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Teacher Perspectives Concerning the Implementation of a Balanced Literacy Program in a Suburban K-2 School

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Teacher Perspectives Concerning the Implementation of a Balanced Literacy Program
in a Suburban K-2 School

by

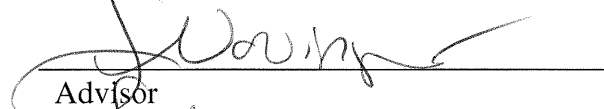Mitchell William Daly

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A thesis submitted to the

Department of Education and Human Development of the

State University of New York College of Brockport

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Education: Childhood Literacy

Teacher Perspectives Concerning the Implementation of a Balanced Literacy Program
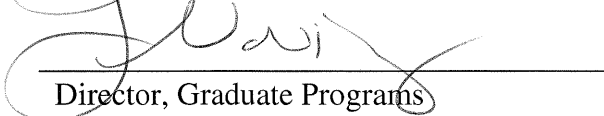in a Suburban K-2 School

by

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Introduction

      With literacy a focus of national, state, and district learning standards, increasing emphasis has been placed on students' literacy achievement. A balanced literacy approach towards literacy instruction allows students to take part in meaningful literacy activities at their own level. A transition to a balanced literacy approach can pose significant obstacles for schools and their teachers. A change in philosophy and practice is a major challenge for many teachers. Balanced literacy has come to the forefront of literacy instruction and is seen as an effective literacy philosophy. Literacy instruction has begun to shift away from the traditional methods of skill and drill and the "one size fits all" philosophy. Despite these recent changes, many schools and teachers still rely on older methods of instruction. In order for changes to be made, these teachers must see the benefits of balanced literacy and be provided with the necessary support to change their philosophy and practice.

      I work as a first grade teacher in an elementary school in Western New York. Recently, my district launched a new balanced literacy initiative. The district has stated that all teachers should concentrate on providing students with literacy instruction that includes the components of balance literacy. For many teachers, this means a drastic change in their instructional methods and philosophy. As a member of my school's Literacy Action Team, I am one of the teachers responsible for the successful transition into balanced literacy. The purpose of my study, therefore, was to discover the best ways to help my colleagues adopt balanced literacy and implement it within their classrooms. Discovering how to best support my fellow

teachers is imperative as my building moves forward with this initiative. In order for teacher to properly implement this new program, they must be provided with adequate support, including professional development, training, and opportunities for reflection.

My research was guided by the following questions: To what extent do the teachers from my school (school D) understand the components of balanced literacy? What types of support and professional development have teachers from school D received and what are their perceptions of its effectiveness? What types of professional development and support would the teachers from school D like to have? And finally, what are the needs, concerns, questions, and challenges teachers from school D feel they face as they attempt to implement a balanced literacy program? Professional development and training must be tailored to the professionals who are supposed to benefit from it. These questions helped me to understand the perspectives of my colleagues and inform my recommendations for future training.

This study took a qualitative approach in order to collect and analyze data. Since my study was specific to the teachers in my building, I used surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to collect my data. A qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study because I was looking to teachers' perspectives and experiences to answer my research questions. My conclusions and recommendations are specific to these teachers and their perspectives and experiences. Teachers from each grade level at my school (K-2) were studied, as the initiative applies to all of these teachers.

Definitions

Balanced Literacy Framework: This is a literacy instruction method and philosophy that consists of nine components. These include word work, read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing. The framework emphasizes oral language throughout the curriculum, working with letters, working with words, integrating themes, observation, assessment, and the home-school relationship (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). These "components are not separate elements but are linked together in two powerful ways: 1) through the oral language that surrounds, supports, and extends all activities and 2) by the content or topic of focus" (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 21).

Instructional Level: The level in which a student is able to process texts successfully with teacher support (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007).

Professional Development: Support designed to improve the culture of a workplace while providing teachers with the capacity to modify their own teaching (Garmston, 2005). Professional development aims to "affect the behavior of groups of teachers toward collaborative quests for improvement, common goals, common curriculum, and pedagogy" (Garmston, 2005, p. 5).

This research drew upon teacher responses to make recommendations for future support and professional development within school D. The qualitative data collected allowed me to tailor my recommendations to the specific needs of school D's teachers, as they work to implement a balanced literacy program. This study

highlights what the teachers feel is needed to help them become successful with balanced literacy.

Review of Literature

      The implementation of a balanced literacy program is imperative if teachers wish to instruct each of their students at an appropriate instructional level. The components of a balanced literacy program help teachers to reach each student and help them to grow individually as literate beings. In order to successfully implement a balanced literacy program in their classroom, teachers must have support. Professional development and support must be in place as teachers work to change both their methods and philosophies concerning literacy instruction.

      This chapter will look at the importance and benefit of the implementation of a balanced literacy program. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss effective means of professional development and support that must be in place in order to best assist teachers as they make changes within their classrooms.

Balanced Literacy

      The concept of balanced literacy is not new. Over a decade ago, balanced literacy was introduced as a both a literacy instructional method and philosophy. This model and philosophy aims to teach each student at his or her instructional level. In order to meet the individual needs of each child, a balanced program of literacy instruction must be in place. Perhaps the most well-known of these seminal works is that of Fountas and Pinnell (1996). In Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children, Fountas and Pinnell laid out the components and importance of a balanced literacy program. In this book, the authors outlined the eight components of balanced literacy as reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared

writing, interactive writing, guided writing (writing workshop), and independent

writing. In addition to the eight components, individual word work was worked in

throughout the instructional framework (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The goal of

implementing these components was to meet the needs of each student and provide

them with increased instructional opportunities. All of the components fit together as

an instructional scaffold. The instructional emphasis within Fountas and Pinnell's

balanced literacy program shifts seamlessly from the teacher to the student while

maintaining the proper support for each student (1996).

Balanced literacy stems from the philosophy that all students can learn to read

and write. By exposing students to a "balance" of reading and writing across the

curriculum, teachers can foster student growth. By using reading and writing

together, students are able to draw on these complementary processes as they work to

construct meaning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The components of balanced literacy

form a scaffold for students as they learn to read, write, listen, and speak. The focus

in balanced literacy slowly shifts from the teacher (read aloud, shared writing) to the

child (independent reading and writing). In between, the students are provided with

proper support in the forms of shared and guided reading, as well as interactive and

guided writing.

Each component serves a specific purpose within the framework, but they all

work together to develop students' literacy. The following are examples of why each

component is so valuable: *Reading aloud* demonstrates reading for a purpose,

develops story sense, makes complex ideas available to children, and establishes and

known text base. *Shared reading* explicitly demonstrates early strategies and behaviors, gives opportunities for participation, builds a community of readers, and demonstrates the reading process. *Guided reading* provides exposure to a wide range and variety of texts, challenges readers, provides opportunities for strategy and behavior use, and allows for teacher support. *Independent reading* allows students to apply their reading strategies and behaviors independently, creates sustained reading opportunities, challenges the reader, and builds confidence. *Shared writing* demonstrates how writing works, draws attention to letters, sounds, words, and other print features, and creates resources for the classroom. *Interactive writing* exposes students to concepts of print, strategy used, how words work, experiences constructing print, and increases spelling knowledge. *Guided writing* helps students to learn to be writers, develop their writing voice, has students write for various purposes, and builds the ability to write words and use punctuation. *Independent writing* provides students with the opportunity to produce text independently, increases their writing ability, and fosters creativity (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). *Word work* provides students with an opportunity to learn both the rules and principles of both phonics and spelling (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Each component has a purpose behind it that is tied to how students develop as readers, writers, listeners, and speakers.

A balanced literacy approach relies on the theoretical principles of Vygotsky. Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) zone of proximal development is the distance between what a child can do on his or her own and what he or she can do with adult guidance or

collaboration with a more capable other (Soderman, Gregory, and McCarty, 2005). This fits in with perfectly with the concept of instructional level and the philosophy of a balanced literacy framework. Teachers in the framework are working with each student to guide them as they increase what they can do independently.

