her instruction. During her last evaluation, there was lots of teacher talk and closed questions during the read-alouds, and this time, I saw students discussing text and more student involvement. I was also able to see her teach a whole group lesson and then practice that strategy at the guided reading table in text on their instructional level. Last year, everything was taught in a whole group format." This data only compliments and confirms what the teachers indicated on their self-assessment.

It seems the professional development with follow-up coaching and modeling with immediate feedback based on the self-assessment was an important factor in the teachers' perceptions of their change in knowledge. According to research, adult learning methods include coaching, timely training, and guided design or professional development. With a coaching method, practitioners with more knowledge and

experience attempt to transfer their expertise to those with little experience (Leat, Lofthouse, & Wilcock, 2006). In addition, teachers should learn when to utilize new practices and how to utilize them to align with the needs of different students, curricular objectives, and settings (Joyce & Showers, 1996). Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, and Bolhuis (2009) indicated that most researchers have increasingly accepted that professional learning is regarded as a social enterprise, where professionals depend on the expertise and support from others to incorporate new innovative practices.

What Happens in Teachers' Perceptions of Their Practice When They Have Participated in Embedded, Contextual Professional Development?

The teachers perceived growth in their practice and perceived a sense of self-efficacy through the process. The focus and individual interviews provided a snapshot of their feelings around their practice, as did their reflections. The teachers continued to speak about how they felt empowered to try new things, to take a chance with trying out things they were learning, and to implement what they were learning grounded in theory and practice. The findings from this question were further supported by the observations of the researcher.

Finally, the principal and assistant principal interviews gave more confirmation of the teachers' perceptions of their practice. The principal stated, "I have seen confidence in Mrs. Sims and Mrs. Black that has not been evident in the past. They are taking a leadership role within their professional communities and really in the school overall. They are excited and eager to share what they are learning and how their children are growing as readers." The assistant principal stated, "This work has empowered them to question practices from the district level, and also to question other peers as to what best

practices of balanced literacy look like. They are changing their belief systems and self-confidence as a professional educator."

It seems that overall teacher perceptions of their change in practice were related to a sense of self-efficacy, confidence level, and ability to see the larger picture of literacy. According to Ross and Bruce (2007), teacher efficacy is related to teaching specific content, to particular students, and within specific instructional contexts. It is an expectancy about future performance based on past experiences. Furthermore, "teachers become confident about their future performance when they believe that through their own actions they have helped children learn" (Ross & Bruce, p. 47).

Which Supports (Coaching and Self-Assessment), If Any, Did the Teachers Feel Were the Most Effective In Helping Them Implement the Strategies and Theories From the Professional Development Opportunities?

The data indicated**,** the teachers felt the modeling, coaching and immediate feedback to be the most valuable in helping them implement what they were learning from the professional development. This finding would be similar to the body of research on modeling and coaching. The review of the literature indicated professional development is stronger when followed by modeling and coaching (Gallucci ,2008; Leat, Lofthouse & Wilcock, 2006; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Showers & Joyce, 1996). The interesting finding within this question was they didn't name the self-assessment to be of importance in helping them. They did indicate the value in having their knowledge honored and their voice heard through the self-assessment but didn't indicate it as valuable in moving them to the next level. As the researcher and coach, the self-

assessment become one of the most critical pieces of data because it provided insight to determine the next steps needed for them.

What Are the Teachers' Perceptions of Children's Performance as Readers and Writers?

Participants perceive the students to demonstrate a growth in skills and to have more ownership of their learning. The teachers continually reported they perceived changes and growth in their children and their performance with comprehension and literacy related skills. From the initial interviews, both teachers indicated they believed all children could learn and had the potential to learn when provided a safe and enriching environment. Mrs. Smith stated, "They (students) are thinkers and have questions now about the books we are reading. They hold their partner accountable for talk." Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Black discussed that on the last comprehension benchmark assessment, almost every child increased in data and they believe this to be a direct result of the interactive read-alouds. As the researcher, I anticipate next steps for this research including a quantitative portion to record pre- and post-test literacy and comprehension student data. It would strengthen and validate the teachers' perceptions of student learning and progress. According to a study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), teachers' expectations played a role in student achievement. In this seminal study, researchers randomly assigned students from disadvantaged backgrounds to either an experimental or control group. The teachers were told the experimental group had high potential levels. At the end of the study, the experimental group performed better than the control group. Even when the control group improved, the teachers did not offer praise or words of affirmation in relation to their improvement. It seems this study would be similar to the

research that the teachers perceived their students to show growth and change due to the expectations being at a high level.

