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"I'm Just a Middleman": A Phenomenological Study of Specialized Literacy Professionals' Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**“I’M JUST A MIDDLEMAN”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SPECIALIZED
LITERACY PROFESSIONALS’ EXPERIENCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

by

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ABSTRACT

“I’M JUST A MIDDLEMAN”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SPECIALIZED LITERACY PROFESSIONALS’ EXPERIENCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Michelle L. Arnold
Old Dominion University, 2021
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Specialized literacy professionals (SLPs) are an integral part of schools, serving as interventionists, coaches, coordinators, and more. They are called on to guide reading and writing in their schools, helping to build academic success for students. However, these individuals are asked to do so much in schools that they have difficulty meeting the expectations set for them. The International Literacy Association has spent decades creating and revising standards for literacy professionals helping to delineate roles for SLPs so that they have set responsibilities that they can focus on. Despite these efforts, SLPs continue to serve a multiplicity of roles. During the COVID-19 pandemic this was exacerbated as SLPs took on more roles and responsibilities than they have in the past. Further, research has failed to dig deeply into how SLPs perceive their role and their identity in schools. To help move SLPs toward the standards set forth by the International Literacy Association, we must first work to understand their current experiences.

This phenomenology investigated the lived experiences of SLPs working in elementary school settings during the COVID-19 pandemic using dialogical self theory. Dialogical self theory acknowledges that individuals take on multiple positions in their lives and seeks to understand how those positions are negotiated within the self. Nine SLPs working throughout the United States participated in this study. Each participant completed an entry survey, two

individual interviews, and six participants participated in focus group interviews. Data were analyzed using the guidelines set forth by Moustakas (1994). Results revealed that all participants had a professional and personal identity that they attempted to separate; they also used coping strategies to navigate their positions within their identities. All participants' experiences were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic because of the changes it created in their personal and professional identities and the positions within them. Some participants also experienced power differences and were influenced by the reading wars. A few participants' experiences were influenced by taking on a new role during a pandemic. Findings from this study can be used to inform practice in elementary schools and SLP preparation programs in institutions of higher education.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

To Ellie who licked my tears.

To my children who were born out of this process.

To my parents who have always supported my educational efforts.

And to my husband who stood by me through the good and the bad, the ups and the downs.

Thank you all. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“...although you may be hired for a position with the title reading/literacy specialist, you may be asked to spend some of your time serving as a coach, leading a data analysis team, or facilitating professional learning activities. You may indeed wear multiple hats!” (Bean & Kern, 2017, p.620).

Reading specialists have existed in schools for over 60 years. During that time, the job of the reading specialist has shifted greatly. In fact, reading specialists have taken on so many different roles and responsibilities that their job has now been broken into a number of different job titles including interventionist, teacher, specialist, coach, and coordinator. In order to encompass the various different titles and the multiple roles these individuals take on, they are collectively known as specialized literacy professionals (SLPs).

Beginning in the 1960s, the International Literacy Association (ILA) set forth standards to outline the roles, responsibilities, and preparations needed to be an SLP (Robinson, 1967). As time progressed, so did the standards. The latest version was put forth by ILA in 2017 (ILA, 2017). According to the latest version of the standards, SLPs included reading/literacy specialists, literacy coaches, and literacy coordinators/supervisors. Several published articles have focused on what the standards meant for SLPs and how they informed literacy practice (Bean & Kern, 2017; Kern et al., 2018). However, research has shown that while the standards clearly delineated the roles of different SLPs, this was not the reality in schools (Pletcher et al., 2018). Many SLPs continue to serve multiple roles, sometimes neglecting one role to fulfill

another (Pletcher et al., 2018). Further, research has shown that many of today's SLPs do not hold any type of reading specialist certification (Bean et al., 2015). More research is needed to understand the current roles and responsibilities of SLPs and how they may or may not align with the standards set forth for the preparation of literacy professionals.

Education and the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2019, the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19 swept the globe, disrupting life and education. The resulting pandemic disrupted the lives of students and educators, closing school buildings and, in many cases, shifting education to virtual platforms. Many governments “played catch-up to the exponential spread of COVID-19” leaving little time to prepare for the shift to virtual learning (Daniel, 2020, “Preparations” section). Students, parents, and educators were all living in uncertain times. As the pandemic progressed and vaccinations increased, schools attempted to return to in person instruction, some operated in a hybrid capacity (both in person and virtual learning, simultaneously), and some remained completely virtual. Each day brought new challenges and uncertainties.

Research on the COVID-19 pandemic and education is only just beginning, and little exists to help us understand its impact at this time. One such study out of the University of Copenhagen found that the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced inequality in families' learning environments, especially when looking at access to print and digital texts (Jæger & Blaabæk, 2020). Another study currently underway at Yale University is working to measure “coronavirus slide” (Hathaway, 2020). “Summer slide” is a well-studied area that gauges the loss of reading skills among kindergarteners through second graders during the time away from school that occurs during the summertime (Alexander et al., 2016). Similarly, and out of a fear of prolonged

loss of instruction, researchers at Yale have been measuring the loss of reading skills between pre-pandemic levels and post-pandemic levels (Hathaway, 2020).

As more research emerges, we are likely to see some parallels to shadow education. Shadow education refers to informal educational programs and opportunities that remediate or support formal schooling such as private tutoring (Gorski, 2013). These opportunities come at a cost that some families cannot afford, furthering gaps in opportunity and achievement between different groups of students (Gorski, 2013). In schools, it is often the job of an SLP to support students struggling with reading or to coach teachers in meeting these students' needs. Moreover, many SLPs support family literacy and help increase access to text and literacy strategies at home. How does this look during a pandemic where many SLPs may not see students or teachers in person?

While research on education and the COVID-19 pandemic is still in the early stages, several other forms of publications emerged throughout the pandemic to help educators using what was already known about best practice and virtual learning. Online education groups pushed out support for educators in the forms of blogs, podcasts, Facebook Live sessions, Twitter chats, and more. The same was true for SLPs, particularly those serving as coaches.

Because the primary focus of literacy coaches was supporting teachers, it may have been easier for them to adapt education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether working from home or a school building, literacy coaches could continue supporting teachers. In school buildings, literacy coaches could practice social distancing and good hygiene to continue working with teachers in the same ways they have in the past. When working from home or with teachers working from home, literacy coaches could adapt using technology. These SLPs were able to use virtual platforms such as Google Meet or Zoom to have coaching conversations and use

collaborative documents in platforms such as Google Drive to create shared lesson plans and documents (Affinito, 2019, 2020). Coaches could even model instructional methods for teachers by logging into the same virtual platform as a teacher and their class.

Adapting to the changes the pandemic has created for education and for life in general may have been more difficult for SLPs who were new to their role or school or who have new teachers at their school(s). Successful coaching is built on trusting relationships with teachers, but the pandemic offered new challenges to building relationships. The quick check-in in the teacher's lounge or morning coffee with colleagues that literacy coaches have used to build relationships may have no longer been possible. During the pandemic, Barkley (2020) recommended focusing on care, vulnerability, and trust in coaching relationships. Literacy coaches needed to find ways to show teachers that they cared, accept the vulnerability of themselves and of others, and trust that everyone was doing their best (Barkley, 2020). This could be accomplished by making sure that coaches were doing more asking and listening than telling (Barkley, 2020); this emphasized support and offered an outlet for teachers to share what they were feeling and thinking. This also modeled for teachers how to approach students during this time of forced change (Barkley, 2020).

In addition to finding new ways to do the same job, media outlets were also capturing another issue many educators were facing during the pandemic: being both parent and teacher while working from home (Corey, 2020; Saslow, 2020). News stories were documenting the stress and difficulties teachers with school-aged children were having while attempting virtual learning. They were trying to meet the needs of their children and their students simultaneously. Moreover, some educators were beginning to send their own children back into school buildings while they continued to work from home or vice versa. Most likely, SLPs shared this same

struggle. While educators with children never gave up their role as parents, even when they would leave for work, the COVID-19 pandemic brought what was once separate, together, melding home and work in new ways. For educators who were not parents or whose children were grown, they may have still faced the dilemma of learning to balance personal and professional roles in new ways and in new contexts.

Statement of the Problem

ILA has spent over 50 years working to outline the roles and responsibilities of SLPs, continually refining standards for literacy professionals in recognition of the vital work they carry out in schools aiding students, staff, administrators, families, and community members (Kern, 2011). This work was put forth by literacy experts across the United States, focusing on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for SLPs to be effective (ILA, 2017). Further, the standards were built upon evidence-based practices and contemporary research (ILA, 2017) and were intended to guide the preparation of literacy professionals and their work in schools.

Despite the extensive work of the ILA, research has shown that SLPs do not always have distinct roles as outlined by the standards (Bean et al., 2015; Pletcher et al., 2018; Selvaggi, 2014). In addition to taking on traditional literacy tasks such as providing reading intervention or coaching teachers on literacy strategies, they have often found themselves handling managerial tasks, substituting for classroom teachers, attending meetings, or presenting data (Bean et al., 2003; Bean & Kern, 2017; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). SLPs have been asked to take on multiple roles simultaneously and yet little research exists exploring the experiences of these SLPs. A majority of recent research in this area has focused on what the role of an SLP should be and not what it actually is. Except for a few studies of literacy coaches (Lynch and Ferguson, 2010; Rainville & Jones, 2008), research has failed to dig deeply into how SLPs perceive their role and

their identity in schools. With the COVID-19 pandemic influencing the way education has taken place for over a year, it is imperative to understand the experiences of SLPs and how the pandemic has influenced their work as SLPs and their identities.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how SLPs, including reading/literacy specialists, coaches, interventionists, and coordinators experienced their role in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and how that influenced their professional identities. To guide this study, I focused on the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of SLPs' serving elementary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic? and
2. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way SLPs experience their work and identities?

Theoretical Framework

Dialogical self theory (DST) acknowledges that individuals can take on multiple roles that can work with or against one another (Hermans, 2001). Further, it recognizes that as society changes, the self also changes. Because SLPs serve a multiplicity of roles and have been working through frequent changes in safety and health protocols brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, DST was a fitting way to think about their experiences and identities. This theory has been used to study teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), but has not been applied to SLPs and therefore offers a new perspective to the existing literature.

Methods

To explore how SLPs, including reading/literacy specialists, coaches, interventionists, and coordinators experienced their work in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and how

that influenced their identities, I conducted a phenomenological research study guided by the work of Moustakas (1994). Phenomenology seeks to find the essence of the lived experiences of individuals sharing in a common phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Further, phenomenology is not concerned with facts, but seeks to determine meanings (Moustakas, 1994). This is something currently missing from the literature on SLPs. Much of the research on SLPs has presented facts about what the role is and should be; this study sought to understand what it meant to be an SLP through the SLPs themselves.

Participants

Participants were recruited for the study through convenience and purposeful sampling (McMillan, 2008). According to a national survey, the majority of SLPs work in an elementary setting (Bean et al., 2015); therefore, participants had to work in an elementary setting. Further, participants must have served as an SLP during the time of the study as SLPs who served in the position at the start of the pandemic but have since left may have different experiences than those still actively serving in the position. In the end, nine participants took part in the study.

Researcher Positionality

To bracket (Moustakas, 1994) myself so that I may view the data with fresh eyes, I wrote an initial *Epoche* statement. An *Epoche* statement is when a researcher takes time to describe their own experiences with the phenomenon of study so they may attempt to set aside their experiences and better understand the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). In the *Epoche* statement, I explored my own experiences as an SLP and my identity both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing myself to identify my assumptions and biases related to the phenomenon of study and attempt to bracket them so they did not influence my interpretation of the data.

Data Sources

Once the participants were selected, they participated in two individual, semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview. The goal of the first interview was to focus participants' attention on the phenomenon of study. During the second interview, I invited participants to share artifacts that helped to illuminate their experiences of their work and of themselves. The goal of the second interview was to understand the multiple roles of each SLP and how they navigated those roles. The last interview was a focus group interview. The purpose of the focus group was to learn information on the attitudes and opinions of participants in the context of social interaction (Dilshad & Latif, 2013)

Data Analysis

After completing data collection, I conducted a phenomenological analysis including the acts of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). These acts allowed me to identify invariant and structural themes and develop them into a synthesis that sought to capture the essence of the experiences of SLPs during the COVID-19 pandemic (Moustakas, 1994).

Study Significance

This study has the potential to impact SLPs day to day lives by creating an understanding of what their work entails and how it influences their identities. From this, administrators and school divisions may also begin to understand the importance of the work outlined by ILA in their standards for the preparation of literacy professionals (ILA, 2017) and why research has suggested that this work be used to help delineate the work of different literacy professionals such as reading/literacy specialists, coaches, interventionists, and coordinators. Further, this study also has the potential to impact preparation programs for SLPs. By understanding how

SLPs experienced their multiple roles, preparation programs may be able to better prepare future SLPs for the realities of their work.

In addition to these practical implications, I also hope to offer new understandings about how individuals navigate multiple identities using DST (Hermans, 2001), a previously unused theory in research on SLPs. This will provide researchers with a new way of looking at the work and experiences of SLPs that may then extend with their own research.

Limitations

While I outline how I plan to ensure rigor in this study within chapter three, this study was not without limitations. One limitation was the use of self-selection due to the sampling method used in the study. Self-selection refers to the ability of SLPs to decide whether to participate in the study. Because of their ability to self-select, the group that chose to participate in the study may not be like the group that opted out, thus creating a biased look at the phenomenon (McMillan, 2008). Another limitation was the loss of one participant and possible deterrence of other participants due to the unique circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, only six of the nine participants took part in the focus group. While it is important to keep in mind that this was a qualitative study that did not seek to generalize findings, but rather sought to provide rich, thick descriptions from a particular group that might help others to understand this set of experiences, these limitations may have impacted the understandings brought about by this study.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 introduced and defined SLPs, highlighting their roles and schools and a brief look at research on SLPs. Next, this chapter discussed the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, exploring how emerging research on education and the pandemic may influence

SLPs. This chapter also pointed to a gap in the literature: research on SLPs has focused heavily on what the profession should be and not what it is. I laid out two research questions that I used to explore this gap in the research with the intent of understanding the experiences of SLPs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in hopes that this knowledge may act as a bridge to helping the educational and research community get SLPs to the roles outlined by the ILA standards.

In the chapters that follow, I expand upon the points outlined in this chapter. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on SLPs including the evolution of SLPs, the evolution of reading research and practice, a look at the roles of reading specialists and literacy coaches, and a summary of research on how SLPs perceive their own work. Chapter 3 demonstrates the methods used to answer the research questions presented here in Chapter 1. It includes a step-by-step guide to the phenomenological methodology used in this study including participant selection and recruitment, data generation, data analysis, trustworthiness, limitations, implications, and study significance. Chapter 4 presents the study results, highlighting key themes that emerged from participant interviews and focus groups along with a general summary and narrative through the lens of DST, the theoretical framework used in the study. Finally, Chapter 5 offers a discussion of how the study results may be situated within existing literature to answer the research questions, limitations of the study, implications of the study, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“A literacy professional is someone who can serve two roles: that of a technical expert for other teachers, and that of a provider of intervention services for students. A literacy professional should be well versed in reading research and theory, and they should be able to provide advice to teachers on how to deliver effective reading instruction. They can do this through observations and feedback, coaching, workshops, PLCs, teacher training, etc. Additionally, literacy professionals can also provide direct instruction to students through push-in or pull-out services. They can use their extensive repertoire of pedagogical techniques to provide Tier II or III intervention to students who are struggling in Tier I instruction.” (Candy, Participant)

In chapter 1 I provided a brief overview of this study including its purpose, research questions, supporting literature, and methodology. In Chapter 2, I situate this study within the existing literature on SLPs including how SLPs and reading research and practice have evolved over time, the multiple roles SLPs take on and the certification it requires, and SLPs’ self-perceptions.

According to the International Literacy Association’s (ILA) literacy glossary, literacy is “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context” (ILA, 2020). This definition stands in stark contrast to the original emphasis on the ability to read and write and recognized that literacies are plural, varying across cultures, circumstances, classes, and more. Due to the

complex nature of literacy, specialized literacy professionals are an integral part of education. The term specialized literacy professional (SLP) came from ILA and was found throughout research and literacy professionals (Bean et al., 2015; Bean & Kern, 2017). They defined SLPs as reading or literacy specialists, literacy coaches, and literacy coordinators and supervisors (Bean & Kern, 2017).

The Evolution of Specialized Literacy Professionals

The earliest reading specialists emerged in the 1930s (Robinson, 1967). These professionals were charged with improving the teaching of reading, but there were few of them and they were mostly in large cities (Kern, 2011). By the 1950s, the number of reading specialists began to increase with the creation of the informal reading inventory and cloze reading procedure (Kern, 2011); reading specialists were charged with carrying out these procedures. Still, Robinson (1967) noted that the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists were extremely varied, they did not have any specialized training in reading, and they were primarily found in elementary settings.

In 1965, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* was signed into law (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* established Title I funding for compensatory reading education to improve the reading achievement in schools serving students living in poverty (Dole, 2004). Reading specialists were often used as Title I teachers to serve as interventionists, supporting struggling readers through a pullout model (Dole, 2004). The pullout model was disconnected from the work of the classroom, with little interaction occurring between the interventionist and classroom teacher (Dole, 2004). Because of this, the program showed little success (Allington & Walmsley, 1995).

Around the same time as the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, the International Reading Association (IRA) introduced minimum standards for the professional training of reading specialists (Robinson, 1967). These standards outlined five roles for reading professionals, that of the reading teacher, reading consultant, reading coordinator, reading clinician, and college instructor. These standards were designed to help guide the work of reading professionals in schools and make them more effective. By the 1970s, the IRA standards were revised to suggest that teachers should have course requirements and credentials to serve as reading specialists (Kern, 2011).

In the 1980s, Reading Recovery began to influence SLPs. Reading Recovery was a one-to-one intervention for low-achieving first grade students (Kern, 2011). Many reading specialists were trained to be Reading Recovery teachers, thus pushing most reading specialists into lower elementary grades (Kern, 2011). Reading Recovery kept reading specialists in the role of interventionist, separating them from work with teachers and classrooms. Around the same time as Reading Recovery, IRA partnered with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education to review reading specialist teacher education programs and the certification process (Kern, 2011). This promoted increased training and preparation for SLPs, but it was not until a nationwide emphasis on standardized test scores and the achievement gap that the qualifications of teachers and SLPs became a focus of U.S. education.

Title I was reissued as a part of the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (Dole, 2004). The goal of ESEA of 2000 was to improve reading and academic achievement for all students while providing resources to districts and schools with large numbers of students living in poverty (Dole, 2004). The reauthorization brought about a focus on the classroom, requiring all teachers be highly qualified to teach reading, reading instructional

strategies and programs be research-based, and informal assessment practices that effectively inform instruction (Dole, 2004). While many reading specialists continued to provide pullout instruction for struggling readers, others found themselves in a unique position to focus on the classroom and support teachers. These reading specialists shifted their role to that of a coach, mentoring teachers by providing them with support as they worked to implement research-based instruction in the classroom.

In 2002, ESEA was reauthorized as No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). No Child Left Behind introduced Reading First, a federally funded program for kindergarten through third grade (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Reading First provided funds for the implementation of scientifically based reading research (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). To support the implementation of such research, Reading First also provided funds for hiring coaches to assist teachers (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). A case study exploring the experiences of Reading First coaches found that they played two major roles. First, Reading First coaches played an educative role by supporting teachers in learning new instructional approaches and how to integrate them in the classroom (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). This was accomplished through assisting with instructional planning, organizing the reading block, rearranging the classroom environment to implement reading centers, and assisting with analyzing data and generating next steps for instruction. Second, they played a political role by “pressuring, persuading, and at times buffering them [teachers] from Reading First” (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012, p.13). Coaches negotiated power relations with teachers as they found ways to pressure and persuade teachers to apply some aspects of Reading First mandates while circumventing others (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). However, Reading First coaches did not spend all of their time assisting teachers. Research has shown that these coaches divided their time between

multiple tasks including, but not limited to, working with teachers, planning for instruction, planning for coaching, observing, school-related tasks (e.g., meetings with administrators or other personnel), management of Reading First administrative work (e.g., entering assessment data, writing reports, etc.), and working with students (Bean et al., 2010).

As reading specialists began taking on different roles in schools, the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) created a need to understand and define the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). RTI was a three-tiered problem-solving approach designed to address the learning needs of all students by identifying and evaluating instructional strategies (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; ILA, 2020) created because of a concern over the number of students identified as needing special education. The first tier was primary instruction that happened in the classroom, the second tier was targeted or supplemental instruction, and the third tier was intensive instruction. The second and third tiers involved specialized personnel such as reading specialists, special education teachers, speech and language teachers, etc. (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). In order to better understand how these different specialized personnel could function to meet the needs of students and teachers, the roles of reading specialist and literacy coach became separated. The literacy coach had a greater emphasis on classroom instruction or Tier 1 instruction, while the reading specialist was more focused on Tiers 2 and 3 by providing intervention for selected students.

In 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 and continued to influence SLPs (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The *Every Student Succeeds Act* called for blended learning, comprehensive literacy instruction, evidence-based strategies, a multitier system of support, professional development, schools'

leaders, and universal design for learning (ILA, 2016). The LEARN Program was a component of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* that provided competitive grants to states for high-needs schools and students to help fill “gaps in literacy proficiency and inequities in student access to effective teachers of literacy” (ILA, 2016, p.28). The program included mandatory funding for literacy coaches and specialists in K-5 schools along with training programs for the coaches and specialists (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This funding of literacy coaches and specialists along with an emphasis on high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction demonstrated a continued recognition of the valuable role literacy professionals played in schools.

The Evolution of Reading Research and Practice

To better understand SLPs, it is also necessary to consider the evolution of reading research and practice. According to Alexander and Fox (2004), “a historical perspective broadens the vista on reading and adds a critical dimension to the analysis of present-day events and issues” (p.33); this historical perspective aids in understanding the current experiences of SLPs as they are active members in the implementation, practice, and research in the field of reading and literacy.

In Alexander and Fox’s (2004) work, they explored five eras in reading research and practice: (1) conditioned learning, 1950-1965; (2) natural learning, 1966-1975; (3) information processing, 1976-1985; (4) sociocultural learning, 1986-1995; and (5) engaged learning, 1996-present. These eras served as an overall framework to help understand major shifts in reading research and practice. In addition to these eras, one must also understand times of crisis that have influenced literacy (MacGillivray, 2010) and the reading wars, a debate between an emphasis on phonics instruction or whole language that have influenced research and practice overtime (Pearson, 2004). The shifts in practice brought about by changing political, social, and

research contexts have frequently been referred to by practitioners as “the swinging of the pendulum” (MacGillivray, 2010, p. 159).

The first era presented by Alexander and Fox (2004) was that of conditioned learning. This era was influenced by a crisis, World War II, the subsequent baby boom, and Sputnik (MacGillivray, 2010; Seidenberg, 2013). During this time, a growing interest in science led to an increased focus on education. Additionally, the growing population led to an increased ability to recognize difficulties in learning to read. The prevailing research orientation of the time, behaviorism, led reading researchers to view reading as a conditioned behavior that could be trained. Consequently, phonics instruction was viewed as “logical groundwork” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p.36) for early reading. This was where the reading wars began, and the pendulum swung toward phonics instruction.

As time moved on, researchers became critical of behaviorism and turned to an increased focus on internal mental structures due to advances in neurology (Alexander & Fox, 2004). During the natural era of learning, Alexander and Fox (2004) described a focus on language development through meaningful use; researchers of the time viewed language as natural and rule-governed and dependent upon a language-rich environment. This was a small shift toward whole language that was then refuted during the era of information processing. During this time, federal funding for reading research increased in the US and was dominated by cognitive psychology, applied research, and information-processing theory. The view of reading as natural and interdisciplinary became replaced by reading as an individualistic act that was driven by prior knowledge; reading could be influenced by direct intervention or explicit instruction.