Wood and Middleton (1975) created the term "scaffolding" to describe the process of children involved in a collaborative effort with another peer or adult (Soderman, et al. 2005). During this collaboration, "the child stretches to understand the new information and...is helped by the teacher pointing out the connection between what the child already understands and the new skill or concept" (Soderman, et al. 2005, p. 11). As discussed previously, a balanced literacy framework is essentially a scaffold that develops students' literacy.

The social-constructivist theory also relates closely with balanced literacy. This theory states that children learn through guidance from others as well as practice while they are in a social setting. Students observe others and then incorporate the skills they observe into their own repertoires (Soderman, et al, 2005). The social context that is provided in a balanced literacy framework helps promote intellectual growth.

In her book Conversations: Strategies for Teaching, Learning, and Evaluating, Reggie Routman (2000) advocates the use of a balanced literacy approach. Routman believes that a balanced literacy approach allows for all the aspects of reading, writing, listening and speaking to receive proper emphasis. This balance allows for students to benefit from instruction that is based on their needs, interests, and

strengths. Routman warns, however, that "balanced" does not refer to a "skill-based hierarchy." Instead, "balance" refers to teachers balancing "instruction, skills, strategies, materials, and social and emotional support" (Routman, 2000, p. 13).

Balance literacy is now at the forefront of literacy instruction. Teachers, administrators and school districts are beginning to realize that each student learns in a way that is unique to him or her. A balanced literacy approach is necessary to meet the needs of each student. Balanced literacy aims to develop all the areas of literacy (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Teachers must be able to understand and effectively implement instructional strategies that focus on the main components of literacy. Bokowieki (2007) believes that teachers must be competent in the following areas: Standards and tests, word recognition, fluency, comprehension, learner diversity, and assessment (Bokowieki, 2007).

A balanced literacy approach, when implemented properly, can lead to literacy instruction in which the needs of each individual student are met. Wharton-MacDonald (1997) looked closely at the instructional literacy practices of teachers considered strong in the area of literacy. In this study, surveys were given to both regular and special education teachers who were considered highly effective literacy teachers by their supervisors. The main characteristic of the most effective literacy teachers was that of a balanced literacy approach. "These teachers used a great deal of scaffolded instruction, provided mini-lessons where needed, and enabled students to progress with just the right amount and level of assistance" (Wharton-MacDonald, 1997, p. 520). These features are that of a balanced literacy program. Teachers are

most effective when they meet the needs of their students through a balanced approach.

The characteristics of highly effective literacy teachers were further discussed by Pressely, Wharton-McDonald, and Allington (2002). In this study, first grade classrooms from five different US locations were observed to discover what types of instruction took place in highly effective classrooms. The most common characteristics discovered amongst the highly effective teachers consisted of "excellent classroom management based on positive reinforcement and cooperation; balanced teaching of skills, literature, and writing; scaffolding and matching of task demands to student competence; encouragement of student self-regulation; and strong cross-curricular connections" (Pressely, et al., 2002). This balance of reading skills, exposure to literature, writing opportunities, scaffolding, and student self-regulation are at the core of a balanced literacy program. Once again, highly effective literacy teachers were able to utilize a balanced literacy approach within the classroom.

In contrast to the characteristics of highly effective instruction (instruction that had students engaged in reading and writing activities), the least effective teachers in this study did not utilize a balanced literacy approach. Instead, the students in these classrooms were engaged in activities that did not focus on reading and writing and were often off-task. The students were not engaged or provided with adequate opportunities to participate in appropriate literacy activities (Pressley, et al, 2002)

Gay Su Pinnell (2006) outlined what a teacher can do to help his or her students learn to read effectively in her article, *Every Child a Reader: What One*

Teacher Can Do. Pinnell believed that teachers must do the following to develop

fluent, deep-thinking readers: read aloud daily, interact with students during text

discussions, create a reading workshop within the classroom, create a writing

workshop within the classroom, teach explicit word work lessons, surround the

instructions with oral language, and supporting the expansion of student thinking

(Pinnell, 2006). These instructional goals match up well with the previously outlined

components of a balanced literacy program.

      The above literature establishes the importance of balanced literacy. With

balanced literacy being such an important philosophy, it is imperative that everything

possible be done to ensure that the teachers in school D are successful in

implementing balanced literacy.

Professional Development

      As teachers work toward the implementation of a balanced literacy program,

they will be in need of support. This support will take shape through professional

development. A change to balanced literacy may require a change in a teacher's

philosophy, instruction, and assessment. These types of changes cannot be done

without proper professional development and support in place. Effective professional

development that caters to the needs of the teachers can help with the complex

process of change, specifically the implementation of a balanced literacy program.

Literacy instruction needs to shift away from programmed reading materials and

instead needs to be supported through the used of ongoing professional development

for effective instruction (Routman, 2000).

In order for teachers to implement a balanced literacy approach, they must be provided with professional development opportunities that instruct them on how and why to teach balanced literacy. Heydon, Hibbert, and Iannacci state that "to address the complexity of literacy, teacher education has, perhaps, never needed to be more dynamic and sophisticated" (2005, p. 313). Teachers must understand the philosophy behind balanced literacy, as well as have a firm grasp of its components.

Gerla, Gilliam, and Wright (2006) showed how an effective and intensive professional development model can positively impact literacy instruction. By working collaboratively with a local university, these researchers were able to create a professional development model that focused on literacy theory, practice, observation, and feedback. Teachers who participated in this new, thorough professional development model were able to see improvement in both their own literacy instruction abilities as well as the success of their students (Gerla, Gilliam, and Wright, 2006). Gerla, Gilliam, and Wright also point out how ineffective standard professional development can be. Too often, the focus of these "courses" is broad and overarching. Teachers become bored and uninterested, affecting the overall impact of the program. Within the professional development format outlined in this study, the individual needs of each teacher were attended to. This was most evident through the individual classroom observations and coaching as teachers implemented a balanced literacy program (Gerla, Gilliam, and Wright). Although this professional development model was put into action with the support of a local university, the lessons learned from this study can still apply to professional

development contained within a districted. Attention to teacher needs, combined with a comprehensive professional development plan should lead to the successful implementation of a balanced literacy program, with or without the help of a university.

The facilitators in Gerla, Gilliam, and Wright's (2006) used some specific practices in order to best support the participants. Initially the participants were instructed on a balanced literacy approach by an expert in the field. The teachers were then given a chance to implement what they had learned in their classrooms. During this time, the facilitators provided teaching demonstrations within the classrooms. The professional development was not a one time opportunity, but rather an ongoing experience. Further staff-development sessions were offered certain days after school. In addition, the facilitators returned on a bi-monthly basis to add further instruction (Gerla, et al., 2006). Ongoing support is indeed important if teachers are to be successful with balanced literacy throughout the school year and beyond.

When designing and planning for future professional development, the needs, concerns, and current understandings of each teacher must be taken into account. Ford and Opitz (2008) surveyed 1500 teachers concerning the implementation of guided reading, a large component of balanced literacy. The researchers analyzed the answers to the questionnaires in order to plan the next steps to be taken in guided reading implementation. Teacher responses highlighted future needs to be addressed through professional development. The next steps include: helping teachers develop a clear understanding of guided reading, connecting guided reading to the other facets

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of literacy, shifting educational focus from quantity to quality, helping teachers with text selection, and instructing teachers on how to integrate several forms of assessment (Ford and Opitz, 2008). By taking information from real teachers, the researchers will able to plan for specific, focused professional development.

The documented experiences of teachers also highlights the importance of appropriate professional development. Paez (2003) tells of her experiences implementing a balanced literacy program in her article, *Gimme That School Where Everything's Scripted!* In the article, Paez describes the positive impact her school's professional development offerings had on her ability to successful implement a balanced literacy program. In her study, Paez took notes about her own learning and instruction, as well as recorded the experiences shared from colleagues at two grade level meetings. Her findings led to several conclusions about the proper steps for implement a balanced literacy program. These steps included creating time for teacher collaboration, providing instructional demonstrations, offer professional development that focuses on the big ideas of balanced literacy, and the hiring of professional developers to work collaboratively with teachers. Paez also makes an important point that should not be overlooked. That point is that research has shown that effective professional development increases student achievement. Although the focus of professional development is often on the teachers, the increase in student achievement is the true goal of professional development.