The Self-Assessment Process and Teacher Learning

The self-assessment was given at the beginning of the study and again at the conclusion. During many of the coaching rounds and follow up interviews, the teachers described growth and learning thus asking many questions that led me to look back at the self-assessment. The teachers' questions, wonderings and new learning indicated they may have inflated beliefs about their level of literacy expertise and might have scored themselves higher on the self-assessment than was truly accurate. The teachers reported they felt the self-assessment would be different if they took it again. This research indicates often learners do not realize how much they may not know or understand about a topic. It seems from the study, teachers sometimes do not know how to ask for the help they need to improve their learning and knowledge. This would be considered limitation of a pre-assessment design.

There are differing opinions on the effectiveness of self-assessment. Ross (2006) examined self-assessment in the school setting and came up with the following conclusions: 1) self-assessment produces consistent results in relation to specific items and over short time blocks; (2) provides information about student achievement that connects partially to teacher assessment; (3) contributes to higher student achievement and improved behavior; (4) the strengths of self-assessment can be enhanced through training students how to assess their work. However, the findings didn't indicate a need

for ongoing and continuous self-assessment, only that it was needed over short blocks of time.

The study results led the researcher to rethink the self-assessment in relation to the professional development model. Additionally, best practice indicates we assess students then teach and then assess again and reteach as necessary. The same seems to be true in a teacher professional development situation. Darling-Hammond (2010) argues there are several key elements that are effective in educational assessment. They are as follows: 1) the student assessment process is guided by common standards and grounded in a thoughtful, standards-based curriculum, 2) a balance of assessment measures that provide authentic evidence of student performance, 3) assessment measures are constructed to continuously improve teaching and learning. Based on the data and feedback from the participants and the research, the self-assessment must be continuous and ongoing in order to truly be valuable and useful in planning and guiding professional development opportunities.

The study also indicated a need for ongoing and continuous feedback in addition to utilizing the continuous self-assessment. As Graham, Harris, and Hebert (2011) argue, there are several patterns of giving feedback to move students forward in their writing. These are as follows: 1) students write with teachers providing feedback, 2) students are taught a strategy for giving and receiving feedback, 3) the writer is provided the opportunity to watch another student try out the strategy for writing, and 4) the students receive feedback from the teacher.

Adult learning should look similar to what we know from the research on teaching students. Within this study, the self-assessment was aligned with literacy

research and theory, and feedback was given to the participants through coaching opportunities. They were provided with opportunities to observe the strategies modeled. The missing link was that the self-assessment was not continuous and ongoing. The self-assessment proved to be beneficial to the researcher and the participants. There was evidence of the teachers feeling their voices and background had been honored throughout the process despite some of the shortcomings.

Classroom Implications

Professional development organized based on teacher's background knowledge and self-assessment followed by modeling and coaching with immediate feedback were important factors in this study. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on their knowledge of literacy instruction and practice. Based on their prior knowledge and reflection of what they had learned in the professional development, they were encouraged to ask for modeling and coaching as they felt it would support them in their teaching. The participants determined the topics for coaching and modeling according to their specific perceived literacy instructional needs. The model contained a balance of professional development and coaching with continuous and immediate feedback. Upon completion of the professional development and coaching, the teachers felt much more confident and demonstrated a greater sense of self-efficacy. The model empowered the teachers and helped them really see the connection between professional development followed by the modeling and coaching. The self-assessment used to determine the professional development opportunities provided the teachers with ownership in the process. This is

similar to the finding of Gulamhussein (2013), in a study of teacher effectiveness and professional learning. She found, "the content presented to teachers shouldn't be generic, but instead specific to the discipline (for middle school and high school teachers) or grade-level (for elementary school teachers)" (p. 5). Thus, similar to this study where every professional development provided not only related directly to the teachers grade level but specifically to what they perceived their needs to be based on the self-assessment.

