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Teachers' Knowledge of Dominie Reading and Writing Assessment Portfolio Word-Level Reading

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Teachers' Knowledge of Dominie Reading and Writing Assessment Portfolio

Word-Level Reading

by

Maxine Y. Kershaw

M.A., Walden University, 2010

M.S., South Carolina State University, 1994

B.S., South Carolina State University, 1985

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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July 2017

Abstract

There is confusion among teachers about the instructional use of the Dominie assessment for word-level reading and phonemic awareness skills for kindergarten and first-grade students. Recent school assessment data indicated that 20% of students tested in kindergarten and first grade needed remediation. The purpose of this qualitative bounded case study was to understand teachers' perceptions about using the Dominie assessment for instruction, and how these perceptions contribute to the decline in reading scores. Constructivism was the conceptual framework for this study. The research questions focused on the trends in students' Dominie assessment scores, the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of the assessment in planning and instruction, and the actual use of assessment results for facilitating construction of students' learning in reading. Interview data were collected from 11 participants from kindergarten and first-grade teachers who had administered the Dominie assessment. Themes that emerged after data analysis were needs for time for assessment, training and supplementary methods, improvements in the assessment itself, and special knowledge to use Dominie data. A professional development project that allows teachers to help students construct their learning in ways that allow them to reflect on experiences and use prior knowledge to improve reading skills was developed. Positive social change might occur as teachers expand their knowledge and instructional approaches through this professional development project in ways that could improve learning and reading skills for kindergarten and first-grade students.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my family (both biological and spiritual) for their support, encouragement and giving a listening ear. To my husband, Keith who has been a consistent and strong force in my life. You have preached a timely word from God that kept me focused and grounded. You taught me the difference between decision and commitment, and that message alone kept me focused many days when I wanted to quit. Thank you, honey!

To my daughter, Rachel "Pookie", for pushing me toward new endeavors that I wouldn't have ordinarily ventured into on my own. You are the best gift to my life. Thank you for helping me in my educational journey (i.e. 'tests' and trials).

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Chapter 1: The Problem

Introduction

Early identification of literacy development is important (Cabell, 2011). Pre-literacy development begins as early as age 3. Many students enter school with fewer language and literacy experiences than their peers. Because some degree of reading skill is warranted across the curriculum, they may become frustrated learners due to adverse effect of poor literacy skills. These children may benefit from language and literacy enrichment provided in the classroom. Ideally, such enrichment would be provided by experts in the field (e.g., speech/language pathologists or Reading Recovery specialists).

Because speech/language pathologists are key members of school-based teams that serve children, their collaboration with teachers can include consultation and co-teaching (Mosboro-Michael, 2010; Donaldson, 2014). This collaborative effort can provide support to the general curriculum (American Speech-Hearing Association, 2012).

Referral to speech and language services is a qualifying component of special education; students who fail the screening are referred for an evaluation.Such evaluations typically contribute to referring students to special education because general education fails to provide programs for at-risk children or special education is used as a remedial service for general education. General and special education teachers have limited special teaching skills; perhaps professional development training is warranted. Educators may come to understand that when modified and implemented in general education classroom teaching, specializations such as Reading Recovery (RR) offer a chance for all students to strengthen their word-level reading and spelling skills.

Definition of the Problem

There is a lack of understanding among teachers in the Richland School District (a pseudonym) about the use of the state-mandated Dominie assessment for word-level reading and the acquisition of phonemic awareness skills for kindergarten and first-grade students. Teachers need research-based instructional strategies for students struggling with word-level reading. Teachers at the local school continue to struggle with the state-mandated Dominie assessment and how this struggle contributes to the decline in reading ability of first-grade and kindergarten students. Teachers have received professional training for using the Dominie data during their initial employment training.

Students are assessed three times per academic school year; the Dominie data serve as the primary documentation of students' progress in word-level reading. Data collected from the participants revealed a major concern at the local school was how to use the data from the Dominie assessment for more than a reading score. Teachers wanted to be trained to use the data for direct instruction to improve reading among kindergarten and first-grade students. The discovery of the need for research-based professional training shaped the creation of the project for this doctoral study.

Rationale

In 2003, a federal Reading First grant was awarded to South Carolina to help schools and school districts in their efforts to improve reading achievement among K-3 students by using research-driven instructional methods. At a local level, mandated testing authorized by the 2002 NCLB Act urged school administrators to emphasize an end of the year summative assessment for all students, but with an added emphasis on

kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Currently, struggling readers, once identified, are referred to RR or speech and language evaluations, which are classified as special education. Excess referrals to special education, and specifically to speech and language programs, has become a major concern across schools in the southeastern states per the local school and the school superintendant. (Percy Mack (superintendant), in discussion with the author, August 2011).

Formative assessments—such as portfolios or performance assessment plans—and summative assessments—such as standardized tests—are both needed to inform instruction. Clinical assessments provide only numerical data that is not always easily understood by many teachers and support staff; such is the case with standardized tests only. These assessments are recognized assessments in South Carolina; as a speech-language pathologist, I use them as a screening or as a diagnostic tool when evaluating students who qualify for placement in special education because they need speech-language therapy. From the perspective of special educators, early intervention focuses on the intersection of skills; traditionally these have been dichotomized as phonetic or phonological delays. Using the Dominie assessment as a joint tool among speech pathologists, reading specialists, and general education teachers will enhance its current usage and will identify the literacy levels of kindergarten and first-grade student. It may be possible to use the Dominie in a new way to: (a) identify word-level reading from the perspectives of all involved, (b) contribute to a greater understanding of the students' literacy weaknesses and (c) provide information on how to strengthen those weaknesses.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

There seems to be a lack of understanding among teachers in the Richmond School District about the use of the state mandated assessment for word-level reading and phonemic awareness development among kindergarten and first-grade students. Meeting the needs of struggling readers continues to be an issue for my local school and expectations have increased for having younger students learn to read.

As a result of the Dominie assessment, school data indicated that 20% of students tested in kindergarten and first grade need remediation. (Percy Mack (superintendant), in discussion with the author, August 2011). Of that 20%, at least half of those identified are referred for speech and language services. Richmond One school district was using the statewide reading readiness assessment, Dominie, to test alphabet knowledge, sentence writing, and spelling Teachers do not currently use the Dominie assessment to identify phonics or phonemic awareness errors, or phonlological awareness development.

The participating student data were selected systematically from those students who qualified for RR scoring in the lowest 20% of all students assessed in the kindergarten and first grade classes. The Dominie was the dominant criteria for diagnosing a struggling reader in kindergarten and first grade.

Reading First schools retain a Reading First literacy coach and reading interventionist in each school; they support teachers by helping with the administration, data compilation, and interpretation of assessments. However, in spite of this support, some schools' teachers demonstrate a concern about the lack of professional development training to use the Dominie assessment. To improve the implementation and effectiveness

of the program, research would be useful in understanding the various factors that support the use of Dominie by teachers and speech/language pathologists.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Reading is fundamental to many life activities and is perhaps the most essential skill children learn in school (Lane, 2014). Advancements in speech and language pathology have moved the field beyond working with individual speech sounds (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2012). Current practice encourages school administrators to use the knowledge and skills of the school speech-language pathologist to support development of vocabulary and comprehension skills in early literacy. As speech-language pathologists become more knowledgeable about their specific roles and responsibilities in supporting reading development. SLP's encourages the application of research and evidenced-based strategies to help students move forward with spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension skills at the word-level reading stage.

As a result of government mandates, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002), public schools have experienced as evidenced by: (a) an increase in the use of standardized assessments, (b)accountability expectancy levels, and (c) more parental involvement regarding school choice (Anderson, 2007). Beginning in the 1960s with Title 1 and continuing into the 1970s with Public Law 94-142, many policies have been implemented. In the new century, these have included NCLB and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2011) legislation, the National Reading Panel Report (2011), the Early Reading First (ERF) program, the Institute of Education Sciences, and the What Works Clearinghouse. Literacy initiatives are being funded at all

levels of government and society with federal, state, and local contributions. The Education Consumer Foundation (2011) reported reading initiatives, such as those for direct instruction, have resulted from language and literacy research which demonstrated a direct link between improvements in direct instruction and improved student outcomes.

Every year, elementary schools in South Carolina require kindergarten and first-grade students to take the Dominie assessment as part of the Reading First program. The assessment, which was developed by DeFord (2001) from the South Easter region by all South Carolina Reading First grants as the primary literacy assessment tool for students in grades K-3. It provides the ability to screen, diagnose, and monitor the progress of students (Goodloe-Johnson, McGinley, Rose, & Kokkinis, 2006). The assessment is administered three times per academic year in South Carolina. With the Dominie assessment, teachers can assess key literacy skills in reading, writing, spelling, phonological awareness and phonics (Goodle-Johnson et al., 2006). Current studies, according to Skebo (2013), support relationship between: (a) phonological awareness, overall language, vocabulary, and nonlinguistic cognitive skills, and (b) decoding and reading comprehension. From the results of this assessment, first graders who fall within the lowest 20% of all students tested in the kindergarten and first grade classes become candidates for Reading Recovery.

Children who demonstrate poor phonological awareness tend to demonstrate associated reading difficulties (Schuele & Schmitz, 2011). Using a statewide reading readiness assessment comprised of phonics, phonemic awareness, and spelling patterns as a unique predictor in the identification of slow and struggling readers among

kindergarteners and first graders is an outstanding endeavor; however, it may not be enough. Although the data are useful in identifying potentially at risk students, the data may also be used in a structured, systematic way so that teachers teach to the students' weaknesses and turn those weaknesses into strengths, particularly with respect to reading and literacy development.

Definitions

The terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Domini Reading and Writing Assessment Portfolio

A summary assessment of word and passage reading and word and sentence writing. Early literacy includes concepts of print, phonemic awareness, identification of onsets and rimes, and letter knowledge (DeFord, 2004).

Early Reading Research Intervention

Investigated the impact of phonological awareness and phonics training within a whole class setting (Diamond, 2013).

Mastering of Learning

Requires teachers to use mastery measures to insure the students are mastering the concepts being taught (Guskey, 2013).

Phonemic Awareness (also phoneme awareness)

The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2012).

Phonics

Instruction that teaches children the connection between letters (graphemes) that compose written language and the sounds (phonemes) of the spoken language (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2012).

 Reading Recovery

A school-based, short-term intervention designed for children aged five or six, who are the lowest achieving in literacy after their first year of school; Tutoring sessions are daily for 30 minutes and continue over a span of 12-20 weeks (Schmitt, 2010)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

The RTI process is a multitier approach to providing services and interventions to struggling learners at increasing levels of intensity (Chidsey & Steege, 2011).

Spelling

The study of word-specific knowledge Spelling is often referred to as a window into the literacy mind of a student (Apel, Masterson, & Niessen, 2011).

Word-level Reading

Focused on the underachieving reading students in kindergarten and first grade and the predictors in spelling and word-level reading that may gauge their success in reading and literacy development (Apel & Lawrence, 2011).

Significance

Constructivists believe that learning should be a process where people reflect on experiences and use prior knowledge to increase their learning. Teacher training and teacher knowledge are critical in the success of students in their classrooms (Hightower,

2011). In order to meet the challenges of teacher training, time management, large classes, goal-based instruction and mastery of learning among kindergarten and first-grade students, every level of education will need to be "substantially reformed and educators must acquire new knowledge and skills" (Banks, Shawer, Gilmore, & Rae, 2012, p. 19). Teachers would work smarter not harder. The use of this project will be a means to compile useful information relative to students' phonics and phonemic awareness. Through professional training, teachers will have a working knowledge of how to provide goal-based instruction in a whole classroom setting; similar to strategies used by specialists in the educational environment.

One significant factor in achieving success in student achievement is the level of teacher knowledge. Both students and teachers bring different backgrounds, experiences, perceptions, and misconceptions to the classroom, which affect learning. Teachers' knowledge and training vary according to their educational background and professional training. Voltz (2010) addressed the diversity of learners in the student population, claiming that it is now time to address the same diversity in the teaching population.

Teachers face a daunting task in teaching reading to students who represent a great variety of instructional levels. Formative and summative assessments measure specific skills to determine mastery on an individual level. They can be used to monitor each student's progress. Teachers must be able to incorporate the data (Browder, 2014), obtained from these initial and subsequent assessments of literacy levels to facilitate the proper placement of students into small, flexible, instructional groups. The results from

formative evaluations provide teachers with data that helps them plan and implement differentiated instruction and monitor student development (Gregory & Chapman, 2013).

To meet the needs of all learners, particularly those at risk for reading difficulties, teachers search for instructional strategies that are: (a) focused on the development of student comprehension skills, (b) research-based, and (c) associated with best practices. The concept is discussed in detail in the literature review. Based on accountability measures, such as those required by NCLB (2002), teachers need to demonstrate accuracy in assessing students' needs and the appropriateness of the designed instruction—informed by the data—to meet those needs. Without the ability of teachers to meet these expectations, all students may not master the skills necessary for adequate reading achievement (Voltz, 2010).

Guiding/Research Questions

Three research questions guided this qualitative exploratory case study. They are:

1. What are the trends in student test scores for word-level reading and phonemic awareness skills for kindergarten and first-grade students?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of the Dominie assessment in planning and instruction?

3. How do teachers use the Dominie assessment results to explore *word*-level reading and phonemic awareness skills for kindergarten and first-grade students?

Merging the unique skill set of the speech pathologist, RR specialist and the general education teacher expands the current practice of the Dominie assessment data

from ranking students who fall in the lowest percentile to improving word-level reading skills.

The structure of the RR program shows why the speech-language pathologist should work with the reading teacher or literacy programs (ASHA, 2014). RR Council documents, at least first grade RR programs contribute significantly to getting students on grade level (Mendoza, 2014). This suggests that as literacy needs increase, it might be necessary to have teachers at all grade levels trained in the principles of reading recovery, so all students can benefit from its strategic claims to reading gains in a 12-week period. Positive results using the mastery of learning approach, including direct instruction, would reflect a reduction in the incidence of literacy difficulties in special education. In the area of speech and language services, among at-risk students, mastery of learning may increase progress and achievement among those demonstrating delayed reading development levels.

Review of the Literature

This section presents the current literature on speech pathology and literacy. The literature review revealed the following themes from the research studies: the RTI model, RR , and the role of the speech pathologist in identifying the need of teachers for professional development using the Dominie assessment.

The strategy for searching literature included reading current literature on the topic of RTI and RR; Two databases were used to find relevant peer-reviewed articles: EBSCO and SAGE vendors. The following key words were used: *response to*

intervention (RTI), reading recovery, word-level reading, direct instruction, mastery of

learning, phonemic awareness, phonics and *Dominie*.

Research

National reports and governmental mandates, such as NCLB (2001) and IDEA

(2000), have raised expectations for all teachers, including the education and training of

early childhood teachers. This is particularly evident among state-funded pre-k and

kindergarten programs, such as Head Start. EBP is highlighted to support the use of

research in instructional decision making to facilitate greater confidence in the validity

and reliability of the concepts, research, and program. Three major components of

evidence-based practice (EBP) require: (a) integrating high-quality published research,

(b) practitioner expertise, and (c) clients' preferences and values (Hoffman, 2013). In

terms of literacy and literacy development, federal and state mandates and expectations

emphasize the incorporation of evidence-based practice (research-driven instruction) to

support the development of curricula, adoption, and assessment of the effectiveness of the

curriculum.

As such, Evidence-based instruction on the literacy curriculum is significant

because the research indicated: (a) the predictive capacity of prereaders' phonological

awareness in terms of later reading success; (b) the ability to target phonemic awareness

instruction among prereading children, which has been shown to result in significant

gains in phonological awareness and in word-level reading skills; (c) the successful

performance of students who receive both phonetic awareness and decoding instruction

incorporated into a single reading program; (d) positive decoding outcomes among

children participating in more explicit approaches to teaching phonics; and (e) the importance of teaching students to master their weak areas, as identified through assessment (Jenkins & OConner, 2010).

According to a systematic review by ASHA's National Center of Evidence-Based Practice in Communication Disorders (2012) researchers indicated the predictive capacity of prereaders' phonological awareness in terms of later reading success and the ability to target phonemic awareness instruction among prereading children. Phonological awareness and in word-level reading skills has been shown to result in significant gains in the successful performance of students who receive both phonetic awareness and decoding instruction incorporated into a single reading program (Jenkins & O'Conner, 2010). Also, Jenkins and O'Connor indicated that positive decoding outcomes emerge among children participating in more explicit approaches to teaching phonics and phonological awareness skills in addition to the importance of teaching students to master their weak areas may be identified through assessments.

When the reading deficit was called to the attention of the nation in President Clinton's State of the Union Address in 1996, the federal government, for the first time, made reading a top priority on its agenda. After several hearings on the national reading deficit, a decision was made that the solution would be to provide millions of dollars annually to states to establish programs to offer professional development and purchase instructional materials and diagnostic assessment instruments to implement what was termed scientifically-based reading instruction (Chapman & Gregory, 2012).

Spelling

Spelling pattern (decoding), phonics, and phonemic awareness are applicable areas for research because these affect the work of the educational community, especially relative to word-level reading among kindergarten and first-grade students, and thus, represents a significant topic in the field of education. The importance of assessing students' knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and phonological awareness (e.g., with non-word reading tasks) can therefore, not be underscored, particularly among students beyond first grade. The phoneme represents a base from which spoken words are built. For example, the English language encompasses a vast number of words, yet roughly 45 phonemes exist. As such different words are formed through a process of deleting or rearranging phonemes. For example, *mat* becomes *man* with a phoneme replacement of /n/ for the existing /t/ and the removal of the phoneme /m/ from *man* leaves you with the word *an* (Apel & Lawrence, 2011).

Although general developmental stages of spelling acquisition have been identified, little data are available on the types of spelling errors that children make or on the frequency of these error patterns at various stages of children's acquisition of standard spellings. Spelling is one form of phonemic awareness that can be directly and easily accessed by speech-language pathologists (American Speech and Hearing Associan, 2012).

After identifying children who fail to demonstrate the anticipated spelling patterns, speech-language pathologists should provide these students with phoneme awareness training in order to facilitate their use of more accurate phonetic

representations of words (Devonshire & Fluck, 2010). Concerning relationships between expressive phonological disorders, performance on tasks of phonological awareness, and later reading and spelling skills, should encourage the speech-language pathologist to systematically monitor the development of phonological awareness skills in all children with phonological impairments and to ensure that they receive the appropriate intervention from a professional who understands the phonological basis of reading development and the nature of phonological deficits in reading disabilities. Instruction of this nature will help to link spelling with reading in children who have not yet caught on to the alphabetic principle (Apel & Lawrence, 2011).

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment system is a measure that is used to assess understanding of the Alphabetic Principle among students in the state of South Carolina. It serves as a valid instrument related to reading outcomes and predictive of later reading proficiency when students are not progressing as expected (Good III, Gruba, & Kaminski, 2002; American Speech and Hearing Association, 2012). The information derived from this instrument helps with the development of instructional objectives. DIBELS is based on the premise that when the elements of phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and fluency with connected text, vocabulary, and comprehension are linked, these same elements serve as predictors of later reading proficiency, allowing educators to readily and reliably determine students' progress.