Teacher needs were at the center of Paez's study. Each professional development session would open with a chance for teachers to ask questions and

share experiences. Topics for training would come from teacher discussions and the observations of other teachers. The question "What do you think?" was frequently asked throughout the training, again putting the focus back on the participants (Paez, 2003).

In 2002, Stein and D'Amico (2002) conducted a study on a district-wide balanced literacy initiative. The focus of the study was on the relationship between educational policy and practice. The researchers utilized nearly 100 classroom observations, reviews of the district's balanced literacy initiative documentation, and interviews with teachers, staff developers, and district leaders to determine the impact of the district's policy on classroom practices. The observations were video recorded and accompanied by field notes.

Stein and D'Amico (2002) concluded that the teachers benefited from a wide variety of professional development opportunities. These opportunities included workshops, inter-visitations, staff developer push-ins, a professional development lab, study groups, and grade-level group meetings. The researchers discovered that most of the professional development within this district was embedded in actual teaching atmospheres. The philosophy of the districts professional development was a change from the traditional professional development offerings that take place out of the classroom context. Teachers learning by teaching and working in educational settings paralleled the philosophy behind balanced literacy. This philosophy believes that students best learn to read and write by spending meaningful time reading and writing. The research concluded that educational policies that create meaningful

professional development opportunities help prepare teachers for the philosophical and physical implementation of a balanced literacy program.

It has been shown that effective professional development can have tremendous benefits for students and teachers. One problem that faces both teachers and those planning professional development is teacher motivation. In order for teachers to take a serious interest in professional development opportunities, they must feel as though it addresses their needs. Teacher perspectives should be taken into account when planning and carrying out professional development opportunities.

Hea-Jin Lee (2005) addressed the need to relate professional development to the needs of the teachers who will be taking advantage. In her study, Lee focused on the impact of professional development on the teaching of mathematics. In Lee's TNB (teacher needs based) model of professional development, the focus was on teacher understanding. Teacher interviews and surveys were used to determine teacher needs. This information was then combined with assessment data from the school districts studied. By combining these data sources, Lee's professional development model was able to address the needs presented from not only district-wide assessments, but those brought up by the teachers themselves (Lee, 2005).

Once the data were collected, the TNB model was used to create professional development opportunities. The TNB model was executed in the form of a year-long workshop about mathematics instruction. The focus of the meetings was derived from the information put forth by the teachers. Opportunities for sharing and reflection about current mathematics instruction took place at each meeting. The

teachers were able to ask questions, have discussions, and decide which aspects of the mathematics curriculum they wanted more information about (Lee, 2005).

Through engagement in a TNB model, the participants were able to clarify their beliefs and understandings about mathematics. The participants were able to discuss best teaching practices and determine how effective they were in meeting state and national mathematics standards (Lee, 2005). A community of learners was created in which the participants were both teachers and learners.

This model of professional development was successful because it included the teachers as participants, decision makers, and consumers. By taking into account what the teachers already knew, the professional development facilitators were able to maximize teacher learning time (Lee, 2005). The information presented was relevant and not redundant. Overall, the response from the participants was positive, something all professional development opportunities should aim to achieve.

Heydon, Hibbert, and Iannaci (2004) believed that teachers must be given guidance as they "deconstruct their own knowledge, beliefs, and practices, as well as those that surround them" (Heydon, Hibbert and Iannaci, 2004, p. 318). In order to give teachers guidance in these areas, professional development planners must first have a solid understanding or teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Focused professional development can address these topics as they relate to literacy instruction. Knowledge, beliefs, and individual and group practices will all be subject to change as a new literacy philosophy is implemented.

Professional development must no longer focus solely on the individual teacher and view them as merely a small part of the instructional system. Teachers are, however, the most important factor affecting student learner (Garmston, 2005). Despite that fact, "today we know that it is through collaborative efforts in schools that teachers' behaviors change" (Garmston, 2005, p. 5). Attempts for improvement, common curriculum, pedagogy, and common goals are successful through professional development opportunities that affect the behavior of entire groups of teachers. That is what school D will attempt to do as every teacher moves towards a balance literacy framework.

Each of these studies highlights the importance and undeniable impact of quality professional development. In order for balanced literacy to be successfully implemented in a school, teacher needs and competencies must be taken into account. Professional development offerings must be intensive and focused, while providing extended support and feedback. The above literature shows the positive effects of well planned professional development. These same results are desirable for school D. In order for that to happen, the data collected in this study must be taken into account when planning future support and professional development.

Methodology

The data collection and analysis methods used in this study attempted to help answer the following questions: To what extent do the teachers from school D understand the components of balanced literacy? What types of support and professional development have teachers from school D received and what are their perceptions of its effectiveness? What types of professional development and support would the teachers from school D like to have? And finally, what are the needs, concerns, questions, and challenges teachers from school D feel they face as they attempt to implement a balanced literacy program? All data was collected from the teachers at school D through the use of a two-part questionnaire and interviews. I developed and administered both data collection instruments.

Participants:

All participants were from school D within District F. School D is a suburban school in an upper middle class community in Western New York. The school offers grades K-2. The participants in this study were selected from all three grade levels. The participants represented a range of teaching experience, from first-year teachers to those who have taught in excess of thirty years. The participants were all Caucasian and the vast majority were female. This was due to the make up of the school. Only 3 of the 34 current K-2 teachers are male and the entire K-2 teaching staff consists of Caucasian teachers. Twelve of school D's teachers from grades K-2 completed the questionnaire. Sixteen of school D's teachers were interviewed. The

participants were selected based on the grade level they teach and the amount of experience they have as a teacher.

School D is a K-2 building that services approximately 700 students. There are thirty-four classroom teachers. The experience levels of the teachers ranges from first year teachers to teachers who have taught for over 30 years. The level of experience with balanced literacy varies greatly amongst these teachers. The level of implementation is different from each classroom to the next. Some teachers have been using the components of balanced literacy for a number of years, while others have little to no experience with balanced literacy. Every teacher has been told of the district's balanced literacy initiative and that its implementation is expected by the end of 2010.

As the co-facilitator of my school's Literacy Action Team, it is my responsibility to help my colleagues as they make the transition to a balanced literacy program. This research will be used by the Literacy Action Team. The selection of these participants will enable the Literacy Action Team to provide support going forward that meets the needs of the teachers it serves. The perspectives of this large sample of school D's teachers will provide myself and the Literacy Action Team with the necessary information to tailor our support to the needs of our school.

Instruments:

The first portion of the study consisted of a questionnaire about the components of balanced literacy and the types of professional development and support that the teachers have had and would like to have. (See Appendix A). The

questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part addressed the components of balanced literacy and the second part addressed professional development and support. The questionnaire was completed anonymously to ensure confidentiality. Only teacher grade level was indicated. The components included: read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, independent writing, and word work. Each teacher was given the chance to write down what he or she knows about each component. The last question asked each teacher to write about how the components of balanced literacy fit together. The goal of this portion of the questionnaire was to answer the first research question posed by this study; to what extent do the teachers of school D understand the components of balanced literacy?

The second portion of the questionnaire focused on professional development and support that the teachers have received and would like to receive. The teachers were asked to write about the professional development and support they have received concerning balanced literacy and how they perceived the effectiveness of these opportunities. The teachers were then asked to write down what types of professional development and support they would like to see in the future to help them implement balanced literacy. This portion of the questionnaire attempted to answer the second and third research questions; what types of support and professional development have teachers from school D received and what are their perceptions of its effectiveness? And what types of professional development and support would the teachers from school D like to have?

This instrument was valid under the assumption that each teacher has reported honestly. The questionnaires were anonymous, with the hope that the teachers will not be afraid to admit a less than solid understanding of a certain component. The teachers received a letter along with the questionnaire that stated that the purpose of the study was to gather information in order to provide future support for them as they make these changes. The assumption was that knowing this would also increase the validity of each teacher's answers.

This instrument was reliable within this school. If repeated, the belief is that the answers would be the same. Reliability is based on the assumption that the teachers have reported honestly about their perceptions and understandings. If given to the same population, the belief is that the responses would be extremely similar. This questionnaire would most likely not yield similar results if given to a different population or even if given to this population after future training. The results are specific to this population and to the level of professional development and support they have received at this point in time.