Information processing viewed reading as an individual act and ignored sociocultural or contextual influences (Alexander & Fox, 2004). By the mid-1980s, researchers began to see

little to no improvements based on the tenets of information processing theory and they began to move beyond its individualistic views to understanding how external factors such as social and cultural elements influenced learning (Alexander & Fox, 2004). During this time, reading instruction centered on the teacher as facilitator and learning through social exchange (Alexander & Fox, 2004). During this time, whole language was the prevalent approach in many parts of the U.S. (Pearson, 2004). Whole language was characterized by its belief that learning to read was a natural process and the use of authentic literature (Pearson, 2004).

This era then shifted in the late 1990s as the meaning of what a text was expanded in response to increasing technology; researchers began to understand that reading evolved throughout the course of a lifetime and was not restricted to reading acquisition in young children; and motivation research became prominent (Alexander & Fox, 2004). During this time, whole language was still prominent in many parts of the U.S. and basal readers were prominent (Pearson, 2004). Basal readers began in a very systematic way, supporting the early behaviorist and phonics-based approaches; however, as times changed, so did basal readers (Pearson, 2004). They began to integrate components of whole language and consequently helped usher in the era of engaged learning.

During the last era of reading research and practice presented by Alexander and Fox (2004), the era of engaged learning, they recognized that learners were “active and willful participants in the construction of knowledge” (p.52). Thus, this era viewed the learner as an individual – much like information processing theory – who operated within a sociocultural context – much like sociocultural theory—combining individualistic and social dimensions. During this time there was also a proliferation of an approach known as balanced literacy. Balanced literacy served as an attempt to end the debate over phonics and whole language by

bringing value to skills instruction, such as phonics and comprehension strategies, and holistic literacy opportunities, such as authentic literature and writing about literature (Pressley et al., 2002). However, balanced literacy has been criticized for being a superficial compromise without addressing the underlying causes of the reading wars (Seidenberg, 2013). It is important to recognize that within each of these eras, rival views existed, however, these eras captured an overall look at how reading research and practice has changed throughout the years.

It has been over a decade since Alexander and Fox presented these reading eras and reading research and practice continues to evolve. Currently, the science of reading (SOR) is at the center of a great deal of research and classroom practices. According to ILA (2020), SOR is “a corpus of objective investigation and accumulation of reliable evidence about how humans learn to read and how reading should be taught” (p.3). While ILA views SOR as a broad amalgamation of research on reading, it is more often focused on word reading and systematic phonics instruction (ILA, 2020); for the purposes of this work, I focused on SOR as an emphasis on word reading and phonics instruction.

In recent years, SOR has reemerged in research and appears to be a response to policy initiatives and research around dyslexia (Shanahan, 2020). Dyslexia is categorized as a brain-based learning disability that impairs the ability to read; it is characterized by difficulties with words recognition, poor spelling, and poor decoding abilities (Gearin et al., 2021). A document analysis of state dyslexia legislation demonstrated that much of the legislation around dyslexia in the US took place after 2015 (Gearin et al., 2021) with an emphasis from large literacy organizations such as ILA (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020) and the Literacy Research Association (Johnston & Scanlon, 2020) in 2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, a global crisis.

A crisis is defined as:

a turning point around which things change. Before the crisis, systems are functional, events are manageable...But then along comes an event or series of events...that existing coping mechanisms cannot handle...the crisis cannot be solved, it stresses the physical, social, and psychological resources beyond the traditional ways of solving problems that have worked in the past (MacGillivray, 2010, p.1).

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the way education functions. At this time, it is unclear whether SOR, in addition to being a response to dyslexia initiatives, may also be a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic may be seen as a crisis, a movement back toward phonics and systematic ways of teaching that seek to address the COVID-19 slide, the learning loss associated with the impact of school closures on student academic achievement (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020). What is clear is that the pendulum has found its way back to phonics.

Understanding these shifts aids our understanding of SLPs because they are active members in reading instruction in schools and help to guide classroom practices and student learning. They have witnessed these changes firsthand during their experiences in schools.

The Multiple Roles of Specialized Literacy Professionals

As education policy has evolved and the job of reading specialists has become increasingly more complex and varied, the idea of SLPs emerged. The term SLP encompasses reading and literacy specialists, literacy coaches, and literacy coordinators and supervisors (Bean & Kern, 2017; ILA, 2017). Galloway and Lesaux (2014) summarized the roles of SLPs as being a “leader, teacher, diagnostician, colleague, and change agent” (p.518). Beginning in 1967, IRA began introducing standards for the development of reading professionals (Robinson, 1967). These standards have evolved over time. The latest version was ILA’s Standards for the

Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017 (ILA, 2017). According to these standards all, SLPs have five common expectations:

1. they must be able to gain the trust of those they work with, including teachers and administrators;
2. they must be able to establish a working relationship with principals as principals serve as change agents;
3. they must be able to understand how the culture of schools affects them and how they affect the cultures;
4. they must be lifelong learners, continually improving their practice and the practices of others; and
5. they must be flexible and recognize that they may undertake various roles (Bean & Kern, 2017).

While many have acknowledged that the roles of specialists and coaches have often overlapped in the educational setting, they are distinct jobs with differing roles and responsibilities. What follows is an exploration of research on reading specialists and literacy coaches and their roles and responsibilities, guided by the ILA standards.

Reading Specialists

In 1998, the International Reading Association defined a reading specialist as: someone who, in addition to providing assessment and instruction, conducts professional development, helps to set reading program goals, helps other staff members achieve those goals, interprets the reading program to parents and community, demonstrates appropriate reading practices, and keeps staff members aware of current research (Quatroche et al., 2001).

This definition illustrated the idea of a reading specialist, sometimes known as a literacy specialist, as a “jack of all trades” (Bean et al., 2015). Even today reading specialists instruct students, assess and analyze data, support teachers, coordinate reading programs, provide professional development, develop curriculum, and more (Bean et al., 2015; Bean & Kern, 2017; Selvaggi, 2014).

Due to the vast number of responsibilities placed on reading specialists and the evolving needs of students and education in general, ILA put forth the Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017 (ILA, 2017). Within these standards, ILA sought to refine the definition of reading specialist along with the definitions of other SLPs to better “highlight what these professionals need to know and be able to do to be effective in their positions” (Bean & Kern, 2017). According to these standards, reading specialists were teachers with specialized preparation in literacy and are highly qualified to teach struggling readers (ILA, 2017). Based on the latest standards, the primary responsibilities of reading and literacy specialists were instructional (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Kern et al., 2018). First and foremost, reading and literacy specialists served as interventionists by supporting struggling readers (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Dole, 2004). A national survey of SLPs found that over 75% of respondents took on instructional responsibilities and of those instructional responsibilities, 98% of that work was with struggling readers (Bean et al., 2015).

The Roles and Responsibilities of Reading Specialists

ILA, formerly known as the IRA, created standards for literacy professionals that have been revised over the years to reflect current research and literature about reading and literacy, professional learning and development, and the roles of SLPs and other professionals involved with literacy instruction. The most recent revision occurred in 2017 and was based off of seven

domains: (1) foundational knowledge; (2) curriculum and instruction; (3) assessment and evaluation; (4) diversity and equity; (5) learners and the literacy environment; (6) professional learning and leadership; and (7) practicum/clinical experiences (ILA, 2017). These served as a way to investigate the official roles and responsibilities of today's reading specialists.

According to ILA's first standard, reading specialists must have a strong foundational knowledge of literacy including the connectedness among the components of literacy (reading, writing, and language) and the major theories and conceptual foundations of literacy (Kern et al., 2018). A strong foundational knowledge was necessary for specialists to implement curriculum and instruction, which was the second standard. For reading, such foundational skills included concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, fluency, and vocabulary (ILA, 2018). For writing, specialists needed knowledge of writing development, writing processes, and foundational skills (ILA, 2018). Reading specialists also must have understood language acquisition, the structure of language, conventions of standard English, vocabulary acquisition and use, and speaking and listening (ILA, 2018).

Reading specialists must be able to provide increased instructional time for struggling readers, including intensive, small group instruction focused on students' particular needs while using evidence-based components of instruction (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; ILA, 2018). Specialists are expected to select, adapt, teach, and evaluate approaches to supplemental instruction and intervention. They must also be able to do this with literacy curricula for all students and collaborate with other educators on curricular needs (ILA, 2018).

The third standard focused on assessment and evaluation (ILA, 2018). In order to be effective, this standard said a reading specialist must be able to understand, select and use assessments. This included assessments to screen, diagnose, and measure student achievement in

literacy (Helf & Cooke, 2011; ILA, 2018; Kern et al., 2018). They must also be able to use the data from assessments to evaluation interventions, inform instruction, and advocate for appropriate interventions for students (Helf & Cooke, 2011). Reading specialists must be able to do this independently when working with students in interventions, and collaboratively with other professionals who work with the students including classroom teachers, special education teachers, etc., as well as parents and guardians (ILA, 2018). Jaeger (1996) emphasized the importance of reading specialists interpreting assessment results and developing instructional plans with classroom teachers so that they became more effective in their own literacy practices. Lastly, reading specialists must be able to participate in and lead professional development for teachers and other professionals in the areas of assessment and evaluation (ILA, 2018).

The fourth standard focused on diversity and equity (ILA, 2017). Reading specialists were expected to work collaboratively with a variety of groups including students, teachers, district personnel, community members, and families (Kern et al., 2018). Because of the diverse groups these specialists interacted with, it was vital that they be advocates for equity for diverse students and work to eliminate bias in institutional structures by knowing and utilizing ideas such as third-space (Gutierrez, 2008) which recognized the need to create a space where students' home, school, and community knowledge was brought together; funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) which recognized knowledge and literacies students build in their homes; and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994) which recognized the diverse cultures of students and the value it brought to classroom learning. Reading specialists as advocates for diversity and equity was a piece of standard four, and in order for them to do this, ILA stressed that they must "demonstrate an understanding of themselves and others as cultural beings" (ILA, 2018, p.3).

According to standard five, specialists must meet the developmental needs of all learners and support the literacy environment (ILA, 2018). This was another example of the multiplicity of roles reading specialists took on (Bean & Kern, 2017). They were used as interventionists, but also focused on the entire student population and their literacy environment. They must be able to collaborate with families, community members, and other educators to meet the needs of diverse populations, taking into consideration the whole child, including physical, social, emotional, cultural, and intellectual factors (ILA, 2018, p.4). In addition to recognizing the unique literacies of students, reading specialists also had to understand the literacy environment, both physical and social (Kern et al., 2018). Specialists had to foster positive learning environments by promoting print-rich classrooms, effective student grouping techniques, constructive social interaction and play, and safe and meaningful digital environments that support digital literacies. Digital literacies included “the multiple ways we read, write, and communicate using digital technologies” (Kern et al., 2018, p.221).

Reading specialists should also serve as leadership for schools by providing professional learning (Helf & Cooke, 2011; Kern et al., 2018). Professional learning was a part of standard six and it came in multiple forms (ILA, 2017). Specialists collaborated with and supported colleagues in delivering effective literacy instruction, developing and implementing school-wide literacy programming, and mentoring or coaching peers (ILA, 2018). In order to support high-quality instruction, reading specialists should provide workshops and other types of professional development to introduce new strategies and programs. They must also provide follow-up training and feedback on implementation in order to help change instructional behaviors (Helf & Cooke, 2011). When professional development fails to follow up, it is often ineffective at producing change (Helf & Cooke, 2011). In this way, the role of the specialist was to facilitate

both student and adult learning (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008; Rainville & Jones, 2008). According to Vacca and Padak (1990), reading specialists were able to successfully facilitate student and adult learning because they were parallel processes based on collaboration. They must also demonstrate the ability to be reflective practitioners who refine their work with educators and students; belong to professional organizations and groups that support their ongoing learning and reflection; and critically consume research, policy, and practice (ILA, 2018).

The final standard focused on practicum and clinical experiences. Because the standards were designed to help prepare educators for the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists, they also put forth guidelines for practical experiences prior to taking on the role. This is not a part of the roles and responsibilities of professionals already in the position of a reading specialist and will not be addressed here.

In addition to their official roles and responsibilities, research has shown that reading specialists often have unofficial roles. A study of reading specialists in schools with exemplary reading programs as identified by IRA found that, in addition to their formal responsibilities, reading specialists also spend time on child study teams, working with paraprofessionals, and working with volunteers (Bean et al., 2003). Studies have also shown that reading specialists often take on non-reading related responsibilities including managerial roles that require them to complete paperwork, manage curricular materials, and inventory materials (Bean et al., 2003; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). One study even reported that some reading specialists found themselves substituting for classroom teachers (Bean & Kern, 2017), supporting the idea that reading specialists are an integral part of schools who serve a multiplicity of roles.

The Certification of Reading Specialists

Cook and Kolson (1963) said that “...unless some method is devised for separating the ‘quacks’ from the experts, we can have nothing but utter confusion in the teaching of reading” (p.184). This was a call for professionalizing reading specialists through certification. Cook and Kolson (1963) demonstrated that there was no consensus among states as to what constituted adequate training for teachers of reading. The number and type of courses required by the few states with certifications lacked consistency and clarity (Cook & Kolson, 1963).

In 1959, the International Reading Association proposed a list of standards and certification requirements for reading specialists (Yarrington, 1967). Following this proposition, universities began master’s degree programs for training reading specialists and several states began certification requirements for reading specialists (Yarrington, 1967). These were the earliest known efforts to professionalize reading specialists. Between 1960 and 1967, the number of states requiring certification of SLPs went from 12 to 22 (Yarrington, 1967). While this was still only 40% of states, it was a move in the right direction. By 1975, a study by Bader found that several states had requirements for reading specialist certification. These states viewed classroom teachers and reading specialists as necessary to education, noting that specialists needed to work with students and teachers (Bader, 1975).

As federal mandates for education continued to evolve, there were many calls for professionals to improve the reading achievement of students, making reading specialists more prominent. Bean et al. (2003) studied reading specialists in schools with exemplary reading programs (as determined by recognition from the IRA). Results of their study indicated that the requirements for the preparation, definition, and title of reading specialists varied from state to state, but that all participants “held some type of credential, certification, master’s degree, endorsement, training, or equivalent in advance reading education” (Bean et al., 2003, p.448).

They also found that reading specialists in schools with exemplary reading programs took on leadership roles in schools, demonstrating a need for certification requirements to include standards for leadership.

As the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists continue to evolve so do the standards for certification by ILA, universities, and states. Today's standards include preparation for reading specialists as school leaders. Quatroche and Wepner (2008) surveyed university faculty and found that 53% of respondents worked at institutions requiring a course on "organization, administration, and/or supervision was required as a part of the reading specialist program" (p.103). Still, a later survey found that many reading specialists did not feel prepared for leadership responsibilities. Further, many professionals actively serving as reading specialists reported that they were not certified reading specialists (Bean et al., 2015). While there are many reasons this may have happened, it demonstrated that despite the continuous work of professionals to use research to improve the preparedness of reading specialists, such knowledge was not always utilized.

Literacy Coaches

The terms literacy coach, reading coach, and instructional coach are often used interchangeably. Either way, this is a person with specialized knowledge about teaching reading that is shared with others in the forms of professional development, one-on-one coaching, or small group coaching (ILA, 2020). In 2014, Toll offered the following definition for a literacy coach:

A literacy coach partners with teachers for job-embedded professional learning that enhances teachers' reflection on students, the curriculum, and pedagogy for the purpose of more effective decision making. (p.10)

In the 2010 Standards for Reading Professionals (IRA, 2010), reading specialists and literacy coaches were lumped together. In the 2017 revision, ILA adopted the use of SLPs and separated reading specialists and literacy coaches into two distinct roles (ILA, 2017). While all SLPs work toward student achievement, the primary ways they went about it was different. Reading specialists devoted most of their attention to students, while literacy coaches focused on teachers (Toll, 2014).

Literacy coaches are an important part of a successful literacy program because literacy coaching leads to increased student achievement. A four-year longitudinal study by Biancarosa et al. (2010) demonstrated that students' literacy learning increased overtime through the implementation of one-on-one literacy coaching. Further, A statewide study of staff development by literacy coaches in South Carolina found that "teachers' beliefs and practices became increasingly consistent with best practices" as defined by national standards (Stephens et al., 2011). In another study, Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2011) found that literacy coaches were able to effectively influence student achievement through improved classroom reading instruction. Moreover, total coaching hours was a significant predictor of student reading gains as evidenced by a standardized reading assessment (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011). By helping to implement best practices in literacy instruction in schools, literacy coaches affect student achievement.

The Roles and Responsibilities of Literacy Coaches

Like reading specialists, literacy coaches have standards for professional development focusing on seven standards. The first standard, foundational knowledge, emphasized the literacy coach's need to understand "major theoretical, conceptual, historical, and evidence-based foundations of literacy" (ILA, 2018, p.5) across academic disciplines, while also having a solid understanding of adult learning theory and evidence-based strategies for professional learning so

that they may effectively work with teachers and other colleagues. Lastly, they must understand how literacy instruction and curricula are developed, implemented, and evaluated, including the major concepts and theories they are rooted in (ILA, 2018).

Because literacy coaches work more closely with teachers, they must be able to develop, analyze, and evaluate literacy curricula and classroom instruction, while coaching teachers to do the same (ILA, 2018; Toll, 2014). This is reflected in the second standard of the Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017 (ILA, 2017). This document required literacy coaches to be expert collaborators with both school and district personnel so that they may create a shared vision and goals for literacy programming (ILA, 2018).

Standard 3 emphasized the importance of the literacy coach's knowledge of assessment and evaluation (ILA, 2017). First and foremost, literacy coaches must have knowledge of assessment and assessment tools; they must use that knowledge to inform and evaluate schoolwide instruction and interventions. Coaches do this by collaborating with teachers and administrators to implement, interpret, and evaluate assessment data to make informed decisions at the classroom level and schoolwide (ILA, 2018). Scholars such as Toll (2014) found that literacy coaches assisted teachers with planning for assessment, collecting meaningful data, and examining what that data means. Literacy coaches also facilitated professional learning around assessment and evaluation and share and explain assessment practices and results with teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, community members, etc. (ILA, 2018; Toll, 2014).

Because literacy coaches are expected to spend the majority of their time in classrooms, it is imperative that they are advocates for diversity and equity which is standard 4 (ILA, 2017). Literacy coaches are expected to know and understand foundational theories and pedagogies of diversity and equity and apply this knowledge in their work, advocating for diversity and equity

in classrooms, schools, and society (ILA, 2018). To do this, they must recognize and reflect upon their own cultures, belief systems, and biases and work with teachers to do the same (ILA, 2018). Through the process of one-on-one or group coaching, literacy coaches should help teachers create, analyze, transform, and implement “diverse learning experiences that are culturally responsive and link school, home, and community literacy knowledge” (ILA, 2018, p.6).

Toll (2014) advised against coaching partnerships that focused directly on a teacher’s beliefs and values but recognized that changes in beliefs and values can come from learning experiences that happen with the help of a literacy coach. Coaching relationships can provide questions, perspectives, and opportunities that create “healthy disequilibrium” (Toll, 2014, p.150). When teachers find a disconnect between their knowledge and experience and what happens in the classroom, they have the potential for learning. It is in these situations that literacy coaches can help teachers identify their own cultures, beliefs, and biases and work to make change.

Standard 5 focused on learners and the literacy environment. Like reading specialists, literacy coaches must understand the developmental needs of all learners, understand digital literacies and how to appropriately integrate them, and foster positive, literacy-rich environments (ILA, 2017). For literacy coaches the primary focus of this standard was on helping guide teachers through these practices. This may include assisting teachers with assessing the physical, social, emotional, cultural, and intellectual needs of students and finding ways to meet them; facilitating the use of digital and print materials; assisting in the integration of digital technologies; and supporting teachers in developing a literacy-rich classroom environment both physically and socially. In this way, the coach affects change by working with teachers.

Standard 6 was the last standard that demonstrated the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches practicing in schools; standard 7 was specifically for guidance on the preparation of literacy coaches. Standard 6 emphasized the professional learning and leadership role of literacy coaches and the need for them to be continual learners; reflective practitioners who are critical consumers of research, policy, and practice; effective collaborators; leaders; and advocates for teachers, students, families, and communities (ILA, 2018, p.7). Literacy coaches carry the responsibility of designing and leading professional development for various school groups and improving the overall literacy knowledge of school personnel. To do this effectively they must have a keen understanding of adult learning and be able to use coaching tools and processes such as coaching conversations, observations, and modeling (Toll, 2014).

In addition to the roles outlined by ILA, literacy coaches must fulfill many unofficial roles in their jobs to be successful. Like reading specialists, literacy coaches have often found themselves in managerial roles such as maintaining book rooms, consulting with teachers on purchasing new resources, completing paperwork, writing reports, etc. (Ferguson, 2013). Literacy coaches must also be able to develop relationships with teachers and sustain them over time (L’Allier et al., 2010; Toll, 2014). Successful coaching evolves over time and is sustained through formal coaching meetings and informal conversation. Coaches often find themselves in informal coaching conversations during lunch or in the hallway (L’Allier et al., 2010). Literacy coaches are a valuable part of a school literacy program because they honor adult learners, support collaboration, promote reflective practice and decision-making, and lead to greater student achievement (Toll, 2014).

The Certification of Literacy Coaches

After extensive research, it is unclear whether literacy coaches have the same certification requirements as reading specialists. Part of this lack of clarity may stem from the ambiguity of roles found in many educational settings. Research has shown that sometimes reading specialists have been used as literacy coaches and vice versa (Bean & Kern, 2017; Pletcher et al., 2018; Toll, 2014), therefore, one might assume that literacy coaches must have the same certification as reading specialists. However, a national survey of SLPs found that only 19% of coaches held reading specialist certification (Bean et al., 2015). The survey also found that SLPs who identified primarily as literacy coaches found that preparation in leadership would be helpful for fulfilling their roles. Additionally, some literacy coaches desired additional preparation in the areas of curriculum and instruction in literacy (Bean et al., 2015).

An article from *The Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse* advocated for qualified literacy professional, offering that the most qualified candidates for literacy coach positions would be those who have a master's degree in reading/literacy, an additional credential in coaching, experience as a classroom teacher, and meet the standards set forth by ILA (Frost & Bean, 2006). This was supported by L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2006) who found that classrooms supported by literacy coaches with advanced degrees in reading had higher average student reading gains than those supported by literacy coaches without advanced degrees or certifications in reading. However, in searching universities with education programs, only some have training specifically for literacy coaches. Moreover, state requirements for literacy coaches vary greatly.

Literacy Coordinators

In the ILA standards (ILA, 2018), literacy coordinators were their own category, following the standards as reading specialists and literacy coaches. The main difference for this group of SLPs was that they were responsible for school- or district wide literacy programs.

Literacy coordinators must be able to work with students, teachers, other SLPs, administrators, community members and more. The standards also required that coordinators have comprehensive knowledge of literacy programs from preschool through grade 12 and must be able to understand models of school reform.

Because literacy coordinators most often come from other SLP roles such as reading specialists and literacy coaches, it would make sense that they would have the same certification requirements. However, little research exists on literacy coordinators. Due to this lack of research, the ILA standards (ILA, 2018) provide the only concrete knowledge on these SLPs.

How Specialized Literacy Professionals View Their Work

While ILA and researchers continue to distinguish the work of reading specialists and literacy coaches, the reality is that SLPs take on different jobs at different times regardless of their titles (Bean et al., 2015) while some have served in “hybrid positions” (Pletcher et al., 2018, p.690), fulfilling the role of both reading specialist and literacy coach. Further, a national survey of SLPs found that while many SLPs could specify their job title (i.e., coach, specialist, interventionist, supervisor), their responsibilities did not always match (Bean et al., 2015). There were reading specialists with coaching responsibilities and coaches with reading specialist responsibilities (Bean & Kern, 2017; Pletcher et al., 2018). When SLPs found themselves serving multiple roles, they often ended up neglecting one to complete the other (Pletcher et al., 2018).

Reading Specialists’ Self-Perceptions

Within the last ten years, limited research exists on how reading specialists view their roles and responsibilities. Perhaps this is because of the recent push in legislation for literacy coaches and the improvement of classroom instruction, focusing on quantitative data over

qualitative and coaches over specialists. Two studies were identified within the past 20 years that specifically addressed how reading specialists perceived their roles and responsibilities in schools (Bean et al., 2003; Selvaggi, 2014).