The study also revealed the teachers felt a sense of empowerment and increasing confidence in their practice. The empowerment was first noted within their own classrooms, with teachers taking the lead on implementing new strategies such as literacy centers. As time passed, teachers began leading in professional learning communities and modeling literacy lessons for their peers. The principal stated that the literacy conversations within the building changed as a result of participants sharing student success. Other teachers began asking for support in the area of literacy from the teachers who participated in the study. The principal stated, "I have not only seen a change in the classrooms and instruction of the participants but among others at the grade level as a result of talk within professional learning communities." It seems, the increased attention on literacy and the talk about literacy among the teachers was inspired by the professional development and coaching participants were experiencing.

Limitations and Future Research

As is common in qualitative research, small sample size, the possibility of researcher bias, and the lack of quantitative data on student outcomes are limitations of the study. This study was a first step in attempting to understand how applying teacher's background knowledge from a self-assessment to guide professional development and coaching impacted teachers' perceived knowledge of instruction in literacy. The small sample of teachers participating poses an issue with validity; however, the small sample size allowed for the researcher to take a close and in-depth look at the participants, respond to their needs throughout the study, and learn from their feedback. This study would be difficult to replicate due to my role in designing the professional development. Yet, someone with similar literacy background could conduct a study similar to this work using the self-assessment and professional development format.

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the general population. Future research would benefit from including control group in an experimental design in order to make certain the results are only due to the factors under investigation (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). It

It is also a limitation in that the participants were all volunteers, and it could be assumed that teachers willing to volunteer would be more motivated and engaged than non-volunteers, thereby impacting the success of this professional development model. However, coercing teachers into participation would likely negatively impact their motivation, and therefore, the results of the study.

Future research would benefit from more quantitative comparisons of student learning. There would be a benefit in looking closely at pre- and post-test data of the students in literacy related areas. From this study, it is quantitatively unknown if students' reading level or literacy skill level increased. Participants stated in interview sessions they have seen growth and development. However, pre- and post-assessment data on students' test level and skill level would provide another layer of data and information.