The second instrument in this study was a series of in-depth interview (See Appendix B). Sixteen teachers, representing each grade level, were interviewed about balanced literacy. The interviews consisted of the following questions, with follow-up questions asked as needed for further clarification. 1) What is your definition of balanced literacy? 2) How have you implemented balanced literacy into your classroom? 3) What challenges are you facing as you implement balanced literacy? 4) What concerns do you have about implementing balanced literacy? 5)

What questions do you have pertaining to balanced literacy, its implementation, and the future support plans for implementation? 6) How do you feel students best learn to read and write?

The interviews were conducted with the goal of answering the final research question: What are the needs, concerns, and challenges teachers from school D feel they face as they attempt to implement a balanced literacy program? This instrument should be considered both valid and reliable within school D. All the interviews were conducted and recorded by the same interviewer. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed by the interviewer. Answers came directly from the interviewees. The results of these interviews could be replicated if asked to the same teachers again prior to any new support, professional development, or experiences with balanced literacy.

Limitations

The data collected in this study was be specific to this population of teachers and should not be generalized to another population. The sample size of teacher interviewed was small. More interviews would have elicited more information, but a larger sample size is not practical due to time constraints. The results of this study only give an indication of teacher perspectives at this point in time. Future experiences and professional development opportunities may affect these perspectives. I am also a colleague of the participants. This may have affected participant responses during the data collection process. In contrast, being an insider

for this action research study helped me to have a better understanding of the participants' perspectives.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires were analyzed for themes and categories within the responses using the constant comparison methodology. These responses were then be coded to clarify the information. This method enabled me to gain a better perspective of the school-wide understanding of balance literacy and the overall preparedness of school D's teachers. I was able to find commonalities and gaps in the teachers' understanding of the balanced literacy components. I discovered what types of professional development most teachers have received, what types they felt were especially effective and those that were not. Furthermore, I find out which types of support the teachers would like to see in the future. The responses were used to help make professional development and support recommendations.

The interviews were analyzed for common themes among teacher implementation, challenges, concerns, and questions. Themes and categories were analyzed through the use of the constant comparison methodology and coded responses. This analysis served to create a clearer picture of the progress being made in the implementation of balanced literacy in school D and help to guide the focus of future support and professional development. Pressing concerns, questions, and challenges were also highlighted through the use of these methods.

The information from both data collection methods was taken into consideration as I made recommendations for future support around the

implementation of balanced literacy. The results from the questionnaire gave me insight into the specific components that need to be focused on, as well as the most effective means of professional development as outlined by the teachers. In addition to targeting component knowledge, the questions, concerns, and challenges presented by the teachers helped to guide my recommendations. The combination of the questionnaires and interviews provided me with information about balanced literacy in the school as a whole, as well as some very in-depth information about balanced literacy within individual classrooms. The recommendations I made addressed deficiencies in teacher understanding through support that is aligned with the responses of the participants. The recommendations aimed to build on what the teachers of school D already know about balanced literacy.

Findings

Instruments

The purpose of this study was to elicit responses from the teachers at school D in order to answer the following research questions: To what extent do the teachers from school D understand the components of balanced literacy? What types of support and professional development have teachers from school D received and what are their perceptions of its effectiveness? What types of professional development and support would the teachers from school D like to have? And finally, what are the needs, concerns, questions, and challenges teachers from school D feel they face as they attempt to implement a balanced literacy program? These questions were formulated to help make recommendations for future support and professional development within school D in order to best assist teachers as they work towards the implementation of a balanced literacy program.

I developed a questionnaire to address the first three research questions. The questionnaire was made up of two parts. Part one gave each participant a chance to write down his or her understanding of each component of balanced literacy (read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, independent writing, word work, and overall framework). Part one addressed the first research question: To what extent do the teachers from school D understand the components of balanced literacy?

Part two of the questionnaire asked the participants to answer questions pertaining to the types of support and professional development they had received

related to balanced literacy and what types of support and professional development they would like to see in the future. The questions were as follows: What types of professional development have you received concerning the implementation of balanced literacy? How effective to you feel these opportunities were? Please explain. What other support have you received concerning the implementation of balanced literacy? How effective to you feel this support has been? Please explain. What types of future professional development do you feel would best support you in the implementation of balanced literacy? Please explain. What other types of future support do you feel would best help you implement balanced literacy into your classroom? Please explain. Part two of the questionnaire addressed the second and third research questions: What types of support and professional development have teachers from school D received and what are their perceptions of its effectiveness? What types of professional development and support would the teachers from school D like to have?

The second data collection instrument I developed was a six-question interview. The interview questions were as follows: What is your definition of balanced literacy? How have you implemented balanced literacy into your classroom? What challenges are you facing as you implement balanced literacy? What concerns do you have about implementing balanced literacy? What questions do you have pertaining to the implementation of balanced literacy? How do you feel students best learn to read and write? The interviews addressed the final research

question: What are the needs, concerns, questions, and challenges teachers from

school D feel they face as they attempt to implement a balanced literacy program?

Questionnaire Part One

Part one of the questionnaire was filled out by 12 teachers at school D. The

data collected helped to answer the first research question, to what extent do the

teachers from school D understand the components of balanced literacy? To

complete part one of the questionnaire, each participant wrote down what he or she

understood each component to be and how the components all fit together. The

components of read aloud, independent reading, shared reading, and independent

writing were answered very similarly by all of the participants. Each participant

displayed an understanding of what each of these four components consist of. The

participants discussed read-alouds as an opportunity to model good reading and

thinking aloud. The idea of shared reading as a chance to read together was

expressed by three of the participants. The participants went most in-depth with their

descriptions of guided reading. All of the participants mentioned working with

students in small groups at appropriate reading levels. 10 of the 12 participants also

mentioned working on specific reading strategies within the guided reading groups.

There were not any mentions of assessment use within the guided reading groups.

There seemed to be some confusion among a few participants about the

differences between shared and interactive writing. Two participants chose not to

write down anything for the interactive writing portion. One participant simply wrote

down a question mark. The phrases "shared pen" and "writing together" appeared in

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a majority of the responses. Shared pen was defined by two of the participants as having both the teacher and students participate in the actual writing. The phrase "shared pen" was written under interactive writing by 6 of the participants. Students and teachers do indeed "share the pen" during interactive writing. The response "writing together" was written by participants under both shared and interactive writing. One participant listed different ways in which the students and teacher wrote together, including: on stories, poems, and morning message.

Responses varied for the component of guided writing. Nine of the responses made mention of a writing workshop. The concepts of mini-lessons and conferences also occurred quite often in the guided writing responses. Two of the participants mentioned working specifically with small groups, while one discussed one-on-one conferencing. Others made reference to whole group mini-lessons followed by independent practice.

Word work had consistent definitions with some slight variations. Phonics, spelling, and letter/sound relationships were all mentioned on more than half of the responses. Some of the participants went as far as to give a definition of phonics. One such definition was "word work builds students' understanding of phonics, the relationships between letters and sounds." Two teachers went on to discuss decoding and encoding as part of word work. Sight words or snap words were mentioned five times. Two of the participants only made reference to spelling on the word work section. Two of the participants made mention of the recently distributed phonics

continuums. One of these participants wrote "word work is the teaching of phonics skills that follow a certain pattern, similar to the new continuums we just received."

The biggest variance on part one of the questionnaire came from the last section, "how all 9 components fit together within a balanced literacy framework." Two participants left this section blank. Two others stated that a balanced literacy framework was simply fitting all of the components into the day. Others discussed fitting the components into both reading and writing workshops. One participant stated that a balanced literacy framework was created by striking a balance between reading and writing. Three participants believed that each component must be worked into every day. Finally, one participant stated that he or she believed that most of the teachers in school D were already using balanced literacy in some way or another.

Questionnaire Part Two

Part two of the questionnaire focused on professional development and support related to balanced literacy. The first question asked what types of professional development have you received concerning the implementation of balanced literacy. The answers to this question were numerous and varied greatly from participant to participant. Two professional development courses were common amongst the participants. These were running reading records training, and Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment kit training. Both courses were mandatory in 2008-2009 for all classroom teachers in the school district, grades K-5.