The DIBELS was developed based on curriculum-based measurement (CBM) by Deno and Fuschs (2001) at the Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities at the University of Minnesota in the 1970s and 1980s (Kaminski, Cummings, Powell-Smith, & Good, 2008; Kruse, 2015) and is designed to be a type of mastery measurement to predict reading difficulty and evaluate the efficacy of phonological awareness.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Response to intervention (RTI) was introduced (now called Response to instruction) to further highlight and clarify the importance of inclusion of all teachers and to support improved reading achievement, regardless of outside barriers that may have contributed to the lack of literacy success thus far. The RTI program has promoted an additional level of collaboration among educators (Ridgeway, 2012). The various educators, including the SLP, regular education teacher, and the special education teacher, are able to collaborate, working together to use their different skills to support positive change and literacy development for an at-risk child. RTI gives the SLP and opportunity to engage more with classroom teachers and other school personnel to show them what we do as professionals in the public school (American Speech and Hearing Association Leader, 2013). RTI has provided an effective method for intervention in which the SLP can have a significant role, participating in the collaboration and interface with other educators (American Speech and Hearing Associan, 2012).

A teacher or a coach uses a literacy assessment to identify the good reader behaviors a student display, to identify areas of weakness, to determine student reading level, and to document student progress (Schudt, 2006). Additionally, an SLP brings a

unique contribution to the curriculum as a part of the RTI process (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2012). The National Center on RTI (2006) has established a standard process to evaluate the scientific rigor of commercially available tools and interventions that can be used in an RTI context. According to research, a greater understanding of reading development and grave concerns over poor educational achievement in the United States have motivated a variety of school reforms over the past few decades revealed 86.7% preschool students in one school achieved a standard score below the normal range for the percentage of consonants correct (PCC) on the Diagnostic Evaluation in the areas of articulation and phonology (Schwartz, Askew, & Gomez-Bellenge, 2007; Mcleod, 2013). According to Bolger, Dunlap, Foorman, Landi, and Perfetti (2006), the difference between the good readers and the struggling readers lies in the ability to read words in isolation, which also keeps struggling readers from improving in their reading. Word-level reading is the aspect of literacy development the Dominie is testing. According to Apel and Lawrence (2011), word-level reading focuses on the underachieving reading students in kindergarten and first grade and the predictors in spelling and word-level reading that may gauge their success in reading and literacy development.

Mastery of Learning

The concept of mastery learning requires that teachers use mastery measures to ensure that students are mastering the concepts being taught. Mastery learning is a philosophy and set of instructional strategies designed to help teachers better individualize teaching and learning in group-based classrooms (Guskey, 2011). After

teachers teach a skill, they test for mastery of that skill prior to teaching the next set of skills. Because the type and difficulty level of the skills that are being assessed continually change, scores from previous tests throughout the year cannot be compared. Thus, mastery-based assessments, such as end of unit tests, only serve to assess whether the student has actually learned the skills/concepts being taught (Guskey, 2011). In contrast, the DIBELS Benchmark serves to provide educators with research-based, criterion-referenced scores that can be used to gauge student progress. The scores are comparable year to year so that teachers can use students' performance in the previous year to identify those in need of more intensive instruction.

Phonics

Phonics can be integrated into whole class instruction or mixed-ability reading lessons for the benefit of normally developing readers as well as those with a demonstrated deficiency in phonological awareness skills. According to research by Levesque (2010), the difference between the good readers and the struggling readers lies in the ability to read words in isolation, which also keeps struggling readers from improving in their reading. The strategy focusing on phonics was shown by Bolger et al. (2006) to significantly impact the reading performance of both normally developing readers and those with poor phonological awareness, with findings demonstrating a reduction in reading difficulties from 20% in comparison (control) schools to 5% in the intervention schools. These results suggested the highly effective nature of phonological and phonics training, particularly for students with poor phonological awareness, even when the instruction was integrated into a whole-class teaching model. Accordingly,

research supports the benefits of early supplementary phonological awareness training for children at risk of developing reading difficulties, particularly when this training is paired with phonics training (linking phonemes to letters in print) linked to weaknesses in print awareness and phonological processing that place children with speech sound disorders at increased risk for reading difficulties (Ehri et al., 2001; Anthony, 2011).

When using the phonics approach, some teachers fail to consider that children are being taught the English spelling-sound rules. Leaning the rules without auditory acuity makes children primarily dependent on letter sound correspondence (Glazer, 2005). For example, teachers teach children the well-known phrases of when two vowels go walking the first does the talking and when a word ends in a silent-e, the first vowel sound is long. These types of rules in English are quite complex, as nearly all English letters correspond to more than a single sound. For example, the letter N begins words like *nose, nice*, and *new;* however, *gnu, knife*, and *pneumonia* sound similar, but do not start with N. Given the rules for spelling and pronunciation in English and the exceptions to those rules, teachers attempt to teach both through the use of the phonics approach (Glazer, 2005).

Phonics involves teaching children to identify and to connect the spoken sounds with the appropriate letters …r groups of letters (e.g., the ability to understand and decipher that the sound /k/ can be represented by *c*, *k*, or *ck* spellings) and teaching children to blend those letter sounds to produce approximate pronunciations of unknown words (Vanderbilt, 2011). Traditionally, teachers are accustomed to working with phonics-based instruction. The ideological and philosophical views change point of view on a continuous pendulum. Glazer (2005) asserted that learning to read is dependent on

the ability to learn phonics; another insisted on the importance of first learning whole words. Glazer contended that "is correct--nor incorrect, that *phonics* is not a mode of teaching reading, but rather a method of teaching the sounds of the English language, and that *phonics* should not be considered a subject in school or a determiner for reading success for all children" (Glazer, 2005, p.71).

Phonics is the understanding that there is a recognizable and predictable relationship between sounds used in spoken language, and the letters representing those same sounds in print or written language. When a student is successful at applying his or her knowledge of letter-sound relationships to reading, the student demonstrates successful decoding (Piasta & Wagner, 2010). A phonics background supports teachers by understanding how to teach children to sound out words, as well as how to help children struggling with linking letters to sounds. As such, phonics can be seen as an instructional strategy, providing a method for teachers to instruct students to learn to read and to teach the relationships between the spoken and written word, that is, the sounds of spoken language and the associated letters of the alphabet (Piasta & Wagner, 2010).

Phonological Processing/Awareness

Phonological awareness instruction and intervention are provided to children for one purpose: to facilitate the acquisition of reading and writing, specifically decoding words and spelling words (Scheule & Boudreau, 2008). Phonological processing/awareness is the most prominent and enduring weakness in young students with word-level reading and spelling problems (Busick, 2013). Similar to phonology,

phonological awareness is not directly related to the letters of the alphabet, but rather, focuses on the sounds in spoken words.

The distinction between phonology and phonological awareness is that where phonology conceptualizes one's ability to hear the difference between sounds in spoken words, the concept of phonological awareness refers to the ability to understand that spoken words composed of sounds (Cunningham, 2012). While this fact may be obvious to adults, children have difficulties understanding that there can be other words within a word (i.e., compound words), or that words are made of syllables, which are in turn made of phonemes. Children lacking phonological awareness fail to comprehend the concepts of rhyming words, alliteration, or the various lengths of words in comparing between written and spoken words (e.g., the spoken word *area* is longer than the spoken word *though*, but in written form, *area* is the shorter of the two) (Cunningham, 2012).

Phonemic awareness is the essential processes for learning to read (Tilian, 2011), while phonological awareness is an essential instructional component to prevent reading failure in Kindergarten and first grade if it is linked with good decoding instruction (Moats, 2005). This higher-level task of phonological awareness, referred to as *phonemic awareness,* is assessed in invented spellings. Thus, phonemic awareness refers to the highest level in the hierarchy of phonological awareness skills. At this level of awareness, the individual is capable of consciously manipulating phonemes.

Invented spelling is an excellent tool to measure phonemic awareness (Squires & Gillion, 2013). Spelling is a phonological task and is one way of demonstrating, in a visible form, the extent of our phonological knowledge (Lombardina, Bedford, Fortier, &

Carter, 1997). Early errors made by children are reflective of their use of phonetic strategies as opposed to phonemic strategies. That is, their tendency to spell stops in consonant clusters with letters corresponding to the voiced stops (e.g., /spal ‒ /sba/). According to Research support was provided by a donation to the LEARN Center at Haskins Laboratories, different preschool speech error patterns predict different school-age clinical outcomes. Many atypical speech sound errors in preschoolers may be indicative of weak phonological representations, leading to long-term PA weaknesses thus effecting spelling. Preschoolers' distortions may be resistant to change over time, leading to persisting speech sound production problems. Children learn to attend to the phonemic level of words through experience with standard spellings (Lombardina et al., 1997; Preston, 2013).

In the case of the Dominie, which is used by the southeastern U.S. elementary school in this study, a passing score on one subtest of phonemic awareness does not automatically give evidence that the student has phonemic awareness, but it does indicate weakness. These identified weaknesses are addressed when the student qualifies for Reading Recovery. It is probable that pre-school students demonstrate early signs of phonological awareness according to ASHA. These early phonological awareness cues can result from informal tuition received in the home through consistent book reading and exposure to language stimulation.

Through administration of various tests such as the Test of Phonological Awareness and the Clinical Assessment of Articulation and Phonology, it has been suggested that phonological awareness, inclusive of phonemic awareness, develops

similarly and at a similar rate among pre-school children (Carson, 2013); and is

evidenced regardless of whether the children received alphabetic tuition or not (Moats,

2005). However, skills of phonemic awareness do not spontaneously develop, but rather

must be learned and hence, trained in the beginning reader. Some of the tasks often used

to assess phonemic awareness and that serve as predictors of later reading success include

phoneme blending, phoneme counting, phoneme deletion, phoneme segmentation,

phoneme reversal, and spelling.

Phonological awareness represents a more general term, which is used to describe

the awareness on the part of the child that verbal or spoken words are made up of sounds

(Gillian & McNeil, 2013); whereas, phoneme awareness represents a more specific term,

a sub-category of sorts under the large construct of phonological awareness (Catts, 1991).

The specificity of phoneme awareness relates to the child's understanding of spoken

words as constructed by individual phonemes, including syllables, onsets, rimes, rather

than a concept of just general sounds. As such, children demonstrating phoneme

awareness skills (Kirk, 2013) understand, for example, that the spoken word *bend* is

constructed of four phonemes, and recognize the specific phonemes in words and that

these phonemes can be rearranged, removed, or replaced to create different words (Wren,

2013).

Through achieving phonological awareness, a child has progressed toward

literacy, but phoneme awareness is required for the child to comprehend that letters of

written text are representative of the phonemes they hear in the spoken word (Robinson,

2011). This is what is termed *alphabetic principle* (Cole, 2013). While children

frequently get taught that the letter M stands for the sound /m/, we often fail to elaborate to teach the child to recognize and manipulate phonemes, to understand, for example, that the phoneme /m/ is in each of the words *milk*, *ham* and *family,* or that through the removal of the phoneme /m/, *man* becomes *an.*

Identification of phoneme awareness in children can be accomplished in various ways (Tilian, 2011). The simplest of the phoneme awareness tasks, blending, is a task in which an adult pronounces a word, pausing between every phoneme (e.g. /b/ /a/ /l/); the child is then asked to blend the phonemes together, creating the word *ball*. In contrast, the reverse of this task represents a more complex phonemic assessment, termed *phoneme segmentation*, in which an adult says the word wholly, and the child is tasked with repeating the word with pauses between the phonemes (e.g., adult says ball, child says /b/ /a/ /l/) (Wren, 2013). The task of phoneme manipulation represents an even more challenging and higher level skill, in which the child is asked by the adult assessor either to say a word without a particular phoneme, that is by removing a phoneme (e.g., say boat without the /t/), or to create a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word (e.g., What word would you have if you added the phoneme /o/ to the beginning of pen?). If the child can reliably do any of these tasks, the child has demonstrated true phoneme awareness, but a relevant point to make here is that the child doesn't need to do much more than these tasks to demonstrate phoneme awareness (Wren, 2013).

Phoneme awareness tasks can be created that are exceptionally tricky due to the complexity of the English language. As a language, English has many confusing phonemes, such as diphthongs and glides that can be confusing for even more

experienced readers (e.g., how many phonemes are represented in *pay*?), as well as phonemes that are not universally defined (e.g., how many phonemes in *ring* or *fur*?). There are also examples of clusters of phonemes, which are groups of consonants perceived as a unit, and which represent a more challenging task in segmentation. For example, the child may begin spelling the /pr/ in *pray*, the /gl/ in *glow*, and the /sk/ in *school* (Wren, 2004). These complexities should be avoided rather than exploited, as it is essential to understand that children do not need to be vastly gifted in phoneme manipulation; rather, it is important that the child be able to display the knowledge that the spoken words are comprised of phonemes (Wren, 2013). In addition, teachers must perceive that although phonemic awareness is critical to reading success, it remains only a single skill of the many important skills that support literacy development as children who have weak decoding and encoding skills will require intensive intervention in phonemic awareness instruction; Studies show according to Simmons, children who received Code instruction scored higher than children receiving context instruction on a variety of reading and spelling measures at the end of first and second grades (Ehri & Nunes, 2002; Leu et al., 2006; Yeh, 2003; 2015).

Accordingly, phonological awareness has been shown to account for minimal variability in the growth of word decoding skills beyond what can be explained from the student's current decoding ability level to ensure that teachers provide instruction and interventions that are sufficiently intense and implemented with fidelity (Torgesen, Wagner, Rashotte, Burgess, & Hecht, 1997; Al Otaiba, 2011). Yet, the general efficacy of phonological awareness instruction and intervention has been supported through evidence

of improvement in phonological awareness through instruction and intervention, which in turn leads to improved word decoding; Duke encourages teachers to focus on processes versus methods in learning how to read (Bus & Van IJzendoorn, 1999; Ehri et al., 2001; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000a, 2000b; Troia, 1999; 2011). Resulting from this research, phonological awareness has not only been added to preschool and kindergarten curricula, but researchers support the need to incorporate these instructional elements into intervention strategies for children demonstrating poor phonological awareness in very young children, such as kindergarteners, which requires service of a speech-language pathologist (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2012).

Intervention and Identification

Early literacy has been found to be a significant factor in supporting the necessary early learning experiences that have been linked to academic achievement (Strickland, 2011). Limitations on the experiences with language and literacy for children increase the likelihood of difficulty for that child in learning to read. Several key early literacy elements serve as predictors of reading and general academic success in school; these include oral language, alphabetic principle, and print knowledge. The level of phonological awareness in a young child serves as an essential predictor of successfully learning to decode print (Strickland, 2011). As noted, phonological awareness implies skills of identification of oral rhymes and syllables in spoken words and of identification and manipulation of the individual phonemes in spoken words; these skills serve as important indicators of the potential success of students to learn to decode print. Another

predictor of reading comprehension success among young students is early vocabulary or language development.

Language development is made up of socially shared rules that include word meanings, making new words, putting words together, and combining words contextually with the encoding (spelling) and decoding (reading) of sounds, to predict and correct common reading pattern errors, primarily among kindergarten and first-grade students as researchers suggest most struggling readers' difficulties involve decoding, word identification, and spelling in the primary grades (DeVonshire & Fluck, 2010; Spear-Swearling, 2011). In theory, using a direct intensive approach, similar to that used in the RR model or a Literacy coach, which focuses on direct instruction for a consecutive number of weeks, would, over the designated testing periods, mimic the comparable results of the RR model.

Early Reading Research

Phonological awareness has been identified as an important component in children's literacy development overall, especially in spelling and reading performance. The Early Reading Research Intervention (ERR) study investigated the impact of phonological awareness and phonics training within a whole-class setting and the effects in terms of increased achievement, of the training on both at-risk students (those at risk for reading difficulties) and normally developing children (Weinrich, 2011; Lombardino et al., 1997). The intervention (hereafter, the early reading research intervention-ERR) is based on a different theoretical model than other interventions, which were derived from research in developmental and cognitive psychology. The ERR, in contrast to previous

interventions, was based on instructional psychology, which maintains a focus on the overall learning environment as opposed to individual differences. The aim of the intervention is to teach the most useful and under developed skills first, even if developmentally they are acquired after skills that appear to be easier (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

Within the ERR, teachers were trained to implement the reading framework through utilization of a sequence of five half-day plenary sessions, along with regularly scheduled follow-up visits to schools by two members of the research team who were educational psychologists. Children in the experimental schools were provided three 12-minute teaching sessions every day, providing a total of 36 minutes of direct instruction. Children at all levels of phonological skill benefited equally from the ERR intervention.

The ERR intervention incorporated phonological and phonics training into a single whole-class session that covered all aspects of reading. The ERR intervention taught two phonological skills: synthesis (blending individual phonemes to pronounce words) and segmentation (breaking words into individual phonemes). The phonics program progressed from individual grapheme–phoneme correspondences, to reading phonically regular words (where individual phonemes are represented by a single grapheme and blended to pronounce a word) to reading words with letter combinations (where phonemes are represented by two or more letters). Graphemes were presented as written letters (for individual grapheme–phoneme correspondences) or in the context of single written words, or embedded within written continuous prose (Jenkins & O'Conner, 2010).

The study involved either additional training outside the classroom or relatively small teaching groups (between 10 and 20 children), and all were of short duration (up to 10 weeks). Minimization of the need for supplementary phonological training through the incorporation of phonological and phonics training into the mainstream, whole-class setting would save time, allowing extra time for the classroom teacher. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, a phonological intervention of this nature conducted within a whole-class and in a research setting has the potential to reveal causes of literacy difficulties; Together this body of research made it clear that most early reading difficulties can be prevented through instructional enhancements (Lombardino et al., 1997; Scanlan, 2011). Through the information gained, new insight, both theoretical and practical, can be gained with regard to the difficulties of the struggling readers.

The results from the ERR study suggest that delivering short, frequent whole-class sessions, inclusive of phonological and phonics training, can benefit reading achievement through a significant effect on the development of reading skills, specifically phonological skills. Thus, this type of intervention can serve to reduce the proportion of children experiencing reading difficulties. And since this strategy has a relatively low impact on educational resources, quality phonological and phonics training should be incorporated within the whole-class instructional practice to reduce reading difficulties for children.

Reading Instruction

An increasing number of students continue to lack grade level reading skills despite efforts to support reading development through reading programs and

interventions (National Reading Panel, 2012). According to national reports and mandates, it is clear that reading is an essential component to all learning for students, supporting the need for study on the efficacy of reading instruction in order to facilitate the literary development of all students in all subject areas. Effective reading instruction would also provide the opportunity to support all students to becoming lifelong learners. As the diverse population of students continues to increase in classrooms according to my school superintendent regarding the researchers' school district as well as across the nation, teachers face many challenges in providing instruction that will meet the needs of every learner.

Research suggests the importance of examining reading instructional practices for evidence of incorporation of research-based practices or instructional programs that have a demonstrated record of success (Strong & Jay, 2012).

Teachers have never been under more pressure. Pressure to perform. Pressure to cover the curriculum. Pressure to meet standards. Pressure to ensure high scores on standardized tests. The political climate surrounding education is more demanding than ever before. Teachers are overwhelmed with state mandates, tests, and rubrics for every task. With all these expectations, time is limited to plan differentiated instruction that individualizes reading instruction for every student yet research shows the precision with which students received the recommended time amounts of each type of literacy instruction, potentially contributes to the distance from the predicted reading outcomes. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Conner, 2011).

The abundance of information available concerning effective reading instruction provides teachers with techniques and strategies for effective teaching, but also makes teaching reading more complex and difficult to master (Cortelyou, 2012). However, successfully promoting instructional change can be difficult in cases where experienced teachers, who have successfully been using traditional methods of teaching reading for a long time, remain satisfied with their current practice. Despite awareness and efforts on the part of teachers to provide individualized instruction that will meet the needs of a diverse student population, accomplishing this task remains difficult.

Typically, teachers acknowledge and accept the many differences among the student population, which can include differences in general knowledge and skills, learning styles, interest, and motivation (Knowles, 2009). Because of the complex nature of differentiated instruction, teachers can become discouraged and overwhelmed with inadequate planning time is available and too much paperwork. Reading, understanding, and evaluating scientific research findings on a regular basis are as critical to professional development for educators as it is for physicians, psychologists, speech pathologists, and meteorologist (Hazelkorn, 2011).

