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Sacred stories of classroom, school, county, and state: Navigating professional knowledge landscapes in the face of mandated reading initiatives

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**Sacred stories of classroom, school, county, and state: Navigating
professional knowledge landscapes in the face of mandated reading
initiatives**

by

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Dissertation

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Sacred stories of classroom, school, county, and state: Navigating professional knowledge landscapes in the face of mandated reading initiatives

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The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of collaboration among members of a first grade team as they participated in a state mandated reading initiative. The second purpose was to examine how top-down mandates of state reading initiatives and collaboration among team members translated into “secret stories” of classroom instruction for the three focus teachers. The study also considered my role as the campus reading coach, as I attempted to facilitate the translation of the reading initiative to meet the diverse needs of the team members, while navigating issues of power among the campus administration and the first grade team. Qualitative research methods were used to document and describe (a) the interactions and collaboration of the first grade team during grade level reading meetings; (b) the formation of micro-groups due to power issues; (c) literacy practices of the three focus teachers and; (d) the secret stories of

members of the first grade team as they navigated the troubled landscape of the second year of the reading initiative. The first grade meetings were observed and documented for five months, as teachers completed the reading initiative modules and attempted to translate those practices in order to complement their existing classroom practices. Each of the three focus first grade teachers was interviewed and recorded during classroom instruction. Interviews with students were also conducted in order to gain the perspective of literacy practices from a child's point of view. Data for the study included field notes from observations, student and teacher interviews, digital images of student work and classroom texts, and digital video and audio recordings of interviews and classroom instruction. The findings of the study indicate that teachers translated staff development practices in accordance with their existing beliefs and tended to gravitate toward and collaborate with those who shared common pedagogical beliefs. The role of the reading coach was best served when the coaching protocols were transparent to all team members. The study revealed the inevitability of conflict in an atmosphere of collaboration as well as the notion that teachers are the true curriculum makers regardless of the initiative.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study examines one school's journey into the second year of a state mandated reading initiative, and the nature of collaboration that emerged among the members of the first grade team. As the reading coach on the campus I wanted to closely examine the degree to which the tenets of the state reading initiative were impacting teacher instruction and student learning, as well as rubbing against them. Of equal importance, I wanted to capture the ways in which teachers represented who they were with colleagues and how these identities translated into the privacy of their own classrooms as the teachers grappled with their growing knowledge and differing philosophies of literacy and children.

Canyon Primary School is a Kindergarten and First Grade campus located in an artists' and writers' colony in the south. From outward appearances of lush homes set against an ocean backdrop, students from the campus are assumed to be from affluent backgrounds by visitors and constituents of the county alike, although approximately 40% of students qualify for the free and reduced breakfast and lunch program. The campus enjoys a remarkable reputation among the people in the community; it is not uncommon for families to wait until their children have completed Kindergarten and First Grade at Canyon Primary School before sending them to the private schools many of their families have attended for generations. The teachers are thought of highly, and long histories exist of grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles having the same classroom teachers. In addition, teacher turnover is rare, and it is not uncommon for the campus

principal to receive 200 applications from interested applicants over the course of a typical summer, so acquiring a position at the school is difficult.

During the summer of 2006, as I joined the faculty of Canyon Primary as their reading coach, I encountered a school very different from the one portrayed above – a campus driven by state mandated assessments that were heavily scrutinized at both the county and state level. Teachers had been told that their students’ performances on these tests would severely impact the funding allocated to Canyon Primary School - a thought that panicked classroom teachers and left them feeling that they had no choice but to make the test their formal curriculum, and involve parents in the test preparation process. The county school system offered no formal staff development to bolster literacy instruction on the campus; teachers were told, instead, to take any steps necessary to ensure the scores increased. Through conversations with teachers, administrators, parents, and the examination of publicly held records, I began to piece together the story of Canyon Primary Elementary, a story I present below as background to this study.

PUBLIC IDENTITY: THE HISTORY OF CANYON PRIMARY SCHOOL

The public story enjoyed by Canyon Primary School is a departure from the typical story of public schooling told in this southern state. Many of the public and private schools exist on opposite sides of deeply drawn racial and economic lines, and the demographics of the public schools do not paint a picture that mirrors the population of the children who live in this state. Of the approximately 800,000 students who are enrolled in schools, almost 75,000 of them attend private schools (Education Bug, 2007; ALSDE, 2006). Private school education is preferred over public education for families

who are able to afford it. Due to a myriad of reasons such as racial tensions, poor state funding of public schools, and the privileged story of being able to afford private education over public, nearly twenty percent of the state's schools are private, with nine percent of the total student population enrolled in those private campuses. And yet, Canyon Primary School has been able to skirt the story of public schools as typically told in this state.

Known for its academic rigor and developmentally appropriate learning experiences for young learners, Canyon Primary School consists of families of Caucasian, African American, Asian, Latino, and mixed backgrounds from a diverse range of socioeconomic groups. Canyon Primary had also, until the 2004-2005 school year, enjoyed a great deal of academic freedom – the freedom to make decisions about student learning based on teacher expertise, knowledge, as well as campus instructional traditions. Up until the 2004-2005 school year, classrooms had been focused on cross-curricular units of study; time was spent writing and performing plays, creating elaborate art projects to commemorate the many local celebrations throughout the year, and exploring the ocean environment near which the school is located. And closely associated with the community, a deep emphasis on visual and performing arts has been and continues to be entrenched in the identity of the campus and attached to the public persona of the classroom teachers. Many stories exist which tell the tale of what it means to be a student, a parent, and a teacher at Canyon Primary School. The teachers all purportedly wrote their own classroom productions, emphasized creativity in their classroom instruction, and made space for the celebration of the artists and writers who lived and worked in their midst. But the stories grew more complicated with the large

emphasis placed on state-mandated testing at the kindergarten and first grade levels, the introduction of a state-wide reading initiative, and a much tighter rein exerting force regarding not only what was taught in classrooms, but how.

Prior to the 2002-2003 school year, Canyon Primary School was untouched by the implications of the National Reading Panel Report and No Child Left Behind because the campus only housed kindergarten and first grade children, and with no formal assessments in place, there was no official tool for gauging student performance. However, in the fall of 2002, the county's curriculum department introduced the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessment (DIBELS) to elementary campuses and began a testing initiative that included students in kindergarten through the third grade. The DIBELS assessment, developed by Good and Kaminski (2002), was based on the "big ideas" of particular foundational skills cited by the National Research Council, 1998, and the National Reading Panel, 2000. These "big ideas" were defined as "skills that differentiate successful from less successful readers and, most important, are amenable to change through instruction" (Good et al, 2001; Good & Kaminski, 2002). Initially teachers were told by building and county administrators not to concern themselves with the test scores. The teachers were simply directed to start administering the DIBELS assessment to the kindergarten and first grade students, following the mandate from the county. At this point in time, only the county required the administration of the DIBELS assessment, not the state, so the pressure to meet specific expectations did not exist. According to teachers who were working at Canyon Primary during that time, they continued with their usual classroom instruction, tolerated the

assessment, and did not consider the test or its results again until the next assessment period.

During the 2003-2004 school year, unbeknownst to the Canyon Primary faculty, events were taking place that would greatly impact their definition of what it meant to teach kindergarten and first grade. According to the campus reading support teacher and the campus principal, the teachers were asked to give the DIBELS assessment under new state monitoring requirements, while teachers continued to administer the test without formal training and without an understanding of what DIBELS was designed to detect in young, developing readers. The state monitoring requirements defined minimum growth expectations for each sub-test of DIBELS in grades Kindergarten through Third Grade, and established minimum percentages of mastery on each tested component. At the same time the county was experiencing rapid growth and a significant change in the demographic makeup of the student populations. Prior to the 2003-2004 school year, student populations other than Caucasian and African American students were small enough that the state did not include test scores for these student populations in the district accountability ratings. However, during the 2004-2005 school year, student groups that had been too small to figure into accountability standards (such as Hispanic, Native American) reached critical mass. Because the test scores for students in those groups were lower than the passing standards, the county was placed in “school improvement” and the county test scores were on the radar of the state as well as the county’s board of education. For the first time simply giving the assessment to students would not be enough and the results for the upcoming school year would be carefully monitored.

In December of the 2004-2005 school year, the faculty at Canyon Primary earned itself a place on the county's curriculum department watch list due to low mid-year test scores, much to the embarrassment of the campus principal and the Scott County Board of Education. Both the building administration and the campus faculty were reportedly caught off guard when the students' DIBELS scores were released, along with the scores of the other campuses in the county, to the local newspaper. Regretfully, Canyon Primary, which had received so many accolades and enjoyed such a highly-esteemed reputation in the community, found itself having to explain the lowest test scores in the county system. How could it be that one of the schools considered to be most effective and affluent would have the greatest trouble preparing their children adequately?

At the same time, the school was embarking on their two year SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) School Accreditation review process. The Scott County curriculum department descended upon the teachers at Canyon Primary and the faculty was told to improve DIBELS scores at any cost. Between the embarrassment of having scores published in the newspaper and the pressure of an accreditation review, the teachers were persuaded to take shortcuts to encourage a quick rise in test scores. These directives from the curriculum department team, including teaching to the test, training parents to time students during the school day, and making copies of the secure testing documents publicly available, flew in the face of what were considered to be developmentally appropriate practices for supporting the literacy growth of young children.

An Emergency Response

As often happens in times of school performance emergencies, the focus of the curriculum department's attention became raising test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In this particular situation, however, the emphasis came without taking the time to deepen faculty understanding of the assessment. As opposed to teaching the faculty how to engage students in authentic literacy tasks, faculty members were simply told to raise scores and found themselves being directed to follow a litany of testing improvement measures for kindergarteners and first graders that did not involve teaching children how to read books or write stories (Seay, 2006). Although the principal (no longer employed by Canyon Primary) and the reading support teacher attended DIBELS training in Oregon (provided by the developers of the assessment) for the purpose of learning how to support student reading development through the use of authentic literacy tasks, the reading support teacher and the principal were specifically directed by the county curriculum department to bypass those strategies. Teachers were directed to Xerox testing materials to send home with parents. Parents were asked to time their children at home on the subtests and report the scores on the various sections each week. According to the reading support teacher on campus during that time, the expectation was set by Scott County Board of Education that scores would be significantly raised regardless of the means. The curriculum became the test, and tremendous amounts of time were devoted to testing and retesting children to check progress toward the established goals needed to remove the campus from public scrutiny.

Because of the directive from the county to increase test scores and the increased pressure to meet both county and state accountability standards, teachers began to teach

to the test. Members of the Kindergarten and First Grade teams, as well as the reading support teacher, recounted the panicked instructional shift. Quickly kindergarten and first grade classrooms began to fill with teacher-created posters made from copies of the state assessment. Teachers began drilling children on isolated skills of the test and documenting test score increases and decreases. Students were tested each week to monitor improvement and teachers began pulling small test practice groups and working with individual students to speed up student testing response times.

Teachers also began training parents by “rewriting” the types of literacy interactions parents were encouraged to engage in with their children at home. Parents were given copies of the various tests and new practice packets were sent home for weekly rehearsals. Most of the tasks involved naming letters or reading “nonsense words,” but the bulk of the attention was given to ensuring students could read passages with enough speed to meet and beat the word per minute testing guidelines on the fluency measures. This aspect of the test was supposed to make certain that students were strong enough readers by the end of first grade to read stories smoothly and accurately, but because the emphasis from the county had been placed on meeting a numeric criteria, teachers and parents were encouraged to teach students to read as quickly as possible to ensure students could read the appropriate number of words per minute.

Parents spent time at home, starting around October of each year, listening to students read passages meant to be read by the end of first grade, all the while encouraging students to read faster and faster. Parents were also trained to use timers, purchased by classroom teachers for use at home, in order to record how quickly their children were reading. Each week those scores were reported to the classroom teachers.

No attention was given toward developing comprehension, developing student preferences in reading materials, or ensuring that students had appropriate materials to read in terms of level of difficulty or subject preference. Students were taught, when coming to unfamiliar words, to look at the tester/parent and say, “Skip it,” or “Don’t know,” in order to prevent time being lost from trying to sound out the word in question. Students were also told never to reread when being timed because, again, rereading would take precious time off the fluency score. Taken a step further, students were also taught to time each other. Again, teachers purchased more timers so that students would be able to use them in the classroom.

During the course of the 2005-2006 school year, campus scores increased greatly and the county expressed satisfaction with the teachers’ efforts. First grade teachers reported a great sense of relief over the raised test scores, while also reporting a deep feeling of dissatisfaction with regard to the methods. Many expected the rise in test scores to fulfill Canyon Primary School’s obligation to the state and county, but a more intensive effort designed to draw curriculum and instruction into the folds of state mandates was underway. The Scott County Board of Education agreed, under pressure from the state department, as reported by central office, to participate in the state mandated reading initiative. Campus faculties would have to commit 85% of their staff (regardless of subject area taught) to attend the week-long training and participate in monthly staff development sessions, lasting the entire upcoming school year.

State Reading Initiative Training

During the summer of 2006, I was introduced to the staff of Canyon Primary as their new reading coach, funded by the state's reading initiative. Our purpose for coming together during the summer of 2006 was to attend the week-long introductory state reading initiative training. The summer reading academy was designed to set the foundation for the upcoming school year. Throughout the week-long training, the teachers, campus administrators and I were introduced to the state department approved reading modules that would guide the professional development for the upcoming 2006-2007 school year. My responsibilities would include supporting the Kindergarten and First Grade teachers with the replication of the modules from the summer training, and help them transition their classroom routines and structures to incorporate the lessons into a non-negotiable 90 minute uninterrupted reading block. Because the Scott County School System had entered into the classification of "school improvement" due to the dismal subpopulation test scores mentioned earlier, they were pressured heavily by the state to participate in the state reading initiative. Of the 132 public school systems in the state, the Scott County School System was the last one to require campuses to attend the training, and that attitude was reflected by the comments of the staff throughout the week.

Within the first few days of the training, I was struck by the chasm that existed philosophically between the stories the Canyon Primary teachers told of their classroom lives and the stories projected by the state staff developers. During the breaks throughout the week Canyon Primary classroom teachers told stories of who they were before the introduction of DIBELS and the emphasis on test scores. These teachers who had enjoyed identities as creative teachers, were sitting through a week-long training, receiving a

curriculum of tightly scripted lessons that appeared to teach only tasks related to DIBELS performance. These lessons also seemed quite limiting in nature because they would only be appropriate for the small percentages of students who were struggling at Canyon Primary, and even then, the content seemed inappropriate. Even the teacher resource books the trainers referred to throughout the training were from an approved list developed by the state. The tone of the sessions felt contrived and tightly controlled.

According to the state's reading initiative website, the goal of the K-12 statewide reading initiative (managed by the Department of Education) was to "significantly improve reading instruction and ultimately achieve 100% literacy among public school students. The training for teachers helps them teach reading in proven and effective ways" (www.alsde.edu). As with state reading initiatives across the country developed under No Child Left Behind guidelines, a rigorous staff development component with year-long follow up training became a mandatory part of the campus's new identity (www.ed.gov/nclb). Not only did each campus receive a reading coach, but each campus also received a principal coach, to ensure that the necessary support would be in place for the reading initiative at the administrative level. The principal coach would also assist the principal and the campus reading coach as they learned to navigate the boundaries of both roles in light of the reading initiative. Although I was certainly expected to support and encourage implementation of the modules, my role of reading coach did not include that of evaluator, hence it carried no level of responsibility other than communicating with the principal if people chose not to participate in the initiative.

As the training commenced, it became obvious that teachers feared their autonomy and their freedom to collaborate with whomever they pleased were in danger

of becoming squelched on a campus known for its ability to take care of itself academically. Teachers were already experiencing a loss of freedom over the impact of the state-required DIBELS assessment, and the mandatory participation in the state reading initiative caused greater concern. As opposed to having their repertoire of strategies for helping students to become skillful readers and writers expanded, the faculty was facing 40 hours worth of training that followed tightly scripted lessons. Up to this point in time, no training had ever been required of the teachers by the county outside of the professional development offered to all teachers at the start of each school year. And if teachers chose to attend training on their own, they were accustomed to selecting training that furthered the choices available to them pedagogically, not designed to constrict their options.

The type of professional development the teachers were hoping for would empower them as teachers, expanding their understanding of literacy development in young children. However, the state reading training was not “empowering teachers toward greater professional independence at all, but incorporating them and their loyalties within purposes and structures bureaucratically determined elsewhere” (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 229). The faculty was trained to follow highly structured, scripted lessons, for the purpose of decreasing the margin of error in their teaching.

As I searched the US Department of Education website, researching the origins of the state reading initiative, I could not help but notice the interesting use of conflicting language used to describe the various No Child Left Behind initiatives. A section titled “Stronger Accountability” was followed by a section titled “More Local Freedom,” under which a subcategory was listed titled “Local Control and Flexibility.” I expected my role

as a campus reading coach would include fostering collegiality among the members of the team, supporting teachers as they explored their own literacy practices and refined these practices with information based on new strategies from the reading initiative modules. However, it became clear early in the training that the goal was to replace teaching strategies deemed ineffective by the state department of education with tightly scripted lessons that allowed little freedom or teacher input.

It was during this initial encounter with my colleagues that I began to feel the push and pull between official “sacred” stories (Clandinin & Connelly; 1995; Craig, 2001) being told by the state and the more honest stories seeping out in the comments across the room. *Sacred stories*, as defined by Clandinin and Connelly, are the stories that are told regarding what is right and what should be happening in classroom instruction. The flaw inherent in these *sacred stories* is that they are usually based on theories that have been stripped of their context and are being applied to circumstances very different than the ones in which they were conceived or researched. One of the criticisms leveled at the National Reading Panel Report (2000) follows this very line of thinking that Clandinin and Connelly are trying to represent with their notion of *sacred stories*: many of the studies in the report are being applied to classroom situations under quite different circumstances from which the research was conducted, and teachers are made to feel that this is the way they should be teaching because the strategies came from “Research.” It is “the universality and taken-for-grantedness of the supremacy of theory over practice [that] gives it a quality of a sacred story” (Crites, 1971). Canyon Primary School teachers were clearly struggling with how to navigate between these *sacred stories* and their own personal teaching experiences. When I entered as reading coach, the *sacred*

stories seemed to be outweighing and invalidating teachers' personal and professional knowledge of teaching.

Research Devoid of Context: Fluency Misunderstood

My first experience with the results of these practices designed to increase test scores occurred during one of the first trainings I conducted for the campus teachers, after the reading initiative training had been completed, and just before the new school year was about to start. I was demonstrating how to place children appropriately in texts based on smooth, fluent reading and the ability of the children to talk about what they read. One of the teachers volunteered her daughter for the demonstration out of concern for her daughter's reading. She wanted to see if I noticed how Felicity seemed to focus on reading as quickly as she could, but without regard for comprehension. Felicity had just completed first grade at Canyon Primary, and her first grade teacher, a woman who enjoyed a highly esteemed reputation among colleagues and community members, also expressed a great deal of concern and frustration to me regarding Felicity's reading. The teacher stated that Felicity was a prime example of the type of reader they were all producing due to the emphasis on DIBELS fluency scores and speed, as opposed to focusing on strategies and comprehension. Entire classrooms of students had worked incredibly hard on "going fast" and as a result, were terrified each time they were asked to read.

Felicity's classroom teacher was right – Felicity had a "death grip" on the text as she waited for me to signal her to begin. The deep breath she took (as if it might have been her last) before she jumped into the text, reading 180 words a minute, was startling.

After she read the first page, I asked her to talk about what she read aloud, and the horrified child looked at me with enormous eyes and confessed that she had absolutely no idea.

Admittedly I thought the teachers were exaggerating when they talked of the practices they were engaging in at the encouragement of the county. However, the reality of the story came full circle as I watched Felicity hyperventilate and grip the book with pure trepidation. I realized that my role would be a tricky one. How could I support the aims of the state and county, while making room for teachers to return to the stories of teacher knowledge they had been forced to abandon out of haste to meet goals privileged by the county and state?

I was reminded of Marie Clay's book *By Different Paths to Common Outcomes* (1998), certain we could afford to make room for the secret stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) teachers were proud to construct with their students inside the walls of their classrooms; certain we could still meet the goals of the state to ensure literacy for all of our children, but define a more authentic way to carry it out. The teachers and I needed to make room for the vast amounts of personal practical knowledge they possessed in the sacred story the state and county wished to tell of high achieving students. In the spring of 2008, I started the process of tracking the professional development of the first grade teachers as they navigated between their personal histories as teachers, the state-mandated reading initiatives, and our conversations in teacher collaborative groups.

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM

In the era of federal and state-mandated literacy initiatives, the emphasis on “research-based” programmatic solutions pervades staff development models across the county. With funding hinging on the use of these government-approved models, top-down prescriptive programs are becoming increasingly common across educational settings (Allington, 2006). The emphasis on programs being able to quantify student achievement and measure reading in terms of isolated skills has created a lop-sided view of all that literacy instruction should encompass (Allington, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Trachtman, 2007). In fact, the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind legislation has been credited with causing the public to believe that state testing and accountability ratings, in isolation, equate with the quality of a child’s education (Barton, 2006; Trachtman, 2007).

The studies published thus far on this particular state’s reading initiative examine improvement of scores on measures such as DIBELS and NAEP, but ignore the stories of the classroom hybridization and finessing of mandated teaching practices as teachers strive to maintain their personal teaching philosophies (Kersten & Pardo, 2007). In a book titled, *How DIBELS Failed Alabama: A Research Report*, the authors devote an entire chapter to interviews of parents recounting the ways their at-home literacy lives were disrupted by their children’s school insisting DIBELS practice take place at home. As with the recommendation at Canyon Primary, these parents were directed to practice

tasks with their young children in order to ensure an increase in test scores. However, the stories of the classroom teachers are overlooked.

Little is known with regard to how classroom teachers and reading coaches are actually navigating these top-down professional development models from the vantage point of a school-insider (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Craig, 2006). Most of the studies examining these professional development approaches were conducted by researchers entering the campus from positions outside of the school. These researchers (Birman, et al., 2000; Silin & Schwartz, 2003; Kersten & Pardo, 2007) studied the extent to which the top-down models of professional development were implemented to fidelity, as well as the ways in which teachers transformed the tenets to meet their own teaching styles and strategies. However, researchers entering schools from the outside are not always privy to the political decisions and struggles that go on inside the walls of the school.

Further, the nature of these professional development initiatives often define what is valued in terms of student learning. In the era of No Child Left Behind, what is presented in mandated training is what is tested, and what is tested, typically is what gets taught (Allington, 2006). However, classroom instruction is a far more complicated picture than that of the tested/taught dichotomy. We need to understand how teachers take up and use professional development that extends beyond what is simply tested in order to work towards the improvement of teaching and student learning.

Professional development literature and experiences indicate that instructional coaches can be key to this process. Literature on coaching typically describes characteristics that make more or less effective reading coaches (Silin and Schwartz, 2003; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007), or divides coaches into two categories (Hargreaves &

Dawe, 1990): those who train teachers to blindly follow curriculum mandates to the letter versus coaches who start with teacher interests. Yet, there is little to describe exactly how coaches and teachers work together to navigate between teachers' personal stories and experiences and top-down professional mandates on their teaching (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). As well, we know little about how coaches help teachers collaborate with one another as they work through these influences on their teaching. The study reported here was designed to help fill these voids in the literature through an in-depth investigation of the collaboration among ten first grade teachers and their reading coach (me). Careful documentation of the professional development experiences and conversations we participated in as a team, as well as how these experiences played out in their classroom teaching, afforded insights into the ways teachers navigate among multiple influences on their teaching. My position as the campus reading coach provided me with the unique perspective of an insider privy to the intimate details of the celebrations and struggles that occurred throughout the various phases of the state reading initiative implementation.

In chapter 2 I will review literature that defines Clandinin and Connelly's notion of *sacred* and *secret stories*, as well as literature that examines coaching roles and professional development programs where the reading coaches play an integral role. Lave and Wenger's notion of *communities of practice* will provide a framework for examining teacher collaboration. Achinstein's work on *communities in conflict* will serve as another structure for examining collaboration. In chapter 3, I will describe the methodology proposed to explore these questions. Chapter 4 describes the structure of the state reading initiative modules as well as the literacy training I chose to implement based on

my own beliefs about teaching children to read and write. Chapter 5 examines the various forms of collaboration that developed among the members of the first grade team, as well as the conflicts that emerged as a result of teachers' attempts at making changes to their existing roles. Chapter 6 examines the literacy practices of three first grade teachers in order to trace the influences of the state reading initiative modules, my influence as the campus reading coaching, as well as the influences of the collaborative efforts among the other members of the first grade team in order to determine how these impacted the classroom instruction of the three focus teachers. Chapter 7 will summarize and discuss the findings from the study and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this literature review I will explore seven areas of research – professional development, top-down state mandated training, roles of instructional coaches, curricular influences of coaching models, teacher stories of classroom practices, teacher collaboration, and issues of conflict – that contribute to our understanding of how classroom instructional decisions reflect these influences. First, I will review the literature related to professional development and the various ways effective staff development structures are talked about in research. Second, I will explore the literature related to the effects of state mandated programs upon teaching, including where these initiatives hail from as well as how they are discussed in studies and purported to impact instructional practices. Third, I will review literature related to instructional coaching in order to understand the extent to which mandates are enacted through the reading coach position. Fourth, I will examine the curricular influences associated with coaching models where teachers control the direction of the learning as well as models driven by testing demands. Fifth, I will review the literature related to teacher stories of classroom practices, examining the various ways teachers represent their classroom practices through the framework of Clandinin & Connelly’s concepts of *sacred* and *cover* stories. These notions of *sacred* and *cover stories* provide a helpful way to view how professional development mandates and personal philosophies translate into teaching practices. Sixth, I will review the literature on collaboration. Because this study is contextualized in terms of a first grade team, it will be important to examine both coaching and the collaboration among team members through the lens of Lave & Wenger’s notion of communities of

practice. Finally, I will examine the conflict that occurs in communities associated with change. To explore these areas, I will utilize six guiding questions.

- (1) What are the structures associated with effective professional development, and how do these structures impact the extent to which teachers are able to transfer new understandings into classroom practice?
- (2) What influences do state mandated/top-down professional development opportunities have upon teachers?
- (3) What does the literature say with regard to the impact instructional coaches have upon teacher practices?
- (4) How do theories of curriculum impact the structures of professional development?
- (5) In what ways can exploring teacher narratives of personal teaching histories inform our understanding of teacher classroom practices?
- (6) How is collaboration described in terms of examining ways of talking as well as structures in which collaboration takes place?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

What are the structures that are associated with effective professional development and how do these structures impact the extent to which teachers are able to transfer new understandings into classroom practice? In this section I will discuss the role of professional development and structures influencing teacher change in order to provide a sense of the ways in which professional development may or may not impact classroom instruction. The examination of these structures will be important when considering the

particular model of professional development designed by the state department of education for the reading initiative at Canyon Primary as well as the structures I put in place as the reading coach, based on my own background experiences.

Professional Development Structures

Professional development formats are wide and varied, ranging from single-session trainings to long-term staff development associated with coaching models designed to help participants support significant change in their teaching practices. Professional development models can target the individual learner as well as entire campuses. Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet (2000) report that professional development models that focus on expanding participant understanding and fostering change in a supportive, collaborative environment are more effective because of their emphasis on building relationships and providing support for the teachers involved. They argue that the more opportunities teachers have to meet with supportive colleagues over time, the greater the likelihood that changes will be systemic and enduring. This notion is echoed in Hargreaves and Dawe's (1990) study of professional development systems attempting to foster instructional changes. In the following quote, they contend that moving teachers from isolation to collegiality is an essential part of professional development.

Releasing teachers from their isolationism, 'cracking the walls of privatism,' as Fullan (1982) put it, has, therefore, been regarded not only as a beneficial move for teachers collegially, but also as an essential prerequisite for securing educational change in any enduring sense (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 227).

In recent years, researchers have lobbied extensively for a shift in the nature of professional development, from a model characterized by individual teachers attending training alone and returning to implement new understandings in classrooms by themselves, toward models that focus on bringing teachers together to share their thinking and support one another as they attempt to make changes in their practices (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Researchers such as Joyce and Showers (1981), Hargreaves and Dawe (1990), and Little (1982) cite problems with teacher isolation and argue that feelings of being overwhelmed have been associated with the emphasis upon the individualistic structure of many older staff development models.

Collaboration

Research on motivation and self-efficacy highlight the importance of staff development that has built-in opportunities for collaboration. “In adaptable and successful schools, interactions about teaching tend to be inclusive; a large portion of the faculty participates and is part of the group of innovators... they are mindful of the consequences for other staff and prepare thoughtful strategies for including others” (Little, 1982, p. 336). According to Darling-Hammond (1998), who draws from her study of effective pre-service training and ongoing professional development designed to support teachers’ continuous learning, the opportunity to collaborate with others while still maintaining a sense of choice over what is learned elevates the level of staff development far beyond that of mere compliance. Staff development opportunities are particularly powerful when teachers can engage in the analysis of their own students’

work and then apply new strategies obtained during training to measure their impact on student performance.

In addition to models that focus on collaboration among teachers, there are several other features of effective professional development that need to be explored. *Content focus, active learning, coherence, and reflection* will be defined and situated within the context of the state reading initiative at Canyon Primary.

Content Focus

The first feature - *content focus* - examines the degree to which professional development training emphasizes a deepening of teacher knowledge and understanding. Equally important are the opportunities for teachers to then engage with the new content in active and meaningful ways, which increases the chance teachers will carry this new knowledge back to their classrooms and put it to use (Blachowicz, Obrochta, Fogelberg, 2005). For example, professional development models that allow teachers to explore research findings on a particular strategy, and then read about how these strategies are applied in the context of classroom practice would meet the depth of content criteria for content focus. *Content focus* was one of the key features of the state reading initiative monthly trainings that are a focus of this study. Each month, as the new module was introduced, teachers were provided with opportunities to read research that stressed the importance of the targeted strategies. Teachers would then engage in discussions, highlighting the significance of the findings and relating them to their current classroom practices as well as practices targeted by the aims of the reading initiative.

Active Learning

Active learning, the second feature associated with effective professional development, is distinguished from other kinds of learning because the emphasis is upon active meaning making as teachers apply strategies in simulated experiences designed to help gain a feel for how these strategies will work in their own classrooms. *Active learning* and *content focus* often go hand-in-hand; strategies studied at deep levels have a greater chance of impacting classroom instruction when teachers have immediate opportunities to apply the new knowledge in context with children. Looking at samples of student work or breaking down a lesson to look at the impact upon the student learning would be examples of active learning (Birman, et. al, 2000). The coaching cycle, in theory, engages teachers in active learning as a part of a long-term professional development experience because teachers are provided with structured opportunities to examine the impact of instructional strategies upon student learning. Not only are teachers learning new information, they are provided with the chance to make it meaningful by engaging with the information in a format similar to how they would on their home campuses (Joyce & Showers, 1981). During reading initiative trainings, the teachers would work in partners to practice strategies or to plan lessons using sample pieces of text, anticipating student needs. Teachers also entered demonstration classrooms for the purpose of analyzing strategies and lessons modeled by the classroom teacher as well as to practice the actual lessons with children on the hosting campus.

Coherence

Coherence is the final marker for professional development quality. *Coherence* speaks to the extent that the training will increase collaborative opportunities between teachers in the future, providing support for one another as well as a format for continuing to experiment with the new practices and develop a deeper understanding (Porter, Garet, Desimone, Yoon, & Birman, 2000). *Coherence* speaks to the likelihood that teachers will learn strategies and develop understandings that will fit into the broader picture of the system in which they teach. Professional development plans that include an imbedded coach to continue to support teachers after the initial round of professional development meet the “coherence” standard of professional development. In some respects, the state reading initiative had a high degree of coherence built into the structure. Each month a single focus for practice would be presented during monthly training. All coaching work, classroom walk-throughs, and professional development sessions would then focus on this single module. However, in terms of matching the practices already in place, or the practices that were studied based on teacher interests, there were times when the strategies and topics of the reading initiative were at odds with what was actually occurring in classrooms.

Duration

In addition to these three features described above, other research (Birman et al, 2000) argues that the *duration* of training is a key factor associated with the success or failure of professional development. Theories of effective professional development (Joyce & Showers, 1981; Little, 1982; Morrow & Casey, 2004; Silin & Schwartz, 2003)

point to the importance of prolonged training, as opposed to one-shot staff development workshops, that allows participants to learn, return to their settings, and begin trying out the new strategies and new understandings. The state reading initiative addressed the standard of length in many aspects: All of the modules from years one and two were initially introduced during the summer reading academy prior to the start of the 2006-2007 school year, serving a role much like that of an advanced organizer. The modules were then reintroduced one at a time and studied in isolation over the course of a month, including classroom visits and support provided through the coaching cycle. Practices studied during previous months were revisited during individual coaching sessions, and were also the focus of future trainings at a more in-depth level.

Built-in opportunities for teachers to revisit modules and strategies during follow-up sessions are crucial. Prolonged engagement of this type creates the time and space for teachers to shore up learning and share their stories of strategy use with fellow teachers. The importance of having time to reflect over classroom practices and student progress cannot be underestimated. One of the most significant writers on the notion of reflection, Schön, is credited with bringing a heightened level of importance to the role reflection plays in teacher decision-making (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Schön's work on reflection (1983, 1987) speaks to the importance of having time to deconstruct what occurred during teaching in order to refine, reject, repair, or reconstruct new, more developed understandings. Hargreaves and Dawes (1990) suggest that Schön's research on reflection has "been widely adopted within the educational research and professional development literature, lifting teachers' knowledge from an image of anti-intellectual

habit and unquestioned experience to one of skilled and thoughtful judgment exercised in practical situations” (p. 230).

Reflection

This notion of reflecting, as written about by Schön (1983, 1987) and Hargreaves and Dawe (1990), as a method of improving and informing future teaching practices has been divided into three categories (Hall, 1997; Phillips & Hall, 2002). These categories should not be considered a progression of levels of reflection, although it is not uncommon for people to experience them in the order presented here. The first and most broad form of reflection is *everyday* reflection. *Everyday reflection* is the type of reflecting one might engage in while in the midst of trying the new strategy or after its conclusion. This type of reflection occurs randomly and often while doing other things – like running errands or even taking a shower – and is an individual effort.

Deliberate reflection (Hall, 1997; Phillips & Hall, 2002) occurs over a period of time and is purposeful. This reflection occurs when one wishes to systematically evaluate an event or lesson to determine whether it is working or not. This type of reflection also encourages mentorship among participants who are trying out new practices in their own classrooms or schools, as well (Hall, 1997; Phillips & Hall, 2002).

Programmatic reflection is much more formal in nature and is cyclical. Action research projects or programmatic evaluation fall into this category. The person or people engaged in the project collect data to examine how the program or strategy is progressing. Many of the reading initiative components fall into this category. As the reading coach, I am often responsible for building in time for people to reflect on

strategies and lessons designed by the state. Teachers use reflection journals as well as open-ended discussions during meetings, as well as participate in informal conversations with me during the day. This form of reflection can also draw upon anecdotal records and student samples of work.

Staff development that makes room for any type of systematic reflection as a component of its process is making space for thoughtful deliberation of practices, thereby increasing the chances that the new learning will be applied and with a higher degree of satisfaction on the part of the participants (Harrison, Lawson, & Wortley, 2005). The form of the systematic reflection is not important in and of itself; the fact that teachers do reflect and formulate a plan for acting upon their reflections is the piece that seems to matter, according to the research in this area.

As with *content focus*, *active learning*, and *coherence*, the state reading initiative embraced and made space for teachers and coaches to *reflect* throughout professional development and coaching cycles. Reflection was carefully planned for, both through written reflection as well as spoken. A great deal of time was spent clarifying how coaches should engage in reflection with classroom teachers without bleeding over into appraisal or praise, while also fostering teacher reflection.

TOP-DOWN STATE MANDATES

The section above examined research associated with effective professional development structures. In this portion of chapter 2, we will look at the emerging trends in staff development in order to answer the question, “What influences do state mandated/top-down professional development opportunities have upon teachers?”

According to a comprehensive study of professional development conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in coordination with the National Center for Educational Statistics, current trends in professional development have been identified by drawing upon data from one of the largest educational surveys ever administered in the United States. The instrument, known as the SASS (Schools and Staffing Survey) of 1999-2000, compiled data from interviews conducted across 4,700 school districts, representing 12,000 schools, 12,300 principals, 52,400 teachers, and 9,900 school library media centers. The purpose of the research study was to capture how “professional development was organized and managed, what kinds of activities were available to teachers, and which ones they participated in” (Choy, Chen & Bugarin, 2006, p. iii).

According to SASS, one emerging trend is that staff development is driven by gaps that appear in testing data between campus goals for students and actual results on assessments. Given the high-pressure climate of No Child Left Behind, this aspect of professional development does not come as a surprise. Another influence is the space teachers are given to define their own professional development needs and then develop the learning opportunities to meet those needs. A third trend reported in the survey is that although staff development meets the needs of individual teachers, it is primarily collaborative in nature (Choy, Chen & Bugarin, 2006). The combination of these three significant staff development trends matches the description of the state reading initiative Canyon Primary participated in. The reading professional development was focused on gaps that were detected by student performance on DIBELS, the state-developed reading assessment, and the results of the NAEP. To a certain extent I drew upon teacher interests to provide direction to my coaching, although I emphasized that aspect perhaps more than

the state reading initiative model called for. Finally, the reading initiative training could be described as collaborative because structures to encourage and support teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-coach interactions were supported both through the model itself in the form of time and space to engage in the coaching cycle, as well as through training by way of substitute coverage during 2006-2007, and to a lesser extent during the 2007-2008 school year.

In addition to examining data from the SASS, another important source of staff development mandates emanates from the impact of ESEA (The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) and Nixon's "War on Poverty" which spurred federal funding through Title I. ESEA's influences continue to be felt today because in 2002, it was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act. Examining the influence of both of these pieces of legislation sheds light on their overarching influence, directly impacting staff development practices, particularly in schools failing to meet the standards according to testing.

If you want an intervention to fail, mandate its use with a school full of teachers who hate it, don't agree with it, and are not skilled (or planning to become skilled) in using it. This is what Linda Darling-Hammond (1990) has called 'the power of the bottom over the top' in educational reform. (Allington, 2006)

As a result of the heavy-handed influence of assessment on the rating of schools, and formally as well as in formally with regard to classroom teachers, professional development models that have emerged as a result of ESEA and NCLB follow a reformatory line of thinking that supports the notion of providing scripted programs to teachers in order to "fix" ineffective instruction. These "research-based" theories are then touted as being best, trumping classroom practices without regard to what those

classroom practices might encompass, as the original contexts of the privileged research are often overlooked. Following suit, curriculum design is also affected as lessons are written for teachers in order to supplant current teaching practices as well as curriculum decision-making processes. In an attempt to ensure students are achieving the necessary results on accountability tests, flexibility is pulled from the curriculum and instead, teachers are asked to work with students in an environment of absolutes and “thou shalt” The emphasis on accountability-based standards and the impact upon curriculum resembles efforts seen in the past as curricular models espoused the importance of maintaining a caste system intent on determining one’s station in life (Bobbitt, 1918).

Another influence upon teachers and their practices is the notion of the “medical model” of staff development in which tests are used to “diagnose” literacy woes – both for students and pedagogically for teachers – so that fool-proof methods can be utilized to cure the child and the teacher of the pinpointed literacy problems. The state reading initiative that Canyon Primary participated in drew from a “medical model” of assessment-driven instruction based on tests. Students were progress-monitored on a weekly and semi-weekly basis in order to chart the course of intervention some students required. Small group instruction was supposed to be planned drawing upon the data from the progress monitoring assessments, in theory, “aligning the tested and the taught.”

No Child Left Behind Meets Canyon Primary

In direct contrast with the styles of professional development and reflective procedures recommended by researchers and described in the previous sections, a competing version of professional development exists that seeks to establish conformity

of practice and “fix” problem schools, which ultimately translates to “fixing” problem teachers. Barton (2006) asserts that this version of staff development has arisen out of the accountability climate of No Child Left Behind, a law that heavily influences the state reading initiative that Canyon Primary School participates in. This climate has caused parents, community members, teachers, students, and policy makers “to equate school success and failure with student performance on NCLB metrics” (Trachtman, 2007, p. 197), which then causes a shift in the focus of staff development from one focused on deepening teacher knowledge and pursuing areas of interest relevant to their particular school and groups of students to one focused on testing strategies designed to prepare students to perform well on standardized tests. Students are spending large amounts of time learning and practicing strategies that do not approximate authentic literacy behaviors that readers and writers engage in (Calkins, 2001).