Another question of interest would be to conduct the self-assessment more often to determine more often if teachers are still in agreement with their original answers. Teachers indicated they felt portions self-assessment were not an accurate representation of their knowledge. They went on to discuss there were items of knowledge they felt like they understood and then realized they didn't understand. A continuous self-assessment would allow the researcher to be more informed and therefore better able to plan professional development opportunities. The self-assessment might prove more useful if sub-categories were added to give the researcher as well as the participant more information. For instance, under the Guided Reading heading, questions could be added about introducing the text, choosing appropriate text matched to readers, teaching all parts of the guided reading less, and working with words. However, in the pilot study conducted by the researcher, a more detailed self-assessment was given and participants' answers became less detailed toward the end of the assessment, possibly indicating it was too long. Overall it seems a continuous self-assessment where the researcher is checking with the teachers' perceptions of their learning would be beneficial.
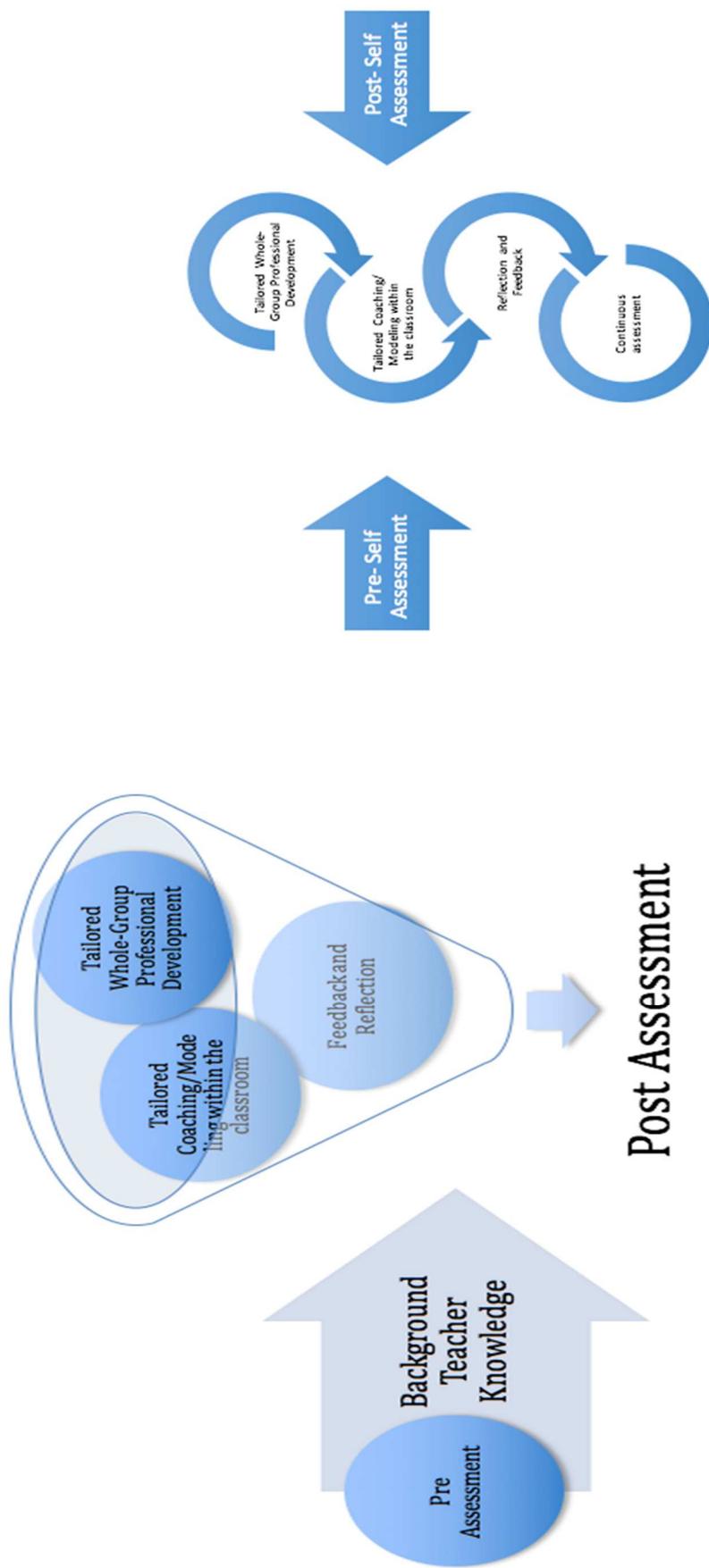
Figure 3 Model of Continuous Self-Improvement

Conclusion

I n conclusion, this study

created a research-based plan for implementing professional development based on self-assessment and teacher background knowledge. This method could be useful for districts and schools who are attempting to provide professional development for teachers. The method could help provide more direct and intentional professional development and coaching based on needs of the teachers. Teacher learning based on self-assessment and background followed up with coaching and immediate feedback could be key in growing great teachers of literacy. This would be a costly and time-consuming endeavor for district to implement. Several factors would be involved: 1) the time spent to train literacy coaches to conduct in-depth literacy professional development 2) differentiating the professional development within a district or even a school would be time consuming for a coach and 3) coaches would have to be available for follow-up coaching and modeling after the professional-development.

This study confirmed the research's belief that teachers need specifically tailored and ongoing professional development. It validated some prior experiences that teachers are engaged and eager to learn when their background knowledge is honored and used as a guide for the professional development provided to them. As an educator of 25 years and a literacy coach for ten of those years, the researcher had experienced the need for quality professional development, and also have had the opportunity to be the provider of the professional development and coaching. This study seemed to confirm that with a self-assessment of background knowledge, professional development grounded in theory followed with modeling and coaching opportunities, teachers will rise to the challenge of learning and implementing new strategies. Additionally, seeing themselves growing as literacy educators within their classrooms is another positive outcome.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LITERACY SELF-ASSESSMENT LIKERT SCALE
Literacy Survey Self-Assessment

ID #:
Years Taught:
Grades Taught
Degrees Earned:

Please respond to the following questions with 1 being no knowledge at all and 5 being highly knowledgeable.