Through the incorporation of research-based instructional strategies that support differentiation of instruction, teachers can help individual students overcome problems that may be preventing them from attaining reading proficiency, rather than leaving these students behind when all students are instructed on the same reading level.
Teacher training is vital to mastery to learning. Girane and Rogers (2008) stated:

Teacher educators – whether university-based educators, school-based educators, or independent consultants – who work with teachers in a variety of relationship have a moral responsibility to organize their work so they are always striving toward the development and enhancement of this professional disposition. Otherwise, the poorest children who are least likely to be the recipients of federally supported programs, will continue to be the least likely to receive the rich literacy instruction they deserve (p.74).

There is an expectation that doctors, psychologists, and other medical professionals be cognizant of current research practices and strategies in their profession; likewise, teachers should be up to date on the current research and the skills needed to most effectively teach students how to read and thus improve student outcomes. Reading teachers are passionate and dedicated about their students' early reading success; they realize that the acquisition of reading skills is essential for continued learning in all fields of study (Kiley, 2013).

Speech Pathology and Literacy

A student's academic achievement is dependent on the acquisition of literacy skills; as such, literacy can be seen as a prerequisite to not only academic achievement, but also social wellbeing, and opportunities throughout one's life. Research has suggested that coupling language skill instruction with literacy may improve language achievement among students (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2012). The specialized knowledge and experience of school speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can assist in identifying reading difficulties as well as other communication disorders and providing

strategies for building at-risk students' language literacy skills. The school SLPs contributes to both special education and regular education settings, providing services in the classroom, co-teaching with teachers and reading specialists, and working directly with students in need of assistance due to reading or other learning issues or academic failure. SLPs also provide opportunities for education and training for parents, teachers, and school administrators to ensure collaborative support for student success.

Often it is the school SLP who is able to identify the root cause of reading and language difficulties. SLPs are trained in identification and handling of language problems through efforts in: (a) prevention, (b) identifying at-risk- children, (c) assessing, (d) providing intervention, (e) documenting outcomes, (f) program development, (g) advocating for effective literacy practices, and (h) advancing the knowledge base (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2012). However, if not careful, over identification of students for special education is inevitable. SLPs are important entities in the educational system and provide a missing link in varying professional learning communities.

With the publication of the American Speech and Hearing Association's (ASHA's) recent scope of practice (2012), and position statement, *Roles and Responsibilities of Speech-Language Pathologists with Respect to Reading and Writing in Children and Adolescents* (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2011), the integration and acceptance of reading and writing as part of SLP practice were was established. Literacy development is recognized as a significant contributory factor to a students' success in speech and language therapy. Research in the area of language

acquisition and literacy development is significant to the field of education, further supporting and facilitating social change.

Morphology and Spelling

In the state of South Carolina, the Domini assessment is also used to measure spelling development to some degree; however, it is based on the traditional correct/incorrect scoring system. Unfortunately, this type of scoring does not represent what is currently known about spelling development because it does not capture linguistic knowledge that children may or may not be using when they spell as some critics object to the idea of a stage-like progression of word knowledge due to the fact that all of the child's errors does not fall into a single stage (Masterson & Apel, 2010; Schlagal, 2013). There are three general stages of spelling development: a *pre-reading* stage, in which children spell by combining letters and numbers randomly without making any sound-symbol relationships; *a letter-name* stage, in which children spell by segmenting the word they are trying to spell into sounds and then selecting alphabet letters that contain those sounds in their names; and a *transitional* stage, in which children exhibit an emerging awareness that English orthography is not a fixed one-to-one, sound-letter code.

Attention to morphology offers several advantages when learning to spell (Devonshire & Fluck, 2010). The English language is complex, with over 1,100 ways to spell 44 separate sounds, far more than any other language (Ridiculous spelling rules, 2009). When boys and girls begin spelling, printing is noted amongst the first big boy or big girl thing that they do. They are very proud of their efforts in making their marks on a

piece of paper and in their minds, they are writing words. At some point, children must understand the significance of spelling. Initially, spelling is solely in concept form, but it begins to take shape when a picture is matched to the letters that represent the word. As educators, looking for teachable moments, we explain to children as we begin the process of teaching the concept of spelling.

The SLP views spelling from a morphological awareness perspective. A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a language. Although educators typically devote more time with reading than spelling, it is a language skill supported by several linguistic knowledge sources, including phonemic, orthographic, and morphological knowledge (Masterson & Apel, 2010). The association between a child's morphological awareness and their reading and spelling skills should be given grave consideration when assessing a student's early literacy skills, particularly as it relates to word-level reading.

Phonological awareness has been a reported predictor of literacy development in early school grades. A strong correlation exists between phonological awareness and spelling skills because spelling errors are generally phonetically accurate (Weinrich, 2011). Apel and Lawrence (2011) examined whether morphological awareness is predictive of performance of word-level reading and spelling measures and concluded that there is a connection between morphology and literacy. Strategically speaking, it appears morphological awareness can be supportive to building literacy in word identification and spelling by enabling students to decode. Students in early grades depend on this skill to be able to learn new words. Therefore, successful reading, even at word level, requires access to the phonological structure of the word (Lely & Marshall,

2010). Morphology (linguistics) the study of structure and content of a word form **and** derived from the knowledge of letter names and phonological patterns of the letter names, letter sound knowledge and phonological awareness are highly predictive of pre-school children's reading acquisition (Foy & Mann, 2012). In addition, identifying the common factor by a prespecificed set of phonics or phonemic elements will provide a map for such simple grapheme-phoneme correspondences, with onset and rhymes taught sequentially and systematically.

Direct Instruction and Systematic Training

The statement, all students can learn, is one easier said than done. Many entities shape a student's ability to learn, specifically to learn how to read (Ritter, 2012). One strategy to decrease the ever-growing concerns surrounding literacy is to provide direct instruction (i.e., instructional method concentrated on a systematic curriculum design). Direct instruction (DI) is used to effectively enhance academic learning time. This feature of DI is a model to be considered when so many students are at risk for inadequate literacy development. Direct instruction is comprised of several basic components, which include the following:

- Setting clear goals for students and making sure they understand these goals.

- Presenting a sequence of well-organized assignments.

- Giving students clear, concise, explanations and illustrations of the subject matter.

- Asking frequent questions to see if the student understands the work.

- Giving students frequent opportunities to practice what they have learned.

According to the United States Education Commission (2010), DI has proven to be a particularly effective method for teaching basic skills of math and reading. The program targets at-risk students in the elementary grades using an accelerated format to lessen the literacy gap among peers. DI has been referenced as the oldest form of teaching and is supported by substantial research, including Project Follow Through (Carinel, 2013). De Graaff, Bosman, Hasselman, and Verhoeven (2009) studied a group of kindergarten students to compare both systematic and nonsystematic approaches. The authors found systematic-phonics instruction to be more effective than nonsystematic instruction for teaching reading.

Implications

The implications of this qualitative case study can be life changing for students who are susceptible to below average word-level reading when compared to their peers by bringing effective research to teachers in classrooms to use the Dominie test results in planning and classroom instruction. This study contributes to a broader base of literacy research because the participants in this study agreed that professional development is a major component for success in using the Dominie assessment to improve instruction and planning. This qualitative case study contributes to the field of teaching literacy to kindergarten and first-grade students. The study can be used as a guide for school and district level administrators as they make important decisions regarding standardized assessment practices for kindergarten, 1st-,and 2nd- grade students. As a result of the study administrators will be informed of benefits authentic assessments can provide instead of a misaligned summative standardized assessment. Teachers seem to be

confident in the administration of the Dominie assessment; these teachers seem to have considerably less confidence in the interpretation of the results which may be a potential place for professional development. Doran (2014) and Goodloe-Johnson et al. (2006) found that the majority of teachers noted the considerable time involved in administration of the assessment, yet praised the detailed information obtained from both the administration process and the results given by the assessment. Despite this praise of the Dominie assessment, the authors found that teachers tended to limit the use of the assessment to tracking individual student progress, failing to utilize the assessment results for development of specific intervention plans for at-risk students or those struggling to read (Goodloe-Johnson et al., 2006) and consequently, at the local school level, there may be a need for more innovative ways to use the data from the Dominie assessment to track individual student progress creating a necessity for professional development in teacher interpretation, instruction, goal writing and progress monitoring.

The research detailed in this study showed that teachers are concerned about their assessment practices and the effects their assessment practices have on their students. The research provided more information on nationwide trends that suggest important subjects and skills are not being addressed in U.S. schools; In 2005, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development funded several Learning Disability Center Grants and challenged these projects to extend the knowledge base about how to prevent, as well as to identify, reading disabilities using RTI approaches. Such knowledge is vital because far too many children struggle to learn to read primarily because they do not receive adequate reading instruction in the primary grades and subsequently do not succeed in

school (Cawelit, 2006; Kedian, 2006; Perkins- Gough, 2004; Petrie, 2007; Posner, 2004; Virture & Vogler, 2007; Al Otaiba, 2011). This study and the literature review can aid district and state level administrators as they make future decisions regarding authentic assessment practices. Finally, in order to foster positive social change in the field of education, it is the intent of this researcher to present the findings of this study to local and district level administrators.

Summary

Chapter 1 focused on looking at what factors contributed to the lack of understanding among teachers in the Richland School District regarding the use of the state mandated assessment and how this contributed to the decline in reading ability for first and kindergarten students. The literature review encompassed issues and strategies in phonics, phonemic awareness, reading recovery, direct instruction, mastery teaching, phonics programs, professional development and the Dominie assessment. Research on reading intervention has provided repeated evidence of the importance of early identification and intervention; students who are at risk for reading difficulties, but who are identified early and are given appropriate interventions, are able to acquire the necessary skills for successful reading achievement. The challenge of educators receiving professional development at my local school level to improve phonics and phonemic awareness training in *word*-level reading as the new *normal* in literacy training is the pivot of social change at the local school.

Providing teachers with the tools to obtain the necessary knowledge and training to accurately assess student learning and plan data-driven instruction (through use of

assessment data to plan instruction) supports optimal learning in the classroom. The importance of staff development and support arises from these difficulties and teachers who lack such opportunities may tend to view differentiated instruction as a burden, failing to see the advantages of the strategy in meeting the needs of all students.

In Chapter 2 of this paper, I discuss the methodology and design of the project study. I present the project in Chapter 3. Finally, in Chapter 4, I offer reflections and suggestion for future research in the area of professional development relative to word-level reading among kindergarten and first-grade students assessed using the Dominie. In order to meet the needs of all students and particularly those at risk for reading difficulties and failure, reading instruction must be targeted to the needs of the student, providing focused and in-depth individual instruction. To accomplish this level of instruction, teachers must be able to accurately assess these needs on an individual basis and provide data-driven instruction to meet those needs (Madison-Harris, 2012).

Chapter 2: The Methodology

Introduction

Teachers at the local school named common issues about the state-mandated assessment, Dominie. Teachers identified that they needed more knowldege of research-based training that would help them administer time-consuming assessments, and differentiate instruction for students identified through RR needing individualized instruction. I administered a questionnaire to elicit each teacher's opinion about the use of the data from the Dominie assessment. Their responses were transcribed and on analysis, revealed patterns. The result was the project for this study. I collected data and performed analysis of the data to address the research problem. I used a qualitative case study approach to answer the study's research questions (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the factors that might be contributing to the lack of understanding among teachers in the Richmond School District about the use of the state-mandated Dominie assessment for *word*-level reading and phonemic awareness skills for kindergarten and first-grade students.

The methodology begins with the research design and approach. Qualitative research allows for the expression of feelings and for freedom to express an opinion without judgment that might not otherwise be solicited in a different type of research method. Qualitative research in this study provides a better understanding of the local problem (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This design allowed me to engage with colleagues in a role that revealed their personal beliefs about the Dominie assessment and its use in planning and instruction.

Research Design

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research allows direct interaction with the people being studied in their environment. Qualitative research is the best fit for this project study because it allows the researcher to study individuals (narrative); explore processes, activities, and events (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). H. F. Wolcott and Hatch agreed that qualitative research involves "mindwork". Researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data (Wolcott & Hatch 2002, p. 148). The focus was on learning the meaning participants hold rather than the meaning assigned by the researcher; as researcher using the qualitative approach, I interpreted what is saw, heard, and understood. As a qualitative researcher, I collect all the data myself, by examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. The analysis of qualitative data typically reveals patterns, categories, and themes; in so doing, the interviews with the participants lead to a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002).

According to Hatch (2009), data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Qualitative data analysis means organizing and interrogating data so that patterns evolve, themes are revealed, relationships are discovered, and explanations develop. In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative inquiry employs different philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2009, p. 173).

Interviews are a common qualitative data-gathering technique. Data collection can take a long time; however, this data collection method motivates the researcher to continually reflect, analyze and then adjust the research during this time as data ought to be carefully labeled and organized in such a way that eases ongoing analysis. This process of qualitative data analysis involves making sense out of data recorded in text, image, audio and/or video formats. Qualitative validity is based on determining if the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers (Creswell 2009, p. 190).

Phenomenology. A Phenomenological research study is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation (or phenomenon). One model I considered was phenomenological; while potentially a close contender for my study, I realize I did not seek to describe the significance of human involvement concerning a rare occurrence (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002).

Ethnography. Ethnography is the branch of anthropology that involves trying to understand how people live their lives. Unlike traditional market researchers, who ask specific, highly practical questions, anthropological researchers visit consumers in their homes or offices to observe and listen in a non-directed way. I did not consider ethnographies because of the focus on individual customs and cultures were the primary data source (Creswell, 2007).

Grounded theory. According to Charmaz (2008), grounded theory is a set of methodical inductive approaches for conducting qualitative research designed towards theory development. Charmaz (2008) described the term grounded theory as: (a)

"a method consisting of flexible methodological strategies and (b) the products of this type of inquiry" (as cited in Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010, p. 157). Researchers then utilize the term in connection to the methods of inquiry employed, for collecting and at the same time, analyzing the data gathered. I did not seek a new theory; therefore, grounded theory was not an appropriate model for this study.

Narrative. Narrative research is a term that subsumes a group of approaches that in turn rely on the written or spoken words or visual representation of individuals. The kind of research approach usually focuses and discusses the lives of individuals as participants of the study, according to how they shared their personal stories. The emphasis in such approaches is on the story, typically both what and how is narrated. I did not focus on the narration of a story; therefore, narrative theory was not an appropriate model for this study. Considering those factors, I elected to the case study approach.

Case Study Approach

A qualitative case study allows the researcher to explore individuals or organizations, simple through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs (Yin, 2003). Also, Yin explained that a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. This study type would be best as effective for this project because exploratory case study because it allowed to

explore the strategies the teacher uses, and observe the teachers within their environment, such as administering the Dominie assessment and observing during in classroom instruction or reading for leisure (Hendry, 2012). Even though the study is a form of inquiry in which I have studied the lives of individuals as in a case study, lived experiences of participants were explored and compared in order to develop a deep understanding of the experiences of participants during test administration or classroom instruction versus asking one or more individuals to provide stories of their lives as in a narrative research (Creswell, 2007, pp. 14-15).

The questions served as a guide when interviewing participants to gain an understanding of their experience with administering the Dominie assessment and using the data to provide research-based strategies in word-level reading among kindergarten and first-grade students. The data provided descriptive information about specific skills, experiences, and thinking of the teachers interviewed. Interviews were chosen as the method of data collection because I wanted a special kind of information (Merriam, 1988) and to be able "to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 1980, p. 196).

Research Questions

The challenge to meet the needs of struggling readers continues to be an issue for my local school and expectations for having younger students learn to read has increased. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the trends in student test scores for *word-level reading* and phonemic awareness skill acquisition for kindergarten and first-grade students?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of the Dominie assessment in planning and instruction?

3. How do teachers use the Dominie assessment results to explore *word-level reading* and phonemic awareness skill aquisition for kindergarten and first-grade students?

There were a total of 11 participants in the study. An interview guide was administered during the individual interview. By using the interview method, I was able to get hands on training to administer the Dominie based on the responses from the well-rounded teachers.

The teachers were comfortable with me in the role as researcher, and it made them feel more comfortable working with a coworker. Even though, they were being recorded, there was no pressure to be formal. I wanted them to feel a sense of pride that their responses were valuable and this project would be a channel to have their opinions voiced and heard. Using this Qualitative design made that possible. After the third or fourth interview, themes and patterns began to evolve. Those themes and patterns began to broaden as the interview continued from teacher to teacher compared with their personal experiences through Inductive Analysis (Creswell, 2011, p. 133).

I used the data from the interviews of 11 teachers to identify their needs for professional development training on the Dominie assessment and how it can be used to plan and provide direct instruction to our students to strengthen word-level reading among kindergarten and first-grade students in my school. The data assisted me in understanding the challenges these teachers have faced when administering the Dominie

and trying to use the data to provide direct instruction to struggling readers. The data

collected were analyzed to capture the essence of expediencies or lack of experience in

acquiring research-based strategies that are effective in using the data from the Dominie

assessment to form individualized instruction for struggling word level readers in

kindergarten and first grade.

    This study is a form of inquiry in which I have studied the lives of individuals as

in a case study, experiences of the participants using the Dominie assessment were

compared in order to develop a deep understanding of the experiences of each participant

using the Dominie versus asking one or more individuals to provide stories of their lives

as in a narrative research (Creswell, 2011).

Sample Method

    Through use of a purposeful sampling plan, I selected participants who were

kindergarten and first grade teachers at a local school for the study so the elements could

"purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon

in the study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 125). The proposed methods of gathering and reporting

data were interviews of participating teachers who have administered the Dominie

assessment. I used coding, member checking, peer review, rich description and

triangulation to ensure validity (Creswell, 2011).

Participants

    The participants in the study were 11 certified teachers. Each teacher currently

works at the local school and was contacted through email requesting participation from

each participant in the study. The teachers were selected because they administer the

Dominie assessment to their grade levels in kindergarten and first grades. Each teacher was asked to respond to the email to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. Once the email was received, a formal consent was signed by each participant.

Each interview was individually conducted during non-work hours in a location agreed upon by both the participant and myself. At no time during any interview was the participant protection compromised. Four of the 11 participants were pregnant and due within 2 to 4 weeks of their due date when the interview was conducted. These participants readily agreed to be a part of my study however; their pregnancy was indeed a minimal risk that I had to consider. The teachers who participated in this study were administering the Dominie assessment at that time or had administered it during their tenure. Two of the 11 teachers were teaching in self-contained classes during the time of the interviews. An iPad was used to record the interviews and checked after each interview for any problems with recording the session. The copies at my residence will be kept safe for five years and then destroyed.

Ethical Protection

The participants in this study were selected from kindergarten and first-grade teachers at the local school. Ethical protection of participants' rights is a dominant feature during this process of selecting participants. I completed the National Institute of Health training (NIH) and am certified for the next five years. I discovered while seeking approval from Walden's Internal Review Board (IRB), that I also needed approval from my school district to conduct research. District approval was given from the Department of Accountability, Assessment, Research and Evaluation as well as the principal. I solely

knew the identity of the participants and the data were collected and stored in a locked

file cabinet at my residence. This study did not require any contact with students, thus

there was no concern with student's rights.

I began each interview by thanking the teacher for consenting to participate in the

study. I stated the purpose of the research then I reminded each of them that their

participation was voluntary and they could refuse to participate at any time and for any

reason. Confidentiality was given the utmost precedence during the interview process.