Predictably, the community of Canyon Primary and the central office figures of the Scott County Board of Education reacted in this exact way when the campus’s DIBELS scores were reported in the newspaper and ranked lowest in the county. The dip in DIBELS scores combined with the county’s low subpopulations scores on state tests caused the county to fall into the “school improvement” category. This designation placed Scott County on the state radar and made participation in the top-down state mandated reading initiative almost inescapable. The test, designed to be an indicator of possible problems with children acquiring basic literacy skills had turned into “an implicit (perhaps even an explicit) blueprint for curriculum – driving publishers, district officials, principals, and teachers into a narrow curricular mode” (Pearson, 2006, p. ix). Staff development soon became focused on raising DIBELS scores – not helping children

to become strategic readers and writers. Teachers were taught to send home testing materials for parents and spend all the time they could afford engaging students in test preparation practice, according to the campus's former reading teacher. These practices were firmly in place when I arrived in the summer of 2006.

In addition to heavily influencing literacy instruction, another issue with top-down mandates is that the tools and training provided to teachers who are required to participate in these initiatives can discourage the use of other teaching practices—practices that are crowded out as a result of over-emphasis on the new, tightly controlling structures. In *The Truth About DIBELS*, Tierney and Thome (2006) argue that DIBELS has not only become a pseudo-curriculum, but it has also started to cloud teachers' abilities to look at students in terms of students' developing literacy strategies. The focus of the assessment is so tight and narrow on minute sub-skills that DIBELS forces the use of a very tiny lens for examining the literacy development of children, leaving the authors calling for an expansion of the tools teachers are given to include a more well-rounded set of tools. In this same text, an entire chapter was devoted to the poor state of reading in the state that Canyon Primary School is located. In this particular chapter, Seay (2006) cited "many documented instances of teaching to the test and narrowing of the curriculum, even to the extent of DIBELS becoming essentially the reading curriculum" (p.63). These professional development and curricular models stand in stark contrast to the line of research designed to broaden the emphasis of staff development far beyond what is tested on measures of No Child Left Behind and the National Reading Panel Report.

Darling-Hammond (2004) argues that providing sound literacy strategies and effective tools for teachers to use with students must occur through a different professional development model that focuses on broadening teacher understanding and going more deeply with developing knowledge regarding literacy practices, not narrowing to the point of focusing on testing strategies to the exclusion of everything else (Darling-Hammond, 2004). “This task is one that cannot be ‘teacher-proofed’ through management systems, testing mandates, or curriculum packages... Teachers need to be able to understand subject matter deeply and flexibly...and to see how ideas connect across fields” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 7). The following studies examine many of the structures associated with top-down professional development programs that are similar to the state reading initiative referenced above.

As described earlier, much of the professional development research literature takes the stance that professional development is a way to enhance and deepen the understanding of participants. Teachers should have a stake and a voice in decisions regarding the work they do in conjunction with training and should have the freedom to apply these new strategies in a way fitting to their teaching styles and to the needs of their students. With the emphasis placed on testing in light of No Child Left Behind, however, staff development initiatives have been pushed toward a more constrictive model. These kinds of staff development models are focused on “fixing” teachers who are ineffective (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Typically the ineffectiveness is associated with test scores and school or district ratings; staff development is seen as a stop-gap measure for teachers who are unable to prepare students for accountability testing. As explained on the state department reading initiative website (where Canyon Primary School is located),

the reading initiative is as much about training teachers to use “proven and effective methods” for teaching reading as it is about helping children to become literate. In fact, upon closer inspection, the wording of the reading initiative’s mission statement does not actually focus on children. It presents a causal statement relating teacher training with children’s literacy acquisition, which in effect, proposes that “fixing” teachers through training will equate with children who can read and write. The website states that by improving reading instruction, “100% literacy among public school students” will be achieved (Alabama State Department of Education).

Education vs. Training

In considering the types of staff development models described thus far, one category of staff development focuses on deepening teacher understanding and the widening the reserve of strategies teachers have to draw from. Teachers help to direct their learning and have opportunities to engage in practice with students as well as receive support through coaching. The other type of staff development chronicled here emanates from the tested and taught dichotomy that seeks to prove a curriculum worthy based on the test results produced at its behest. This type of staff development seeks to “fix” teachers and provide answers applicable to all situations through the application of proven methods. Hargreaves and Reynolds (1989) make an important distinction between these two types of professional development by separating them into distinctive categories referred to as *Education* and *Training*.

Education is the first type of staff development that they consider to empower teachers by expanding and deepening conceptual understandings. Teachers are

encouraged to support one another and think collaboratively. *Training*, on the other hand does not foster collaboration and collegiality among teachers. Rather this top-down reformative *training* seeks to remove “professional independence” so that teachers will follow a structure, routine, and teaching style that has been determined “bureaucratically” elsewhere. “They [state mandated staff developers] may be fostering training, not education, instructional closure rather than intellectual openness, dispositional adjustment rather than thoughtful critique” (Hargreaves & Reynolds, 1989, p. 229).

The state initiative in which Canyon Primary school participates follows the second structure described above. Teachers are presented with specific modules they are required to implement in their classrooms throughout the year. The background research, when available, is provided as a way of convincing teachers that the modules are valuable and privileged above teachers’ current practices. Time is spent in discussion with teachers regarding ways they already engage in these types of activities, utilizing a co-optive, presumptive stance that teachers should already be using aspects of these strategies. At the conclusion of the discussion, a specific lesson is modeled for adults by the coach, “re-planned” together with participants, and modeled with students, and then a teacher’s name is drawn from a pool. The chosen teacher must teach the same lesson on the spot to another group of children. Teachers have been *trained* to regurgitate this same exact lesson with children from their own classrooms and will also be asked to teach this exact same lesson for their reading coaches.

Because the top-down model is pre-constructed for teachers and administrators and presented as utilizing research, it emits an aura of being “right” because it can be

backed up with citations (although it was not always in the case of Canyon Primary – the state department of education’s seal served as the research “approval”).

According to Hargreaves and Dawe (1990), *training* fails to acknowledge the forms of teacher resistance that the authors feel would serve to inform and improve the staff development models. If teachers resist, there is an important reason behind it and programmatic staff development is not structured to make space for that kind of dialogue (Silin & Schwartz, 2003). These models also ignore the various contexts in which teachers work each day. Calkins (2001) writes of her concern with these top-down models of instruction which seek to control the decisions teachers should be making, almost insinuating that the job of teaching and deciding what is important for students is too important to be entrusted in the hands of teachers. She refers to this fight for the freedom to plan and control what is taught and when as the “stranglehold of standardized testing” (p. 4).

Whereas *education* is comprised, in part, of well-crafted staff development that has an imbedded space for incorporating teacher goals and areas of interest, *training*, does not. For example, staff development based on the tenets of the No Child Left Behind seeks to right the instructional wrongs that are detected by “fool-proof” standardized tests, turning staff development into occasions for training teachers how to teach to a test (Seay, 2006). Truscott & Truscott (2004) express concern over the emphasis of fixing problems through staff development as opposed to deepening understanding. The “problem paradigm” seeks to locate and take care of deficits within a system, to which the cure is located and defined outside of the campus itself. Teachers are treated as if they are not able to solve their own problems by bringing in consultants or other instructional

support positions, whose purpose is not to develop teacher self-efficacy, but to support teachers as they implement a rigidly structured program. Often the principles on which these programs are based do not resemble the contextual situations of the original research, symptomatic of so many of the practices espoused in the National Panel Reading Report, which heavily influenced the state reading initiative for Canyon Primary School (Allington, 2006). The following section extends this notion of research portrayed without its original context.

Conduit as a Metaphor for Staff Development Delivery

When considering the notions of *education* and *training*, another powerful metaphor that further enhances these notions is Clandinin and Connelly's term, "conduit." Clandinin and Connelly suggest the term "conduit" as a way to understand top-down staff development delivery, drawing upon Reddy's (1979) research in the field of linguistics, Johnson's (1987, 1989) work in philosophy, and Schwab's (1973) research on curriculum. According to the definition of a *conduit*, it represents the metaphorical tunnel through which theory derived from research is stripped of its research context in order to make it more accessible to classroom teachers and schools, and as it emerges unburdened on the other side of the tunnel, the recommended practices (devoid of their original contexts) are now portrayed as *moral imperatives*. In other words, central office or campus administrators communicate to classroom teachers that "research says" a practice is valuable, and then it becomes officially deemed as a "best practice" even though the context, in which it worked initially, is no longer attached to the research (Schwab, 1973).

Schwab felt that there was “too much theoretical knowledge, and in the wrong form, for practical use [by teachers] without translation via a readying process in which theoretical was made practical” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 9). In the process of attempting to make sure the theories were ready to be used by teachers, the theories would end up “stripped of their origins.” Schwab termed the act of stripping the contextual meaning from theories, “a rhetoric of conclusions.” This metaphor is an important one for examining the way staff development has been delivered at Canyon Primary School since the advent of DIBELS use, and as the state mandated reading initiative became a reality.

Beginning with the introduction of DIBELS to Canyon Primary School, theories of literacy as defined by the National Reading Panel Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) were translated into tightly scripted reading initiative modules that were expected to be implemented to fidelity in each classroom. These scripted lessons designed to decrease the margin of instructional error on the part of the classroom teacher, were in direct contrast to the ways teachers at Canyon Primary had been used to teaching, and in direct contrast to the practices I wished to share with the teachers. In addition, the reading modules also did not match the community’s perception of the types of educational experiences their children were supposed to be receiving from the teachers. This strong tension between what teachers believed was right for students and what they were being asked to do is referred to as an *epistemological dilemma* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), and causes a great deal of frustration for teachers (and coaches) because of their powerlessness to make any changes in the system issuing the mandates. “...There is no entry point for debate and discussion of the funneled

materials [in this case, testing materials and scripted lessons]. [The state reading initiative materials], necessarily, must be taken as givens. To debate their appropriateness is to question someone's authority. Discussion, such as it is, is removed from matters of substance to matters of personality and power" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 11). Not only did teachers and parents feel the tug between the state reading initiative and the kinds of literacy they wanted for their children, as the campus reading coach, I also felt torn – torn between doing the job I had been hired to do and the compulsion I felt to show the teachers a different side of literacy that would come closer to emulating the types of reading and writing activities literate adults engage in. Just as the teachers were being asked to engage in “contrived” acts of literacy based on desired testing outcomes, I would also be asked to engage in a type of “contrived” coaching designed to support only the tenets supported by the state reading initiative.

COACHING: ROLES AND INFLUENCES

What does the literature say with regard to the impact instructional coaches have upon teacher practices? This question now becomes a more complicated one in light of the previous section. Instructional coaching, in most cases, is far more complicated than entering a campus, listening to teacher needs, and providing support to help them make their wishes a reality. Instructional coaches usually are hired into situations with pre-existing agendas and must learn to navigate within these pre-established parameters. The following section examines the various roles of coaches and the potential impact coaches can have upon teacher practices.

Instructional Coaching Models

Coaching is defined as the interaction between a more experienced and more knowledgeable partner and a less skillful one. Coaching is different from other forms of staff development because coaching does not rely on just verbal explanations, but uses demonstration and modeling as the backbone of the process. Coaches and mentors work alongside one another and the partnership can be an enduring one (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Coaches can respond with many different levels of support to teacher needs. The most basic level involves forming relationships with faculty members, gathering materials, assisting with student assessment. The more intense levels of coaching include providing feedback to teachers, videotaping lessons, and helping teachers to analyze their own teaching (Bean, 2004; Rodgers & Rodgers, 2007).

The form of coaching I engaged in during this study was a combination of the two. For teachers requiring the most basic levels of support, I did engage in pulling materials for lessons and provided an open ear to listen to them discuss frustrations trying to make changes that felt foreign to their normal mode of classroom instruction. For teachers who were ready to implement more complicated strategies and techniques, I provided feedback on objectives set collaboratively between the two of us, drawing upon techniques such as journaling for self-reflection and analysis of taped lessons. Just as staff development has two distinct sides, coaching does as well.

The first coaching context, known as collegial coaching, encourages learning and deeper understanding partnered with a sense of self-efficacy and collaboration among fellow teachers and the coach. The second type of coaching, referred to as technical coaching, involves the transmission of a specified program or group of strategies that

teachers are expected to take on through the process of modeling, teaching, and feedback (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). According to Hargreaves and Dawe, there are three major flaws with the technical coaching model.

The first issue with technical coaching is that it does not take into account the beliefs and experiences of the people being coached. The goal is for the coach to get participants to take on the predetermined set of practices and the presence of teacher resistance is ignored – swept under the rug, metaphorically speaking. The second problem with technical coaching is that it ignores the amount of time necessary to establish new routines and enact new strategies in a classroom. In addition, context is not attended to because everyone works on implementing the same lessons and strategies regardless of the children involved or the teacher’s teaching preferences. And finally, “the technical coaching model is uncritical and neglectful of the conditions of its own existence, of the political and ideological forces which enhances its administrative appeal” (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 233).

These three issues with technical coaching are of great significance in looking at my role at Canyon Primary School because my job description, according to the state’s list of responsibilities for reading coaches, fits exactly in the role of technical coaching. I was *supposed* to serve as the conduit (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) delivering the theories from the National Reading Panel Report into the classrooms of teachers, whether teachers agreed with the strategies or not, regardless of whether they met the needs of the students. But that was not the role I chose to play. I tried to balance the aims of the initiative with the teachers’ beliefs and my own beliefs regarding appropriate literacy practices for young children. Where I could combine concepts supported by the state

reading initiative with other strategies that were more palatable, I did so, but I was also at an advantage over most of my coaching peers because of my background in supporting teachers in previous jobs. As is cited in Hargreaves and Dawes' research, the other drawback to technical coaching is that the coach often lacks specialized training because coaches in this model are typically teaching peers. The state reading initiative supplied full-time reading coaches for each of the campuses in the state instead of relying on fellow classroom teachers to lead the coaching cycle. However, the people who were selected as reading coaches often had no more training in coaching or reading instruction than their campus peers, which placed them in the awkward position of leading staff development and coaching peers days after receiving the turn-around-training. Of the twenty-nine reading coaches who began coaching during the 2006-2007 school year, only three of us had specialized literacy training or had served in a similar role in the past. This meant that the only knowledge most people had to draw upon came from the state reading initiative trainings.

Staff Developer as Mediator

The job of staff developer can be a tricky one, making tradeoffs between the requirements of the staff development job and the needs of classroom teachers. Representing conflicting interests can create hurdles toward teacher buy-in because teachers question how often they will be asked to try practices that run counter to their beliefs. Researchers (Craig, 2001; Silin & Schwartz, 2003) argue that professional developers are often in the position of acting as “buffer” between the interests of the teachers and the goals of staff development, massaging both sets of goals in order to

ensure teachers walk away having their needs met, while the professional development goals are served as well. Another hurdle staff developers face is the clash between what teachers hope to glean from professional development and what administrators expect will be implemented in the classroom setting. Staff developers who provided ways and suggestions for teachers to meet their own goals as well as the goals of administrators found that teachers were more willing to focus on making desired changes and remain feeling positive about the experience (Silin & Schwartz, 2003). Fostering this sense of teachers as “active decision makers who can and should” is echoed again and again across not only staff development literature, but also literature emanating from psychology on self-efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Truscott & Truscott, 2004).

One of the aspects of literacy coaching that I did not expect was the conflict I felt negotiating the goals of my job based on the outcomes of the state reading initiative with my own sense of what the teachers on the campuses needed and were interested in learning about. From my past experiences supporting teachers and from my own experiences as a classroom teacher, I understood that supporting teacher growth was more akin to a dance between partners. The ability to share the aims of the larger focus (in this case the state reading initiative), while balancing the needs of the classroom teacher, created a situation where teachers were more willing to trust the process and experiment with new practices instead of dismissing the entire process as being irrelevant. Although my job description clearly fell under the technical coaching umbrella, I could not completely adhere to this model – although I found it easier to engage in technical coaching with certain types of teachers than others.

Advocates for Classroom Teachers

In reality, the role I played fit the definition of *collegial coaching*. *Collegial coaching* involves closely working with teachers, considering their specific context (background of teacher, the complexity of students in the room, the teacher's pedagogical philosophies), while helping them to engage in reflective practices in order to move their teaching forward (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Silin and Schwartz (2003) examined how staff developers (used interchangeably in this instance with *coaches*) were able to act as advocates for classroom teachers, making space for teachers to be able to deal with district demands being delivered via the conduit of district mandates in the name of research-based practices, while allowing teachers to generate strategies for meeting the cover story of district policy. At the same time, staff developers were able to support classroom practitioners as they determined the extent to which these policies would affect their classroom lives. Silin and Schwartz were also able to delve into teachers' resistance to change and the positive ways this resistance could help staff developers support classroom teachers in their struggle to retain the sacred stories of their own belief systems with the cover stories that needed to be projected for the district's sake in the face of curricular mandates.

One of the largest struggles faced/reported by teachers was "that they felt they were working for two different masters... with very different expectations about how teaching and learning should proceed in the classroom" (Silin & Schwartz, 2003, p. 1593). Finding ways for teachers to retain the beliefs they operated with in their own classrooms while making room for some new understandings allowed teachers the sense

of autonomy they craved, while helping them to incorporate many of the components of the district mandates in such a way that their pedagogical beliefs were not violated.

The research conducted by Silin and Schwartz identified three major roles played by staff developers and literacy coaches that were deemed to be helpful to teachers. The role of *strategist* was defined first. Staff developers worked in coordination with “teachers about how to implement new initiatives in a way that fulfilled the district requirements and simultaneously permitted them to continue their work with learner centered practices” (p. 1595). The study revealed that the importance of continuing to support teachers with prior endeavors is critical in maintaining a sense of legitimacy regarding their prior efforts. The second role was of *translator*. Staff developers served the crucial role of “filtering and clarifying” district mandates for the teachers to relieve the stress teachers felt with the threat of facing yet another change. The staff developers provided the teachers with a sense of the background behind the proposed changes and helped them to understand how these changes could fit into the belief systems already held by the staff. Morrow and Casey’s 2004 work on the role of reading coaches as partners in change mirrored this same sentiment - teachers felt more comfortable implementing changes when they had a coach to support them by modeling lessons in the context of their own classrooms, with their own students. In this way, teachers were able to see how the changes could be translated into their own classroom environment.

The final role of staff developer and reading coach was that of *advocate*. Advocates “represented the teachers’ professional interests with administrators and others outside of the classroom” (Silin & Schwartz, 2003, p. 1597). This notion of “going to bat” for teachers is mirrored in Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi’s work on positive

psychology (2000) as referenced by Truscott and Truscott's model of professional development for positive school change (2004). One of the key notions emanating from Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi's research is the conceptualization of teachers as decision makers who can and should exercise choice, coupled with the belief that staff development is about a shift from focusing on the idea that teachers need *fixing* to a model that promotes *building* teacher knowledge and confidence in order to better serve students. As with the ideas referenced from Silin and Schwartz's work, these ideas place staff developers in a complementary position next to classroom teachers.

Negotiating the kind of coach I desired to be (collegial) with the kind of coach the mandated reading initiative directed me to be (technical) was critical to my work over the past two years as I strived to create a balance for the classroom teachers I worked with. On the one hand I made a concerted and conscientious effort to honor their interests and their sacred beliefs of what it meant to teach first grade students to become readers who engaged in literacy, while also supporting the aims of the state reading initiative, as well as the county's impending basal adoption and the accompanying theories of reading instruction presented in that text.

TEACHER COLLABORATION

After examining staff development models and styles of coaching, I now shift the focus to examine the role of teacher collaboration in learning, developing literacy practices, and remaining happy and satisfied in a very difficult profession.

Teachers working collaboratively together for authentic purposes have been associated with making powerful changes to classroom practices, resulting in the kinds of

authentic literacy experiences (reading and writing as opposed to worksheets or isolated drills) we should want for all students. Not only did students benefit from teachers who worked together to design more powerful literacy experiences, but increases in motivation were also experienced for teachers engaging in projects that led to this type of change (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990).

This may be because collaboration results in the construction of empowering communities within schools, which is subsequently reflected in classroom interactions and student learning. Irwin (1996) maintains that the organization of schools and belief about power in schools exert a strong influence on the type of education that results (Irwin & Farr, 2004, p. 344).

These factors work together to produce schools that meet the criteria of *power-with* organizations, to be contrasted with the model for *power-over* organizations. The *power-with* paradigm calls for teachers to be active decision makers with regard to what affects the way they do their jobs. In this paradigm, teachers have an active say in the curriculum and how that curriculum is translated into classroom practice. It is also associated with collaborative environments that Irwin credits with nurturing “each person’s individual growth, thus supporting individuality and diversity within a broader framework of community and interpersonal connection” (Irwin & Farr, 2004, p. 345).

According to Irwin & Farr (2004), it is important for teachers to talk and reflect with others during the school day; the time set aside for teachers to reconsider their roles in the classroom as well as to set goals is as important for the experienced teacher as it is for the novice. In a study conducted by Singh & Richards (2006), the researchers examined new teachers and the conversations they had in a group learning environment as they delved into not only the content of their teaching, but also the accompanying pedagogical styles. The researchers discovered that the dialogue the educators

participated in was critical to their learning, providing for opportunities to validate their own understandings as well as a place for re-storying (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) and reshaping their understandings to include new information learned by talking with others. This chance for honest discussion and talk about what was going well, in addition to what was troubling, were the kinds of conversations that Canyon Primary School had to make room for outside of the confines of the state mandated reading initiative. Teachers needed places to talk about the day-to-day happenings inside their classrooms based on their preferences for teaching and the histories of their teaching careers. Due to the cut in state reading initiative funding between the 2006-2007 school year, and the year this study was conducted, 2007-2008, teachers began shifting the spaces in which they engaged in this type of collaborative work from inside of the school day, to outside of the school day, and began forming their own groups based on common interest, but the collaboration continued in spite of budgetary constraints.

As we have seen in the literature on coaching, coaches and teachers must both deal with the reality of mandated professional development initiatives based on research communicated through a conduit of moral imperatives. In the age of accountability and testing, these are, unfortunately, inevitable struggles. In this next section, I shift from the topic of coaching to the examination of curriculum theories, making an official space for the examination of these theories because it is this notion of “curriculum” that fills the agendas of coaches and teachers in schools.

Curriculum Design Implications

How do theories of curriculum impact the structures of professional development?

State curricular mandates delegate what teachers must teach and often how it must be taught. There is no place for negotiation because the curriculum arrives in print, as a finished product. Elliot Eisner, in an article for *Educational Leadership* (2006), explored the struggles teachers experienced as they found themselves dealing with ideals that were the very anti-thesis of what they believed were right for children in their classrooms. His take on curriculum was a hopeful one that reached out against the confines of what often travels down the conduit.

...Teaching makes it possible to play your own cello. Despite the beliefs of some very well-intended technocrats, there are no recipes for performance, no teacher-proof scripts to follow. Teaching well requires improvisation within constraints. Constraints there will always be, but in the end, teaching is a custom job (Eisner, 2006, p. 44).

Teachers as Curriculum Makers

Craig (2006) echoes Eisner's beliefs as she writes, that "rather than being curriculum implementers as commonly conceived, teachers are curriculum makers. From this perspective, 'teachers and students live out a curriculum [in which] an account of teachers' and students' lives over time is the curriculum, although intentionality, objectives, and curriculum materials do play a part of it'" (p. 261). I saw this first-hand each day I spent concentrated amounts of time in teachers' classrooms, watching as the classroom teachers orchestrated a dance between their beliefs and their children's interests and abilities. None of the reading initiative practices that were taken up by teachers were executed in the same way from room to room, as teachers adjusted the strategies to better meet the needs of their students. And just as teachers exhibited wise

decision making with regard to their adjustment of some of the practices from the state reading initiative, they also knew when practices should be completely glossed over in their classrooms, either because the practices did not meet the needs of their students or because the structure of the practices was a mismatch for their teaching style and classroom philosophy.

According to Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (2000), humans have a need to feel a sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Opportunities for teachers to engage in activities and ways of working with others that reinforce these notions of competence, relatedness, and autonomy, as referenced above, can lead to the development of people (in this case teachers) who enjoy strong relations with others and are able to work to their full potential. These factors also lead to a strong sense of motivation, which according to the authors is "highly valued because of its consequences: Motivation produces" (p. 69). Motivation also has many different faces. Different people are motivated by different factors such as external pressure, extrinsic rewards, or the satisfaction of having worked hard. These different ways of being motivated matter because the level of "interest, excitement, and confidence, which in turn is manifested both as enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity" is higher for those who are intrinsically motivated (p. 69). When considering the findings regarding motivation within the framework of self-determination theory, it is of utmost importance for teachers to be able to engage in staff development and curricular work in which they have a voice that will be heard by someone who will listen as well as an opportunity to engage in the development of a curriculum that is meaningful both to teachers and to students.

Ryan and Deci (2000) speak of intrinsic motivation as being indicative of the great potential in humans. Because humans have “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn,” teachers felt they had the latitude to incorporate their own practices, even if those practices were in contrast to what the staff development model was calling for. I also discovered that I had the need and the desire to engage in work that was novel and challenging in order to continue to extend my own practices as well as the practices of those around me. The times that were most rewarding as a coach were the times I was making new discoveries with teachers or watching them pursue interests with their students that yielded unexpected results. Conversely, the times that were most frustrating were those associated with the mindless replication of reading initiative modules and imperative to work with as many people as possible simply to cross a task off the list of reading initiative requirements.

The Need for Flexibility

In order for teachers to feel a sense of self-efficacy, Ryan and Deci’s research (2000) indicates that teachers and students must have opportunities to explore and seek out novel learning opportunities. However, with the No Child Left Behind legislation, staff development has taken on a regimented tone in which the objectives are pre-determined and not up for negotiation. The state reading initiative Canyon Primary participated in was structured in this way, with all of the objectives based upon the findings of the National Reading Panel Report (2000).

Although having clearly stated outcomes helps to ensure that trainers and teachers are meeting their goals, there is also a risk involved in creating such rigid forms of staff development. Eisner (2005) discusses the importance of being *flexibly purposive* with our teaching and curriculum design. “Being flexibly purposive means that we are open to new opportunities that we did not foresee. One consequence of our preoccupation with standards is that it freezes our conception of what we want to accomplish in our schools. Rigor gets defined and becomes associated with rigor mortis” (p. 15). Just as teachers require freedom and flexibility to maintain motivation and interest in their jobs, children also need teachers who are flexible and can meet their needs in a variety of ways. Eisner labels this movement to control and track all aspects of school *technical rationalism*, and he attributes its apparent necessity to the desire of a system to be able to maintain a sense of sameness as well as the ability to compare output to ensure this sameness is occurring to expectation across campuses, districts, and states. “We want predictable procedures that provide no surprises and yield the same quality, can after can, as the product comes off the assembly line. That model works well on products that have little variability: Beans are beans are beans. Children, however, are not cans of beans. They differ in temperament, aptitude, intelligence, social competence, and emotional vulnerability” (p. 16). As this study progressed, paying particular attention to the ways classroom teachers put their own curricular “spin” on the non-negotiable focus strategies assigned by the state became extremely important. How did teachers talk about these customizing practices with other teachers and how were they enacted at the level of the child?

No longer would a one size fits all curriculum be regarded as an option. Individualization would not simply reside in the pace at which all children moved through the same track toward the same goals; children would be offered the

opportunity to pursue studies that suited the kind of intelligence they possessed in abundance. They would have an opportunity to play to their strengths.
(Eisner, 2004, p. 33)

This quote calls to mind some interesting considerations in the face of mandatory research-based reading and literacy programs abundant throughout the United States. The state system in which Canyon Primary resides rested on an assumption that all of its constituents were being served appropriately as long as the children were taught by teachers who unquestioningly replicated the lessons and strategies taught during the mandatory summer academies and the monthly follow-up trainings. The type of curriculum espoused by the state reading initiative emanated from a power-over paradigm (Irwin & Farr, 2004). In this type of a system, people have power over others with regard to which practices will be used and which materials can be accessed. According to their study, Irwin and Farr discovered that teachers who taught in a power-over paradigm were less able to meet the needs of their students because doing so was made more difficult within the confines of the system. These teachers were denied access to necessary materials, the ability to meet and collaborate, as well as the opportunity to decide what to teach and how. The teachers of Canyon Primary most certainly experienced this sense of confinement with the requirements of the state reading initiative and worked to make other spaces for collaboration and the refinement of teaching practices that were personally meaningful.

The Efficiency Movement

Using testing criteria to compare children across classrooms as opposed to using the information to build a more complete picture of a child's strengths and needs is

another aspect of the power-over paradigm. Instead of informing instruction and scaffolding student learning, testing results were used as a way to judge teacher efficiency, as documented by Seay (2006) for the state in which Canyon Primary is located, and as reported by people in Scott County who were evaluated in this manner. Not only were decisions made about the value and worth of individual teachers, but judgments were made about children regarding the extent to which they were shaping up to look like “on grade level children” in accordance with national norms. Eisner refers to this need to quantify and ensure all children are developing at the same rate as the *efficiency movement*, and likens it to the practices developed during the Industrial Revolution designed to efficiently and quickly place children into slots befitting of their stations in life - clearly not what Eisner nor Gardner envisioned for schools or the children who attend them.

The testing regime and emphasis on comparing assessment data is not new to education. Franklin Bobbitt, a celebrated curriculum developer during the Industrial Revolution, painted himself as the first professional curriculum developer, and actively promoted the uses of tests in order for superintendents to be able to keep a handle on which teachers were doing their jobs correctly (Bobbitt, 1918; Bobbitt, 1918). As opposed to operating under the assumption that all students should achieve the exact same levels of achievement in exactly the same way (as is now espoused under the guidelines of No Child Left Behind), Bobbitt portrayed curriculum and testing as a way to ensure the high achieving schools were doing so, and the schools less capable of achieving those same results were performing at their expected level. Just as factories were supposed to be turning out specific types of products, so too were the schools. Not

only were student performances scrutinized, but teacher performances were under the watchful eye of administrators, too. Test scores were used to identify which teachers were weak and which ones were strong, just as principals and students were also defined by those same scores (Bobbitt, 1918). The only difference that seems to exist between the early 1900's and NCLB is that teachers who were outperforming according to their "expected" levels of achievement were viewed with a great deal of suspicion. They were also monitored carefully, according to Bobbitt, in case they were teaching beyond the station of their students or offering advanced curriculum without official permission.

The Medical Model of Education Reform

While Bobbitt's version of curriculum was designed to maintain one's station in life and ensure the student was prepared in every aspect to fill the requirements of that station, the era of No Child Left Behind draws upon a medical model for its design. Under this paradigm, children with reading problems can be *diagnosed* using particular literacy screening tools, and then placed in small group settings. Teachers in these settings use methods that have been "proven" effective because they are based on studies that have been conducted using "sound research practices." These studies were cited as being worthy because they followed rigorous research design methods, drawing upon quantitative research and a positivistic paradigm. As noted on the website for the state reading initiative Canyon Primary participated in, the focus was on providing teachers with a set of sound practices to ensure students met the appropriate outcomes – treat the symptoms of ineffective teaching and by taking the thinking out of teaching and prescribe a set of explicit steps to ensure the appropriate treatment is successful.

However, as more and more researchers in the field of literacy examine the National Reading Panel Report and the studies comprising the report's recommendations, methodological problems abound. According to Pressley and Allington (1999), skills-oriented reading research has been privileged by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) because the methodological rigor is considered to be more pure than that of early literacy research. The research that has been conducted on the skills-oriented reading approach is supposed to be free of the "philosophical and ideological positions" that have clouded research on early literacy. In order to respond to this assertion, Pressley and Allington reviewed the research upon which reading initiatives across the country are based upon. Pressley and Allington (1999) found that the research studies on phonemic awareness and word recognition were questionable because although the studies explained the procedures for selecting participants for the studies, they rarely detailed who the participants were. Demographic information was absent and so was information that revealed whether participants had been in special education classes.

Troia's (1999) results were referenced in the article to answer the question of whether the "rigorous" phonemic awareness studies met established criteria for internal and external validity. According to Troia's findings, over half of the studies did not use random assignment. Only 23% of the studies met two-thirds or more of the internal validity criteria. Studies typically failed to describe participants through the use of demographic data such as ethnicity, school achievement data, or whether participants had already received special services for reading assistance. In addition to these concerns,

there was also an over-reliance of isolated phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, which has become the panacea for curing school-aged children of reading problems.

Authentic v. Inauthentic Literacy Practices

Allington (2006) has delved more deeply into various definitions of reading instruction since the publication of The National Reading Panel Report, to gain an understanding with regard to what is actually happening in classrooms and reading support programs. His line of research describes many of the problems that Canyon Primary School and the other Scott County schools were struggling with. He found two very distinct categories of literacy events occurring in classrooms: those directly related to literacy acts such as reading books, reading sentences, reading words; and those that were assumed to be related to reading, but are not actually reading such as copying, circling answers, participating in phonics drills.

The observations documented that kids spent substantially more time in activities called reading than they did actually engaged in reading, even though 85 percent of the children were on-task and engaged in their lessons at any given point in time. The observations also indicated that there were large variations in the volume of reading between students and that these differences predicted large differences in reading development (Allington, 2006, p. 42).

In addition to the skepticism surrounding the content of the models espoused by The National Reading Panel Report, many of the models were structured in problematic ways. Allington's 2006 article on the three-tiered reading model, which examines at-risk readers who are receiving instruction from the classroom teacher as well as other specialists, addresses the fragmentation of instruction which occurs when multiple teachers are involved in and responsible for educating the same child. Students who were

exposed to instruction from various teachers, who were not involved in planning together, had difficulty making reading achievement gains, particularly when that instruction was not specifically tailored to the needs of the students, which is the case in scripted, canned programs. Allington (2006) also makes reference to studies (Allington & McGill-Franzer, 1989; Haynes & Jenkins, 1986; O’Sullivan et al., 1990) that looked at the types of tasks struggling readers were asked to engage in and found that the programs did not increase the amount of time spent reading in connected text. “Simply put, children who received reading instructional support...often had the volume of reading reduced rather than expanded as remedial and resource room lessons focused on other activities” (p. 43).

In the next section, I will examine the ways in which teachers talked about the conflicts they encountered to be true to themselves as teachers, while attempting to stretch their practices, while bowing to the mandates of the state reading initiative.

TEACHER STORIES OF CLASSROOM PRACTICE

In what ways can exploring teacher narratives of personal teaching histories inform our understanding of teacher classroom practices? Teacher stories are the stories educators tell of their past, present, and even future in teaching. The events they relay as they talk about their teaching lives provide the listener with a great deal of information and insight. Teacher stories reveal why teachers make the pedagogical decisions that they do. Teacher stories reveal why teachers react the way they do with particular colleagues and even with certain types of students. The construction of these teacher narratives is not as simple to define as the sum of materials, supplies, and students in a teacher’s classroom. Nor is it an individualistic definition comprised of teacher, years of

experience, and educational background. The way teachers relay their stories of what it means to be a teacher are defined not only by the reputation of the campus but they are also defined by the interactions amongst team members. The complicated but interesting picture that is painted of teachers and their classroom lives provides an important glimpse into teacher decision making that cannot be gleaned from an assessment or simple survey. I will use the teacher stories of my first grade colleagues to better understand how pedagogical decisions are made in their classrooms and how their past and present situations and experiences inform those decisions.

Secret Places

Another element of telling teachers' stories is the designation of *secret places* - places where teachers live the secret stories of their classroom realities with others they trust, and share the living of practical stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Not only do teachers need the time to regularly engage in honest conversations about classroom practices and school issues, they also need a space within which they can be safe in doing so. *Secret places* differ from official meetings that are held surrounding curriculum and pedagogical topics because official meetings are reserved for discussing theories and the accompanying rhetoric that is expected to be put into action in classrooms. Teacher secret stories are usually never told in the public eye, outside of these secret places. Clandinin & Connelly (1995) write of the importance of *knowledge communities* that they define as "safe havens in which genuine community provides shelter for real dialogue and the sharing of stories, human stories of relation and reflection" (p. vii).

Part of my focus in this study was to give teachers the opportunity to talk about their experiences in a safe environment in order to reflect upon the factors influencing their teaching, as well as to examine the ways in which the first grade teachers chose to form their own safe groups to share these private stories and to collaborate. “Teachers need others in order to engage in conversations where stories are told, reflected back, heard in different ways, retold, and relived in new ways in the safety and secrecy of the classroom” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 13). Having the opportunity to officially talk about what actually happens in the privacy of the classroom when only the teacher and students are there lends credence to each teacher’s story of what it means to teach in that particular classroom. Cheryl Craig (1995) talks about the difficult waters teachers tread, navigating the differences between the teaching decisions they make in the privacy of their classrooms and the way they feel they are *supposed* to be teaching because of pressures such as mandatory programs or standardized tests and assessments.

Cover Stories

Cover stories, referenced by Clandinin & Connelly, as well as Craig (2006), are the types of stories teachers tell that portray the public image teachers feel people are expecting to hear about their teaching practices. These are particularly prevalent any time teachers (and entire campuses) feel they need to present one type of image in public, but that story does not match the more private identity of the school and classroom. In the face of the mandatory reading initiative and the county curriculum expectations, the teachers of Canyon Primary School were quite familiar with cover stories. Teachers told cover stories to try and balance what they believed about literacy instruction for children

with the mandates the country curriculum department set forth. And now as the reading initiative placed emphasis on another set of practices, the teachers had something else to include in their teaching identities.

This quandary is expressed well in the following quote. “Increasingly, teachers tell us they live and tell cover stories in the out-of-classroom...landscape, stories in which they portray themselves as characters who are certain expert people. These cover stories are a way of managing their dilemma” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 15). This dilemma that Clandinin & Connelly refer to is the chasm between the practices and materials teachers use in their classrooms and what they think people beyond their classrooms expect of them. These expectations are not just placed upon them by mandates or campus administrators. Pressures of team members and colleagues can cause teachers to tell cover stories in order to maintain an identity complementary of the other members of the team. This notion of pressure and conflict among team members would become much more salient as this study progressed.

Creating Communities of Practice

How is collaboration described in terms of the structures in which collaboration takes place and the ways of talking about those collaborative events? Work by Lave & Wenger (1991) explores the necessity of social interaction with a community of others and rejects the isolation that is frequently prevalent in individualistic views of intelligence and learning, which pervade the typical notions of schooling. Learning occurs any place people change the way in which they participate in communities of practice. “Wherever people engage for substantial periods of time, day by day, in doing

things in which their ongoing activities are interdependent, learning is part of their changing participation in changing practices” (Lave, 1996, p. 150). This attitude of valuing community and collegiality is one that necessarily needs to be explored further in school environments, at the urging of Lave & Wenger. The informal practices which provide opportunities for people to serve in apprenticeship roles are powerful learning opportunities that raise questions about the more formalized practices in school (Lave, 1996).

Examining behaviors that lead to more collegial environments conducive to collaboration has also been documented in the work of Judith Warren Little (1982). She cites the presence of four behaviors as being the most significant in school environments where collegiality is at the forefront. Mirroring Singh and Richard’s findings (2006), a focus on the importance of certain types of dialogue that were privileged over others, allowed teachers to function together in a productive and cohesive way. The four types of privileged dialogue are described in detail below.

The first style of talk is one in which teachers developed a common language used to specifically and concretely discuss relevant aspects of their teaching with one another. The focus of this kind of talk remained intent on discussing classroom practices and what worked or did not and why. The groups rarely discussed aspects of teaching out of their immediate locus of control such as student family problems or teacher failings. The second type of purposive talk emanated from teaching feedback that the participants of the groups gave one another after agreeing to observe one another teach. Again, focus on concrete observations helped maintain a tight focus on teaching and student learning. The third area of focus centered on the design and development of materials to be used with

students, as well as the evaluation of those materials. The time to talk through lessons and the accompanying materials helped to deepen the group's understanding of the pedagogical elements. The final element noted by Little, was the opportunity and expectation for all teachers to share their understandings about teaching with one another in formal ways. In this way, the schools were able to capitalize on resources within their own buildings, providing everyone with equal status and respect for the talents and special knowledge they possess.

In order for teachers to have opportunities to function in collaborative ways, campus administrators can create the time and space for this to occur within the schedule, and impact the identity of the campus. "...The change process needs to involve school leaders creating a climate of collaborative effort and ownership of the change process. However, to bring about effective change, school leaders and teachers must be actively involved in the change process together" (Carrington & Robinson, 2004, p. 142).