A Lucy Calkins writing workshop course was mentioned most out of all the professional development received by the participants, appearing on four of the questionnaires. The Daily 5 study group and "in-service in district" courses were the only other types of professional development mentioned by more than one participant. Both responses occurred twice.

Other types of professional development written down by the participants included courses about the Developmental Reading Assessment, 5 + 1 method for teaching writing, grade level meetings, visiting other schools, reading centers, and graduate work outside of the district. The responses given showed both types of professional development and topics that were covered. The participants did not, however, go into detail about which topics were presented through which professional development formats.

The second question asked the participants to tell how effective the professional development they had received had been. Eight of the participants responded to this question. One participant stated that the opportunities had been "great." Three stated that they had been effective overall. Four of the participants wrote down "fairly" to describe the effectiveness. Explanations for the effectiveness were not given by all of the participants. Of those who did give explanations, three of them stated that most of the professional development had been simply overviews of the topics without much continuation. One of these three suggested that "having follow-up or refresher courses would help to make the initial professional development more effective for me." One participant believed that the opportunities

were too time consuming to be effective, showing a contradiction between the teachers' perspectives.

Question three asked the participants to write down what other types of support had they received outside of standard professional development. Discussions and work with colleagues was the most common response, occurring four times. Two participants cited reading materials as their additional support. Other types of support mentioned once were a phonics continuum, grade level meetings, faculty meetings, observations of other teachers, the internet, and visiting other schools. Two questionnaires showed that the participants had received no additional support.

The fourth question asked the participants to tell about the effectiveness of these other types of support. Three of the four participants who mentioned colleagues as additional support stated that they found this support helpful. The two participants who cited reading resources as a means of support stated that that support was "helpful" and "ok," respectively. One of the participants who wrote down observing other teachers as a means of support also wrote that "seeing another teacher's instruction during guided reading groups was very helpful." Several of the participants listed types of support and a general comment about their effectiveness, but did not go into further detail, making it hard to connect the responses for these two questions. This section was left blank by five of the participants.

Question five asked the participants to tell what types of future professional development they felt would best support them in the implementation of balanced literacy and to explain their answers. On this question there were no two answers that

matched. The ideas for future professional development were as follows: repeating previous workshops, visiting other schools, observing other classrooms, an overview of the district's plans, informational videos, visits by experts, hands on workshops, an outline of the "goals" of balanced literacy, a course on implementing writing into the classroom, word work, and a course with reminders of how each component is defined and what it looks like within the classroom. Few explanations were given, as most of the ideas were self-explanatory. The participant who wrote about repeating previous courses thought that it would give an opportunity to those "who did not have the time or the ability to attend last year." The participant who was interested in a course outlining the who and what of balanced literacy cited wanting to make sure he or she was "doing the right things in the classroom."

The sixth and final question of part two asked the participants to tell what other types of support would best help them with the implementation of balanced literacy. Again the participants were asked to explain their answers. Five of the twelve participants stated that they would need proper resources and materials for their classrooms. Reasons for this included having enough ideas to use in the classroom to having help moving forward with balanced literacy. Common planning time was the only other response to occur more than once, being cited by two participants. One gave "a chance for discussion about new initiatives" as the explanation. Observing others, ideas for implementing writing, and a true commitment from the district were also given as responses.

The data collected from these questionnaires shows a range of perspectives and opinions that exist at school D. The level of comfort is high for some teachers but low for others. The varied responses about both the understanding of balanced literacy and desire for a multitude of professional development offerings shows a need for district F and school D to create a comprehensive plan of support for teachers. Most teachers seem to feel a strong need for more support but are not quite sure of which type of support is most needed.

Interview Responses

I conducted the interviews individually with 16 teachers from school D. The interviewees consisted of four second grade teachers, seven first grade teachers, two special education teachers, and three kindergarten teachers. Each teacher was asked the same six questions, with follow up questions if deemed necessary for clarification or a more in-depth response.

The first question I posed to the 16 interviewees was, what is your definition of balanced literacy? Each of the teachers had some portions of their responses that were unique to them, but there were a few commonalities that appeared in several of the responses. Six of the participants discussed the concept of meeting students at their level, more specifically during reading and writing instruction. Examples of this included selecting appropriate texts, focused guided reading lessons, and flexible grouping. In addition, two other teachers stated that balanced literacy consisted of "meeting each child's needs" in reading and writing instruction. When pressed further, both connected this idea with students' instructional levels.

Four of the teachers' responses included a reference to reading, writing, listening, and speaking as balanced literacy. These four areas of literacy come directly from the district's English Language Arts curriculum. Two of these four teachers spoke of making sure to include all four areas each day.

Of the interviewees, four listed the nine components of balanced literacy addressed in the questionnaire. One kindergarten teacher discussed how "all of the components are used in a balance throughout the day." The teacher went on to discuss how the components help to "build students into readers by using all of the parts." A first grade teacher stated that these components can be taught in both small and large groups with a focus on each child's level. "Whole-group mini-lessons and small reading groups can work together to provided balanced instruction."

Four of the interviewees mentioned phonics and phonemic awareness as a specific part of balanced literacy. One of these teachers went into greater detail by discussing how she had utilized phonics instruction during both guided reading and independent work times. "I often work on phonics during reading group time. Later, those students will work on something similar during reading centers. This helps to reinforce the skills."

Several other topics were discussed by individual teachers as part of their definitions. These included topics such as the gradual release theory in which teachers introduce skills to students and then slowly give them more of the responsibility for their learning. A multi-sensory approach to literacy instruction was also mentioned as a way to appeal to different learning strengths. This method was

stated by both special education teachers. Teaching with a whole language and holistic approach to reading and writing were also mentioned. Participants equated using inventive spelling and using many forms of literacy with these approaches.

The second interview question asked the teachers, how have you implemented balanced literacy into your classroom? The first theme that emerged from the responses to this question was the presence of the balanced literacy components. At least five of the interviewees mentioned one or more of the following components: read aloud, guided reading, independent reading, guided writing or writing workshop, and word work. Shared writing, interactive writing, independent writing, and shared reading were all mentioned by at least two teachers. The teachers made reference to multiple instructional goals, including improving fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and creative writing.

Overall, guided reading was the component mentioned most often, with eight of the interviews discussing it somehow. Guided reading is the cornerstone of a balanced literacy program, but was only mentioned by half of the participants. This could be from a lack of understanding of what guided reading is, or what its role is in a balanced literacy approach. When talking about guided reading in their classrooms, several teachers referred to grouping "by ability" or "at the level" of the students. Upon elaboration, one teacher stated that "ability" meant "how well and at what level book they can read." When asked about grouping students by their "reading level," one participant replied that "by level" meant "grouping a student based on that student's instructional reading level which is found through assessments like the

DRA." One second-grade teacher stated that "I have used guided reading groups for a few years now and I like how it allows me to work more closely with the students. By trying to pick books that are appropriate I can see how well they progress as readers."

The teachers also described various means in which balanced literacy fits into their classrooms. Five teachers talked about the Daily Five reading/writing center management system. A first grade teacher said that "I started using the daily five last year. It allows me to incorporate reading, writing, and listening into our reading time every day. It helps the students to be very independent with these activities." The Lucy Calkin's writing workshop was also discussed by five of the teachers. One teacher stated that "the Lucy Calkin's writer's workshop has really given me a focus for my writing instruction. The mini-lessons and writing conferences help combine large and small group instruction."

The use of reading centers to engage students during small reading groups was a method mentioned to implement balanced literacy. Participants also discussed using both small and large groups for literacy instruction. For the writing portion of balanced literacy, mini-lessons with follow-ups or conferences were responses given by teachers as a way to facilitate student writing.

Question three asked the teachers, what challenges are you facing as you implement balanced literacy? Two challenges became very clear during the analysis of the responses to this question. Over half of the teachers interviewed commented

on the difficulty of reaching each child at his or her level and the lack of time to do all that has been asked of them.