Bean et al. (2003) interviewed reading specialists to see how they perceived their roles. According to the interviews, reading specialists identified five common roles: resource to teacher, community liaison, reading program coordinator, assessment coordinator, and interventionist (Bean et al., 2003); these roles aligned with many of the standards laid out by ILA (ILA, 2017). The majority of reading specialists stated that they taught using both in-class and pull-out instructional models when teaching. In-class teaching usually involved modeling for or co-teaching with the classroom teacher while pull-out instruction was typically for intervention for struggling readers (Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003). This study took place before ILA acknowledged literacy coaches as a distinct role with responsibilities separate from reading specialists (ILA, 2017). This was evident in this study as reading specialists identified their major responsibilities as working both with students and teachers.

In 2014, Selvaggi interviewed SLPs with various job titles in an attempt to understand how SLPs viewed their roles and responsibilities. This study found that most reading specialists viewed themselves as responsible for providing and/or coordinating intervention for struggling readers (Selvaggi, 2014). The reading specialists in this study also discussed the importance of working with literacy coaches to collaborate with grade levels on literacy instruction and provide professional development (Selvaggi, 2014). This study provided evidence of a move toward understanding that there were multiple literacy professionals who could work in schools; that SLPs had different, but sometimes overlapping job descriptions; and that SLPs could work collaboratively to the betterment of the school.

Literacy Coaches' Self-Perceptions

Because of the recent push in legislation to improve classroom instruction, several studies have explored how literacy coaches view their role. In these studies, balancing multiple roles was not a theme (Ferguson, 2013; Hunt & Handsfield, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). While this may have meant that many literacy coaches were more tightly aligned with the descriptions put forth by ILA, it may have also meant that because the researchers focused their studies on coaching specifically, navigating a multiplicity of responsibilities may not have come up during data collection.

Literacy coaches described their major responsibilities as designing lessons, modeling lessons, observing teachers, and debriefing with teachers (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Literacy coaches found that these tasks were made easier when they were able to establish informal relationships with teachers as it lessened power shifts and struggles in the coaching relationship (Rainville & Jones, 2008). Literacy coaches viewed these informal relationships as key to their work and often found themselves chatting with teachers in hallways, stopping by classrooms, and visiting the teacher's lounge to say "hello" or have a quick conversation (L'Allier et al., 2010, p.549). Literacy coaches have also noted that they felt more successful at influencing teachers' beliefs and practices when they are able to coach fewer teachers. When attempting to coach too many teachers at once, they found their work to lack the reflectivity and depth needed to assist teachers with instruction (Pletcher et al., 2018).

While literacy coaches have noted the importance of building relationships with teachers and staff, they have also discussed feeling torn between demonstrating knowledge and expertise while also positioning themselves as co-learners (Hunt & Handsfield, 2013). Literacy coaches often find themselves organizing literacy programs, conducting professional development, and

taking on other leadership roles in schools (Ferguson, 2013). In this way, they felt they were meant to be leaders in their schools, but at the same time, they were not evaluative and were often considered to be equal to a teacher (Hunt & Handsfield, 2013). This role ambiguity left some literacy coaches feeling unsure of themselves and their work (Ferguson, 2013; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010).

In addition to role ambiguity, some other major barriers presented by literacy coaches include limited principal involvement and resistant teachers (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Coaches described principals as important to their success because they created teacher schedules and had the ability to create time for teachers to meet with a coach (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). When coaches did have time to meet with teachers, they found some of them to be resistant to working with a coach (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). Toll (2014) described such teachers as the “Put-on-the-brakes Group”. These teachers often wanted to distance themselves from a literacy coach as they either felt satisfied with their work as it was or were dissatisfied and did not want others to know (Toll, 2014, p.45). Teachers may have also been resistant to working with a literacy coach because they did not fully understand the role of the coach. According to a study by Rainville and Jones (2008), literacy coaches found that “when a teacher and a coach have different expectations of the coach’s roles in the classroom, misunderstanding and miscommunication (on both sides) can lead to a counterproductive standoff” (p.477).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored research on the evolution of SLPs, reading research, and reading practice. Research on SLPs had demonstrated that there are many different roles these individuals fill in schools. While organizations such as ILA continue to create distinct roles and definitions for SLPs, this distinction does not always exist in reality. SLPs have served teachers,

students, administrators, communities, and more. They have served as reading specialists, literacy coaches, and coordinators, often simultaneously. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, the world was in crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools into new territory. Many schools operated virtually; some used hybrid formats that incorporated in-person and distance learning; and some schools reopened their doors for face-to-face instruction. How did SLPs navigate their already complex positions during these times? There were no previous models to help SLPs know how to do their jobs during a global health crisis.

Research on how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way SLPs view and practice their roles in school was needed. Such research may serve to help other SLPs learn to navigate their own practices during this time. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic had the ability to change the future of education. Therefore, learning to adapt will be vital for SLPs in the future. SLPs have often relied on building relationships with teachers, casually stopping by classrooms, and visiting in informal places such as the teacher's lounge. How will SLPs navigate this in a virtual setting? For these reasons I posed the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of SLPs' serving elementary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way SLPs experience their work and identities? and

In the following chapter, I have provided a plan for how this study addressed the above research questions. Chapter 3 also explored how the study was designed use phenomenological research methods. Subsequent chapters detail the results of the findings and discuss their potential impact.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

“Phenomenology is the ‘science of science’ since it alone investigates that which all other sciences simply take for granted (or ignore), the very essence of their own objects” (Husserl, 1965, p.23).

In previous chapters I introduced SLPs and explored what research has shown about their positions in schools and how the reading research and practice that SLPs support has evolved. I also demonstrated the gap in research around the actual lived experiences of SLPs. This research sought to address this gap by exploring how specialized literacy professionals (SLPs), including reading/literacy specialists, coaches, interventionists, and coordinators experienced their role in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and how that influenced their identities. By exploring the experiences of SLPs during this health crisis, scholars and practitioners may be better equipped to understand how the roles of SLPs are evolving and how that impacts those they work with including administrators, teachers, students, community members, and, most importantly, themselves.

To explore the experiences of SLPs, I investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of SLPs’ serving elementary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way SLPs experience their work and identities?

In this chapter I have detailed the methods I used to address these research questions. I begin by discussing the paradigm and theoretical framework grounding the study. Then, I describe the methodology, as guided by Moustakas (1994) and how I established trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, I address limitations, implications, and study significance.

Study Design

A qualitative approach was best for this study because it focused on the socially constructed nature of reality for SLPs. Qualitative research seeks to answer questions that stress “*how* [emphasis in original text] social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p.17). Qualitative research can be seen as empowering because it allows participants to share their stories and voices (Creswell, 2013). Through this study, I sought to share the experiences of SLPs working in education and understand how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their work and their views of themselves.

Paradigm and Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by postmodern research. Postmodernism emerged in the 1960s as a critique of modernism, rejecting static systems of logic and the existence of Truth, committing itself to “ambiguity, relativity, fragmentation, particularity and discontinuity” (Crotty, 1998, p.185). Postmodernism recognizes that there is no one truth, but instead, multiple forms of truth that are made and remade within multiple discourses (Stinson & Bullock, 2012), individuals, and the environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The ontology of postmodernism includes a rejection of the traditional self (Crotty, 1998), making the goal of such research to recognize that an individual does not exist as a fixed being, but as a fragmented self, continually created and recreated (Crotty, 1998; Stinson & Bullock, 2012). This was a fitting paradigm for this study as prior research has shown that SLPs take on a variety of roles that are often in conflict with one

another. Postmodernism allowed me to analyze this multiplicity and discontinuity due to its recognition of such paradoxes (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

Developing from postmodernism and as a response to Minsky's (1985) notion of the self as a society of mind, was DST. Minsky considered the mind as organized in a hierarchy with interconnected parts that function together as a society. Within this idea, Minsky recognized that the mind contains many agents that work at the same level of the hierarchy but may act in opposition to one another.

The idea of the dialogical self emerged in the early 1990s (Hermans et al., 1992) and was later developed into a formal theory used in the social sciences (Hermans, 2012). DST moved beyond the model of the society of mind by recognizing that the "self does not only function as a mini-society but is, at the same time, an intrinsic part of macro-society" (Hermans, 2012, p.3). According to Hermans (2001), the dialogical self is rooted in the idea that a person can occupy multiple I-positions, meaning a person can position themselves in a multitude of ways that can "agree, disagree, understand, misunderstand, oppose, contradict, question, challenge and even ridicule" one another (p.249). I-positions were those positions individuals experienced that were a part of the environment and that were perceived as 'mine' by the individual (Hermans, 2001). This dialogical self was linked to a particular position in time and space (Hermans, 2001) and was often negotiated (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). In this way, the dialogical self was social, where the self can construe another by taking on differing perspectives on the world and themselves (Hermans, 2001).

Individuals can move between internal and external positions. Internal positions were those that an individual felt as a part of themselves such as being a mother or teacher (Hermans, 2001). External positions were those that were linked to the environment; they were people and

objects that the individual found relevant to their internal positions such as their children or students. Internal and external positions were part of a dialogic process and at times worked in cooperation or competition (Hermans, 2001). This dialogic process offered a way of looking at the multiple roles of SLPs, especially during the pandemic where personal I-positions may have more closely interacted with professional I-positions.

Further, DST recognized that changes and developments in the self could lead to changes and developments in society and vice versa (Hermans, 2012). In this way, when society becomes more complex so too does the self. At the time of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic was causing society to become more complex with constant changes in safety and health protocols that effected the way people conducted their daily living and the way education operated. These societal changes may have had consequences for the self, especially among SLPs.

Another area DST addressed was power differences. DST recognized power differences between the individual and society and between the I-positions of an individual. When thinking about dialogue, there is a turn-taking element. Turn-taking ensures that those involved in dialogue have an opportunity to hold power when they speak and relinquish power when they listen (Hermans, 2004). When one voice, either that of an institution in society or that of a particular I-position, dominates the dialogue, they strip the other voices of their power (Hermans, 2004). DST has acknowledged that “asymmetry or relative dominance” is always present in dialogue in some form and influences how speakers communicated (Hermans, 2004, p.6).

DST also recognized uncertainty, understanding that the self and society were constantly in flux and unpredictable while also acknowledging that uncertainty was not necessarily negative (Hermans, 2012). These uncertainties helped to question the existence of one absolute truth (Hemans, 2012), negating the idea that there was a right way to be an SLP. Using DST as a lens

for understanding the experiences and identities of SLPs during the COVID-19 pandemic avoided the difficulties of treating the self as a self-contained entity (Hermans, 2012) and instead acknowledged and helped to comprehend the complexities of their positions. DST has been used to study teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), but has not been used to date in the literature on SLPs; therefore, the use of DST in this study offered a new way of understanding the experiences of SLPs and their identities, filling a gap in research.

Methodology

To explore the experiences of SLPs during the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted a phenomenological study. A phenomenological study seeks to describe the common meaning of individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p.76). Further, phenomenology is not concerned with facts, but seeks to determine meanings (Moustakas, 1994). This was something currently missing from the literature on SLPs. Most of the research on SLPs presented facts about what the role is and should be; I sought to understand what it meant to be an SLP through the SLPs themselves. The individuals in this study were SLPs and the phenomenon was their experiences of working in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. I sought to discover the “universal essence” (Creswell, 2013) of these experiences and what it meant to be an SLP during the pandemic.

This phenomenology occurred during and focused on the COVID-19 pandemic; this context created unique circumstances for the research. COVID protocols limited research by restricting data collection and generation to a virtual environment. Further, participation recruitment had to take place in a completely virtual format.

Epoche

When conducting a phenomenological study, it is necessary for the researcher to bracket themselves by writing an Epoche (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). When a researcher brackets themselves, they work to set aside personal experiences so that they can look at the phenomenon with fresh eyes (Creswell, 2013). An Epoche requires “the elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt” (Moustakas, 1994). In this section, I addressed my own experiences as an SLP and as a person living through the COVID-19 pandemic in an attempt to bracket those experiences.

In my first role as an SLP, I served as a Title II literacy coach. That meant that my work was solely focused on helping students through helping teachers. I was not allowed to work directly with students. This position was at a Title I school serving predominantly minority students with a predominantly White, female staff. It was the same school I had worked in as a classroom teacher and the transition was easy for me. The staff was reflective of my own White, middle-class background and we all worked well together. I had built a rapport with the administration and staff over the years and was able to make the shift to coaching seamlessly.

After two years in the position, I took a job at another school as a reading specialist. In my new position, I was given the opportunity to serve as both an interventionist and coach, working with both students and staff to impact achievement. Further, I worked on a team with two Title I reading teachers. During my four years at this school, my job description stayed the same, but that of the Title I teachers slowly evolved from majority of time with students to majority of time with teachers. And as their roles evolved, so did mine. The more time the Title I teachers spent with teachers, the more time I spent with students.

In addition to the stress of dealing with constantly evolving job descriptions, I was a White, middle-class teacher working in a school dominated by people unlike myself. Most of the

students I worked with were Black and/or living in poverty and much of the staff was Black. It was a difficult transition, and it took a great deal of time and effort to build relationships with the students and staff. Still, after four years I called that school home and was sad to leave it. The experiences I had as a reading specialist at that school were powerful. I found that none of my training properly prepared me for how to enter a new school and make them like me enough to invite me into their classroom. I was not prepared to build those relationships.

Three years later, I am no longer an SLP, but I am living through the COVID-19 pandemic. I am juggling schoolwork, teaching, and family. I am using virtual platforms for teaching while I have two kids at home. I am assisting my daughter with virtual preschool. My son is not aware that anything exists outside of the street we live on. I struggle to meet the needs of all those who rely on me, including myself. I have lost a loved one to the virus. Taking a shower is a daily victory. This pandemic has caused a major shift in how I view myself and my job. In reflecting on my experiences as an SLP and as a human being during the COVID-19 pandemic, I am extremely interested in the experiences of SLPs during this time and how it is impacting how they view themselves.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

For participant selection and recruitment, I utilized convenience sampling as it was based upon availability and willingness (McMillan, 2008). Additionally, I used purposeful sampling for participant selection and recruitment by selecting individuals because they were particularly informative about the phenomenon of study (McMillan, 2008). To participate in the study, participants had to meet the following characteristics:

- Actively serve as an SLP during the pandemic.
- Spend at least part of their job working in a US elementary school.

These criteria were selected because: (1) one must serve as an SLP during the pandemic to understand the experience; and (2) research has demonstrated that the majority of SLPs work in elementary settings and that their work is often different than those in secondary education settings (Bean et al., 2015). SLPs who served in their roles at the start of the pandemic but have since left the role will not be considered as their experiences may be different from those who were in the position at the time of the study.

In addition to purposeful sampling, I utilized convenience sampling as I advertised the study online and relied on self-selection for participation in the study. To recruit participants, the study was advertised on social media among groups related to education and teaching including “Teaching During COVID” and several reading-related groups on Facebook @ILAToday, @ALEROnline, @academicchatter on Twitter; and academic groups such as “The Dissertation Coach” on multiple social media platforms (see Appendix A). The study was also advertised on listservs from the Literacy Research Association and the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers (see Appendix B). I then used snowball sampling (McMillan, 2008) by asking SLPs who expressed interest in participation to recommend others who fit the criteria of the study to be a part of the study.

Interested SLPs received a brief online entry survey via Qualtrics (see Appendix C) that was used to make sure participants met the criteria of the study and to gather information to inform data generation. This survey included information on race, gender identity, certification and licensure, years of experiences, professional affiliations, and SLP roles and responsibilities. Anyone who completed the survey and met the criteria of the study received an email asking for consent to participate in the study using a Google form (see Appendix D). Individuals who did

not meet the criteria received an email thanking them for their interest and an explanation of why they did not meet the criteria of the study; their data was then destroyed.

Fifteen individuals participated in the survey; of those, 14 met the criteria of the study. Of the 14 individuals, ten gave consent to be active participants in the study; one participant was lost to attrition. Individual participant profiles are available below in Table 1.

Data Generation

In phenomenology, perception is the main source of knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Descriptions of experiences from multiple perspectives are needed to create a “unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p.58). I gained essential insights on the experiences of SLPs working during the COVID-19 pandemic by generating data through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. All surveys, recordings, and transcriptions were housed virtually, and password protected.

Survey. To make sure participants matched the criteria for the study, anyone interested in participating in the study took a survey (see Appendix C) including demographic information and questions about their position as an SLP. The survey also helped to inform interview and focus group questions.

Table 1*Individual Participant Profiles*

Participant	Job Title(s)	Demographic Information				
		Years as an SLP	Grade Levels Served	Highest Degree Held	Age	Race/Ethnicity
Aria	Literacy Coach/ Coaching Coordinator	3.5	K-5	Masters	36	White
Candy	Reading Specialist	1	PreK-5	Masters	29	No Response
Erica	Literacy Coach	3.5	PreK-3	Masters	38	White
Evelyn	Reading Specialist/ Instructional Specialist	11	K-5	Education Specialist	55	Black
Hannah	Literacy Coach	15	PreK-5	Masters	43	White
Julie	Interventionist	1	3-6	Doctorate	41	White
Melanie	Literacy Coach	6	PreK-2	Masters	55	White
Natalie	Lead Educator/ Instructional Coach	3	K-8	Masters	42	White
Spencer	Reading Specialist	3	1-5	Masters	33	White

Note. This table contains information collected from participants' survey responses.

Interviews and Focus Groups. Interviews allowed participants to share their experiences of working as SLPs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants took part in two in-depth interviews. Each interview began with the same semi-structured interview guide provided to participants via a Google Form (See Appendix E). Participants were emailed the Google Form and instructed to provide as much information as they saw fit. After submitting the

Google Form, follow-up questions catered to the individual participants were addressed through Zoom, an online web conferencing platform. This allowed participants flexibility in the amount of time they had to meet with the researcher. Some participants opted to write extensively on the Google Form and spend less time in conversation over Zoom, while others wrote little in the Google Form and chose to spend more time in the Zoom portion of the interview. The questions intended to capture two broad ideas: (1) what participants have experienced while working as SLPs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) what contexts or situations had influenced or affected those experiences. According to Moustakas (1994), these ideas are needed to help participants focus their attention on the phenomenon of study including their experiences of their work and identities as SLPs, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the second interview I also invited participants to bring artifacts they wanted to share, guiding them to select artifacts that helped to illuminate their experiences of their work and of themselves as SLPs.

After individual interviews, participants were invited to participate in one focus group interview via Zoom. Focus groups are another way of learning about SLPs' experiences of their work and themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic. Focus groups are helpful because they offer information on the attitudes and opinions of participants in the context of social interaction (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). To keep focus groups manageable in an online context, the nine participants were split into two groups based on the nature of their position and their years of experience in education (see Table 2). Focus group one included of SLPs who had more years of experience (Evelyn, Hannah, Melanie, and Natalie) along with SLPs who served as a coordinator (Aria, Evelyn, and Natalie). Focus group two included SLPs with fewer years of experience (Candy, Spencer, and Erica) in education and SLPs who worked directly with students (Candy, Julie, and Spencer). This created a way to homogenously group participants as homogenous

groups often help to ensure “free flowing, open, and sincere discussion among the participants” (Dilshad & Latif, 2013, p.194).

During interviews and focus groups, social-desirability bias was a potential limitation of the study. Social desirability refers to the desire to appear “intelligent, competent, and emotionally stable” that may lead them to provide responses they think others want to receive (McMillan, 2008, p.225). To help overcome social desirability bias, I worked to ensure the anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms and framing questions in an indirect or neutral manner. For focus groups, I worked to create groups with homogeneous SLPs to help negate issues of power, framed questions in an indirect or neutral manner, began focus groups with an introduction that emphasized my desire to hear a range of experiences and feelings, and served as a moderator that sought to create an open-minded atmosphere where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences (Hollander, 2004).

Table 2.

Focus Group Composition based on Years of Experience

	Names	Job Title	Years of Experience
Focus Group 1	Aria	Literacy Coach/ Coaching Coordinator	14
	Evelyn	Reading Specialist/ Instructional Specialist	19
	Hannah	Literacy Coach	20
	Melanie	Literacy Coach	25
	Natalie	Lead Educator/ Instructional Coach	20
Focus Group 2	Candy	Reading Specialist	7
	Erica	Literacy Coach	15
	Julie	Interventionist	18
	Spencer	Reading Specialist	10

Field notes enhance data and provide thick, rich context for analysis (Creswell, 2013). According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) field notes help situate a study within larger societal and temporal context while also providing non textual, auditory, and/or visual information about interviews and focus groups that help researchers understand participant meaning (p.381). Following the procedures laid out by Phillippi and Lauderdale's (2018) review of qualitative research involving field notes, I have field notes for each interview and focus group. I began each set of field notes with the date and time of the interview or focus group and the participant's pseudonym. Next, I noted the setting of the interview, including a description of the platform used for the interview and whether video was used and by whom. If the participant's video was on, I used the field notes to capture the emotions, body language, and context of the interview. Throughout the course of interviewing, there was only one instance of a participant's video being turned off. Erica did not use video during interview one due to a technical issue that could not be resolved. At the conclusion of each interview, I completed the field notes with my own critical reflection. Critical reflection was an important part of the field notes as it allowed me to assess their "performance as a participant in the narrative and as an interviewer" (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p.386).

Data Analysis

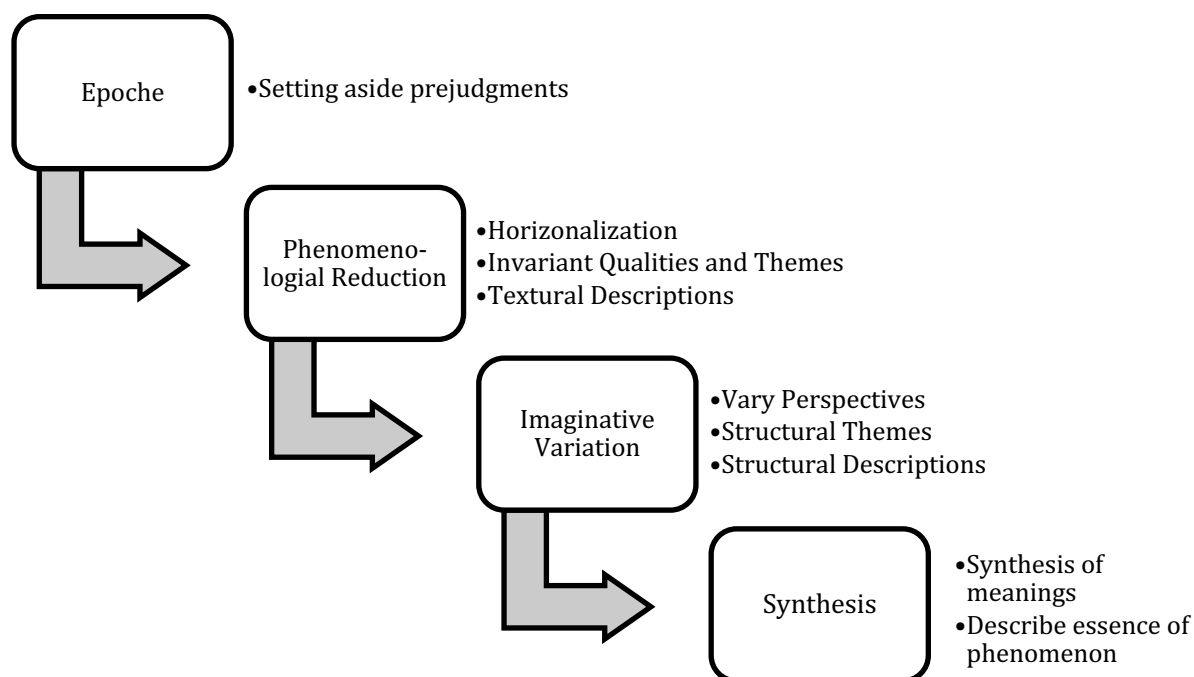
At the conclusion of data generation, I transcribed the interviews and focus groups with the assistance of Zoom's audio transcription tool. I then followed with the data analysis methods of Moustakas (1994) for phenomenological methodology. This process is detailed below and summarized in figure 1.