There are several other maxims that Carrington and Robinson (2004) discovered through their study. In addition to a cohesive campus journey, teachers need opportunities to have their individual professional needs met through staff development and coaching efforts. Making space for individual needs helps anchor teacher efforts in a sea of swinging pendulums and curriculum changes. Staff development and coaching opportunities should also occur with enough frequency to deepen understanding while maintaining the momentum of the study. Peer collaboration is another crucial element because this decreases feelings of loneliness and isolation that are common during times of change and provides opportunities for people to problem solve through difficult times and share the triumphs. Finally, Carrington and Robinson point out that time to share

common experiences helps to develop the school's sense of self including "Opportunities for the school staff to reflect and possibly reconstruct beliefs and values related to student rights and education [that] will affect how teachers think about schooling, their students, the curriculum and their own teaching approach" (Carrington, 1999, p. 144). Mirroring these same findings, Allington & Walmsley (1995) suggest that in their experience, every school program in which change was sustained involved collaboration among teachers.

Salomon and Perkins (1998) write of the importance of this social nature of learning: "Social mediation of learning and the individuals involved are seen as an integrated and highly situated system in which the interaction serves as the socially shared vehicles of thought. Accordingly, the learning products of this system, jointly constructed as they are, are distributed over the entire social system rather than possessed by the participating individual" (Salomon & Perkins, 1998, p. 4). This notion of collective intelligence can be described as one of the possible benefits of participating in campus-wide staff development.

Salomon & Perkins (1998) examine the myriad of ways that individuals come together to learn in collective groups and make the suggestion that these collaborative learning endeavors are more than the sum of individuals coming together to share their thinking. They speak of a "synergy" that occurs as individual understandings and actions combine with the inertia of the group to produce novel thinking that would not have occurred as the sum of individual thought, alone. Salomon & Perkins identify six different forms of collective thinking that can occur. The distinctions between each of the six kinds have to do with the speakers involved and the degree to which they participate in the collective thinking. These frameworks are helpful when examining the different

ways I interacted with the teachers throughout the year as well as how they interacted with one another.

The first learning arrangement they describe draws from Vygotsky's work on the Zone of Proximal Development (1978), and is labeled *Active Social Mediation of Individual Learning (by an active agent)*. In this description, a person or team helps an individual to learn. When the appropriate scaffolding is in place, both the individual who is the focus of the assistance and the tutor or group of tutors, learn from one another. The tutor may need to seek new ways to explain or demonstrate the concept in question to the person receiving assistance, which causes the tutor to come to novel understandings about the concept that could not have been articulated before the collaboration. If the support occurred at an appropriate level, then the person receiving assistance has also come to a new understanding that carries the meaning of the interaction between the two. I find this situation happened constantly in my position as reading coach. My interactions with teachers and children continually revised my understanding and sense of purpose as I modeled new concepts.

The second learning arrangement referred to as *Social Mediation as Participatory Knowledge Construction* moves from a coaching model where one person is the focus of the interaction to focusing on a group of people and the learning that takes place among group members. "Social mediation of learning and the individual involved are seen as an integrated and highly situated system in which the interaction serves as the socially shared vehicles of thought. Accordingly, the learning products of this system, jointly constructed as they are, are distributed over the entire social system rather than possessed by the participating individual" (Salomon & Perkins, 1998, p. 4). These types of

interactions will be explored later in the context of the required reading initiative meetings during which teacher teams came together to make sense of new understandings regarding literacy and young children.

Social Mediation by Cultural Scaffolding has been a particularly powerful and favored way of uniting teachers at Canyon Primary. The use of cultural artifacts, particularly books and videos, provided teachers with the types of interactions that were not in existence on the campus during prior administrations. These tools were particularly useful in dealing with the gaps in knowledge on a campus that had not received any formal staff development (outside of programmatic training) in the past ten years. Salomon and Perkins (1998) emphasize the importance of the emphasis on cultural artifacts in this particular model of social mediation and all the historically imbued meaning accompanying those particular artifacts. “The learner may enter into some kind of intellectual partnership or at least be greatly helped by cultural artifacts in the form of tools and information sources. Such artifacts can range from books and videotapes that tacitly embody shared cultural understandings (Perkins, 1986) to statistical tools and socially shared symbol systems...” (p. 5). Erickson (1996) echoes this sentiment regarding the importance of the “purposive use of tools” and the notion of thinking as being “transpersonal” because the knowledge and understanding is distributed in the heads of many, as opposed to a single brain. Looking across the various authors who have delved into the sociocultural paradigm, what clearly stands out across all their writings is the emphasis on *active* participation by members of the collective. It is the interest in the action that people take together, through both word and deed.

COMMUNITIES IN CONFLICT

Although communities of learners can certainly be a safe place for people to explore new teaching options and experiment amidst the support of others, communities are also places rife with conflict. Literature on coaching typically focuses on the strategies and techniques coaches use to facilitate changes in practices among teachers and facilitate conversations that lead to collaborative planning experiences. However, any time people are attempting to foster change in a group setting whether through mandates or based upon the interest of individuals, tensions naturally exist. Achinstein (2002) conducted a study examining the conflict that exists among teaching communities. Termed “the micropolitics of teacher collaboration,” Achinstein cites three structures that exist in teacher collaboration that are a natural part of collaboration, but work to create a sense of discord. The first structure is *conflict* that Achinstein describes as a natural part of the collaboration process. When dealing with individuals coming together for a common purpose, people’s views and behaviors diverge as a result of their individual beliefs. People are forced to engage in critical reflection over their own practices as they encounter beliefs and experiences of others that run counter to tightly held convictions of some of the members of the group.

Another tenet of Achinstein’s work deals with border politics. Border politics work to construct ideas that define which people belong within a group and which people belong on the outside. “Communities may simultaneously construct insider and outsider status. As they reinforce shared identities, they distinguish members from nonmembers... Conflict offers a key site for making border politics visible as members articulate insider and outsider status (including people and ideas)” (Achinstein, 2002, p. 426).

Ideology is Achinstein's third tenet of micropolitics of communities. Ideology reflects a common set of beliefs about the role of school, the kinds of activities students should engage in and notions about the relationship between school and the larger community. Ideology also impacts the way teachers navigate their roles in schools and their interactions with one another. What rights do teachers have to impact the curriculum? How should teachers take action? What should be embraced? Which practices should be rejected?

Within Achinstein's work on conflict, she examines two directions collaborative groups typically take: maintaining status quo versus ongoing inquiry and fundamental change. Some groups work diligently to build and maintain high "walls" around the beliefs of their group, differentiating their own beliefs from the beliefs of "outsiders" as a way to maintain group membership. Groups that focus on inquiry and fundamental change openly explore differences and alternative ways of working as a group. Diversity of students and teachers are celebrated and encouraged, and these differences are drawn upon to stretch the current boundaries of the group. An interesting phenomenon, however is how members of both kinds of group seek to portray themselves as being very different from one another.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Reflecting upon what research tells us about the characteristics of effective staff development, the movement away from single opportunity workshops in favor of long-term approaches to staff development appears to have a greater impact on the practices of teachers. Staff development models that include various forms of coaching provide an

official space for teachers to consider their practices outside of the confines of formal evaluation. Teachers form a common identity as they study their practices together, and although these relationships may exist on a more formal level between coaches and teachers, they often trickle down into teachers coaching one another, which also supports practitioner reflection.

Staff development models that utilize on-site coaches offer opportunities for the prolonged study of teaching of practices. This provides teachers with enough time to implement new strategies in their classrooms while providing them with a systematic way of stepping back from their practices in order to reflect, as well as gain the perspective from a different point of view via the coach.

Although there are many positive aspects of staff development models that are long-term in nature and include coaches as part of the faculty configuration, many questions still exist about the nature of practice and teacher collaboration within these models. How do teachers collaborate with one another as they study new practices together? How do teachers reconcile their beliefs in their own teaching practices while making room for practices espoused by staff development initiatives? In what ways do coaches help teachers to navigate the teaching curriculum that is often already in place long before the needs of the teachers and campus are determined? Although some studies look at the hybridization of practices that can occur when educators are asked to incorporate new practices into their existing classroom structures, these studies are limited. Further examination of the strategies teachers use to reconcile their differences between what they already do in their classrooms and what they are being asked to do through staff development in one important area for research. A related avenue of study

would be looking closely at the power dynamics among teachers and coaches. Coaches are represented in the literature in a fairly neutral way, as if they blindly carry out the coaching process with little regard for their own practices and teaching preferences. It is important to consider that most coaches were classroom teachers before assuming their roles as coach, and they bring their pedagogical beliefs and agendas to their jobs just as teachers do. Coaches are usually talked about in terms of how they help teachers change their practices to meet pre-established coaching outcomes, but little is said about how coaches alter the planned staff development experience in order to work their own beliefs into the coaching curriculum. Another area of importance that will be critical to study pursues the messiness and conflict that is inherent in systems driven by change. Although communities of conflict have been studied across different campuses, questions still remain regarding how teachers on the same campus deal with the conflict that is a part of major change systems like the state reading initiative this study is focused upon.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project involves the ethnographic study of teacher collaboration and constructivist thinking in planning and staff development groups. This project also seeks to examine how literacy practices are impacted differently in individual classrooms as the result of collaboration among team members and the literacy coach, as well as staff development. Specifically, this study will address the following questions.

- (1) What is the nature of collaboration and learning among teams of first grade teachers as they study their literacy practices as a grade level?

(2) In what ways do professional development and collaborative experiences influence their classroom practices?

The questions above will provide a framework for the beginning of the study. These areas of focus will help to frame how teachers make decisions about the various mandates and individual literacy interests represented.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative inquiry took place over a period of 6 months and investigated the professional development experiences of 10 first grade teachers. Data sources included field notes from classroom observations, audiotaped staff development sessions, audiotaped collaborative meetings, videotaped classroom lessons, classroom and meeting artifacts such as lesson plans, student products, meeting notes, and meeting graphic organizers, as well as audiotaped interviews of the classroom teachers and students. The design of the study included both a broad, more encompassing examination of 10 first grade teachers (10 of the 12 teachers gave consent for the study), as well as a more in-depth study of three focus teachers.

This chapter is divided into several sections. In the first section I will discuss the rationale for the selection of the constructivist paradigm. Second, I will describe the site, participants, and procedure for obtaining participant consent. Third, I will detail data collection procedures, documentation procedures, and record keeping. Fourth, I will outline the phases of the study in order to paint an overarching view of the project. Finally, I will outline my data analysis methods.

SELECTION OF THE CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

Based on the theoretical assumptions on which I framed the study, I felt that the use of the constructivist paradigm was most appropriate because this paradigm “affirms the mutual influence that researcher and respondents have on each other” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 15). This study examined not only teacher and state

reading initiative curriculum influences on one another, but also looked at my role as collaborator and instructional coach. Ethnographic methods of inquiry provided insight into how professional development practices informed the classroom literacy practices of first grade team members, as well as my own literacy practices as I planned, modeled lessons, and coached teachers through state reading initiative professional development modules and staff development of my own design.

Ethnographic methods were chosen because of their ability to capture what it means to belong to a certain group. “Ethnographers stress that we move within social worlds, and that to understand the behaviour, values and meanings of any given individual (group), we must take account some kind of cultural context” (Massey, 1998, ¶ 6). It is this very context that is at the heart of what I sought to discover about ways teachers made decisions about literacy instruction as members of a grade level team situated in the midst of competing influences from mandates, team initiatives, and their own pedagogical beliefs.

Our best understanding of teacher knowledge is also a narrative one (Carter, 1993; Clandinin, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1995; Elbaz, 1983). “In this view of teachers’ knowledge, teachers know their lives in terms of stories. They live stories, tell stories of those lives, retell stories with changed possibilities, and relive the changed stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 12). Of particular importance is the focus on the element of time in this method. Events were looked at in terms of their temporal connections in order to avoid simply being left with a list of descriptors (Carter, 1993; Scholes, 1981; Scholes, 1982). The inclusion of this sense of time in teacher narratives enables the reader to gain a sense of the events that preceded and influenced the current

practices utilized by the teacher as well as providing a hint of the direction the teacher will travel in the future based on events unfolding with students, parents, colleagues, and even administrators.

Because there was a void in the literature concerning how top-down mandates are actually enacted in classroom instruction from the perspective of school insiders, negotiated by both instructional coaches and the recipients of the top-down mandates, it was difficult to frame questions in terms of already established categories. Another void in the literature with respect to coaching and top-down mandate implementation was the aspect of conflict and the messiness of campus life as a result of being involved in an initiative designed to create significant changes in classroom practices and require teacher collaboration among members unaccustomed to working together in a formalized manner. By utilizing a constructivist paradigm, I was able to look for ways teachers made meaning as a group, negotiated the inevitability of conflict as a group, and influenced one another's practices as a result of their newly constructed understandings, and then carried those collectively established understandings into literacy practices in their own classrooms. By forgoing the use of already established categories, I was at liberty to look for patterns in the data that might have been excluded if there were pre-established categories.

The constructivist paradigm afforded me with the opportunity to focus not just on how practices were enacted in classrooms, but how the first grade teachers represented their practices in front of one another during meetings. The paradigm also made a space for the exploration of ways teachers collaborated and co-constructed meaning, which in turn impacted the way students were taught to read and write. It also accounted for my

role as a literacy coach and my interactions with the first grade teachers as we planned lessons together, worked with students side-by-side, and participated in reflective practices regarding work with children.

The kinds of questions the constructivist paradigm seeks to answer aligned with the purpose of this study; these questions explored issues of context and how context was critical when investigating what was occurring. Another crucial component of this type of research was the examination of how knowledge was built among co-participants and the structures and tools participants utilized in the process. Were there particular ways of talking or interacting that bolstered group meaning making or squelched it? Did certain groups of teachers make meaning in certain kinds of ways?

The constructivist paradigm also acknowledges that the researcher and the participants have mutual influences upon one another. Because my role as the campus reading coach was already tightly intertwined with the first grade teachers due to the fact that this was the second year of implementation for the state reading initiative, this paradigm provided an official space to account for the impact we had upon one another.

SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

The study took place at Canyon Primary School in Scott County, located in a southeastern state. At the time the study was conducted, the Kindergarten and First Grade campus had approximately 550 students. Canyon Primary's student population pulled from the immediate surrounding area comprised of homes established during the late 1800's, as well as recently built homes. Families living in the older homes typically fell into two categories. The first being families whose descendents arrived when the town

was established as a single tax colony, and the second comprised of families who could afford to pay the steep costs associated with real estate on the ocean. Publicly subsidized housing and one group of apartments were located to the south of the downtown area. The school's ESL population was less than one percent of the total make up of the school, with 40% of the total school population qualifying for federal breakfast and lunch programs. Of the 550 students, 78% were Caucasian, 13% were African American, 2% were Hispanic, 2% were Asian/Pacific Islander, with 5% categorized as "other," according to paperwork completed by parents for enrollment purposes.

Ten of the twelve first grade teachers were the broad focus of the study, with focused classroom observations taking place in three of the ten classrooms in order to provide detailed examples of how the co-construction of literacy understandings and staff development mandates were translated into classroom practice. Table 1 lists the ten participating teachers, their total years of teaching experience, and the number of years they taught specifically at Canyon Primary School as classroom teachers. The fourth column represents the number of years teachers worked as classroom aides either prior to becoming certified to teach or while awaiting classroom job openings. The final column lists each teacher's preferred methods of teaching reading and writing as evidenced by classroom observations and planning sessions I conducted as the campus reading coach during the 2006-2007 school year, and were confirmed during the course of my work with campus teachers during the 2007-2008 school year.

Table 1: Canyon Primary School First Grade Team 2007-2008

Teacher***	Total Years of Teaching Experience**	Years Teaching at Canyon Primary**	Years as Aide at Canyon Primary	Favored Method of Teaching Reading & Writing
D'Eagle	12	12	0	Reading & Writing Workshop
Foi*	2	2	0	Reading & Writing Workshop
Pedd	11	5	0	Guided Reading Reading Workshop Story Writing
Rohl*	26	16	0	Basal & Open Court Modified Reading and Writing Workshop
Roma	17	11	0	Reading & Writing Workshop
Rouge	17	15	0	Reading & Writing Workshop
Sein*	8	2	0	Guided Reading & Modified Johnny Can Spell Readers Response Journals
Shue	8	2	0	Guided Reading Literature Discussion Groups Story Writing & Reading Response Journals
Wein	18	14	0	Basal Tentative Reading Workshop Prompt Writing
Yxel	4	4	10	Reading Workshop with Basal Readers Response Journals & Story Writing

***Bolded Names** – 3 Focus Teachers
 ** – Including 2007-2008 school year
 *** – All names are pseudonyms

I focused on the first grade team exclusively because they were the grade level charged with teaching children how to read and write starting from the beginning of the year. (The kindergarten team as a whole did not begin formal reading instruction until several months of the school year had passed.) First grade was also the grade level in which fluency and comprehension in connected text were assessed formally for the first time using the DIBELS assessment. The presence of this assessment was important because prior to my entrance on the campus as a reading coach, the majority of first grade reading instruction time was taken up with the task of teaching children to read through texts as quickly as possible in order to perform well on this one assessment. I was interested in documenting how I might help teachers rethink the role of testing within the context of teaching students to read, as well as how the state reading initiative would influence their instructional decisions.

As reported by Canyon Primary School's principal, the county issued a directive from the curriculum department that teachers were to begin timing their students during the reading instructional block in order to beat the necessary 40 words per minute threshold benchmark for students to be considered making adequate progress as readers. When I first arrived at Canyon Primary, students were spending a large portion of their daily class time practicing passages that were timed by teachers and classmates. Teachers were told by the Scott County Curriculum Department to skip the portion of the test that examined student retelling of the passages because the state was only concerned with the fluency scores from the Oral Reading Fluency portion of the assessment.

In addition to examining the first grade team as a whole, I narrowed my focus down to three of the first grade teachers for a more in-depth look at their teaching

practices. Narrowing my focus enabled me to conduct more detailed interviews for the narrative inquiry portions of the research. As well, I collected observational data in these classrooms during the literacy block in order to better understand how topics covered during team meetings, trainings, and specific interests of each teacher were translated into classroom practice. The focus classrooms were selected based upon the method of reading instruction each teacher used, as well as the number of years of classroom teaching experience in order to achieve maximum variation.

Mrs. Foi was the first teacher selected for the study. Mrs. Foi was beginning the second full year of teaching, and had been hired to replace a teacher in the spring of 2006. The second teacher, Mrs. Sein, was new to Canyon Primary as well as to Scott County. She had seven years teaching experience in the neighboring county school system, Murphy County, and had worked for Canyon Primary's principal in Murphy County. The third focus teacher in the study was Mrs. Rohl, a veteran teacher of twenty-six years, who had taught at Canyon Primary for the past sixteen years. The decision to select these three particular teachers was made because the three reading instruction methods the focused teachers used (listed in Table 1) represented the range of diversity in methods among all first grade team members, and each of the three focus teachers utilized their particular method to the greatest fidelity of the model each was based upon. I was interested in how the pressures of testing and the various mandates figured into their reading instruction decisions, as well as how these teachers built their understanding of reading during grade level meetings and trainings. This close-up look into the targeted teachers' classrooms provided a more detailed analysis of the ways in which not only DIBELS testing pressures impacted how students spent their time during the reading

instruction block, but also the ways in which the method of reading that each teacher used influenced her adoption of the state-mandated initiatives.

In addition to examining reading instruction, I also looked at the various ways writing instruction and the use of writing in students' academic lives played out throughout the course of the literacy block. One of the directives of the state reading initiative was that no writing instruction was allowed to take place during the 90 minute block of uninterrupted reading instruction, and I felt it was important to look closely at the extent to which this mandate impacted what occurred during the literacy block.

FIELD ENTRY

My entry into Canyon Primary School occurred in July of 2006, as I attended the state reading initiative training with the classroom teachers and campus administrators in preparation for the upcoming 2006-2007 school year. The actual work with classroom teachers as their reading coach began in August of 2006. I worked closely with the first grade teachers from August of 2006 through May of 2008, modeling lessons for them with their own students, and problem solving with teachers in order to provide effective literacy instruction to ensure all students were learning to read and write strategically. The majority of the coaching interactions were precipitated by requests from the classroom teachers and the content of the lessons typically featured strategies and practices that the teachers were interested in and not specifically state-mandated lessons. Teachers were more receptive and willing to invite me into their classrooms when they chose the direction of the coaching interactions than when I coached them in the name of the reading mandate.

Another way I worked closely with teachers was through the delivery of the required staff development modules that were written by the state department of education as part of the top-down reading initiative. These were limited in number, however; only occurring five times throughout the year. The lessons were conducted with teachers who volunteered to be a part of the modeling and teaching cycle. I also participated in state sanctioned “walk throughs” during literacy blocks, not in an evaluative capacity, but in an attempt to plan further training in accordance with the state goals set aside for the campus during its first and second years of participation in the reading training. During the “walk throughs,” the campus administrators, members of the state reading initiative support team, and I traveled through all of the classrooms during the literacy block to see which pieces of the reading initiative could be seen in the classrooms in order to set goals for which steps should be the next area of focus.

The teachers were very familiar with my presence in their classrooms, and my role as facilitator in the group meetings and trainings, so I felt reasonably comfortable conducting the study because of our close working relationships. As part of my responsibilities as a state reading coach, I was also required to scribe notes during our meetings as well as keep data regarding group interactions for my reflection log, so the teachers were already accustomed to those procedures taking place.

In accordance with IRB requirements, I asked a representative not associated with my job, the campus, or the state reading initiative to explain the study and request the teachers’ consent. To ensure that the first grade teachers felt comfortable asking questions about the study, I did not attend the meeting with the exception of a short question and answer session during which my meeting representative read the questions

aloud generated by the team. Once I responded to the questions, I again left the meeting so that teachers could decide whether or not to participate in the study, without being influenced by my presence. Of the twelve first grade teachers, two teachers did not consent to participate in the study, and therefore did not have their data analyzed or any other information pertaining to their classrooms or grade level meeting participation taken into account. All teacher identities and student names mentioned during the course of our sessions have been substituted with pseudonyms in order to protect teacher and student identities. All data was kept in a secure, locked location off-site.

THREE FOCUS TEACHERS

The first focus teacher of the study was Mrs. Foi. I included her as one of the focus teachers because she was new to the teaching profession (the study took place during her second year) and was a very innovative and skilled teacher. Because Mrs. Rohl and Mrs. Sein were experienced teachers, I thought it would be important to gain the viewpoint of someone who had a fresh perspective on the trainings and initiatives the first grade team experienced. Mrs. Foi's method for teaching reading followed a readers' workshop format. As part of the workshop format, Mrs. Foi guided the text selections of students by ensuring students were able to read smoothly from their individually selected texts with a minimum amount of support. Students also needed to be able to demonstrate an understanding of what they were reading by providing accurate retellings. Mrs. Foi used both mini-lessons and student conferences as ways of meeting individual student needs as well as reinforcing focused strategies and common understandings about reading to the class as a whole. Mrs. Foi also utilized a workshop format of instruction for her

writing block. The basis of the workshop format was that mini-lessons were presented at the start of both the reading block and the designated writing block. During mini-lessons, Mrs. Foi would model a specific strategy that students would then try as they worked independently or with partners. A singular strategy focus was usually maintained throughout the course of a week, unless students needed more time or were ready to move on more quickly. Mrs. Foi also met the needs of students as individuals or in small groups through the use of writing conferences. Just as students made choices regarding reading selections, students also made their own decisions during writing workshop regarding topics and genres for writing.

Mrs. Foi was quick to reflect on her practices and because she was still relatively new to teaching, I found her to be very aware and conscious of her decision-making processes regarding classroom instruction, and very open about areas of difficulty or concern. Working with a teacher with this level of awareness regarding teaching decision making was very informative and provided a different perspective from that of the more experienced focus teachers.

As a first year teacher during the 2006-2007 school year, and the special education inclusion classroom teacher, Mrs. Foi's students scored fifth highest on DIBELS scores as measured by the fluency and comprehension indicators, on her team of 13 teachers (one of the 13 teachers was on a year's leave of absence during the 2007-2008 school year). Mrs. Foi made the decision to keep all her special education children for the reading block because she wanted all of her students to be able to participate fully in reading and writing workshop on a daily basis. During the 2006-2007 school year, all of the students in her classroom exceeded the 40 word per minute minimum for fluency

on an end of first grade level reading passage, with an average comprehension retelling percentage of 40%. This meant that for every 100 words a student read, the student could provide an accurate retelling of at least 40 words in length.

Mrs. Sein, the second focus teacher, had been teaching for eight years at the time of the study and was trained in Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), which she used with all of her students in accordance with the model as set forth by Fountas and Pinnell. Mrs. Sein using running records to determine the initial appropriate placement for each child in leveled texts. She then used observations of the students during weekly guided reading groups as well as the results of running records given every one to two weeks (or less often dependent upon the level of the reader), in order to confirm book placements as well as guided reading group placements. Mrs. Sein also used fluency passages to make student grouping determinations. The guided reading groupings were fairly stable, with little change in group membership across the school year.

Mrs. Sein had received a great deal of literacy and math training while working for Murphy County, a nearby school district from which she transferred in the fall of 2006, and was considered to be an excellent source of advice by many of the other first grade teachers. She was confident in her work and was, at the time, impatient with regard to the lack of updated literacy training most of the teachers at Canyon Primary School had. Mrs. Sein commanded a strong presence during team meetings and trainings, offering many points for discussion or questioning the responses of others respectfully, yet thoroughly. As I reflect upon our trainings and meetings that occurred twice each month during the 2006-2007 school year, Mrs. Sein's contributions and willingness to start discussions really helped to jump-start a lot of meaningful conversations among the

teachers and also provided an entry point for people to consider expressing conflicting opinions safely.

The inclusion of Mrs. Sein as one of the three focus teachers provided a close-up look regarding how someone who already had history with the state reading initiative (from her prior county) and extensive training in Guided Reading, interpreted and enacted literacy practices in her own classroom. I also had established a collaborative relationship with Mrs. Sein because of our common background with respect to Guided Reading, writing workshop training, and curriculum alignment work. Mrs. Sein also expressed that she appreciated my willingness to give her honest feedback about her teaching because most of her administrators would simply tell her that “everything was great” with her classroom instruction and she felt frustrated missing out on opportunities to grow from constructive feedback.

The final focus classroom teacher was chosen because of her fidelity to the county’s basal adoption. Mrs. Rohl was confident in her use of the basal and adhered tightly to the accompanying basal teacher guide. She had been teaching for 26 years and used the basal reading series for the entire time she taught. I considered Mrs. Rohl to be very confident and capable in working with her students as she had a wealth of strategies and scaffolding techniques to support students who were unable to access the basal texts. Because of her traditional model for teaching reading, I was particularly interested in investigating how she navigated the reading initiative mandates and the extent to which they informed her classroom instruction. Following her closely also afforded me with many opportunities to talk with her under more private circumstances as she tended to be

one who observed and watched her team members in interactions, rather than entering the discussions as a major participant.

Although using the basal for reading instruction was considered passé by many members of the team, Ms. Rohl's end of the year DIBELS scores for fluency and retelling across socioeconomic groups, gender, as well as special and regular education students were very intriguing. When comparing students who qualified for free and reduced lunch and breakfast programs, special education students, and those deemed at-risk based on classroom performances on literacy tasks, Mrs. Rohl's students consistently out-performed similar students from other classrooms who received Guided Reading as their model for reading instruction on fluency and comprehension measures.

All first grade teachers who granted permission were included in the study, but the engagement with the three focus teachers was much more in-depth. Permission was obtained from ten of the twelve first grade teachers, as well as from the parents in the classrooms of Mrs. Rohl, Mrs. Sein, and Mrs. Foi due to the fact that I videotaped reading and writing lessons in each of their classrooms, and the students from those classrooms were captured on tape and in photographs engaging in the literacy lessons their teachers either designed or were part of the state reading initiative.

NON-PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

The two teachers who declined to participate in the study were members of the collaborative group that planned with Mrs. Sein. Both teachers used a Reading and Writing Workshop approach in their classrooms and participated in the vocabulary module lessons and associated weekly tests. One of the two teachers was heavily

involved in planning the vocabulary lessons and tests and was also responsible for helping Mrs. Sein establish reading assessment notebooks for the purpose of testing first grade students to determine reading levels through the use of running records. The first teacher reported that she declined to participate out of concern that she would embarrass herself during the course of the study. The second teacher declined due to her busy personal schedule, but there were also strong tensions between the two of us as well as other members of the first grade team. I believe, ultimately, she declined because of issues of trust.

PARTICIPANT RESEARCHER

My role in the study was that of researcher as well as a participant due to my job as the campus reading coach. Many aspects of my role as the researcher were already embedded in my normal job responsibilities as a campus reading coach. In accordance with the state reading initiative, I was expected to observe teachers on a regular basis and take notes during the course of the observations in order to reflect and debrief with the teachers. I was also expected to interact with and support students by obtaining and analyzing work samples as well as talking with students about their engagement in literacy activities. My responsibilities also included providing instructional support.

As a participant in this study I also need to acknowledge my personal biases toward particular methods of teaching reading. My initial training in literacy instruction focused on a combination of using minimum fluency thresholds based on the number of words read correctly per minute in combination with accurate retellings to confirm appropriate book placement. The minimum fluency levels helped to ensure that students

encountered text that provided opportunities for problem-solving without presenting too many challenges that might interfere with comprehension. The importance of student choice was encouraged during reading conferences, as long as students were able to meet a minimum fluency standard and discuss the book in an in-depth manner.

I was also trained in Reading Recovery, and in addition to working with students one-on-one, I supported their classroom teachers in order to ensure that developing readers were held to the same level of standard during class as during the Reading Recovery sessions. In my experience in this role I discovered that developing readers who participated in Reading Recovery were often under-placed in texts and few expectations were carried over regarding strategy usage. These low expectations seemed to seal the fate of these emergent readers. Accordingly, I found in my role as reading coach that when I observed teachers engaging in guided reading with the most emergent readers, that the strategies most often prompted tended to focus solely on decoding with almost no attention to meaning.

In terms of teaching students to write, I subscribed to the model of writing workshop as set forth by Lucy Calkins (2001) and Jim Guszak (1992). I felt it was critical for students to write every day and that students needed to have choice over their writing topics. I also felt that teacher modeling on a daily basis was a non-negotiable aspect of writing. Students needed to publish often so that their work would reach an audience of readers, which in turn also motivated students to write more and to reread their work carefully. Although I certainly felt other forms of writing, such as response journals were very important, I struggled to support classroom teachers who used response journals as the only form of writing during class because of the limited nature of this form of writing

and the overemphasis upon mechanics and production of a specified number of journal entries.

DATA COLLECTION, DOCUMENTATION, AND RECORD-KEEPING

In this section I will describe, in greater detail, the methods used for collecting data that were briefly referred to in previous sections.

Observation by Researcher

My role in the teacher planning and staff development meetings was as a participant-observer. Because of the nature of my job as a reading coach, I had certain obligations and responsibilities that required my involvement in leading and participating in discussions, as well as other procedural types of interactions with first grade teachers during team meetings. However, there were also periods of time during each of these meetings when I was required to take notes and observe, rather than interact with the teachers. These steps remained consistent across all phases of the study, although my areas of focus were more defined in greater specificity for phases 2 and 3. During these phases, my goal was to describe specific styles of teacher collaboration and co-construction of meaning, as well as more complex interactional patterns regarding teachers as they traversed their own literacy practice preferences with the state mandated trainings. I also examined how teachers represented their literacy instructional practices in light of campus and student needs.

During time spent in the three focal classrooms, my presence became less intrusive as the study continued. Teachers and students were already accustomed to my

presence in the room because of my role as the campus reading coach, but as time went on the use of the video camera and other equipment became less conspicuous, as well. Students were more at ease describing the tasks they were engaged in, and teachers were more at ease talking about the role of the state reading initiative in conjunction with their personal beliefs about literacy and the students in their classrooms. Initial observations were used to understand the structure of the literacy block in each classroom, in addition to the types of activities students were asked to engage in and each teacher's roles during these events. As the year progressed, the observations were focused more closely on the stylistic preferences of each of the teachers during their reading and writing instruction. I looked for examples of classroom instruction that demonstrated the teachers were incorporating aspects of the reading initiative into their teaching or into the activities they planned for their students.

Expanded Field Notes

Upon leaving the teacher meetings and classroom observations, I expanded my written field notes and meeting documents in order to construct a more detailed account of observations as well as to include important contextual information. In addition to the expansion of field notes, I also made three other types of notes based on classroom observations: personal notes, methodological notes, and theoretical notes (Corsaro, 1981; Erlandson, et al., 1993; Hubbard & Power, 1999) (Table 2). Periodically these notes were shared with first grade teachers, including the three focus teachers, for the purposes of member checking and triangulation. As I read through the notes I also engaged in tagging, whereby I created tentative categories through OneNote software to describe

what I thought was occurring with regard to teaching moves, student literacy activities, and the reading initiative modules. My notes were sorted according to these tags so that I was able to further refine my tagged categories.

Table 2: Codes for Expanding Notes

Personal Notes	This includes any information relevant to the researcher's mood, or that of the class. Personal notes include information such as a child vomiting 10 minutes before you enter the room, or a difficult parent conversation involving the teacher being observed. These notes reveal feelings, introspections, fears, biases, and emerging values of the researcher during the study. Personal notes should cover anything that might affect the researcher's mood, which would affect note taking.
Methodological Notes	These notes involve the documentation of how the researcher is doing her work. Recording decisions to place equipment in certain places or suggestions regarding what the students or teacher should be doing in order to document the process – like asking the teacher to write for 5 minutes in a journal, reflecting upon the lesson. Or, it could be asking the students to do some type of response. These notes provide information about how procedures, strategies, and day-to-day decisions were made during the study.
Theoretical Notes	These notes deal with hunches regarding why something is happening. These can be formal observations about students. Or they can be “aha” moments about why particular students are frustrated.
Questions & Codes	Another tool for cooking notes can be the addition of questions that are intriguing as well as initial codes for patterns that begin to emerge in observations.

Note: Adapted from *Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher-Researchers*, by Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 129.

Interviews with Mrs. Rohl, Mrs. Sein, and Mrs. Foi

Each of the focus teachers were interviewed at least 3 times outside of official school hours, as well as through informal conversations. The focused teachers also had the option of meeting with me during their planning times (at their request) because debriefing with teachers was an activity that was acceptable for me to do in my role as a reading coach during the school day. The normal protocol for my coaching job was to provide teachers with the option of meeting before, during, or after school.

The first set of interviews occurred at the beginning of January as each of the focus teachers spoke with me about their reading goals for their children for the spring semester, as well as classroom literacy practices they were utilizing and tweaking based on the first half of the year and student data. The next series of interviews occurred during Phase 2 as classroom practices became more regulated in the second semester and teachers had participated in team meetings and professional development sessions. The next set of interviews took place during Phase 3, as the academic portion of the year was drawing to a close with the impending administration of the end of the year DIBELS assessment. The final round of interviews occurred in the final weeks of school, providing teachers with the chance to reflect on the school year, student progress, achievements, and any surprises. The only exception to this schedule occurred with Mrs. Sein because she was on maternity leave from March through the end of April. Mrs. Sein and I agreed upfront that we would complete her interviews during Phase 2 so that I would have enough time to gather information for the study.

The first round of interviews was structured loosely. The focus teachers were asked to describe their philosophies of teaching reading and writing, as well as the types of materials and books they preferred to use. Teachers were asked to talk about their experiences that led to the development of these philosophies as well as their experiences with the state reading initiative in which they all participated the previous year (2006-2007). I asked each of the focus teachers to address what they knew about the students thus far in their classrooms and how they planned to accommodate the range of student literacy competencies within their philosophies of teaching reading and writing. During the second and third interviews, teachers were asked to reflect on and comment on the types of activities students were engaged in and how they felt about student reading and literacy growth. I also asked teachers to reflect upon the teacher meetings (both the reading initiative meetings and the ones they attended with the teachers they chose to plan with on their own time) and conversations that occurred during those meetings where they were present. The teachers were also asked to discuss the impact DIBELS had upon their classroom practices. The fourth series of interviews, during Phase 3, focused on looking back across the year to reflect on the impact of both team meetings, and meetings in smaller planning groups, my role as the reading coach, and how students progressed within the framework of their pedagogical beliefs and the degree to which they put stock in the final DIBELS scores.

During the audiotaped interviews, teachers were asked to reflect on their teaching and ways in which literacy concepts were fostered in their classrooms. Teachers were asked to talk about the role of the state reading initiative or lack thereof in classroom instruction. One of my main interests was the ways in which teachers were able to get the

desired outcomes expected by the state and county initiatives while using their own pedagogical beliefs and practices to make this happen – different paths to common outcomes. Teachers were asked to speak specifically about fluency and comprehension practices because those were the tested outcomes the county and state examined carefully on DIBELS measures, and caused the most tension regarding classroom reading practices as well as involvement from parents at home.

I also asked teachers to tell their story of how they lived their classroom lives, when they were alone with only their students. I wanted to know about their past teaching experiences and how these affected the decisions they made in their classrooms as well as where they saw their classroom practices headed. A portion of these interviews were also designed to get a sense of how teachers defined the sacred story of Canyon Primary School – how the school was portrayed in the community – and how this affected their teaching decisions.

Student Interviews and Observations

Student interviews took place during Phases 2 and 3 of the study, when reading and literacy routines were well established and students had ample time to develop an understanding of the activities in which they were engaged. Informal interviews took place during the classroom reading and literacy block as students were asked to talk about what they were doing and how those activities helped them to become better readers and writers. Students were also asked to comment on how their teachers taught students to read and write as well as what activities they liked to participate in the most and why. The questions were ultimately guided by working hypotheses developed throughout the

course of the study. These interviews took place during times scheduled with the classroom teacher and during informal visits to the classroom that occurred as part of my reading coach responsibilities.

Students were also formally interviewed in small groups. Teachers were asked to rank order their students according to their reading and writing progress. I took the lists of students from each teacher and organized the students into groups of two or three. My rationale for constructing the student interview groups in this way was that I wanted students to feel comfortable speaking about their literacy habits, and I was fearful that if student groups were comprised of students who differed greatly in terms of their levels of literacy, some children might feel intimidated answering some of the questions. Students were asked the following questions:

1. What do you like the most about reading?
2. How do you know when someone is a good reader?
3. Who are the good readers in class and how do you know? Be sure to talk about yourself as one of the good readers.
4. What do you like the most about writing?
5. How do you know when someone is a good writer?
6. Who are the good writers in class and how do you know? Be sure to talk about yourself as one of the good writers.
7. If there was anything you could choose to skip, what would it be?

Audiotaped Recordings

Audiotaped recordings were used in situations when setting up a video camera could not be accomplished in advance or would cause distractions to the classroom environment. The audio recorder was also used to enhance the audio capabilities of the video recorder, to prevent valuable conversations from being out of range of the camera's microphone, when possible. Specifically, teacher and student interviews were audiotaped in situations where the depictions of interactions with others were not the major focus of data collection. Audio taping was the preferred method of conducting teacher interviews in order to help the teachers feel more comfortable. This method for recording grade level meetings was utilized to ensure that teachers felt more at ease interacting with others, in order to establish patterns of communication and how group understandings were built. The audiotapes were transcribed later, tagged, and used as another layer of information for analysis.

Videotaped Recordings

A video camera was used in all phases of this study in order to capture broad pictures of student classroom interactions when appropriate. During phase 1, the videotape was used to gain a broad sense of the types of literacy activities each of the focus classrooms engaged in. During phases 2 and 3, the focus classrooms were videoed much more selectively, focusing in on the various ways specific students engaged in literacy tasks that were assigned as well as ones of their own choosing. These tapes were reviewed in order to establish patterns in the data for further analysis and the continued

refinement of what was videotaped. Videotapes were reviewed and transcribed weekly, and categories that emerged during transcription were tagged accordingly.

Artifact Collection

Artifacts that pertained to this project were scanned, photographed, or sent by e-mail so that they remained in the possession of the students and teachers. These items included lesson plans, classroom charts and rubrics, reflection logs, examples of texts students were reading and writing. As the project evolved, the range and variety of artifacts collected changed and expanded, as sampling procedures for both participant focus and artifacts were refined. All scanned images and photographs of student work were also tagged using this same procedure in order to facilitate the useful coding and sorting of artifacts.

PHASES OF INQUIRY

The following sections outline the timeline for the four phases of inquiry for the project. The phases are adapted from those of Rowe (1994). Peer debriefing continued throughout all phases of the study.