1. Rate your knowledge of overall about literacy instruction.
   ___1 ____2____3 ____4____5
2. Rate your knowledge about the gradual release model and the Zone of Proximal Development as it relates to literacy instruction.
   ___1___2___3___4___5
3. Rate your knowledge of informal running records.
   ___1___2___3___4___5
4. Rate your knowledge pertaining to small group instruction in reading.
   ___1___2___3___4___5
5. Rate your knowledge about guided reading.
   __1___2___3___4___5
6. Rate your knowledge about Writer's Workshop.
   ___1___2___3___4___5
7. Rate your knowledge about vocabulary instruction.
   ___1___2___3___4___5
8. Rate your knowledge about phonemic awareness.
   ___1___2___3___4___5
9. Rate your knowledge about comprehension strategy instruction.
   ___1___2___3___4___5
10. Rate your level of knowledge about phonics instruction.
    ___1___2___3___4___5
11. Rate your overall knowledge about differentiation.
    ___1___2___3___4___5
12. Rate your knowledge about fluency.
    ___1___2___3___4___5
13. Rate your knowledge about interactive read-alouds.
    ___1___2___3___4___5
14. Rate your knowledge in interactive and shared writing.
    ___1___2___3___4___5
15. Rate your knowledge in writing across the content areas.
    ___1___2___3___4___5
16. Rate your knowledge in moving readers forward based on assessment data.
    ___1___2___3___4___5

APPENDIX B: SCHEDULE OF SCHOOL CONTACT

Date	Type of Contact	Hours in School
September 1, 2016	Initial Meeting, Consent Forms Signed	1.0
September 6, 2016	Planning with Administrators and Literacy Leader Pre-Self Assessments Administered	1.0
September 15, 2016	Focus Group Interview #1 Professional Development #1	4.0
September 23, 2016	Focus Group Interview #2 Teacher Observations (Interactive Read-Alouds)	3.0
September 26, 2016	Modeling and Coaching (Interactive Read-Alouds)	2.0
September 28, 2016	(Modeling and Coaching)	2.0
October 10, 2016	(Modeling and Coaching)	2.0
October 19, 2016	Individual Interviews Modeling and Coaching Conversations	3.0
October 20, 2016	Focus Group Interview #3 Professional Development #2	4.0
October 21, 2016	Modeling and Coaching	2.0
October 24, 2016	Modeling and Coaching	2.0
November 9, 2016	Modeling and Coaching	2.0
November 10, 2016	Modeling and Coaching	2.0
November 11, 2016	Lunch and Learn Professional Development #3 and Literacy Block Modeling Focus Group Interviews	4.0
November 16, 2016	Modeling and Coaching	2.0
November 21, 2016	Modeling and Coaching	2.0
November 22, 2016	Modeling and Coaching	2.0
November 23, 2016	Individual Interviews	3.0

APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Tentative Initial Interview Questions

(Due to the phenomenological methodology of this study, these questions are really tentative placeholders that will shift according to the results from the literacy assessments. This is important because this study sets out to use a flexible framework to meet the individual needs of teachers within professional development)

1. When you think about the kind of readers you want your students to be by the end of the school year, what is standing in your way?

2. When you think about the kind of writers you want your children to be by the end of the school year, what is standing in your way?

3. How do you feel about small group instruction? If you have used it, could you explain the strengths and weaknesses that you have noticed within this approach to instruction?

4. Tell me about the types of text that you use as part of reading instruction.

5. What role do you think read-alouds play in your reading instruction with young children?

APPENDIX D: GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Tentative Initial Focus Group Interview Questions

(The Likert scale was used to capture the knowledge of the teachers prior to the research study beginning. I chose not to ask teaching practice questions on the Likert scale due to the upcoming group interviews. I felt the interviews would help tell the story of the teaching practice.)

1. When you think about a ninety-minute literacy block, describe what it would look like in your classroom.
2. What do you feel are your strengths as a teacher of reading?
3. What do you feel are your strengths as a teacher of writing?
4. What are some areas in literacy you would like to learn more about?