Phenomenological Reduction. The first part of the analysis was phenomenological reduction. It began with setting clear boundaries for the phenomenon of study, in this case the

experiences of SLPs during the COVID-19 pandemic and identifying key aspects of the phenomenon that were common amongst participants. In this way, phenomenological reduction involved understanding *what* the experience of SLPs during the COVID-19 pandemic was. During this process, the researcher must continue to bracket themselves by setting aside personal experiences and opinions to approach the analysis with fresh eyes (Moustakas, 1994).

Figure 1.

Moustakas's Summary of the Phenomenological Model



The first step of phenomenological reduction was horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). During this process, I conducted repeated readings of the data, treating everything with equal weight. According to Moustakas (1994), during the early stages of data analysis all information is considered valuable; everything has the potential to inform rich, thick descriptions of SLPs

experiences of their job and themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic. After repeated readings, I worked toward delimited horizons. During this stage of analysis, I reflected on the data and identified horizons that stood out as invariant qualities of the experience. From there, I identified invariant themes. Invariant themes are distinct descriptors of the experiences through the eyes of the participants that do not repeat or overlap (Moustakas, 1994).

Next, I created individual textural descriptions for each participant. This included looking across each participant's responses and writing a description of what each participant experienced because of serving as an SLP during the COVID-19 pandemic. I then looked across each individual textural description to create a composite textural description that created a universal textural description, getting at the essence of *what* the experiences of the SLPs were.

Imaginative Variation. Phenomenological reduction seeks to understand the *what* of the phenomenon while imaginative variation seeks to understand *how* the phenomenon came to be what it is (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation guides the researcher to create structural themes from the textural descriptions obtained through phenomenological reduction, understanding that there is no one way to understand the experiences, rather, there are innumerable possibilities (Moustakas, 1994).

To begin, I reread each textural description and sought to imagine the various possible meanings and perspectives of the phenomenon, looking at it from different perspectives and roles. Then, I constructed a list of structural qualities of the experiences. From this list I identified distinct, emergent structural themes.

Using the emergent structural themes, I created individual structural descriptions for each participant. These structural descriptions highlighted how each participant came to experience the phenomenon of being an SLP during the COVID-19 pandemic. These individual descriptions

were then synthesized into a composite textural description. The composite structural description included meta-themes, or universal structural descriptions, resulting in a rich understanding of *how* the essence of the phenomenon of study came to be.

Synthesis. The last step of data analysis was the synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions. This synthesis was meant to be a “unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p.100), within a particular time and place.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is different from quantitative research. Phenomenology in particular aims to describe a phenomenon rather than generalize about it. In this way, qualitative research must use different ways to test the quality of a study. Shenton (2004) put forth four major constructors to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I address each of these below.

Credibility. Credibility deals the congruence of study findings with reality. Shenton (2004) put forth criteria for enhancing credibility including the use of established research methods, triangulation, reflective commentary, iterative questioning, peer scrutiny, member checking, thick descriptions of results, and more.

One of the ways I added credibility was using member checking. After composing individual textural and structural descriptions, I emailed copies to the participants for their review. In this way, participants were able to make sure that I was working toward the *what* and *how* of their personal experiences with the phenomenon. I also used well-established methods for phenomenological research in the form of Moustakas’s (1994) *Phenomenological Research Methods*. I also sought credibility through triangulation. Triangulation refers to the use of

different methods of data generation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study I used surveys, interviews, and focus group interviews, looking across each for consistency. Multiple sources of data generation allowed a deeper understanding of each participant's experience. After interviews I used field notes as a form of reflective commentary to keep a record of thoughts, connections, context, and feelings (Merriam, 2009). I also had debriefing sessions with my dissertation chair to discuss alternative methodological approaches; these sessions also served as a place to test out developing ideas and interpretations.

Lastly, I used member-checking to achieve credibility. Textural and structural descriptions were reviewed by participants to make sure they were accurate representations of their experiences. Participants had the ability to make comments on the textural and structural descriptions that led to revisions that were again checked by participants. In the end, only one participant requested additions to their textural and structural descriptions to account for continually evolving views on reading research and practice.

Transferability. Because phenomenological research methods rely on smaller numbers of participants, the prospect of findings being transferable to a broader group can be unrealistic (Shenton, 2004); however, I increased transferability by providing rich, thick descriptions within my textural and structural descriptions and synthesis (Creswell, 2013). Rich, thick descriptions allow the reader to contextualize results and transfer them to their own environment.

Dependability. Dependability is the issue of whether findings would remain the same if the study were repeated in the same context with the same methods and participants (Shenton, 2004). I achieved dependability by carefully detailing my study methods and data analysis methods.

Confirmability. Confirmability has to do with whether “findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p.72). I achieved confirmability through the triangulation of data, by situating myself in the research to bracket out my own ideas and experiences and enlisting the assistance of a secondary coder for data analysis, a university faculty member trained in phenomenological research methods.

Limitations

Phenomenology is a well-established research methodology; however, it is not without limitations. The study utilized convenience sampling which may have led to self-selection bias where the sample may not have been representative of the population being study (McMillan, 2008). To aid in overcoming this limitation, I used the entry survey to learn demographic information and select participants who represent diverse backgrounds and experiences. Despite these efforts, the participants were mostly white females.

Another potential limitation was the unique circumstances created for individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the routines and daily lives of many people and for one participant this made it difficult to participate in the study and they choose to withdraw from the study. Similar issues may have deterred other SLPs from taking part in the study.

Lastly, despite copious attempts to schedule focus group interviews during a time that was convenient for all participants and sending out calendar and email reminds, only six of the nine participants took part in the focus group interview.

Implications and Study Significance

This research work sought to address a gap in the literature on SLPs by bringing to light the lived experiences of SLPs and how those experiences were affected by a crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study may help influence work in the field of education and SLP preparation programs in institutions of higher education. Further, this research offers implications for the use of DST in research on SLPs. These implications are briefly addressed here, with further detailed provided in Chapter 5.

This study may impact SLPs' day to day lives by creating an understanding of what their work entailed and how it influenced their identities. From this, administrators and school divisions may begin to understand the importance of the work outlined by ILA in their standards for the preparation of literacy professionals (ILA, 2017) and why research has suggested that this work be used to help delineate the work of different literacy professionals such as reading/literacy specialists and coaches.

This research also has implications for SLP preparation programs. The knowledge gained about the lived experiences of SLPs will help researchers understand how the field has shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic and how SLPs view the field in the future. Further, this study will also impact preparation programs for SLPs. By understanding how SLPs experience their multiple roles, they may be able to better prepare future SLPs for the realities of their work and the vision SLPs have for their future.

In addition to these practical implications, I also offered new understandings about how individuals navigate multiple identities using DST (Hermans, 2001), a previously unused theory in research on SLPs. DST offered ways of understanding the identities of SLPs during times of uncertainty such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This will provide researchers

with a new way of looking at the work and experiences of SLPs that may then extend with their own research.

Conclusion

In this chapter I shared the methods used to understand the lived experiences of SLPs. Because I sought to understand the essence of their experiences, I used the phenomenological research methods set forth by Moustakas (1994). I also shared the guiding theoretical framework, how I recruited and selected participants, how I collected and analyzed data, how I established trustworthiness, and study limitations. Lastly, I offered implications and how the study was significant. In the remaining chapters I presented the results of the study and a discussion that interpreted the meaning of the results, putting them in context, and explaining their significance. I also offered suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

“There’s too much to do and not enough of me.” (Spencer, Participant)

In previous chapters, this dissertation explored the evolution of SLPs and their multiple roles along with the evolution of reading research and practice. Research has demonstrated that SLPs take on a variety of roles and responsibilities in schools, and while those roles were separated into three primary positions by the ILA—specialist, coach, and coordinator—that is not always the reality for SLPs (Pletcher et al., 2018). Further, SLPs have lived through various shifts in reading research and practice, moving between skill-based phonics, whole language, and balanced literacy approaches (Alexander & Fox, 2004). To help SLPs better support literacy development, it is necessary to understand their experiences and how those experiences can act as a bridge toward improved practice. This study sought to understand the universal essence of what it meant to be an SLP and how that was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic using phenomenological research methods.

In this chapter, the results of this study are revealed using rich, thick description of participant experiences as they apply to emergent themes relevant to the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of SLPs’ serving elementary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way SLPs experience their work and identities? and

Summary of Data Analysis

In chapter 3, I detailed the methods used for data collection and generation for this phenomenological exploration of SLPs lived experiences. Data collection and generation produced a rich data set including two individual interviews per participant divided between an initial semi-structured guide distributed via Google Form and a Zoom follow-up, two focus group interviews, and field notes providing context and critical reflections for each interview and focus group. I analyzed the data using the framework provided by Moustakas (1994); these steps are summarized below. Secondary analysis was performed by a colleague who studies education and has experience in phenomenological research methods.

Phenomenological Reduction

In the first stage of data analysis, I read through all transcripts while constantly referring to field notes to offer context. Then, I began the process of horizontalization where I highlighted any phrases that may have been relevant to the phenomenon of the lived experiences of SLPs. Next, I began to identify and record invariant horizons. According to Moustakas (1994), invariant horizons are "...the unique qualities of an experience" (p.128). When horizontalization was complete, I began to identify patterns within participants' experiences and clustered those into themes. For confirmability (Shenton, 2004), I reread participants' interviews to match each theme against the narratives. Using the themes, I wrote a textural description for each participant to contextualize their experiences as SLPs. This was aimed at understanding *what* the participants experienced.

Imaginative Variation

Returning to the themes and textural descriptions created during phenomenological reduction, I wrote a brief structural description for each participant. During this process I sought

to understand the various meanings and perspectives of the phenomenon. This was aimed at understanding *how* participants experienced being an SLP.

Synthesis of Composite Textural and Structural Descriptions

During the final phase of data analysis, a colleague and I each read through the full list of themes from all nine participants, identifying the common themes. We then collaborated to create a list of seven meta-themes that existed throughout most, if not all, participants' experiences. Of those seven meta-themes, one theme contained four subthemes. Using these meta-themes, I went back through the processes of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation to describe the essence of being an SLP, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the following sections, I have provided a brief introduction to the participants to contextualize findings. Then, I present the synthesis described above, organized by theme. Each theme related to the first research question: What are the lived experiences of SLPs' serving elementary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic? Theme four addressed research question two: How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way SLPs experience their work and identities? Next, I provided a general narrative focused on the experiences of the participants followed by a general summary of what that meant for SLPs as a population, incorporating DST. Lastly, I addressed trustworthiness.

Participant Introductions

Aria

Aria was a 36-year-old white female who worked in a rural school district in the U.S. Midwest. She had her master's degree and was a certified K-12 literacy specialist. Based on her coursework in graduate school and her connections, she was suggested for the position of literacy coach. She had 14 years of teaching experience, four of those years as a literacy coach

and coach coordinator. At the time of the study, Aria coached teachers in one elementary school serving primarily kindergarten through third grade. She also served as a coordinator for literacy coaches across her school district. In total, Aria served ten schools.

Candy

Candy was a 29-year-old female with a master's degree and reading specialist certification. Candy did not provide information on her race or ethnicity. She had seven years of teaching experience; at the time of the study, she was in her first year as a reading specialist. She was working in a school serving an urban area in the southeast region of the United States. In her work, Candy primarily worked with kindergarten through second grade. Prior to working at that school, Candy served as a co-teacher and teacher trainer for the Peace Corps as well as working in other schools in the United States. Through her experiences in these settings, Candy "realized how important the ability to read, and read well, was" which drove her to pursue reading specialist certification.

Erica

Erica was a 38-year-old, white female working as an instructional coach for a school in an urban area within the southeast region of the United States. Erica had a master's degree in reading education and a literacy endorsement. She did not have a reading specialist certification because it was not needed for literacy coaching where she worked and would have required her to go back to school and do another practicum experience. She had 15 years of teaching experience, four of those years working as an SLP. She coached between 10 and 15 teachers in preschool through third grade and worked with one small group of students.

Evelyn

Evelyn was a 55-year-old, Black female pursuing her doctorate. She had 19 years of experience in education with 11 years as a certified reading specialist. During the pandemic and at the start of the study she transitioned from a reading specialist position in one school district to an instructional specialist in another. This transition happened midway through the school year. She served urban schools with students in kindergarten through fifth grade in the southeast region of the United States. Her school district chose to remain virtual for the entire school year due to the pandemic.

Hannah

Hannah was a 43-year-old, white female with a master's degree and reading specialist certification. She was a literacy coach with 20 years of classroom experience, including 15 years of experience as a reading specialist. At the time of the study, Hannah worked with preschool through fifth grade in a Montessori setting in an urban area of the U.S. Northeast but did not have Montessori training. She worked with 13 teachers in multi-grade classrooms as well as 13 teaching assistants. Hannah said that she believed, "that education—specifically in literacy—was the key to empowerment and the ability to be an active citizen of the world".

Julie

Julie was a 41-year-old, white female serving a suburban school in the southeast region of the United States. She had 18 years of teaching experience and was in her first year as an interventionist. She worked in a Title I school and was responsible for math and reading intervention, but her primary focus was reading. She supported 52 students in reading and 15 in math; her students were in third through sixth grade. Julie was a certified reading specialist and had her doctorate in education.

Melanie

Melanie was a 55-year-old, white female with 25 years of teaching experience, six of those years as a literacy professional. She had her master's degree and reading specialist certification. Melanie worked in the southeast region of the United States in a Title I school serving students in preschool through second grade from both rural and urban environments. Melanie was working as a literacy coach but also had experience as an interventionist.

Natalie

Natalie was a 42-year-old, white female with a master's degree and 20 years of experience in education, including three years as a lead educator and one year as a senior lead educator of curriculum for reading and social studies. She served kindergarten through eighth grade and coached 11 teachers in an urban setting in the Northeast region of the United States. While Natalie's job title was not reading/literacy coach, interventionist, or specialist, she still served in this capacity. She coached teachers on their instructional practices and collaborated with teachers in professional learning communities around reading and social studies. Natalie was also a certified reading specialist.

Spencer

Spencer was a 33-year-old, white female working as a reading specialist in a Title I school in a rural area in the Southeast region of the United States. Spencer had two master's degrees and was a certified reading specialist. She had 10 years of teaching experience, serving as a reading specialist for 3 of those years. As a reading specialist her primary role was that of interventionist, working with struggling readers in first through fifth grade. Early in the pandemic, Spencer's school moved to a hybrid model with students alternating between in-person and virtual instruction; by the end of the study her school was moving to completely in-

person instruction. Spencer described herself as being a “really super positive person” and was grateful to be “back in the building”.

In the next section, I summarize the textural and structural descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants in this study within a thematic synthesis.

Thematic Synthesis

Seven themes emerged from participant interviews. Below in Table 3, I have listed the seven meta-themes that emerged from participant interviews along with a description of each theme. Then, in Table 4, I have listed these themes along with a tally for each participant that expressed that theme in their interviews. Additionally, I have provided situated narratives for each theme in Appendix F; in the situated narratives I listed each theme and provided a representational quote from each participant.

Table 3*Summary and Description of Themes*

Theme	Description
1. Professional Identity	Theme 1 summarizes the participants' professional identities, including the multiple positions they took on as professional.
2. Personal Identity	Theme 2 summarizes the participants' personal identities, including the multiple positions they took on outside of their profession.
3. Importance of Coping Strategies	Theme 3 illustrates the various coping strategies participants used to help them navigate their professional identities both within and outside of the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Influence of COVID-19 Pandemic	Theme 4 describes the various ways that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the participants' experiences of being an SLP. This theme is divided into four sub-themes.
A. Impact of Forced Move to Virtual Learning	Sub-theme A illustrates the various ways being forced into virtual learning impacted SLPs both at work and at home.
B. Pandemic Creates Uncertainty	Sub-theme B highlights a feeling of uncertainty created by the pandemic, where they often felt they needed to justify their time.
C. Pandemic Influence on Wellbeing	Sub-theme C speaks to the various ways that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced participants' overall health and well-being in a negative way, including their physical and mental health.
D. Impact of Pandemic Protocols and PPE	Sub-Theme D describes the different ways protocols such as social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE) impacted the participants' experiences as an SLP.
5. Power Difference	Theme 5 describes situations where participants dealt with issues of power differences and whether they felt their voice was heard. In some situations, participants felt like they had power, and in some they did not, leaving them in some odd middle ground.
6. Influence of the Reading Wars	Theme 6 addresses how participants felt influenced by the reading wars in their work as SLPs, noting shifts between perspectives on reading research and practice.
7. Influence of New Position During a Pandemic	Theme 8 illustrates how four of the participants' experiences were influenced by taking on a new position during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the changes put in place by the pandemic affected their transition to these positions.

Table 4*Dominant Themes Across Participant Interviews*

Theme	Aria	Candy	Erica	Evelyn	Hannah	Julie	Melanie	Natalie	Spencer
1. Professional Identity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Personal Identity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3. Importance of Coping Strategies	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4. Influence of COVID-19 Pandemic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
A. Impact of Forced Move to Virtual Learning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
B. Pandemic Creates Uncertainty	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
C. Pandemic Influence on Wellbeing	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
D. Impact of Pandemic Protocols and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	X	X	X		X	X			X
5. Power Differences	X	X	X	X			X		X
6. Influence of the Reading Wars	X	X		X		X	X		X
7. Influence of New Position During a Pandemic		X		X		X		X	

Theme 1: Professional Identity

All nine participants talked about their professional identities, identifying multiple positions they took on as SLPs. Many of these positions aligned with what would be expected of an SLP and some did not. When discussing her professional identity, Aria referred to herself as a literacy coach and coach coordinator. She described this in the following way, “As a literacy coach, I conference with teachers around data, co-plan lessons based on the data, co-teach, model, and observe instruction.” Other coaches such as Erica, Hannah, Melanie, and Natalie had similar descriptions of coaching. They all talked about collaborative planning with teachers, working with or observing teachers in the classroom or virtual setting, and providing feedback to teachers. They also talked about providing professional development to teachers around literacy topics with the intent of improving pedagogy in schools. Erica said, “My main job is to coach teachers on best practices by observing, giving feedback, and running meetings.”

Aria, Evelyn, and Natalie all worked within schools, but also at the district level. When discussing their professional identities, they all labeled themselves differently. Aria was a coach coordinator, saying, “As a coach coordinator, I plan and facilitate professional learning for coaches including ongoing workshops to build knowledge and practice coaching behaviors as well as ongoing coaching for coaches.” Evelyn was an instructional specialist, describing that in the following way:

Just recently I switched jobs so that I’m at the division level as a, I guess I’m an instructional specialist. That’s my official title. But I still look at reading and I look at data. I’ll be working with teachers, building administrators...Now I get to hopefully influence building level administrators’ knowledgebase of the reading process.

Natalie's description was like Evelyn's, but her title was senior lead educator. All three of this SLPs still took on many of the coaching responsibilities that other participants had but had an added required element of working across their school districts and in collaboration with other SLPs and building administrators.

Candy was the only participant who was required to take on two professional identities: reading specialist and literacy coach. Candy described a reading specialist as a "provider of intervention services for students" and a coach as a "technical expert for other teachers". Her definition of coach matches closely with how other participants described a coach and her definition of reading specialist matched closely with Spencer's. Spencer's title was reading specialist, but her sole role was to provide intervention to students based on the Response to Intervention model. She sometimes worked with teachers, but it was informal, at the request of teachers, and not required of her. Julie was titled interventionist and provided support for students in both reading and math, however, most of the students on her caseload needed support in reading. She provided 52 students with reading support services and only 15 students with math support services.

In their descriptions of their work as coaches, specialists, and coordinators, all participants shared responsibilities that are typically associated with SLPs. However, they also took on a variety of other responsibilities within their professional identities that may not typically be associated with SLPs. Erica, Hannah, and Julie all mentioned having to substitute or monitor classrooms in some capacity. Erica said:

...I feel like I get pulled in a lot of different directions, especially subbing, I end up being the go-to sub or one of the go-to subs for a lot of people. That's always frustrating. When

I wake up in the morning, it's not even seven, and I have a bunch of texts like, “So and so called out. Can you sub?”

Similarly, Julie said:

We have so many teachers out and it's so difficult to get a sub. So, the job that I'm supposed to be able to do, while they're benchmarking because I'm supposed to be able to catch up on some stuff when they're doing that, I can't do that because I'm actually having to fill-in in a classroom.

Hannah described substituting as one of those “variable pieces” that could easily affect her schedule and impact her professional identity on a day-to-day basis.

Participants also discussed many other responsibilities they took on in their schools. Many served on committees, worked with data, developed and revised curriculum, assisted teachers with technology implementation, administered student assessments, and helped with arrival and dismissal. Candy and Hannah even found themselves writing lessons for teachers. Candy said, “I write structured literacy lessons for K-5 teachers to use in their whole group,” while Hannah said:

I was struggling with that a little bit because I felt like...first of all, it was a lot of work...I've really resisted lesson planning for people in the past because I felt like there was something not terribly genuine about it.

Hannah felt that lesson planning should be responsive to the students in the class, and she struggled to write lessons for students that weren't hers. However, feedback from teachers helped her understand that it was a very helpful practice.

Within their professional identities, all the participants emphasized the importance of building and maintaining relationships with colleagues. Erica believed SLPs needed to have

strong relationships with teachers by being a good listener, saying, “I have become a better listener, that is what has gained me the trust...people really don’t trust you unless they have a good relationship with you”. Erica and Evelyn each noted that many of the conversations they had with teachers to help build relationships happened in the hallway. Melanie furthered this by emphasizing a need to allow teachers to share their frustrations and be a positive support for them. And Aria said:

I think you need to have a knack for connecting with people because you like, I see the word literacy professional as someone who's like bringing literacy research and best practices to classrooms and teachers and so to be able to do that effectively, I think you need to be able to connect with people and develop rapport quickly.

In addition to building relationships, participants described SLPs as needing to take on a variety of characteristics to be successful in their professional identities. Some of these included having an asset-based mindset, being able to see the big picture, having empathy, being flexible, having a strong foundational knowledge of literacy, continually seeking to learn more, and being organized. Erica summed it up when she said:

I think that the typical things: a deep devotion to children and a deep devotion to literacy practices and being able to stand up and say this is what I think is best for children and knowing that you can back it up, are they are other things that are really important and I'm probably leaving things out...

Theme 2: Personal Identity

Each of the nine participants talked about themselves as having an identity outside of their professional identity, their personal identity. Within their personal identity, one position participants took on was continual learner. Aria, Evelyn, and Natalie were in doctoral programs

at the time of the study and Candy was hoping to apply to a doctoral program. Julie and Hannah both continued their educational development by working with local universities. Melanie taught science of reading courses, while Spencer maintained several social media groups and websites on promoting the science of reading. Additionally, all the participants delivered professional development as well as attended professional development and conferences.

When reflecting on her experiences as a learner, Evelyn said:

Well, the reason that I enjoy working and presenting at conferences is because typically what I find is, well, I'm in school myself right now too, but in the past I might learn about something, and I just like to continually hone my craft...because just you sharpen your skills, and you deepen your knowledge, and you just get a thrill out of just sharing with your colleagues and you know the feedback and everything. And it's just fun.

Julie, who taught two university classes after completing her doctorate in education said, "My dissertation research opened my eyes to the differences and importance of content and disciplinary literacy knowledge in elementary grade levels and how that knowledge can shape teachers' literacy decisions."

Natalie's role as a continual learner often interacted with her role as a mother to two daughters. She did her best to prioritize the role of mother and save her schoolwork for when her family was sleeping or otherwise engaged. When talking about her role as continual learner and mother, Natalie said:

I knew there were going to be some sacrifices that would come along with me continuing my education. In the past there have been times where my husband will take them. You know, if it was a nice day in the summer, like he'll take them to the lake for the day just so that I would have time for me. So, I try to make sure that, once again, balancing it all,

so that they don't feel slighted by that. There might be times too where, you know, if they're sitting watching a movie I might be reading during that time, and they don't mind that. It was funny because yesterday my youngest, she was doing something like goofy and she was like... 'I guess I get the sense of humor from my father' and I was like, 'Oh wow so like what are you calling mommy?' And she said, 'Oh mom, you're like determined and focused when it comes to like your work; like you're determined and focused. Like that's what you are.' And I was like, 'Okay.' So, I guess, they are noticing my behaviors and just trying to balance it all.