Phase 1: Field Entry

Phase one of the study, initial entry into the field as a researcher, began in January of 2008. This phase lasted from the beginning of January of 2008 through the end of January 2008. During this phase I observed each of the three targeted teachers during their literacy blocks once a week for an hour, for four weeks. This allowed me to familiarize myself with each teacher and her students, as well as the structure utilized

during the literacy block including the types of activities students were beginning to engage in, the extent to which formal reading and instruction was taking place, and the overall structure of the literacy block. One of the ways I negotiated my role as researcher and participant observer was to read stories in each of the classrooms and model reading and writing lessons so that students would have an opportunity to get to know me better and feel more comfortable with my presence. I also brought the video camera with me into the three focus classrooms when I conducted these introductory activities prior to the start of the study so that students would be accustomed to the equipment.

Data was recorded during this phase through field notes written during each class time and then expanded after school. Videotaping was also done in order to record how each teacher spoke with students about their various literacy activities and the rationale for doing them. I also wanted to capture how the students were adjusting to these activities because of the ages of the students and the fact that literacy “school structures” were still relatively new to them. I monitored the obtrusiveness of my note-taking and videotaping by examining both the behaviors of the teachers and those of the students, and took this into consideration when analyzing data. I also took further steps to minimize my obtrusiveness including remaining on the periphery of the classroom when possible, and introducing my laptop and the digital and video cameras into the classroom before the study began so that students were not distracted by the equipment. And, as mentioned earlier, my role as the campus reading coach provided many other opportunities for me to interact with students in other capacities, which will also helped with the issue of obtrusiveness.

Audio and videotaping took place in each of the three focused classrooms, as students were engaging in reading, writing, and other literacy activities. In the classroom environment, videotaping afforded me the ability to capture a wide range of student literacy behaviors more accurately than note-taking alone. The use of the videotape also allowed me to examine how long students were engaged in those various activities. I was also able to capture how the teacher portrayed these literacy events and how those plans fell into the spectrum of what the first grade teachers, as a team, studied and learned about in the teacher meeting settings.

In addition to analyzing the video and audio tapes collected during classroom instruction from the three focus teachers, I also gathered and analyzed the beginning of the year DIBELS scores from August, from all ten classrooms in order to establish a baseline for data analysis regarding campus trends and trends across individual classrooms. Middle of the year DIBELS scores and end of year DIBELS scores were examined in order to monitor student growth in the areas of reading, comprehension, and fluency, against the bar set by the state.

During this time, I spoke with each of the three classroom teachers formally and informally about their literacy block and the structure each used. We also discussed how each teacher felt her students were adjusting to the structure, and any other insights into ways each teacher was learning more about her students in terms of literacy behaviors and adjusting their instruction and types of activities accordingly. Artifacts collected in this phase included planning materials, teacher record keeping, anecdotal records on student literacy behaviors, and any artifacts the students produced which reflected the

teacher's philosophy of early literacy instruction. Informal conversations were also documented through notes, audio, and video recordings, when possible.

The other portion of field entry involved the first grade teacher meetings that initially occurred twice a month, but were later culled to once a month, at the request of the campus principal. Data during the group meetings was recorded through audiotape due to my active role in these sessions. Following each meeting, the audiotapes were transcribed and theoretical, methodological, and personal notes were added. Those notes were revisited at later dates and expanded. Part of the note expansion process included examining where teachers sat in relation to one another as well as how they referred to their teaching practices in these initial meetings. Meeting artifacts were collected including agendas, group notes, and charts. Only the artifacts from the three classrooms with student permission secured were included in the data for this study. Audiotape was used because it was less intrusive than videotape and it afforded the opportunity for smaller conversations that occurred in group contexts to be recorded. The group participants felt more comfortable being recorded with the small audio recorder than with the intrusive video camera.

My role as the campus reading coach and researcher continued to be established at these meetings. The opportunity to record my interactions with the teachers and the kinds of topics we focused on during these meetings was important to capture. Again, because of my dual roles as reading coach and participant observer, the audiotape was invaluable in helping me to construct a more accurate depiction of the events during these meetings. Part of the meeting protocol for the state department requirements involved creating "anchor charts" which would leave a record of the topics discussed and action

steps the teachers would follow up with until we met for the next training session. I created separate anchor charts for each group I met with and recorded any information we discussed during these literacy meetings in order to have a record of the topics discussed as well as to trace the different paths the various groups took based on participant interactions.

Phase 2: Focused Observations

Phase 2 of the study involved more focused exploration of teacher collaboration and the co-construction of meaning during team meetings and trainings, as well as how these built understandings infiltrated classroom practices in the three targeted classrooms. During this phase I began to engage in hypothesis development. Because I was conducting four separate team meetings each month and the full-time nature of my role as reading coach on the campus, this phase lasted from February of 2008 through March of 2008. This length of time was necessary because of the school holidays that occurred during the months of February and March, interrupting both the teacher meetings as well as literacy instruction routines.

During teacher meetings, my role remained as participant observer, due to the nature of my job. However, my involvement in the three targeted classrooms was one of observer during the literacy block, when teachers were working with students, and also that of coach when debriefing with teachers about lessons or when called upon for advice while teachers were working with students. Classroom observations occurred at a minimum of every other week, but more often when feasible. I videotaped and audiotaped lessons and literacy events, but also took notes. My position remained on the

periphery of the classroom while classroom instruction was occurring. However, once students were released to continue working, I assumed a closer vantage point in order to better observe the types of tasks students were engaged in as well as to document the levels and types of student engagement in the various tasks.

Following both the teacher meetings and the classroom observations, I expanded my field notes and at the end of each day of observation, I reviewed the video and audiotapes as an aid to add further detail to the field notes. These expanded notes also served as an index of sorts to the types of observations and activities that could be seen and heard in each of the files. Another useful way of categorizing the segments of video from the three classrooms was the software I used for downloading the digital video. The clips were categorized using a key scene from each of the segments, which made locating specific sources of classroom instruction efficient and easy to locate. I was also able to insert tags through OneNote software as I recorded my field notes and transcribed segments of talk. Digital photographs of student and teacher artifacts were also stored and tagged through OneNote using preliminary codes.

Periodically I reviewed my field notes, tentative hypotheses, and selected data (videotapes, audiotapes, transcripts, artifacts) with members of the three teachers of focus for purposes of member checking. This process involved asking teachers to review field notes, video segments, and portions of transcripts as time permitted. We also met to discuss their responses as to the accuracy of my notes. When the interpretations of the participants differed from my own during this phase of the inquiry, these interpretations were taken into account as the data collection and initial stages of analysis continued. Later in this stage of data collection, the teachers and I reconvened to review more recent

data, looking for evidence that supported the various interpretations. Additional data collection included formal and informal discussions and meetings with teachers, samples from teacher reflections, artifacts the teachers created with students that represented concepts studied in our team meetings, as well as student artifacts and student comments about their literacy activities. By the end of this phase, mid-year DIBELS scores were already available for comparison to the beginning of the year scores. Progress monitoring data was also available as the classroom teachers set goals from the end of year DIBELS testing for student progress and made changes in classroom instruction for the second half of the spring semester. As this second phase of data collection continued, sampling procedures became more theoretical as hypotheses were further developed and refined. My system for tagging audio, video, and word documents was also refined based on the introduction of new data that helped me to revise my tagging categories.

At the conclusion of Phase 2, I examined the data collected thus far (video and audiotapes, student and teacher artifacts, field notes, interviews) with greater scrutiny in order to establish a theoretical summary of the working hypotheses. This process incorporated those hypotheses already established as well as those that were in the more tentative stages. This summary was then used to guide methodological decisions such as data collection and sampling issues. This theoretical summary was also used to identify certain features of the teacher meetings and particular types of classroom events to focus on in more detail during Phase 3.

Phase 3: Hypothesis Refinement

Phase 3 of this study was similar to the second phase of data collection methods (field notes, audiotape, videotape, informal interviews with teachers, work-related comments from students, and artifacts). This phase lasted from April through the through mid-May. My role as participant observer continued during teacher meetings while my role as a classroom observer continued in the targeted rooms. During this phase, sampling became more theoretical in nature and the observations were greatly narrowed to focus on specific literacy events within the classrooms. Data from the teacher groups had ceased by this point in time because staff development was drawing to a close and my coaching role was focused on meeting with individual teachers regarding student concerns and plans of action for the remainder of the school year to ensure adequate literacy growth. Examination of classroom practices of the three focused teachers continued because their teaching moves in preparation for the close of the year were becoming even more focused and strategic to ensure all students were making adequate growth in reading and writing. As a result of this focused teaching, I narrowed the focus of classroom observations and teacher interviews to ensure I had a clearer picture of children's developed and developing literacy strategies as well as the intentions of the teachers in shoring up student strategies and trying to care for students who were still struggling.

Phase 4: Closure

The final phase of this study lasted from mid-May through the last week of May. The reason for extending the study to this point in the year was that teachers were

concluding final preparations for children to participate in the end of year DIBELS assessment, which measured student fluency and comprehension on the tested passages. I felt it was critical to capture the types of teaching and literacy activities that students were engaged in as teachers prepared them for this very public test. This time of year also afforded me with opportunities to have students show their end of the year work, allowing me to trace growth of reading and writing from the start to the conclusion of the study. Students were able to speak about their work in detail and were also able to reflect upon the year and their growth as readers and writers.

During this phase, member checks were conducted and the teachers were asked to evaluate my interpretations for accuracy so that they could have input in the final product. During this phase of the study, my time was spent to a greater extent on data analysis, with less time spent on classroom observations. Time spent in classrooms during this phase was much more focused and highly dependent upon the data findings and needs. Because this study was conducted using a constructivist paradigm and meaning was constructed as the study progressed, and research hypotheses were not predetermined, some of the decisions regarding methodology (length of the phases of the study and sampling units) were made and revised as the study evolved.

DATA ANALYSIS

The primary data sources of this study—observational data, transcripts of group conversations, coaching and reflective notes, and interviews—were analyzed using the constant-comparative approach. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the duration of this project.

Constant-comparative Method

According to Strauss and Corbin, (1998) and Erlandson, et al., (1993), the constant comparative method is a way of “deriving ([or] grounding) theory” as it emerges from the data, rather than predetermining the categories and then searching for the data to confirm or disconfirm (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During this research process, the data I collected was read and studied, and hypotheses began to emerge. I used OneNote software to begin tagging examples that exemplified my initial hypotheses in addition to adding analytic memos. Each time data was collected and analyzed, my processes were refined and data collection procedures were modified to incorporate these new hypotheses. This method also involved the careful categorization of items and events that seemed to relate in important ways. These categories were carefully defined by rules that governed them and the definitions that described the patterns of interaction or behaviors occurring.

I first engaged in *open* coding in order to identify concepts that appeared to be emerging from the data. During this process I labeled and categorized concepts that emerged by asking questions such as, What is happening with regard to reading instruction? Who is it happening with? How is it happening? Where does it occur? When does it occur? Data was sorted by tag (in OneNote) and compared under these concepts to look for elements that were similar and that could be combined to fit into more abstract categories. *Open* coding was utilized to “pull data apart” by placing it into smaller categories, but *axial* coding reassembled the data together in new ways by making connections among categories and sub-categories. Examples of *axial* coding included examining the various ways reading and writing instruction were enacted across

classrooms, or how the use of various levels of text were modeled and explained by classroom teachers. *Axial* coding was then used to more clearly tease apart the characteristics that defined each of the categories that emerged during *open* coding. Finally, *selective* coding was used in order to examine categories of data that emerged for the purpose of forming an initial theoretical framework.

Data analysis was used to drive hypotheses formulation and refinement as well as inform further data collection. The schedule for analysis involved weekly reviews of expanded field notes, methodological notes, and theoretical notes, peer debriefing, and member checking. I continued to use the constant-comparative method as well as discourse analysis, and as mentioned, I engaged in an extensive review of the data at the conclusion of Phase 2. This extensive review resulted in a theoretical summary of working hypotheses. That initial summary informed and focused the sampling and data collection that occurred during Phase 3. Upon the conclusion of my field work, data analysis focused on further developing and refining hypotheses.

The findings from constant-comparative analysis, particularly within the twice monthly and then monthly teacher meetings, informal teacher groups, and teacher interviews, were further refined through the use of discourse analysis. In order to examine the teacher team meeting interactions, I drew upon discourse analytic methods because of my interest in the ways teacher collaborate and co-construct meaning in face-to-face settings. I transcribed audio and video files pertinent to the hypotheses for the purposes of analysis. Of particular interest was the ebb and flow of conversation, who wrested control of those conversations, who was allowed to have input and who was shut out. Erickson (1996) refers to this as the “conjoint participation and influence, in which

no mover is unmoved.” How did these teachers come together to make meaning when so many different ideologies were present around the table? As Wertsch describes, there is most certainly an important place reserved for all the voices present, but not all were actually heard all of the time. “Instead, we must consider how and why a particular voice occupies center stage, that is, why it is ‘privileged’ in a particular setting” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 13-14).

Drawing upon the work of Neil Mercer (1995, 2000) seemed particularly important because of Mercer’s socio-cultural approach to the construction of knowledge, which was at the very heart of these teachers coming together to learn and to plan. The specific focus on how teachers formulated what reading instruction consisted of in their classrooms, with particular attention toward the role of fluency rates and student retellings of classroom texts, in addition to the use of testing materials and other teacher-created tools figured into that definition. The socio-cultural approach “gives explicit recognition of how people construct knowledge together. This inevitably highlights the role of language in the construction of knowledge. Individually and collectively, we use language to transform experience into knowledge and understanding. It provides us with both an individual and social mode of thinking” (p.67). It gives credence to the notion that talk is used for the purpose of accomplishing tasks and getting things done.

As important as the refinement of rules and definitions was, it was also important to define what did not fit neatly into the established categories of rules and definitions, also referred to as *disconfirming evidence*. The search for disconfirming evidence was utilized by looking for examples of negative cases (Crewsell & Miller, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994), which did not appear to fit into any of the categories or definitions.

DIBELS Data Analysis

Although the validity of DIBELS as an indicator of early literacy achievement was questionable to me, I was interested in a particular segment of the DIBELS data. The Oral Reading Fluency test (ORF) provided fluency data based on the number of words read correctly per minute on a passage equivalent with the beginning of second grade. This test was the only DIBELS subtest that did not attempt to extrapolate reading indicators based on isolated and fragmented tasks. Examining the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 data afforded me with the opportunity to look for changes in DIBELS data now that the first grade teachers were providing extended time for children to read from appropriate text, instead of relying solely on the basal for reading instruction. The data for each of the years was examined in terms of fluency and comprehension scores across classrooms and according to the types of literacy strategies teachers employed in their classrooms. I also traced the Oral Reading Fluency scores back to the 2004-2005 school year to gain a better picture of the scores prior to the influences of the state reading initiative.

I categorized the reading scores, looking for patterns in the scores according to the method of reading instruction noted during classroom observations, as well as teacher philosophies that emerged during trainings and interviews, as documented through field notes, video, and audiotapes. Scores were disaggregated based on student ethnicity, socioeconomic status, method of reading instruction, and classroom teacher. The purpose for engaging in this type of analysis was to mirror the categories and strategies of data analysis examined at the state and county levels for accountability purposes, in addition to searching for trends of interest to me.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Qualitative researchers engage in multiple analytic techniques to safeguard the trustworthiness of their studies. *Credibility* is the first measure of trustworthiness which seeks to examine the degree to which the findings of a study represent the participants' actions and beliefs as accurately as possible, based on the participants' perceptions. The second area of trustworthiness is *transferability*. *Transferability* seeks to establish the extent to which the findings in of a specific study can be utilized in other situations with other respondents, although the contexts and specifics of each situation will vary. *Dependability* is the third aspect of trustworthiness which asserts that if the same conditions existed with other people, and the same research tools and procedures were used, the same basic results would be found. The final category is *confirmability*. This trustworthiness technique ensures that the findings have resulted from the inquiry process set forth in the study, and not the biases of the researcher (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

According to Erlandson, et al. (1993), the "credibility of a study is essentially its ability to communicate the various constructions of reality in a setting back to the persons who hold them in a form that will be affirmed by them" (p. 40). Credibility is safeguarded by utilizing prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy materials, and member checks. For this project, I observed in the three targeted classrooms for a minimum of one hour each week, during the initial phase of the study, and I lead all of the teacher staff

development and team meetings that occurred each month. My full time role as a reading coach and my close involvement with all of the classrooms on campus outside the realm of this study helped to ensure that teachers and students adjusted to my presence and that it was less obtrusive over time.

Persistent observation provided in-depth information and afforded me with the opportunity to refine what I attended to during observations and what was irrelevant. Remaining persistent with classroom observations provided me with the opportunity to follow student and teacher behaviors long enough to tease out significant events. For example, during team meetings, I noticed that teachers who met with sub-groups on their own time referred to certain literacy practices in slightly different ways due to collegial conversations that were occurring elsewhere. I was able to then follow up with classroom observations as well as plan future observations in order to carefully watch for evidence that practices had been altered in meaningful and consistent ways. Prolonged engagement provided me with the time to explore various interpretations of these events.

Triangulation of methods and sources (field notes, videotapes, audiotapes, artifacts, interviews, current literature, member checking) allowed me to garner information about the various working relationships, philosophies, and interactional styles among team members from a variety of perspectives. Utilizing different sources of data and different methods for gathering that data led to a more credible study. Using triangulation enabled me to ensure each piece of information within the study could be expanded by at least one other source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Peer debriefing also provided me with a much needed outside perspective on this research project. My peer debriefer was able to provide feedback as well as refine and

redirect my inquiry process. Lynn Masterson served as my peer debriefer throughout this project.

Member checks were crucial to the credibility of this study. It was extremely important for teachers to have opportunities to review and give input into the interpretations and analysis of the events depicted in this study because of its focus on the way teachers co-constructed their understandings of literacy in light of their personal beliefs as well as professional development opportunities and state mandates. These opportunities for member checks occurred both with the first grade teachers as a group as well as with the three focus teachers. We reviewed video clips, transcription, and notes. Teachers were able to provide input with regard to how I interpreted the events and conversations, in addition to how I formed categories and working hypotheses. I was able to ensure the teachers recognized the events in terms of the constructions and categories I used to represent them. Teacher feedback held an important place in the analysis of these events and was represented.

Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba, 1985, transferability in a study is judged by the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied in other contexts or to other respondents. Rather than attempting to prove that isolated variables of the focus study are equivalent to other contexts, constructivist researchers safeguard their research by providing thick, detailed descriptions of the people, events, and locations of the context being studied. The use of thick descriptions will allow readers to make judgments regarding the transferability of this study and its findings to other settings. Purposive

sampling is a critical part of ensuring transferability because it is governed by emerging insights as well as what is relevant to the study, and demands both examples of a range of typical and divergent data. One of the ways that purposive sampling was used was to highlight the various ways the notion of *fluency* was portrayed in classroom instruction and student practices. Because part of the state mandated reading initiative measured student reading success based on this indicator, and a tremendous amount of the group time was spent discussing and learning about this element, it was important to gather data that showed how fluency practices were enacted across classrooms.

Dependability

Researchers must establish dependability in their studies by leaving their readers with enough evidence that if the study were replicated with similar or the same participants, in the same or similar context, the findings of the study would be repeated. In order for this study to be checked for dependability, I created an “audit trail” in which I provided documentation and running accounts of discoveries and observations that occurred throughout the course of the study. This project was safeguarded for dependability by triangulation of methods (described in a previous section), an audit trail, and a natural history of methodology.

The audit trail consisted of raw data (interview transcripts, observation transcripts, field notes, documents), data reduction and analysis products (notes from analysis), data reconstruction and synthesis products (data analysis sheets, concept maps), and process notes (journal).

Confirmability

Confirmability is defined by the degree to which the findings of a study are “the product and focus of its inquiry and not the biases of the researcher” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The data should be able to be tracked by the reader to its sources and logically reassembled in order to arrive at the same findings. This project will safeguard confirmability by utilizing an audit trail, triangulation, peer debriefing, and case reporting in order to provide examples of raw data to illustrate conclusions. The audit trail, triangulation of methods, and peer debriefing (described above), increases confirmability by providing the reader with access to the data in order to draw their own conclusions regarding the accuracy of the representation of the findings.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity occurred as I noted my biases, assumptions, and beliefs during the process of this research project. This was of particular importance because of my job as reading coach on the campus, and my previous experiences with the classroom teachers. “It is particularly important for researchers to acknowledge and describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand their positions, and then bracket or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Because I entered my job as a reading coach with strong presuppositions of effective ways of teaching children to read and write, I had to guard against my biases in the context of group meetings and interviews. I was also in a position of relative power in regard to classroom teachers because I reported to the state, the county, campus administrators, and was in graduate school. I knew the teachers had

the tendency to want to please me by mirroring my own opinions and teaching practices in my presence, so I had to work to create a climate where teachers felt comfortable being honest about classroom practices.

ETHICS

Information gathered for this research project was shared with the three focus teachers (Mrs. Rohl, Mrs. Sein, and Mrs. Foi), as well as with the first grade team of 10 teachers for the purposes of member checking and triangulation of data. The information from this study has also been shared with the members of my doctoral committee, my peer debriefer, and the Canyon Primary campus administration. In the future, this data will be used as part of professional meetings and in publications. The data will be subjected to further analysis by me in the future. Inconveniences of the study affected the three targeted teachers, who met with me either before or after school in order to discuss the study and review data. The only risk to participants was the possible loss of their confidentiality, and I have taken every precaution possible to protect their identities by providing pseudonyms and changing identifying features to the extent feasible.

During the course of the study, raw data was kept in my locked office at school and in my home. The members of the first grade team, my campus administration, my doctoral committee, my peer debriefer, and I were the only ones who had access to the raw data. The first grade team's access was limited to member checking and triangulation for the segments specifically involved with all members of the team. Mrs. Rohl, Mrs. Sein, and Mrs. Foi had full access to raw data related to both the team meetings as well as the observations of literacy instruction in their classrooms. Upon completion of the study,

all tapes and notes will remain in my possession, in a locked cabinet, to be used by me for research only. Any future uses of this data will ensure the subjects' confidentiality.

Chapter 4: Overview of the State Reading Initiative

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the State Reading Initiative as outlined by the State Department of Education, in addition to an overview of the work I conducted with teachers based on my own literacy beliefs. Although this chapter does not necessarily represent findings of the study, the information found here serves as important background for the findings that follow. First, I will review the goals of the state reading initiative and define the accompanying literacy modules. The coaching philosophy as defined by the state department of education, along with the three-tiered coaching approach will be detailed next. The third focus of the chapter will be the description of the coaching modules that drove the monthly professional development I led. As the campus literacy coach, I attended monthly reading coach professional development during which I received the exact training on the modules that I was expected to turn around to the classroom teachers on my campus with complete fidelity. The fourth section of this chapter will describe the initiatives I introduced as part of my own background knowledge in literacy education – a personal decision meant to update reading and writing practices that most teachers were not familiar with, but were common in other places throughout the country. In the final section, I will describe my methods for gaining entry into teachers’ classrooms for the purpose of building trusting relationships that would allow me to coach the teachers on state reading initiative modules as well as work with them to support other literacy initiatives, including their own goals.

STATE READING INITIATIVE: GOALS AND CONTENT

The state department website and the reading initiative training notebooks specify the two major goals of the statewide reading initiative: (1) to achieve “100% literacy among public school students,” and (b) to educate teachers so that they may “teach reading in proven and effective ways.” As discussed in chapter 1, “100% literacy” was not explicitly defined by the state department of education’s website on the reading initiative pages, but the basic components of the teacher curriculum were laid out according to the components from the National Reading Panel Report in the beginning pages of the reading initiative manual, and designed to be disseminated through a combination of staff development and coaching.

Table 3 displays the broad categories of training all kindergarten through third grade teachers in the state were required to receive. Prior to the onset of staff development at the campus level, the state required every elementary school to attend one of the week-long reading academies during the summer, and then spend the year following the summer training revisiting and learning more about these topics in a variety of ways through staff development and hands-on experiences with students. Schools were required to ensure 85% of their certified teaching staff attended each day of the reading academy and follow up training, regardless of their content area assignment.

Table 3: State Reading Initiative Training Modules

- I. Utilizing Assessment Data
 - a. The Goal of Reading Instruction: Skillful Readers
 - b. Factors that Influence Reading Comprehension
 - c. Progress Monitoring
 - d. Let's Talk About DIBELS
 - II. Phonemic Awareness
 - III. Phonics
 - IV. Fluency
 - V. Vocabulary
 - VI. Comprehension Instruction
 - VII. Effective Intervention
-

Each of the sections beginning with “Phonemic Awareness” was broken down into subcategories, detailing where each module fit into the definition of reading as constructed by the state department of education, a description of what highly skilled instruction in that particular module looked like, as well as the demonstration lessons seen during the academy. Each subcategory also included a continuum of skills organized from most simple to most complex, and additional demonstration lessons including scripts and student materials in order to provide further practice for teachers

and students. Each of the sections also included practice lessons and support documents such as phonics progressions and questions to facilitate comprehension lessons with children.

In terms of citing research within the reading initiative's 104 page guide, Michael Pressley's name appeared on several pages, giving credit to him for motivational quotes that appeared sprinkled throughout, but no citations for the quotes were available. There were no other references listed, and no indication of where the lessons, components, strategies, or scaffolded progressions were developed. No credit was given to the state board of education. The reading initiative guide, then, was presented as if there were no identifiable authors, other than vague references to "research."

THE STATE READING INITIATIVE: COACHING JOB DESCRIPTION

The state department of education outlined nine job responsibilities for every campus literacy coach. The first tenet was to "become an expert in Scientifically-Based Researched Reading programs and instruction." The state department of education reading initiative supervisor expected each campus coach to attend the monthly training with one teacher from his or her home campus, and then return to their respective campuses to present the same training to the rest of the staff. The majority of the coaches in my cohort moved straight from classroom positions into their coaching roles, with no special background in reading or literacy. Each campus reading coach was expected to be an "expert," as outlined in the state reading initiative literature, after attending the eight-hour, one day training and in turn, should be prepared to support teachers and students on campus through the coaching cycle.

The second requirement was for each coach to spend 50% of his or her time coaching teachers, with the remainder of the time spent working with “struggling readers,” or preparing to provide staff development based on the modules from the monthly literacy trainings. Reading coaches were not allowed to engage in any instruction involving writing, unless children were writing letter sounds as part of a decoding lesson or writing sentences containing words with those same targeted sounds. This tenet was reinforced during each state level coaches training as well as during the week-long training the teachers and I attended during the summer of 2006.

The third responsibility involved data monitoring and analysis. As reading coaches, we were responsible for monitoring all campus data derived from DIBELS progress monitoring, as well as the official DIBELS testing that occurred three times a year. Reading coaches were also responsible for planning data meetings so that teachers and campus administrators could keep an eye on the extent to which children were progressing towards the end-of-year DIBELS goals. During these grade level meetings, teachers and coaches analyzed the data from the DIBELS assessments and progress monitoring materials and discussed how instruction might be adjusted for the purpose of raising DIBELS scores across the campus.

Coaches were also responsible for organizing interventions for struggling students and struggling teachers. Because of my many job responsibilities on campus, I felt that it was important to serve needy students on a short-term basis, working side-by-side with the teacher with respect to planning the intervention. My goal was for the teacher to maintain a sense of responsibility for the child’s reading growth, without feeling as if the responsibility for instruction no longer remained with the teacher because I was serving

the student. Because our campus boasted a population of approximately five hundred children, many teachers needed support with their developmentally young students, which heightened the pressure to work with as many people as possible.

The fifth level of responsibility included facilitating professional development on each campus. During coaching training each month, the state level reading coach would provide each of the campus level coaches with a script and presenter's notes that would assist us with turning around the state training on our campuses to fidelity. The state initiative discouraged improvising or adapting the training to better suit the needs of the campus because the state wanted to ensure all schools were receiving the same experience. The state level reading coach responsible for training my cohort was quite flexible and understood the need for us to think through the needs of our own campuses before turning the training around, but she also reminded us that when state level administrators conducted campus visits, we needed to keep these "deviations" to a minimum. This was an area with which I struggled a great deal. I found many of the principles behind the modules were based on useful and effective strategies, but I did not always agree with the rigid manner that teachers were asked to work with children. I often found myself changing the parameters of the trainings to fit my own style of teaching to a greater extent. I felt that I would be more effective as a coach staying true to my beliefs while also conveying the state's intent. I was quite open with teachers where the state stood and where I was deviating.

The sixth requirement of coaches was that we maintained a schedule that was sent in each week to the state department reading coach, and then forwarded to the state department of education. This weekly schedule was also sent to campus administrators

for their approval. One of the scheduling procedures that I found particularly valuable was the designation of “payback time.” Because classroom teachers would volunteer to attend the monthly coaches’ trainings, which then committed them to participate in the entire coaching cycle, the reading coaches were allowed to build in time to cover lunch or recess duty, or pick the teacher’s students up from P.E., Art, or Music, in order to compensate the teachers for their willingness to give up their planning periods, meet during lunch, or after school to reflect on the module lessons or to plan or co-present with their campus coach.

The next component of the coaching responsibilities proved easier to comply with dependent upon who I was working with. “Exhibit winsome human relations” was listed in the description of the reading coach job in multiple places throughout the reading initiative training manual. During the first year of Canyon Primary’s participation in the state reading initiative, I found this to be a much easier task than during the second year. During the first year of the reading initiative, people were excited about having time away from their classrooms. They enjoyed viewing modeled lessons, and experimenting with new strategies. The campus, as a whole, had also bonded during the summer training. The teachers and administrators realized I had many of the same concerns as they did over the content of the modules and the strategies being proposed for working with young children. Although most members of the first grade team were still eager and willing to work with me during the second year, other members of the team proved more of a struggle. These teachers had been reluctant the first year, but appeared to play the game because they participated in the half-day trainings while a substitute teacher covered their classes. However, during the second year when the funding for substitutes

was gone, reluctant teachers were less willing to give up their planning time or time after school to work on the modules, and became more vocal over my time with people who were willing.

The eighth goal of the coaching position was to “achieve 100% literacy.” The implication is that we would produce children who could “DIBEL” well and that would translate to 100% literacy for students. At Canyon Primary, however, the teachers defined “100% literacy” differently than the state department of education. For the teachers at Canyon Primary, “100% literacy” meant that children were reading and writing in the absence of being asked to do so by their teachers. Teachers were using a combination of reading and writing workshop, guided reading, and their own strategies to move children into trade books as soon as they were able to begin reading them. And teachers understood the importance of having children write often and publish books for a real audience. The campus principal sought permission from the assistant superintendent for the campus to follow the set of practices associated with reading and writing workshop, and he agreed. The assistant superintendent felt the reading and writing workshop model was better-suited for our young students than the state reading initiative practices. I continued to support both the aims of the reading initiative as well as reading and writing workshop, but felt much better knowing we had the support of at least one member of central office.

The last goal in the reading coaches’ job description was to “be the hardest working individual in the building.” I will admit that the coaches’ job was a complicated balancing act and that I most certainly was busy planning, meeting with people, engaging in the coaching cycle, and conducting professional development, but it was difficult to

look at the teachers who surrounded me, spending their days teaching five, six, and seven year olds, and delude myself into thinking I was the hardest working person in the building. Perhaps I was one of the most public figures in the building, but my days as a reading coach paled in comparison to teachers who received one thirty-five minute break during the day.

THREE-TIERED COACHING CYCLE

When examining the literature on coaching provided by the state department of education, for the purpose of training reading coaches, what became evident was the lack of research cited. As with the teacher modules, few places existed where studies or authors were mentioned, and where references were included, most were incomplete. One of the few references that was present accompanied a chart adapted from a study conducted by Joyce and Showers (2002), which examined the relationship of student achievement to staff development. The chart illustrated three levels of understanding according to the type of staff development model. The chart displayed the number of people who understood content presented during staff development, the percentage of people who were able to demonstrate the practice, and the percentage of people who were able to imbed those skills within practice. Joyce and Showers then grouped staff development models into four categories: theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching. The coaching model, which incorporated all the components from the other categories (including feedback and reflection from a knowledgeable other), purportedly resulted in 95% of the participants demonstrating an understanding of the content.

Building on a model of coaching based on Joyce & Shower's work, the following coaching cycle was created to provide a framework for working with teachers that was explicit enough to provide step-by-step assistance, but with enough flexibility to accommodate a wide variety of coaching situations. Although the cycles could be used in any order, the intent was to start with data that indicated there was a need, with a decrease in the amount of support provided over time.

Phase I

The first phase of the cycle involved a heavy level of support provided by each coach, as the teacher and coach worked together to begin establishing a new literacy practice. The coach made arrangements to meet with the teacher at the teacher's convenience, guiding the planning of the specified lesson. During this planning time, the student outcome of the lesson was identified and together the coach and teacher determined what they would "look for" as evidence that children were either grasping the new strategies or required additional support. The coach guided the teacher through each step of the lesson, focusing back on the purposes of the lesson as indicated by student data, and reinforcing the desired student outcomes. The coach then modeled the lesson for the teacher, as the teacher collected data about the frequency of desired literacy behaviors as exhibited by the students and opportunities for strategy use as determined by the targeted outcomes for the lesson. The two would then separate to provide an opportunity for both teacher and coach to reflect on the lesson with regard to student success, and at another pre-determined time, would reconvene to debrief and plan the next steps for the next stage of the coaching cycle.

Phase II

The second phase of the coaching cycle began with the planning of a new, but similar, lesson. The same outcome was used to determine approximations toward student success, but during the planning phase, the teacher and coach collaboratively constructed the lesson. As they planned the lesson together, they drew upon their observations of students during lesson one, carefully taking into account areas where students needed more practice or could have advanced more quickly. Teacher and coach also decided together who would teach which sections of the planned lesson. The teacher and coach traded turns recording observations primarily in the form of quantitative data. This data might include the number of times students had opportunities to participate, the number of times the teacher needed to step in and support the student. Before the teacher and coach debriefed about the extent to which the lesson was successful, both went their separate ways to expand notes based on their observations. The time away allowed both participants to choose their words carefully and narrow down their next steps to the one or two most salient aspects. The teacher and coach shared these points at a later date, and used their shared observations to shape the third lesson of the cycle.

Phase III

The third phase of the coaching cycle followed the same basic format except that the classroom teacher was now leading the planning session for the third and final lesson of this coaching cycle. Based on the reflection notes from teacher and coach, the teacher determined the specifics of the lesson, including what the targeted student outcomes should be comprised of, as well as anticipating which portions of the lesson might be

difficult for students and how the teacher would provide the right level of support without smothering student initiative. The coach was now responsible for taking data based on the defined outcomes. After the teacher and coach separated in order to reflect upon the lesson, they would come back together to debrief.

The three cycle coaching continuum was not meant to be followed in a lock-step manner. Initially, the coaching cycle was followed as described above because the coaches were new to the coaching cycle and followed the process verbatim in order to become familiar with the components. But once coaching became more driven by campus, teacher, and student needs, the cycle was used in a more flexible manner. There were times when I would enter the cycle in the least supportive realm because I was there to help a teacher reflect on practices they were comfortable with; the teacher simply wanted a second pair of eyes to see what she could not as her attention was taken up with teaching a small group of children. Other times I would enter the cycle in the least support level and discover that the teacher needed support in basic classroom management of literacy materials. In that case I would drop down to the most supportive level, serving as a heavy-handed guide through the planning process as well as during the initial teaching phases.

I found the three-tiered coaching cycle to be extremely effective when I worked with teachers who felt they could commit to that level of coaching. I learned a tremendous amount about the modules and garnered powerful insight regarding the teaching strategies teachers already had under control. The teachers I coached informed my work with young children as much as they informed my work with adults, and every

time I had the opportunity to work closely with someone under this structure, the experience was very rewarding.

Coaching Model Complications

The downside to the coaching model espoused by the state reading initiative, however, was that many people felt overwhelmed by the time needed to complete the coaching cycle. Although the time commitment was fairly significant, I made arrangements to ensure the teachers were “paid back” the time spent with me. Those who did not understand the process were wary that I would evaluate them or find something innately “wrong” with their teaching – or worse yet, that I would report them to the principal or assistant principal. I underestimated the importance of ensuring the teachers understood the steps of the coaching cycle. I simply thought they were steps that I needed to “get right,” but in reality, the teachers needed to understand how the coaching cycle worked, including what was and was not the purpose.

There was one incident in particular that that became a *critical incident* illustrating the need for transparency of procedures with regard to the coaching cycle. I had been asked by my state level reading coach to make appointments with classroom in order to observe the various ways people were working with struggling readers in the hopes of finding some opportunities for coaching. I made an appointment to visit Mrs. Yxel’s room, one of the first grade teachers who was working closely with a student in one-on-one tutoring. She was working with a first grade student who was struggling to learn how to read. Because Mrs. Yxel was new to teaching, I thought this side-by-side coaching opportunity would be the perfect chance for me to show her a few strategies and

to help her think more carefully about the purpose of her lesson. Although I explained the purpose of my visit was to problem-solve with her regarding additional strategies for working with struggling readers as well as looking for evidence of strategies students had under control, Mrs. Yxel “heard” that I was coming in to evaluate her. No matter how often or how many ways I explained to teachers that I did not evaluate them, the fear persisted that I really did.

As part of the scaffolding I provided during the lesson, I signaled to Mrs. Yxel that I wanted to try and clear up a confusion the student was experiencing to see if I could make the difficult task a bit easier. At the conclusion of the lesson Mrs. Yxel and I spoke for a few minutes about the child, and I never sensed anything problematic. Several hours later, the principal and assistant principal arrived at my office door stating Mrs. Yxel was very upset that I had interrupted her observation and took over her evaluation lesson, stating she never had the chance to finish teaching. She also told the campus administrators that I was never to speak to her about the issue. A powerful lesson learned regarding the importance of making the coaching cycle transparent to all involved.

Monthly Literacy Modules

The literacy modules developed by the state reading department of education were based upon the categories of literacy skills defined by the National Reading Panel Report as fundamental for early reading success. The modules, referred to as “Turn-Around-Trainings,” were designed so that coaches at the campus level would experience the exact training they would “turn around” on their own campuses the following month. The campus reading coaches were encouraged to follow the presenter’s notes verbatim,

as well as use all the materials provided such as handouts put out by the state department detailing the importance of the module and its impact on developing readers. The demonstration lessons, provided on DVD as an assurance of fidelity, were conducted by the state department reading supervisors and filmed on at-risk campuses around the state in an effort to show the lessons were effective with a broad range of students. As another layer of support, our state level reading coach would also model “live” lessons in a classroom at the training site. In order to “up” the level of participation among campus level reading coaches, our names were placed in a hat during the latter portion of the training so that someone from the group would have to demonstrate the same lesson modeled by the state coach. This format was utilized on our individual campuses, as well, for the Turn-Around-Trainings.

The Turn-Around-Trainings were comprised of five modules. The first four are detailed in Table 4 (below). The modules examined explicit vocabulary instruction, comprehension strategies and a framework for embedding those strategies in whole group and small group interactions. The roles of phonemic awareness and phonics were also explored with regard to their prominent role in reading instruction as defined by the state board of education, based on the National Reading Panel Report (2000).

Table 4: Reading Initiative Modules

Module	Summary
Tier II Vocabulary	This module was designed to establish routines that promoted the student use of targeted words and raised consciousness at the classroom and school level through the explicit instruction of high utility words not typically used in the spoken vocabulary of young children.
Reading Comprehension Part I	The goal of Part I of the reading comprehension module was to raise teacher-self awareness of comprehension strategies before moving on to teach these strategies to children.
Reading Comprehension Part II	Part II of the comprehension module continued the focus on comprehension, but moved away from emphasizing teacher metacognition, examining instead, what children needed to do during reading.
Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Instruction	The fourth module covered phonemic awareness and phonics instruction and targeted explicit phonics instruction taught in isolation, and touted phonics instruction as the beginning ground for teaching children to read.

The Reading Intervention Module was fifth in the progression because it wrapped three of the first four modules into a single bundle in order to assist students who were not making adequate progress according to DIBELS progress monitoring and benchmark

testing. The structure was loosely based on guided reading groups. Teachers were first asked to provide students with an opportunity to warm up on familiar text to encourage fluency and automaticity of sight word recognition. Targeted words were then pulled out and worked with in isolation. During this period of time the phonics progression from the previous lesson module was utilized to determine which words to focus on in isolation. Then students were guided through the reading of a new text. During this time teachers would encourage students to decode unfamiliar words as well as think about the comprehension cue cards designed to support student thinking before, during, and after reading.