Some questions will be based on the self -assessment teachers complete at the beginning of the research phase. Sample questions are as follows:

1. Talk about the various types of comprehension strategies?
2. How do you incorporate comprehension strategy instruction into your literacy block?
3. What are some of your strengths? What are some areas of need?
4. How often do you read aloud to children? How would you describe a typical read-aloud in your classroom? What are some of the challenges that you face in read-alouds?
5. How do you choose the books you read aloud? Talk to me about your selection criteria? Tell me about some of your favorite genres and authors that you use in your classroom.
6. Talk about phonics instruction in your classroom. Tell me about the strategies you use to teach phonics, word study and/or spelling.
7. What are some ways that you organize your students across the day within literacy instruction? (Depending upon responses, I will follow up with the following questions) Tell me how you facilitate small group instruction? Tell me about a small group literacy lesson that you recently taught.
8. Tell me more about _____ as it relates to literacy instruction.
9. Describe the use of _____ in your current literacy block.
10. How is vocabulary taught within your literacy block? What strategies might you use? What is your point of view about context and vocabulary? Explain your reasoning.
11. How do you instruct literacy for all levels of readers and writers? What role does differentiation of instruction have in your classroom? What do you need to keep thinking about as related to differentiation of instruction?
12. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate yourself as a literacy teacher? What is your rationale for the rating? What is an example of a teachable moment that you may have experienced with students? What do you want to keep thinking about as a literacy teacher?

APPENDIX E: POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

Gradual Release Model

What
Is
It?
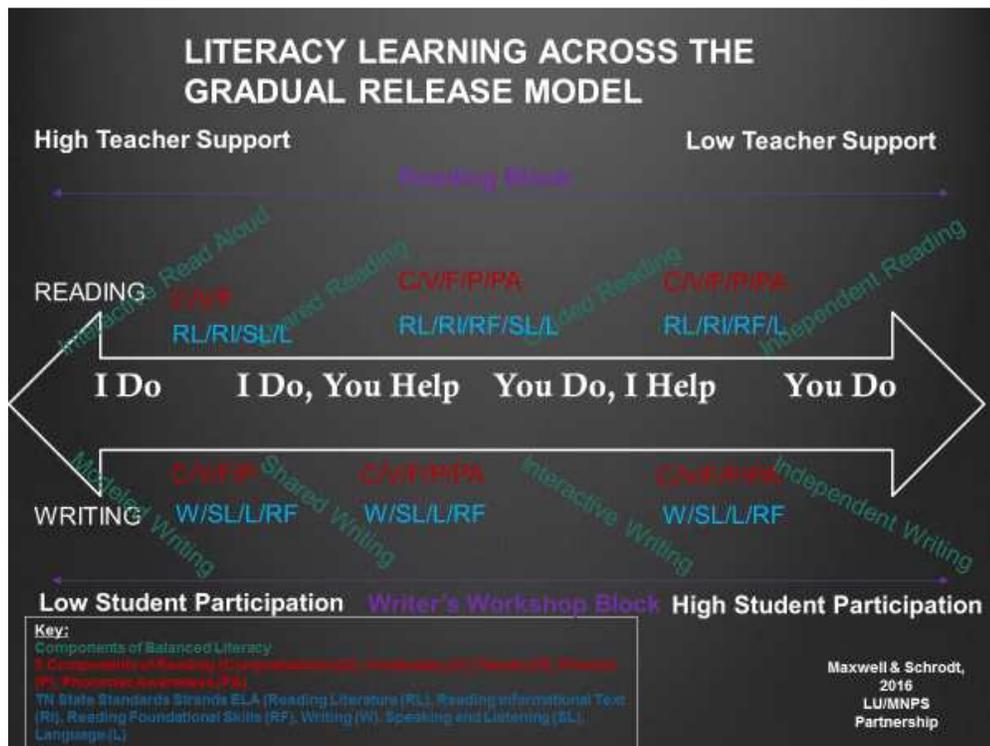
So What Does This Mean For Teaching Comprehension?

Let's hear from one of the leading experts in the field:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgSRH0EYvhU

Comprehension is the *reason* we read.

How do we teach someone to understand what they read?

Comprehension is complex, involving many simultaneous thinking processes.