Another participant who was greatly impacted by family, especially the role of mother was Spencer. Spencer said:

When I became a mom, I decided my child came first and school came second and everything else came third...I just think being a mom made me stop doing a lot of extra stuff because I leave at four o'clock to go home and see my daughter.

If it weren't for her daughter, Spencer thought that she would probably still be working all the time. Overall, Hannah summed up what many participants thought when she said:

And I could stay until, you know, anywhere between, like, 4 and 5:30 and in just putting in like those extra three hours a day I could like feel finished so that when I went home, I could be home and be with my family.

Participants needed to have a stopping point for their professional identity so that they could focus on their personal identity.

Theme 3: Importance of Coping Strategies

To be successful as SLPs, all nine participants discussed coping strategies they used to help them stay productive and avoid burn out. Participants used scheduling and organization; boundaries; and leaning on administration as coping strategies.

All nine participants emphasized scheduling and organizing as something they did to help themselves with their professional identities. When asked to share an artifact that represented themselves as SLPs, Aria, Erica, Hannah, and Natalie used that as an opportunity to share what that looked like. Aria used Google Keep and a Post-it system, like Hannah who also had a Post-it system. Hannah showed a Post-it stack she kept and said:

So, I put like, you know, there's multiple layers here, but like I'll pull out, I try to prioritize each day so Tuesday these are the big things that I need to get done on Tuesday and then like Wednesday and then there was Thursday priorities. And then, at the end of the week, I had like, okay here are these last things, so I sort of keep pulling things from the different pages and putting them at the front. And the way that I'm deciding what those priorities are it's kind of a mix of like, because a lot of that production work - like the lessons and things - it's all for the following week, so I generally just sort of, it's a kind of a balance of which things sort of fit together, naturally.

Reflecting on these systems, Aria summed up how most participants felt about their organization and systems when she said:

In years past I haven't been as precise about putting things into my schedule and I think one physical thing that I do is taking the things that absolutely have to get done that day, putting them into that day and kind of shutting the door once I finished those things rather than in the past, when I was a classroom teacher and even in years past as a coach I felt the push to like exhaust yourself, you know what I mean? Like, you just feel like I have

to do more, I have to change that person's mind, I have to do this. And I think scheduling, like putting it into a schedule and saying these are the things that I think are important for today and fit in with my professional and those additional pieces. I've done those things, I shut the door, I share what I think, and then I kind of shut the door and move on to you know, having a life, and you know enjoying my animals and enjoying books and, like the rest of life because, like this isn't the only part of life. So, I think the scheduling probably has been a big part and then just mentally being able to like just being able to say, like okay that's- I don't know everything, this is what they've decided to do, and it is what it is...I guess it goes back to being, continuing to be apathetic, like this is where they might be coming from here, here are some ends, but you know I'll take that as it comes, rather than getting so frustrated about it.

Aria's quote leads into using boundaries as a coping strategy. The idea of "shutting the door" was common among participants to help them avoid burn out. This was easier for participants such as Aria, Melanie, and Spencer because they had come to the realization that their schools could function without them. Melanie said:

Well, I achieved a lot on my job and that helped and I got older and I think the older I get the more I realize there's no—and you know, just events, events that have happened in the professional world—that have made me realize that they can do it without me and I'm just a little small piece in a big machine...I'm a little humbled because I thought I was a lot more important than I really was and I'm also kind of relieved that, you know, I don't have to hustle and I don't have to- I mean I put myself out there and I do my very best because I want to intrinsically, but it's also relieving to know that things are going to go on if I'm not out there doing it all.

This realization meant that it was okay to step away from work and spend time on their personal identities. Aria echoed this when she said:

“It’s very easy to get caught up in education and get caught up in being there every minute and feeling like you’ve got the weight of the world on your shoulders, but in reality, I am not the only person leading those districts. I’m not the only person. I’m not even really in charge of any of those things. Just saying that to myself is another way that I try to keep sanity.

For other participants, they still recognized that spending too much time on work was not effective. Candy summarized this when she said:

I feel like there's so much pressure of the good teacher who sacrifices everything for her school and her students and is the first one there and the last one to leave and is grading late into the night and spends her weekends planning lesson plans. And I very much bought into that at the beginning of my teaching career, but now I work so hard from 7:30 to 3:30-4:00, sometimes 5pm if I have after school stuff and then I stopped and I admire people that can keep going but, for me, I just have to be like, no. This is my time to do my things and I need to enjoy my life. Because I can't. If I'm going to do this for years longer, I cannot be burnt out at my age, like it just, it won't work.

To help them create boundaries from work, participants would avoid bringing home their computers, set timers to remind them when to stop working, and create physical boundaries of where work could and could not take place.

The last coping strategy for the participants was leaning on administration to help manage their professional identities. Hannah and Spencer both discussed having close

relationships with their principals and times when they would meet with them to reflect on their roles and responsibilities and how to prioritize and manage their work. Hannah said:

I usually meet with her [the principal] on Friday mornings and kind of talk through my work at each level and kind of talk about what's going well and what challenges there might be. Things that I'm noticing or thinking about. And then, just in talking it through with her it helps me realize and recognize patterns or trends or areas of urgency and then I'm kind of able to say like, okay, so this is what I'm going to do now and it just, it just sort of naturally becomes a priority-setting opportunity because she's a wonderful listener, and also she used to be the literacy coach before me, and so she knows the position and she knows the teachers so well and so she's just really wonderful about listening in a very understanding way.

Participants found that when administrators supported them and listened to their concerns, particularly those about priorities, it helped them to better manage their professional identities.

Theme 4: Influence of COVID-19 Pandemic

At the time of the study, all participants actively served as SLPs in elementary school settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected these SLPs in a variety of ways. The four major sub-themes that emerged were impacts from times when the SLPs were forced to do their job through virtual learning, uncertainty created by the pandemic, the pandemic's influence on participants' wellbeing, and the impact of pandemic protocols such as social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE). Below, I have discussed each of these four sub-themes.

Sub-theme A: Impact of Forced Move to Virtual Learning

Throughout the course of interviewing, many participants moved between different educational settings. Evelyn and Natalie were completely virtual, working from home with students and teachers who were also working from home. But for other participants, there was fluctuation, with many participants starting in a virtual setting and then gradually easing back into face-to-face instruction. The common thread for all participants was that they had all been forced into virtual learning at some point during the pandemic and it impacted their work as SLPs.

Candy, Julie, and Spencer were interventionists and shared similar concerns about providing reading support to students in an online setting. Julie said, “as a literacy professional and just an interventionist, I cannot intensively intervene with you online” because she felt that there were many obstacles to working with students online. Background noise, connectivity issues, and a lack of personal connection were some of the issues they cited. Candy talked about these issues and said:

...providing small group instruction to students has been incredibly frustrating: attendance is poor; students' devices often die or can't connect; background noise of parents/siblings/TV is super distracting. And even when all of that goes well, it's just really hard to keep little kids engaged in reading lessons done online.

Spencer shared similar concerns and felt detached from students, saying:

And it's also just like, as much you can do reading online, there's a lot of it that you can do, but I just miss the personal connection of it and being able to walk up to a kid and being like, “Come on, now, you know that when we make a *d* we make a *c* and we close it up” and just having that connection with them. That's missing.

Participants often found themselves serving as technical support during virtual learning, working to support teachers and students on different online platforms such as Zoom, Google Meets, and Microsoft Teams. They also worked to provide teachers with digital resources, for example, Erica recorded read alouds, Hannah created Google slides to “adapt existing units of instruction to an online environment”, and Aria reformatted an early literacy website with digital resources. Aria felt like a great deal of this work was “reactive” and said the following about the resources as they returned to in-person instruction:

I do sometimes feel like it was a very reactive endeavor that is now not really being utilized or they're utilizing it, but kind of in a superficial role with the virtual students. Like they'll post them to the virtual students.

When thinking about coaching in an online environment, participants found that they were unsure of how to coach teachers virtually and often could not do things as they normally would. Hannah commented, “I don't have, like the regular window into students experience to know that it's [coaching] making a difference.” And Erica said, “I'm not able to do my six week [coaching] cycles the way that I normally would. Partially because I'm still learning myself and I feel like I'm still learning how to be a good coach virtually...”.

Evelyn summed up the overall feelings of working in a virtual setting when she said: Well, it was a little frustrating. Like I said, I'm used to having a broader scope of what was going on. And now it's very narrow because it's only what I can see on that screen; it's not what I can see in the general building like before.

Sub-theme B: Pandemic Creates Uncertainty

Another way the pandemic influenced participants was that it created uncertainty for them and those with whom they worked. Early in the pandemic, participants found that as

teachers struggled to operate in a virtual capacity, they did not have the time or energy to work with an SLP. Even interventionists struggled to get started as they worked to handle classroom instruction first. During this time, participants experienced feeling uncertain about their role and purpose. Erica said the following about that time:

But then last year during the pandemic when we were teaching kids virtually, even when we were doing all asynchronous teaching, I struggled to fill the hours which is why I also watched a lot of webinars. Because I really felt like I needed to justify my seven hours of work each day.

Similarly, Hannah said, “it’s like a weird position in a way, you have to kind of like justify it,” when reflecting on how she spent her time at the start of the pandemic.

As the pandemic progressed and participants were able to find their purpose, they found that quarantine created additional uncertainties. Aria said that there were “classes quarantining pretty regularly or teachers quarantining or students quarantining; that’s another thing that has thrown a wrench into everyone’s lives”. Aria herself had to quarantine because of a possible case at school and then upon return contracted COVID-19 and had to quarantine again. During that time Aria noted that she “wasn’t doing anything” because she wasn’t allowed to work during those times. She felt that things were easier with in-person because it allowed consistency but noted that:

it’s still frustrating because a lot of teachers still feel in limbo, like we could be going back to virtual or...a class may need to quarantine...so there’s always this feeling...of, okay, well, we’re not ready quite yet because we’re not sure what’s going to happen.

This made it difficult for her to work with teachers because there was constantly a feeling of the kids needing to get settled.

Like the teachers and students, participants also felt uncertain about what the pandemic meant for them personally. Candy expressed feeling like her life was “on pause” and Evelyn remembered wondering when she would every return to working in person. Evelyn said:

...when I first started I just, you know, we were all just sort of shocked. And you know, March came: Are we going to go back to school, or are we not? In August and then, no, we're not going to go back. And then all of the back and forth: August, September, October, November...

Spencer frequently referred to her experiences during the pandemic as “temporary”, but by the end of her second interview she said, “It’s just been wild, and I think it’s just finally dawned on me that this isn’t going away like I thought it would...”. Participants were living in a constant state of uncertainty.

Sub-theme C: Pandemic Influence on Wellbeing

Seven of the nine participants talked about how the pandemic had influenced their overall wellbeing, including their physical and mental health. All seven participants felt like the pandemic had increased their workload. Spencer said, “There’s too much to do, and not enough of me”. The increased workload had significant impacts on participants with Hannah saying:

And I also think that just like at a personal level, it's not sustainable, like I am really struggling with...Like I start in the morning and then I work until generally dinnertime. And then I get my kids to bed and then I work again after they go to bed, sometimes to like 12 or one and then most weekends. I'm still trying to do stuff and I'm struggling with...I'm feeling really exhausted and I think depressed.

When thinking about how to reduce their workloads, participants struggled. Hannah said, “You can’t really take something off your plate without putting it on somebody else’s plate” and Aria called it an “uphill battle”.

Working from home also affected the health of participants. Erica said, “I am legitimately tired of being at home. And there are some great things [about working from home], but I think that my mental health also might improve if I’m not sitting in my house all day long.” Spencer, who had to quarantine and work from home said, “I’m out for all of March basically and that’s just been a nightmare. Stress.” In this way, the pandemic created conditions that had a negative impact on their mental health.

Participants also struggled to take care of their physical health during the pandemic. Candy said the amount of time she had to spend working meant she had less time to exercise or prepare health meals. When working from home, Erica eliminated her daily commute which involved regular walking and she struggled to integrate movement into her day. And Julie said, “It’s hard for me to get my water intake... because I have to wear the mask all the time and I can’t drink the water that I need to drink so that’s difficult.”

Evelyn had conversations with colleagues about some of their daily habits and said:

We had a conversation today, the other people on my team, and we have to put up some boundaries because we’re noting that we’re eating breakfast in front of the computer, eating lunch in front of the computer, we’re on a computer until seven or eight o’clock at night.

They recognized that they were not taking the time to care for themselves. In reflecting on her years of educational experience, Evelyn remembered that wellness had often been a conversation

in schools, however, she said, “I don’t really know if we practice it so well, but we should. We should do better”.

Sub-theme D: Impact of Pandemic Protocols and PPE

Evelyn, Melanie, and Natalie worked in school districts that were operating completely virtually throughout the interview process. Because of this, they were impacted by virtual learning, but did not have to deal with protocols and personal protective equipment (PPE) that were required of the participants whose schools had some form of in-person instruction occurring. The remaining six participants all worked in-person in some way and talked about what Aria called “...the added pressure of personal protective equipment, cleaning, social distancing...”.

When working in-person, participants saw social distancing as a barrier. Social distancing required students to be three or six feet apart, depending on COVID-19 guidelines, and participants said that was difficult for small group reading instruction. Candy shared, “Sitting six feet apart from kids is really far if you're trying to do a small group lesson while other stuff is happening in the class.” Moreover, when interventionists such as Candy, Julie, and Spencer would form small groups of students to work with they were not able to mix students from different classes to help minimize contact. This made it difficult for them to meet with as many students as usual. When describing her experience grouping students, Spencer said:

...you have to take kids from the same class, and so we have like 40-something different classes and I was losing my mind...So, what I did was I reached out to all of my teachers. I said, “I really don't even know how to move forward right now. You give me a couple of time periods that might work. I'll start building my schedule based off of that, and then I will plug in.” And that's what I did. Every teacher got a time slot. I looked at their

matrix and whoever had the highest score from that class got that time slot, but it was stressful. I think it wouldn't have been so bad if we could have mixed classes...because you might only have one kid from a class that needs help, but they would be perfect with the kid from another class. But I mean...I don't blame anybody, it's just the reality of the situation.

Lastly, social distancing also meant that students had to be more spread out in the building and that meant that Hannah had to give up her office in the building and continue working remotely from home, leaving her feeling isolated from her colleagues.

Another barrier was wearing masks. Spencer found that the mask made her difficult to hear so she said, "I did buy a voice amplifier off of Amazon so I look ridiculous and look like a telemarketer all day, but I wanted to make sure that no matter what the kids could hear my voice." Julie also mentioned having a plexiglass barrier to place between her and the students she was working with so that they could pull down their masks to work on articulation; however, Julie also said, "...the students need to pull down their mask and that's what the barrier provides, and some of them are real nervous to do that, but I can't hear them with a mask when they have to do a running record." Candy sought out what her school referred to as a communicator mask which had a clear square in the middle that allowed students to see her mouth. She was excited because "when I point to my mouth and am like, 'Look at where my tongue is or look where my lips are,' the kids can actually see".

Aside from masks posing problems for instruction, they also created extra work for the participants. Candy mentioned that she would often see students wearing masks below their noses or around their necks. Erica found that masks made things difficult for children and made her feel like the "mask police". She would tap her own nose to remind students to pull their

masks into the right position when they would slide down. She would also do things to help students feel more comfortable in their masks. She said, “I make little mask pillows” where she wraps a tissue around the straps to cushion the mask behind their ears. Erica acknowledged that she wore two masks during the school day and often felt uncomfortable herself so she could understand what the students felt like. Julie went further and said, “I just can’t breathe. I can’t breathe in the mask.”

The last barrier that the six participants discussed was cleaning protocols. Spencer had spray bottles of Oxivir 5, a hospital-grade disinfectant, that she used to regularly disinfect spaces at her school. Julie shared the following:

You don't even think about the amount of cleaning that I do between groups. So, my students have to have their own little area, and I have to go and pick up all their materials, put it in an area that is just theirs. I have to clean all their area and then go get another group. And so that time, I waste a good five to 10 minutes just cleaning and sanitizing between each grade.

Cleaning also impacted participants’ building access. For example, Melanie could not enter her school on Fridays because it was “deep cleaning day” and Erica had to leave the building each day by 4:30 for cleaning purposes.

Theme 5: Power Differences

Another prominent theme among six participants was power differences. Sometimes participants felt like they had a voice in how literacy instruction or other things were handled in their schools, and with that they had power, but sometimes they did not. Participants described themselves as being between teachers and administrators; Erica named it “admin with a little *a*”, while Candy described it as being in “no-man’s land” and a “weird gray space”. They

acknowledged that there were places where their voices were heard such as gatherings of SLPs within their districts, but there were many places where their voices were ignored. For example, Evelyn and Aria both talked about times when they felt that they had some voice in decision-making process, but that their status often meant that their opinions were eventually overlooked. When talking about creating professional development, Evelyn laughed and said that sometimes “they’ll [people above her] say, ‘Well, that’s the direction we’re going so...’”. In this way, Evelyn’s vision for literacy instruction would often go unrealized. In reflecting on the different directions and lack of vision that Evelyn had observed, she wondered “Are we ever going to get off this hamster wheel?”

Candy also felt like her voice was overlooked, taking away her power. When thinking about events at school Candy said:

I just felt like something was getting lifted off my shoulders with read across America week planning being done, and now...I have an academic night to plan and to create this calendar of LA activities. So, it just feels like you don't get a break, because the next thing starts before the other one even finishes and I don't really get much of an opportunity to be like, ‘Yes, I think, I would like to be on this, or like no I don't think I want to do this’. It feels like I'm voluntold a lot of the time.

Times when participants did feel they had some power and voice was when they felt like an authority on something, giving weight to their voice. Evelyn felted that being a doctoral student strengthened her voice because she knew what research had been done and could use that knowledge to influence literacy instruction. Spencer also felt she had influence in literacy instruction because of her role as a blogger and social media influencer. She recalled this specific instance:

...my principal read my blog and she was like, “Okay, so when I see cueing strategies in the classroom, that's not what we're looking for, right?” And I was like, “Yeah, you know, cueing strategies are really not supported by the science.” And so, it was really cool that she was listening to me about that.

Participants struggled with power and voice because the various positions they took on in their professional identities and the various contexts in which they operated all placed them in different levels of power. This made participants feel like they were stuck in the middle, between positions of power and positions without power. When talking about this sense of being in the middle, Melanie said:

I'm not an administrator of the schools, I am not an administrator of the district. I'm just kind of that in between person, but a lot of times I think they see me as one of those administrator people, evaluative people, and I'm not at any point an evaluator of what they're doing. I'm here to support you, so I really have to walk that line of supporting district initiatives, even though sometimes I don't always agree with them, and bringing them to the teachers.

This supported the idea that Melanie was really stuck between teachers and administrators and oftentimes felt in the middle, saying “I'm just a middleman with no control over anything”. In this way, Melanie, like the other participants, seemed to struggle with power and voice in her job, and lacked a strong voice in her school. While she sometimes had a voice to share ideas and opinions, she was “still lower down on the chain of decision-making” and that made it difficult for her.

Theme 6: Influence of the Reading Wars

Six participants talked about the evolution of reading research and practice and how it had influenced their work as SLPs, particularly the reading wars. The reading wars focus on a longstanding debate over best practices in literacy instruction that has often resulted in a divide between systematic, phonics-based instruction and balanced literacy or whole language approaches (Pearson, 2004). Aria felt caught up in the “reading wars”, saying “I think about the reading wars that are national; it’s very much the one side of reading wars where it’s ‘let’s focus on phonics’”, emphasizing how she felt an “immense divide” that was forcing her practice toward skill-and-drill approaches versus the child-centered instructional practices that she felt her students needed. Candy’s school was shifting from balanced literacy to the science of reading. When asked about it, she said, “I will say it feels a little bit like a cult and I almost feel like...I’m taking sides in these reading wars”.

Julie felt frustrated because she found that many of her students needed phonics instruction, but her school was using balanced literacy and so phonics was only addressed when the need arose; it was not systematic. She felt that systematic phonics instruction would benefit many of her students, but that it was not allowed. She said, “...we don’t teach phonics. That’s a no-no in our school, in our grade levels. That’s just a big no-no. However, the students we intervene with would benefit so much if we could go back and do some phonics”. She was able to get access to a computer program for her students that attempted to fill this need, but still felt strongly that some of her students would benefit from a “tailored program”. In this way, Julie echoed Aria’s sentiment that instruction should not be based on what side of the reading wars you fell on, but on the needs of students.

Evelyn believed that the key to giving students what they needed was making sure that teachers had strong foundational knowledge in literacy instruction. However, what Evelyn had

witnessed more than developing teacher's knowledge was an investment in different programs and trainings. Evelyn noted that she was participating LETRS training and recalled other training programs she had gone through in the past and said:

I keep taking all this stuff and it hasn't helped me because I know this [phonological awareness framework]. This is why it doesn't help me. Because I know this [refers to the phonological awareness framework posted on her wall]. And I learned this in my program of studies.

She went on to add:

...if we don't get a stance on 'this is how literacy is going to go in our district' then we're going to swing the pendulum one way and then with whatever comes along, swing it the other way. And then we will look at ourselves and say we haven't accomplished much of anything

Melanie and Spencer were both advocates for the science of the reading and felt strongly that education should shift to that approach to instruction. Melanie and Spencer both sought out training in the science of reading on their own and had worked to shift their practice from balanced literacy approaches and cueing strategies to systematic, multisensory instruction. Spencer was frustrated because she saw college coursework as an impediment to the science of reading when she said, "there are still pre-service and master's programs in education who are teaching those kinds of strategies [referring to cueing systems]". She went on to say, "Colleges need to do a better job of teaching people" to read research critically. For her, a critical reading of research would support the use of the science of reading.

Theme 7: Influence of New Position During a Pandemic

Four of the nine participants took on a new position during the COVID-19 pandemic. Candy and Julie each started their first year as an SLP during the pandemic, while Evelyn and Natalie moved from being within one school building to working across an entire district. Taking on a new position during the pandemic created unique challenges for these participants.

Taking on a new position meant learning the expectations of that job. For Candy that was difficult as she often felt unclear of what her role was because of a lack of clarity from the school. When discussing her work Candy said:

I feel like I'm doing the role of a literacy coach to some extent and reading specialist at the same time. Even though originally, the way they described my position was reading specialist and the majority of your time will be spent doing intervention work and that is not the way it's been at all.

Further, her evaluation was based on her work as an interventionist and had the ability to influence her salary, but in reality she said, "...my 'literacy coach' role takes up the majority of my time. I spend many more hours per week on these responsibilities than on working directly with students".

Julie was also learning to navigate a new position. While she had more clarity than Candy because her job was federally funded with clear guidelines for what was expected of her, she still struggled to meet those expectations. Julie was required to meet with students for tier three reading intervention and complete a great deal of paperwork related to intervention. In thinking about her first year Julie said:

This job is new to me, at this point I'm not where I need to be...it's almost like we're trying to clean up a mess, years and years of mess and it's just a lot of hard work...but I think that comes...naturally with a new position.

She was working in a low performing school and found that the Title I paperwork that came before her was not handled well and there was a larger than normal number of students needing intervention.

The fact that Candy was in a new place, “new job, new school, new district, new everything” during the pandemic made it difficult for her to build relationships with colleagues. She expressed wanting to be able to talk with people about real life saying, “[talk about] something other than school to really build those connections around our personal interests or hobbies or whatever”, but that did not happen because meetings happened virtually and when they were over she said people would press the leave button and go. She felt that there were no opportunities to have informal conversations. This made things difficult for Candy because she spent a good deal of time coaching which she felt was more successful when people could trust you, but without “those little one-on-one conversations” she felt that was not happening.

Like Candy, Natalie also had limited access for relationship-building. Natalie commented, “...in the real world, when you are in person with someone, you can definitely feed off of each other with that energy that’s happening within that room, whether it’s negative or positive...so it is different not being in person”. Being new to her position, Natalie felt it was important to build relationships with the administrators, interventionists, and teachers she worked with; this was easier with the administrators because many already knew her or were familiar with her work. The interventionists and teachers did not know her and so it meant she had to find ways to meet them in a virtual setting: “I only knew two of those teachers that I am working with, the other ones I did not know...So it was basically being brand new, presenting myself, letting them know about me”.