When stating reaching each child at his or her level as a concern, the teachers interviewed mentioned many of the same reasons. Too many students was one issue voiced by teachers with one teacher saying that "too many students have made it difficult to focus on the needs of each individual child. The amount of assessment need to find out where each child is academically is concerning." A lack of additional classroom support was a repeated concern. One teacher felt that "we are being asked to do so much more work but have not really received any additional support in or our of the classroom." The third main reason that has made reading each student difficult was having strong classroom management. As teachers work to change their instruction, it is imperative that they adapt their classroom management routines to fit with small group instruction. These changes seem to have proved difficult thus far. Two of these teachers spoke to how it has been especially challenging to reach the highest of students with such little support and resources. A first grade teacher voiced this frustration by stating that "gifted education doesn't begin until second grade, but it seems like every year there are one or two students who read a much higher level than the rest of the class. It is difficult to put them in their own reading group, but I'm not sure how else to meet their needs. I don't think that they always benefit from the whole-group instruction."

Time was an issue that was stated by the majority of the interviewees. The reasons for a lack of time to implement a balanced literacy program were numerous.

The teachers gave explanations such as the amount of preparation, paperwork, lack of help, and the tremendous amount of time needed for individual assessments, specifically the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment. This concern was highlighted in a statement by a second grade teacher, "we are expected to make these changes in our classrooms, but this is combined with so many other new things. I think that the new assessments will be very time consuming and cut into our time in the classroom. Without any extra help or support, I'm not sure how everything will work."

Other responses pointed to a lack of full understanding of just what is expected of each teacher. A first grade teacher discussed how "we were told about balanced literacy and what it is made up of during superintendent's day, but we having been given to much guidance outside of that brief presentation." Teachers cited trouble "getting started" with balanced literacy or a "lack of training" in balanced literacy.

The answers for question four matched closely with those from question three. Question four asked, what concerns do you have about implementing balanced literacy? Two concerns emerged from the teachers' answers as the most prevalent. Concerns over time and the district's ability to follow through with initiatives were the chief concerns expressed by more than half of those interviewed.

Eight of the sixteen teachers interviewed cited time as a concern as they worked towards the implementation of balanced literacy. Time for assessments was the most pressing of the time concerns, as it was mentioned by five of these eight

teachers. The new Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment was mentioned multiple times. One teacher stated that the assessment expectations were "too much for a single teacher to complete." Another teacher worried about how much time would be taken away from actual literacy instruction to complete all of the required assessments. One teacher stated that "I understand the need for assessment in order to plan instruction. However, I feel as though this new assessment will be a huge undertaking. I haven't heard of any extra assessment time or in the classroom assistance for teachers while they are assessing. I am worried that it will interfere with my time with students." Also evident was the perceived need for help either in the classroom or with assessments, especially as teachers learn how to use them.

Planning was the second most common time concern. Three teachers mentioned how they would like more time to plan both on their own and with their colleagues. One teacher asked "how will we find the time to plan to meet each individual child's needs? I like the idea of common planning time and I hope that that will be beneficial in the upcoming year."

The second most evident concern outside of time was a fear that district F would not stick to this new initiative and carry through with plans to help teachers implement changes. Seven teachers discussed this concern. The biggest concern about district follow through seemed to stem from prior initiatives within the district being put into place only to be abandoned a few years later. One teacher stated that "the expectations for balanced literacy have not been clearly explained throughout the district." Other comments, such as "teachers not on the same page" and "what will be

asked of us" also pointed to a concern for district F's future plans. This concern seems troubling. If teachers do not feel as though everyone is "on the same page" at the beginning of an initiative, future changes may prove difficult. One teacher did, however, point out what seems like a more unified effort by stating that "at least the district seems to be willing to put some money and time into the literacy initiative. I know the whole district has had to complete literacy related workshops and I am assuming there will be more next year."

Meeting each child's needs was another concern that emerged from the answers to question four. Five teachers expressed a concern with their ability to properly meet each child at his or her individual reading and writing levels. "Often times my class has a wide range of abilities. I know I will do my best to work with each student at his or her level, but how do I know that I am really meeting all of their needs?" stated a first grade teacher. One teacher was concerned with meeting the needs of a class with a "very large gap in abilities."

Some concerns were elicited during the interviews, but were not emphasized to the extent of those already mentioned. Materials, both having too many and not enough were of concern to some. Some teachers felts as though they should be provided with more materials to assist them in changing to a balanced literacy approach. On the other hand, some teachers expressed concerns about having too many materials to read through and create. Having a scope and sequence for literacy instruction was a concern expressed during the interviews. Teachers felt that this would provide guidance for the upcoming changes in instruction. Some teachers

expressed a concern of not having a complete knowledge of all the components, while others wanted to be sure that the new initiatives are derived from researched best practices.

Question five asked what questions teachers had pertaining to the implementation of balanced literacy. The majority of the teachers' questions fell into three categories: knowledge about balanced literacy, future expectations, and changes that will be made.

Many teachers voiced questions that related to their understanding of balanced literacy. These questions included: What does it (balanced literacy) look like? What are the definitions of the components? How does phonics fit in? What does the research say? How do we assess students outside of Fountas and Pinnell? How do we get to each child? Meeting the needs of each child and knowledge of all of the components were the most frequent question topics. One teacher asked "how does balanced literacy help me to meet the needs of all of my students. Will I get that information from our new assessments or will I need to do more?" A less than complete understanding of the components was evident in the concerns of a few teachers. For example, one teacher expressed her concerns by saying that "I'm not sure that I am doing everything right. I have heard some explanations, but I'm not sure that I know everything I should about how to do all of the different part of this new initiative." Another teacher wondered if "I am doing some of the components but just call them something else."

As for future expectations, there were several questions that related to what is going to be required of each teacher. These questions included: What is expected of me? How will I get in all of the assessments? What will my students need for the following year? How will I stay up to date on changes? How can I improve? These questions highlight some concerns that will need to be addressed, but also point to teachers who are concerned about their ability to properly instruct their students. Questions about staying up to date and self-improvement point to dedicated teachers who seem willing to take on the new literacy initiative.

The final category, changes that will be made, had the most questions. These included: Will there be a scope and sequence? Will there be a new curriculum? How will the district ensure consistency? What support can we expect? Will there be additional classroom help? Will we get extra assessment time? How will the district provide us with the proper resources? Consistency was the topic most frequently asked about. One teacher said "I think a lot of us want to know how literacy is going to look across the district, not only with each school, but from school to school, grade to grade." Another wondered "will these changes bring a full commitment from the district? How will we as a building work together to make changes?"

The last interview question asked the teachers how they felt their students best learned to read and write. The concepts of differentiation, exposure to reading and writing, and modeling were the most frequent responses.

Eight teachers discussed differentiation in instruction. These teachers made statements such as "meeting each student at his or her level," "teaching to the

individual," "meeting individual needs," and "balanced literacy, or at their levels." These statements reflect the belief that altering instruction to fit the individual is the way in which students best learn to read and write.

Six of the sixteen interviews made reference to exposure to reading and writing in one way or another. Some used the term exposure, while others used the terms "practice," "opportunities for reading and writing," and "by reading and writing." A kindergarten teacher said "I believe that students learn to read and write by doing exactly that, reading and writing."

Modeling was stated by five of the teacher's interviewed as one way in which students best learn to read and write. The teachers indicated that they modeled strategies, behaviors, and new activities. A second grade teacher discussed modeling in more detail, stating that "I use modeling to show my students how something is done. The hope is that they pick up on how I showed them that I did a particular behavior or strategy. Then they can work to make it their own." Two teachers talked of having students model their new learning for one another.

Various other methods of learning were mentioned by no more than two teachers. These included: creating a comfortable environment for learning, utilizing hands-on activities, and a multi-sensory approach. Finding students' interests was mentioned as a way to increase student motivation for reading and writing. Using assessment to guide instruction, and "using balanced literacy" were also mentioned as way to teach students to read and write.

Interpretations

When looking at all of the data collected through parts one and two of the questionnaire and the interviews, certain themes begin to become evident. The first theme was that of meeting students at their level. This helps to answer my first research question, to what extent do the teachers from school D understand the components of balanced literacy? Meeting student needs is the main goal of balanced literacy and its components. This concept was prevalent in the definitions of guided reading. During the interviews, the idea of meeting students at their individual levels came up several times as the teachers gave their definitions of balanced literacy. This concept was also mentioned when teachers discussed how their students best learn to read and write.