During the 2007-2008 school year, the campus reading coaches were asked to continue working through the same modules that were introduced during the first year of the state reading initiative. The reading coach trainings I attended with the other coaches delved more deeply into these same topics. Many of the other campuses found ways to continue to pay for substitute funding so that their trainings would at a minimum last half a day. With the help of my state-level reading coach, I found ways to introduce the modules during the thirty-five minute meetings, and then continued working with the modules by following up with modeled lessons in people's classrooms, or engaging in the full coaching cycle, with willing teachers.

State Reading Initiative Coaching Internship

The final training of the 2007-2008 school year was the mandatory reading coach state internship that all reading coaches were required to complete. As with many other aspects of the state reading initiative, this training had been paired down from two weeks

to one. The focus of the internship was two-fold: examine the interpersonal skills required for successful coaching and delve more deeply into the coaching cycle. The six areas of focus included facilitating conversations, planning, observing, reflecting, providing feedback, and modeling. In a sense, this culminating activity felt like group therapy because it provided the campus level coaches a safe environment in which to talk about the difficult place of not being a teacher any longer and not part of the administration team either. Many of us wished this training had taken place much earlier because it was not “just” about the modules we were required to turn around. It was about the people factor.

Personal Coaching Influences

In some ways, the campus reading coaches who came to their positions straight from the classroom were at an advantage in their ability to deliver the Turn-Around-Training modules to fidelity. I possessed beliefs based on my own literacy work, training, and experiences, and felt these strategies needed to be shared with the teachers at Canyon Primary. I was alarmed by the fact that the teachers had not experienced the kinds of literacy trainings common elsewhere. Reading and Writing Workshop seemed natural places to begin after listening to the teachers complain about trying to teach children to read from a single basal story assigned each week by the county.

I also introduced the concept of rubrics. Only the two teachers from Murphy County were familiar with rubrics, and their experiences were limited to rubrics teachers used to grade student assessments. The teachers at Canyon Primary were accustomed to assigning grades for completed products, but had not considered teaching children the

criteria they were looking for by developing rubrics with children. I explained to the teachers that when expectations and thinking were made explicit for children, then children were much more likely to rise to the occasion because they understand the rules of the “game.” The more explicit we were, the more children would respond. The use of rubrics offered great opportunities to teach children to self-regulate their reading and writing strategies as well as their behavior.

The rubric strand of staff development that I introduced to the teachers became the campus goal for their Professional Development Plan (the document used in Scott County for campus administrators to evaluate all teachers). The principal and assistant principal hoped the singular focus for the campus would help to unite the faculty further. This was the first time teachers on a campus had a common goal for their Professional Development Plans (PDPs) in Scott County. Prior to the 2007-2008 school year, teachers wrote their own goals. In some ways having a common goal was more reassuring for teachers. They would not have to search for training on their own and teachers could share their work with one another, creating less of a drain on their time and energy. On the other hand, having a campus wide goal meant that people who were not interested in learning about rubrics were now committed for a year, and time during faculty meetings would be spent in training, adding another mandate to the teachers’ proverbial plates.

METHODS FOR GAINING ENTRY INTO CLASSROOMS

I discovered in my previous job working with teachers that word of mouth was a fast and efficient way to “drum up business.” When I began my work as a reading coach at Canyon Primary, I spent several weeks on campus before I attended the first Turn-

Around-Training for reaching coaches, so I had to devise a way for people to begin allowing me into their classrooms. As a stranger from out of state, the teachers had limited exposure to me outside of the week-long summer reading academy we attended as a group. I found myself drawn to the first grade teachers who, during the summer reading academy, most vocally expressed their concerns about teaching children to read using the basal system supported by the county.

I began with Mrs. Roma, spending two weeks in her classroom during the literacy block, teaching her how to place young readers in texts where students would have opportunities to engage with text where they could read fluently with relative ease. We spent time teaching children the beginning strategies for self-monitoring, how to confirm text placement, as well as which mini-lessons were most effective for teaching children to self-sustain their own reading and problem-solve with minimal support. Mrs. Roma's enthusiasm for the quick growth she observed from her students began to spread to other teachers. Soon I had people stopping me in the hallway, asking when they could begin reading workshop.

Another method for gaining classroom entry was to volunteer to model lessons for teachers emphasizing that there were no expectations that they would commit or replicate the lessons. I felt it was very important to honor their teaching preferences; as a classroom teacher I knew I could be highly ineffective if expected to implement lessons that did not fit with my style of teaching. I told the teachers that at the very least, the model lessons would either add a new level of understanding to their current practices, provide them a chance to sit back and observe their students, or confirm that their current practices were more appropriate for their group of children. The lessons I modeled were

typically mini-lessons on writing or comprehension. This was my chance to “sell” ideas I believed in before I was expected to begin providing the state reading modules. I was able to gain a sense of which teachers would be most rewarding to work with and which teachers needed to be treated with kid gloves, either because of their hesitancy or because I sensed potential barriers to accessing their classrooms.

For these model lessons, instead of approaching teachers individually, as I sometimes did when I was aware of a specific instructional need, I would place a master sign-up sheet in the teachers’ workroom with enough timeslots over the course of a week for all classroom teachers to sign up if they wished. I found that teachers would readily sign up for model lessons. Again, with minimal commitment outside of providing me with a space in their busy schedules, I would plan, model and debrief the lessons with the teachers, and follow-up with the individuals who expressed an interest in pursuing the lessons more in-depth.

My final method of gaining entry was through the use of the SmartBoard on campus. Until I arrived, the SmartBoard remained tucked away in the library closet. Once I began modeling lessons, teachers were fascinated with its use and various functions. When I arrived at Canyon Primary, technology consisted of two computers per classroom on which alphabet games were loaded. Students were not using computers for writing, only for the purpose of participating in drills on letters and sounds (most of which students already knew). Using the SmartBoard I modeled comprehension lesson and writing lessons, showing teachers how text could be scanned in so that children were able to see the beautiful pictures and words, and our thinking together could be marked on the text and images. I also demonstrated how strategies for helping children pre-plan their

writing through graphic organizers could be facilitated through the ability to sketch, write, and select planning templates embedded within the software.

Working with teachers who were eager to learn and embrace new strategies for teaching left me feeling excited and energized. Although some of the state reading modules were controversial, I provided balanced by sharing reading and writing strategies with the teachers that matched my own notions of what was appropriate for young children. The ability to help people with the kinds of reading and writing that made sense to me helped to temper the unease I felt at times over some of the tenets espoused by the state reading initiative. There were times when I had trouble imagining that my situation could be any more perfect: I was working with talented teachers who were enthusiastic and thrilled to be learning new strategies. But there were also times that were quite difficult and troubling. As the funding structure for the reading initiative was altered, and teachers began to realize that the expectations for continual learning and classroom experimentation were not going away, a level of stress and resentment not present on the campus before began to make itself evident.

A SHIFT IN TONE

As the first grade team transitioned from year one into year two, the teachers formed micro-teams in order to better “live out” their secret stories of classroom life among the team members who shared their visions. The formation of these “micro-teams” developed out of the starkly contrastive literacy goals each group held for their students, in addition to issues of power that erupted as local and state funding for the

reading initiative floundered, and difficult decisions were made by campus administration.

Chapter 5: The Nature of Collaboration and Learning in Grade Level Groups

THE TRANSITION FROM YEAR ONE TO YEAR TWO

The 2006-2007 school year marked Canyon Primary's first year of participation in the state mandated reading initiative. In accordance with the initiative guidelines, the teachers and I gathered together each month to begin learning about the state-designed reading modules (described in chapter 4) that first grade teachers were supposed to implement in their classrooms. A portion of each of the state trainings was devoted to a share session of sorts as teachers spoke of the practices in their classrooms that were already in alignment or complementary to the new focus strategies for the month. Initially the first grade teachers were quite nervous and hesitant to talk about their practices in front of one another – the school climate prior to the 2006-2007 school year fostered an aura of competitiveness and secrecy as teachers attempted to outperform one another by producing the most creative plays or designing the most innovative parade floats or planning the most exciting field trips – but hesitation soon gave way to curiosity, and curiosity paved the way for the sharing of ideas. The teachers began asking each other for deeper explanations of their instructional practices, followed by requests to visit each other's rooms during the literacy block in order to see these practices first hand.

As the first year of the state reading initiative came to a close, the teachers of Canyon Primary had grown accustomed to meeting together and examining their practices in an open forum. Initially tentative with one another, teachers were more open about exploring ideas as a team, pushing each other at times to explain their thinking or

to defend their practices. During the formal meetings, topics would arise such as common spelling lists and common reading assessments. Teachers would intimate their desires to come together on their own time to make some formalized team-level decisions on these topics. Although the teachers were committed to maintaining their own styles of teaching, people were starting to realize the importance of developing common grade-level student expectations.

This was a very exciting time for me in the role of campus reading coach, watching the first grade team's enthusiasm for learning develop and grow, as their identities expanded. The state reading initiative meetings were "not simply about the absorption of knowledge but also the means of entry into a particular social status" (Reeves and Forde, 2004, p. 95). The teachers were no longer simply people who worked and taught children under the same roof. They were now members of a group who studied their practices together. Reeves and Forde (2004) delve into this notion of a third space, where people can come together to explore understandings in a way that does not occur at any other place or time. I enjoyed the fact that the teachers were not turning to me for advice quite as much as they had, instead, learning to turn towards one another. At the same time, however, a polarization of sorts was occurring that led to a shift in team dynamics: teachers were beginning to align with specific members of the first grade team based upon whose beliefs regarding literacy instruction most closely matched their own. Beginning with a planning session that took place in July of 2007, and continuing into the start of the 2007-2008 school year, these initial steps toward forming separate groups would firm up as the result of several critical incidents.

The role of coaching and the state reading initiative's first year commitment to fund substitutes fostered this new sense of collegiality partly by affording time and space for collaboration. Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) suggest that "...coaching appears to foster the development of professional and collegial relations in schools, making school structures more amenable to improvement in many areas" (p. 232). In the case of Canyon Primary, my presence afforded people with the chance to talk about their practices, and the funding for substitute teachers from the state guaranteed sacred time to honor practitioner reflection. The feedback I received from teachers at Canyon Primary was that the process was extremely rewarding.

Mrs. Foi: Like working with you, I, you know, it was like, just this door opened for me that ...through your coaching, you showed me, number one, not to be afraid to try it. And how one child I could be conferencing with on how to break apart words, but then over here, I can also move two feet and reach a child that needs comprehension strategies.

The teachers benefited tremendously from having a "name" attached to their strategies and hearing detailed descriptions of their teaching moves. People did not have the luxury of watching themselves teach so I served as their teaching mirror; I was able to reflect back to teachers' descriptions of their teaching strategies and bring a sense of clarity to the literacy practices they engaged in with their students.

Members of the community began to notice the changes at Canyon Primary. As children transitioned to the second and third grade campus, the first grade teachers received phone calls from the second grade team at the start of the 2007-2008 school year because the second grade teachers were shocked by the level of reading proficiency the children demonstrated. Mrs. D'Eagle, one of the members of the first grade team received

the following message from a parent whose child attended Canyon Primary during the 2006-2007 school year.

Just had the pleasure of attending the 2nd grade [Reading] assembly. Most of the top 10 readers were from your classroom. You'll be proud to know #1 and #2 readers overall for both volume read and comprehension were [from your class].

Mrs. D'Eagle also received an additional e-mail from another parent who attended the same reading assembly.

The librarian said she had the most kids getting to the 25 point club in the first month than any time in school history. AND, they collectively had the highest comprehension rate in school history. 44 kids made it to the 25 point club – she usually has 10 or so. I don't want to take anything away from the 2nd grade teachers... but I can't help give a bunch of credit to [Canyon Primary] – the new reading strategies implemented last year through Lora Darden's efforts and the efforts of your wonderful teachers seemed to shine today. As a parent, I applaud you!

The letters above were such wonderful validation for the first grade teachers as well as for me. The teachers were certainly pleased with the new teaching strategies, but it was very rewarding to have other members of the community acknowledge that the emphasis on connected reading was impacting students in a way that mattered – the children were reading voraciously.

FUNDING CUTS

The second year of the state reading initiative brought many changes, however. The state funding available during the first year of the reading initiative was reduced dramatically, leaving no money to pay for staff development substitutes. Content from the state reading initiative now had to be squeezed into thirty-five minute teacher conference periods. People missed having the official time and space to discuss their

practices and were feeling rushed and hurried trying to balance their classroom responsibilities while giving up their planning times in order to attend the sessions. Stress levels began to rise with regard to the truncated sessions, and the time spent during planning periods to cover the same content seemed cheap and counterproductive. People began to ask me, in passing, if we could stop meeting as a team during planning because of the limited time. I also noticed a sharp decrease in the amount of teacher talk and quality of contributions during the meetings as compared with the first year.

Part of what made the first year “tick” was that time was built in for teachers to consider the ways in which their current classroom practices were already meeting portions of the reading initiative goals. Through discussions with peers, people were able to understand that some of their classroom routines and instructional beliefs already accommodated segments of the reading initiative strategies – perhaps in a more powerful way than the reading initiative strategies. Teachers had the time and space to negotiate the practices espoused by the reading initiative, deciding how those practices should be translated to better fit the sacred story of Canyon Primary.

However, during the second year, there was no time allotted for the teachers to negotiate the reading initiative modules as a team. People began to feel anxious because the proper time was not afforded to see the strategies modeled with children, as in the past, nor to build background knowledge as to why these strategies might be worthwhile or how they could be transformed to better meet the styles of individual teachers. I dreaded the rushed thirty-five minute sessions because as the reading coach, I felt like a salesman for the state department of education. I found many of the modules to be problematic because of their emphasis on scripted, direct instruction and I felt like the

first grade teachers needed the time to translate these modules into practices more in-line with our new campus beliefs of what was appropriate for young children. The time to interact as colleagues was no longer available to us due to the amount of content I had to cover for the reading initiative, which meant if the conversations were to continue, they would need to happen someplace else, and only for the people who felt they could meet on their own time.

The reading coach training I attended each month allotted one full day per module, which we were supposed to replicate on our own campuses. A few of the campuses made arrangements to continue half day trainings, but the decision was made by campus administration at Canyon Primary to compact the modules into teacher conferences times. Joyce and Showers (1981, p. 166), write about the importance of considering “organizational variables and the macro-sociopolitical variables that are unquestioningly important” when examining the likelihood that people will take on new practices. An official space must be made for the purpose of investing time and effort into the examination of practices and people must feel supported in their efforts to do so. During campus “walk throughs” conducted the second year of the reading initiative, none of the modules we covered during the 2007-2008 were taken up. We saw no evidence of any of the second year focus lessons, but we did see lessons that matched elements from year one as well as what people planned when they did meet in groups. Approximately half of the first grade team taught the vocabulary lessons from year one and the other half of the team embraced the writing workshop and reading workshop lessons. I found this observation to be quite significant – people would make room for practices they were

given time to study, explore, and implement, but without proper time, the likelihood that new practices would adopted was slim.

CHANGES IN GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Another critical disruption to the collaborative environment established during year one was the reorganization of the teacher staff development groups for year two. The year one groups were based on P.E., Art, and Music schedules, which were ultimately influenced by long-standing friendships on campus. Teachers who planned field trips and classroom plays together were placed on the same rotation for special classes. These groupings worked extremely well for the state reading initiative trainings because the people who attended training together were already close friends and had relationships that involved planning together on some level.

During year two, however, the groups were reorganized in an attempt to coerce some members of the first grade team into repairing damaged relationships. During the first year of my time at Canyon Primary I had been accepted to present at the International Reading Association Conference in Toronto. The campus principal wanted teachers to accompany me on the trip. In the name of making decisions quickly to allow people to have time to obtain passports, the principal decided against using an application process, and decided to simply name the members of the travel team based on their willingness to work with me as a coach and to embrace the reading initiative modules. Teachers who ordinarily would not have been interested in attending due to family or other personal obligations felt slighted because they were not given an opportunity to apply to attend the IRA Conference. Accusations of favoritism began to ring across the

campus. People who attended the conference were the people who worked with me fairly closely, so some of the other teachers began to feel that the people invited to attend were simply invited because they were my friends. This conference issue turned out to be a critical event in the collaborative workings of the faculty, and will be revisited later.

In planning for the second year of the reading initiative, the principal decided to inter-mingle the members of the first grade team so that each of the new teams would be comprised of a combination of people who attended the IRA Conference and people who did not. Because relations were quite strained among the members of the groups, the thirty-five minutes we had together twice a month became even more fraught with tension. Teachers began to seek out their own groups for planning as a result. They learned to value working together during the first year, but realized the significance of working with others whose beliefs aligned with their own. During year two, the stress of the forced groups helped the teachers to see how much group productivity was tied to working with others who were like-minded. The formation of alternative groups was a logical outcome. However, those on the outside viewed the alternative groups with a certain degree of suspicion. According to Achinstein (2002), this phenomenon of taking sides in order to preserve sacred beliefs is not uncommon in communities that change practices in the name of collaboration.

Micro-Teams

The team split into three basic groups: Group Sein, Group Roma, and teachers who remained on the periphery of Groups Sein and Roma. The group of teachers who remained on the periphery of the first two groups were either loosely associated with

members of Group Roma or Group Sein, or simply remained on their own. Mrs. Rohl, one of the focus teachers of this study, remained on the periphery of both groups.

Group Sein

The first group, Group Sein, was comprised of three teachers who originally held positions in the neighboring county school system of Murphy County, and one teacher who spent ten of her last thirteen years at Canyon Primary as a paraprofessional before becoming a classroom teacher. Group Sein was also comprised of the two teachers who did not give permission to participate in the study. Group Sein's collaborative efforts focused on four main areas: vocabulary development, aural comprehension, running record analysis, and spelling.

The first area of focus was the implementation of vocabulary lessons that originated from one of the state reading initiative modules during the first year of the reading initiative. These lessons were designed to be oral in nature, but Group Sein modified them to include a written component. Students would learn four words each week that were linked to a book read aloud in class. Students would learn to use the words by first learning the definition for each word and then learning to use the words in appropriate sentences. Students worked in partners to generate sample sentences together. Mrs. Sein and the other members of the group added the expectation that students would write the definitions and sentences during the lessons over the course of several days, and would then take a test at the end of each week.

The next focus of Group Sein was the examination of each child's ability to comprehend stories, taking out the factor of each child's reading level by supporting the

reading through the use of a text read aloud to the class. Using the same book that was used for the vocabulary lesson, students would have multiple opportunities to listen to the book during the week and would also engage in discussions of the book. On Friday, when the vocabulary words were tested, students would also answer questions about the designated book on the same assessment. The members of Group Sein agreed to read the test to the children so that students would simply need to select the correct responses or write down the correct definitions and words. Eventually students did begin to read their own tests, as the reading level of the class as a whole progressed throughout the year.

The third area of focus was using running records as a tool for confirming students were making adequate reading progress throughout the year. Several of the members of Group Sein established reading progress notebooks in which running records for each child would be kept in order to monitor whether or not students were “hitting” certain benchmark targets for particular times of the year, which meant that students needed to read at or above a certain Fountas and Pinnell level, according to their system of leveling Guided Reading texts (1996). Grades were assigned based on running record outcomes, so that students who were unable to read the minimum level or higher for that particular point in the year would receive a grade reflecting below level reading. The assessment notebooks that were established on the team were eventually required campus-wide.

The fourth area of concentration of the group was the development of a common spelling progression, however, as the year progressed, the members of Group Sein abandoned this effort due to individual classroom needs and the variance of spelling development in students.

Group Roma

The second group, referred to as Group Roma, was made up of the first grade teachers who attended IRA, in addition to another first grade teacher, Mrs. Rouge. Mrs. Rouge developed an interest in joining the group after working with some of the members during the small group reading initiative training sessions during the start of the 2007-2008 school year. Group Roma had three main goals: to study reading and writing workshop, to support one another in the completion of weekly lesson plans, and provide moral support for one another because of the rapidly declining climate among the first grade teachers on campus.

The main focus of this group was further developing their understanding of reading and writing workshop, as well as crafting solid mini-lessons to drive the direction of their students' work and the focus of teacher-student conferences. For this purpose the teachers in the group drew upon the structures of reading and writing workshop as portrayed by Lucy Calkins (2001), Brad Buhrow and Anne Garcia (2006), and Jim Guszak (1992). The teachers used the elementary language arts standards from the state as the basis of their mini-lessons and drew upon these resources as well as their own ideas to craft lessons together.

Another common goal of Group Roma was working as a team to complete weekly lessons plans that were required to be turned into the campus administrators each week. Each one of the members of the team was responsible for bringing big ideas to the planning sessions for their assigned content area, but the group would work together to create the plans. During this time the members of the group would debrief lessons they

tried earlier and tweak their plans for the upcoming week based on how well students met the desired outcomes.

The final purpose of the group, which developed as the 2007-2008 school year progressed was to provide moral support for one another. So much scrutiny was directed toward the members of the team who attended IRA and who worked closely with me, that we found our encounters with some members of the faculty emotionally draining. All of the members of Group Roma were the recipients of this unwelcome attention in some form or fashion, so many of the planning sessions were spent not only on curriculum and instruction, but also helping the members of the group to deal with the negative attention from other members of the first grade team.

Purposively Separate

Members of Group Roma felt the practices of Group Sein were too rigid and far too driven by testing and assessment. Members of Group Sein felt too much talk was allowed in the classrooms of Group Roma and that the classrooms ran without structure, as children wandering freely about the room. The issue of status and the right to collaborate freely with others under particular definitions of particular kinds of literacy became a way for the teachers to stake claims, establishing their identities as certain kinds of teachers: assessors, creators, innovators. Although the amount of conflict that existed between the groups was a surprising by-product of collaboration, the overall structure created during the first and second years of the reading initiative made a permanent place for collaboration to exist. Little (1982) references this space that is made for what eventually becomes an expectation – that teachers no longer operate in isolation

once collaboration is introduced. “Situational norms supporting professional development are built and sustained over time by the words and deeds of the staff... Thus, the status of an actor, both ascribed (e.g., position) and achieved (reputation as a master teacher) tends to govern the rights of the actor to initiate and participate in collegial experimentation” (p. 337). However, regardless of the extent to which collaboration is embraced and becomes a normal part of the operative procedures, collaboration is still fraught with conflict. Achinstein’s work on conflict in communities of collaboration reveals that these tensions are an “essential dimension of a functioning teacher community” (2002, p. 422). These feelings of conflict and polarization were reiterated as members of the first grade team reflected upon year two of the reading initiative.

Mrs. Darden: And, and the kicker is - to me it's, it's so natural that we've kind of gravitated into those two groups. But, but the two groups have got to admit that it's okay that there are two groups! That we are pleased and genuinely happy to be working with who we're working with.

Mrs. Roma: But that's not happening.

Mrs. Darden: And you're right, that's not happening.

Mrs. Roma: And I'm not sure it ever will because I don't think leadership has, um, encouraged it to happen. And I think that's part of the problem. Leadership has, um, kind of listened to some people. I don't know - but

Mrs. Foi: Oh, definitely!

Mrs. Roma: And so, you know, there's a definite tension still in the school, I think. Do you feel it on that hall?

Mrs. Rouge: Yeah. A lot of people come by and talk to me because they think I don't have an opinion. And that I'm not going to argue with them. And, and that they can say pretty much anything. And so I hear from a lot of different, a lot of different [people.]

Members of both planning groups found ways to discredit the other group’s practices, openly differentiating their respective group’s identity from the other. Sometimes these tensions manifested themselves in very public ways on the campus with comments openly made by some of the members of the first grade team during faculty

meetings. Other times the differences between the groups were more veiled through discussions that were less overt, but the tensions were obvious across the campus. Teachers from both groups would confide in me from time to time, venting their frustrations toward the other group's notions of literacy. The following is a quote from Mrs. Shue, a member of Group Sein.

Mrs. Shue: I like how - In some ways I don't like how, how open it is, with teachers having options to do kind of whatever they want in their classrooms. But then I like it, too, because I'm able to do it. And I think I'm making the right choices...

The divide over the differing philosophies was wide and hard to ignore. Both groups were so positively against what the other group espoused, and as the campus reading coach, I felt an enormous sense of responsibility to support both aims and celebrate the accomplishments of both groups in an attempt to lower the animosity across the grade level.

ALTERING THE STRUCTURE OF TURN-AROUND-TRAININGS

In an attempt to relieve some of the pressure associated with the state reading initiative, the principal soon requested that the reading initiative meetings only occur when truly pressing issues arose and asked that I work with teachers individually through the coaching cycle instead of in the small groups. At approximately the same time, the teachers' union for the state announced that teachers could not be forced to give up their planning times for official meetings, which solidified the principal's decision to stop the reading initiative meetings during planning. The macro-political influences referenced above in Joyce and Showers' work (1981), in addition to decisions made by the campus

principal, were wreaking havoc with the new story teachers were attempting to write of their classroom lives at Canyon Primary. Without the adequate time and space to work together that was financed only during the first year of the training, teachers had to find other alternatives.

It was at this point that the groups teachers formed on their own accord began to have even more significance. Although the reading initiative meetings were contrived, they did provide a safe place for teachers to come together and learn together. There was a level of comfort knowing that people did not have to think of teaching ideas alone – an area of panic for Mrs. Foi who felt overwhelmed, at times, planning for classroom instruction by herself as a second year teacher. Now that the state reading initiative trainings were all but obsolete, teachers attached even more significance to their self-selected groups. The following conversation occurred among the members of Group Roma after they started planning together each week using a workshop format for instruction.

Mrs. Foi: And the next step in that life-changing moment was starting to plan with all of y'all. Because y'all showed me that you didn't have to [figure it out by myself] - you know, in the process that y'all were going through - so that I was going through it at the same time, but y'all showed me that, that it is okay to go with your gut instinct, and that you allow them to become life-long readers and writers by learning to be that yourself. And I've just kind of taught myself along the way to enjoy reading and writing and enjoy watching them read... it's okay to just let them read... I thought it was work and after teaching this way I've finally seen that it really is something that you do in life that you enjoy.

Mrs. D'Eagle: And lifting each other up. I know, I think we've done that with each other -

Mrs. Roma: As a group -

Mrs. Foi: You know? Just helping each other with lesson plans and ideas and hugging and saying, "It's okay." And passing Kleenex. You know, just bounding off of one another.

Although planning was an important aspect of the grade level groups, providing emotional support in the midst of the turmoil-ridden environment of Canyon Primary was just as important, as Mrs. Foi so aptly described.

ISSUES OF PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

During the second year, at the campus principal's request, I instituted a school-wide professional development plan (PDP). Outside of the state reading initiative, this was the first time that teachers at Canyon Primary would have a common focal point for their appraisal goals for the school year. The chosen focus for the professional development plan was the study and development of rubrics to provide teachers with a common format for examining student work and student behavior. Another goal was for teachers to co-construct rubrics with students to help students better understand expectations for their own work and to begin to evaluate their own growth and set goals. I explained to the faculty that we would take the year to experiment with rubrics and during Monday faculty meetings, people would have opportunities to share their work with others. I also told the teachers that there were no expectations for them to begin developing rubrics until the faculty had several opportunities to see rubrics that were already being developed on campus. In this way people would not have to do the work alone, and could collaborate and support one another.

The first people I asked to share were some of the teachers who had attended IRA in addition to Mrs. Sein. Mrs. Roma, Mrs. D'Eagle, Mrs. Foi, and I spent time together during the summer fleshing out new strategies we learned when we attended IRA in May, which included developing rubrics to help children self-select text more efficiently. Mrs.

Sein was already using rubrics in her former district and was excited about the prospect of developing rubrics students could use. My decision to have these people present was meant to lower the stress level with the other teachers because these ladies were willing to share rubrics they had already completed developing, and we could place readily available tools in the hands of the other faculty members to experiment with during the school year.

When Mrs. Roma and the other teachers in her group stood up to present, Mrs. Roma mentioned that she had been meeting with me as well as with Mrs. D'Eagle and Mrs. Foi during the course of the summer to develop the rubrics she shared. The temperature in the room seemed to drop rapidly. It became obvious that our collaboration outside of the formal school day was greeted with great misgivings. In talking with people after the faculty meeting, it appeared that I was showing favoritism. From their perspective, I was supposed to be the campus reading coach, and now it had been revealed that I was meeting with teachers during the summer without the knowledge of the entire team. To make the situation appear even more subversive, the members of the team I was meeting with were also the people chosen to attend the IRA Conference. And now, during a Monday faculty meeting, these same teachers were standing up in front of the campus to share work that was the result of "secretive" meetings. "...[T]he story is suggestive of the way in which a single event can shatter an established story of school and make apparent the existence of cover stories being lived and told by school people" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996, p. 26).

The story we had worked so hard to construct the first year was quickly crumbling. Just as the teachers were coming to embrace the power of working together in

larger groups, the time necessary for their collaboration was taken away by the state and local systems due to a rapidly disappearing budget. And in my attempt to support the level of professionalism on campus by raising an awareness of the importance of attending conferences and working on action research projects to investigate new practices and present new strategies to peers, some of the teachers felt I was showing preferential treatment in my work. I struggled to balance my allegiance to the faculty members as their reading coach with my need as an educator to experiment and plan with people outside of the school day, on my own time. The following conversation illustrates the need that both teachers and coaches have to collaborate with one another and share the decision-making load with trusted colleagues. Mrs. Foi talks about the importance of having trusted colleagues to plan and share ideas with.

Mrs. Foi: Or knowing that there's a safe place to go and have these off the wall ideas - or a big picture idea rather than an in the box idea - an idea that someone might go, "What are you doing?"

Mrs. D'Eagle: I don't think I ever could have done this by myself. I, I never - I would have given up. Even if I was, even if I was motivated, in the beginning, I just couldn't.

Mrs. Roma: Yeah, because with [?] first grade teachers, there is no cohesiveness. I mean there really isn't, so, it's been nice to have this little group.

Mrs. D'Eagle: Yeah, we've never done - we've never had a group like this. That talks and assists and helps. You know, not just do homework.

The comments from the members of Group Roma reaffirmed my commitment to the importance of supporting and promoting collaboration even if it meant doing so outside of the typical parameters of the school day. The school systems where I worked prior to Canyon Primary expected teachers to meet on a weekly basis to examine their practices. Collaboration was a non-negotiable, and on larger teams, the teams typically split into more manageable groups. In contrast, when I enacted these same patterns at

Canyon Primary, many of the teachers reacted with suspicion and a sense of resentment. The teachers were not accustomed to coming together other than for Monday faculty meetings, which prior to 2006, were solely for the purpose of communicating upcoming events, not delivering professional development. Planning periods were too short to produce collaboration of any note, and most people were not interested in giving up time after school to meet. This shared framework of entrenched ideas and values against planning and learning together was the wall behind which many of the team members hid (Achinstein, 2002).

PROBLEMATIC GROUP MEETINGS

From the outset of the reading initiative, I felt it was extremely important for people to view the modules through the lens of their current practices, and I worked to create the expectation that different pieces of the modules would appeal to different people. Truscott and Truscott's (2004) work on Self-Determination Theory "acknowledges that people have the intrinsic need to be autonomous, and that creating opportunities for people to make informed choices enhances their development as human beings" (p. 52). It was difficult for me to comprehend what was so problematic about people wanting to meet together. Group Roma was not a group that was trying to operate in secret, but rather a group of people with common beliefs who simply wanted to meet, share ideas, and make classroom life exciting and more meaningful for both teachers and students.

Mrs. Rouge: Well, this group, this group has created a lot of resentment.

Mrs. Roma: This group has created - and I feel like a lot of people still look at us like, and think, "Who do you think you are?" You know? I-I'm just teaching. I'm

just doing what I do. Why are they mad at me for that?

Mrs. Rouge: And aren't they - why aren't - why don't, why don't they join us?

Mrs. Roma: But you [Mrs. Foi] know you've had to learn to back off talking to some people.

Mrs. Foi: Uh huh

My intension was never for the team to become one unit where everyone would aspire to have the same type of classroom or embrace the same kinds of practices. Expecting twelve people to come to consensus was not a reasonable goal. I was caught off guard by the strong reaction from the other members of the first grade team. I did not understand what was so problematic about like-minded people coming together to plan for a common purpose. I suspect the fear of being left out or over-looked was at the heart of the strong reaction, reinforced by the way people were selected to attend IRA. The obvious fact that people were meeting together outside of the 35-minute reading meetings without the other members being made aware caused the planning meetings of Group Roma to be viewed with suspicion. Despite the terse reaction from other members of the team, the planning sessions continued because of the strong sense of collegiality among the members of the group and the need to collaborate with one another.

When examining the research on teacher collaboration, several factors were highlighted which helped explain why particular groups of people gravitated toward one another. Irwin and Farr's (2004) study of teacher-to-teacher collaboration models recognizes the importance of three dimensions in these relationships. The first dimension deals with *intensity*, defined as "the strength of the ties to professional practice" (p. 346). The first grade team was studying literacy practices in an intense manner. People wanted to improve their practices and feared being left out of important conversations, once they discovered people were meeting in formalized groups outside of the school day. Teachers

also wanted to be recognized for the development of new practices, honoring their efforts, their willingness to study, and finally their tenacity in implementing these new strategies in their classrooms. The members of the small groups that met fulfilled these needs for one another. People studied practices together, and made plans together.

The second dimension, *inclusivity*, defined by Irwin and Farr as “the boundaries and limits of the group,” entered into the equation of the team as people began to scrutinize each other’s practices (p. 346). They began to define who was “in” and who was on the “fringes” of the most effective way to teach students based on who teachers were aligning with. Did teachers value following the lead of the child? Did teachers thrive off of creating new lessons based on spur of the moment ideas? Or, did teachers need consistency and routines? Did teachers need to see a numeric score to determine how successful a lesson was received by students? These questions highlight some of the major differences in the way Groups Sein and Roma operated.

Irwin and Farr’s third dimension is *orientation*. *Orientation* is defined as, “the teacher’s value dispositions and... individual depth of pedagogical expertise” (p. 346). The first grade teachers were in the process of sizing one another up in terms of who they were going to believe held more knowledge and who they would side with. Would they align themselves with the group that met after school (most of whom attended IRA), or would they join the other members of the first grade team, most of whom who came to Canyon Primary with additional training?

FOCUSING ON EQUITY

My work on campus became much more constrained. As a reading coach and as a curriculum specialist in my prior district, I understood that each teacher was in a different place in terms of his or her interest in studying new practices. Some teachers just wanted to see lessons modeled, while other teachers were ready to revamp entire portions of their literacy block. I made the decision to actively recruit members across the first grade team to engage in model lessons and pushed people to try new strategies in an attempt to prove that I was being “fair.” This created more pressure because although some teachers complained others were learning more than they were because I was not accessible to everyone to the same degree, the complaining teachers were not necessarily willing to engage in the coaching cycle and grow their practices. This gave them more cause to complain about the pressure they felt because of the attention they were receiving.

I was extremely sensitive to the fact that people were scrutinizing my time, watching to see how much time I spent working the Mrs. Roma, Mrs. D’Eagle, Mrs. Foi, and Mrs. Rouge. I went to great lengths to prove that my time was spent in an equitable fashion. I created charts in my office to show which teachers I spent time coaching and I coded those sessions with symbols that would describe the type of coaching that I engaged in. I also made a plan to systematically invite teachers across the campus to present strategies to other teachers during Monday faculty meetings. Reeves and Forde (2004) write about the notion of a “contextualised social space” that occurs when people begin to study their practices together. This notion, as written about by Reeves and Forde, accounts for the stress people felt when they were at the pinnacle of deciding whether to hold tight to their existing practices or make room in their repertoire for new practices.

[This place of learning is] a context for social interaction that is permeated by two imagined spaces. One of these is a source of new forms of enaction, a space for experimenting with what might be, a future storied space that can be the originator of disruption in the contextual space. The other imagined space is the source of stability and conformity, the past storied space, where accounting and reflection has fixed personal/group sense, identity and perception (Reeves & Forde, 2004, p. 100).

I felt it was very important for people to maintain their desire to examine their processes closely. But I also realized that it was important to honor the fact that these two teams of teachers, Group Sein and Group Roma, had very different goals in mind for their groups. I wanted to honor the existence of these groups by drawing attention to their efforts, but yet, I found the aims of Group Sein to be aims that I could not support on many levels. I was pleased to see the collaboration, but unhappy with the large emphasis placed on student testing. I was glad that they were creating group norms and common expectations to gauge student progress, but not pleased about the large amounts of instructional time taken up on the administration of these lengthy common assessments.

Mrs. Sein's group rallied around the reading initiative vocabulary module. Each of the teachers in Group Sein were committed to developing weekly lessons reinforcing vocabulary and comprehension through author studies using children's literature. They were also committed to devising a way to test what had been taught in order to have comprehension and vocabulary grades that were common across their group. The members of Group Sein felt it was important to rid the grade level of the more subjective practices like basing grades off of observing students while reading and using anecdotal records as a way to document growth and next steps. I was also concerned that they used an oral language lesson designed to support and encourage richer vocabulary use, and turned it into a tested task written many grade levels above a typical first grade text. The

boundaries and limits of Group Sein were confined to the teachers who did not attend IRA, but who wished to have their practices recognized in a public manner. Many of these teachers held leadership roles in their prior district or were ready to assume them at Canyon Primary, and all members of the group felt marginalized in some way. Although the group initially formed as a result of the desire to assess student comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, the most salient and defining feature of the group manifested itself in the belief that children should be tested and results should be quantifiable. The common experience of most of the members was working in Murphy County where they learned that anything worth teaching was worth testing and that high scores proved to be correlates of effective teaching. This group was interested in documentable proof that what they were doing was “right,” as referenced by Mrs. Shue, earlier in this chapter.

Group Roma’s aim was very different in their goals. Members of the group felt that too much testing was already occurring on this kindergarten and first grade campus, and did not agree with the level of complexity of Group Sein’s weekly vocabulary assessment. The dimension of *intensity* showed in Group Roma through the reading and writing workshop model that was embraced across all members of the group. The sessions the members of the group attended at IRA were focused on this style of teaching children to read and write and the group planning sessions were devoted to creating mini-lessons and determining the content of student conferences. The boundary of the group was limited to members who rejected the basal and also rejected the notion of centers and rigid guided reading. Group Roma believed that instead of asking children to engage in work designed to occupy them until time to read with the teacher, that students should be engaged in reading and writing – authentic literacy tasks - as the teacher conferred with

students or worked with temporary small groups for specific needs. These teachers embraced teaching students to self-select books and felt that talk was an important aspect of a reading and writing workshop classroom. The orientation of these teachers differed from Group Sein because they were more interested in asking children to engage in the kinds of literate activities adults engage in while documenting growth in terms of anecdotal records and student work samples as opposed to rigid assessments designed to look at everyone through the same lens.

The conflict between the two halves of the first grade team was fairly public. Their group identities were important and mattered in a public way. Who was asked to present at faculty meetings? Whose practices were highlighted during grade level meetings? Members of each group jockeyed to have their practices legitimized and noticed in a public way (Reeves & Forde, 2004). The following comments illustrate the tension that existed among members of the first grade team and the public nature of the friction. Mrs. Rouge spoke about the pressure the teachers felt to compete with one another. Mrs. Rouge also states, that as a member of Mrs. Roma's group, she and her fellow members were starting to feel more confident in their decision to take a different instructional direction not only from what had been place prior to the introduction of the reading initiative, by abandoning their use of the basal, but also from that of Group Sein.

Mrs. Rouge: We're very bad to compare ourselves to each other at this school. Oh! Look what they're doing. Oh, their handwriting is better than my kids'.

Mrs. D'Eagle: Or they're not going to be prepared for second grade.

Mrs. Rouge: You walk into somebody's room. "Oh no, we're not doing that." I think we're starting to get away from that now, a little bit. And, and, realizing that we need to do what's authentic and important and let some of the - you know, I don't have bows on my baskets. And I don't own any tulle.

The reference to bows and tulle is a nod to the cover story of Canyon Primary as an art-focused campus concerned with outward appearances and Mrs. Rouge's willingness to let authentic literacy practices trump the concern with outward appearances and "cosmetic" improvements backed by little substance.

TEACHERS AS CURRICULUM MAKERS

Before examining teachers as curriculum makers, I want to note that, in this section, I am re-characterizing the split of the first grade team in a different light than in the previous section. Prior to the start of the second year of the reading initiative, Mrs. Sein, one of the focus teachers of this study decided to organize a meeting of the first grade teachers for purpose of establishing some common instructional strategies for the first grade team. This was not a meeting I was asked to attend in part because this was a time and place for the first grade teachers to negotiate some common practices under their own terms, not under the influence of the state reading initiative. However, this was also a space for Mrs. Sein to take the position of emerging leader of the first grade team - a role she began assuming informally during the course of the first year of the reading initiative. As mentioned earlier, Mrs. Sein relished her role as an instructional leader in her previous district and was anxious to lead her new team members in some of the initiatives where she began her career. At the conclusion of the first year, many members of the first grade team were interested in creating a strong sense of identity as a team. The group embraced some of the practices from the reading initiative, but longed to develop more practices that matched their teaching philosophies more tightly. This planning group met, in part, because of the need Mrs. Sein felt to recreate many of the common

practices that were in place on her former campus in Murphy County. This response of attempting to recreate a sense of *status quo* is cited as a common one when teachers come together to collaborate (Achinstein, 2002). This meeting also signified the first official dividing line among members of the first grade team as it became apparent that certain practices were becoming privileged over others.