Participants were informed about the procedures of the study and the expectations of the

research and were given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher, obtain a copy

of the results, and have their privacy respected (Creswell, 2009).

The approved project study (05-08-14-0030707) was shared with the principal at

the local level and a copy is stored in the school's vault allowing access for all

participants in the study. A copy was submitted to the Office of Accountability,

Assessment, Research, and Evaluation in my school district. Participants in the study are

identified as *Participant* in a sequential manner (example Participant A) to protect their

identity. In addition, a data use agreement with the district and me was obtained along

with de-identified copies of the assessments from the school.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The primary sources of data in this qualitative case study were interviews from 11

teachers in the local school. The interview instrument used to collect data from

participants was consistent across each participant. This study is supported through the

consistent research process and the analysis of the data. I allowed each participant to

view the draft findings in order to allow each to determine if their own data used in the findings was true to their intent and meaning. Finally, I maintained objectivity in the data collection process and in the analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that conformability is maintained by the researcher through an audit trail.

Data Collection Procedures

After permission was granted from my local school district, an email was sent from my Walden email address to indicate a separation of work and school, to each teacher invited to participate in the study. The consent form was placed in each teacher's mailbox with instructions to place the signed consent form in my box if they chose to participate in the study. Several of the forms were returned the same day and the coding of participants began on a first returned form, first interviewed basis. Participation was voluntary and did not interfere with work relationships in my local school. I maintained confidentiality by removing any identifiable information when reporting the findings for this study.

Data were collected in the form of interviews from the participants and data analysis of those interviews about the Dominie assessment served as the primary instrument for data collection in this qualitative case study. The Dominie, South Carolina Readiness test was a secondary source and data that was used in this qualitative case study along with descriptive analysis of de-identified data trends from my school. I interviewed kindergarten and first grade teachers, the RR teacher, the curriculum resource teacher totaling 11 certified teachers.

Semi-structured interviews were held with 11 teachers. The interview guide questions were adapted from the Domini teacher survey conducted by Charleston County School District. The participants in this study were asked the same questions during the interview. The plan called for 20 to 30 minutes per interview however; in practice, only 14 to 20 minutes were required per interview. Each interview was recorded using an Ipad. After the interviews, I analyzed the results following the recommended protocol to assure the quality, credibility, and accuracy of the results.

The first step was to transcribe the interviews. I took the organized process of open coding, using "in vivo codes" (Creswell, 2011, p. 153). I looked at the exact words of each interviewee and segmented phrases or sentences that drew my interest to the experience of the interviewees' readiness for professional development in planning and implementing the Dominie assessment results (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). After transcribing the responses from the interview, each participant reviewed their portion of the draft results to confirm the credibility of the information when asked by me if the themes and categories made sense and whether the overall account is accurate. Any changes that the participant wanted to make were changed accordingly by me and are reflected in the findings. There were no discripencies as neither of the interviewee's requested changes to their poriton of the transcription. The open-ended questions allowed for each participant to share their opinion and viewpoint on each question being asked. Rubin and Rubin (2011) stated that the main questions guide one into getting information you need for your research and the follow-up and probing questions allow you to go deeper into vivid details.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process that entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combinining information from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications to reveal patterns or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). The analysis is based on the common themes generated from the interviews. Qualitative data analysis is not about counting or providing numeric summaries but rather to discovering the participants' concepts, perceptions and thoughts that may answer the research question (Creswell, 2011).

I used an open coding scheme based on the coding schemes of Creswell (2012), Hatch (2002) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) to set forth categories that revealed themes for the development of my professional development project. I conducted the teacher interviews following the recommended code of behavior to assure the quality, credibility and accuracy of results. I transcribed the interviews and reviewed for common areas related to teachers' use of the assessment data and perceived needs in planning and instruction for professional development training.

Continual re-reading of the data allowed for the development of themes appropriate to providing answers to the research question. The data were then categorized through open coding (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2002). The following themes were established: the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers, the confidence or lack of confidence of the teachers in using the Dominie assessment, and the personal learning experience of the teachers. The final process was to organize a narrative from the categories and themes that articulated the findings. Color-coding was used in the transcriptions. Rubin and

Rubin (2012) stated "coding allows you to sort statements by the content, theme, or even event" (p. 219). The color-coding method was instrumental as identified the themes of viewpoints, needs, and feelings about professional development using the Dominie assessment and determined whether participants were willing to accept a professional development program series.

The collected data presented in Chapter 3 was analyzed using Hatch's (2002) typological analysis. I used Hatch's (2002) nine step typology for analyzing interviews using open coding to identify related topics. After themes were identified, I followed Hatch's fifth, sixth, and seventh steps and read through the data to code and assigned data to the appropriate pattern. Coding by color was followed by an analysis of data to determine if the themes were supported by data and if non examples are prevalent within the identified patterns (Hatch, 2002).

The theme codes were assigned a specific color to the topics identified in the transcript. Finally, Hatch's (2002) eighth and ninth steps were followed by using Microsoft Office 2007 to open a copy of the coded transcripts, the original copy of interview questions, and a copy of the research questions. The data were compared to the defined themes and the research interview questions to ensure the research questions were addressed. Next, I examined the transcripts to determine if the interviewees made specific comments related directly to the research question. Theme codes were assigned to the topics by color identified in the transcript. I rechecked the coded data to see if examples suited the topics. I, then arranged, copied, and pasted all data by color code into

a document created for the organized data. I organized the data to look for topical

relationships based on the responses of all interviewees.

Results

Three major themes emerged from the coded interviews. The teachers determined

three areas for which professional development should be provided: (a) Needing an

increased training; and assessment is time consuming, (b) Needing supplementary

methods to use the Dominie data, (c) Developing each teacher as a Specialist (the 'a' is

understood), and (d) needing much improvement to keep the assessment. These themes

were the central beliefs and opinions shared by the teachers during the interviews. I used

a table format to align each interviewee's responses side by side. This way it was easy to

identify consistency or conflicts within their responses. Each main concept is explained

in detail in the narrative description. Coding assisted with linking the pseudonym to each

interviewee for easier retrieval of themes and patterns. Highlighting common texts from

the transcribed interviews proved profitable in sorting through the transcription for

common themes, beliefs and attitudes. Table 1 contains the breakdown of the major

themes discovered from the analysis, addressing the three research questions of the study:

Theme 1: Needing an increased training; and assessment is time consuming (code

color – orange)

Theme 1 addressed the first research question of: "What are the trends in student

test scores for word-level reading and phonemic awareness skill acquisition for

kindergarten and first-grade students?" Data findings for this theme related to the

responses from the first set of the research interview questions related to training, support

and administering the Dominie:

Table 1

Breakdown of the Results of the Analysis

Research Questions	Themes
RQ1. What are the trends in student test scores for word-level reading and phonemic awareness skills for kindergarten and first-grade students?	Needing an increased training; and assessment is time consuming
RQ2. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of the Dominie assessment in planning and instruction?	Needing supplementary methods to use the Dominie data
RQ3. How do teachers use the Dominie assessment results to explore word-level reading and phonemic awareness skills for kindergarten and first-grade students?	Developing each teacher as a Specialist (the 'a' is understood); and Needing some improvements to keep the assessment

IQ1A. How were you trained on using the Dominie?

IQ2A. How easy or difficult is it to administer the Dominie?

IQ3A. How easy or difficult for other staff and support professionals to be trained

in using the Dominie?

IQ4. How long does it take to administer the Dominie?

IQ5A. After administering the Dominie, how confident are you regarding

transcribing the results?

IQ6A. How were you trained on using the Dominie data?

According to the data for Interview Questions one to three, teachers were

consistent with how they were trained to use the Dominie assessment. All participants

reported that they were trained during a district professional development and that it was

easy to administer if one participated in the said training. The training is predominately

for teachers, specifically first-year teachers of kindergarten and first grades. It was noted

that other support staff (i.e., speech pathologists) are not required to participate in the

training. For the participants of the study, a stricter practice and implementation of the

said training is needed in order for the assessment to be more successful and for the goals

to be achieved more effectively.

Participant A suggested an increased professional training is needed in order for

all teachers to be familiarized with the assessment. The first teacher interviewed

indicated that although it is relatively easy to use and apply the assessment, the training

should definitely aid the new teachers. She explained: "while it's easy to administer, it

needs to be more professional development on it because sometimes it's a year especially

when you're new from the time you get the training till the time you got to use it".

Participant B echoed Participant A and expressed that the Dominie Assessment should

not be as difficult if all teachers are given the opportunity to participate in knowledge

building courses and training on how to use the assessment. However, another problem

is when some teachers themselves do not adhere to the training requirements: "if you

attend the training, then I think it was pretty easy to do. Some people wanted to do it

without the training which made it more difficult but if you do the training, it was pretty

easy". Participant J commented that there is a yearly professional development on

Dominie Assessment targeted to increase the skills and awareness of the new teachers:

> We had professional development on a district level the first year I taught
>
> kindergarten ad we went for an after session and they went through the whole

Dominie kit with us. Every year they do another professional development so it's really for first time teachers who haven't had Dominie training.

Finally, Participant C explained that the training adds valuable skills and knowledge to the teachers and should equip them with the capabilities needed to properly administer the Dominie Assessment: "Well if you're properly trained and administrate it properly then it becomes it becomes a much more valuable resource if you're not trained properly then the test is not valid so I suppose everybody benefits if you're trained properly."

The fourth interview question from the first set generated many opinions regarding the time it takes to administer the Dominie. As a result, teachers tend to spend most of their time adhering to the needs of their students based on the assessment and some students who are ahead of their peers are left at a disadvantage. Participant A shared the amount of time that it takes to implement the assessment properly and accurately. In addition, the length of time in administering the Dominie depends on the grade levels and needs of the students:

> It goes over several days because you're working one on one with a student probably one to two hours to administer but this also depends on how experienced the teacher is at giving it. It takes longer for new teachers to give it until they are comfortable with it but in general it's given over several days. In second grade, you can give it to a group, which makes administering it a little bit easier. In kindergarten, everything is one on one.

Participant C commented on IQ2 and IQ4. The participant added two more factors that affect the administering of the Dominie assessment. For Participant C, the reading level and time of the year both play significant roles in the overall process and outcome of the assessment:

It depends on the reading level of the child and also the time of year. At the beginning of the year, it's very easy especially for first graders because most of them cannot read so the books are short and easy and you really just are looking for who has an idea of concepts about print and that kinda thing but at the end of the year when children can really read, it can take a long time but if you know what level your students are on, you should not have to go through three or four books to find their level.

Participant K shared the opinion made by Participant C, about knowing on which level your student performs. Participant K admitted that it takes a lot of time to successfully administer the assessment. The different grade and skill levels indeed affect the process the assessment:

It takes a lot of time. What's so hard, especially in kindergarten, is that they need a quiet environment. So, for us to take them out of the classroom to administer the test—it's just a lot of work and especially for the ones that struggle—the low students—it takes twice as long as the ones that can handle it.

In terms of minutes, I would say for text leveling anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes based on if I can figure where there level is… cause usually I can say 'oh she's probably around a new kindergarten level, I'm gonna give her a 2 but then, if I'm

way off then I can say let me try another level'… oh my gosh, ok let me try a 1b

or let me try to do a 2a and that's what takes so long is when I'm off but I would

say text leveling around 20 minutes; sentence writing about 15 minutes and

alphabet about a minute or two.

Meanwhile, Participant I, a self-contained teacher, added another feature as to

why the administration of the test is time consuming; in that she reports:

It's relatively easy to administer, it just takes a long time to do because you have to

do it individually and in my particular class-I'm usually dealing with some

behavioral issues and the students don't want to do it so you need to motivate them

to sit for long periods of time. Per student, it takes a half hour.

Participant J reiterated that the assessment is time-consuming and that from her

experience, the most significant factor is the text-leveling given that there are students

who are way behind their peers:

The hardest part I think about the Dominie is the text leveling just because you

have some students that need to go on and on because they are so far ahead of

thee grade level and they need to keep bumping up a book and as you bump up,

there are different requirements then you have to do the words per minute, fluency

and then on the other end of it, if you have somebody that doesn't even pass the

first book then you have to go back down and do the show me books which

measures the concepts of print so it just takes a little bit of time.

Participant D, a veteran teacher, added yet another perception on the time it takes

to administer the Dominie. She stated: "It takes a long time but its takes even more time

when you are trying to administer a test to a student who doesn't understand English

because you don't know if the student is understanding what you are asking them to do so

you have to keep repeating, it can go on and on and on. I think the ESOL [English

Speakers of Other Languages] students take up the most time." Subsequently, during the

interviews, the participants commented on the time it takes for teachers to administer the

Dominie; the data from questions five and six revealed that there is little training on using

the Dominie relative to using the data. Participant C noted:

> Very little training has been done on how to use the data but reading teachers
>
> probably received more than regular classroom teachers on using it. Teachers use
>
> it to group their students; that's the main way they would use the data. All you
>
> have to look at is a running record. The only portion that I give is the test level. I
>
> don't give all the other components the teachers would have access to. I would
>
> have access to if I wanted to look at it but for my purposes, I use it to group
>
> children according to their reading levels.

Participant D commented on the positive effect of the training on her and her

students. However, one issue was the lack of attention given to the success of the

program inside her classroom: "it would make my students' scores more accurate the fact

that I've been trained on it but I don't think anyone else has looked at my student's

scores." Participants E and F then related the benefits of their training to their abilities to

implement and administer the assessment to their students:

> We know kinda where to start with them and what their assessment results mean
>
> for their guided reading groups, like what I'm gonna use with them what level

books I'm gonna use with them, what kinda activities were gonna do in our

literacy centers and guided reading groups.

Participants J and K reported the methods of training that they received on the

assessment:

They trained us on how to administer it specifically the reading fluency section

and how to mark it on the paper. We practiced that but otherwise to use the data,

no. During grade level meetings, throughout the year, our data would be brought

to us and we put it into Test View and we are shown how to group the students

and different ideas are given on how we can use it in literacy centers; we can see

who is substantially below, who's below or who's on grade level and with that I

would do my own interventions in the classroom based on what they needed but

there was nothing specific like do this or that with the data.

Theme 2: Needing supplementary methods in using the Dominie data - (code color - aqua)

The second major theme from the analysis addressed the research question:

"What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of the Dominie assessment in

planning and instruction?" Data findings for this theme related to the responses from Set

B of the interview guide with the questions related to using the Dominie data:

IQ1B. How do you use the Dominie data?

IQ2B. How easy or difficult is it to use the Dominie data in planning and

instruction?

IQ3B. How user friendly is this instrument by other staff and supporting

professionals (i.e. resource teacher, CRT, speech pathologist)?

IQ4B. Who in the school building tracks and reviews the students' Dominie data?

According to Participant A, teachers help each other in informing and making

each one understand the assessment better. The teachers share their tools and resources

in improving their assessment processes; despite the lack of a concrete system on how to

train and make the new teachers aware of the use of the assessment:

New teachers coming in benefit from my training because they have a person they

can ask come if they are confused about what to do and the teachers are a good

resource for that because they've been doing it for a while but I can help the

teachers get started and guide them in the right direction as to who can help best

answer their question. The common use among the teachers to use the Dominie

data is primarily to group the students according to their reading level. The

teacher and school administrators are privy to the data results. The data is housed

in Test View to track progress. Test View is a part of the districts' intranet system

used to import the data results three times a year the assessment is given.

Meanwhile, Participants F and I also mentioned the use of test view as a tool for

the assessment process of their students. However, they complained that from

observation, there are a number of teachers in the third grade who do not know the

purpose; and more so, how to use the data:

It goes into Test View and it stays there until I put in their next data for the next

testing session. But I know that it is used for kindergarten to second grade and I

know that the third-grade teachers or at least the third-grade teachers that my

students go to don't even know what it is or how to use that data.

Participant I further stated how the data has not changed or improved her students

as of the interview. The participant even strongly stated that the data is not useful;

implying the need for more aspects and factors to be added to the assessment content for

the purpose of improving a larger number of students' skills to be fully achieved:

> The data is not useful… The data doesn't help me put groups together like I said
>
> because all my students are in the low range that they basically all fall within the
>
> same range on the Dominie test so I have a small group of students so their
>
> groupings are a little more specifically related to their needs and goals.

Theme 3: Developing each teacher as a SPECIAList (code color – pink)

The third major theme addressed the last research question of: "How do teachers

use the Dominie assessment results to explore word-level reading and phonemic

awareness skill aquisition for kindergarten and first-grade students?" Similarly, data

findings for this theme related to the responses from Set C of the interview questions

related to analyzing the Dominie data:

> IQ1C. How do the Dominie data assist in referring students for interventions
>
> and/or special education?
>
> IQ2C. What are the pros and cons of using the Dominie assessment?

Participant H responded on the indication of their students' progress and

condition in terms of their reading and phonemic skills. The assessment then brings out

the uniqueness of each teacher in having the ability to know the best for their students:

Well, I know it is considered one of their assessment scores so the teachers will

bring it up as an indication of how well they are doing compared to the other kids

in their class, that's the only thing I've seen it used for.

Furthermore, Participant C shared the following details on how she uses the

Dominie data. Through the Test View, she can monitor the progress and know which

students need an increased attention and monitoring after a certain period and timeframe.

For the teacher, the assessments aid her in providing the proper knowledge and decisions

on where to place the students and how to approach them:

It goes into Test View the districts' site. It's there to track progress and I use it to

help myself place children especially midyear. I look at all the classroom

teachers' results because I don't give it to everybody but especially midyear I can

look and see who is not meeting progress and those will be the children who I

need to look at in the middle of the year. I take students who fall in the lowest

20% on the Dominie. She continues to report that at the end of 20 weeks students

who have made gains will graduate from the RR program (now called Language

Literacy Intervention – LLI). LLI was developed by two reading teachers. It's a

group program based on RR principles. I have to do word-level reading with

kindergarten and first and second grade that I take that have gotten past word-

level reading and I can do a little more with them on fluency but my primary

interest is kindergarten and first. The beauty about RR is at the end of the

program, some were considered graduates but the way the system used to work

was once they left RR there was a small group they could go into so that they still

had support even if it wasn't one on one. As it is now, once they have finished their time and LLI is the same thing, it's a short-term intervention and there's really nowhere to go once they've done there time. She inserts, 'now I do keep some students all year just because there is no place for them to go. The ones that have made decent progress through the program, they're taken out and new ones are put in.

Theme 4: Needing much improvement to keep the assessment

The second interview question under Set C discussed the pros and cons regarding the intended function of the Dominie to rather the district should keep it or do away with it. Participant A, during her final comments indicated that there is 'talk' that the district is considering doing away with the Dominie assessment but she wasn't sure of its replacement and question two was added to the list of interview questions. Their comments supported both sides. Participant H commented that she would be against keeping Dominie assessment stating:

I would be against Dominie. I have used other tests in the past that has more specific information including, instead of having a reading score just one reading score, there would be a fluency level and a comprehension level which I find is really helpful. And a problem with the really lower functioning students is that they end up reading the same book every time. Every single time we do it, which they are lower functioning and they don't necessarily remember it but you're having them repeating the same test information which could possibly skew their scores or you know make the test invalid. If they did away with it, then I wouldn't

need to administer it. I think it would be nice to replace it with something else, like I was saying with something that will give a fluency and comprehension score cause I think those could really be separated and worked on separately and be more effective. Sadly, I'm testing them on their grade level so I would give them the second-grade writing prompt or the second-grade sentence prompts even if they are working on letters because we're comparing them to their same age peers. The reading is complex where you just do what level they are on and you use your chart to figure out where that corresponds but we generally would use just the lower few books. It's administered three times a year. I hope to see a difference in the score between testing's'. Sometimes I do sometimes I don't or sometimes it will be in one area or the other or a little jump in fluency and a little jump in comprehension and it just depends if it coincides that they are scoring higher for it to show that they are scoring higher. I do have my students for three years so in those three years I do expect to see some gains but then in that time, they have taken the test 9 times and if they are still on the same book they've read it 9 times.