In addition to being seen as a positive, the idea of meeting individual needs also posed as a challenge or concern to some. The large amount of reading groups, students at the high and low ends of the academic spectrum, and time for planning and assessing for each individual were all mentioned as concerns or challenges. This helped to answer research question four, what are the needs, concerns, questions, and challenges teachers from school D feel they face as they attempt to implement a balanced literacy program?

The data I collected in this study point to a concern from some teachers about the school district's ability to follow through with the balanced literacy initiative, further answering research question four. This was stated directly by a few teachers during the interview and written by others in part two of the questionnaire. It seems

as though some teachers feel as though the district has not always followed through on initiatives. One participant stated that, "It seems like we are always being asked to change to some new teaching method that is abandoned a few years later. How can we be sure that this won't happen again?" When pushed further as to what types of methods he or she was referring to, the participant mentioned "we have been given different math programs, reading series, and assessment tools. Now all of those are changing."

Continuing to address research question four, I discovered that time was also a very evident issue. When discussing both challenges and concerns during the interviews, several teachers spoke of a lack of time. The time needed for planning, instructing, and assessing all seemed to be key challenges or concerns. The teachers spoke most directly about the amount of assessment that has now been required. The new Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment seems to have teacher worried about the time it will take to complete an assessment for each child the required two times a year.

The data show that collectively, the participants do not have a clear understanding of what balanced literacy truly is. There is, as mentioned, an understanding that individual needs should be met, but I do not believe that it is completely understood how balanced literacy does this. First of all, the definitions of balanced literacy varied among the interview participants, showing that perhaps a concise definition has not been given by the district. This goes along with the feeling expressed earlier about everyone "not being on the same page." The participants also

represented teachers from various educational backgrounds and with varying levels of experience. These differences surely affected the definitions given by the participants. Furthermore, most of the questionnaire participants had some difficulty stating how all of the balanced literacy components fit together in a framework. A lack of understanding of how the components fit together may suggest a lack of understanding of the balanced literacy philosophy. Instead of seeing the components working together as an educational scaffold, it seems as though the majority of the participants think of the components as separate instructional methods.

Part two of the survey showed that the teachers feel a need for further professional development through a variety of means. Most of the teachers have had some support and professional development related to balanced literacy. The effectiveness of this professional development was hard to gauge for two reasons. The first reason was that many of the teachers' responses about effectiveness were vague and not tied specifically to particular professional development courses. Furthermore, most of the literacy based professional development was completed recently, thus not giving enough time to determine its true effectiveness. Teachers discuss working with peers favorably and continuing this seems like a natural step for future support. These themes helped to answer research question number two, what types of support and professional development have teachers from school D received and what are their perceptions of its effectiveness?

The fact that so many ideas for professional development and the nature of these ideas (i.e. refresher courses, courses explaining how and why) suggests that

perhaps some of the teachers are feeling unsure of themselves when it comes to teaching balanced literacy. There were many ideas given by teachers that helped to answer research question three, what types of professional development and support would the teachers from school D like to have?, but these ideas really spoke to the fact that most teachers see a real need for more support in one way or another. It seems as though district F has begun to offer support around balanced literacy, but not to the extent in which all teachers understand what is expected of them in the upcoming few years. It is evident that the majority of teachers feel the need for further support and professional development. This will not only improve the chances of success for the balanced literacy initiative within the classrooms, but show teachers that district F is prepared to follow through with this initiative. By reviewing the questions and concerns of teachers, I believe that the teachers of school F would also be interested in professional development that will inform them of what will be expected of them. It seems as though most teachers want to feel as though they thoroughly understand any changes that they will be making in the classroom.

The data collected through the questionnaire and interviews has helped provide the perspectives of several teachers within school D concerning balanced literacy. These perspectives should be used to plan future professional development and support to ensure the success of each teacher as they work toward implementing balanced literacy in each classroom.

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary and Conclusions

I used a two-part questionnaire and interviews in this study to gather

information concerning the perspectives of school D's teachers as they relate to the

implementation of a balanced literacy program. The data were collected in order to

answer the following research questions: To what extent do the teachers from school

D understand the components of balanced literacy? What types of support and

professional development have teachers from school D received and what are their

perceptions of its effectiveness? What types of professional development and support

would the teachers from school D like to have? And finally, what are the needs,

concerns, questions, and challenges teachers from school D feel they face as they

attempt to implement a balanced literacy program? The information that was

collected helped give insights into what school D's teachers thought about the

components of balanced literacy, how they felt about past and possible future

professional development and support, and the thoughts, comments, challenges,

concerns, and questions these teachers face as they work toward the implementation

of balanced literacy.

Part one of the questionnaire showed how 12 of school D's teachers defined

the nine components of balanced literacy and how those components fit together. The

findings from this instrument showed that although there was some consistency with

the responses, there were many different definitions for each component. This shows

that teachers are most likely working with their own definition of each component

rather than definitions put forth by the district, school, or in recent professional development. This shows a lack of consistency in the understanding of balanced literacy amongst school D's teachers.

The last section of part one asked each of the participants to write down how the components fit together. For the most part the explanations were either lacking or missing altogether. Most who responded considered the fit to be using each component each day. While that is an important concept, it does not truly get at how the components fit together in a literacy framework. None of the participants mentioned how the components work as a scaffold, or support for learners. Each component puts a different amount of emphasis on the level of teacher and student responsibility. When the components are used together in a balanced literacy framework, the instructional emphasis shifts from student to teacher (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). This is done to help the students move from what they can do with help to what they can do independently. It seems as though many of the teachers see each component as a separate instructional strategy as opposed to one part of a larger framework. Teachers spoke of "including" each component into their instruction as opposed to "integrating" the components together.

Part one of the questionnaire has led me to conclude that although most of the participants seem on the right track or making some progress with their understandings, there is not a consistent understanding of the components throughout school D. Some seem to have a solid understanding of balanced literacy while others are having trouble "getting started." Although the teachers are at different points in

their implementation, many of the ideas that were expressed point to a basic understanding and perhaps a willingness to improve that understanding. For the most part it seemed as though the teachers were aware of balanced literacy and its components and gave what they truly believed to be the definition of each component.

Part two of the questionnaire focused on the types of professional development and support the teachers had received and would like to receive in the future. When looking at the responses, one thing stood out immediately. The only two types of professional development that had been required of every teacher were the running reading record training and the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment training. While both of these means of assessment are valuable and can give teachers excellent information, they are but one part of a balanced literacy program. To this point it seems as though the district has focused primarily on the assessment piece of balanced literacy as opposed to the instructional piece. This is concerning, especially when it seems that not every teacher has a solid understanding of what balanced literacy is and what is expected of them. Having an understanding of how to assess students is valuable, but not nearly as valuable if those who are assessing do not fully understand how the information informs their instruction within a balanced literacy framework. In addition, teachers wanting refresher courses, courses that help with understandings and definitions, instruction on how to properly implement balanced literacy, and continued in school support. Previous research regarding the implementation of guided reading showed similar responses. Teachers

surveyed in 2008 study listed helping teachers develop a clear understanding of guided reading, connecting guided reading to the other facets of literacy, shifting educational focus from quantity to quality, helping teachers with text selection, and instructing teachers on how to integrate several forms of assessment as options for future support as they attempted to implement balanced literacy (Ford & Opitz, 2008). It seems as though teachers in most districts want to feel competent and well-supported as they take on new challenges. School D's teachers seem willing to change if they think they will be successful. It will be almost impossible to have full implementation of balanced literacy if there are teachers who feel as though they still need refreshers, definitions, and clarification about the components. These concerns about professional development must be taken into consideration if district F wants the balanced literacy initiative to be successful.