Cohen and Ball (1990) reference this desire to achieve common practices as teachers examine the relationship between instructionally mandated policies and the actual practices of classroom teachers. Cohen and Ball note that the tighter the structure of the mandate, the smaller the amount of control that is exerted on the teachers' instructional time throughout the course of a school day. Because the state reading initiative modules were highly scripted and focused lessons, they used up a maximum of a forty minutes from the ninety minute reading block of classroom instruction, leaving large amounts of time for teachers to pursue other teaching goals within the privacy of their own rooms. And because the planning of these lessons had been culled down to what was essentially a fill-in-the-blank worksheet provided by the state department of education (assuming teachers even bothered to plan for or teach the modules), little was expended preparing for the lessons. This left teachers with a great deal of time to pursue their own interests, and define their own instructional practices as team. This notion of choice is referenced in an area of research regarding self-determination theory, as researched by Ryan and Deci, (2000). Self-determination theory looks to three fundamental needs of people as they seek to make their own way. A sense of competence in making decisions and executing plans, the feeling of relatedness where their ideas are valued by others, and the ability to be autonomous in decision making greatly influence

the motivation levels of people. This initial team planning session prior to the start of the 2007-2008 school year that was initiated by Mrs. Sein, met the need the teachers had in determining their own paths for the upcoming school year. The planning session allowed the first grade teachers to make preparations on their own terms as opposed to waiting for the state reading initiative to plan it for them.

As Mrs. Sein searched for ways to incorporate her beliefs regarding the importance of testing what was taught and the analysis of student scores as a sign of effective teaching, she offered the opportunity for members of the first grade team to come together to plan the vocabulary and comprehension lessons based on her comprehension lessons from her former school district and the hybridized version of the vocabulary modules. Outside of Mrs. Shue, a friend who taught with Mrs. Sein in the former county, three other teachers agreed to meet together to develop the vocabulary lessons and weekly tests.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TEAM SPLIT

The issue of status was a major factor behind the formation of these separate groups. People needed their respective ideas formally honored and wanted the company of like-minded colleagues to plan with as well as to continue to expand and refine their practices. The teachers of Group Sein and Group Roma bolstered their specific and competing beliefs by planning in their separate groups each week. Below, some of the members of Group Roma talk about some of the reasons they bonded as a group.

Mrs. Rouge: but the thing is, when we, when we see each other, when we - I mean, just passing each other in the hallway, you know, the things we talk about, are, usually are things about, things, things that will help us do a better job, ideas

that we're sharing, and, and, uh, just encouraging each other. And, um, it seems... like a lot of the teachers, um, their discussions are all about ego, and about, about them -instead of about, you know, teaching.

Mrs. Roma: Those same teachers weren't looking to change.

Mrs. Darden: And that's okay. You actually had a neat quote...

Mrs. D'Eagle: There was something and I don't even know where I got it. There's like an echelon of, um, and it, uh, and, you know, I don't want to categorize it like this - I don't think it was, but this is all I can remember. "Insightful people discuss ideas," um, you know, then the next down, or, another level is, um, people just talk about every day things like, "I love your sweater." And then the lowest rung is gossip. And, and you know we all do all of it, but you hope you're more in, you know - especially when it comes to education.

The issue of status rose to prominence during the spring of 2008 when the campus principal made the decision that Group Sein should present their own staff development to the campus on their own reading beliefs. The principal felt this was an important decision because it would take some of the focus off of the members of the Group Roma, whom she felt had received too much attention. I also felt this was an important move for several reasons. Group Sein had worked diligently throughout the year to develop their own sets of literacy beliefs that may have been meaningful for teachers who were not comfortable with reading and writing workshop. Learning how to determine student progress through the use of running records and the use of centers had a place in literacy practice. Group Sein deserved to have an official place to share these practices in addition to their vocabulary lessons. I also knew that I would not be returning the following year. Because Mrs. Sein was one of the few members of the faculty with a Master's degree in Reading, I assumed she would take my place as reading coach. Providing her with a public space to present with the other members of her group would officially acknowledge her understanding of reading, providing her with additional credibility in the eyes of her peers.

During the same period of time the campus principal made a concerted effort to stop socializing with the members of Group Roma on a personal basis. The members of group Roma felt shunned and ostracized. And the culture of the campus based on the decisions of the campus principal felt divisive and competitive. It was as if there was only room for one group to have prominent status at a time – an either/or dichotomy that was creating an even wider chasm between members of the first grade team. The following conversation occurred as members of Group Roma discussed the stress caused by the division of the first grade team as their competitive nature prevailed.

Mrs. D'Eagle: I spend a lot of time trying to not feel judged. You know?

Mrs. Foi: Uh huh -

Mrs. D'Eagle: - to just go that's them, not me. I have to talk myself out of a lot of stuff.

Mrs. Foi: Mmm... hmm...

Mrs. Rouge: Well, I think, I think for you, when people judge you, they're really thinking, um, that you're really more creative than they are. And that they -

Mrs. D'Eagle: But, but that's a personal affront.

Mrs. Rouge: It is?

Mrs. D'Eagle: Yeah, it's hurtful. 'Cause it's negative.

Mrs. Rouge: But I think that they think that they can't possibly achieve that. You know. And so they, uh, resent it, sort of.

Mrs. Foi: And before coming into this school I was so nervous because you heard of the, you know, the pressure from the parents being at Canyon Primary but this year - and there is, there's a lot of pressure - but, I found this year that there's almost more pressure in the school, you know, on - especially the first grade team of, you know, being judged, or liked, or...

Teachers were openly unkind to one another, refusing to speak in the hallways, and making derogatory comments to one another. Other members of the team were approaching people associated with other planning groups, criticizing the work that was done in the smaller groups or the people presenting training during Monday faculty meetings. People struggled to deal with the new identities of these separate groups, and could not conceive of groups co-existing on the same team and operate under differing

literacy philosophies (Achinstein, 2002). As discussed below, members of the team worked to be less sensitive to the criticism that abounded on the team.

Mrs. Roma: Well, unfortunately, what I'm learning this year is you have to just be who you are and if - I said it's because you're trying - in their opinion - trying to shine, or you will get attention in some way and you're going to notice that people - that's the biggest thing is no - there's a lot of opinions. And they don't like for anyone to outshine anyone else. Whether it's them or their friend. Ugh! It's just so frustrating.

Mrs. Rouge: Yeah, and it creates - you're, you're right. It creates some anger.

Mrs. D'Eagle: Inside both people.

Mrs. Foi: Yeah!

Mrs. D'Eagle: ...unless you're a strong person, and can handle it. It took therapy to help me figure that out! [finally laughing]

Such divisions of teams are often the result of mitigating events such as the privileging of certain teaching styles over others, or the unequal access of resources to certain groups over others. When teachers sense these inequities, it is logical that they bolster themselves with people who are like-minded and share similar teaching philosophies. Schools are not neat and tidy places as often depicted in school studies. Schools are messy places in which widely contrastive philosophies, ideas, and power differentials are expected to harmoniously exist under a single roof. The state of stress and anxiety necessitated the split of the first grade team. In the next section I will detail the level of collaboration that existed among Group Sein and Group Roma, in order to highlight the reasons why the members of each group gravitated toward their respective members.

Group Sein

When I asked Mrs. Sein to talk about the formation of her planning group, she emphasized that this group was comprised of very busy people who did not have time to

meet after school. This statement contrasted the norms of Group Roma, who enjoyed the time to talk, reflect, and debrief. Mrs. Sein's comment was not to be glossed over because at the outset of the interview, the statement was meant to separate the purposes of the two groups, a nod to the tension and frustration of members of both planning groups. The cover story Mrs. Sein told of her group was one of extreme efficiency. She stated that there was only one face-to-face meeting during the year where the members came together to plan their vocabulary lessons and design their classroom tests, and that the remainder of their planning sessions consisted of messages sent back and forth to the group members via e-mail. This contradicted what the other members of Group Sein stated about their group involvement, although eventually they did streamline their practices to communicate solely through e-mail. I assigned a great deal of significance to Mrs. Sein's portrayal of her group and their way of working together. By building a different cover story for her planning group, she created a space to honor and even privilege their practices because they required less time and effort and were more efficient.

Although I was certainly pleased to see the team take up the vocabulary module lessons from the state reading initiative, I was saddened to see the altered tone the lessons. These lessons that were designed to be primarily oral in nature, drawing upon children's literature read aloud to the class, morphed into a taught and tested curriculum, influenced by the teaching backgrounds of Mrs. Sein, Mrs. Shue, and Mrs. Pedd, all of whom taught in high poverty areas under the watchful eye of Reading First. Their entire teaching careers prior to joining Scott County were spent in a district where a constant stream of data was required in order to analyze student progress and guarantee enough

annual growth to meet the standards set forth by AYP and NCLB. Students were constantly being tested and the results were scrutinized in a public way. Now their classrooms at Canyon Primary were turning into classrooms focused on common assessments and charting and graphing student results constantly. One of the joys of working on a Kindergarten and First Grade campus was that mandated testing was very minimal, and I was disturbed watching this over-emphasis on testing young children proliferate across these classrooms. Another emphasis of Group Sein was the implementation of data binders for tracking student reading levels. The process of using binders allowed for the definition of specific reading level targets throughout the year. Students needed to be reading on or above the designated levels in order to be considered making adequate reading progress. As referenced earlier, the notion of teaching students to self-select texts felt too “loose.” Many of the members of Group Sein embraced Fountas and Pinnell’s notion of Guided Reading, which called for the close tracking of student reading levels. Running records were used to confirm appropriate text placement as well as to document students in need of intervention of special education testing.

Due to the closed nature of Group Sein and because their preferred style of communicating transpired almost exclusively through e-mail during the second half of the 2007-2008 school year, my data for the Group Sein planning sessions was limited. The data consisted primarily of individual interviews from some of the members of the group, and evidence of the vocabulary lessons as they were referenced in Mrs. Sein’s lesson plans. I also gathered examples of the student vocabulary and comprehension tests.

Group Roma

The purpose of Group Roma was to inspire one another with stories of their classroom practices, as well as to engage in the more mundane task of completing lesson plans in order to satisfy administrative requirements. Mrs. Foi shared an example of one way the team members found resolutions to their teaching dilemmas together.

Mrs. Foi: So, I meet with them [Mrs. Roma, Mrs. D'Eagle, and Mrs. Rouge] once a week to plan for the next week and it's really interesting because we plan together to do our lessons, but we've found that the logistics of it, really, are really just for paper and we're doing so many more things in our classrooms and it's fun to be able to share about that and to inspire each other, you know across the board. Like this week we decided to start publishing and, um, the teacher that plans writing, she was kind of really nervous about starting publishing because her kids weren't quite ready there but when Mrs. Roma and I were talking, you know, Mrs. Rouge realized that it was okay. That that [writing] would actually help her problem - to start publishing, it would inspire them [her students]. She felt that they had just lost interest, and they were frustrated with writing. She was just frustrated. Basically, it was just good for us to talk - Mrs. Roma and I were able to say, "Oh! Well that's exactly what we're seeing." But, with our experience with publishing last year, we know that this will take them to that next step.

This notion of being inspired and realizing that as co-planners, they didn't have to solve all their problems and issues alone, provided a sense of safety and security. They drew upon the collective knowledge as a group to grow as educators and further their practices.

The sense of having some security as a member of a group was echoed as Mrs. Foi shared how fortunate she felt, as a new teacher, to be surrounded by the experience of the collective group. Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of Communities of Practice comes to mind as Mrs. Foi spoke of absorbing how experienced teachers anticipated what needed to be taught while they juggled the minute details associated with running a classroom.

Mrs. Foi: I think one thing that really helps me - they just - with their experience, as a new teacher, it really helps me to be surrounded by all of that experience

because not only do they remind me of all the little things, that need to be done but they remind me that it's okay that I hadn't gotten to it. And just their way of thinking is just where I'm not yet but they never make me feel like that. You know, and like little things like, um, how Mrs. D'Eagle has all her kids reading on their levels and it's a very different way of teaching, but when she talks to me she's so encouraging, you know, to say, well I know how you do your class, you could use this reading log, this way.

It was both the small details of being a classroom teacher – lunch count, field trip permission slips, fundraiser money and paperwork – that seemed so overwhelming for Mrs. Foi. In fact, the small details were almost as overwhelming as the larger issues - like how to manage different levels of readers and how to meet the needs of all of the developing writers. Collaboration of the members of Group Roma was driven by the deep respect members had for each other's teaching styles, but was also grounded in their common set of core beliefs including following the moves of the child and allowing student work to inform their plans for teaching.

Group Roma openly embraced the different ideas among the members of the group. In this way Group Roma differed significantly from the members of Group Sein, who strived to maintain a sense of uniformity to their structure by focusing their planning on a single type of lesson structure as well as certain types of reading assessments. In the section below Mrs. Foi spoke about the benefit of teaching with people who differed in the way they approached particular lessons. As noted above, the members knew so much about one another's teaching, they were able to anticipate problems and offer ways to adjust the lessons in order to meet the styles of the various members of the group.

Mrs. Foi: And that was one thing I really - Mrs. Roma and I have similar teaching styles - we're a little bit more close - that's why Mrs. D'Eagle is good for both of us. 'Cause she is so different - it's so good to have that in the group. But with Mrs. Roma it's good, I'd say, being a new teacher, as a new teacher, it's good to have her, 'Cause she's close enough to my teaching style and thinking style. She reflects

a lot and I've learned to reflect from her. And it's okay that teaching is learning. And she's taught me that from hearing her in the meetings. I'll walk in her room to get manipulatives and she'll say, "Don't do what I said! That was a total disaster. But I learned and I can take this part and do it this way." ...She's so eager to try new ideas. It's just so inspiring, you know, how whatever we talk about - if she gets an idea from me, she, she goes and tries it. And she'll say, "Well I did it this way, you try it that way and let's talk about it." It's really fun. It's really fun.

The joy of teaching as members of a collaborative was evident in the comments from Mrs. Foi. The members of Group Roma carefully considered the words of each other as well as the words of the students they taught. In a sense, their curriculum was derived from the actions of their children. Although the group members had a road plan that was refined during their weekly planning sessions, they followed the lead of their students, keeping one eye on the plan as recorded in the plan books, with another eye toward their reflections of the lessons throughout the week and with regard to how their students were responding.

Mrs. Foi: I think all three of us have the same love for teaching and love for our students, and respect for their opinions. And respect for what they can teach us. And I've learned that from both of them. I remember sitting in Mrs. D'Eagle's reading workshop and, you know, putting all the, all of it aside of what wasn't like my class and realizing that, you know, learning from her - just how she listened to her kids... It's just neat how she inspires Mrs. Roma and I to be free and listen to our kids - be free in the sense of letting go what we want to do. And Mrs. Roma inspires Mrs. D'Eagle and I both to think about what we're doing. Okay, well that changed, but why did it change.

It was evident in studying their words that the members of this group were constantly engaging in apprentice-type relationships one another – although Mrs. Foi was a newcomer in the sense of her years of teaching, each of the members was a newcomer to reading and writing workshop and as such, they treated one another with equal footing. In the example below, Mrs. Foi introduced the notion of “accountability” as it applied to ensuring children had a product of some sort to show their comprehension during reading

workshop. She presented her colleagues with the notion of accountability in a reading workshop model. Mrs. Foi shared a way of thinking about comprehension with her colleagues and Mrs. Roma, in turn, helped her rethink the role of the mini-lesson.

Mrs. D'Eagle: And so, what do you mean by "accountability?"

Mrs. Foi: Like simply that - being able to say, "Okay, fill out your reading log." And I'm thinking for now, that will be... that reading log will help them kind of get into the reading -

Mrs. Roma: - the enjoyment of books

Mrs. Foi: Yeah. And like the reading response journal I did last week, they got that, but because that was their first experience of writing about what they're reading, I think they need this kind of "fearless accountability" - a log that's just kind of fun to fill out.

Mrs. Roma: And just think - you're probably wearing them out

Mrs. Foi: Yeah!

Mrs. Roma: With all this, um, mini-[lessons]. And not that that's a bad thing, but just - it's amazing when you teach really hard for a few weeks, like on a mini-lesson, and then you pull back and just let them read, it is so cool to see who they're grouping with as they're reading, what books they're reading. It's really cool to just sit back and watch and see what you'll see.

Mrs. Foi: And that brings up two things that I've not been able to do that I so want them doing, and that's, you know, the reading logs, or whatever, at the end, and have book nooks.

The members of this group exchanged information with one another, reflecting on classroom practices, teaching each other about new concepts and engaging in reflection side-by-side. The focus of Group Roma followed the teaching moves of the individual members and needs of individual students, where as the structure of Group Sein focused around pre-determined products and lesson structures.

Reading Initiative Teacher Groups with Contrived Membership

In contrast with the self-selected membership of Groups Sein and Roma, all members of the first grade team were assigned to mandated reading initiative groups, as described earlier. These groupings were assigned by the campus principal in an effort to

integrate different members of the team who did not typically plan together. There was one exception and this was the group comprised of Mrs. D'Eagle, Mrs. Roma, and Mrs. Rouge. Mrs. Rouge was assigned to this particular reading initiative group before she started to meet with Group Roma after school, but asked to join Group Roma as a result of hearing Mrs. D'Eagle and Mrs. Roma talk about their weekly planning meetings. The decision to allow Mrs. Roma and Mrs. D'Eagle to stay together was because the two teachers had been planning together for over ten years and the principal did not want to break up the partnership. She also felt that Mrs. Roma and Mrs. D'Eagle might offer Mrs. Rouge some interesting teaching strategies to incorporate in her classroom instruction.

Members of the state mandated reading initiative groups were willing to contribute and share their ideas, but the ideas they discussed were surface level ideas. The majority of the turns at talk during the meetings were taken by me as I presented the layout of the state reading initiative focus, and then teachers contributed at the point in the training where they were expected to share their classroom practices. The teacher talk was collegial, as teachers shared like ideas politely, but with the exception of the group comprised of Mrs. D'Eagle, Mrs. Roma, and Mrs. Rouge, the ideas that were shared were at a surface level and served only to progress the meeting.

The following segments of talk represented the kind of talk that occurred during the state reading initiative trainings. In the following excerpt, the teachers shared the various ways they encouraged active participation and classroom talk, which was the focus for the second half of the school year.

Mrs. Darden: What I thought we'd talk about first is, what are some of the ways you increase active participation in your classroom? It could be during reading

time, or science, or math. And then in addition to active participation, what are some of the tricks you have for getting kids to talk more in class?

Mrs. Yxel: Well I let mine each week come up with their own morning math opportunity. And then we share them. Every child gets up and shares theirs. So they get to participate and the opportunity to speak about it.

Mrs. Darden: And too, when they know they've got to share, there's a little heightened pressure to do it [the assignment].

Mrs. Yxel: Yeah.

Mrs. Shue: My boys and girls share their story responses.

Mrs. Sein: Mine do as well.

Mrs. Darden: And so that provides that rehearsal in writing before they have to stand up and talk about it. Okay, what else?

Mrs. Yxel: I haven't yet, but in the past I've done like Readers' Theater. It's a little harder with the books we're using now, but they enjoy that. I need to, I guess I need to sit down and type it out.

Mrs. Sein: Well, that reminds me we did a play, where they learned their parts and got to perform a play.

Mrs. Darden: So, yeah, so learning for a performance. And so what are opportunities you build in for kids to have time to talk about what they're working on or share something that they've been reading?

Mrs. Shue: I know I did a vocabulary lesson similar to how you presented it last year, where they come up a meaning and share with their partner and share with the whole group.

Mrs. Sein: And I do the same as well. And whenever, whenever they come with me, come sit with me during independent reading, they get to read to me from their "book of thoughts" from things they're been writing about in their books, they get to share with me. I know they haven't shared out loud, but when they read to me it really makes them pay attention to what they're writing. And I get to choose what I want them to read to me.

Mrs. Darden: And I do that also.

In this excerpt, it is apparent that the teachers were willing to share their classroom practices with one another, but their responses simply layered on top of one another. The participants did not push each other's thinking during the course of the conversation or create any novel ideas through exploration of the topic. It appears that the norms of the meeting precluded people from questioning one another or extending the ideas presented in the training.

The next transcript provides a very different look into the same training conducted with the members of Group Roma, except Mrs. Foi. (Mrs. Foi was not present because she was assigned to another group by the principal in an attempt to try and bring harmony back to the team, intermingling those who attended IRA with those who did not.)

At the beginning of this session Mrs. D'Eagle has brought in a piece of student writing to share the story with me because she was excited about what the child wrote. Her decision to bring the child's writing was impromptu. The child's story Mrs. D'Eagle is sharing is one that has struggled through the course of first grade, but Mrs. D'Eagle is very pleased with his progress as a writer. The excerpt begins as Mrs. D'Eagle reads the child's story to the group. Note that the session also begins with members of the group teasing each other about whether they needed to bring anything to the session. The other groups begin with silence, waiting for me to start the meeting.

Mrs. D'Eagle: "My dad took me to my mom's house and my mom took me to a party. I was running after this teenager. She had my truck. I tripped and cut myself in the hand. Mom said, 'You'll have to get stitches.' You'll have to go to the emergency room..." [the story goes on]

Mrs. Rouge: Was I supposed to bring anything?

Mrs. D'Eagle: Yes! Where are all your things? We're waiting for you.

Mrs. Darden: No!

Mrs. D'Eagle: We're kidding!

Mrs. Darden: Just yourself.

Mrs. D'Eagle: Look, I brought Jordan's. Will you help me read her's?

Mrs. Darden: First of all, look how much she wrote! What a celebration! [We read her story out loud.] They're writing blood and guts stories.

Mrs. D'Eagle: It's amazing how much they want to write - but do you know why?

Mrs. Roma: Did you tell them to write blood and guts stories?

Mrs. D'Eagle: No, I didn't say it like that. But I said, "Think of a time that was traumatic and then I modeled the story of when I stubbed my toe when we went camping and my grandfather said..."

Mrs. D'Eagle: And those lines really help them keep going -

Mrs. Roma: - What lines?

Mrs. D'Eagle: You know like where they just put the first letter or the last and then they just keep on going?

Mrs. Roma: Yeah, it does help them.

Mrs. Rouge: So why did you have them do it on paper instead of in their notebooks? Just to be different?

Mrs. D'Eagle: yeah, 'cause sometimes they get a little tired of writing and now they think it's something new! And plus I told them - and they liked a piece of plain paper to illustrate.

Mrs. Roma: That's true.

Mrs. D'Eagle: You might be so profound today!

Mrs. Darden: [I begin by talking about the background and purpose for the module.]

We're going to talk about some ways that you just naturally use in your classroom to get kids to participate - tricks you use or whatever.

Mrs. D'Eagle: Can I say something about that please?

Mrs. Darden: Yeah! Sure.

Mrs. D'Eagle: I think as with anything you kind of have to set those parameters and then after a while you can loosen it. I bet you already - you have loosened who they talk to, haven't you? [Mrs. D'Eagle addresses her question to the other members of the group.]

Teachers: Oh, yeah.

Mrs. Roma: We don't even have assigned partners any more.

Mrs. Rouge: I've noticed that it works better with the boys sometimes. The girls tend to want to get things started.

The dynamics of this group session differ greatly from the first session. When examining turns at talk, I am no longer controlling the turn taking or the flow of conversation. The members of this group are certainly on task, but are directing questions and answers toward one another. As opposed to leading the session, my role became that of facilitator. Although we had pre-determined state reading initiative outcomes we had to meet as a group, the participation level of the group allowed me to follow their lead in a sense, and their style of communication indicated they were more willing to consider the strategies being presented in the lesson as they linked the ideas with the classroom practices in their own rooms.

The examination of the interaction patterns between groups of teachers who chose to work with one another and the interaction patterns of the assigned groups seems to

point to the importance of allowing teachers to self-select whom they wish to work with – particularly in situations where teachers are forced to enact top-down mandates. As two separate groups, the members reported a satisfaction being able to pursue their educational interests with like-minded people. In the face of top-down mandates, an official space needs to be maintained to allow teachers to plan together. It is unreasonable to expect that people, with established teaching habits and preferences, will simply abandon their practices and pick up those practices and strategies privileged by a staff development model. Nor is it appropriate to expect that members of an instructional team with widely varying educational experiences and philosophies will come together and instantly communicate at deep levels. Just as team members grapple with maneuvering among team members and differing belief systems, teachers as individuals also negotiate complex factors as a natural part of their harried teaching lives. Teachers make thousands of decisions calling upon prior knowledge, existing routines, and the introduction of new practices. Which practices will continue? Which practices will be incorporated and adapted? Which practices will be abandoned? In the next chapter we will examine how the influences from the reading initiative and the influences from the collaborative groups were translated into the literacy practices of three first grade teachers.

Chapter 6: Secret Stories of Classroom Literacy Instruction

In this chapter, I will describe the ways in which professional development and collaborative experiences among the first grade teachers influenced the classroom practices of the three focus teachers, Mrs. Foi, Mrs. Sein, and Mrs. Rohl. I will first paint the picture of each teacher in terms of their sacred stories of pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices relayed to me during one-on-one interviews during the spring semester of 2008. By beginning with their stories of tightly held classroom practices, I wish to highlight the centrality of their beliefs built upon their past teaching experiences and hopes for the future of each of their classrooms. These stories of beliefs and practices will provide important context as we consider the impact of professional development and collaborative experiences upon their teaching. Next, I will define the types of coaching relationships I maintained with each teacher; the style and parameters of our working relationships varied greatly, directly impacting our levels of influence upon each other. A thick description of each teacher's classroom will follow to provide the reader with a sense of the spaces allotted for instruction which reflected each teacher's instructional priorities. The fourth section of each teacher's case will cover the extent to which the state reading initiative modules and other literacy interests (outside of the scope of the mandated ones) were incorporated into their classroom instruction. The fifth section examines the literacy practices through the words of the students in each classroom. In the final section, I will compare the DIBELS scores across indicators of fluency and comprehension for all three classrooms. The purpose of reviewing the scores helps us to see the degree to which each teacher was able to address the accountability

standards of the state reading initiative, that were the ultimate goal of the state mandated professional development model.

The order in which the focus teachers are introduced is significant because they are organized according to the extent of our coaching relationships: from Mrs. Foi, who requested and required the greatest level of support, to Mrs. Rohl, who requested the least. Although the state reading initiative called for equal coaching of all classroom teachers, I understood that some teachers were just beginning their teaching careers and were hungry for more information. Other teachers were interested in expanding particular aspects of their classroom practices. Still other teachers were in their final years of working with children and had smoothly operating classrooms in little need or want of coaching. I felt an important nuance of my coaching position was to honor these differences in the teachers with whom I worked. In Irwin & Farr's (2004) examination of collaborative school communities, the authors cite the importance of honoring the interests and concerns of each teacher through coaching in order to "nurture each person's individual growth, thus supporting individuality and diversity within a broader framework of community and interpersonal connection" (p. 345). I tried to ensure that I met the differing wants and needs of the classroom teachers through short-term coaching opportunities as well as long-term.

As a second year teacher, Mrs. Foi was still in the formative stages of defining her reading and writing instruction, strategies, and philosophies. I frequently modeled lessons in her classroom, assisted her with gathering resources, and coached her through parent conferences. We often completed all three phases of the coaching cycle (defined by the

state reading initiative coaches' manual as we worked to provide students with lessons that would inform reading comprehension, reading strategies, and writer's craft.

Mrs. Sein, an experienced teacher of seven years, is addressed second because although I modeled lessons in her classroom from time to time, and she participated actively in the state training modules, I served more as a sounding board for confirmation of her ideas than someone supporting her in the implementation of brand new practices. Because she arrived at Canyon Primary with a very different set of training experiences than the other teachers, she needed a place to discuss her instructional non-negotiables and receive validation that her ideas were valued, important, and worthy of continued pursuit.

Mrs. Rohl will be discussed last. As a teacher with twenty-five years of experience, and a firm conviction in her instructional beliefs and practices, I spent the least amount of time in a direct coaching capacity with her. She enjoyed showing me the ways in which she had already incorporated many of the tenets of the state reading initiative into her classroom instruction. She also proudly showcased the many aspects of her classroom instruction that she considered "old practices," but were making yet another appearance repackaged as new teaching strategies in updated research. As she considered her imminent retirement, she was not particularly interested in renovating her classroom practices, which was certainly understandable. Mrs. Rohl experienced great success developing first grade students who could read, write, and discuss stories with great detail, providing little impetus for a change in teaching strategies.

THE STORY OF MRS. FOI

Mrs. Foi was a second year teacher at the time of this study, and although she was new to teaching, she was older than most second year teachers and brought a wisdom and maturity to her teaching role not typically found in beginning teachers. The principal at Canyon Primary learned of Mrs. Foi from a principal friend at a school in Murphy County where Mrs. Foi student taught. Mrs. Foi came highly recommended for her ability to teach struggling learners and her kind but firm manner with children. Mrs. Foi grew up dreaming of living in the small town where Canyon Primary was located and still could not believe she was teaching in the quaint school in the center of downtown. Mrs. Foi was well aware of how difficult positions were to come by at Canyon Primary and was grateful for the opportunity to replace a teacher who left the campus to stay home with her young children.

My first encounter with Mrs. Foi came shortly after her first observation by the principal during her first year of teaching. For the observation, Mrs. Foi had chosen a reading lesson following the steps she learned during her student teaching experience in which children were reading the same passage from the basal reader. Mrs. Foi had been told that requiring students to perform picture walks was a crucial pre-reading strategy that would allow children to familiarize themselves with the story. Mrs. Foi was told not to skip this step if children were to have a chance at successfully reading the text. At the summary conference, the principal pushed Mrs. Foi on her purpose for doing a picture walk when most students could already read the text, and Mrs. Foi responded by explaining that although it felt unnecessary, she did it because she was told it was important. During their post-observation conference, the principal was struck by Mrs.

Foi's willingness to reflect and recognize where instructional improvements could be made, and felt that Mrs. Foi was ready to begin studying her instructional practices more closely. The principal encouraged her to seek out my assistance. Mrs. Foi was eager to begin working with me; she was ready to trust her instincts and find more efficient strategies to better meet the needs of her students and fuel her creativity as a teacher.

Not long after our initial conversation about starting reading workshop in her classroom, Mrs. Foi returned to me panicked. Several students in her classrooms were beginning to struggle with reading and had cried during class. Amidst a stream of tears, Mrs. Foi began to share her own sacred story with me – a teacher who was not really a reader at all, attempting to teach first grade students without really knowing what she was doing. She relayed her own experiences as a struggling first grader leaving first grade without knowing how to read. She recalled that gut-wrenching feeling of wanting to read, but no matter how hard she tried, the words were just out of reach. She recounted the feeling of trepidation and fear as she recalled seeing that same look on the faces of two of her students in her first grade classroom at Canyon Primary.

Mrs. Foi: My significant teaching event - I think it, like, goes back to a childhood experience because - I may start crying - but, um, because when I, when I was in first grade, I really was that struggling reader that could not read and I remember sitting with my teacher and she - I can just remember it just being just a, a time when it would just drag by because I knew everything she was asking me to do, I had no clue what she was talking about. And I would just stare at what these letters that were in these little formations and I didn't know what even a word was.

Mrs. Foi continued her story as she talked about her student teaching experience in the neighboring county. Mrs. Foi was expected to use the county's scripted reading program that was the only form of reading instruction that had been modeled for her. As she

attempted to work with the students, she recognized the same looks on their faces that she had experienced as a failing first grader. She knew that she could not work in a county that operated under the heavy-handed federal mandates of No Child Left Behind and Reading First. When Mrs. Foi accepted the classroom position at Canyon Primary, she expected she would encounter teaching very different from her student teaching experience – the kind of instruction that she dreamed of receiving as a child.

Mrs. Foi: And then when I came here and it was still - though it was a different, you know, creative environment - you saw the art work on the walls - as far as the teaching, it was still pretty much the same. And it was still that scripted program and I still had that frustration of - this isn't what I thought it would be. You know? And I can remember, um, Lora telling me, um, we want to teach the children to be life-long readers and learners. And I can remember having this huge knot in my throat 'cause all of a sudden I realized, "I'm not a reader or a writer!" And I realized, that's why - because that's how I had been taught - was so by the script that this reading and this writing was work and it wasn't something that you enjoyed. It's something that you have to do to get through life. And so I laugh now 'cause my first parent meeting I proclaimed to them that I was going to make their children lifelong readers and writers - and in the back of my head I was like, "How the hell am I going to do that?"

Two of Mrs. Foi's teammates, Mrs. Roma and Mrs. D'Eagle (the first two teachers at Canyon Primary to volunteer to work with me), had befriended Mrs. Foi and talked her into allowing me to help her set up a reading and writing workshop style classroom. I reassured Mrs. Foi that we would be able to teach all her students to read and that we would find the right books for all of her students, allowing ample time for practice in meaningful ways so that students could progress at their own pace. Mrs. Foi eventually embraced the belief that by being a model for her students, her students might learn how to become life-long readers and writers *with* her. Mrs. Foi's narrative of her own secret story painted a portrait of a teacher who desperately wanted to teach all of her

students to read, freeing them from the fear she felt as a child, struggling to become a reader.

Our Coaching Relationship

The nature of my coaching relationship with Mrs. Foi was an extremely active and supportive one. As a coach, I was drawn to Mrs. Foi because of her eagerness to learn as much as possible about reading and writing, but also because we shared a mutual philosophy about children and teaching. “The most powerful learning takes place in the real world and educators are encouraged to situate learning tasks in authentic contexts for both children and adults” (Truscott & Truscott, 2004, p. 53). We both embraced the notion of looking toward the literate acts of adults as impetus for working with children, believing that the ultimate goal of school was helping children to develop a love of reading and writing so great that they would choose to engage in reading and writing without being asked to do so by a teacher.

Initially Mrs. Foi and I spent time on details of classroom management and student expectations during reading and writing workshop. She grappled with management questions such as whether to allow students to get up and move around the room and how to develop a system where students would efficiently indicate they needed help without being reduced to sitting and waiting for the teacher. However, the majority of our time together was spent crafting reading and writing workshop lessons, and planning her next teaching moves based on student observations we made during her literacy block.

As we continued our work together during the Spring of 2008, Mrs. Foi spoke about the difficulties she encountered as a second year teacher who was still trying to figure out how to cope with demanding parents. She was also concerned with how to decide where to take students next as they progressed past the point of simply learning how to read. Although Mrs. Foi did have a broad plan for her instruction for the year and she was supported by Mrs. Roma and Mrs. D'Eagle, many of Mrs. Foi's teaching decisions were based upon what her students were doing in front of her eyes. She was consumed by the moment-to-moment teaching involved in helping her students solve new words or select the right texts. She found it hard to anticipate where students might be two weeks down the road because many of her teaching moves were based upon what was needed at that moment. Mrs. Foi asked me to come into her classroom and listen to her students read so that I could help her determine what her next teaching points should be during reading conferences. She also wanted assistance with confirming that her students were reading from appropriate books. In the excitement over chapter books, Mrs. Foi suspected that quite a few students were substantially over-placed in books and we needed some simple guidelines to help children think more carefully about their book selections. The following excerpt is from my coaching notes prior to modeling the book selection processes, which captures Mrs. Foi's concerns regarding student book selection habits.

Mrs. Foi had expressed concern that many students were just blowing through books, while others seemed to suddenly struggle. I went into her room to do her reading block. The mini-lesson focused on what characteristics our books should have. [coaching notes, January 14, 2008]

I decided to start with two simple guiding principles that I had written on Mrs. Foi's dry erase board, listing criteria for selecting a "just right" book:

- Only 1 word per page that is unknown (names don't count)
- Unknown words could be
 - words you can't pronounce or
 - words you can't explain

After reviewing the book selection guidelines, Mrs. Foi and I then stood back and observed students as they made their text selections and headed back to their seats to begin reading. I reminded her of the importance of standing back and watching students closely for signs that wise choices were made – a critical step in heading off off-task behavior.

Mrs. Foi and I spent the first 10 minutes [of independent reading time] just standing back and watching for wiggles and other signs that someone might be in trouble. Mrs. Foi said this was a step she had forgotten about. We noticed it took Fred a good five minutes to settle in, but once he did, he was off and running. That was important – we talked about how if you turn your back too soon, some of them never settle in. We also discovered that her high readers were doing 1 of 2 things... either blowing through books with scant comprehension, or putting back books constantly, and never sticking with one book to completion... there were two [students] who were [having] chronic [difficulties] in this area. [coaching notes, January 14, 2008]

The example above highlights some of the technical elements of coaching that I engaged in with Mrs. Foi. On one hand, she had great insights into her students and knew so much about them in terms of their strengths and opportunities for growth. She presented them with powerful lessons on topics such as visualizing and how to make inferences in text.

However, Mrs. Foi needed to feel confident sharing her knowledge of her students as readers with their parents. Interactions with parents were plentiful because the workshop model of instruction required a re-education of parents with regard to the fact that fewer “school papers” would be coming home and that children would be reading out of variety of books instead of the weekly basal selection. The parents at Canyon Primary were, for the most part, an extremely involved group. Because Mrs. Foi was teaching children to read using something other than the basal the parents were accustomed to, Mrs. Foi had to learn to explain, and in some cases defend, her teaching decisions so parents would understand the model for her instruction.

The nature of our coaching relationship was two-fold. I helped Mrs. Foi to establish reading and writing workshop systems in her classroom, including helping parents understand the reading and comprehension strategies. I assisted with more basic aspects such as classroom management of a workshop-style classroom structure and record keeping methods. The second part of our coaching relationship was collegial. I learned as much from interacting with Mrs. Foi as we planned reading and writing workshop lessons as she learned from me. I would often walk away from planning sessions marveling at the units of study that had been written based on Mrs. Foi’s ideas that I could never have developed on my own. I also served as counselor from time to time as Mrs. Foi was criticized by one member of Group Sein, in particular, who had served as her mentor the year before. Mrs. Foi had since outgrown their mentoring relationship, but was still receiving pressure from this teacher to abandon some of her newer practices as well as her teaching partnership with Mrs. Roma and Mrs. D’Eagle.

Even in our coaching work together, it was hard to escape the undeniable tension that existed across the first grade team.

Mrs. Foi's Classroom

Mrs. Foi's classroom was neat and tidy, colorful and appealing. Mrs. Foi was located in a portable building, fondly referred to as a "cottage," located on the back side of the Canyon Primary School's 4.3-acre campus. Two picnic tables painted like ladybugs rested under the trees just outside Mrs. Foi's cottage – a gift from Mrs. Foi's classroom parents in honor of Mrs. Foi's favorite insect. Children would often eat snacks at these tables before heading out to recess, or would sit outside in warm weather, reading books or writing stories.

Upon entering Mrs. Foi's cottage, a tall wooden painted loft was constructed to the left of the door. A student computer was located below the loft in a cozy area. Eventually students would compose writing workshop stories here, saving to the shared drive or onto the computer – a new practice for students and teachers. In the past, first graders had used computers to retype stories they had already written and most students found the task painstakingly laborious. As a coach, I helped Mrs. Foi, as well as Mrs. Roma and Mrs. D'Eagle, rethink how adults use computers. Mrs. Foi began using the computer station as a place for students to compose and save their stories. To the immediate right of the classroom entry was a small table specifically for small group instruction or where Mrs. Foi would meet with students who needed extra assistance.

After stepping into the classroom ten paces, a colorfully blocked rug was located in the middle of the floor with an easel set off to one side. This was Mrs. Foi's whole

group instruction area and the place where she modeled writing and reading to her students. The easel provided a space for writing jot lists, modeling graphic organizers, and creating anchor charts for the purpose of leaving tracks of the class' thinking for students to refer back to throughout the year. Behind the easel, near the right wall of the classroom, low bookshelves were placed in the shape of a "U" in an area lined with comfortable pillows of all shapes and sizes. Student book boxes, a non-negotiable from our first year of the state reading initiative, lined the tops of the low bookcases. Students read from their book boxes on a daily basis and were also provided time to read from the books inside Mrs. Foi's "U" shaped classroom library. The library was filled with a combination of books from the teacher whose position Mrs. Foi inherited, Mrs. Foi's personal collection, books from the campus leveled book library, as well as books from the school and town library.