Participant J stated that although the assessment has its flaws and negative features; it can still be considered a good assessment in general. Furthermore, for the participant, the assessment should be adjusted better to match the needs and skills of the younger students:

For me, I think it just serves as like a formal document like formal evidence of where a student stands or what their ability levels are. It's kinda hard I think in

kindergarten to pick out what might be wrong based on the assessment because

they are so young but I think it is a good assessment I haven't had any problems

with it the only con I have are some of the books I feel like the wording tricks the

student so to speak, and some of the vocabulary that they use in there are things

that the students aren't familiar with like it'll say refrigerator and most of the kids

say fridge or they say chair but the child think it's couch. I know the using the

reading strategies but that I still feel like when we're doing small group you kinda

teach them the strategies but not trying to trick them so that's my only con I think.

Some of the students aren't familiar with but I still feel like it's a good

assessment.

Participant K also provided some positive reviews for the Dominie assessment.

She indicated how she uses the assessment to show and present to the parents their

children's scores and learning progress. However, the same negative issue was posed

such as the assessment being time-consuming:

That's our biggest test that's our biggest assessment so whenever I like for

instance I had a student who kept scoring very low on Dominie so that is what

triggered me to start putting things into place to get her the help that she needed

because I could tell, you can tell by the Dominie scores like we need to do lots

and lots of intervention so I think that is good and I always pull that out when I do

a conference with parents, I always pull out the Dominie scores I always let them

see this is what they scored this is what they missed which is nice because parents

it's not just a bunch of charts and numbers it's an actual like they missed this

word they forgot this letter which I like." The cons of the Dominie "its definitively time consuming it takes a lot of planning a lot of being organized and if you're not organized to give the test then it's gonna take even longer and then the pros are like how you really get to see where your kids are you really get to see growth so we give it in September and they don't even know half of their letters and then now when we give it in April or May they're reading and so I like looking and seeing the growth; that's a positive.

Finally, Participant C commented how she strongly believes on the effectiveness of the assessment; however, she also believes that the assessment should be more organized and objective rather than "purely" being subjective:

I do not want to see the Dominie test go away... It (Dominie) should not be subjective. It is purely writing down, taking a running record of a child's reading and mine and yours ought to match. You know all the training I've had on running records, we ought to be pretty much getting the same thing…; you're not supposed to tell a word immediately so that they won't miss it the rest of the story and that kinda thing. I'm not sure what we're going to use because I don't know how you tell how well a child reads except they read especially a little child that needs to read out loud. I will continue to use it as a benchmark for me. It'll be great if the district quits using it, at least I can give it as need be to check progress. It will become my own little testing tool to make sure I'm checking myself before I move children up in levels too much; which I can't do it now because it's used for the district but if they're not going to use it anymore then it will be mine!

To provide kindergarten through first grade teachers with resources to assist them with research-based strategies when using the Dominie assessment, the product for this project study is a three-day professional development workshop aimed to support their articulated concerns during the interviews regarding the Dominie.

Evidence of Quality, Credibility, and Accuracy of Results

The small number of participants in this study allowed me to obtain comprehensive analysis of each teachers' distinctive needs with regard to the use of the assessment. Qualitative research requires the selection of participants that can provide data in relation to the research questions (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). I then used interviews from 11 teachers to address research questions one to three as suggested appropriate by (Yin, 2011). The participants were all asked the same interview questions. Teachers use each assessment period as anecdotal records for each student indicating strengths and weaknesses of the student. The participants were given the opportunity to confirm their responses and challenge any questions they may have had concerning the draft findings and their own data.

Conclusion

The data that were gathered from 11 participants disclosed themes that represented their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and practices toward the Dominie assessment and its usability. Their responses from the interview questions were transcribed and the transcription was used to develop the themes of the study. I was then able to connect common themes and patterns which led to addressing the research questions. The first major theme showed me the attitudes and beliefs about how teachers were trained to

administer the Dominie and the untold issues that surround a successful testing session. Meanwhile, the second major theme dealt with the teachers' perceptions regarding data use of the Dominie assessment in planning and instruction. Finally, major themes three and four revealed the personal and significant learning experiences that make every teacher an untitled specialist with input to share regarding the use of district or state provided assessments; and how the assessment is much needed by the teachers but may require improvements and modifications.

The data collected from the interviews confirmed that the participants had different thoughts, beliefs and opinions regarding the Dominie assessment. The major themes indicated what teachers believed effective for them, what does not and how more professional development training is needed. For example, one participant was clear in her opinions that teachers need much training through professional development and that "it needs to be done correctly."

Inclusive leadership is the practice of leadership that carefully includes the contributions of all stakeholders in the community or organization (Wagner, 2011). Providing professional development that is developed from the teachers needs and concerns, rather than being communicated from state personnel makes a teacher feel valued and inclusive and will benefit all stakeholders; it lessens the gap between "specialist" and "classroom teacher". Yes, our training may be in different areas, but the fact is, in education, teaching is occurring at all times. For example, when asked "Who benefits from you, the teacher, being trained through professional development?" a

participant replied, "The students definitely." They, the students, are the greatest investment.

A project was created from the results of the study. Teachers convene for weekly staff meetings and one of those weekly meetings is set aside for professional development training. The project that follows outlines three professional workshops resulting from the data collected from the interview questions, archival and observational data. Each professional development workshop talks about using the Dominie assessment in new ways to promote social change in the school.

Chapter 3: The Project

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I describe this study's culmination project. I explain the project within the study and the project, a three-part professional development workshop. I describe the rationale for selecting a three-part professional development workshop. The literature review focuses on current literature that formed the culmination of this project study.

The chapter includes subsections to address implementation of the project's implications for social change. In my data analysis, I show how the data collected from the interviews of teachers revealed specific areas for a three-part professional development series on using the Dominie assessment. The teachers were open to, and excited about, the idea of not re-inventing the wheel in being able to use the Dominie assessment in a new way. Teachers involved in this study had classroom experience ranging from 5–30 years. All teachers were interviewed individually. The participants consisted of teachers from kindergarten to second grade. Feedback was collected on their opinions about the Dominie assessment in four areas: (a) training and support, (b) administering Dominie, (c) analyzing Dominie data, and (d) using Dominie data. This three-day workshop could inform to teachers at the elementary school level; a future professional development series could improve (a) student instruction and (b) planning for using other state assessments**.**

Description and Goals

The project, a three-day professional development workshop, reveals the need for professional development among kindergarten and first-grade teachers who were using the Dominie assessment. The first goal of the project was to look for common parts of the Dominie assessment that could be used by specialty area professionals, for example, speech pathologists, literacy coaches, self-contained (teachers in self-contained classrooms with small groups of students and managed by special education teachers) and resource teachers (ones assisting the classroom educators) through third-grade teachers. The second goal of the project was to help teachers understand the importance of following testing protocols and how subjectivity in interpreting students' responses invalidates the testing results. Finally, the third goal of the project was to help teachers understand that working collaboratively is more beneficial for student learning.

Rationale

The rationale for selecting a three-day professional development workshop as the project, originated from local school districts' use of the state-mandated assessment Dominie. The Dominie is being used by kindergarten through third-grade teachers as the primary assessment for students' reading level. I sought to provide information to a specific audience because the Dominie assessment is administered three times per academic year by all teachers in kindergarten through second grade. The data is used primarily for grouping students in reading groups. The results of this project study could be used as a foundation for future professional development series or projects studies within my local school. This study positioned me to address teachers beyond this study's

grade level and to extend the findings to teachers in third through fifth grades along with the administrators of my local school. Additionally, the format of this project study provides readers with data analysis in a user-friendly manner to ensure that it is easy to apply to the other research-based strategies and practices when using other state assessments.

Review of the Literature

In this review of literature, I concentrated on elements germane to the project- a three-part professional development series. The three-part professional development workshop series provides the teachers with new information and recommendations relative to using the state mandated Dominie assessment

In the review of literature, I streamlined the genre, explained the purpose of the professional development series, and presented the project study because the topic areas in the literature review are necessary components of the project. I researched publications, books, articles and topic related publications using the vendor "EBSCO" host which is a portal into the various scholarly articles. The main idea needed to be discovered centered on how to teach and incorporate the use of the Dominie assessment across general education and specialty area domains. The key search terms included *collaborative learning, teacher education, quality professional development,* and *different types of professional development*.

Professional Development

Professional development remains an important part in providing quality instruction. Just as student learning depends on the expertise of teachers, the expertise of

teachers depends on the quality of their professional development (Hightower, 2011).

Professional learning is beneficial in providing teachers with time to investigate the

importance of incorporating research-based strategies into literacy instruction.

Professional development is meaningful when it is learner-centered, and by choice

(Moorewood, Akrum, & Bean, 2010). Staff development by way of professional learning

is beneficial in providing teachers with time management to improve upon incorporating

research-based strategies to provide direct teaching instruction. Although some districts

have centers for teaching and learning, many do not, leaving faculty with little guidance

and support. Faculty members seeking to improve their teaching evaluations in

anticipation of tenure and promotion are left on their own to find resources for enhancing

their teaching skills. Other faculty members who have been teaching successfully for

many years, but may be tired of teaching the same way, may find little support in

identifying new, effective teaching methods (Ginsberg, 2010).

Identifying Teachers Who Need Professional Development

Research indicates that a teacher graduating with a teaching degree means the

individual is qualified to teach, but teacher preparation programs have come under harsh

criticism lately, mostly for not keeping up with 21st century realities (Messer, 2010).

Institutions that offer teacher preparation are commonly blamed for inadequately

ensuring that teacher-hopefuls will be successful in a classroom with the expectations of

modern-era youth and the advancements in technology that today's classroom include

(Duncan, 2010).

In the early 1980s, personal computers (PCs) moved from home use to the educational field and became prevalent in computer labs for word-processing and educational drill-and-practice programs (Dettelis, 2011). Teachers no longer relied on the chalkboards and overhead projectors; they now have options for students to use computers. By the 1990s, Internet access became available for use in classrooms and school computer labs. Identifying teachers, who perhaps have not had meaningful professional development in the area of reading instruction or working with students who struggle with reading disabilities is important to our local school district. Improving teacher quality through professional training presupposes that the educational experience will positively change teachers by using new teacher strategies and methodologies as well as the student learning style. Landsman and Gorski (2007) advocated that when teachers are empowered to draw upon and develop their expertise to employ pedagogy that works best with particular students, differentiation, there is an improvement in student performance (p. 41). Perhaps, teachers are looking for more professional development to enhance their knowledge in literacy development. Professional development to help teachers teach using data driven instruction is still an apparent need to improve student achievement for the school district to meet the goal of all children performing at proficiency levels in reading and math (United States Department of Education, 2011).

The Internet revolutionized education by providing teachers with seemingly unlimited resources (Collins & Halverson, 2010). Data results shape direction instruction in a way that the teacher and support staff would meet the needs of the struggling student. Through collaboration, intervention strategies are able to continue with the classroom and

during pullout programs. Professional development is a key to successful schools (Tournaki, Lyublinkskaya, & Carolan, 2011. Professional development itself can be perceived as another unwelcomed demand on a teacher's limited time. Increasing pressure for student performance, a 23 lack of appreciation from administration, and strained relationships among colleagues make for a work environment that takes a toll mentally and physically (Beaudoin, 2011).

There is a growing body of research indicating that embedded TPD tactics, such as mentoring, co-teaching, professional committee meetings, trade book study groups, and self-reflection, are more effective than traditional workshops (Kaiser, Rosenfield, & Gravois, 2009; Klein & Riordan, 2011). However, the economic climate over last several years has continued to shrink the budgets of school systems, further relegating professional development initiatives into the least costly; namely, large group in-service workshops led by employees willing to do so for a small sum or for free, and are not necessarily the ones best qualified to do so (Nakaoka & von Frank, 2011).

Nakpodia (2010) reported that teachers' attitudes towards their principals had a significant, positive correlation to their attitude towards teacher professional development (TPD). If teachers had confidence in their administrator, they were likely to see the benefits of TDP. The reverse was also found to be true regardless of the quality of the TPD received. Another assumption explored by the literature is that many teachers need some incentive, especially a financial one, to implement change in their instructional techniques. This belief is supported by the highly popular notion of pay-for-performance initiatives (Marsh & McCaffrey, 2011).

Professional Development Opportunities

Professional development opportunities in the public-school system are more important now than ever before. The next generation of teachers is being trained to incorporate technology into every aspect of learning that are filled with new ideas and different priorities to increase student and teacher learning. Possessing a mastery of technological knowledge (TK) is an ongoing endeavor. Technology changes rapidly and mastery of technological tools can only occur with dedication to life-long learning.

Therefore, Harris et al. (2009) defined technological knowledge as "developmental, evolving over a lifetime of generative interactions with multiple technologies" (p. 398). The next generation of technological advancement came with the expansion of laptop computers in the classroom (Warschauer, Arada, & Zheng, 2010). Teachers are using laptops as another instructor in the classroom by setting up interactive educational websites for students to practice specific weaknesses (Parr & Ward, 2011). A few ways to promote professional development in the workplace includes: (1) support and modeling behaviors; (2) cross training work assignments; (3) having access to resources and (4) coaching and development.

Support and model behavior. Principals and lead teachers serve as role models to employees in education. Teaching can be an isolated, time-consuming profession, in which professional development is the common method of teacher quality improvement. Teachers may work alone in their classrooms all day with little to no time for collaboration. However, Foltos (2013) suggested that collaboration is the essential key to improve teaching and learning. In fact, Musanti and Pence (2014) believed that teachers

cannot improve their practice alone; they must engage in meaningful collaboration to construct new knowledge. They showed support and model behavior by taking an active role in in-house professional development activities and let staff know how valuable these opportunities of professional development help to further their career. Teachers must proactively seek the technological knowledge necessary to stay abreast of the latest tools available to engage students in their familiar, native environment of digital technologies (Prensky, 2001). Professional development provides an opportunity to show interest in the progress of each teacher participating in online courses or special projects, and share their successes at staff meetings. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to enroll in professional associations or organizations and for doing so, are rewarded points towards recertification.

Miranda and Russell (2012) pointed out that when teachers feel pressure from administration, they tend to integrate technology more often than teachers who do not experience administrative pressure. However, teachers who perceive technology integration as having a positive impact on student achievement use technology and encourage their students to use technology despite administrative pressures (Miranda & Russell, 2012). Therefore, it is important to encourage technological value for a teacher by providing sufficient professional development that involves engagement in meaningful and relevant activities (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2010). Teachers can possibly overcome barriers to technology integration and build confidence by working with a peer and sharing successes and failures (Wright, 2010). Dudeney et al. (2013) suggested that teachers work in professional learning

networks to share and gain new knowledge. Researchers suggested 79 teachers crave

support and collaboration when integrating digital technology such as the iPad and

creating an information exchange network for communication with other teachers would

be helpful (Ally, Grimus, & Ebner, 2014; Dudney et al., 2013; Pegrum et al., 2013). This

"online hub" (p. 76) could encourage teachers to be more active in their learning process

(Pegrum, 2013).

Cross-training work assignments. Teachers need technological content

knowledge to recognize when technology can be used to enhance their curriculum (Harris

& Hofer, 2011). Hofer and Grandgenett (2012) purported that teachers need content

specific professional development opportunities to increase their technological content

knowledge. Having the proper knowledge of which technology to use can help teachers'

support content learning which is the goal of acquiring technological content knowledge

(Young, Young, & Shaker, 2012). On-the-job training is a traditional and effective

method of encouraging professional development at work. Once a teacher masters the

tasks required in her role, offer opportunities to learn skills of complementary positions.

Cross-training engages employees and shows teachers their work is valued enough to

give them other educational and teaching opportunities. Developing teachers to perform a

variety of roles also makes good business sense, because it helps avoid hiring long term

substitute teachers to cover absences due to vacation or sick days.

Access to resources. Offering professional development opportunities to teachers

with a variety of resources such as: a) building a DVD collection or online video library

of training material and tutorials; b) arrange on-site workshops or seminars; c) host

lunch-and-learns with guest speakers on current issues and new developments in your field; d) coordinate and take part in informal or formal mentoring and peer-coaching relationships between staff members; and e) assist interested employees in accessing other resource material to further their professional and career development. While many schools are implementing iPads across the nation, not all are providing the professional development support needed (Attard, 2013). The iPad itself will not encourage student productivity or engagement; therefore, the teacher must have the knowledge to purposefully integrate the device within the curriculum (Chou et al., 2012). Teachers need to be provided with sustained, ongoing professional development that is relevant and focused on content (McCollum, 2011). Ongoing professional development is a widely-discussed topic in research and has a variety of specific interpretations (Matherson, Wilson, & Wright, 2014; Polly, Neale, & Pugalee, 2014). Ongoing professional development or sustainability has been measured in the number of training sessions and in years. Professional development is typically a one-shot training with little to no follow-up, which is unsuccessful at generating instructional change (Roehrig et al., 2011). Teachers require the time to build their knowledge, engage with the concept, and have the opportunity to self-assess their progress (Matherson et al., 2014). It is with time and hands-on experience that teachers can develop the confidence necessary to be successful at integrating technology.

Coaching and development. School-level administrators create mentor programs, opportunities to observe successful technology integration, and professional development designed for specific classroom practice (Miranda & Russell, 2012; Mueller

et al., 2008). Administrators could create a customized development plan with each teacher to support professional development during performance planning by asking each member of the team to identify at least one skill or area they would like to work on. For teachers to integrate technology effectively within their instruction, they must be provided with meaningful technology training and not just an add-on to the current professional development being offered (Chou et al., 2012; Coffman, 2009; Guzman & Nussbaumt, 2009). Teachers and principals can work together to identify suitable opportunities and a timeline for completion. Schedule regular coaching or mentoring sessions to discuss progress and allow the teachers to ask questions. Professional development is a recognized approach to improving the quality of instruction in schools. The goal of professional development is to increase teachers' knowledge and improve their practices, which lead to enhanced student learning

Collaboration

Characteristics of collaboration include cooperating, coexisting, communicating, coordinating, and partnering (Devlin-Scherer & Sardone, 2013). Collaborative professional development structures provide educators opportunities to take part in meaningful, professional learning with others; this collaboration is absent from several professional development proposals (Stanley et al., 2014). Collaboration allows teachers to draw from a deep pool of experiences from others and it is a powerful tool for meaningful professional development (Attwood, 2011). Collaboration within grade-level departments could also be essential for teachers to realize effective techniques and strategies when implementing their technological tool (Hsu, 2010). Collaboration is

associated with enhanced job satisfaction, and it is a successful learning method, especially for adult students. Collaboration requires the establishment of meaningful goals. When teachers work together, goals that are established should be worthwhile, and the expectations should be high (Morel, 2014). Effective collaboration can result in an increase of teacher effectiveness as evidenced through student achievement. Elementary teachers were found to enjoy the collaboration opportunities within professional development more than the secondary teachers (Mayotte et al., 2013). Reasons for this might be in the fact that traditional professional development programs are embedded with assumptions of what teachers actually need. Collaboration allows the occasion for educators to cultivate more sophisticated understandings of their own manner of teaching this might be in the fact that traditional professional development programs are embedded with assumptions of what teachers actually need. Collaboration allows the occasion for educators to cultivate more sophisticated understandings of their own manner of teaching (Danielowich, 2012; McNicholl, 2013). In addition, effective collaboration contains clarity of purpose, accountability, some type of team structure, and trust (Sparks, 2013). A respondent supports Regelski (2014) that collaboration is so important and is potentially the most efficient way to do professional development. Most teachers are just glad to be able to work in concert with other teachers to solve problems. Collaborating with other educators, particularly other speech teachers, is equally valuable (Hesterman, 2012).