Evelyn echoed Candy and Natalie's take on relationship building during the pandemic. Evelyn valued the impact of relationships on her experiences as an SLP but said this of the pandemic: "...[it] has made it so that we don't connect in the same way because we don't get to see each other anymore". In reflecting on relationships prior to the pandemic she said, "sometimes you're just walking down the hallway, you're greeting teachers, you're saying, 'Hello. How are you doing?' and then they may mention a student and then that's where the conversation happens". During the pandemic, these impromptu conversations no longer existed and had to become more intentional and planned.

General Narrative

Phenomenological analysis revealed several commonalities among participants' experiences, including commonalities in how they experienced being SLPs during the pandemic. Below I have summarized participants' experiences with the meta-themes through the lens of DST.

Professional and Personal Identities

All participants had both professional and personal identities, and they took on multiple I-positions within those identities. According to DST, I-positions represent the multiple selves that emerge from a person; Hermans (2012) has stated, "The theory's [DST] central notion, I-position, is introduced because it acknowledges both the multiplicity of the self and its coherence and unity" (p.8). Professionally, they were SLPs with roles such as reading specialists, instructional coaches, coordinators, instructional specialists, and interventionists. Within those roles, participants took on multiple I-positions depending on context and the external positions they encountered (i.e., students, teachers, administrators). Outside of their professional identities, participants had personal identities that were influenced by context and external

positions such as family, friends, and community members. Participants found themselves in a process of positioning, repositioning, and counter positioning when negotiating the multiple positions they took on in their professional and personal identities, constantly seeking to find the right context for each position and a way to each position from one another. To do this, they used a variety of coping strategies. In this way, participants sought to have their different I-positions take turns so that they were in a “dialogical relationship of inter-subjective exchange and temporary dominance” (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

Coping Strategies

All the participants shared strategies they used to help them manage their professional identities. They created boundaries in time and space to help them section off their professional identities to allow them time to experience their personal identities. Coping strategies included internal dialogue where participants would tell themselves when one I-position needed to end, and another begin. This internal dialogue was described by Hermans (2012) in the following way: “The voices interact like characters in a story or movie, involved in processes of question and answer, agreement and disagreement, conflict and struggle, negotiation and integration” (p.8). Participants also used scheduling and organization to help them increase their efficiency at work which helped them to cope with their workload.

The Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic

All participants’ experiences as SLPs were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic in at least one of the following ways: being forced into virtual learning, having a sense of uncertainty, having an influence on their own wellbeing, or being impacted by pandemic protocols. The virtual learning environments created by the pandemic were new for participants and DST has shown that “changes in society have immediate implications for changes in the self” (Hermans,

2012, p.4). The change to virtual learning put most participants in a new situation that they had to navigate. They had to learn what it meant to be an SLP virtually.

Most participants also had to deal with a sense of uncertainty created by the pandemic. According to DST, the experience of uncertainty has four characteristics which are defined below in table 5: complexity, ambiguity, deficit knowledge, and unpredictability (Hermans, 2012). While working as SLPs during the pandemic, most participants described feeling unsure of what their role was during the time, referring to their deficit knowledge of what an SLP should be in such a time. The participants were often left in an ambiguous state where their positions were determined by context because of the unpredictability of how things would unfold day to day. Moreover, many teachers were so consumed by uncertainty, that participants felt that while their professional identity was normally so complex, the pandemic left them in a new situation where they needed to find ways to fill their time and justify their work. This unpredictability was difficult for participants to manage. Participants also felt that the constant possibility of quarantine or the move to virtual learning left them in a state of unpredictability. Hermans (2012) emphasized that uncertainty can be problematic when it creates confusion and anxiety, but it can also create new challenges and possibilities. This was echoed by participants who felt like they were learning new ways to be an SLP.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most participants found that their workloads had increased, and their overall wellbeing suffered. They found themselves mentally and physically exhausted. They had trouble taking the time to focus on themselves and their own wellbeing as their professional identities and the uncertainty created by the pandemic overtook them. This created ambiguity in their experiences where they were constantly determining their position based on a context over which they had no control.

Most participants' experiences were also influenced by protocols and PPE required because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This again links back to Herman's (2012) definition of the experience of uncertainty. Participants had to navigate their positions with deficit knowledge. They had to find new ways to deal with masks, new ways to form groups of children for reading intervention, new ways to manage materials, and more. They also expanded the complexity of their professional identities by creating new positions such as "mask police".

Table 5

Defining the Experience of Uncertainty

Characteristic	Definition
Complexity	Referring to a great number of positions of the self, with an increased number of possible relations
Ambiguity	Referring to a suspension of clarity, as the meaning of one position is determined by the flux and variation of the other one
Deficit knowledge	Referring to the absence of a superordinate knowledge structure that can resolve the contradictions between positions
Unpredictability	Implying a lack of control of future developments in the content and organization of the position repertoire

Note. These definitions came from Hermans' (2012) interpretation of DST (p.13).

Power Differences

Some participants discussed power differences as influencing their experiences as SLPs. Participants had distinct views on how literacy instruction should take place in their schools or districts, but due to their unique positioning between teachers and administrators, they often felt like their voice was not heard or was heard, but overlooked, leaving them feeling without power.

According to DST, turn-taking in dialogue helps to create an exchange of power where each participant has a chance to be heard and to listen (Hermans, 2004). When turn-taking is eliminated, one side holds the power; in society, this often happens with institutions of power (Hermans, 2004). For participants, there were often opportunities for conversations amongst peers and occasionally with administrators, but there were more experiences with individuals ranked above them such as administrators, district representatives, school boards, etc., that had the ability to eliminate their voices and strip them of their power.

When talking about power, DST has also suggested that power differences in society can be reflected between positions in the self (Hermans, 2012). The counter positions in the self may agree or disagree, conform or not conform (Hermans, 2012). When thinking about the experiences of the participants in this study, they often found themselves having to temper their positions as knowledgeable SLPs and go along with the voice and opinions of those above them who held more power.

Influence of the Reading Wars

Some participants talked about how their experiences as SLPs were influenced by the reading wars, an ongoing debate on how literacy instruction should be often resulting in a debate between phonics-based instruction and balanced literacy or whole language (Pearson, 2004). Participants felt that they knew the best approach for their schools, but that they did not always have the power to bring that to fruition. In their experiences, participants had found that schools tended to shift back and forth between the different sides of the reading wars, but they believed that their schools and districts needed to do what was best for students and persist with that effort over time to be successful. For many participants, the science of reading and phonics-based approaches were best; for others, a child-centered approach such as balanced literacy was best.

The influence of the reading wars demonstrated that another I-position participants saw themselves as was that of pedagogical expert, capable of determining the literacy needs of their schools or districts.

Influence of a New Position During a Pandemic

A few participants had unique experiences because they took on a new position during the pandemic. DST viewed the self as a “mini-society” that emerged from a connection to the environment, bound by a particular position in time and space (Hermans, 2012, p.8). The participants in new positions found themselves in a new environment, without access to the environment. Two of the participants with new positions were in completely virtual spaces and the other two spent a great deal of time in virtual spaces. This lack of access to the physical environment of their job created uncertainties with which they had to deal.

Participants who were new to their positions also had to navigate what their new professional identities meant while having limited access to the social interactions. External positions, such as colleagues, influence the positions the self may embody. Without access to those external positions, new participants were left with deficit knowledge about what it meant to be an SLP in a new environment. Without this knowledge, participants could see an increased number of positions for themselves in the workplace causing them to deal with complexity, another element of Herman’s (2012) experiences with uncertainty.

General Summary

A thematic analysis of individual participant experiences offered insight into the lived experiences of SLPs, including their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Female SLPs working in elementary school settings took on multiple I-positions in their professional and personal identities. These positions have different voices that are in constant dialogue, helping

SLPs to interpret and re-interpret their experiences and identities (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). This inner dialogue has led SLPs to create coping strategies that help them to separate their identities in meaningful ways. These coping strategies were even more important during a time of crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created change and uncertainty for SLPs including a forced move to virtual learning, quarantine, increased workloads, and health and safety protocols including PPE. These changes and sense of uncertainty negatively impacted SLPs wellbeing, forcing them to focus on and enhance their wellness practices in the hopes of preventing burnout.

Phenomenological analysis also revealed that SLPs were knowledgeable about literacy in schools and had ideas and plans for how literacy instruction in their schools should look. However, SLPs' voices were often overpowered due to their unique place between administrators and teachers. SLPs often felt one of their inner voices silenced by institutions, leaving only the voice of consent. Some of those power differences took place around the reading wars. SLPs were actively involved in literacy instruction in their schools. As reading research and practice has evolved and changed, it has influenced SLPs. SLPs were torn because their knowledge and training provided them with insight on where they felt their schools' practices should live, but they were often left to do whatever administrators or those above them told them to do. Lastly, analysis demonstrated that SLPs relied on relationships to help them navigate their position. However, when taking on a new position during the COVID-19 pandemic, relationships were forced into virtual or socially distanced environments that made it difficult to make meaningful connections.

Trustworthiness

The results presented in this chapter conform to Shenton's (2004) description of trustworthiness in a variety of ways. First, I used well-established research methods from Moustakas (1994), including the use of bracketing. Next, I triangulated data by using individual interviews, focus group interview, and field notes. During data analysis, another researcher trained in phenomenology acted as a secondary coder who also aided in thematic analysis. Data analysis involved conversations with my dissertation chair to aid in imaginative variation.

Once I completed the initial analysis, I composed textural and structural descriptions that were securely shared with participants for member-checking. All participants had the ability to comment and make suggestions about these descriptions so that they could represent their true experiences as closely as possible. Most participants confirmed receipt of these descriptions and approved of what was written. One participant added to their descriptions wishing to provide more information than she originally offered in the interview. Lastly, I sought to achieve trustworthiness by providing rich, thick descriptions of participants' experiences with supporting quotations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the results of the phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of SLPs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants' experiences of their work and identities were shared. Across their experiences, seven meta-themes emerged. These themes included: (1) professional identity; (2) personal identity; (3) importance of coping strategies; (4) influence of the COVID-19 pandemic; (5) power difference; (6) influence of the reading wars; and (7) influence of a new position during a pandemic. Within the fourth theme, four sub-themes emerged including: (1) impact of forced move to virtual learning; (2) pandemic

creates uncertainty; (3) pandemic influence on wellbeing; and (4) impact of pandemic protocols and PPE.

Using the analysis guidelines of Moustakas (1994), I translated participants' experiences into the essence of what it meant to be an SLP, especially during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this process I was able to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of SLPs' serving elementary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic? and
2. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way SLPs experience their work and identities?

Overall, the participants in this study experienced multiple I-positions during their work as SLPs and had to put coping strategies in place to help them handle these multiple I-positions. They also had to negotiate power differences and frequently found themselves stuck in the middle between teachers and administrators, having to sacrifice their own voice for that of those in power. When considering, their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants found themselves learning to navigate their positions in a virtual environment, dealing with constant uncertainty and new health and safety protocols. They found their wellbeing suffering and coping strategies became increasingly important. For the few participants that had the added stress of taking on a new position during the pandemic, they found that they also had to deal with a complexity of I-positions during a time when they had deficit knowledge about their roles and lacked access to known methods of social interaction with colleagues.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

“So, what’s going to happen with, say the literacy coach in your building, is you’re stretching them thin, okay? Because you’re telling them, ‘Yeah, I want you to coach teachers. I want you to plan the intervention. I want you to find the intervention. I want you to make sure you have people in there to do the intervention. And then, sometimes, I want you yourself to do the intervention. How about that? You’ve given them a whole bunch of roles and they don’t like it.” (Evelyn, participant)

In this chapter, I begin by summarizing the study. Then, I contextualize the results of Chapter 4 within the existing literature addressed in Chapter 2 and offer future research directions. Next, limitations of the study are explored followed by implications for research and practice. I conclude with reflections on the essence of the study and how it informs my knowledge and future directions.

Study Summary

In chapter 1, I introduced and defined SLPs as reading/literacy specialists, literacy coaches, and literacy coordinators/supervisors (ILA, 2017), recognizing the variety of roles they take on in schools. Chapter 1 also discussed the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, exploring how schools moved into virtual learning feeling unprepared, how many families had limited access to text at home, and the ways that professionals were negotiating personal and professional identities within the context of their home. Lastly, Chapter 1 pointed to a gap in the literature: research on SLPs has focused heavily on what the profession should be

and not what it is. I laid out two research questions that I used to explore this gap in the research with the intent of understanding the experiences of SLPs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in hopes that this knowledge may act as a bridge to helping the educational and research community get SLPs to the roles outlined by the ILA standards.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the relevant literature on SLPs, reading research, and reading practice. I found that ILA has dedicated over 50 years of research to outlining the roles and responsibilities of SLPs, continually refining standards for literacy professionals (Kern, 2011). These ILA standards were put forth by literacy experts across the United States, focusing on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for SLPs to be successful (ILA, 2017). The standards were built upon evidence-based practices and contemporary research (ILA, 2017) and were intended to guide the preparation of literacy professionals and their work in schools. Despite this work, research has shown that SLPs do not always have distinct roles as outlined by the standards (Bean et al., 2015; Pletcher et al., 2018; Selvaggi, 2014). In addition to taking on traditional literacy tasks they have often found themselves handling managerial tasks, substituting for classroom teachers, attending meetings, or presenting data (Bean et al., 2003; Bean & Kern, 2017; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). SLPs have been asked to take on multiple roles simultaneously and yet little research exists exploring the experiences of these SLPs.

Chapter 4 focused on the methodology I used to address the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of SLPs' serving elementary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic? and
2. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way SLPs experience their work and identities?

Phenomenology seeks to find the essence of the lived experiences of individuals sharing in a common phenomenon and was a fitting research approach for these questions. (Creswell, 2013). I then outlined my phenomenological research approach including participant recruitment and selection, data collection, and data analysis. Data was analyzed using the process outlined by Moustakas (1994) including bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, textural and structural descriptions, and a synthesis of textural and structural descriptions aimed at understanding the essence of the lived experiences of SLPs.

The results were then interpreted using DST (Hermans, 2012). DST is a postmodern theory that acknowledges that individuals can take on multiple roles that can work with or against one another (Hermans, 2001). It also recognizes that as society changes, the self changes. Because SLPs serve a multiplicity of roles and have worked through various changes in safety and health protocols brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, DST was a fitting way to think about their experiences and identities. This theory has been used to study teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), but has not been applied to SLPs.

In chapter 4, I presented the study data. Thematic analysis revealed seven meta-themes among participants' experiences as SLPs. These seven themes were: (1) professional identity; (2) personal identity; (3) importance of coping strategies; (4) influence of the COVID-19 pandemic; (5) power difference; (6) influence of the reading wars; and (7) influence of a new position during a pandemic. Within the fourth theme, four sub-themes emerged including: (1) impact of forced move to virtual learning; (2) pandemic creates uncertainty; (3) pandemic influence on wellbeing; and (4) impact of pandemic protocols and PPE. Using DST as a lens to think about these meta-themes revealed that participants experienced multiple I-positions both at work and at home. They used coping strategies to separate these positions and negotiate power

differences. These power differences were often a result of feeling between teachers and administrators. Overall, the pandemic created uncertainty for SLPs by creating new situations and environments for them to navigate. This uncertainty and newness had a negative impact on SLPs wellbeing. For SLPs who were new to their positions, things were even more difficult because they had deficit knowledge about their roles and lacked access to known methods of social interaction with colleagues.

Contextualization within Existing Literature

In this section, I connect the results of Chapter 4 to the literature review presented in Chapter 2. I explore how the results align with and differ from the existing literature, following the list of themes presented previously in Table 2.

Theme 1: Professional Identity

There were nine participants in this study. All the participants had advanced degrees and eight of them were certified reading specialists, although their exact titles differed. The one participant, Erica, who was not a certified reading specialist was an instructional coach which did not require certification where she lived. This aligned with the results of a national survey of SLPs that found coaches were less likely to be certified than reading specialists (Bean et al., 2015). However, this is only one of five participants who identified themselves as coaches and Erica had all the requirements of a reading specialist certification, but her practicum was out of date and would have to be redone which she was not willing to do at the time. Overall, this group of participants were highly trained for their positions.

While all nine participants described themselves as taking on multiple positions within their professional identity, only one, Candy, described herself as being both a coach and interventionist under the label of reading specialist. The other participants saw themselves as

having one dominant role. This differs from the existing literature that has suggested that SLPs lack distinct roles (Bean et al., 2015; Pletcher et al, 2018; Selvaggi, 2014). Within their positions, all the participants echoed what prior research has demonstrated: SLPs take on a variety of roles in schools and sometimes neglect one to fill another (Pletcher et al., 2018). The participants in this study did the jobs indicated in their titles and more. Participants led professional development, served on school leadership teams and committees, worked as curriculum developers, led school-sponsored events such as literacy nights, oversaw tutoring efforts, substituted for classroom teachers, assisted administrators with evaluations, served cafeteria duty, assisted in the hallways for arrival and dismissal, and much more.

When sharing the qualities they felt were necessary to be SLPs, participants highlighted some of the items shared by ILA (2017): gain the trust of those with whom they work; serve as change agents; be lifelong learners; and be flexible. They also added that SLPs should have an asset-based mindset and be able to understand systems. When they discussed understanding systems, participants shared that it is important for SLPs to see what Hannah described as the “macro to the micro”; they need to see the big picture of education in their schools and then look down to the small instructional decisions that impact that big picture. This unique perspective was something they saw as important for SLPs to be successful.

Theme 2: Personal Identity

Each of the SLPs in this study emphasized the role of learner as a position within their personal identities. According to the ILA (2017), being a continual learner is an important factor in being a successful SLP. Three of the nine participants were in doctoral programs, one participant had her doctorate, and another expressed interest in becoming a doctoral student. Additionally, all participants voluntarily pursued professional development opportunities in

literacy both within and outside of their jobs. Supporting the ILA's (2017) statement on continual learners, this study demonstrates the value SLPs place on learning. During the focus group, Hannah and Aria had the following exchange:

Aria: ...coming to the work within an attitude of I'm a learner and I'm going to continue to be a learner for this whole journey. I think it's really important.

Hannah: And just generally, I mean as a professional in education, I think there's a level of intellectual humility. You have to have open-mindedness, but also a grounding of like, what does research say about this? And not the way that I think is the right way, but let's consider those possibilities and always connecting it back to data.

Outside of being learners, participants in this study took on many other positions within their personal identities, always situated against the external positions in their lives. They were mothers, wives, daughters, girlfriends, friends, and more. They found that it was important to finding stopping points between their personal and professional identities so that they could better focus on who they were outside of school. This was a piece not addressed in the existing literature on SLPs.

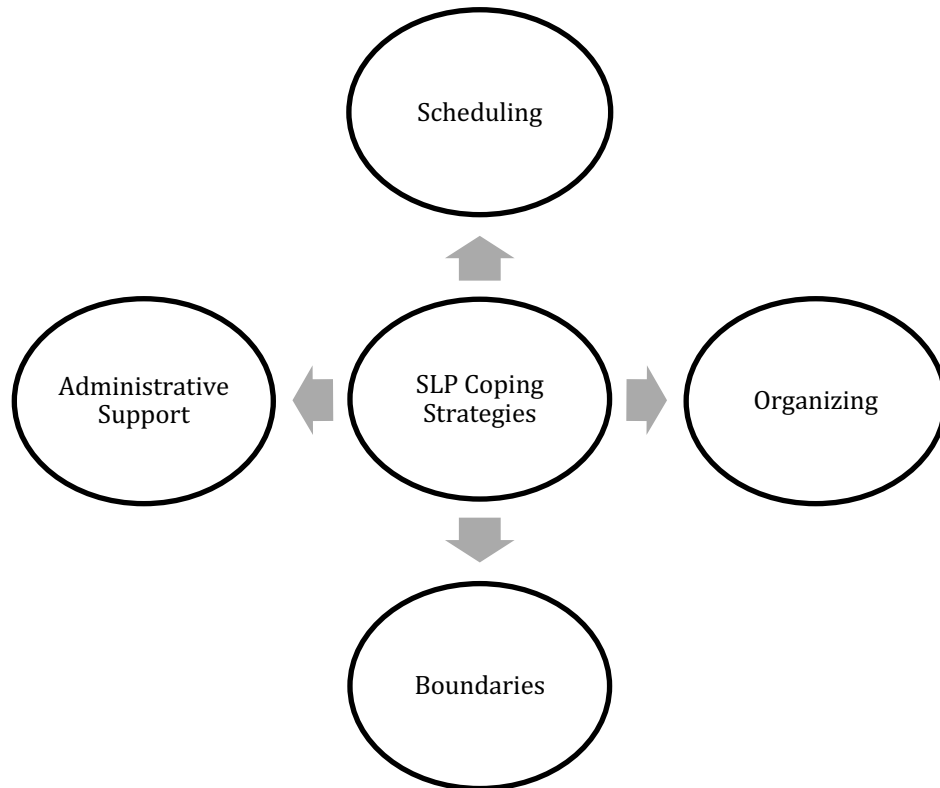
Theme 3: Importance of Coping Strategies

The literature on SLPs has frequently recognized that these professionals take on a variety of roles in schools; however, the research does not address how SLPs handle these various roles on a day-to-day basis. In this study, participants shared coping strategies they used including scheduling, organizing, creating boundaries, and leaning on administrators. (see Figure 2). These coping strategies allowed participants to separate their personal and professional identities and avoid burn out from overworking. These coping strategies were seen as

particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic as the global health crisis increased their workloads and stress levels.

Figure 2

Visual Depiction of Participant's Coping Strategies



Theme 4: Influence of COVID-19 Pandemic

MacGillivray (2010) positioned a crisis as an event or series of events that one's coping mechanisms cannot manage. The COVID-19 pandemic was a new crisis that created unique circumstances for schools not previously addressed in research on SLPs. While media stories emerged sharing the difficulties educators were experiencing when working from home as their positions as parents as teachers overlapped (Corey, 2020; Saslow, 2020). This was not the case

for the SLPs in this study. Instead of emphasizing the overlap between their professional and personal identities, these participants focused on creating breaks between them, a coping strategy that existed prior to the pandemic, but was more heavily utilized during it. What participants did focus on with regard to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic was the forced move to virtual learning, a sense of uncertainty, personal wellbeing, and pandemic protocols and PPE.

SLPs had to learn new ways of doing their jobs during the pandemic, especially during times when schools moved to virtual learning. Virtual learning added additional distractions from the home environment and left them finding new ways to engage students through virtual tools and online reading materials. Further, participants struggled to gain a big picture of what was happening within their schools due to the limited perspective they had when observing and participating in classes in a virtual environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic also created a sense of uncertainty for participants. They were uncertain about how to use their time at work, how to do their job in a meaningful way, when individuals or groups may have to quarantine, and when they would return to a sense of normalcy within their schools and their own lives. This sense of uncertainty coupled with the influence of the pandemic on participants' wellbeing was overwhelming. Participants found the the COVID-19 pandemic made them overloaded with work and impacted their mental and physical health in a negative way. Many found it difficult to move their bodies regularly and drink enough water. They were allowing their work and home lives to overlap and losing sight of themselves as individuals outside of their jobs.

Moreover, pandemic protocols and PPE negatively impacted the SLPs in this study. While recognizing that these protocols were necessary, they also felt that they made their work more difficult. Social distancing made grouping students for intervention difficult, prevented

them from visiting classrooms, forced them to serve as mask monitors among students, and made building and maintaining relationships difficult. Previous research has demonstrated the value of relationship-building for SLPs (L’Allier et al., 2010; Toll, 2014), but this was a struggle when participants were left isolated from their colleagues during the pandemic creating feelings of loneliness. While technology was able to create opportunities for conversation, it was not the same as impromptu conversations that take place in schools outside of the pandemic.

Theme 5: Power Differences

Previous research has shown that coaches negotiate power relations with teachers as they found ways to pressure and persuade teachers to apply or avoid elements of instructional mandates such as Reading First (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). Participants in this study echoed this as they described having to bring initiatives to teachers that they sometimes did not support. What was new was the sense of being a middleman. Participants in this study described power differences as stemming from their unique placement in schools as “admin with a little *a*” (as described by Erica) where they were not administrators, but not teachers (see Figure 2). As Candy said, they were in “no-man’s land”. Participants struggled to identify colleagues in their same unique placement. They also recognized that being in the middle was sometimes beneficial, allowing them an opportunity to dialogue with those above them and have authority with teachers, and sometimes was not, forcing them to go along with mandates and instructional practices with which they disagreed.