Down the left wall, opposite from the classroom library, were a series of cubbies holding mailboxes for each student that were usually filled with school and classroom newsletters and other kinds of papers destined to be lost inside first grade backpacks. The shelves were also used to display children's projects as well as interesting science and math equipment. The back half of Mrs. Foi's classroom was taken up with student desks, clustered in groups, in the middle and to the right, balanced out by Mrs. Foi's desk in the rear left-hand corner. Students would read and write at their desks, although they sometimes earned the privilege of reading and conferencing with partners on the carpet with special pillows to sit upon. Mounted across the back wall was Mrs. Foi's white board which was eventually replaced by her Smart Board. The Smart Board was used for writing, math, reading, and exploring the internet. Warm-ups and Math story problems

were posted at times on the Smart board and spelling words were usually posted there as well.

State Reading Initiative Modules & Alternative Initiatives

Although Mrs. Foi actively participated during the state reading initiative trainings, our coaching relationship was nested in the reading and writing workshop training I brought to Canyon Primary from my previous university and school district training. These understandings were expanded through the conference sessions we selected to attend at IRA, which also fueled our coaching relationship. We did not pretend to spend coaching time on the implementation of the state modules, instead directing all of our time together on the mini-lessons and daily details of running a reading and writing workshop with six and seven year olds. Mrs. Foi resisted the state modules for the same reason that I did: although many of the ideas were valuable in the right context, they were meant to be delivered in a dry, straightforward, scripted manner with little regard for the various levels of students in each classroom. In the following quote from her interview, Mrs. Foi speaks of her first classroom experience before coming to work in Scott County. The school where Mrs. Foi worked operated under the Reading First version of the state reading initiative and was monitored closely.

Mrs. Foi: [After] getting out of college, and being at [the other school], where it was very state mandated - everything was scripted, you had to do what the grant said, you had to do what [the state reading initiative], you know, told you to do, and DIBELS, and here I was faced with all these children - that I saw that look on their face. And it reflected me. And I knew exactly how they were feeling - that they had no clue what I was asking them to do but yet, the, the teaching that was modeled for me was what I remembered. And it was just this - it would just make me cringe 'cause I knew it wasn't working.

According to the state reading initiative, the lessons were designed to meet the needs of struggling students, but they were presented as decontextualized skills. We both agreed that her students needed to engage in the reading and writing of connected text (Calkins, 2001; Guszak, 1992).

I enjoyed working with Mrs. Foi immensely because our partnership was based on equal give and take. She was an easy person to coach because of her open and eager attitude. Our coaching relationship was also fostered by the fact that we held the same beliefs about the importance of teaching children to engage in meaningful authentic literacy tasks. In thinking about my coaching interactions with all of the teachers on campus, my work with Mrs. Foi was a highlight. I found it easy to work with someone who most certainly had the basics down with regard to classroom instruction and simply wanted to learn more and deepen her repertoire of strategies for supporting student literacy growth. Of the three focus teachers, my work with Mrs. Foi required the least amount of effort and involved no conflict of any kind. I was bolstered by our work together.

Each time I watched Mrs. Foi teach or helped her plan lessons, I walked away with a greater understanding of our literacy work with children, and a greater sense of patience for following the leads of the students. The following is an example of a lesson that Mrs. Foi planned based on a discussion we had about helping children engage with text as they read. She was drawing their attention to the way that authors use the five senses to create strong visual images in the reader's mind. Mrs. Foi later used this initial lesson as the basis for encouraging students to incorporate imagery into their writing workshop stories using the five senses.

Mrs. Foi: Close your eyes... if she's walking and she hears a sound that reminds her of her mother, what do you think she might hear?

[Students begin to pad their hands on the carpet to imitate the sound they think the bear might make. One possibility is the sound of the bear walking.]

Helen: Munching

Mrs. Foi: Why might she hear munching? [Student talks about someone eating berries. Students are responding to the pictures in whisper voices... they have realized that it's not the little girl's mother. A student makes a prediction and Mrs. Foi's student think it's going to be Sal's mother in the grass.]

Mrs. Foi: I just realized that I want to reread this. I saw that exclamation mark but it didn't really sound right. Let me go back and reread.

Student: Mrs. Foi, you're supposed to say gulp.

Mrs. Foi: Why do you think I didn't say gulp? [She draws their attention to the fact that gulp was written in special print.] It's cursive, like third graders. [She's referring to italics.]

Student: You really gulped instead of saying it!

Mrs. Foi: Close your eyes and let me read this again... "Little bear padded up and peeked into her pail." Turn to your shoulder partner and tell them what you see when you peeked inside the pail.

Student: Blueberries!

[Mrs. Foi laughs becoming tickled at the story and at her students' reactions. Cory brings up deodorant that smells like bears – he hunts and knows about deodorant that disguises human smells. Mrs. Foi picks up on this and honors it as a legitimate response. She is so unruffled.]

Mrs. Foi: When I read this part, I had a hard time understanding it. [Then she goes back to reread the part. She talks about how she was confused by the language. She asks the students to visualize the mom's pail and then Sal's pail... she helps the kids to see (by visualizing) that Sal did not do a very good job of filling her pail because she kept eating them all. Her students catch on quickly to what's going on.]

When examining the transcript of Mrs. Foi's teaching, the careful way she made her reading strategies overt during this read aloud provided insight into the kind of reading teacher she was. Across many classroom observations Mrs. Foi used metacognitive, self-monitoring talk so that students would attend to her strategic decisions as a reader. Notice in the example above how she tied the role of punctuation to the author's way of emphasizing sounds in a story as she revisited the section with the exclamation mark in order to adjust her expression to meet the author's intent. A student

even picked up on the fact that Mrs. Foi used a sound effect instead of reading the word, as Mrs. Foi completed the point by drawing her students' attention to the way the sound effect word was written in italics.

The Recursiveness of Reading and Writing

In many ways, the fact that Mrs. Foi embraced a reading and writing workshop approach made our coaching relationship much more fluid and easy than with the teachers who embraced other methods. Because we agreed upon the method and the means, there were very few awkward moments of supporting teaching practices I struggled to believe in. Mrs. Foi was anxious to learn more about how to meet the individual needs of her students, and I was anxious to step in to help her and to learn with her. One of the strategies that Mrs. Foi and I concentrated on was helping the students to see the reciprocal nature of the reading and writing workshop lessons. We wanted the students to understand how the writing techniques we were modeling impacted their comprehension as readers in addition to their writing craft. My observations in Mrs. Foi's classrooms suggested that the explicitness of Mrs. Foi's language during classroom lessons enabled her students to gain a fuller understanding of some fairly complex concepts – a part of her existing teaching practice that was not a result of our coaching relationship, but rather a strategy that came naturally to her. In the following example of a classroom conversation, Mrs. Foi began to teach her students about the visual images authors create in their writing that call upon readers and listeners to use their senses to construct vivid images in their minds of what is happening in the story. In this example, Mrs. Foi read aloud from *Blueberries for Sal* (McCloskey, 1976). In her copy of the text,

she placed sticky notes at points where she wanted to stop and draw on the imagery of the language.

Mrs. Foi: Today we are going to *visualize* - use all five senses to better understand stories. I'm going to read one of my favorite stories... Mrs. Roma shared this with me last year and it's one of my favorites to use visualizing as a strategy.

[As Mrs. Foi reads, kids are making "mmmmm" (yummy noises).]

Mrs. Foi: Dropping blueberries in her tin, metal pail... imagine what her blueberries sound like as they are being dropped in the pail.

Fred, what do they sound like?

Fred: [Fred gives a response in the form of a sound that approximates something dropping in a metal pail.]

Mrs. Foi: Why do you think they sound that way?

Fred: It's some type of metal.

Mrs. Foi: Show me the "me, too" sign if you thought it sounded that way.

Students: [They all show the "me, too" sign.]

Mrs. Foi: I want you to close your eyes and reach into her mother's pail, and visualize and think about what it feels like.

Student 1: Like playdough...

Student 2: bumpy...

Student 3: yummy...

Student 4: smooshy, gooey

[Mrs. Foi talks of buying blueberries and putting them on her cereal, popping them in her mouth, eating them frozen.]

Mrs. Foi: Why might she hear munching?

[Student talks about someone eating berries.]

In this conversation, Mrs. Foi noted her observations about the text, backing them up with relevant aspects of the text—parts of the text she had already marked in her preparation. Her clear, explicitly visual, language seemed to invite the children to actively participate (e.g., padding their hands on the carpet; closing their eyes to envision). Mrs. Foi also used several strategies to help the children buy in to one another's thinking. Students used the "me, too" sign (thumbs and pinkies extended, moving back and forth between the listener and the speaker) to indicate the listener was thinking along the same lines as the speaker. In this way, students were able to participate in a visible way even when they did not have the floor to speak. I also enjoyed the way

that Mrs. Foi openly gave credit to Mrs. Roma for recommending the book they were using. Mrs. Foi found overt opportunities to highlight her own literacy as well as the literacy of the other members of Group Roma to show children that she was a reader and a writer.

As a coach, I found Mrs. Foi's teaching to be engaging and responsive. It was exciting to work with her, given her eagerness for feedback, always wanting to take her teacher to more advanced levels. Further, her ability to reflect upon her teaching brought a thoughtful level of analysis to our conversations. These reflective conversations allowed us both the opportunity to try and experiment with new teaching strategies in her classroom. Her tendency to look at her own teaching with critical eyes seemed to be fostered by Mrs. Roma, Mrs. D'Eagle, and Mrs. Rouge, all of whom engaged in this type of reflective practice. Although I was careful with my wording, I never felt the struggle to select my words carefully with Mrs. Foi. Our relationship as a supportive one, and Mrs. Foi entered into reflection without an ego attached – there was no sense that I had to validate her reputation in any way – she was there to learn and grow as a teacher. At the start of the following debriefing session, Mrs. Foi and Mrs. D'Eagle talk about the fairy tale and folk tale unit they are in the midst of, and then move into debriefing writing workshop. This is a strong example of the open and honest reflective conversations they engaged in as a group and that carried over into my coaching sessions with Mrs. Foi.

Mrs. Foi: Mrs. D'Eagle, on the folktales and fairy tales, I really have not done much with it, except introducing the difference and reading maybe one of each, but it's so neat because I have kids writing that kind of story in writing workshop already. And they noticed today that a whole cubby in the classroom library was just fairy tales and folk tales. And so they asked if we could put them all out. It's just funny seeing-

Mrs. D'Eagle: And you know what's interesting as you read them? Mine are just making all these connections - we talked about connections. "I'm connecting to there were 3 bears and then 3 pigs. I'm connecting to..." And I was like, "Can we just read the story?" [joking]

Mrs. Foi: My writing workshop is kinda like - not out of control - but for [my] mind is out of control.

Mrs. Roma: My is kind of out of control, too.

Mrs. Foi: Because they're so inspired that like Mike, on the last story he published was a song, and the word he needed help with how to spell "rainy" [Mrs. Foi demonstrates how the child sings the word, holding the last sound] - like he was singing - how to spell it.

Mrs. Rouge: How they - okay.

Mrs. Foi: We talked about how with the last sound, which letter made that sound, and would drag it out. And I have one that I really need help from Mrs. D'Eagle on [laughing]. They [the students] are pair-writing a lot ...

Mrs. Rouge: When they pair-write, do they, do they both write or does one write and one publishes?

Mrs. Foi: Oh, no, they're both writing. They're writing the same thing, but they're talking a lot about what they're both writing so it's great.

Mrs. Roma: I think that is really cool!

Mrs. Foi: And that's the thing - like at first with each new idea, I'm like, "I don't know about that," inside. I'm like, "How do I do that? How do I tell them what to do?" But I've just let them go.

Mrs. Foi mentioned wanting Mrs. D'Eagle's help with regard to song writing conventions because Mrs. D'Eagle had a background in theater and the skills for the conventions of song writing. My observations and my interviews suggested that these four teachers made time and space to continually think about ways to improve lessons, and then customized them to honor each teacher's pedagogical preferences. Again the absence of egos made my work so much easier within the context of the group as well as working with these ladies as individuals.

Scaffolding Student Understanding

Mrs. Foi's teaching practices and reflective stance towards her own teaching afforded many opportunities for coaching, as discussed earlier. In the discussion that

follows, Mrs. Foi and I were debriefing her attempts to scaffold children as they used the visualizing strategy that she had been teaching using a combination of Patricia Polacco's books and the *Blueberries for Sal* book referenced above, but this time, as students made the shift from listening to reading from their own texts. The students were accustomed to sitting in a large group and listening to Mrs. Foi read. Mrs. Foi would stop at pre-determined points in the text and the students would talk about the images in their heads evoked by the descriptions from the text. However, when Mrs. Foi "turned the students loose" in their own texts, we both realized that students had a hard time knowing when to stop to record places where they were visualizing strong images. And when students did find places where the language painted an important picture, they were frustrated by the mismatch between what they wanted to write and the stamina needed to write it. They wanted to say so much more than they could efficiently write. In the excerpt below, I had just made the suggestion that Mrs. Foi insert a supportive step between having the students talk about their connections out loud before sending them back to their seats to juggle the task of reading, knowing when to stop to record what they were visualizing, and then write it down on a sticky notes. The "in between step" would call for Mrs. Foi to read to the students from another picture book, but let the students begin to record their connections on sticky notes as they listened to her read. In this way she could begin to help students understand why readers stop at particular places in a text to consider particular aspects of a story, while still carrying the burden of reading from the text to free up student attention in order to allow them the opportunity to attend to the writing task.

Mrs. Foi: So are you saying do their read aloud while they're at their desks?

Mrs. Darden: Yes.

Mrs. Foi: Oh, okay! I like that a lot more because it really concerned me yesterday after glancing over their notes, the writing really held some of them up. They can do it when they're on the carpet but when they have to use sticky notes [meaning, when they have to write it down] they struggle. So I like that bridge that we're creating. And I'm thinking for my lesson tomorrow on visualizing, since we've done the sticky notes and I'm realizing we need to back up on that... I think that this would create a visual in front of them... take the words from the story and get them on paper. Just like in Writing Workshop it made me realize how we talk about our story first, then we draw our story, then we write. And what you've just said, what you've reiterated is that I've skipped a huge step – especially for my little ones – a huge part of that writing process that they're used to and it's scary.

Mrs. Darden: I had not ever even thought of that.

Mrs. Foi: and um,

Mrs. Darden: That makes me want to refine what we're going to do for Friday, then. Maybe draw a line and have them do a picture at the top of the page and *then* write.

Mrs. Foi: And it also makes me think in writing workshop to do one lesson, one day (laughs at the *one day* part because there is so little time and she has many goals she has not yet reached), how we use words to draw the picture in their heads...

In our debriefing, Mrs. Foi was able to quickly synthesize her reflections from a lesson moments earlier and sculpt out a plan for making improvements. Many beginning teachers are worried more about the “transmission” aspect of their lessons – just making it through their plans – that they struggle to find the time to reflect upon and refine their practices. From the snippets of coaching interactions above, it was clear that Mrs. Foi was comfortable and competent in analyzing her own teaching. In the debriefing session, she realized that during writing workshop, she used a great deal of oral rehearsal in the form of discussion for the students to work through their stories before committing them to print. This form of oral rehearsal allowed students to solidify what they wanted to write and practice it several times orally before slowing down to do the writing. In the lessons on visualizing Mrs. Foi had been facilitating thus far, she was controlling the

writing and students were accustomed to making elaborate connections that they were now struggling to get down on paper.

Our coaching sessions, then, were dialogic in nature, and characterized by an easy back-and-forth conversation about her teaching practices. In reflecting on the “easiness” of our coaching relationship, it seemed that several things contributed to this ease:

- 1) Mrs. Foi and I shared a similar philosophy of literacy as well as that of teaching and learning;
- 2) Mrs. Foi was inclined towards a reflective stance on her own teaching, partly cultivated by her close relationship with three more experienced teachers (Mrs. Roma, Mrs. D’Eagle, and Mrs. Rouge); and
- 3) Mrs. Foi was able to quickly incorporate our reflections into her lessons, making strategic improvements quickly in order to help students become more effective readers and writers.

In addition to her reflective stance on her own practices, Mrs. Foi also eagerly took up practices I modeled during our joint sessions with other members of the first grade team. For example, in one of the reading initiative trainings, we talked about the power of noticing what students were able to do independently in order to scaffold students as they took the next step. The ability to notice students’ strengths, no matter how simple, was transformative to each student’s sense of self-efficacy. Later, in a small group lesson in Mrs. Foi’s classroom, I modeled a type of talk strategy for her, designed to increase some of her struggling readers’ willingness to problem-solve independently. Very soon after I modeled this lesson, I observed her applying this style of talk, working it into her student conferences during reading workshop. The following reading

conference illustrated the way that Mrs. Foi highlighted student thinking and provided a name for that thinking. She began the conference by asking the student to relay the strategy he just used to solve a new word.

Brady: Go all the way to the end of the period.

Mrs. Foi: Let me tell you what I'm so excited about... you used the pop-out strategy. Show me how you did that again. [The student models the process again.]

When you came to the word *here* show me how you were flexible. We learned that during word work. We learned how you have to try it one way and then another. How did you try it differently? How were you flexible? [The student responds.]

I really like how you tried it one way and then another. Can you keep practicing? And I want to listen to you read this story again tomorrow.

Her use of language helped make the targeted strategy clear to the child. She provided a name for the strategy drawn from one of their many reading lessons on “fix up” strategies. She widened the definition for him by layering the term *flexibility* on to the initial strategy. Mrs. Foi then held Brady accountable for the new strategy he had just demonstrated for her as she painted him as the kind of reader who used these strategies on a regular basis.

In conclusion, Mrs. Foi's ability to quickly incorporate new strategies into her teaching, and put her own special twist on them made her rewarding to work with. Her high level of patience with her students, and her ability to listen to them carefully and adjust her teaching reminded me of the importance of following each child's lead. In the next section we will learn how her practices played out in the literate lives of Mrs. Foi's students, from their perspective.

The Student Perspective

The vast amount of time students spent in Mrs. Foi's room engaged in reading and writing was quite obvious during my interviews with the students from her classroom. I asked Mrs. Foi to group her students for me according to their strengths as readers and writers. I followed this same procedure across all three classrooms. I interviewed the students in groups of two or three students because I felt that in smaller groups they might feel more comfortable sharing with me. I also thought that the students might remind each other of things they wanted to talk about that might be forgotten if I talked with them one-on-one. During student interviews, the children were able to talk about their reading and writing strategies with great specificity. Students were also able to quickly name specific books and authors they had been reading in class, belying students who lived "readerly lives." This was one of the major goals Mrs. Foi and I had for the students in her classroom. The following comment is from a child named Lisa, a voracious reader in Mrs. Foi's classroom, who loved to share her favorite books with anyone nearby who was willing to listen.

Lisa: I love it because you can enjoy a book and it's like, just sooo awesome to get all the details and it, and you can might make a text-to-self connection. Because when I read a book, my dad, he had a bent ear - he had something wrong with his ear - and this dog had a bent - so I made a connection to that, and it was, like, so cool! I loved how, also, all the, um, books with levels (not chapter books), but the *Parades*-like books, they had a lot of neat stories. Though they w- some - a lot of them were not nonfiction, but I could actually make like if I was in that story, how I would feel. So it was kind of nice to just read all those neat books.

Lisa's enthusiasm for reading was quite evident from her detailed explanation of reading workshop. Her ability to talk about comprehension strategies as well as the way she mentioned specific books showed that she was truly a reader at heart. Of importance to

me was the fact that Lisa did not simply refer to “status books” like *Junie B. Jones* or the *Magic Tree House* series, but a wider range of reading books that she had experience with.

From the next conversation I had with two other students from Mrs. Foi’s class, it was easy to recognize the prominent role writing workshop played in this first grade classroom. Renee and Nelson’s conversation underscores the importance of providing students with the chance to perform literate moves in authentic contexts, capturing the importance Mrs. Foi and I both placed on children engaging in reading and writing that involved an appropriate amount of choice. From Renee and Nelson’s comments, we can see that conferencing with Mrs. Foi was a regular part of their writing workshop experience. In the last segment Renee anticipates what Mrs. Foi’s final directives will be.

Renee: I'm on my fifth story published and I love publishing, 'cause I like typing and I like writing. I like writing in my writing journal because I really, really use my mind and I get - like add all the details and really tell about everything.

Mrs. Darden: Wow!

Nelson: And, um, I'm, I'm on my fifth story, too.

Mrs. Darden: Good -

Nelson: And, um, that it's fun when Mrs. Foi gets to conference with you because you, you, she checks if you have all the capitals and periods so you can breathe.

Renee: And this morning when I was [everything?], she was thinking of something, and she, like, "Um, go back to your desk." And I'm like, "Circle and the 'then's." And she's like, "You know what to do!" _

It was clear from spending time in her classroom as well as listening to the students’ comments outside of the classroom setting, that these children valued Mrs. Foi’s notions of what it meant to be a reader and a writer. Mrs. Foi’s enthusiasm was easily captured as she interacted with her children during conferences and lessons. I doubt this same level of enthusiasm would have existed for the students or Mrs. Foi if we had been confined only to the state reading initiative modules. Hargreaves and Dawe

(1990) suggest that “These forms of instructional and professional intervention [technical coaching – like the state reading initiative] which withhold from teachers opportunities for wider reflection about the context of their work; which deprofessionalize and disempower teachers in denying them opportunity to discuss and debate what and how they teach... foster training at the expense of education” (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 239). It seems that Mrs. Foi, in avoiding the mandates of the state initiative, chose her own path of professional development mediated by a sympathetic coach who was willing to support other paths of literacy outside of the state reading initiative modules. Mrs. Foi’s teaching decisions were also supported by her planning colleagues (Group Roma) as they navigated the same path she did – one that traveled away from the scripted lessons of the reading initiative.

DIBELS

Although the purpose of using DIBELS to measure student growth toward the “100% literacy” goal set for by the state felt artificial, DIBELS scores were still part of our reality. From my perspective the scores were important because the scores would determine whether the campus principal and the assistant superintendent (who granted us permission to abandon the basal) would continue to be supportive as we pursued other literacy avenues outside the confines of the basal reading program and the state reading initiative.

Table 5, below, represents the class averages for each of the first grade teachers at the middle and end of the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school year. The Oral Reading Fluency scores were determined by how many words students read correctly on an end of

first grade passage. The retelling portion was calculated by each student's ability to retell the story accurately. The number of words in the child's retelling were tallied. Averages with pale highlighting were the lowest on the team for each category. Averages with dark highlighting were the highest for each category. Mrs. Foi's class averages appear in bolded text. From examining the scores below, we can see that Mrs. Foi's scores were among the highest scores on the grade level. I attribute her students' performance on the oral reading measure to the extended time spent reading each day during reading workshop. Mrs. Foi rarely engaged in progress monitoring, which afforded students the chance to practice taking the assessment, which meant that the oral reading fluency effects were not due to test practice. I attribute her strong oral retelling scores to the large amounts of time students spent engaged in focused conversation around their reading workshop books.

Table 5: End of Year Class Averages for DIBELS

	07-08	06-07	07-08	06-07
	Oral	Oral	Oral Retell	Oral Retell
	Reading	Reading		
	Fluency	Fluency		
	(40)	(40)		
Foi	86.2	76.9	28.8	27.8
D'Eagle	80.9	112.5	27.2	38.9
Pedd	96.4	N/A	29.9	N/A
Rohl	80.3	65.2	26.4	24.7
Roma	73.6	69.3	33.4	21.9
Rouge	59.7	51.8	22.6	18.7
Sein	77.3	63	25.9	21.8
Shue	76.1	71.1	23.8	24.9
Wein	61.5	88.6	16.3	33.5
Yxel	70.9	91.6	30.8	33.9

THE STORY OF MRS. SEIN

From an early age, Mrs. Sein knew that she wanted to be a teacher. We laughed about this fact during the interviews because we both recalled organizing neighborhood friends so that we could play school. What I found fascinating about her story was that based on her earliest memories, she described herself as a person who desired to be in charge – to be the one calling the shots – the person who organized and led others.

Mrs. Darden: If you don't mind, talk about your teaching and like, what's influenced you, and, um,

Mrs. Sein: As I'm being a teacher? Or be - like to become a teacher.

Mrs. Darden: Anything - it doesn't matter. I mean, you can definitely start with before and why you wanted to do this.

Mrs. Sein: [laughing] When I was three... Okay.

Mrs. Darden: Yeah... We don't have to go back that far. Actually, some of us have probably known that long.

Mrs. Sein: Well, I think I did. I used to make my neighborhood kids play school. And I was the teacher and made them - and I used to give them homework - in the summer time. It was bad. Nobody else could be teacher but me.

Mrs. Darden: That was funny.

Mrs. Sein: My poor brother.

Her confident air in combination with her willingness to serve as a leader followed Mrs. Sein into her classroom life. As she spoke of her early years as a teacher, the same level of confidence exuded from her stories. She began student teaching in a second grade classroom during the fall semester of 2001, and was ecstatic when she received a job offer to teach second grade for the spring semester of the school year. From the interview, below, a strong sense of self is present in Mrs. Sein's secret story as she described her way of teaching and structuring her classroom that she found was inspiring for others.

Mrs. Sein: I had a really good experience when I did my, um, internship with a second grade teacher and then I was hired as a second grade teacher, so that was, it was an easy transition. She was wonderful, but she also allowed me to do

whatever I wanted in her classroom. And I'll never forget because I went back to a workshop - about four years later and had learned that she had come out of the classroom and was teaching a workshop on, uh, word walls, using word walls and centers and things like that and she said that she had learned an idea from me that year. And I remembered exactly what she was talking about - I just didn't know I was giving her something that she would use in her future. And it was funny sitting there in that workshop, with other teachers... and she was saying, "Well, I had this student teacher about four or five years ago, and this is what I learned from her." And I'm like, whoa! [laughing]
And, um, then being able to step right into second grade was even more remarkable because I had the beginning of the year down because I started the beginning of the year underneath her. So I had the beginning of the year down and it was - and it just felt, like, it fit. You know? I walked right into it.

This sense of tenacity expressed by Mrs. Sein gave off the impression that regardless of the situation, she would find a way to make her efforts successful. This quick sense of confidence displayed early on by Mrs. Sein parlayed into the attributes of a teacher who enjoyed being a role model to others; she was not shy with regard to securing what she needed in order to be effective and encouraged others to do the same. Mrs. Sein's presence on the first grade team inspired some of the other teachers to embrace similar practices as well as to speak out for what they thought was right.

Recreating Status Quo

In many ways my work with Mrs. Sein presented professional challenges for me that were both positive and a point of struggle. In my opportunities working with Mrs. Sein, it seemed clear that she was determined to find a way to bring her classroom vision to fruition regardless of the obstacles she was presented with. Some of the practices she brought with her from Murphy County were practices that I had purposely avoided introducing to the teachers at Canyon Primary because I felt they were less effective than other practices I was hoping to promote. When Mrs. Sein introduced practices such as

data notebooks and highly routinized schedules of assessing students, I felt a mixture of dread and relief. I was relieved that she was the one to introduce them – these practices could be associated with her and not necessarily with me. I was also saddened that some of these practices were finding their way into our campus. Achinstein (2002) writes of the notion of *status quo* as a way to explain the need people have to recreate what is known and comfortable in the midst of situations that are constantly changing. Reestablishing *status quo* brings a sense of balance and continuity. I understood it was important for Mrs. Sein to be able to bring some of these structures with her to Canyon Primary and that it made sense for some members of the team to be interested in learning about that. It was a balancing act for me as coach, trying to honor her past experiences and her desire to share with teammates while also keeping an eye toward my own beliefs about literacy that I hoped to pass on.

When Mrs. Sein joined the faculty of Canyon Primary, she never dreamed the campus still relied upon the basal adoption as its primary method of reading instruction. As a strong proponent of guided reading, she was taken aback when she discovered the campus's leveled library consisted of a scant 100 sets of leveled readers – most of which were far too high to support beginning readers. Initially frustrated by the lack of teaching materials available on campus, Mrs. Sein turned to her own book collection and began organizing those books to use during guided reading groups. She then secured a subscription to Reading A-Z, an on-line collection of leveled readers, which she could print in her classroom. Mrs. Sein began assembling her own library of leveled books so that she would have her own collection of readers at her fingertips.

As Mrs. Sein began to share her strategy for equipping her students with an inexpensive and almost inexhaustible supply of leveled readers, other teachers took notice. The Parent Teacher Council arranged for each teacher on campus to have his or her own subscription to Reading A-Z. Mrs. Sein's firm belief in her pedagogical beliefs and her willingness to stand up for what she needed was duly noted by team members. Truscott & Truscott (2004), who reference Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) research on positivistic psychology, note the importance of making space within schools for "conceptualizing teachers as active decision makers who can, and should, exercise choice." Mrs. Sein's efforts to secure the books helped to create an identify of "active decision maker" (p. 51). As a result, members of the team began to seek her out for advice regarding her classroom systems and methods for teaching children to read. This sense of leadership and notion of confidence is exemplified in the transcript below.

Mrs. Sein: You can give me just about anything to do, but I'm going to do it the way that I know that it works. So I'm gonna, you know, put my finger down on the organization part of it and relaying it to children, you know, the way that I think it works best for me, and I know it works good for them because I have the results, you know, in front of me.

Mrs. Darden: Yeah.

Mrs. Sein: Yeah, because I've been - I've had that - the system that I came from - well this is what you have to teach. This what - here it is. Figure it out. And, I knew I had to teach it so I did that - I organized it. And I studied it and I played with it. You know, I made it work. The, the best for the children. And that's kind of what I do with things. I'll listen to other people's ideas and I'll feed off of it or if I see something that I like, I usually take it back and make it my own.

In talking with Mrs. Sein during after school conversations, it became evident that she was ready and eager to accept campus leadership roles, with the eventual hope of becoming the campus Reading Coach, once I returned to my home state. Mrs. Sein received a great deal of respect on her previous campus for her teaching prowess and she

was looking forward to assuming leadership roles at Canyon Primary, as well. She had already completed her Master's degree and spoke of going back to school to earn a Ph.D. Although eager to support other teachers, her aspirations were laced with impatience and an impending air of intolerance, at times, toward the literacy practices she observed around her. Mrs. Sein's comments below occurred as she was talking about the lack of leveled texts available on campus, and her question regarding how the teachers taught children to read.

Mrs. Sein: And the things that were here, I didn't understand. And then again, it's kind of like, "What is here?" I kept going, "What are, what are people doing here?"

Mrs. Darden: How did anybody learn to read?

Mrs. Sein: You know? I don't know what they're doing. And the things that I had heard, didn't make sense to me. And of course, I didn't see it because I'm not able to, you know, leave my room and go stay in someone else's room all day long and see what they're doing. I just knew that I didn't know what they were talking about. And I didn't know how to make it work. So it was hard, it was very hard.

Mrs. Sein tried to reconcile this notion of Canyon Primary "as being one of the elite in Scott County" schools with she viewed as sub-standard practices. She was baffled by the lack of reading knowledge at Canyon Primary, surprised what counted as novel practices in the eyes of her teammates.

In a certain respect I have to credit Mrs. Sein with forcing me to improve my skills as a coach. Mrs. Foi was so easy to coach because we had the same basic beliefs about literacy and she was eager to take on new practices. With Mrs. Sein I had to honor the fact that she had valid experiences that were quite different from my own and her belief system regarding what was right for children in learning to read and write at times contradicted my own. Our work together forced me to carefully consider my own tendencies to want to recreate the *status quo* that made sense to me based upon my own

past experiences. Mrs. Sein helped me to keep my sense of self in check, remaining more cognizant of making room for other practices outside of the ones I privileged.

The Importance of Classroom Routines

As I listened to Mrs. Sein speak about desirable classroom practices, it became evident that her need to maintain order in her classroom was paramount. Mrs. Sein had clear rules and expectations for her classroom and clearly defined consequences, which resulted in a smooth and efficiently run classroom. The example below illustrates the well-defined data collection procedures Mrs. Sein had in place to monitor student reading progress. The importance of consistent routines and procedures were meant to streamline the amount of work for Mrs. Sein, while also meeting the requirements for monitoring student reading growth as set forth by the reading initiative.

Mrs. Sein: If I do a - when I do a benchmark at the beginning of the year, I do a benchmark on everyone and I put their names across the bottom with the level - just like a regular bar graph. And then I'll check back in with my below - the ones who are below grade level - I'll check in with quarterly. And so I can progress monitor their progress quarterly.

Mrs. Darden: Mmm... hmm...

Mrs. Sein: And, um, depending upon where they are, middle of the year, or if they're, you know, higher level, I may not check them again until the end of the year - that fourth quarter. So I use my bar graphs. And I really - I like that 'cause It's just - it's a quick, easy visual.

I found it interesting that once children reached a particular point in their reading, Mrs. Sein did not formally assess them again until the end of the school year. This is an example of the model of extreme efficiency that Mrs. Sein and the other members of her group valued. With the extensive number of assessments Mrs. Sein gave on a weekly basis, she needed a systematic way to determine whether or not all the students needed to

be tested. Defining minimum benchmark levels for each point in the school year allowed her to manage the amount of testing in her classroom.

I enjoyed working with Mrs. Sein and appreciated her willingness to experiment with new practices. Any ideas that were mentioned during staff development or reading initiative meetings that Mrs. Sein felt fit into her own framework for literacy would be tried and then reported on. I found her classroom to be an excellent place to send teachers who were trying to implement similar practices; her extreme sense of efficiency and her propensity for organizing tasks and students made Mrs. Sein an excellent model and an excellent person for the other teachers to ask questions.

Our Coaching Relationship

Mrs. Sein was extremely confident in her practices, so in terms of my role as the campus reading coach, I functioned as more of a sounding board for her than someone assisting her with the acquisition of new practices. There also existed a small but noticeable level of tension between the two of us that was not always conducive toward working together as closely as we could have. As mentioned earlier, there were practices such as Fountas and Pinnell's notion of guided reading and the keeping of student data notebooks that I hesitated to introduce on campus. Although I was certified to train teachers in these areas, part of the joy in working at Canyon Primary was the fact that as a kindergarten and first grade campus, we did not have to concern ourselves as heavily with testing and assessment. I knew the teachers at the intermediate campus had to deal with enough testing and our students would soon be exposed to standardized tests. I found ways to resist as much testing as possible because I knew that it would inevitably

creep in at higher levels. Because Mrs. Sein hailed from a school that had already been through the reading initiative training, she was very familiar with the structures and strategies employed in reading initiative schools, which also translated into an emphasis on testing. She wanted to share her knowledge with others and recreate some of these same structures. I was certainly not in a position to squelch her attempts at spreading some of these practices, but I would not openly promote them unless it was a required part of my job. I was more than happy for her to take the onus and share what she thought was important.

When I did engage in the coaching cycle with Mrs. Sein, we focused almost exclusively on the nuances of guided reading groups for the more advanced readers. She was interested in implementing the comprehension strategies from the second state reading initiative module, and she used her stronger readers to experiment with the strategies during guided reading groups. Because a certain amount of tension existed between the two of us, I felt it was important to follow her interests during coaching opportunities to increase the likelihood that she would trust me a bit more and that we could continue to develop our working relationship. I had to be cautious with Mrs. Sein because I had observed that it could be tricky broaching opportunities for change. I think because most people went to her for advice and the administrators she worked for in the past were always extremely complimentary, it was a new way of thinking to critically analyze her own teaching, and she was not yet comfortable with engaging in this type of analysis.

My main concern, outside of the large amounts of assessment that were a major part of her weekly literacy routine, was with the emergent readers in her classroom.

These were students for whom the state reading initiative was designed for, but their guided reading groups focused almost exclusively on decoding with the little attention paid to metacognitive strategies. Learning to decode the isolated letters and sounds was the most difficult aspect of learning to read for these students, and when I analyzed the interactions between Mrs. Sein and the children in the most emergent groups, they were consistently prompted to decode without attention to strategies that would have supported meaning making in text. This was a prime example of a coaching opportunity that I did not feel comfortable initiating because of Mrs. Sein's tendency to become defensive when practices were questioned. It seemed easier to let it go and encourage and support Mrs. Sein's experimentation where my input was called for than to risk entering controversial territory and shutting down our sometimes tenuous relationship. My access point was volunteering to come into her classroom to work with these students. However, when I would do so, Mrs. Sein was working with other students so my presence offered little in terms of passing on new strategies.

In terms of coaching, most of my time was taken up with teachers who had far less training in reading than Mrs. Sein, and who were ready to embrace change. Although I certainly influenced some of her practices, it was more by the mere mention of ideas rather than adhering to all of the elements of the coaching cycle. I only had to suggest an idea or mention an extension of something Mrs. Sein was already doing in her classroom and within short order, she would have attempted the strategy or lesson idea. We spent time after school chatting about reading, comparing notes on our common understandings and trainings. Although our opinions differed at times, and I found gaining an entry way

to engage in the coaching cycle with her to be challenging, I had a great deal of respect for her perspective.

Throughout the course of the second year, Mrs. Sein took on more of a leadership role introducing teachers to some of the practices she and Mrs. Shue were accustomed to using in their former district of Murphy County. Although these were not required by the state reading initiative, we both agreed that for a campus that had only used the basal for reading instruction, having a system for determining student reading levels was appropriate. As I mentioned earlier, I was more than happy for her to take the lead on initiatives like establishing data notebooks because although those practices were “en vogue” in many districts, I was not interested in perpetuating them at Canyon Primary. The initiatives gave her the official space to serve in the leadership capacity that she wanted to pursue and gave me the freedom to distance myself from supporting those strategies.

One of Mrs. Sein’s frustrations was the requirement from the county curriculum department that first grade students receive “systematic phonics instruction” using the Open Court program. As a new teacher to the campus, Mrs. Sein had been notified that there was no more money from the county board of education to purchase an Open Court kit for her classroom, and that she would have to share with her neighboring teacher, Mrs. Rohl. There was also no training available for Open Court. Mrs. Sein was left with a set of Xeroxed cards pilfered from Mrs. Rohl, and no clear understanding of the program. Below, Mrs. Sein talks about her frustration over the lack of available teaching materials.

Mrs. Sein: Trying to make -
Mrs. Darden: Make do -

Mrs. Sein: with what I, with what I had. Um, not to say you know when that was - it wasn't taken away but it wasn't in place here.

Mrs. Darden: Well, and it wasn't even here.

Mrs. Sein: It wasn't in place.

Mrs. Darden: It didn't exist.

Mrs. Sein: And the things that were here, I didn't understand. And then again, it's kind of like, "What is here?" I kept going, "What are, what are people doing here?"

Because of the county's insistence upon an explicitly taught phonics program, Mrs. Sein had an opportunity to explore some options to find something that would meet the needs of her students. Mrs. Sein spent the summer researching Johnny Can Spell and created her own version of it that she experimented with and refined throughout the school year. As a teacher feeling lost without the materials that were available to her in her former job, Mrs. Sein found ways to adapt existing materials or locate new ones in order to teach in a way that was meaningful to her. This was another point of differing opinions for us. I had trouble accepting phonics in isolation for twenty minute blocks of time. Students who were already proficient readers could apply these rules without support and students who were struggling showed no gains in their ability to decode words in context. I did understand that isolated phonics instruction was simply part of Mrs. Sein's concept of effective reading instruction. This was symptomatic, in my opinion, of the fact that she learned to teach in a system that embraced the principles of Reading First and the isolated tenets of the National Reading Panel Report. This was not an area that I was going to have an effect and chose to search for more productive ways for us to work together.

For the 2007-2008 school year, rubric development was the focus of each person's Professional Development Plan. After the initial campus-wide training on rubrics, Mrs. Sein promptly returned to her classroom and began developing rubrics to

teach her students how to monitor their own behavior during literacy centers as well as assess the quality of their work. She was happy to share with other members of the campus and allowed me to take photographs of her rubrics to share with other reading coaches across the county. She was already thinking of ways to refine her work with rubrics for the following school year. As Mrs. Sein so eloquently stated, when given a directive, without a doubt she could find a way to make it work in her classroom effectively, to the benefit of her students.