Collaboration with colleagues was also reported as increasing teachers' abilities to integrate technology effectively (Polly, 2011). Therefore, providing teachers with

professional development opportunities to learn at their level of understanding, work with a technology coach, and collaborate with peers can address the misconception reported by Wang et al. thus supporting teachers and encouraging them to effectively integrate technology.

Professional Development and Technology

The literature about professional development for technology integration consistently indicates that teachers play the pivotal role in that process (Beglau et al., 2011; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Inan & Lowther, 2010; Varma et al., 2008). Technology in today's world of technology, engaging professional development from a distance is a commonplace occurrence. The iPad has become the most popular digital technology tool to be implemented in schools since it was introduced to the market in 2010 (Murray & Olcese, 2011). Researchers suggested that elementary schools have encountered challenges related to the level of support provided to teachers when introducing iPads into the classroom (Chou et al., 2012; Pegrum, Oakley, & Faulkner, 2013). Elementary school teachers in the southeastern United States received iPads and iPad training to improve teaching and learning across the general curriculum.

It appears social media has become the preferred tool for communicating between principals, and teachers. Fewer hand written notes are used as email or a link is used instead. "Enhanced connectivity and technological expansion have led to richer media being offered for educational communications, and the affordances of the communication tools now used enable substantial social presence" (Cunningham, 2014, p. 41). The online idiom applied by educators can be utilized to collaborate, increase and

acquire new capabilities that are significantly imperative to the enrichment of their

knowledge, and increase educational inventory (Kabilan, Adlina, & Embi, 2011). A

structure of online educator collaboration is teacher to-teacher online peer support.

Educators communicate their uncertainties, apprehensions 90 or difficulties within an

online group. This idea is aligned with the concept of external peer mentoring as

discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, Internet technology has permitted

educators to collaborate in an online environment that is unrestricted from the limitations

of place and time (Kyounghye & You-Kyung, 2013).

   The classroom was becoming more interactive and collaborative and less lecture-

driven. In the late 1990s, the Promethean Board and SMART Board became popular

within classrooms. These interactive boards "combine the functionality of a whiteboard,

computer, and projector into a single system" (Giles & Shaw, 2011, p. 36) allowed

students and teachers to access broader educational resources. As the technologies

continued to advance, schools began to integrate smartphones and e-readers, and

implemented Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiatives (Melhuish & Falloon, 2010;

Sangani, 2013). The latest revolution of 2 technology advancement to enter the schools

was the Apple iPad. The iPad was released in February of 2010 as Apple's first hand-held

tablet device, which was smaller than a laptop computer and more mobile than other

technology hardware (Murray & Olcese, 2011). The iPad has steadily become the

technology of choice for educators because of the ease of access, the touch screen, and

the ability to download a variety of applications for educational use (Hutchison,

Beschorner, & Schmidt-Crawford, 2012). The iPad has replaced the laptop as the

emerging technology due to its smaller size, lighter weight, and longer battery life (Marmarelli & Ringle, 2010). The intuitive design of the iPad makes the use, even by small children, an engaging platform for learning. According to the United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, students in the 21st century must use "skills that increasingly demand creativity, perseverance, and problem solving combined with performing well as part of a team" (2007, p. 1). Teachers' use of emerging technologies, such as the iPad, in instruction encourages students' 21st century skills referred to by Secretary Duncan thus properly preparing them for the future workforce.

The concept of eMentoring, like other forms of mentoring, requires clear goals and the establishment of relationships even more so than in a face-to-face mentoring relationship. Participants also need to be carefully selected and be committed to the program. A well-constructed program has the potential to provide powerful professional development when supported by the training, resources and most importantly, people (Bullock & Ferrier-Kerr, 2014). McAleer and Bangert (2011) explained that the majority of the time teachers are at the school, they are with their students leaving little time to interact and work with professionals from the same teaching discipline. Because an online environment leaves flexibility, participating in an online program promotes more time and better coherence with teachers' professional goals. Stanley et al. (2014) related a story about a teacher who was able to provide string lessons (violin, viola, and cello) to a colleague across several states via Skype. Skype is a simple and effective educational technology tool to use to facilitate remote presentations or professional development opportunities (Hussain, 2014; Michels & Ching-Wen, 2011). Additionally, presentations,

mentoring sessions, or collaborative meetings can be recorded for later viewing through Skype. The chat and video features included in Skype are very similar to common networking social sites like Facebook (Blankenship & Kim, 2012). A study of two people that took part in a virtual professional learning and development course stated that they developed a sense of self-efficacy that motivated them to try alternative approaches, and to initiate an interactive cycle of trial, error, and improvement (Owen, 2014).

Continuing Professional Development

Since technology changes so rapidly, teachers must stay abreast of the best practices for technology integration. Researchers suggested successful best practices for integrating technology as focusing on one specific content area at a time, alignment of pedagogy and technology, collaboration with colleagues, and ongoing professional development. Ongoing research implicates a need for alternative methods to assist with effective professional development. Effective professional development is evident in classrooms where teaching and learning are intertwined. Professional development is rich in content and incorporate accountable talk from teachers in a collaborative setting. Many school districts recommend and expect excellence as the achievement standard. Through professional development, teachers are given a chance to discuss with others curriculum, student achievement, and assessments. Guskey (2000) suggested that "teacher knowledge and practices are the most…significant outcomes of any professional development effort" (p. 75) and need to be measured in some way.

Teachers provided additional professional development by engaging shared classroom assignments as each student in third grade and above has been given an

opportunity to have access to technology through an iPad. Students have access to the general curriculum, other schools, states and countries; therefore, teachers may need ongoing professional development throughout the school year to gain a better appreciation of the iPad and ways to use it more effectively. In a study by Attard (2013), one of the participants reflected that he was already a technology savvy user but continued to find that extended, ongoing professional development was necessary for iPad implementation to be effective.

Implementation

The participating teachers will receive a letter extending an invitation to participate in the project, a 3-day professional workshop series. I will summarize the results of the interview questions from the participants thus producing the development of the project. I will provide the teachers with a true/false activity sheet to facilitate further discussion of the value of implementing the project. I will engage the teachers in a discussion of the results.

As facilitator, I will lead the sessions and provide directions for each session and activities. Post it wall sticky sheets will be spaced out throughout the room. The teachers will be divided into two groups and have an opportunity to give comments on the true/false questions. A teacher in the group will record the responses of the teachers onto the wall sticky note. The note will be the minutes for the discussion results; the group will rotate so that all teachers will have an opportunity to comment on all questions. The teachers will have an opportunity to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the project. The goal of the project, a 3-day professional development series is to help the teacher

reflect on their assessment administration practices, data drive instruction, word-level reading among kindergarten and first-grade students and referrals to pullout services. An evaluation will be on the last day of the professional development series. The teachers' feedback will contribute to the validity of the project. The project should begin as soon as the doctoral study is approved.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The resources to develop this 3-day professional workshop include the 11 participating teachers that consented to share their opinions and experience using the Dominie assessment. The 3-day professional development workshop is designed to share research-based strategies for data driven instruction, practice test administration and using data results as a screening for recommendation for additional evaluation as needed and using the data to address individual word-level reading goals for struggling students within the classroom.

 A variety of books, self-evaluations, engaging activities are provided for teachers to share their experiences and strategies to potentially reduce assessment administration stress; time saving strategies for documenting responses while dealing with different student types. The project provides a resource for teachers building and strengthening a professional learning community.

Potential Barriers

An initial barrier included finding the time to provide a three-day workshop within a school day. However, the project has been approved by the office of research in the local district to host the professional development workshops during the school day.

Facilitators for the training sessions will be determined by the principal due to budget allowances or expertise of the staff member. District employees may also volunteer to lead the training sessions if they have expertise in the specific area. The activities are developed from the requests discovered during the interview of the participants. As a result, teachers, consultants and administrators will benefit from the use of the three-day professional development workshop series that will provide data driven results for using the Dominie assessment as an instrument to improve student instruction and achievement. Students are not participating in this study. However, examples of student work are used for training purposes for the participants.

The data collected in this project study revealed that the teachers of this one school are concerned about their assessment practices. Teachers argue that the assessment results are not valid if the teacher as the assessor is not trained to administer the assessment. This study contributes to the body of knowledge regarding professional development strategies for teachers using standardized assessments to plan and implement student achievement for word level readers.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The project, a 3-day professional development series is made up of 11 teachers at the local school. It will take three days to implement this project. Each day, sessions will convene from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. Different facilitators are expected for each session. Handouts are included during each session for future references.

The doctoral project, a 3-day professional workshop, begins with an introduction that explains the purpose for developing this product and the project's overall goal. The

terms phonics, phonemic awareness and word-level reading will be defined based on recent research literature. A short definition of terms clarifies the meaning of terminology used in this project. There is a brief explanation of why some students struggle with word-level reading relative to their development of phonic and phonemic awareness skills to give teachers a better understanding of how to adjust instruction to help students avoid these struggles. The explanation is in the form of Dominie samples from students revealing their inventive spelling and spelling patterns related to word-level reading.

The Dominie assessment encompasses several components that can be used to design word-level reading instruction for classroom teachers including specific developmental targeted phonemes used in building word-level reading skills. The Dominie is useful in identifying inequalities between high and low performing readers. An essential part of the assessment looks at invented spelling which will help teachers and students understand the link between speech and print when reading and spelling (Senechal, 2011).

The three-day professional workshop includes a variety of research-based instructional strategies that motivate teachers such as learning how to administer time consuming assessments, using specific information from the Dominie. There are test administration suggestions and suggested books to use in strengthening phonics, phonemic awareness and word-level reading skills. Suggested resources are included in this 3-day professional workshop such as web sites, readymade materials for role play when administering the Dominie assessment and dealing with various student types.

Finally, there is an evaluation for rating the three-day professional workshop

sessions with suggestions on the helpfulness of this project study and the need for future

professional development.

Role and Responsibilities of Teachers

The project in this study was designed to address the use of the Dominie

assessment among kindergarten and first grade teachers by providing them with research-

based strategies and resources in phonics, phonemic awareness and word-level reading.

The need for research-based strategies in word-level reading was determined by

analyzing data collected from 11 individuals interviewed. Each teacher involved in the

study is vital in determining the effectiveness of this three-day professional development.

Each teacher's attitude toward the use of new assessment and implementation methods

and strategies learned during the three-day professional workshops will be beneficial and

a welcome support in introducing this project to other teachers throughout the district and

potentially the state.

Role and Responsibilities of the Researcher

My role with regards to the workshop is as the developer and the facilitator of the

workshops. I will be assisting with other colleagues. I will be responsible for all

workshop materials. The school will provide a designated room for the workshops to take

place and allow time for implementation of the workshops. In order to conduct a review

of this project, a three-day professional workshop, I will encourage teachers to use the

strategies learned during the 3-day professional workshops during the next administration

of the Dominie assessment to see how well the project addressed their needs as indicated

Concept Development: 1 month
•IRB Approval
•Consent for participation (2 weeks)
•Individual interviews with kindergaten and first grade teachers((1 week)

Organization: 3 weeks
•Transcribe inteviews (2 weeks)
•Discover pattern needed for project, a three day professional workshop series (1 week)

Recruitement of Faculty: 1 week
•Emailed letter to participate as a facilitator during the professional workshop

Communication: 1 week
•Review results with particants
•Communicate results at weekly staff meeting
•Facilitator assignments given
•Copy of the workshop agenda emailed

Program Delivery: 3 days
•Follow the agenda
•Sessions daily from 8:00 - 3 pm daily

Program Delivery: 3 days
•Follow the agenda
•Sessions daily from 8:00 - 3 pm daily

Assessment and evaluation: 1month to 1 academic year
•Begin implementation a research site based on data findings and post assessment
•Quartely review of teachers use of the Dominie assessment data stratigies in classrooms
•Discuss pros and cons of the project

Figure 1. The timeline recommended sequence for the project, a 3-day professional development series.

in the data analysis. I will meet with the teachers during a monthly staff meeting over a three-month period to receive feedback from using the strategies. I will compile the results of the feedback obtained from the project evaluation. I will review the results during a follow-up staff meeting and make revisions or additions that will strengthen future professional development workshops. Beyond this exposure, I plan to share the three-day professional workshop development with teachers in grades two-five in my local school, the consultant for my school district for potentially using this project study across the school district in over 26 elementary schools. This three-day professional workshop could be placed online district site for teachers in regular education, special education and ESOL for easier accessibility. If this three-day professional workshop proves to be effective, I will consider sharing it with colleagues to be implemented in the private sector.

Project Evaluation

The goal of the formative evaluation is provide qualitative feedback that can inform and encourage future professional learning opportunities in the local school (Kealey, 2010). Key stakeholders for this project included the teachers, school administrator, district consultants and in particular, the kindergarten and first-grade students who will benefit by their teachers using the Dominie assessment to structure their classroom instruction. In this project, I included the opinions and recommendations of the teachers interviewed gathered from the open-ended interview questions. The data generated from the interview questions were useful in identifying the needs of the teachers regarding using the Dominie assessment to include areas of positives and

negatives of administering the assessment to using the assessment as a tool to plan instruction. An evaluation form (see Appendix A) is available for participants to identify strengths and weaknesses of the training sessions for consideration of future teacher training sessions. Stull, Varnum, Ducette, and Schiller (2011) stated that a formative evaluation process is beneficial for the learner and the instructor. By participating in a formative evaluation process, the learning identified what has been learned while the instructor can project future opportunities for learning by gauging the successfulness of instruction and areas of instruction that need to be amended.

Implications Including Social Change

The development of this project study has the potential to promote social change by highlighting the strengths of the Dominie assessment to teachers as a useful tool to form student instruction that may increase student achievement. In addition, another implication is for the teachers' recommendations of improvement on the assessment can be realized. The findings of the study can also be used by kindergarten and first-grade teachers to grasp the dual function of this assessment; that it provides a solid foundation for their teachers as well as benefit their students' educational achievements. In the current study, it was proven that without the proper training of teachers, administering this state mandated assessment to early struggling readers as a tool to shape instruction, could potentially negatively impact student achievement, test scores, and the overall school ranking among the district schools.

 I learned about the beliefs, needs, and attitudes of the teachers regarding the Dominie assessment during my project study. I am uncertain if the work that I have done

will alter the test administration or use of the Dominie result practices of the participants involved in this study; however, I am still very much hopeful each participant will consider the advantages and recommendations discovered from this project. I have heightened the teachers' awareness for inclusive professional development. By developing a three-day professional development series, I have demonstrated my knowledge and thoughts for using the Dominie assessment in a way to promote social change. I also hope that the teachers would find support in the proposed activities during the three-day professional development series. Finally, teachers will be able to move forward with a keen sense of the Dominie assessment and the varying ways to use the data; thus, yielding a positive social change by all stakeholders.

Local Community

As early as kindergarten and first grade, phonemic awareness is the essential foundation for learning an alphabetic system, while phonological awareness is an essential instructional component to prevent reading failure in Kindergarten and first grade if it is linked with good decoding instruction (Lane, 2014). This higher-level task of phonological awareness, referred to as *phonemic awareness,* is assessed in invented spellings. Thus, phonemic awareness refers to the highest level in the hierarchy of phonological awareness skills. At this level of awareness, the individual is capable of consciously manipulating phonemes. The Dominie assessment by Deford (2004) is significant in that it is the primary source among the elementary schools in the southeastern region being used as an indicator for struggling early readers. On the Dominie assessment, students are not reading for fluency and comprehension necessarily

but rather the students' ability to sound out words and write words from dictation. This assessment is administered three times per academic year for progress monitoring minimally. Students who score within the lowest 20th percentile are referred to receive services in RR for 10-20 weeks. This program is considered a specialty support program and students qualify to participate in this program by the score they receive on the state mandated Dominie assessment. Once the 10-20-week cycle is completed, the students may continue services for an additional cycle or return to regular class instruction.

The concept of pulling students from the regular classroom setting into a small group to provide direct instruction is similar to the procedures used for students qualifying for special education (speech therapy). Providing speech and language services also use a pull-out model. Such a model is beneficial for working with students whose speech and language delay adversely affects their academics. The professional in charge of a child's speech therapy -- called a speech-language pathologist, speech therapist, speech teacher, or whatever combination of these words that each school district pastes together -- will work to find fun activities to strengthen a child's speech and language in areas of weakness. Consequently, the results of the Dominie assessments have been used to identify and refer students for a screening rather than for planning or instructional purposes. Having these children instructed in the classroom rather than a pull-out speech and language therapy program, might have a positive effect on their self-concept and learning. Both RR and special education (speech therapy) requires a process to include a referring source such as a standardized assessment and a team. They both use a direct teaching model. Goals and objectives are developed and taught to mastery.

Additionally, both programs are considered specialized supports in the elementary

school. Ironically, both programs more likely than not, share the same students.

Oftentimes, scheduling is a huge problem because the law requires both RR and speech

services to be provided when a student qualifies for speech and language services causing

an overlap in services thus contributing to the over identification of students qualifying

for special education (speech therapy).

Far-Reaching

This project study could be the impetus of professional development for other

elementary schools within the district and state. Teachers with access to the findings of

the study may develop the ability to increase word-level reading in kindergarten and first

grades for students in schools using my project. In addition, other professional

development initiatives may be more successful with the establishment of research-based

strategies for struggling readers, which will be used during my project.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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The purpose of this was study was to discover how to use the data collected from

teacher interviews regarding what they know and do not know about interpreting the

results of the Dominie assessment. The results of this project are appropriate for new and

continuing teachers of grades kindergarten through third grade.

This project (see Appendix A) consists of engaging activities surrounding the

usage of the Dominie assessment. It is apparent to me that teachers want to have a voice

in the professional development trainings. Chapter 4 will contain reflections of the study,

its strengths, limitations and directions for future research. Additionally, it will reveal

what I have learned as a scholar, practitioner, project developer and ending with my

reflection on the importance of the study while summarizing what I have learned.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the strengths and limitations of my project, series of professional development training sessions that would take place over three days. This allowed teachers trained in using the Dominie assessment to explore word-level reading and phonemic awareness skills among kindergarten and first-grade students. I will present a picture of my experience and acquired learning as researcher, scholar practicioner, project developer, and as the project's impact on social change.

Accountability pressures on schools have increased demands on teachers to improve their teaching practices (American Educational Research Journal, 2013). At the same time, the call for accountability may lead to learning new strategies and techniques for creating more successful learning opportunities for students in reading comprehension (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Creemers, Kyriakides, & Antoniou, 2013; Grossman, 2011; Masuda & Ebersole, 2012; Putnam & Borko, 2000). The perception of teachers in this project study revealed a need for research-based professional development.

Project Strengths

My project study was developed in response to 11 interviews and steered by my research questions. This project provides stakeholders with future professional growth derived from the data collected during the teacher interviews. Secondly, teachers can incorporate research-based strategies from this project into their regular routine without reinventing the wheel: the Dominie does not reveal itself as something extra or as just

one more thing that the general educator must do. Rather, it is a means to use the Dominie assessment and the data.

Teachers with firsthand knowledge of administering and scoring the Dominie assessment for kindergarten and first-grade students contributed personal, professional and practical information during the interviews. Open-ended questions gave way to spontaneous responses (Mosburg-Michael, 2013) and allowed for extensive details of their experience with the Dominie to be shared. Lastly, my project serves as a resource for new and veteran teachers with access to the Dominie assessment. It offers research-based strategies and practices to improve instruction and reduce early reading deficits for at-risk students (Gabig & Zaretsky, 2013).