Theme 6: Influence of the Reading Wars

The reading wars are an ongoing debate around the best approaches to literacy instruction (Pearson, 2004) brought about by changing political, social, and research contexts, often known as a swinging pendulum as approaches move back and forth between phonics and whole

language (MacGillivray, 2010). This study demonstrates that the pendulum is still shifting and a divide between the best approach to literacy instruction still exists. The debate the participants in this study had were child-centered instruction versus skill-and-drill instruction and science of reading versus balanced literacy.

Theme 7: Influence of New Position During a Pandemic

Participants who were new to their position during the pandemic experienced confusion and deficit knowledge. This was an area not addressed in the literature. They had to learn their job, positioning and repositioning themselves in an attempt to find out what their role was. These participants also had a unique challenge when building relationships. Research has shown that literacy coaching relies on informal conversations that happen during lunch or in the hallway (L’Allier et al, 2010; Toll, 2014), but this was not possible during the COVID-19 pandemic due to social distancing requirements and working from home. While participants who were veterans in their schools could rely on previously formed relationships, Candy, Evelyn, Julie, and Natalie could not. While Barkley (2020) recommended that SLPs help nurture relationships by focusing on care, vulnerability, and trust during the pandemic, this does not support new SLPs who were still struggling to introduce themselves to teachers and form initial connections. Instead, Candy, Evelyn, Julie, and Natalie demonstrated that SLPs must be resilient and willing to put themselves out there in new ways in a virtual setting. As Natalie and Evelyn suggested, they had to intentionally plan time with teachers and use that to present themselves to others.

Limitations

This study took place during the COVID-19 global pandemic. While the pandemic’s influence was a part of the study included within the research questions, it was also a limitation. The influence of the pandemic on people’s daily lives including health and safety protocols and

changes in work environments made it difficult for one participant to take part in the study and may have deterred others from agreeing to participate.

In addition to attrition, this study had other limitations. Phenomenology is a well-established research methodology and great care was taken to detail the study methodology in Chapter 3; however, the sampling method of this study is a limitation. This study utilized convenience sampling which may have led to self-selection bias where the sample may not have been representative of the population being study (McMillan, 2008). To aid in overcoming this limitation, I used the entry survey to learn demographic information and select participants who represent diverse backgrounds and experiences. Still, the participants were homogenous with most being white females.

Another limitation of the study was participation in the focus group interviews. Multiple attempts were made to schedule focus groups at a time that was convenient for everyone. Once the focus group schedules were determined, emails reminders and calendar invitations were sent to participants. Despite these efforts, only three of the nine participants took part in the focus group interviews.

Implications

In reflecting on her experiences as an SLP during the pandemic during a focus group interview, Julie said: "...I feel like this is a great pilot study for how literacy is changing to meet the needs of online learners and learners in such a situation. That's what I look at this year as, a great pilot study." The other focus group participants nodded silently in agreement. Thinking about these experiences as a pilot study demonstrated that these SLPs were living and learning through their experiences as SLPs during the COVID-19 pandemic, not knowing the right way to do things, but making every attempt to figure it out. Their experiences offer practical and

theoretical implications. Below I detail those implications, interweaving those offered by the participants themselves and their vision for the future of SLPs and their preparation.

Implications for the Field of Education

Results of this study may have significant implications for the field of education and the SLPs who work within it. The participants in this study felt that what it meant to be an SLP was changing, and that part of that change was a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Melanie summarized this by saying, “Teachers’ and students’ knowledge has changed and the way we meet their needs has changed also. One timeless feature though is that students still need to learn to read.” Because participants recognized the vital role of literacy in the lives of students, they all agreed that SLPs would remain an important part of schools.

This study can be used to understand the multiple positions SLPs are asked to take on in their work and help move SLPs toward more streamlined roles where they are able to be more efficient. Many of these positions do not align with their job title and/or job description and take away from the literacy work that they are intended to do. By understanding this, schools and districts can better understand the delineated roles shared by ILA (2017) in their standards for literacy professionals.

This study may also bring to light the impact of the work of SLPs and the COVID-19 pandemic on the overall health and wellbeing of SLPs. These individuals suffered from power differences at work and had workloads that could not be satisfied during normal contracted hours. They had to create coping strategies to help them avoid burnt out so that they could stay in the profession. By understanding the experiences of SLPs in these areas, schools and districts can work to support the wellness practices of SLPs. Further, they can address the areas that are

negatively influencing SLPs to improve their experiences. This would benefit schools and districts by helping them to retain SLPs over time.

When discussing the future role of SLPs, all participants indicated that they must prioritize data analysis and data-driven instruction. This need to focus on data was a reaction to the regression the participants were experiencing in their schools. While education continued during the pandemic, the uniqueness of the learning experiences impacted students and overall participants saw that happening in a negative way. Many participants already described working in schools that were low performing and they felt that the pandemic exacerbated that. Students were regressing in literacy and scores on literacy-related assessments were below where participants felt they would be if it were not for the pandemic. To move forward, participants felt that data must be at the forefront. Erica said, "...running really targeted data meetings and making sure teachers really understand what the next steps are for their students".

Participants also thought that intervention would be key for SLPs in the future. Natalie said, "The pandemic has contributed to a learning loss for our students and literacy professionals are going to need to be strategic with interventions and resources to address this gap". Candy furthered this saying:

I would love to see more people trained in foundational literacy and more resources and time dedicated towards small group intervention and tier two and tier three intervention so that we can actually get students caught up. I hope that in the next coming years we get funding from somewhere, I don't know where it will come from, to really spend the time meeting students where they are and not just being like, "Oh let's forge ahead with our regular curriculum and just hope they catch up on their own," because I don't think that's going to happen.

Participants discussed feeling like SLPs were moving more toward instructional coaching and that a lot of emphasis has been placed on coaching. However, they felt that interventionists would be more important than ever to combat learning loss after the pandemic. As Aria noted, “We’ve always known that kids don’t catch up well, but we always still think they can because we put a lot of faith in kids...”.

Participants discussed approaches to educational practices as changing and felt that their role in this moving forward would be as a coach supporting classroom practices. Erica felt that trauma responsive work that started during the pandemic would prove beneficial over time because it “created better relationships with kids and teachers”. Melanie described mini lessons as “the heart of virtual education” and saw them as a valuable tool moving past the pandemic that really helped teachers serve as facilitators of student learning. Natalie saw the pandemic as bringing to light the need for “curriculum to be culturally responsive and reflective of diverse student populations”. Julie and Candy both emphasized needing to be able to deliver instruction across virtual platforms.

The SLPs in this study felt that the field of literacy was constantly changing and what it meant to be an SLP was changing along with it. They did not fear change but embraced it. Erica summarized the thoughts of most participants when responding to the question: Do you think what it means to be a literacy professional is changing? She said, “I hope it’s adapting; I hope that is always changing. I hope that our expertise is even more leveraged and even more appreciated because of what we've all gone through in the last year.”

Implications for Institutions of Higher Education

This study may also have implications for institutions of higher education that have preparation programs for SLPs. Results of this study demonstrate a need for institutions of

higher education to place a higher emphasis on the critical consumption of research that extends beyond their enrollment, preparation for multiple SLP roles, and more field experiences.

One concern that arose for participants was a lack of focus on the critical consumption of research in higher education programs. Spencer commented, “I was not given the tools to look at a piece of educational research and say whether or not it was valid and what does it mean for my students.” This was echoed by Aria who said, “We really want to ground our professionalism in ongoing literacy research.” Spencer also commented that as someone not currently enrolled in college courses, her access to research was limited. Spencer said:

I think that research needs to be made more available to us. I was trying to write this blog article and the cheapest thing I think was \$14 just to read it. If I wanted to print it, I had to pay \$40, \$42 to read an article...

This lack of focus on research analysis meant that SLPs and the teachers they worked with struggled to navigate best practices and literacy and used paid trainings such as LETRS and Orton-Gillingham as a substitute. Each participant in this study was required to take part in different paid trainings through different companies throughout their careers and they were heavily influenced by them. However, if institutions of higher education were better able to teach SLPs and teachers how to access and consume research, they would eliminate the need for these paid trainings. For example, some universities provide library access to alumni so that they continue to consume current research. A greater focus on providing access and critically consuming research might also help SLPs to gain buy-in from teachers on new approaches to literacy instruction and help to eliminate outdated instructional practices.

Research has previously demonstrated that SLPs wear “multiple hats” (Bean & Kern, 2017, p.620). The results of this study bring to light the lived experiences of SLPs who wore

those “multiple hats” and the negative impact it has had on SLPs. Institutions of higher education who prepare SLPs must be aware of the realities these professionals face in schools so that they may better prepare future SLPs for the realities of the position. This may include introducing students to the coping strategies that have become prominent among SLPs in this study. It might also include taking on some of the recommendations shared by participants including programs that contain coaching and intervention within one program and job shadowing.

Candy shared that she felt unprepared for her job as a coach saying:

...there was a reading specialist strand, and there was a literacy coach strand and the literacy coaches, they did an internship with a coach, they took classes about adults, what do you want to call it like talking to adults and training. Exactly like that sort of stuff and I feel like that would be so helpful now because now it's like, oh teach the small groups and, but most of the time, work with teachers that may or may not like and trust you. And that's just really hard when I don't have a background in that at all so that's why I say I'm unqualified.

This is because many institutions have preparation programs that prepare professionals to provide reading intervention or to provide instructional coaching; few integrate the two.

However, the results of this study demonstrate that SLPs deemed interventionists still coach teachers and coaches still work with students. They need to be prepared for both. While it is an option for these professionals to take more than one program to prepare them for both, most do not. Erica was an instructional coach and not an interventionist and she said this was because “I didn’t really feel like going back and taking more classes to do another practicum.” And Aria said, “I think receiving training around coaching. That was one piece that I didn’t have when I

started” in response to being asked what advice she would give to future SLPs. These are already highly trained individuals who have demonstrated their desire to be continual learners; to require them to pay to take another program is unnecessary.

Participants also felt that future SLPs would benefit from preparation programs that integrated job shadowing. Hannah, who also worked at a local university, supervised reading specialists interns and said that the program at the university had recently embedded a job shadowing component where “they will place people with coaches in the district to shadow them and learn from them” and she found that to be helpful. Aria agreed and thought that by providing job shadowing to future SLPs they would be better prepared for the realities of the work.

Implications for Dialogical Self Theory

In Akkerman and Meijer’s (2011) study of teacher identity, they used DST to recognize the indistinct nature of the personal and professional identity. They said, “All that a teacher considers relevant to his profession, that he or she tries to achieve in work, is part of the whole ‘personal’ self” (p.316). This is echoed in the results of this study. SLPs ruminate on their work and have inner dialogue around their work outside of their work. The personal and professional are in constant coexistence so much so that they have had to develop coping strategies to try and separate them. Continued research through the lens of DST is needed to understand the complex nature of the inner and outer dialogues of SLPs. The COVID-19 pandemic has led SLPs to focus on their wellness practices and to create time for themselves outside of their work. Future research may seek to understand how this plays out after the pandemic.

Future Research

Further research is needed to fully understand the implications of this study within elementary schools and institutions of higher education. This study found that SLPs took on multiple roles in schools and often found themselves working outside of contracted hours and they sometimes lacked agency in their work, often being told what to do and when to do it, particularly regarding extracurricular activities and events held by the school. Further, SLPs often felt like they were neglecting their personal identities because of their professional identities. This caused stress for participants. They found that when they were able to find ways to separate their personal and professional identities and distance themselves from work outside of contracted hours, they were happier and felt their lives were more balanced. SLPs had to accomplish this on their own, but, as Evelyn noted, schools need to do a better job of supporting wellness practices. Future research should seek out schools that have integrated wellness programs for the faculty and staff, including SLPs. Using a case study approach, these schools could be studied to find out how the faculty and staff perceive these wellness programs. Schools where the faculty and staff have positive perceptions of wellness programs could help to create a model of what this could look like in other school settings.

Another research study that would be beneficial to better understand the implications of this study would be a qualitative content analysis of graduate programs that prepare future SLPs to be both interventionists and coaches. Many programs focus on one or the other. Taking the time to analyze and understand how programs successfully prepare SLPs for the two prominent roles they take on in schools will offer other programs an example of how to better prepare future SLPs for the realities of the position.

Conclusion

ILA has spent over 50 years working to outline the roles and responsibilities of SLPs to help improve the field (Kern, 2011). Despite this work, SLPs continue to take on multiple roles in schools, some that take away from their primary goal of improving literacy and literacy instruction. Further, research on SLPs has focused heavily on what SLPs should be without acknowledging what they actually are in schools. This study sought to understand the lived experiences of SLPs and use that as a bridge toward making change in the field, helping to align the work to that outlined by the ILA and SLPs themselves.

Using a phenomenological research approach as outlined by Moustakas (1994), this study explored the experiences of nine participants who were SLPs working in an elementary setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through phenomenological analysis, the following themes emerged across participants' experiences: professional identity; personal identity; importance of coping strategies; influence of COVID-19 pandemic; power difference; influence of the reading wars; and influence of new position during a pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused multiple waves of changes both within and outside of schools. Social distancing, virtual learning, PPE, cleaning protocols, and working from home are just a few of the ways the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced life. Since this study took place during the pandemic, it helps to capture these waves of change and how it has influenced SLPs and may continue to influence them in the future. As Melanie said, "we will always need to teach students to read. That will not change, but the ways in which we do it may." SLPs are a prominent piece of teaching students to read. They impact students, teachers, administrators, and more. They aid in curriculum development and redevelopment; they read and disseminate reading research; they teach students; they teach teachers. Still, they often find themselves as a middleman, not teachers, not administrators. They do their best to implement change, but with

limited power. Unless we take the time to truly understand the experiences of these amazing educators and work to improve their field, SLPs will continue to struggle to meet the needs of their districts, schools, and students.

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APPENDIX A

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS

Are you a reading/literacy coach and/or specialist? Do you work in an elementary setting?

If so, please consider participating in my research study titled “A Phenomenological Study of Specialized Literacy Professionals’ Experiences of Their Work and Identity during the COVID-19 Pandemic”. The study consists of a brief survey, two individual interviews (approximately one hour each), and one focus group interview.

This research will help the education community better understand what it means to be a specialized literacy professional and how researchers and practitioners can support the profession moving forward.

If you are interested, please take this entrance survey:

https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8p1aexZLrc3JGw5

Feel free to contact me at mlezz001@odu.edu with any questions.

Thank you,
Michelle Arnold
Old Dominion University PhD Candidate

**Are you a reading/literacy coach and/or specialist?
Do you work in an elementary setting?**

If so, please consider participating in my research study titled “A Phenomenological Study of Specialized Literacy Professionals’ Experiences of Their Work and Identity during the COVID-19 Pandemic”. The study consists of a brief survey, two individual interviews (approximately one hour each), and one focus group interview.

This research will help the education community better understand what it means to be a specialized literacy professional and how researchers and practitioners can support the profession moving forward. Participation is voluntary, confidential, and individuals may withdraw from the study at any time.



If you are interested, please scan the QR code to complete the entry survey.

Feel free to contact me at mlezz001@odu.edu with any questions.

Thank you,
Michelle Arnold
Old Dominion University PhD Candidate

APPENDIX B**LISTSERV ADVERTISEMENTS**

Dear (ALER/LRA) Members,

I am a PhD candidate at Old Dominion University studying literacy, language, and culture. I am conducting a research study titled “A Phenomenological Study of Specialized Literacy Professionals’ Experiences of Their Work and Identity during the COVID-19 Pandemic”. I am seeking individuals who work as reading/literacy coaches and/or specialists in an elementary school setting to share their experiences of their work and identity through a brief survey, two individual interviews (approximately one hour each), and one focus group interview. This research will help the education community better understand what it means to be a specialized literacy professional and how researchers and practitioners can support the profession moving forward.

If you are interested, please take this entrance survey:

https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8p1aexZLrc3JGw5. The purpose of the survey is to see if you meet the criteria of the study, collect demographic and background information, and collect contact information to set up the initial interview.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Michelle Arnold
Mlezz001@odu.edu

APPENDIX C

ENTRY SURVEY

Thank you for your interest in the research study “A Phenomenological Study of Specialized Literacy Professionals’ Experiences of Their Work and Identity during the COVID-19 Pandemic”. Please complete this brief entry survey. In order to participate in this study, you must currently serve as a specialized literacy professional and spend at least part of that job working in an elementary setting.

This data collection is confidential and will only be used by the researcher. If you qualify for participation in the study, the researcher will contact you to complete the consent form and set up an interview. If you do not qualify to participate in the study, your survey responses will be destroyed.

This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Arnold at mlezz001@odu.edu.

1. Name:
2. Email Address (the researcher will use this to send you the consent form and set up interviews)
3. Preferred Pseudonym (This is the name the researcher will use in place of your real name in the study to help protect your anonymity. If left blank, a pseudonym will be randomly assigned to you.):
4. What is your job title?
 - a. Reading/literacy specialist
 - b. Reading/literacy coach
 - c. Interventionist
 - d. Reading teacher
 - e. Other (please specify)
5. Is your position full time or part time?
 - a. Full time
 - b. Part time
6. Is there a written job description for your position?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
7. What is your funding source?
 - a. School
 - b. District
 - c. State
 - d. Federal (e.g. Title I)
 - e. Grant
 - f. Unknown
 - g. Other

8. How many schools do you serve?
9. Are the schools you serve primarily urban, suburban, or rural? (Mark all that apply)
- urban
- suburban
- rural
10. What grade levels do you serve? (Mark all that apply)
- PreK
- Kindergarten
- 1st grade
- 2nd grade
- 3rd grade
- 4th grade
- 5th grade
- 6th grade
- 7th grade
- 8th grade
- 9th grade
- 10th grade
- 11th grade
- 12th grade
11. If you work with students, what is your general workload? Approximately how many students do you serve?
12. If you work with students, in what capacity? (Mark all that apply.)
- Pullout
- In-Class
- Other
13. If you have coaching responsibilities, how many teachers do you work with throughout the course of the year?
14. What, if any, administrative duties do you fulfill?
15. How many years have you served as a specialized literacy professional?
16. How many years have you worked in education?
17. Please list your certification and/or licensure areas.
18. What is your highest degree?
- Bachelor's
 - Master's
 - Education Specialist
 - Doctorate
19. Gender
- Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary
 - Other
 - Prefer not to answer
20. Age
21. Race/Ethnicity
- American Indian or Alaska Native

- b. Asian
- c. Black or African American
- d. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- e. White
- f. Other
- g. Prefer not to answer

Thank you for your interest in this research study. As a reminder, if you qualify for the study you will be contacted by the research to provide your consent and set up an initial interview. If you do not qualify for the study your survey responses will be destroyed.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Arnold at mlezz001@odu.edu.

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT GOOGLE FORM

5/4/2021

Informed Consent Document

Informed Consent Document

Old Dominion University

* Required

1. Email *

Project Title

A Phenomenological Study of Specialized Literacy Professionals' Experiences of Their Work and Identity during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The study is titled A Phenomenological Study of Specialized Literacy Professionals' Experiences of their Work and Identity during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study will take place virtually.

Researchers

- Primary Investigator: Judith Dunkerly-Bean, Ph.D., Darden College of Education, Department of Teaching & Learning
- Investigator: Michelle Arnold, M.S.Ed., A.B.D., Darden College of Education, Department of Teaching & Learning
- Investigator: Kelly Rippard, Ph.D., Darden College of Education, Department of Teaching & Learning

Description of Research Study

Several studies have been conducted looking into what a specialized literacy professional should do in the course of their work in schools. Few of them have described what the experiences of specialized literacy professionals actually are. This research seeks to understand the experiences of literacy professionals' work and identity, especially considering the changes that may impact them due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving two individual interviews and one focus group interview. During the second individual interview you will be asked to share an artifact of your choosing that demonstrates your experiences with you work and/or identity during the pandemic. If you say YES, then your participation will last for approximately four hours online using Zoom (a free web-based conferencing software). Approximately 25 literacy professionals will be participating in this study.

Exclusionary Criteria

You should have completed a brief online survey. To the best of your knowledge, you should meet the criteria of the study in order to participate. You will be excluded from participating in this study if you do not meet the criteria of being a currently practicing specialized literacy professional working at least part time in an elementary setting.

Risks and Benefits

- **RISKS:** If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of discomfort due to the nature of some of the questions or a breach of confidentiality. The researcher tried to reduce these risks by allowing you to refuse to answer any questions you choose and use pseudonyms. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.
- **BENEFITS:** The main benefit to you for participating in this study is having the opportunity to discuss your experiences, roles, and identity as a literacy professional, and offering ways to improve the work of literacy professionals in the future. Others may benefit by gaining an understanding of how to prepare future literacy professionals and how to support those who are already literacy professionals.

Costs and Payments

The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

New Information

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

Confidentiality

The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as names of people and places confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected and use pseudonyms in their place. The list connecting names and pseudonyms will be kept in a password protected computer file along with all data collected during the study. When the study is complete and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. The participants' names will not be used in any report. The participant's information will not be used or distributed for future research studies even if identifiers are removed. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

Withdrawal Privilege

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

Compensation for Illness and Injury

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact the investigators, Dr. Judith Dunkerly-Bean at 757-683-3283 or Ms. Michelle Arnold at 757-651-7995, Dr. Laura Chean the current IRB chair at lchezan@odu.com, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

Voluntary Consent

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

- Judith Dunkerly-Bean, jdunkerl@odu.edu
- Michelle Arnold, mlezz@odu.edu
- Kelly Rippard, krippard@odu.edu

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Laura Chezan, the current IRB chair, at lchezan@odu.edu, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757 683 3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

2. Subject's Name - Typing your name in the space below represents your electronic signature.

3. Date

Example: January 7, 2019

4. Do you want to participate in this study?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

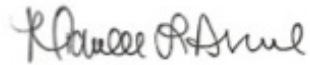
Investigator's Statement

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

5/4/2021

Informed Consent Document

Investigator's Printed Name, Signature, & Date: Michelle L. Arnold, 11/17/2020



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APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDES

Semi-Structured Interview Guide 1

Hello, (participant's name). My name is Michelle Arnold. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I am conducting research to learn about the experiences and identities of specialized literacy professionals. Additional information about the study is available in your informed consent statement. One part of the informed consent indicates that interviews will be recorded. The recording will be transcribed and used for analysis. Any identifiable details will be moved. Is it okay if I record the interview?

I also want to remind you that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and that you may choose to stop participating at any time. Additionally, you may choose to not answer any of the questions that I ask during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

As we begin, I want to get to know you a little better and provide a space for you to gain comfort sharing your experiences with me.

1. What was your path to becoming a (reading specialist/literacy coach)?
2. In your experience, what is a (reading specialist/literacy coach)?
3. What were the most meaningful experiences you had in your role? Why were they so meaningful?
4. What dilemmas or challenges do you have as a (reading specialist/literacy coach)?
5. In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced how you view your role as a literacy professional?

6. What have you experienced in terms of working as a literacy professional during the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of being a literacy professional during the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. Is there anything else regarding your experiences as a literacy professional you would like to share with me at this time?

Semi-Structured Interview Guide 2

Before we begin, I want to reiterate that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and that you may choose to stop participating at any time. Additionally, you may choose to not answer any of the questions that I ask during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Please tell me about the different roles you take on both professionally and personally.
 - a. How do you view your roles?
 - b. How do you prioritize these roles?
2. What, if anything, have you found most difficult about managing multiple roles during the pandemic?
3. What have you found to be easiest about managing multiple roles during the pandemic?
4. What artifacts did you bring with you today?
 - a. Where are your artifacts from? Are they self-created?
 - b. Are you required to use them? If so, in what ways?
 - c. How do your artifacts help you carry out your job?
5. Overall, do you believe what it means to be a literacy professional is changing? Why or why not?

6. Is there anything else regarding your experiences as a literacy professional you would like to share with me at this time?