Teachers must teach students the habits of competent readers through strategy instruction and provide lots of opportunities for reading practice.

**What good readers DO when they read...**

Predict

Connect

Infer

Visualize

Question

Monitor

The Reading Process

1. Pre-Reading

2. During Reading

3. After Reading

Strategies can be used throughout the process.

Think Aloud: to help students understand, we must open up our heads and show our thinking.

MODEL GOOD READING

https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/theories-of-character
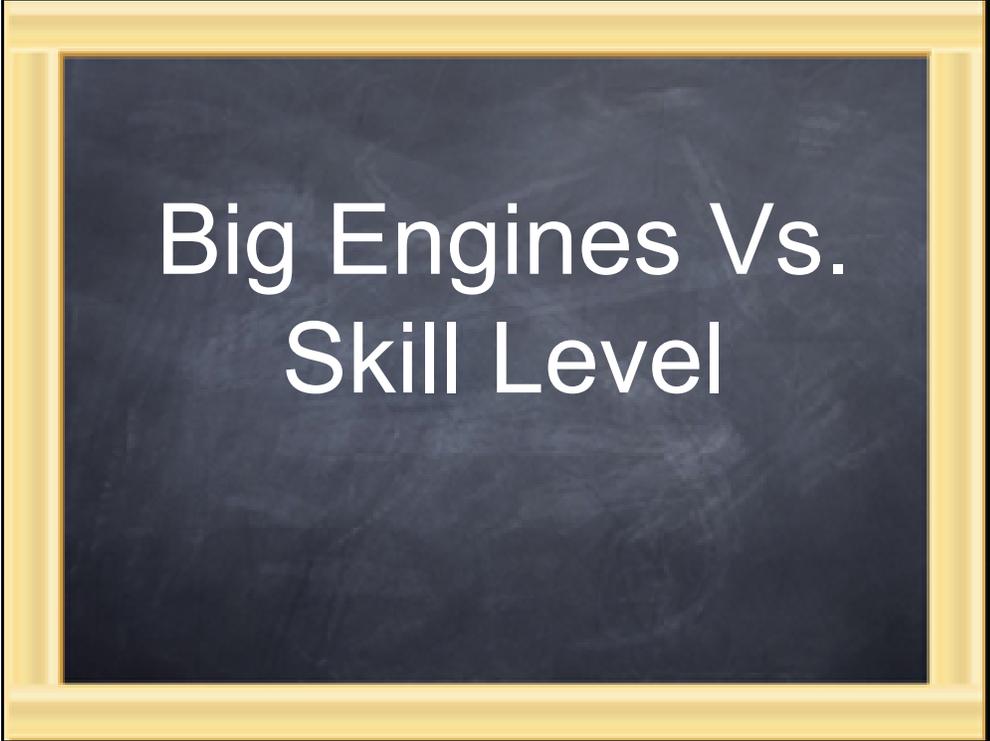
Big Engines Vs. Skill Level
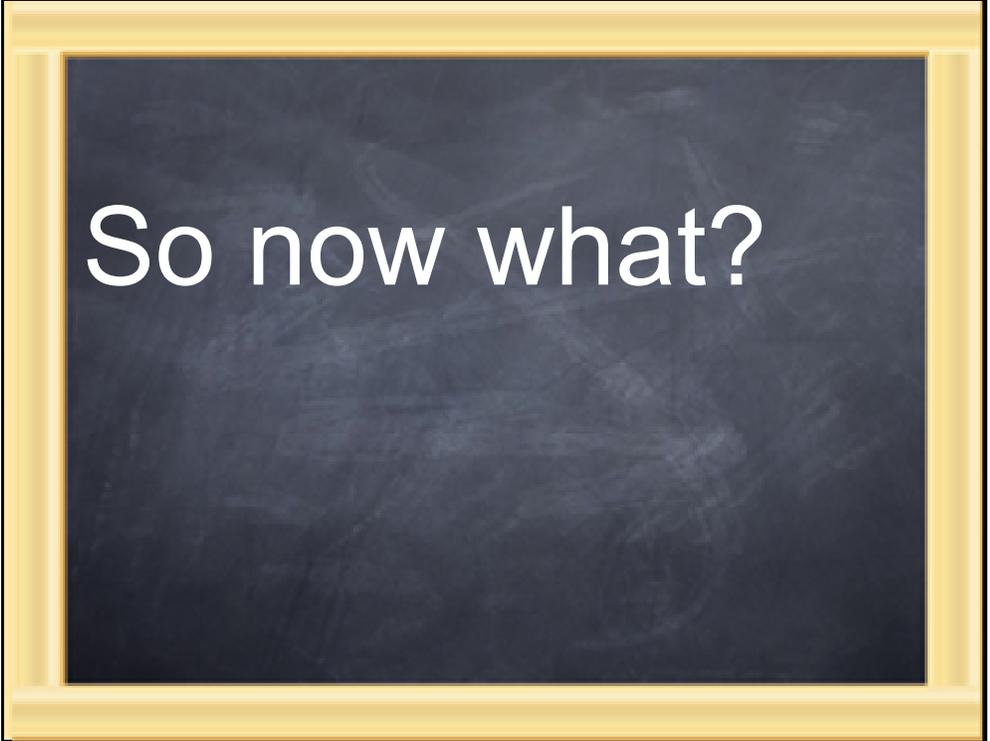
So now what?