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

Two limitations are considered for this project study as follows: (1) the sample size and (2) my educational experience is not as a regular classroom teacher. While the Dominie assessment is the sole instrument administered to students in kindergarten and first grade, the teachers are different which leads to different styles, temperament, individual biases regarding the test itself and the administration alike. These opinions continue to vary among general education teachers who have switched grade levels to a higher grade over the years, looping and are now the recipients of the students they once taught in the earlier grades (Murphey, 2012).

Approaching the use of the Dominie assessment from the perspective of a speech pathologist and not a general education teacher may bring out an educational power struggle. Identifying the real purpose of the Dominie assessment beyond it being a state

requirement, provides support to the need for this professional development project study; to show general educators how to use this tool to increase word-level reading and phonemic awareness skills using this state mandate assessment because teachers must embrace collaborative professional development (The American Speech and Hearing Association Leader, 2012) in order to create a culture that supports teaching practice and student learning (Tseng, 2013). Remediation of the identified limitations includes broadening the size and focus of this study. Future research could include a larger sampling of students from different grade levels or the targeted grade level at other elementary schools within the district.

Scholarship

During this professional development project study, I have discovered many things about myself as a special educator, my colleagues, and a few forgotten essentials for student achievement. I have learned that taking time to reflect is essential to learning. To grow and learn as an educator, I must be willing to consider the opinions of other educators even though I am considered a specialist in my area as a speech pathologist (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2013). From a sermon, my husband preached, there is a difference between decision and commitment. And it takes discipline to follow through when the results are not immediate. As a special educator promoting social change, I've learned that having these three ingredients are necessary for increasing scholarship.

Project Development and Evaluation

Creating this professional development project study lead me to be purposeful and focus on a clearly identified goal (Grant, 2012). I struggled initially because project development and evaluation required me to be organized, adaptable and demonstrate foresight. I needed to be able to plan the project from beginning to end to include identifying any resources that may be needed. I needed to know the logistics of the project study based on my own educational convictions so that I could influence my local school and district (Flynn, 2013) to look at the seriousness of my study.

The project evaluation aspect allowed me to include the participants in this study in self-reflection. Roberts and Pruitt (2009) asserted that professional development is effective when teachers work collaboratively in groups. It brought them face to face with an everyday event that they have possibly lost passion about over the years after administering the same assessment over and over. The interviewing of the participants because it leveled the playing field so to speak because there was minimal risks or biases. Through my experience while developing and evaluating this study, I have obtained the knowledge and confidence to conduct project evaluation and development in the future.

Leadership and Change

As my project study concludes, I have learned through this process that leadership is less about who has the title but more about who has the influence (Kruse, 2013). I've learned that when administration and teachers work together, we can create change Van Driel and Berry (2012) contended that if instructional changes are going to occur in schools, teachers must change their attitudes regarding collegial interactions. The

participants seemed to enjoy having a voice in this process to evoke change. They were eager to be involved in using the Dominie assessment in a new way. The participants were willing to share their thoughts and ideas regarding the state mandated assessment. This process helped me learn leadership and make changes in ways that that I could not figure out without the collaborative effort (Flynn, 2013) of all the participants in this study to include my chair and URR reviewer. Diverse vantage points we made during the interview process. Making a change was inevitable; progress is optional (Sullivant, 2013). As the leader of my professional development project study, I had to celebrate the strengths of my school and community while finding a non-threatening way to strengthen our weakness. Each contribution to this project study promoted strength to stay the course because leaders shouldn't quit, even when it seems to be the most viable option. My project enhances the mission of the school, values, teachers' practices, and professional development activities (Crowthers, 2009).

Analysis of Self as Scholar

While developing this project study, I lost my way and became desperate to be out of school more than I wanted to promote social change. I lost my passion along the way but I've learned that being a scholar means that setbacks are a staple in being successful (Smith, 2013). A small glimpse of success through a compliment on the discussion board from an invisible classmate or hap in stance meet of a former student that somehow reunited me with my purpose and thus the scholar in me was awakened. I somehow gained courage and insight along the way to persevere despite the let downs when I thought I did my best. Through the process of time, I was able to increase my

proficiency in conducting research and scholarly writing for the sole purpose of promoting social change in my local school. I discovered links to other ideas, concepts, and theories through my use of Walden University library online databases (ERIC, ProQuest, EBSCO Host, and SAGE), reports, books, dissertations, and Google Scholar. The challenge from a reviewer's perspective provoked me to be and become a better scholar. Being a scholar is more than being able to write a dissertation (Scroggs, 2013) but rather being and becoming a living dissertation. With excitement, I embrace the improvements to in instruction as a result of this study in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms moving forward.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

This project study has had a profound impact on me professionally and I feel secure in saying I am a practitioner! Wow, I have grown in such a way that I am now able to reflect on past, present and future research practices that may help improve student learning. I feel confident that I am able to help general education teachers and speech pathologists enhance their teaching strategies (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2013) and use of the Dominie assessment to plan instruction and increase student achievement. Schon (1983) defined practitioners as people who "often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of actions and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice" (p. viii-ix). I believe that through this process the teachers in my school are less territorial and are willing to work in a collaborative effort moving forward.

This process is clearly defined the difference between making a decision and making a commitment. The difference is called discipline. This process required discipline to keep going; keep writing, to finish what I started (Humphrey & Simpson, 2013). The word 'research' is not as scary as it was when I started. I feel like research is simply new revelation and now I have a deeper understanding for the pursuit of a doctoral degree and am willing to share that process with all who want to increase student achievement.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

Initially, the words project developer scared me because it seemed rigid, detailed and analytical to me, all of which I am not. I struggled as a project developer in the onset because I don't think I ever saw myself as such. Taking on the role as a project developer and evaluator required a paradigm shift in my thinking and my way of assessing and educating my students and working with my colleagues. I began to see myself as a contributor to social change in my local school through this process. I had to give consideration to matters that I would ordinarily give little or no attention to i.e. ethics, while important, is not at the forefront of my brain as it was during this process. Considering stakeholders and ensuring that all involved is protected (Creswell, 2013), included or excluded while stating specifically why greatly improved my understanding of collecting data and doing research. For me, project development and evaluation are necessary for a professional development project study. At present I believe, I am able to facilitate improved practices for using the Dominie assessment to help solve early identification of slow and struggling readers in kindergarten and first grade.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

The potential impact on social change in this professional development study may give teachers a voice in identifying the root to a long-standing problem (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). Teachers want to be inclusive in the strategies for improving student achievement rather than returning to school each year with yet another new program developed by people in offices seemingly with no real clue of student's needs. Professional development provided the opportunity for teachers to remain engaged with their input which may influence their student learning environment (Dufour & Mattos, 2013). Specialty areas and general education teachers will be able to use the principles derived from the professional development project study in a way that is conducive to each student no matter their developmental level. Administrators at the local and district levels may note the receptivity to having colleague led professional development may provide valuable insight to the beliefs and values among school level community educators.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project study has implications for my local school and elementary schools in my district using the Dominie assessment. The findings from this study contribute to the early education sect concentrating on early literacy skills. In particular, this study adds to any existing literature on word-level reading and early literacy development. Allowing teachers within the local school conduct professional development sessions would surely save the district money. Research shows that professional development is most effective when it is collaborative and provides teachers with opportunities for active learning

(DeFour et al., 2008; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Talbert, 2009; Van Dreil & Berry, 2012). I think there should be compensation for the service however; most teachers have needs far beyond money only. A successful professional development will encourage other teachers to share their ideas and thoughts about district assessments, direct teaching, and setting goals for struggling students. Dominie, a state mandated assessment has been used since I have been an employee of the district (over 20 years) and it's the only assessment that is being used to assess word-level reading for kindergarten and first-grade students.

This study has implication for continued research that will inevitability become a type of intervention so that the entire local school benefits from in-house professional development lead by specialty area educators in that the district and will consider other specialty educators i.e. speech pathologists, reading/literacy coaches as to how these resources might use the Dominie assessment possibly as a part of the screening process for referral into special education. My local school and other district elementary schools could use findings about the Dominie assessment and recommendations to improve assessment processes and practices in planning instruction.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

In Chapter 4, I discuss personal reflections and conclusions from my project and acknowledged the strengths and limitations of my 3-day professional development sessions. Recommendations for remediating this project's limitations were also included. This chapter includes reflections on my journey to becoming a scholar, developing this project, and understanding leadership and change. Reflection is purposeful, critical

analysis of knowledge and experience (Strube, 2012). Additional subsections encompass analysis of my growth in areas of scholarship, practice, and project development. In the final subsections, I present the potential for social change and implications and direction for future research.

This project study stemmed from my curiosity to improve word-level reading for struggling readers in kindergarten and first grades. My research and project study derived from a local problem that I am continually confronted with working in the area of special education. This project study should make a positive contribution in my local school and in my school district for the reasons I have discussed in my reflections, and implications for future study. Many teachers are not ready or are reluctant to change their mode of teaching, especially if they are tenured and well experienced (Knight, 2009) and I am not sure at this point, my administrations' viewpoint on teacher induced professional development or using the Dominie data crossing professional domains (American Speech and Hearing Association, 2013) but I intend to nudge and poke at this project study to encourage local and district follow through.

I believe this qualitative case study should make a positive contribution to research on the teachers' beliefs and practices with using the Dominie assessment to improve student achievement and classroom instruction. The participants appeared to enjoy the interviewing process and being asked to participate in the study. While many of them expressed their nervousness about being recorded, once they sensed that it was not a 'test', but rather a quest toward an inclusive solution for present and future research, it became apparent that this project study was worth exploring. The knowledge I have

gained through this study has increased my determination to lead and support social change initiatives that improve word-level reading for struggling students in kindergarten and first grades.

Conducting this research was truly a great experience. I particularly enjoyed the possibility of promoting social change in my local school. I believe that this experience has motivated the teachers to work as a team and embrace special area teachers beyond being extra help in the schools but a contributing resource for student achievement. Mindich and Lieberman (2012) found a clear relationship between teachers working together and the effects of these learning opportunities on student outcomes (Luke, Woods, & Dooley, 2011; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009).

Professional development, especially among colleagues has proven to be a useful and effective tool. Why, because it's inclusive and the teachers seemed to enjoy being asked their opinion on the matter. I enjoyed the role as researcher during the interview process and not just as the "speech teacher." I got the last rung of understanding for my project study by spending the time listening to their input on a matter that I was interested in but didn't have the useable knowledge but because of this exchange, I have understanding. They provided information that made me a better speech teacher and researcher.

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Appendix A. 3-Day Professional Development Training

3-day Now I Know my ABC's plus D for Dominie! Agenda

Day 1 – Administering time consuming assessment strategies	
8:00 – 9:00	Opening Activity: PIG Test
9:00 – 10:30	Why Dominie? Using Assessment to inform instruction
10:30 – 11:30	Open Discussion
11:30 – 1:00	History of SLP's involvement in Literacy
1:00 – 3:00	Phonetic Alphabet and sound development language development chart
Day 2 – Supplementary methods to use the Dominie data	
8:00 – 10:00	Relationship between spoken language problems and reading difficulties
	Roles and responsibilities of SLP's relative to reading and writing
	Phonological awareness
	Phonemic awareness
10:00 – 12:00	Merging Phonemic awareness and phonics
	What we know
	Building blocks for successful reading
	Activity: Practice phonemic awareness and phonics of word-level reading
	Key processes for reading
12:00 – 3:00	Overview of Dominie through practice exercises
	Ethical or not ethical, that is the question? (Self-evaluation)
	Supplementary methods to use the Dominie
	Dominie samples of word-level reading and writing
Day 3 – Every Teacher is a Specialist!	
8:00 – 11:00	How much do you know about phonemic Awareness?
	True or False quiz
	Answer review and discussion
	Effective teaching points
	Suggested books for word-level reading and phonemic awareness skill development
	Activity: Books
11:00 – 12:30	Administering time consuming assessments
12:30 – 2:00	Practice testing scenario

	Activity: Role play with testing scenario cards
	Open discussion
2:00 – 3:00	Conclusion and evaluation form

Professional Development workshop – Day 1

Opening Activity/Ice Breaker
PIG Test
Draw the Pig Personality Test

8:00 am – 9:00 am

Description
This fun icebreaker can be an energizing way to engage participants. It's a "Personality Assessment," but it's just for fun; there is no scientific value to the results. However, this activity is likely to shed light of various teaching styles, interpreting test results or subjective misidentification of students.

Materials
☐ Paper for each participant
☐ Pens, pencils and colored markers for each participant
☐ Printout of the "Pig Analysis" sheet (at the end of this lesson)
Preparation
None
Procedure
Use the following script (or modify to suit your needs):
☐ "Let's start out our time together by getting to know each other."
☐ "We'll do it in a funny way."
☐ "On the sheet of paper that each of you has, I would like you to each draw a pig."
☐ "Make it as detailed as you like." **(Allow 5 minutes for drawing the pig.)**
☐ "Now that you've drawn your pig, I'm going to help you do some analysis to see what your drawing tells us about you." **(Read each of the descriptions on the "Pig Analysis" sheet. Keep it light and fun.)**
☐ "Take a few minutes, and share your Pig Analysis with your table."
☐ "Tell them if you think it is accurate or not."
☐ "So, what do you think? Does your Pig Analysis match your personality?"
☐ "Okay, this was not a scientific instrument, so any truth it contained was probably accidental….or was it?" **(You might want to have participants put their names on their pictures and post them around the room.)**
Pig Analysis
If the pig is drawn:
Toward the top of the paper – You have a tendency to be positive and optimistic.

Toward the middle – You have a tendency to be a realist.
Toward the bottom – You have a tendency to be pessimistic and may be
prone to behaving negatively.
Facing left – You have a tendency to believe in tradition and be friendly; you may also be prone
to remembering dates well.
Facing Right – You have a tendency to be innovative and active, but may be prone to forgetting
dates easily and may not have a strong sense of family.
Facing front – You have a tendency to be direct, and may enjoy playing the role of devil's
advocate; you also are prone to neither fearing nor avoiding confrontational discussions.
With many details – You have a tendency to be analytical, but may also be prone to being
cautious to the point that you struggle with trust.
With few details – You have a tendency to be emotional and to focus on the larger picture rather
than focusing on details. You also have a tendency to be
a great risk taker and may sometimes be prone to reckless and impulsive decisions.
With less than 4 legs showing – May indicate that you are living through a major period of
change and as a result you may be prone to struggling with insecurities.
With 4 legs showing – You have a tendency to be secure and to stick to your ideals; however,
others may describe you as stubborn.
With large ears – Indicates how good of a listener you are (the bigger, the better).
With a long tail – Indicates how intelligent you are (the longer, the

9:00am – 10:30am – Why Dominie? Using Assessment to Inform Instruction

A series of studies have confirmed what was probably obvious from the

beginning. Good teachers, effective teachers, matter much more than particular

curriculum materials, pedagogical approaches, or "proven programs." It has become

clearer that investing in good teaching – weather through making sound hiring decisions

or planning effective professional development – is the most "research-based" strategy

available. If we truly hope to attain the goal of "no child left behind," we must focus on

creating a substantially larger number of effective, expert teachers.

"Assessment must serve the learner. This is of utmost importance. The Dominie Assessment is State mandated and in addition, the assessment must promote learning, not just measure it. That is, when learners are well served, assessment becomes a part of the learning experience that supports and improves instruction. The learners are not just the students, but also the teachers, who learn something about their students" (Routman, 2008).

The Dominie is currently the dominant assessment tool used among kindergarten and first grade teachers to assess the reading level of each student. This factor alone makes the Dominie a research worthy source. Teachers endure many changes each school year. Many of those changes are changes of the prior changes made the year before. This concept creates frustration among teachers because if it felt as soon as we learn the new concept or idea, we're challenged with a new one. In the case of the Dominie assessment, it has been a steady source and used in varying capacities relative to test administration and book leveling but not so much as a tool to identify phonics phonemic awareness or word-level reading skill development.

10:30am – 11:30 am – Open Discussion:

In general, when the child is not progressing, he is finding some part or parts of the reading process difficult. Oftentimes he has learned to do something, which is interfering with his progress, and he may have learned it from the way you've been teaching. (Teaching Struggling Readers, Lyons quoting Guidebook, Clay, pg. 57).

- Effective assessment must be a continuous process.

- It must provide teachers with data that can be used to enhance learning opportunities.

- Assessment is more than the traditional test; it is more a process of reaction, reflection, and redirection.

- Assessment provides opportunities for students to assume a sense of responsibility for their own learning. When actively engaged in the assessment process, students become less-teacher dependent and more independent.

- Assessment respects the child and preserves and enhances his or her self-esteem.

- Assessment should be used to improve instruction and gauge progress; it does not simply assign numerical scores to reading achievement.

- Assessment provides opportunities for teachers and students to work toward common curricular goals, both short-term and long-term.

- It is important to consider assessment as a positive feature of literacy learning.

- Assessment is a cooperative activity between teachers and students. It is not something done to students, but rather an activity done with students.

11:30am – 1:00pm - History of SLP's involvement in Literacy

"It may be notable for a podiatrist to deliver a baby when no one else is available, but an obstetrician would be more qualified. SLPs instructing reading may be well intentioned, but no better qualified than a podiatrist delivering babies…Incorporating reading skills during articulation, language, voice, and fluency treatments is justifiable when the primary goal is to improve oral communication deficits, not reading ability" (Rucinski, 2008).

We must be cognizant that speech-language pathology is a fluid discipline and continue to keep pace with new perspectives and developments. It was only in the 1970's that we began to consider our role in treading children with language disorders! We need to embrace the full range of disabilities that fall under our purview and applaud the fact that our profession allows SLPs to develop specializations across a wide range of communication disorders (Mercado Gauger, 2008, p. 138).

The role in literacy development and remediation of reading disorders recognized and discussion is greater than 3 decades

- SLP "has and essential contribution to make to the process of reading acquisition in normal and language disordered children…" (Rees, 1974).

- SLP is…"best qualified to identify, assess and remediate the language-based reading problem exhibited by many reading-disordered children" (Catts & Kahmi, 1986)

- A focus on written language often can improve spoken language and does not preclude simultaneously targeting spoken and written language (Apel, 2009

1:00pm – 3:00pm – Phonetic Alphabet and sound development
Table A1

Sound Development Chart

Age	Sounds
3	/p/, /b/,/m/, /n/, /g/, /d/, /w/, /h/,/k/
4	/t/,/y/,/tw/,/kw/,th (voiced)
5	/pl/,/fl/,/bl/,/kl/,/gl/,/v/,f (final position), l (initial)
6	l (final), /sh/,/ch/,/j/, th(voiceless)
7	ng (final),/z/, /s/, /sp/, /st/, /sk/, /sm/, /sn/, /sw/, /sl/, /skw/, /spl/
8	r (initial), /br/, /tr/, /gr/, /pr/, /kr/, /dr/, er (final)
9	/thr/, /str/, /spr/, /skr/

Note. Adapted from Phonetic alphabet and sound development (Goudreau, 2015)

Table A2

Language Development Chart

Phonology Years	
2 – 2 ½ years Phonology	Approximately 70% intelligible May omit final consonant, reduce consonant blends; substitute one consonant for another.
2 ½ - 3 years Phonology	Still some substitution and distortion of consonants Continuing to improve intelligibility – now approximately 80% intelligible Consonants mastered: p, m, n, w, h
3 – 3 ½ Years Phonology	Uses final consonants most of the time Phonological processes disappearing by age 3; consonant assimilation, diminutization, doubling, final consonant deletion, prevocalic voicing, reduplication, unstressed-syllable deletion, velar fronting
3 ½ - 4 Years Phonology	Becoming very intelligible in connected speech Continued refinement of articulatory skills taking place Consonants mastered: b, d, k, g, f, y Phonological processes continuing after age 3: cluster reduction, depalatalization, epenthesis, final devoicing, gliding, stopping, vocalization
4 – 4 ½ Years Phonology	Should be few omissions and substitutions of consonants Very intelligible in connected speech
4 ½ - 5 years Phonology	Most consonant sounds used consistently and accurately, though may not be mastered in all contexts More errors present in difficult blends
5 – 6 years	Consonants mastered: l, ing, r, l
6 – 7 years	Consonants mastered: voiceless th, sh, ch, j (By 8 years, voiced th, v, s, and zh are mastered

Note. A. Gard, L. Gilman, J. Gorman (1993)
Speech and Language Development Chart, Second Edition, Austin TX: ProEd

Now I Know my ABC's plus D for Dominie!