It seems as though the teachers at school D truly value their interactions with colleagues. This was mentioned by many of the participants as one of the main means of support, both currently and for the future. Discussions, study groups, and observing other teachers were discussed positively as something that the teachers would like to see more of in the future. Having a group of teachers who believe in their colleagues enough to seek them out for help will only serve to improve the chances of this new initiative's success. Teachers collaborating with teachers will create a community of teachers working towards the same goals. "Today we know that it is through collaborative efforts in schools that teachers' behaviors change" (Garmston, 2005, p. 5). If the behavior of an entire group of teachers can change

through collaboration and professional development, attempts for improvement, common curriculum, pedagogy, and common goals can be successful (Garmston, 2005)..

Many of the responses to the questionnaire and interview questions showed a certain level of anxiety amongst the teachers at school D. This anxiety seemed to stem primarily from concerns of time and follow through from the school district. The new Fountas and Pinnell assessment and all that is expected of the teachers with its use has led many to worry about having enough time. Teachers expressed concern over losing instructional time, needed extra help, and having too much to do with each student. It seems as though the implementation of this new assessment may be too much for teachers who are just beginning to make the transition to balanced literacy, along with everything else that has been expected of them, such as the new math initiative. As teachers are adjusting to a balanced literacy philosophy, there will be changes in planning and instruction. Most teachers will have to put more time into their planning and instruction as they learn how to implement each of the balanced literacy components. In order to help teachers balance the increase in their workload, ongoing and strong support must be in place. Research has shown that several steps must be taken to help teachers to take on the challenges they face as they make change. Teachers who are provided with initial support, support in and out of the classroom, and follow-up support, can be successful as they make instructional changes (Gerla, Gilliam, & Wright, 2006). This type of support will help teachers to make the most of their efforts.

Concern about follow through was expressed on both part two of the questionnaire and when the participants were responding to the questions and concerns portions of the interview. The responses to these questions show that not every teacher is clear on what the overall plan is for the balanced literacy initiative or what exactly will be expected of them. Also, some references were made to previous initiatives that were started but then abandoned after a few years. It is understandable that teachers might be weary of putting a great deal of effort into something they are not sure will be properly supported by the district. Questions about new curriculums, assessments, and expectations further demonstrate the need for a better understanding amongst the teachers of the district's goals. The district needs to share its vision for the balanced literacy initiative with the teachers who are expected to implement it. Communication and guidance from the district are imperative to the success of any initiative. If teachers are expected to deconstruct their beliefs, knowledge and pedagogy, they must be provided the guidance necessary to do so (Heydon, Hibbert & Iannaci, 2004).

Recommendations

What was encouraging from the data collected was that it is evident that school D does have teachers who are very knowledgeable about balanced literacy and have already have implemented parts, if not all of it into their classrooms. This, combined with what seems like a previous capacity to learn from each other, helps me to make the following recommendation for future support: Teachers with an understanding of balanced literacy should be used to help their colleagues, if they are

so inclined. This support can range from informal discussions to common planning time to having their classrooms observed.

Within school D, proper support must be offered to teachers as they make changes. Study groups, colleague observations, and discussions should serve to spread understanding and make the teachers of school D feel as though they have common understandings and goals. By working with each other, the teachers can draw on the experiences and knowledge of others while at the same time sharing their experiences and knowledge. When teachers can share their experiences, they can learn from each other. By encouraging collaboration, school D will create a community of teachers and learners, perhaps alleviating the shared concerns of many of the teachers. Collaboration has been shown to be an effective tool in helping teachers adjust to change. In a study by Paez (2003) teachers used collaboration as part of a successful professional development initiative. The teachers in this study were able to ask questions, have discussions, and share concerns as they attempted to implement balanced literacy. These opportunities helped to build a community of teacher learners that felt as though they work working together as opposed to in isolation (Paez, 2003).

My next recommendation is for the focus of future professional development. The district must provide opportunities for teachers to learn about balanced literacy and how it looks in the classroom setting. Courses about the components of and philosophy behind balanced literacy will help create a better understanding of what will be expected. Up to this point the focus of professional development within the

district has been almost completely on assessment. Assessment is indeed important, but only if teachers truly understand how to utilize the information Experts from both outside and inside the district, as well as refresher courses should be utilized to help put each teacher on the same page with his or her understanding. As previously mentioned, utilizing a wide variety of support options is beneficial for the implementation of a new initiative (Stein & D'Amico, 2002).

Adopting a teacher-need based system would help district F to tailor its support to the real needs of school D. Teacher-need based professional development has proven to be successful and would allow teacher to understand the direction district F is taking concerning literacy (Lee, 2005). District F should also consider utilizing a wide range of professional development opportunities. The teachers of school D had a variety of professional development and support recommendations and each should be at leas considered. It has been shown that teachers can benefit from a wide variety of professional development opportunities (Stein & D'Amico, 2002).

The fact that teachers question the district's commitment to the balanced literacy initiative is a concern. District F must continue to show its full support of the balanced literacy initiative. School D must find ways to offered continued support for teachers and provide them with clear expectations going forward. Support from both the district and school must be ongoing. Research has shown that continued professional development and support throughout the change process is needed for success. Districts that create and stick to a long term plan can be successful (Gerla,

Gilliam, & Wright, 2006). These steps will help show that this initiative is here to stay. A common definition of balanced literacy, put forth by the district, would be a good first step in creating this needed consistency.

Finally, the teachers in district D must be reassured that what is expected of them is manageable. As it stands, many of the teachers seemed overwhelmed by all that has been put on them, particularly the assessment piece. The new assessments will take a considerable larger amount of time to complete, without any extra time or help being provided. This, I fear, may lead to resentment of the changes that are taking place. Both school D and district F need to understand that implementing a balanced literacy framework is a complex process for teachers to undertake. Both school D and district F need to let teachers know that they are not alone as they struggle with expected changes. School D and district F must be flexible in creating more time and support for teachers if they are to meet these new expectations. This is an issue that must be looked at and worked through with the concerns of the teachers in mind. Teachers are going to need more time, more help, or less to be required of them in the area of assessment. When more and more is asked of teachers, there must be support in place to aid with the new responsibilities. Professional development and support opportunities must be ever-changing to meet the needs and demands of an entire teaching staff. Support cannot be too broad or general in nature, but rather focused and adapted to teacher needs (Gerla, Gilliam, & Wright, 2006). Adopting a balanced literacy program is a complicated task. In order to ensure teacher success with a new initiative, "teacher education has, perhaps, never needed to be more

dynamic and sophisticated" (Heydon, Hibbert, & Iannacci, 2005, p. 313).   If all of

the proposed changes, along with the types of forthcoming support are laid out for the

teachers of school D to see, I believe they will be more at ease with the new balanced

literacy initiative.

Overall I believe that both district F and school D have the right intentions.

By looking closely at the perspectives of the teachers, I have learned that more

attention must be paid to proposed changes. By adopting a teacher needs-based

perspective on professional development and support, district F and school D will be

able to better meet the needs of each individual teacher. Better efforts must be made

to ensure the teachers understandings of not only the balanced literacy framework,

but about what will be expected of them. If changes are made without haste and the

support provided by the district is consistent, I believe that the implementation of a

balanced literacy framework can and will be successful.

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Balanced Literacy Questionnaire, Part 1

Grade _____

Please take some time to consider each component of balanced literacy listed below. In the space provided, please write down what you know about each component. Write as much or as little as you feel comfortable writing. This questionnaire will be anonymous.

Read-aloud:

Shared Reading:

Guided Reading:

Independent Reading:

Word Work:

Shared Writing:

Interactive Writing:

Guided Writing:

Independent Writing:

How all 9 components fit together within a balanced literacy framework:

Part 2

What types of professional development have you received concerning the implementation of balanced literacy?

How effective to you feel these opportunities were? Please explain.

What other support have you received concerning the implementation of balanced literacy?

How effective to you feel this support has been? Please explain.

What types of future professional development do you feel would best support you in the implementation of balanced literacy? Please explain.

What other types of future support do you feel would best help you implement balanced literacy into your classroom? Please explain.

Appendix B

Balanced Literacy Interview

1) What is your definition of balanced literacy?

2) How have your implemented balanced literacy into your classroom?

3) What challenges are you facing as you implement balanced literacy?

4) What concerns do you have about implementing balanced literacy?

5) What questions do you have pertaining to the implementation of balanced literacy?

6) How do you feel students best learn to read and write?