APPENDIX F: CODING LEVELS

Open Codes: Initial Level of Coding	Axial Codes: Second Level of Coding	Selective Codes: Final Level of Coding
Letter	Skill	Self-efficacy
Scope and sequence	Detail	Big-picture
Benchmark assessment	Isolation	Intentionality
Writing	Teaching	Modeling
Reading	Choosing	Real situations
Comprehensions	Feedback	Student comprehension
Leveled text/leveled readers	Immediate	Student ownership
Books	Practice	Student Learning
Schedule	Noticing	Growth skills/strategies
Centers	Decision-making	Self-assessment
Ipads	Literacy block	Continuous
Small group	Five components of literacy	Empowered
Whole group	Guided reading	Confidence
Phonics	Interactive read-alouds	Integration
Phonemic awareness	Teaching the story	
Vocabulary	Teaching the book	
Phonics tubs	Strategies	
Letters	Correct misconceptions	
Sounds	Errors in reading	
Letter writing	Practice and supports	
Non-mastery	Supports	
Modeling	Couldn't fit it all in	
Coaching	Everything is connected	
Fiction		
Non-fiction		
Questioning		
Asking questions		
Self-assessment		
Compare and contrast		
Rigby leveled books		
Stories		
Retell		
Sequence		
District mandates		
Teacher knowledge		
Strengths and weaknesses		
My knowledge		
Practice in place		

APPENDIX G: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Tuesday, August 30, 2016

Investigator(s):   Melanie Maxwell (Student PI), Cyrille Magne (FA) and Katie Schrodt
Investigator(s') Email(s):   mmaxwell@mtmail.mtsu.edu; cyrille.magne@mtsu.edu
Department: Literacy Studies/Psychology

Study Title: *Examining professional development and teachers learning about literacy instruction*
Protocol ID: 16-2324

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category *(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior* A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification	
Date of expiration	8/29/2017	
Sample Size	20 (TWENTY)	
Participant Pool	**Adult K-2 teachers**	
Exceptions	Collection of voice recordings and handwriting from the participants is permitted upon administory informed consent	
Restrictions	Signed informed consent	
Comments	Training records for Katie Shrodt has been verified	
Amendments	Date	Post-approval Amendments
		NONE

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (8/29/2019) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 8/29/2017. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study MUST be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.

Continuing Review Schedule:

Reporting Period	Requisition Deadline	IRB Comments
First year report	7/29/2017	INCOMPLETE
Second year report	7/29/2018	INCOMPLETE
Final report	7/29/2019	INCOMPLETE

IRBN001   Version 1.3   Revision Date 03.06.2016

Institutional Review Board   Office of Compliance   Middle Tennessee State University

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website. Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, investigator information and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University
Email: irb_information@mtsu.edu (for questions)
        irb_submissions@mtsu.edu (for documents)

Quick Links:
        Click here for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
        More information on expedited procedures can be found here.