Professional Development workshop – Day 2

8:00am – 10:00am – Relationship between spoken language problems and reading difficulties

- Spoken language problems are both a cause and consequence of reading disabilities.

- Therefore, language problems are a major component of almost all reading disability cases.

- A large body of research exists to support this.

Roles and responsibilities of SLP's with respect to reading and writing (ASHA, 2001)

1. Position statement – SLPs have critical and direct role in literacy development for children with communication disorders and a role with general education students.

2. Guidelines – knowledge and training areas that should be expanded

3. Technical Report – summarizes literature establishing scientific base for the aforementioned.

Differences between Phonological awareness and Phonemic Awareness

Phonological awareness

- Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize that words are made up of a viariety of sound units. The term encompasses a number ofsound related skills necessary for a student to develop as a reader. As a child develops phonological awareness, they come to understand that words are made up of small sound units (phonemes). Additionally, words can be segmented into larger sound "chunks"

known as syllables and each syllable begin a sound (onset) and ends with another sound (rime).

- Phonological awareness provides the basis for phonics. Phonics is the understanding that sounds and print letters are connected, and is the first step towards word-level reading.

- As a speech pathologist, when measuring a child's phonological awareness skills, I'm looking at the child's ability to apply several different skills. A child with a storng phonological awareness should be able to recognize and use rhyme, break words into syllables, blend phonhemes into syllables and words, identify the beginning and ending sounds in a syllable and see smaller words with larger words.

Phonemic Awareness

- Phonemic awareness involves an understanding of the ways that sounds function in words, it deals with only one aspect of sound: the phoneme. A phoneme is the smalles unit of sound in a language that holds meaning. Almost all words are made up of a number of phonemes blended together. Consider the word "tall". It is made up of three phonemes: /t/ /aw/ /l/. Each of its sounds affects the meaning. Take away the /t/ and replace it with /b/ and you have and entirely different word. Change the /aw/ to an /e/ sound and again the meaning changes.

- Phonemic awaress is one aspect of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness includes a child's ability to recognize the many ways sounds function in words, phonemic awareness is only understanding the most minute sound units

in words. Thus phonemic awareness is a sub-skill under the phonological awareness "umbrella" not all of the measures for detemining a word level reader's skill level are applied when assessing it.

- A reader with strong phonemic awareness will demonstrate the ability to hear rhyme and alliteration (the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of several different words used in a short phrase or sentence) i.e. find the different sound in the set of words "bat", "ball", "wet".

There is a distinction between phonological awareness and phonemic awareness yet the two terms are often used interchangebly. For the most part both are used to refer to what is technically phonological awareness. The more common term used to identify both skills sets is phonemic awareness. However, it should be noted that 'phonemic awareness is likely refered to as "phonological awareness".

10:00am – 12:00pm – Merging Phonemic Awareness and Phonics

What we know:
Most readers experienced early and continued difficulties in accurately identifying printed words

Ultimately, it is this difficulty in rapid word knowledge recognition that limits comprehension in older poor readers (Torgeson, 1998)

Building Blocks for successful Reading Penny Castagnozzi

Comprehension

Vocabulary

Reading fluency

Phonics

Phonological Awareness

Phonemic Awareness

Practice: A woman is concerned that her husband may have **tepterponkois**

Key Processes for Reading: Phonological Awareness-Orthographic (Visual) Process

and Rapid Naming

12:00pm – 3:00pm – Overview of Dominie through Practice exercises

Purpose: To identify specific sections of the Dominie relative to Phonics, Phonemic Awareness and Word-level reading;

Participants: K – 3 grade teachers

Materials: Dominie assessments with non-identifiable information

Presenter: Speech consultant

Goal(s): 1. Become familiar with the portions of the assessment to indicate weakness in word-level reading

> 2   Experience and practice identifying individualized goals from the error patterns noted in the Dominie assessment

Activity: Self-evaluation is a necessary element to elevate the guess work of a student's skill level as well as establishing the teacher's commitment to administering a given assessment. Each participant will do this informal self-evaluation and the results will be an opportunity to participate in an open discussion.

<div align="center">

Ethical or not ethical, that is the question?
(Self-evaluation)

</div>

True	False	
		This assessment is important because it will show that I am a good teacher?
		This assessment is will identify the 'good' and 'bad' kids in my class?
		This assessment will determine if I am a good assessor?

The information of this assessment will benefit the teacher?

When giving this assessment, I want my students to give the correct response?

I am likely to correct a student if they 'almost' get the answer correct?

I am likely to over-emphasis the directions to help my students do better on the assessment?

I will repeat the directions if my student makes errors that I think they should know?

I will model the correct response to give my students an edge for the correct response?

I take my student's incorrect responses personally?

When I know that I have taught my student, and they still get it incorrect on the assessment, I feel frustrated?

I think standardized testing should be done away with for students in kindergarten and first grade?

Students with special needs should not be given the same assessment?

Using the assessment results should be a requirement for the next grade level teacher?

The assessment is to determine where the student currently functions?

I like assessing the higher functioning students?

It takes the same amount of time and concentration to administer the assessment to each student?

I would rather use running records to assess my students?

Supplementary methods to use the Dominie data

Purpose: To optimize the data from the Dominie assessment. Identify strengths and weakness beyond the numerical score

Participants: K – 3 grade teachers

Materials: Dominie Assessment: Overview and Case studies
            Kindergarten Sentence Writing and Spelling Scoring Sheet/Samples

Presenter(s): Language Literacy coach; Speech Consultant

Goal(s): 1. Highlight aspects of the Dominie assessment from each presenter's viewpoint

2. To encourage the importance of running records

Evaluation: Teachers will complete an evaluation form after each session.

Overview

The Dominie Reading and Writing Assessment Portfolio is designed to offer teachers, administrators, and parents a comprehensive literacy assessment program to be used as an a) an assessment tool in reading, writing, spelling and phonics b) providing an analysis of ongoing student work to aid as informal assessment within the classroom and c) assist with planning and instruction individually or group. The documentation in these three areas provides an outlook for emergent readers and writers, early readers and writers and developing readers and writers in grades K – 2. Emergent readers and writers are learning how writing and reading are used; early readers and writers are usually students in the end of kindergarten or the beginning of first grade; developing readers and writers are generally in the middle of first grade. The provided examples of student work will be used as examples of word-level reading, phonological awareness skills and inventive spelling patterns. Participants will pair off and use the given example of student work to identify the word level of the student's reading ability, examples of phonological awareness, and examples of inventive spelling patterns. Pairs of participants will share their findings with the whole group.

Sound Development chart by Age according to ASHA.

Activity with book(s)

Samples to be used to practice identifying phonics, phonemic awareness and word-level reading skills. These samples will be distributed to each table (groups of 4-5). Open

discussion will follow. Books are a basic means to demonstrate that phonological awareness is accessible in various ways.

Activity with Dominie sample(s)

Kindergarten Sentence Writing and Spelling Scoring Sheet/Sample

Prompt: A dog ran by a cat. It did not like the cat. So it stopped and made the cat jump up a big tree.

Figure 2. Student work

I Know my ABC's plus D for Dominie!

Professional Development workshop – Session 3

Every Teacher is SPECIAList

Purpose: Teachers will collaborate with new ideas for future professional development areas; provide encouragement to each other in a supportive manner.

Participants: K – 3 grade teachers

Materials:

Presenter(s): CRT or designated staff

Goal(s): 1. Provide opportunity for dialogue from each person's perspective on a given issue i.e. replacement assessment for the Dominie, new teachers using the Dominie versus vetted teachers, should all teachers be trained to administer and use the Dominie assessment?
   2. Open discussion on the Dominie
   3. To identify ways to provide teacher support for all genres of education

Evaluation: Teachers will complete an evaluation form after each session.

8:00am – 12:00 – How much do you know about Phonemic Awareness?

True or False quiz (place an X in the box to indicate your response)
Duration: 60 minutes

Questions	True	False
Developing young children's phoneme awareness knowledge will help facilitate their knowledge of letter sound relationships		
Invented spelling strategies reinforce children's spelling errors and have little value in advancing children's reading and spelling development		
Bilingual or multilingual speakers will be at a disadvantage in their development of phonological awareness in English		
Intensive intervention to improve young children's knowledge of rhyme will significantly improve their reading ability		
It is more effective to integrate phonological awareness activities with speech production goals for children with speech sound disorder than working on speech goals only		

Drawing young children's attention to print and sounds in words
during shared book reading can be distracting for the child and has
little added benefit
Children with severe speech disorders (e.g., apraxia of speech) can
benefit from relatively short periods of phonological awareness
instruction (e.g. between 20 – 25 hours of intervention over a 3
month period

Answers

Practical implications: integrated model may be most efficient: Teach letter name,
letter sound and Phonological awareness concurrently (Kim, Y. S., Y. Petscher, et al.
(2010).
Invented spelling (with feedback) can help children understand the link between speech
and print with reading and spelling (Senechal, M., G. Ouellette, et as. (2012).
- Phonological Awareness skills transfer across all languages
- Evidence does not suggest disadvantage. Bilingual children either do not differ
  from monolingual children or bilingual children may have an advantage –
  depends on languages being learned (Wren, Y., H. Hambly, et al. 2013)
A 9-week programme that focused on rhyme and syllable awareness for preschool
children had little effect on improving later literacy development (Nancollis, Lawrie,
Dood et al. 2005).
Integrated intervention that targets speech production, letter sound knowledge and
phoneme awareness can lead to improved
- Speech production
- Phoneme awareness
- Reading and spelling development
Compared to therapy that focuses only on speech production goals (G. Gillion, 2000,
2002, 2005).
Teachers use of print referencing techniques during shared book reading on a regular
basis has superior long term benefits for children's reading development compared to
reading the story only (Piasta, S. B., L. M. Justice, et as. 2012).
Nine of 12 children with Childhood Apriaxia of Speech (aged 4 – 7 years) showed
significant gains in:
- Phonological awareness
- Speech targets
- Letter sound knowledge
Following two 6 – week blocks of intervention (24 hours total). (McNeill, B. C., G. T.
Gillon, et al. 2009).

Effective Teaching

*Monitor development and adapt instruction to meet individual needs.

*Expect success in ALL children.

*Integral parental involvement

*Well supported by educators/health care workers with specialist knowledge when required.

*Strong instructional leadership (Foorman et al., 2006)

Suggested Books for word-level reading and phonemic awareness skill development

A balanced literacy program must include direct phonics instruction, phonological awareness training, and reading/comprehending of informative and engaging tests. Developing phonological awareness skills can be accomplished in a very systematic way beginning at the word level, progressing to syllables, and finally to individual phonemes within words. This progression encourages students to perceive increasingly smaller units of speech.

Activity: Books are a basic means to demonstrate that phonological awareness is accessible in various ways. The books in the chart below can be used to demonstrate phonological awareness skills. The targeted phonological awareness skill is indicated in the last column of the chart. Participants will form groups of 3. Each group will choose a book and use it to identify examples of the identified phonological awareness skill. Each group will return and share their findings with the whole group.\

Table A3

Booklist-Phonemic Awareness

Title	Author	PA skill
A House is house For Me	Mary Ann Hoberman	Word Awareness
A Pocked for Corduroy	Don Freeman	Syllable Awareness
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day	Judith Viorst	Blending Syllables
Blueberries for Sal	Robert McCloskey	Rhyming
Caps for Sale	Esphyr Slobodkina	Identifying beginning and final sounds
Henry Penny	Wener Zimmerman	Substituting initial sound
Noisy Nora	Rosemary Wells	Adding syllables
Swimming	Leo Lionni	Clapping Syllables
The Hat	Jan Brett	Deleting sounds in blends

Activity 2
Table groups will discuss the questions below and formulate group responses to each question. You will then select a speaker from your table to present the responses to the whole group.

Discuss the at least 5 strengths and weaknesses of the Dominie assessment
-
_____
_____
_____
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Should other professional staff member be trained to administer the Dominie assessment? If yes, are you comfortable with using the results from an assessor other than yourself?

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Are their advantages or disadvantages to administering portions of the assessment at each testing period rather than the entire assessment three times per year?

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How confident are you with using the Dominie assessment as a tool to recommend students for further testing by the speech pathologist or school psychologist?

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In your opinion, are there assessments that would provide the same information or more information than the Dominie?

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_____

12:00pm – 2:00pm – Administering time consuming assessments

Purpose: To identify areas of commonality; practice effective test administration strategies that will help teachers identify assessment opportunities in ordinary everyday classroom events.

Participants: K – 3 grade teachers

Materials: Hands on materials i.e. ice cream sticks, markers, books, Handouts, evaluation form

Presenter(s): Speech Consultant

Goal(s): 1. Enhance teachers' ability to use every opportunity as an 'assessment' opportunity

2. Provide assessment scenarios with short cuts

3. Ethics self-evaluation followed by open discussion

12:00pm – 3:00 - Practice Testing Scenario cards

Activity: The teachers are divided up into five groups. Each group will include at least

one teacher per grade level. Teachers will role play giving the assessment. The other

teachers will make notes regarding test administration, recording the results and

additional comments.

Table A4

Easy Game Play

The Antsy student	Easily Distracted student	Slow to respond Student
Concerned about giving the right or wrong answer	Not Listening student	Perfectionist student
Almost got it right student	Zoned out student	Wants affirmation and continues to ask "Is this right?"

2:00pm – 3:00pm – Evaluation Form

I attended Session(s): 1   2   3   All (Please circle to indicate which session you attended)

After participating I feel as though I can…	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
…identify specific sections of the Dominie relative to Phonics, Phonemic Awareness and Word-level reading;					
…optimize the data from the Dominie assessment and identify strengths and weakness beyond the numerical score					

…collaborate with new ideas for future professional development areas; provide encouragement to others in a supportive manner. …identify areas of commonality; practice effective test administration strategies that will help teachers identify assessment opportunities in ordinary everyday classroom events

Strengths of the workshop(s):

Recommendations for improvement:

Additional comments:

Suggestions for future professional development workshops

Summary

This project is comprised of a three-day workshop to meet the needs of the interviewees in their expressed areas of concerns. This three-day professional development segmented by daily 30-90 minute sessions condenses knowledge of research-based strategies to using the Dominie assessment as a tool to improve administering time consuming assessment, using the data to form individual and group instruction and lastly to decrease referrals to special education so that goal based

instruction may be implemented in the classroom. The evaluation form is designed for

future professional development sessions.

Appendix B. Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study that supports speech and language development and literacy awareness of word level reading among kindergarten and first graders. You were chosen for the study because you are a kindergarten or first grade teacher who administers the state required Domini assessment; have administered the Domini assessment at one time in your educational career. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding to participate.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Maxine Y. Kershaw, who is a doctoral candidate at Walden University. You may know the researcher as a Speech Therapist, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of teachers in kindergarten and first grade who administer the Domini assessment. The staffs who have administered the Domini during their educational career are also invited to participate.

Procedure:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in one interview session for approximately 20 minutes.
- Each interview will be audio recorded with permission from the participant.
- 15 minutes to go over the researcher's findings for your data for edits as needed

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at AC Moore Elementary School will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any question that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Your participation is confidential, so there are no risks in this process. Your participation will benefit the school by providing responses of how the Dominie is currently used so that your responses will be compared to those of other participants to find common themes. The common themes that surface will be researched in-depth and will be instrumental in the creation of a doctoral project to use the Dominie assessment is a different way to identify word level reading among kindergarten and first grade students.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating in this doctoral study.

Confidentiality:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential by the researcher. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. Research records will be kept in a locked file.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. The researcher's chairperson is Dr. Latasha Jones.   Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via Maxine Y. Kershaw – Home phone: 803-234-8055 or University approval number for this study 05-08-14-0030707 and it expires on May 7, 2015. The Research Participant Advocate at Walden University is Leilani Endicott, you may contact her at 1-800-925-3368, x 3121210 if you have questions about your participation in this study.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature

_____

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

_____

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically

Appendix C. Approval to Conduct Research

Richland One
South Carolina's Capital Schools

Jennifer Coleman, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Accountability, Assessment, Research and Evaluation
Stevenson Administration Building

March 4, 2014

Ms. Maxine Y. Kershaw
206 Berwick Road
Columbia, SC 29212

Dear Ms. Kershaw:

The Research Committee of Richland County School District One has *approved* your research study titled, **"An Exploration of Teachers' Knowledge of Instruction for Word Level Reading and Phonemic Awareness Skill Acquisition Using the Dominie Assessment for Kindergarten and First Grade Students"**, for the duration of the 2013-2014. You may not conduct your research during testing, both state testing and school end of year exams.

Instead of your school administrator or the CRT providing scores for your research, our office will provide the necessary Dominie scores/responses to you. Please contact Cerissa Fulmer at 231-7454 to discuss what data variables are needed. Also, please give the office 4 weeks to process your data request. The data will only be pulled once so please make sure you include all variables needed when you make the request.

Please maintain the confidentiality of the data and do not make public the name of the district, the schools, the students or the parents. We ask that you provide us with a copy of your completed research.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Coleman, Ph.D., Chair
Richland One Research Committee

1615 Richland Street • Columbia, SC 29201 • (803) 231-7450 • Fax (803) 231-7456 • www.richlandone.org

Appendix D. Protection of Human Rights

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Maxine Kershaw** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 12/19/2013

Certification Number: 1346248

Appendix E. Interview Guide

These questions address four main areas of (a) training and support, (b) administering Domini, (c) analyzing Domini data, and (d) using Domini data.

Training and support

1. How were you trained on *administering* Dominie?

2. How were you trained on *using data* from Dominie? How do you use the data?

3. Who, to your knowledge is considered an "expert" on administering, scoring and analyzing the Dominie assessment?

4. Who benefits from your training on Dominie? Please explain.

5. How easy or difficult for other staff and support professionals to be trained in using the Domini? Please explain.

Administering Dominie

1. How easy or difficult is it to administer Dominie? Please explain.

2. Who administers the Dominie to your students?

3. How long does it take to administer Dominie to each student?

4. How user friendly is this instrument by other staff and supporting professionals (i.e. resource teacher, speech therapist)? Please explain.

Analyzing Dominie data

1. How easy or difficult is it to understand Dominie data? Please explain.

2. After administering the Dominie, how confident are you regarding

transcribing the results? Why do you feel this way?

3. Who in the school building tracks and reviews the students' Dominie data?

4. Who is privy to the results of the Dominie in the school building?

5. Where does the data go when it leaves the building?

6. How do you use the data to inform instruction? Please explain.

Using Domini Data

1. How easy or difficult is it to use Dominie data in planning and in instruction?

   Please explain.

2. How useful are the data collected from the Dominie in instructional planning?

   Please explain.

3. How does the data from the Dominie affect grouping students? Please explain.

4. How does the Dominie data assist in referring students for interventions

   and/or special education services? Please explain.