Focus Group Interview Guide

Before we begin, I want to remind you that participation in this focus group is completely voluntary and that you may choose to stop participating at any time. Additionally, you may choose to not answer any of the questions that I ask during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Please describe the characteristics of a literacy professional.
2. What roles do you take on as a literacy professional?
3. How has the pandemic influenced your work as a literacy professional?
4. Do you believe what it means to be a literacy professional is changing? Why or why not?
5. In the future, how do you envision the role of the literacy professional?
6. What advice do you have for educators seeking to become literacy professionals?

APPENDIX F
SITUATED NARRATIVES

Supporting Quote for Each Participant by Theme

Theme	Participant Quote
Theme 1: Professional Identity	<p>“My professional role is a literacy coach and a coach coordinator. As a literacy coach, I conference with teachers around data, co-plan lessons based on the data, co-teach, model, and observe instruction. As a coach coordinator, I plan and facilitate professional learning for coaches including ongoing workshops to build knowledge and practice coaching behaviors as well as ongoing coaching for coaches.” -Aria</p> <p>“As a Reading Specialist, I perform assessments and place students in small groups for intervention. I write lessons for my small groups and meet with them twice a week virtually. Now that I am back in the building, I also provide Foundations and Heggerty to in-person first graders every day and small group intervention to kindergarten students every day. In my role as a Literacy Coach, I observe teachers conducting Heggerty and Foundations lessons and provide feedback. I write Structured Literacy lessons for K-5 teachers to use in their whole group. I provide feedback for City Year volunteers on their small group reading lessons and serve as the Internal Coach for our Literacy Lab Pre-K volunteers. I cofacilitate LEAP (professional development) for K-5 teachers and ELA Planning sessions for K-2 teachers. I serve as a literacy expert in the building and attend two different professional development sessions outside of school hours to increase my knowledge of literacy instruction. In addition to these responsibilities, I also serve on different school committees, such as Academic Leadership Team, Read Across America committee, Report Cards Awards Committee, Testing Committee, etc. Now that we are in person, I also serve in the role of School Support Personnel, which means having a duty station for arrival and dismissal, helping take students to the bathroom, covering for lunch or recess if partner teachers are absent, etc.” -Candy</p>

“My main job is to coach teachers on best practices by observing, giving feedback, and running meetings. I also work with outside organizations to get tutoring set up for students and I am in charge of formative and summative assessments...”-Erica

“Just recently I switched jobs so that I’m at the division level as a, I guess I’m an instructional specialist. That’s my official title. But I still look at reading and I look at data. I’ll be working with teachers, building administrators...Now I get to hopefully influence building level administrators’ knowledgebase of the reading process.” -Evelyn

“...instructional coach, curriculum writer, data analyst, professional development leader, school leadership...” -Hannah

“As a professional, I take on many roles. I am considered part of the administrative team, so I am part of administrative school meetings; am a sounding board for determining school decisions; help administer district and state wide assessments; facilitate teacher support team (TST) tier two and three meetings; communicating with parents; supporting teachers in using interventions and completing TST paperwork; preparing paperwork, committee meetings, and paperwork for comprehensive evaluations for Sped or 504 rulings; communicate with both the lower elementary and high school for transitioning students from and to different grade levels within the intervention TST process; participate and conduct professional developments at the school, district, and state level; maintain school, district, and state required reports for interventions; intervene with students in reading and math using specific programs daily for 30 to 45 minutes a day with a current service load of 64 students in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades collectively; support a certain number of tier two and three behavior interventions along with the counselor; morning and afternoon car rider duty; CERT team safety committee for the school where I help conduct practice and emergency drills; constantly clean my room between groups; constantly clean and organize reading intervention materials when returned after teacher use; sifting and cleaning up years of paperwork misuse by previous interventionists and unsuccessful administrative staff; and work with administrative team on supporting teacher moral. I know I am forgetting something.” -Julie

“My main role is instructional coach. I also can take on an administrative role, professional development role, curriculum specialist role, and technology trouble shooter.” -Melanie

“Supervise and coach district Reading Interventionists; Supervise district English Content Leads; Evaluate classroom teachers using Danielson Framework; Create and facilitate professional development sessions; Revise ELA and Social Studies Curriculum (K-8); Collaborate with school leaders and share best practices for instruction focused on Reading and Social Studies; Analyze district-wide data to inform instructional resources and best practices; Collaborate with other district Senior Lead Educators and Supervisors; Conduct learning walkthroughs.” -Natalie

“At school, I am a reading specialist who works with children and helps staff when needed. I am also the chair of our VTSS committee, and have helped to run One Book, One School for the past 3 years. Outside of school, I run an Instagram, Facebook group, website, and TPT [Teachers Pay Teachers] store all centered around reading.” -Spencer

Theme 2: Personal Identity

“I am also a daughter, sister, a fiancé, a friend, and a second-year doctoral student.” -Aria

“Outside of school I try to play the role of responsible adult...I also have the role of friend (trying to keep up with people that I haven't seen in forever because of the pandemic), daughter (getting down to visit my parents safely who live 2.5 hours away), and girlfriend (trying to not take work stress out on my boyfriend and find time to do enjoyable things with him when he is not working).” -Candy

“I have sought to balance my personal and professional life in a better way due to the pandemic.” -Erica

“...mom, friend, church member, neighbor, aunt.” -Evelyn

“Mother of two small children, breadwinner of my family, writer, so much more.” -Hannah

“I teach two classes for a state university...I also maintain a household for my husband and myself.” -Julie

“My husband is an elementary principal and I'm an elementary coach so it's real hard for us to disconnect and so sometimes we just have to look at each other and go, ‘No we're not talking about this anymore, you know, we've dissected this enough’.” -Melanie

“I think, for me, to have my daughters recognize that I am a mom, I am a, you know, I have a career, I am a wife and we're balancing all of that, and it can be done; I think it speaks to empowering them. To say like, you know, you can have all of this too. You don't have to place yourself in a box just because, you know, you are a mom or you are like you can have all these things, so I think it's giving them an example of what it looks like.” -Natalie

“When I became a mom I decided, you know, my child came first and school came second, and everything else came third.” -Spencer

Theme 3: Importance of
Coping Strategies

“I think one physical thing that I do is taking the things that absolutely have to get done that day, putting them into that day and kind of shutting the door once I finished those things rather than in the past, when I was a classroom teacher and even in years past as a coach I felt the push to like exhaust yourself, you know what I mean? Like, you just feel like I have to do more, I have to change that person's mind, I have to do this. And I think scheduling, like putting it into a schedule and saying like these are the things that I think are important for today and fit in with my professional and those additional pieces, I've done those things. I shut the door. I share what I think and then I kind of shut the door and move on to you know, having a life, and you know enjoying my animals and enjoying books and, like the rest of life because, like this isn't the only part of life. So, I think the scheduling probably has been a big part and then just mentally being able to like just being able to say, like okay that's- I don't know everything, this is what they've decided to do and it is what it is like I can't I guess against it. I guess it goes back to being, continuing to be apathetic, like this is where they might be coming from here, here are some ends, but you know I'll take that as it comes, rather than getting so frustrated about it.” -Aria

“I try very hard to not work after those [committee meetings] and on the weekends, because then it just makes me feel burnt out. I'll get back on a Monday and like, ‘Oh my God, I feel like I didn't even take a break. So, I try not to do more than that.’” -Candy

“I close my computer and I work in our guest bedroom; I try to leave the guest bedroom and just like leave work behind...and I think that's actually been pretty successful for me.” -Erica

“I try to take a walk everyday if I can. Sort of keeps me up mentally, clears my mind too. So, my roles, I try to separate them, so you know, like in the morning, I get up. I come down here. I tell my friends I come down the grand staircase [refers to the staircase in home] to my office. Here we go [pointing toward stairs] and, but you know, I also like to say at five o'clock, ‘Alright, Evelyn, you’ve got to call it a day.’” -Evelyn

“I usually meet with her [the principal] on Friday mornings and kind of talk through my work at each level and kind of talk about what's going well and what challenges there might be. Things that I'm noticing or thinking about. And then, just in talking it through with her it helps me realize and recognize patterns or trends or areas of urgency and then I'm kind of able to say like, okay, so this is what I'm going to do now and it just, it just sort of naturally becomes a priority-setting opportunity because she's a wonderful listener, and also she used to be the literacy coach before me, and so she knows the position and she knows the teachers so well and so she's just really wonderful about listening in a very understanding way.” -Hannah

“Yes, I would die without a system. There has to be some type of function in my life.” -Julie

“Well, I achieved a lot on my job and that helped and I got older and I think the older I get the more I realize there's no—and you know, just events, events that have happened in the professional world—that have made me realize that they can do it without me and I'm just a little small piece in a big machine...I'm a little humbled because I thought I was a lot more important than I really was and I'm also kind of relieved that, you know, I don't have to hustle and I don't have to- I mean I put myself out there and I do my very best because I want to intrinsically, but it's also relieving to know that things are going to go on if I'm not out there doing it all.” -Melanie

“I have been a teacher for over 16 years, and I never took that to be something as a negative. I always knew that the weekends were going to be dedicated to lesson planning or I always- I like to be an over-planner. I like to have things ahead so I don't mind that because I know it will only help me in the long run. Even when I was a teacher, I would get to work, get to the school a little earlier, make sure everything was set up, make sure I had everything to go for the day just because there's different things that come up throughout the day that we can't plan for, but if there is something that I can plan for, then I want to make sure I have it covered. That's just my personality.” -Natalie

“I have a really close relationship with my principal. I feel like I really trust her, and I feel like I can go to her and say I literally can do nothing else right now, like there's nothing else I have in me, and she understands. I kind of just don't agree anymore to do things that I don't think are in my wheelhouse too. Like before I was just like, oh, we need somebody to help do this math night and I'm like, cool let's do it.” -Spencer

Theme 4: Influence of
COVID-19 Pandemic

Sub-theme A: Impact of
Forced Move to Virtual
Learning

“During virtual instruction, it was very much oriented around tech support: extra hands on deck when you're doing like Zoom meetings or Google meets to, you know, people can't see the students or there's tech issues or whatever. So yeah, when it was virtual it was more along the lines of providing resources, digital resources that we were collecting or compiling and then the tech support and just like “How are you doing? Are you like, mentally okay?”-Aria

“Additionally, providing small group instruction to students has been incredibly frustrating-- attendance is poor; students' devices often die or can't connect; background noise of parents/siblings/TV is super distracting. And even when all of that goes well, it's just really hard to keep little kids engaged in reading lessons done online.” -Candy

“I'm not able to do my six week [coaching] cycles the way that I normally would. Partially because I'm still learning myself and I feel like I'm still learning how to be a good coach virtually...” -Erica

“Well, it was a little frustrating. Like I said, I'm used to having a broader scope of what was going on. And now it's very narrow because it's only what I can see on that screen; it's not what I can see in the general building like before.” -Evelyn

“I don't have, like the regular window into student experience to know that it's [coaching] making a difference.” -Hannah

“So, I lived that environment at the beginning of the year, right? And that was difficult because, as a literacy professional and just an interventionist, I cannot intensively intervene with you online to the point where we had to make really hard decisions and some parents, you know, were upset with

us when we made those decisions, but they still see that okay, we understand now that we've been in school, we see why my student my child needs to come back.” -Julie

“There is a lot of frustration, because I am in a Title I high minority school, high poverty school and there is a lot of frustration, because- At first it was technology issues; they didn't have devices. We've given people devices. Now they don't have Internet; we've given hotspots as much as we can.” -Melanie

“It is different, not being in person. I find it very difficult when it comes to doing classroom observations, you do walk throughs online. And you're not getting the full dynamic of what is happening in the classroom and the interactions good classroom environment like what is up in the classroom—the anchor charts, the print rich environment—you're not seeing all that...most of the teachers do have something behind them to support that, but it's not like it would be in the classroom.” -Natalie

“And it's also just like, as much you can do reading online, there's a lot of it that you can do, but I just miss the personal connection of it and being able to walk up to a kid and being like, “Come on, now, you know that when we make a d we make a c and we close it up” and just having that connection with them. That's missing.” -Spencer

Sub-theme B: Pandemic
Creates Uncertainty

“But even so, when we're operating in person, one of the...it's still frustrating because a lot of teachers still feel in limbo like we could be going back to virtual, or...the class may need to quarantine which has happened a few times for different classes. And so, there's always this feeling, or it always seems to be this feeling of: okay, well, we're not ready quite yet because we're not sure what's going to happen. And...even when we're in person that's still happening; there's still a sense of it's really difficult to work with people on a goal if they're just waiting for the next step, or if they just feel like the kids need to get that much more settled.” -Aria

“I also feel like mentally it's been difficult to be a responsible adult because I feel like my life is on pause in some ways (traveling, many graduate schools aren't accepting new doctoral candidates, etc.).” -Candy

“But then last year during the pandemic when we were teaching kids virtually, even when we were doing all asynchronous teaching, I struggled to fill the hours which is why I also watched a lot of webinars. Because I really felt like I needed to justify my seven hours of work each day.” -Erica

“...when I first started I just, you know, we were all just sort of shocked. And you know, March came: Are we going to go back to school, or are we not? In August and then, no, we're not going to go back. And then all of the back and forth: August, September, October, November...” -Evelyn

“...my kids are supposed to start going back, but right now I'm getting a lot of support with child care from my parents, from my mom, and once my kids go back to school, which would only be two days a week, they are not...We can't see them anymore because of their age and until they get vaccinated and so...I don't know, like how I can actually do my job without having any support with remote schooling and child care on the days that my kids are home.” -Hannah

“And I think this is a great challenging time for people who are going through the pandemic they're experiencing something that I never received as an educator through my training, how to handle this and. So now we are really branching out into a group of teachers and a group of educators, literacy professionals that can really adapt and more fair instruction, although hard. Have we worked out the kinks? No. Do we have a lot of changes we want to make and different goals that we want to have? Yes. But I mean I feel like this is a great pilot study for how literacy is changing to meet the needs of online learners and learners in such a situation. That's what I look at this year as, a great pilot study.” -Julie

“It's just been wild, and I think it's just finally dawned on me, that this isn't going away like I thought it would, and we have to just learn to live with it now.” -Spencer

Sub-theme C: Pandemic
Influence on Wellbeing

“Because it feels like an uphill battle where you're on, like, a, whatever, like an escalator moving, you know, I mean remember those moving upward walkways? See we even forget our vocabulary. Now I feel like I'm losing it.” -Aria

“I feel like, as most teachers probably feel, I work or stress about work well outside of school hours, and that has detrimental effects on other roles sometimes. Late professional development sessions or meetings after school means that it's dark and freezing outside when I'm done, and I

can't get as much exercise. Sometimes I don't have time to fix a super healthy dinner because I am hungry and tired when the classes end. And it's hard to spend quality time doing things with my family or friends when we are discouraged from seeing each other during the pandemic.” -Candy

“I am like legitimately tired of being at home. And there are some great things [about working from home], but I think that my mental health also might improve if I'm not sitting in my house all day long.” -Erica

“I just think overall it’s just sort of like a progressive process where I’m finally realizing that I’m, you know—as much as they talked to us about wellness, I don’t really know if we practice it so well, but we should. We should do better.” -Evelyn

“And I also think that just like at a personal level, it's not sustainable, like I am really struggling with...Like I start in the morning and then I work until generally dinnertime. And then I get my kids to bed and then I work again after they go to bed, to bed, sometimes to like 12 or one and then most weekends. I'm still trying to do stuff and I'm struggling with...I'm feeling really exhausted and I think depressed.” -Hannah

“It’s hard for me to get my water intake... ‘cause I have to wear the mask all the time and I can’t drink the water that I need to drink so that’s difficult.” -Julie

“There’s too much to do, and not enough of me.” -Spencer

Sub-theme D: Impact of
Pandemic Protocols and
PPE

“But also, there's just the added pressure of personal protective equipment, cleaning, social distancing, and depending on the teacher and what and how they organize their classroom that has changed the way a lot of people teach.” -Aria

“This is the thing I've been so excited about. This is my communicator mask because, as I'm sure you know, when you're teaching letters and letter sounds, seeing your mouth, even just being able to hear is so difficult. But then I can't tell a kid like no, look at my mouth. My teeth are on top of my lip. Like that just becomes so pointless with a mask on so I finally sweet-talked the secretaries at my school into giving me a couple of these [holds up communicator mask, a mask with a clear piece in the middle so students can see her mouth].” -Candy

“I don't want to be the mask police, but I want to like, I need to find a nice way to be like, ‘Hey!’ . So just tapping my nose [taps own nose] when I see that their mask has slid down, and it really does help, but it's interesting because somehow it really is the boys. There's three boys and three girls and I don't know why it is, the boys really are having a hard, much harder time than the girls at keeping their masks up. I'm not sure. Oh, I also make little like mask pillows. The teacher will take a tissue like a Kleenex and wrap it up and wrapped around their string and then tape it to make it like a little bit more of a cushion for them behind their ears. So, I would say once or twice a day I make some mask pillows for the mask strap if they're complaining that it's too tight or their ears are hurting. Just legitimately. I mean I wear two masks when I go in and depending on which masks I have sometimes they do start to be uncomfortable, so I understand because when I'm in my office I don't have to be masked because I'm by myself and we have pure air purifiers and things, but the kids really are wearing them all day long.” -Erica

“We are now transitioning back to something a little bit more normal, except that in our building because of trying to keep like safety regulations with, you know, social distancing space we've had to kind of expand out into all spaces, so I don't actually have like an office in the building anymore, and so my principal kind of wants me to keep working remotely as much as I can, because she doesn't really have a place to put us and I'm like really wanting to be back in the building...” - Hannah

“You don't even think about the amount of cleaning that I do between groups. So, my students have to have their own little area, um, and I have to go and pick up all their materials, put it in an area that it's just theirs. I have to clean all their area and then go get another group. And so that time I waste a good five to 10 minutes just cleaning and sanitizing between each grade.” -Julie

“I did buy a voice amplifier off of Amazon so I look ridiculous and look like a telemarketer all day, but I wanted to make sure that no matter what the kids could hear my voice and if I do have to do like articulation with my mouth, I just put my mask down and show them.” -Spencer

Theme 5: Power Differences

“I think they're missing the boat because they're still driving those skills when really the focus should be on: what do those students need? Because we have to acknowledge that they're not going to be where they might have been if this was a normal school year, like, hands-down not going to happen especially considering the different levels of support. So, I think that it needs to shift to a

more individualized, empathetic system that also acknowledges the pressures that teachers are feeling, but if only...if only I had the powers to shift that. I totally would, but I don't." -Aria

"I just felt like something was getting lifted off my shoulders with read across America week planning being done, and now it's like oh now I have like, an academic night to plan and to create this calendar of LA activities. So, it just feels like you don't get a break, because the next thing starts before the other one even finishes and I don't really get much of an opportunity to be like, 'Yes, I think, I would like to be on this, or like no I don't think I want to do this'. It feels like I'm voluntold a lot of the time." -Candy

"I like being part of the, I call it admin with a little a. I don't have to be the assistant principal who, or principal who like, has to deal with all that stuff, but I get to at least have my voice heard." - Erica

"I get somewhat of a role in professional development since I'm the one that creates most of them. [laughs] But sometimes they'll say, "Well that's the direction we're going in so...", then we have to go back and forth and, you know, come up with what it is they want to present, because I think also, and in that area, we present a lot of things it looks really good. But we're not doing it or you know just checking the box. So, I want to say this, most of my literacy professionals, most of my friends are literacy people and they feel the same way. They're like, 'Why do we keep spinning our wheels?' And I'm like, 'I don't know.'" -Evelyn

"A lot of times, it becomes that us vs. them mentality. I'm not an administrator of the school, I am not an administrator of the district, I'm just kind of that in between person, but a lot of times I think they see me as one of those administrator people - evaluative people and I'm not at any point an evaluator of what they're doing. I'm here to support you. So, I really have to walk that line of supporting district initiatives, even though sometimes I don't always agree with them, and bringing them to the teachers." -Melanie

"Like in years past, I felt like I was the new kid, and I didn't really have much of a voice." -Spencer

Theme 6: Influence of the Reading Wars

"I think about the reading wars that are national it's very much the one side of reading wars, where it's you know let's focus on phonics, let's focus on the big five, and that really is like all we focus

on. Without the other pieces that we know that kind of like, bring that together or application.” - Aria

“They had decided they were going to move to this science of reading approach which is for...I just find it very like theoretically interesting to look at the two, but this is something I guess I had learned in grad school that a lot of low income schools end up focusing on these basic skills and kids are never getting to the higher level skills because they're focusing on the basics and that was bad.” -Candy

“Personally and professionally, I think if we don't get a little bit more staying the course on certain initiatives, that we're going to sort of miss the boat on some major things. And like, right now there's - you weren't aware of all this whole battle with the science of reading... - but if we don't get a stance on ‘this is how literacy is going to go in our district’ then we're going to swing the pendulum one way and then with whatever comes along, swing it the other way, and then we will look at ourselves and say we haven't accomplished much of anything.” -Evelyn

“Like we don't teach phonics. That's a no-no, in our school, in our grade levels. That's just a big no-no, however, the students that we intervene with would benefit so much if we could go back and do some phonics introduction with them. When I say phonics, we do more balanced literacy, so we bring out the phonics when it comes up. You know, you do have tailored lessons and that go through an order and that order has a rhyme and reason. I'm for those, but you don't do that. You do it more of when it is needed and you bring it in, however, some of our students would benefit from a tailored program.” -Julie

“It's baby steps. Because we were so ingrained to teach cueing systems, and this was how you taught children to read and we had *extensive* [emphasis on extensive] professional development on this, and we have the Jan Richardson books and it was how we were teaching reading for 70 years and we worked hard to perfect that craft and so now you're- you've got to unlearn a lot of that and you've got to figure out for yourself how to reconcile the two and that's where I'm still struggling is that I understand the science of reading but I've got to reconcile how that would look in my practice and how I can mesh what I was so ingrained and what I successfully taught. I taught a lot of children how to read with the cueing systems, and I saw success with that and now I've got to really learn and unlearn—unlearn first and then relearn—so it's baby steps.” -Melanie

“When I was going through my second master's I was taught balanced literacy, I was taught the cueing strategies, I was taught that we teach kids to think about what makes sense over everything else. We literally taught them to do everything except look at the letters on a page and read the words. And so, I think that things are changing now because we're understanding how all of those different aspects of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing, how they all need to blend together to help children be successful. And while I had heard of it [the science of reading], I never understood it.” -Spencer

Theme 7: Influence of New Position During a Pandemic

“...coming to this district and to the school in a new position and the first half of the year not having met anyone in person and...who knows how many relationships I would have now at this point in a normal year, maybe a few, maybe it would be many, but I feel like I don't really have them. I have some people I'm getting closer to, but it is so much harder to feel like people know you and trust you when the only time you talk to them is over a screen...” -Candy

“I had to do a presentation for my new district on analyzing their PALS data-talk about just get in there. There's, there was no honeymoon, and they were like, we want this done and they gave me a week to do it. And so, I was like, holy cow, but I did it.” -Evelyn

“It's almost like we're trying to clean up a mess, years and years of mess and it's just a lot of hard work. So, yeah, at this point I'm last, but that's not normally the case in the jobs that I've had previously. But I think that comes, sometimes comes naturally with a new position and the stakes that are in the position that I have.” -Julie

“It has been an adjustment for me. I'm new to this role as of September, so I only knew two of those teachers that I am working with, the other ones I did not know. I would see them in different meetings, say hi, just being respectful, but I didn't know them. So it was basically being brand new, presenting myself, letting them know about me.” -Natalie

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Selected Conference Presentations

- Arnold, M.L. (2021, February). The roles and self-perceptions of specialized literacy professionals. Eastern Educational Research Association annual conference. Online conference (due to COVID-19).
- Parsons, S. A., Patterson, A. N., Colwell, J., Jang, B. G., Coiro, J., Mallette, M., Tatum, A., Vardas-Doane, A., Usher, K., LePelch, L., & Arnold, M. (2020, December). How is LRA a home for a range of epistemologies and research methodologies? [Symposium presentation, chairs: B. Baker & G. McMillon]. Literacy Research Association annual conference. Online conference (due to COVID-19).
- Arnold, M.L. (2019, November). Narrative life stories as a literacy intervention for students. Roundtable presentation at the annual meeting of the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers, Corpus Christi, TX.