As our relationship grew, Mrs. Sein asked me to observe her teaching guided reading groups. Although Mrs. Sein was confident in her teaching ability, she also longed for honest feedback. When campus administrators would come in to observe Mrs. Sein both in her former school and at Canyon Primary, she was always told that her students were extremely well-behaved, she had excellent classroom management, and that her lessons were interesting, and the students were engaged. However, Mrs. Sein wanted a more critical look at her teaching. She was hungry for improvement and enjoyed finding new ways to make her teaching more effective. I felt both flattered and nervous with regard to her request. I needed to tread lightly – striking a delicate balance between validating her practices while highlighting opportunities for growth. I did not want to appear overzealous in my attempt to look for areas of need, betraying my misgivings about her implementation of guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) in her classroom, and also discouraging her from coming to me in the future. I found myself carefully reviewing the coaching protocol as set forth in the state reading coaching training. I took careful notes and then without commenting, returned to my office to expand those notes.

Mrs. Sein's strong convictions about her guided reading practices, and her enactment of guided reading during my observation, raised some concerns for me with regard to the amount of text students had the opportunity to read. The strategy focus of the lesson was tight – referring back to text evidence for comprehension – but I was concerned by the fact that Mrs. Sein read the first few pages of the book to the group, effectively cutting the number of opportunities students had to read from connected text by approximately 25%. I have often seen teachers spend too much time controlling the reading of the text during guided reading groups in an effort to draw a “perfect reading” out of the children. To express these concerns, I recall cautiously drafting my words for her. From previous encounters with Mrs. Sein, when she felt her practices were being questioned, she could be defensive, and I did not want to invalidate her trust in me by coming across too strong. I carefully scripted my words, describing my concerns in terms of the number of pages students were given the opportunity to read, and recognizing the tendency to hope for a clean reading of the text by the children. It was okay to let the students read the entire book, and it was okay if the children had a less than “clean” reading. The conference went smoothly – Mrs. Sein appreciated the honest feedback – and I realized the importance of trusting the coaching protocol by planning out my words and basing my observations on quantifiable data. By investing time with Mrs. Sein to provide her with feedback for her teaching, I felt I had secured her trust, and the experience opened the door for me to find ways for her to share her knowledge with the other teachers on campus.

In terms of my coaching relationship with Mrs. Sein, I actually engaged in very few full coaching cycles with her. There were bigger emergencies on the team than

coaching an accomplished teacher like Mrs. Sein, and she was also riskier to coach.

Feeling extremely confident in her practices, and being open and willing to take on new practices of her own accord, there were not as many opportunities to engage her in the coaching cycle. She was also difficult to coach because she had the tendency to reject certain ideas if they were not tightly in line with her current practices and beliefs.

Although I had concerns regarding the implementation of isolated and phonics and the way that guided reading groups for the younger readers focused almost exclusively on cueing for visual information (decoding), I did not feel comfortable in broaching the topic. In many ways I viewed her as a secondary reading coach: she was a wonderful addition to the team because she enjoyed organizing planning sessions and defining some common practices that should have been more closely aligned across the team. As a classroom teacher she was able to help the other teachers understand the need for streamlining some of their practices such as common expectations for reading levels at various times of the year, in order to have a cohesive definition of when students were exceeding first grade expectations, right on target, or in need of additional support.

Mrs. Sein's Classroom

Mrs. Sein's classroom was located in the exceptional building, in the classroom adjacent to Mrs. Rohl. Mrs. Sein's classroom was the epitome of a well-organized classroom. The walls were uncluttered and posted materials were germane to classroom instruction. Many of the classroom displays were either built with the children's assistance or constructed as lessons progressed throughout the year. Upon entering the classroom, the common wall Mrs. Sein shared with Mrs. Rohl had a dry erase board

mounted on it with a large chart tablet posted on the left hand side. The chart table was filled with poems that followed phonetic rules Mrs. Sein taught to her students based on her use of Johnny Can Spell. Mrs. Sein located poems that she used to reinforce the new sounds for the week. A large rainbow colored rug was placed on the floor directly in front of the dry erase board. Whole class lessons would take place here with students either facing the dry erase board (if Mrs. Sein was using information on the board for her lessons) or facing the rear wall, where Mrs. Sein would teach lessons.

To the right of the dry erase board and slightly out from the wall was Mrs. Sein's guided reading and assessment table. She sometimes stationed herself at this table when teaching whole group lessons and would have students turn on the carpet to face her there instead of toward the dry erase board. This small group kidney shaped table was used for five major purposes: guided reading groups, DIBELS weekly progress monitoring, fluency checks in Reading A-Z materials, running records to assess student reading levels and strategies, and conferencing with students with regard to their response journal entries.

Behind the small group table was Mrs. Sein's desk, which backed up to the hallway she shared with Mrs. Rohl. There was a door to the right of the desk that led into the special education unit for the severely handicapped preschool that shared the exceptional building with the two first grade classrooms. To the right of this door Mrs. Sein posted the Open Court cards with the blank sides facing out. Mrs. Sein adapted the back sides of the Open Court cards to generate the example words she was teaching the students to illustrate the phonics rules they were learning from Mrs. Sein's modified version of Johnny Can Spell. Student desks took up the right hand side of Mrs. Sein's

classroom, across from the small group table and the whole group rug. This wall also had a dry erase board mounted high upon the wall and Mrs. Sein used this area to project images from the overhead projector. Student desks were typically clustered in small group configurations so that students would work together on assignments and have a natural clustering for literacy centers.

To the left of the dry erase board Mrs. Sein kept the rotation schedule for literacy centers. Student book boxes were located underneath the dry erase board. Some center materials were also located on low bookcases below the dry erase board. From watching students during the literacy block it was obvious that they were well-schooled in terms of the appropriate placement of the materials. Rarely did students ever have questions about where to return items or how they were to be packed away. Student rubrics for self-monitoring behavior during centers and reading time were posted in several locations around the room initially, but this was their final place of residence.

The back wall of the room was where Mrs. Sein's book tubs were housed. Books were organized by approximate reading level as well as by genre and story series. During the second half of the spring semester of 2008, there was a greater concentration of nonfiction books housed in this part of the library. Mrs. Sein found later in the school year that her children were drawn to nonfiction to a greater degree than fiction so she purposefully changed the concentration of the types of books located here. Student book boxes were a combination of guided reading books from the Reading A-Z series from lessons with Mrs. Sein and books from the classroom leveled library.

The State Reading Initiative and Alternative Initiatives

Of the three focal teachers, Mrs. Sein most closely followed the state reading initiative guidelines. She embraced the Tier II vocabulary lessons, she used Benchmark Books for the purpose of confirming student reading levels, and she had a tightly structured system for assessing her students on a regular schedule. Although she did not participate in any alternative initiatives, such as reading or writing workshop, she modified some of the reaching initiatives to fit her own instructional needs. For example, she used Reading A-Z texts instead of only DIBELS progress monitoring passages. She added the comprehension test to the Tier II vocabulary module. “Raised” in Murphy County to respect these mandates, Mrs. Sein mentioned early on in the study that she prided herself in being able to take any of the state initiatives and make them work in her classroom. I did not ever encounter her rejecting a practice that was a part of an official mandate. She did, however, reject practices outside of mandates and outside of the scope of practices she used in her former district. The following sections detail her use of each of these tools.

Tier II Vocabulary

One of the literacy initiatives from the state reading department was a strand on teaching students vocabulary in a systematic fashion. This strand was one of the earliest modules introduced to the teachers on campus and the module that people were drawn to more than any of the others. Typically teachers struggled to teach “vocabulary” because the task felt enormous and unmanageable. Prior to the introduction of the vocabulary

module from the state reading initiative, teachers often wondered where to start the monumental task of addressing vocabulary.

The state reading initiative lessons focused on Tier II vocabulary, defined as high-utility words that were easily definable in child-friendly terms, and were not content specific. This last caveat was important because children needed multiple opportunities to encounter the words regularly, and content area words would have had limited opportunities for frequent use. The lesson design started with an appealing children's book that students would have already heard. The designers of this vocabulary lesson structure felt that it was important for students to have an already-existing background knowledge of the text in order to free children's attentions up for the new words. The teachers and I worked together initially in one-on-one coaching sessions with a book of their choosing. We would go through the book and read it together, making lists of any words that met the criteria mentioned above. We would then examine the list to ensure the definitions were vastly different for each word – we discovered through trial and error that words with similar meanings were too difficult for children to keep straight. The teachers and I also looked for words that we could associate a hand signal or some sort of motion that would make their definitions more memorable. The final test was whether we could write a child-friendly definition using few words that truly captured the meaning of the word.

In Mrs. Sein's class, the typical structure for teaching vocabulary was as follows. Students were introduced to targeted vocabulary words that were linked with children's literature. Students were given opportunities to use the words with other students and were taught how to use the words in appropriate contexts. Copies of the book covers were

displayed around the room. The targeted words were posted under each book cover to help remind the children of the new words.

Mrs. Sein loved the Tier II lessons, and decided to incorporate them into her daily literacy block. Mrs. Sein along with her teaching partner, Mrs. Shue, decided to add some additional components to the vocabulary lessons. In their former district, students were given comprehension grades based on stories that were read aloud to the class multiple times during the week. In this way teachers could assess story comprehension and student understanding of key vocabulary terms without relying on students to actually read the texts independently. Mrs. Sein combined the focus on vocabulary with an emphasis on comprehension and created a weekly test on the focus book for vocabulary instruction and also tested student comprehension at the same time. She felt this was an efficient way to separate comprehension from reading level in a systematic way because students did not have to read the text on their own. Although I introduced the notion of Tier II vocabulary to Mrs. Sein during a reading meeting, she systematized the procedure in her classroom and helped to recruit more teachers in the use of this model.

The Tier II vocabulary lessons served another purpose. One of the sources of conflict on the first grade team had to do with the confusion over the concept of *sight words* versus *vocabulary words*. For Mrs. Sein, the distinction was clear, but for the teachers who had been employed by Scott County, the water had been muddied because the basal adoption provided weekly “vocabulary tests” which actually tested a child’s ability to read sight words in isolation. Mrs. Sein offered to meet with interested teachers to design grade level vocabulary modules that could be delivered each week in conjunction with children’s literature author studies to bring a level of rigor to vocabulary

instruction as a first grade team. As the reading coach, I was not necessarily in favor of using the vocabulary lessons to test first graders using pencil and paper; I was far more in favor of promoting an interest in new language as children learned to use Tier II words in the oral lesson format as set forth by the state department. However, I was pleased that some of the teachers were eager to develop some common literacy expectations and were turning to one another for planning lessons. The vocabulary lessons provided another opportunity for Mrs. Sein to put her stamp on Canyon Primary and influence literacy practices in a manner that brought some continuity to team practices. Her willingness to embrace the vocabulary initiatives was influenced by the fact that the lessons provided an opportunity for her to find a place in her teaching for the comprehension lessons she used in her former county, and liked so much. The lessons would ensure some common expectations for the grade level – something she wanted desperately. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, her attempts to bring the team together were only accepted by half of the team, and rejected by the remaining members.

Establishing Common Grade Level Practices

Another portion of the reading initiative that defined Mrs. Sein’s classroom practices was the progress monitoring and assessment expectations. Teachers across the state were required to ensure students were making adequate progress toward the DIBELS goals for each of the data checkpoint meetings. Although Mrs. Sein used the progress monitoring tasks recommended by the state, she felt that by themselves, the DIBELS progress monitoring tasks were an inadequate depiction of student progress. In her former district, Mrs. Sein had used “benchmark books” as a gauge of student progress

in reading in addition to the isolated DIBELS progress monitoring tasks meant to equate to book reading. Benchmark books were special books that represented appropriate levels of text for various checkpoints during the year and were reserved for testing students. By holding the books back, this was a guarantee that children would not have the opportunity to encounter these texts in classroom instruction. Together with Mrs. Shue, Mrs. Sein created a leveled text chart showing which levels of Reading A-Z books students should be able to read and comprehend at various checkpoints across the year. These minimum expectations defined where an “average” first grade student should be reading at various points throughout the year. The importance to Mrs. Sein of organizing benchmark books indicated to me her preoccupation with controlling the pace of student reading instruction. As mentioned above, students who were “above level” based on the benchmark books were not checked again until the end of the year. Tests appear to be used as a way of deciding who to attend to and who to dismiss, as opposed to ensuring continuous growth for all students.

Some of the first grade teachers were intrigued by this method of determining student progress. The issue with the DIBELS progress monitoring passages was that they were written to reflect an end of year reading level for first grade students, and only assessed whether or not the child was capable of reading at the end of year standard. The Reading A-Z texts were more developmentally appropriate because they were designed to show smaller increments of growth along the way. Some of the first grade teachers whole-heartedly embraced this new assessment notion. It was accepted primarily by the members of Group Sein who felt that some of the other teachers had lost sight of a way to monitor where students should be reading at various points across the year. Money was

provided at the campus level for each teacher to have two assessment notebooks. One notebook held preprinted testing materials, running record copies, and progress charts to track student growth. The other notebook contained the actual copies of completed student running records and charts to document student growth or a lack of. Book boxes were also purchased to store the benchmark books. The grade level teachers came to consensus regarding the number of times benchmark assessments would be used and how the results would be documented and shared. These decisions were made at the end of the 2007-2008 school year and were to be organized by Mrs. Sein for the campus, for the upcoming school year.

Systematic Assessment

Throughout the course of my observations in Mrs. Sein's room, I was struck by the extensive amount of time she spent engaged in student assessment and evaluation. When Mrs. Sein was not conducting guided reading groups, she was engaged in a regular schedule of testing children or assessing their response journal entries. This mindset of constant assessment was developed in her former school district. Because she taught in a large urban school district with high poverty and low student success rates, her former campus emphasized the importance of engaging in a constant cycle of assessment, progress monitoring, and data meetings. The teachers had a particular onus of proving their students were making appropriate achievement gains on measurements of reading achievement. In this sense, the state reading initiative was very appealing to Mrs. Sein. She had come to associate "hard" numeric data on state approved assessments and running records as proof positive that students were growing. Data was also extremely

important when proving that students were experiencing learning problems beyond the scope of classroom instruction. In the conversation below, Mrs. Sein explains her system for using running records to talk with parents about student progress.

Mrs. Sein: So with the parents I actually pull out run-running records and I actually pull out the books and show them, "This is example of, you know, of level D... This is an example of a level H, which is where we are right now, you know? I show them those things and I also give them charts that I've made of the different levels through the grade levels so they can see the difference between kindergarten, first, and second grade. I use the fluency passages and I keep them in my notebook. I use the benchmark - I keep it all in my notebook. I use my benchmarks to do my leveled books with them to do my small group teaching with them. I usually write comments on those papers - I usually write right on the child's running record, or the fluency passage.

Data became a way to reiterate the grade level expectations to parents, and a way to document when students were struggling that was more difficult to argue with than teacher opinion alone.

As opposed to the state reading initiative influencing Mrs. Sein, I would say that Mrs. Sein influenced the translation of elements of the state reading initiative. She was at an advantage in many senses because the elements of the reading initiative had been part of the required cycle of instruction and assessment in her former district, so she had been given ample opportunities to tweak many of these practices in a manner that made sense to her. The large amount of time spent administering assessments both formally and informally made the use of centers in her classroom paramount to the organization of her classroom structure. I did observe, however, that the use of centers in Mrs. Sein's room was not replicated in the other first grade classrooms, with the exception of Mrs. Shue. Many of the teachers felt that center time was counterproductive because children were not on-task and their behavior was distracting to the teacher trying to work with small

groups. The other teachers also did not embrace assessment to the degree that Mrs. Sein did. One of the dangers of over-emphasizing assessment was the confusion of assessing student understanding with that of actual teaching. Engaging in fluency checks, running records, and the evaluation of completed readers' response journals does not constitute instruction or take the place of modeling.

The Student Perspective

As with Mrs. Foi's classroom, I felt that engaging in student interviews would provide an important viewpoint worth considering when looking at classroom literacy practices. There were several common themes that emerged across student interviews. The first theme dealt with how students determined whether or not people in class were good readers. As part of Mrs. Sein's classroom, students were expected to write in reading response journals. Mrs. Sein would conference with children on their assigned day of the week. During these conferences, students would set goals for the number of entries to be completed the following week in addition to goals regarding writing conventions. In addition to how much people read, the reading response entries became associated with being a good reader by the children in Mrs. Sein's classroom. This was the only classroom out of the three focus classrooms in which writing was associated as a sign of being a good reader.

Mrs. Darden: How do you know when somebody is a good reader?

Susan: You like, see them reading every second and they won't stop to, like, write down anything. Or if they really think a book is really good, and they just love the book, they'll write down something about - and they only write down thoughts about their book when they really, really love it.

Cayce: Mine is, um, like, um, like, they don't stop - they keep on reading. And they, like, check out a lot of books.

Susan: Like Christa - she checks out a lot of books - like one chapter book a day.

Cayce: And, um books, like,

Susan: And they do anything to get a book.

Cayce: And they buy books with their own money.

Chris: Um, You can watch 'em read and you can hear 'em. And if they're really good at writing, and they write down all their thoughts and, uh, they could read like, um, a chapter book, like in three days.

Susan: Whenever I see him reading, he's writing down a lot of stuff. Like before he's done - I'll see him reading a book and before he even gets to the last page, he writes down his thoughts.

When students were asked to talk about the “good” readers in class, a child by the name of Christa was consistently referred to as the best reader. Students said that she read a different chapter book each day and that Christa could read *Harry Potter* books by herself. The power of the almighty chapter book surfaced – a theme that ran consistent across all first grade classrooms regardless of the teacher. It was, however, of interest to me that *Harry Potter* was referenced as a book the students in Mrs. Sein’s room wanted to read. The *Harry Potter* series rarely surfaced in the interviews of first grade students as an example of a chapter book that children typically wanted to read because of its high level of difficulty. Usually *Magic Tree House* was the standard goal, but because students had seen Christa with the *Harry Potter* books, the series was on the radar. In addition to Christa’s prowess as an accomplished reader, her work ethic was also evident during student interviews. She viewed school very seriously stating that she was in school to learn – an attribute openly praised by Mrs. Sein. With each group of students, I asked if they were given the choice to skip some aspect of the literacy block, to talk about what that might be. The following is my conversation with Christa.

Mrs. Darden: What would you choose not to do?

Christa: That's kind of a tough question because I like to do all of them.

Mrs. Darden: Okay, well, so your choice might be that, that you would not want to skip any of them. And, and that is a good choice.

Christa: 'Cause that's what I came here to learn about. So, I wouldn't skip anything.

Another interesting aspect of student interviews dealt with the vocabulary lessons that Mrs. Sein was famous for implementing. Children enjoyed learning new words and hearing the stories, but did not enjoy the monotony of writing the words and their definitions each week. Students did enjoy writing sentences that used the words appropriately in context, but the act of copying the words and definitions was considered “work.”

Mrs. Darden: So talk to me about vocabulary, and when you all study books during the year, and you learn vocabulary.

Susan: Well... it's not really fun because - it's fun hearing the story and stuff like that, but, it's not really fun when you have to write down, write down, like, the meaning and the word. We just like writing down all four sentences - not really the part where you write down the word and the meaning.

Cayce: Because some are funny, some are sad, some are silly.

Susan: yeah.

Mrs. Darden: What were you [Chris] going to say about vocabulary?

Chris: Um, I like, uh, vocabulary words because they teach me new words. And the meaning.

Mrs. Darden: And it's good if you're going to learn a new word to know what it means. So what's your favorite part of all of that?

Chris: My favorite part is writing the meaning and the word.

Mrs. Darden: If there was anything that you got to skip. Mrs. Sein said, "Today, you can choose one thing and you don't have to do it." Out of spelling or handwriting or reading or vocabulary or response journals.

Susan: I like a lot of stuff.

Mrs. Darden: But you can only pick one. So think really hard for a minute. What would you skip?

Susan: Writing down the definitions and the words.

Mrs. Darden: Okay, so that's what you would skip. Cayce?

Cayce: Uh...

Mrs. Darden: You keep thinking and I'll come back to you.

Chris: I would skip the same thing as Susan. Vocabulary.

Mrs. Darden: Why?

Chris: Because I kind of get bored of writing down the sentences.

The students' comments suggested to me that the regimented nature of the vocabulary lessons took away the pleasure of listening to picture books and learning new language. The written aspect had been added to the lesson by Mrs. Sein, and was the least enjoyable part. Susan makes an interesting distinction because she enjoys creating the sentences which used the targeted vocabulary in context, but she did not enjoy the more mundane task of writing definitions. The notion that students tended to enjoy tasks that involved more authentic forms of literacy over contrived tasks was mirrored across all three classrooms.

DIBELS

The DIBELS scores presented an interesting pattern of data. There were two teachers on the first grade team who used guided reading exclusively to teach children to read: Mrs. Sein and Mrs. Shue. One interesting pattern that emerged during the 2006-2007 school year and continued into the 2007-2008 school year had to do with the readers at the lowest levels. When examining student reading growth based on words read correctly per minute and the extent to which children were able to retell the passage accurately, students taught to read using Fountas and Pinnell's version of guided reading (1996), who were being instructed using lowest levels of text in the classroom tended to make the least amount of growth when compared to struggling students in classrooms using other methods of reading instruction. The discrepancy in scores at the end of year between the lowest readers and the next group of students up was astounding. None of the other methods of teaching reading produced such large discrepancies between the lowest readers and the remainder of the class as measured by the end of year DIBELS

measures of fluency and comprehension. In considering the struggling readers in Mrs. Sein's classroom, I hypothesized that guided reading was holding the lowest students to a certain type of book and a very narrow level of text, preventing these children from being exposed to a broader range of reading experiences. Student book boxes were filled with the books from the guided reading groups and books they were allowed to select from the classroom leveled library mirrored these same types of texts. Extremely limited access to books confined to a small range of text levels served only to constrain the kinds of stories developing readers were exposed to in the classroom. Guided reading groups for struggling students utilized primarily patterned text at low levels and the teaching points typically focused on decoding skills with an emphasis on flawless reading. These notions of varying student treatment were confirmed as I observed groups composed of students who were progressing steadily in reading compared with those groups comprised of students who were making few gains. The teaching points among the different types of groups varied greatly.

The majority of Mrs. Sein's students made growth commensurate with other readers across the first grade, with noticeable differences, however, on the retelling portion of the assessment. Although Mrs. Sein placed specific focus during reading on the retelling portion of the assessment, student scores remained basically the same throughout the year. In considering this pattern, I speculated that students were not spending time talking about the texts for extended periods of time. Mrs. Sein spent tremendous amounts of guided reading lessons providing background on the stories and having students engage in comprehensions strategies, but students did not have opportunities to read and share their thinking with others. Reading during centers was a

quiet activity designed to provide students with the opportunity to practice reading, and the comprehension portion was addressed during response journals. Asking students to write about their reading and providing students with time to talk about their reading are very different types of comprehension activities. Because the DIBELS assessment examined each child's ability to retell a story as opposed to write a summary, I am speculating students tended to score lower than their peers in other classrooms of similar reading ability where oral retelling was practiced on a regular basis. Because of the privileging of written comprehension over oral forms, what was taught and rehearsed versus what was assessed did not match in terms of format – which matters in the case of six and seven year olds.

THE STORY OF MRS. ROHL

At the time of this study, Mrs. Rohl was completing her twenty-fifth year of teaching and was contemplating retirement. She had been teaching at Canyon Primary in its various locations for the vast majority of her career and provided an important perspective regarding the school and its history across two and half decades. Mrs. Rohl spoke of the various ways her roles as an educator had changed, as she slowly watched the people she considered her close teaching peers forced into retirement by the last few administrators. According to Mrs. Rohl, these kind ladies were deemed out of alignment with the public image of Canyon Primary, and were given difficult students in large enough numbers that they resigned themselves to retirement.

Mrs. Rohl: I guess I'm more of a loner...Um, past years, like, um, I used to have a teacher buddy that we taught a lot alike. As we did, you know, a lot of things together – that was right next door. But I guess, you know, as time changes, and

new teachers come in, and their styles are so different, I guess I've just kind of... drifted off and I'm kind of like 'old school.' [laughing]

In Cohen and Ball's 1990 article examining how teachers grapple with new mandates in the midst of their already-developed classroom practices, they argue the importance of a teacher's history and articulate Mrs. Rohl's position at the end of twenty-five productive years as a first grade teacher, suddenly inundated by a new reading initiative.

Teachers... cannot ignore the pedagogical past because it is their past. If instructional changes are made, they must make them. And changing one's teaching is not like changing one's socks. Teachers construct their practices gradually, out of their experience as students, their professional education and their previous encounters with policies designed to change their practice. Teaching is less a set of garments that can be changed at will than a way of knowing, of seeing, and of being (Cohen & Ball, 1990, p. 334).

Before I knew Mrs. Rohl on a personal level, my early introduction consisted of what other members of the first grade team told me about her. Her colleagues described her as a warm and lovely person whom they enjoyed spending time with. But I noticed that their descriptions of her were only social ones and that her fellow teammates, many of whom had taught their entire teaching careers by her side, understood little about her teaching practices other than that she used the basal for reading instruction and was a firm believer in daily phonics lessons. Both Mrs. Rohl and her team mates would have been surprised to learn how much of Mrs. Rohl's teaching was like that of her colleagues.

The word "resourceful" is one that I would use to depict Mrs. Rohl. She organized her own leveled library using the books she had. She created a numbering and checkout system so that children simply had to record the book code on an index card. She retyped stories from old basals so that the stories could be reused for readers' workshop and

readers' theater. By using these books in novel ways she provided her students with many opportunities to read in text at their own levels throughout the day. This was one of the ways she managed to support readers who either struggled in the basal or were not challenged enough by the basal story for that week. The stories were also typed up and sent home for students to practice with their parents. Mrs. Rohl had a system where parents could let her know which words their children needed help with so that she could follow up with the children the following day at school.

Mrs. Rohl also ensured that as many aspects of her weekly reading, spelling, and Open Court goals were in alignment as possible. If she could detect a phonics rule family within the basal story for the week, then she would ensure the spelling words for that week correlated. She also incorporated sight words into her classroom in this same way.

Mrs. Rohl: I'm very routine... you'll notice that I'm very consistent and do weekly... pretty much the same kind of thing and build. And we just keep building on it and adding more each time. Because I've found over the years that just seems to... if they know what they're expected and they know what we're doing, they know what's expected of them. That's why I get the kids who need structure because I'm very structured. I feel like it helps a lot of children because they need structure.

In my estimation, many of Mrs. Rohl's practices were fresh and intriguing to her students. Children relished the time in class allotted for reading books of their own choosing and writing stories on self-selected topics. She was constantly searching for ways to incorporate more reading into her classroom, drawing from sources such as National Geographic for Kids and books from old adoptions that she either placed in her own leveled library or retyped in a more child-friendly format. In terms of planning with other teachers during my time at Canyon Primary, however, Mrs. Rohl worked primarily in isolation with the exception of planning for classroom field trips and school parades

with Mrs. Sein, whose classroom was next door to Mrs. Rohl's in the exceptional building.

During our many hours together spent talking about classroom practices and teaching philosophies I learned that one reason for Mrs. Rohl's professional seclusion was her belief that her traditional methods of teaching children to read and write perhaps did not fit into the story of what it meant to teach at Canyon Primary. Although Mrs. Rohl had ample proof that she was teaching children well because of satisfied parents and children who were skillful readers and writers, she was quite conscious of the school-wide emphasis on art projects and projecting a particular type of image of having a cute classroom. Although the tone of the school had changed in many ways, there were certain expectations the parents and community members still maintained. Many parents continued to expect elaborate art projects and painted t-shirts for every school event, and Mrs. Rohl was just more interested in teaching children academic subjects like reading, math, and science.

I found Mrs. Rohl's classroom to be a place not ruled by structure and "hard" academics but a place where children were provided with many opportunities to talk with one another and work together. Students read constantly, wrote across the day and throughout content areas, and art was carefully planned and incorporated into many of the classroom activities.

Of the three focus teachers in this study, I was the least involved in the role of coach with Mrs. Rohl. There was no tension between us in any way – I simply did not view her as a candidate for coaching. I knew that she was making plans to retire within the next year or so, and from her quiet level demeanor during Turn-Around-Training, I

assumed that she was not going to implement any sweeping changes to her classroom. Eventually I would discover that there were already many aspects of the state reading initiative that Mrs. Rohl had implemented in some form or fashion, but these practices, such as explicitly taught phonics, had been part of Mrs. Rohl's repertoire long before anyone had heard of the National Reading Panel Report.

My only regret with regard to Mrs. Rohl is that I did not learn more about her classroom earlier in my time at Canyon Primary. There were many aspects of her classroom practices worthy of bringing to other teachers' attention, and I think there were quite a few faculty members who identified closely with Mrs. Rohl's style of teaching who may have felt more a part of the changes at Canyon Primary if they had realized there was a colleague on campus for them to plan with.

Mrs. Rohl's Classroom

Upon entering Mrs. Rohl's classroom, there was a neat, orderliness to the space. The student desks were sometimes arranged in straight rows, facing one of the two dry erase boards in the classroom, while at other times, the tables were arranged in clusters of five or six, with students facing one another. Mrs. Rohl said the arrangement was dependent upon the class's ability to attend to her teaching, which she frequently changed accordingly.

Each space on her classroom walls was filled with an instructional tool utilized as part of her weekly literacy routine. As I conducted observations in her classroom across the semester, I saw her refer to each of the tools posted on her walls: there were clearly designated areas for posters highlighting phonics and spelling rules; Open Court wall

cards were posted along the wall that Mrs. Rohl shared with Mrs. Sein; leveled book boxes, basals; student folders were located along low bookshelves that lined the classroom walls; and on the board that shared a common wall with the hallway, the daily warm-up was posted each morning.

Morning warm-ups usually consisted of skill work such as alphabetizing words, editing sentences, or practicing contractions. To the right of this board, the week's sight words and vocabulary words from the week's basal story were posted on flashcards. Focus words from the Open Court lessons for the week were also posted there. The focus words displayed the phonics rules that would be focused on during lessons throughout the week. To the left of this board was Mrs. Rohl's word wall area with the cumulative list of sight words posted high on the wall. Students entered these words in their spelling dictionaries on a weekly basis and Mrs. Rohl also had students participate in word searches, looking for these words in leveled readers printed on copy paper. Students would use highlighters and search for them in one of four leveled stories they would be assigned, based on Mrs. Rohl's assessment of each child's reading level.

On the wall to the right of this main board, the weekly spelling words were posted. This wall also held the dry erase board that was used for two purposes that I observed during my time in Mrs. Rohl's room. The first purpose was to record the words needed for the Open Court phonics lessons in which she would underline portions of words with the focus rules for the week. The other use for this board, which I observed on two occasions, was where Mrs. Rohl would model stories for students at the beginning of her writing block. This practice of writing stories on this board originated in training I conducted on writing during the fall semester of the 2007-2008 school year. At the

completion of the story, Mrs. Rohl would erase it. Once our focus on writing training was over, I did not observe stories written on this board again.

Returning to the left side of the room, and below the word wall, a door led to a small room located off the side of Mrs. Rohl's classroom. Decades ago this room had been a small workroom for the special education teachers who worked in the exceptional building, but in the years since, Mrs. Rohl utilized this room for her own leveled library built from books she purchased with her own funds (even though the special education unit for students with profound disabilities was still located in this building with Mrs. Sein and Mrs. Rohl). On this same side of the classroom, but further toward the back of the classroom, a large group area with a rug was located in an alcove. This space was reserved for whole group choral reading sessions from the basal as well as discussion of the basal stories, which will be described in more detail later.

Cubbies were built along the back wall of the classroom, lined with tall windows from floor to ceiling. Special folders were kept within these cubbies such as writing folders and behavior folders. Student backpacks were hung on pegs in a hallway that ran behind the main dry erase board student desks often faced. The space above these pegs was reserved for art projects that Mrs. Rohl incorporated into a content area lessons in her classroom – often social studies or science. This was the space where Mrs. Rohl made official room for artwork produced by her students, but always produced during the school day, without parental assistance or worded another way, without parental interference. The artwork was always structured with the products from each child looking very much the same, but with individual differences. One such assignment involved students creating little versions of themselves wearing t-shirts describing how

they would make the world a better place. Another example was a series of kites students decorated about the concept of Spring.

The State Reading Initiative and Alternative Initiatives

“When teachers changed in response to policy, they did so in terms of their pre-existing practice, knowledge and beliefs. They reframed the policy in terms of what they already knew, believed and did in classrooms” (Cohen & Ball, 1990, p. 331). This quote exemplifies Mrs. Rohl’s response to the state reading initiative. Many of the strategies we discussed during the mandated trainings were strategies Mrs. Rohl was already familiar with in one form or another from her past twenty-five years in education. In our afterschool conversations, Mrs. Rohl spoke of being in education long enough to have seen the strategies and methods from the state reading initiative as well as other literacy practices come and go many times over, with only the name changing. She did laugh about the way many of these strategies were often “re-branded” as being based on the latest research, and yet she remembered clearly when those same strategies were introduced as new and cutting-edge while she was still in college.

There were four major components I observed Mrs. Rohl implement in her classroom from the state reading initiative: student book boxes, phonics taught in isolation, cued elicitation responses, and repeated readings of texts. Of these practices, only the student book boxes were a new addition to her classroom. Although the book boxes were purchased with campus funds to support the state reading initiative, they were already in alignment with Mrs. Rohl’s insistence that every student in her classroom have access to books at an appropriate level for his or her needs. Mrs. Rohl already had a well-

established personal classroom library from which children would check out books on a daily basis, so the book boxes were a natural extension of an existing classroom practice.

The Importance of DIBELS

Ensuring her students were prepared to do well on the DIBELS assessment was important to Mrs. Rohl, and she worked accordingly with her students to provide enough practice before the test for students to understand the tasks and to perform them fluently. Parents listened to students read passages for homework at night, circling words that were problematic. However, Mrs. Rohl did stop asking parents to time their children once she understood, through my coaching, the negative impact that the emphasis on speed had upon student performance. However, during my time in Mrs. Rohl's classroom I never observed students directly practicing any of the portions of the DIBELS assessment. The most salient pieces of Mrs. Rohl's normal literacy routine that I suspect directly impacted the fluency and comprehension scores for the DIBELS assessments, were the vast amounts of reading students engaged in each day, in addition to the opportunity to engage in repeated readings of stories. Although I was not an advocate for Open Court, the direct instruction of phonics through Open Court prepared students for the nonsense word fluency portion of the assessment.

Toward the end of the study I asked Mrs. Rohl to reflect upon her current teaching practices and whether the state reading initiative or the presence of DIBELS testing impacted any aspect of her decision-making in the classroom.

“It really hasn't changed my style of teaching. Nor has [the state reading initiative]. Because, I mean, I've always been really, you know, phonics to me – I learned reading with phonics, as a child, so to me it was very, very important so,

you know, I've always really stressed a lot of phonics in my reading curriculum. Um, but DIBELS, of course, all the progress monitoring that we ever had to do, you know, just to, to ensure, and that's a good thing. You know, there have been some good things that have come out of it, such as that."

Mrs. Rohl also mentioned that prior to instituting the reading passage homework folders she had never provided formalized reading practice for her students to work on at home with their parents, but she felt the reading folders had been a successful improvement. They arose from the need to ensure students would be able to pass the reading fluency portion on the DIBELS assessment. She had not believed in the importance of having children practice oral reading – typically in her classroom they read most pieces silently until she attended Timothy Rasinski's training on fluency and reading and students were required to read aloud for DIBELS. "I guess, and like I say, but as far as my overall style it really hasn't changed my style 'cause to me reading's always been the key. That's why I like first grade, you know, because it, and you can see those little ones all of a sudden just turn on."

Another by-product of both Rasinski's training and the pressure of ensuring students would perform well on DIBELS was the concerted effort Mrs. Rohl made to ensure every child had ample reading material to take home each night, above and beyond the practice folders. Every morning as students entered Mrs. Rohl's classroom they would return the books they had borrowed from the day before from Mrs. Rohl's personal leveled book library so they could choose new books to take home. As referenced earlier, Mrs. Rohl's leveled library was located in a small room off to one side of her classroom. Years before this area had served as a teachers' workroom for the teachers who worked in the exceptional building. As Mrs. Rohl explained during one of

our conversations, the leveled library was divided into four broad sections and she would assign each child to the section she felt was most appropriate for their reading level. The notion that struck me was that in comparison to the leveling system used in Mrs. Sein's classroom, Mrs. Rohl's students had access to a much broader range of types of levels of text. It seemed that granting students access to wider ranges of text would lessen the chance that students would be unnecessarily constrained in their access to appropriate texts based solely on teacher judgment. In essence, by providing a wider breadth of choices, Mrs. Rohl was protecting her students against preconceived notions she might have formed that were less than accurate. There were no rules regarding how long books could be kept out, but I did observe that most children brought back books every morning and exchanged them for new titles. The checkout system was simple. Each child had his or her own index card and each book had an assigned number. Students simply crossed out the numbers for returned books on their index cards and recorded the next numbers for the books they were borrowing.

Research-Based Influences

Mrs. Rohl was a teacher who put great faith in the notion of "research," trusting products such as Open Court or the design of the basal system because researchers had designed these materials. Mrs. Rohl recalled one of her teammates rearranging the Open Court lessons to mirror the basal program. The teacher had been asked to share her work with the rest of the team members. Mrs. Rohl was straightforward with me about choosing to trust the Open Court alignment. She felt the people who designed the Open Court system did so for a reason and she was not going to use the new alignment from a

teammate when professionals had worked diligently to design a system that worked. Mrs. Rohl was comfortable in the fact that the basal series introduced different skills during different time periods than Open Court and felt that the spiraled review that resulted was important and good for her students.

Mrs. Rohl was one of the few teachers who was able to place many of the aspects of the DIBELS assessment contextually in her classroom. Most teachers were just working with students on the nonsense word portion of the assessment because they were told to bring up their scores. Mrs. Rohl, however, realized that the nonsense words required the same set of skills that students needed when reading multi-syllabic words. Mrs. Rohl felt that Open Court really prepared children to meet this challenge. She also noted that Open Court developed vocabulary very early with students. Although the reading books were not utilized as part of the Open Court program, the high vocabulary from the stories were present in the Open Court lessons that Mrs. Rohl used as part of her daily routine. She credited the exposure of those kinds of words with the growing vocabulary her students were developing. As the words were encountered in the lessons, Mrs. Rohl found the need to explain the often high-level words, supporting her students by teaching the meaning and placing the words in context.

Another way that Mrs. Rohl felt she drew upon research-based practices was through the comprehension strand she taught that was tied to the basal stories. As opposed to embracing the more open-ended comprehension model that involved teaching the students how to question their way through any fiction or nonfiction text through teacher modeling and scaffolding, Mrs. Rohl used the comprehension questions at the end of every basal story to ensure that students were attending to the meaning behind the text.

During the comprehension questioning sessions, students would be asked to answer the questions from the basal in rapid-fire succession. Students quickly discovered that certain members of the class would always volunteer answers, which allowed the remaining students the opportunity to disengage from the question and answer sessions. Mrs. Rohl was in search of correct responses to the stories from the basal during these comprehension sessions. Students were called on in quick order and incorrect answers were responded to by moving on to another child who was more likely to have the correct response. The purpose of questioning in this area was to find the correct answer, not to have children explain their thinking unless the questions from the basal explicitly called for students to do so. Mrs. Rohl would also guide students through the other passages that accompanied the main basal story. These passages were typically nonfiction in nature and had multiple choice responses akin to what might appear on a standardized test.

Multi-faceted Reading Instruction

The public story of Mrs. Rohl on campus was that she was a “traditional teacher,” relying heavily upon the basal and phonics for reading instruction. As reading coach privy to assessment data, I knew that Mrs. Rohl was successful in producing children could read and write well. Interestingly, during my initial observations of Mrs. Rohl’s reading block, I did not see any instruction involving the basal. I observed students reading from a variety of leveled texts in a structure that looked much more like reading workshop than reading using the traditional basal format with a focus story for the week. At the beginning of March I asked Mrs. Rohl if I could observe the other parts of her reading block where she used the basal. She seemed surprised at first that I would be

interested in viewing her basal instruction. I sensed that Mrs. Rohl initially wanted me to see only the components of reading she thought I would agree with and that she was relieved and a bit nervous about what I might think of her use of the basal. Toward the end of the study Mrs. Rohl would reveal that she felt quite affirmed after showing me all the components of her reading block. It was nice to have someone validate her instructional methods – particularly when she was aware of how different her methods seemed from the rest of her team members.

According to my journal entry on March 10th, I knew that more was happening with regard to reading instruction than Mrs. Rohl was showing me because her students were reading at such high levels - I knew they were spending longer than a few minutes per day reading small books and highlighting sight words (which up to this point in time was all that I had seen). Students who were as proficient at reading as hers had to be engaged in reading for more of the day than just a 10 to 15 minute block of time. I had almost forgotten that Mrs. Rohl had been deemed the “traditional basal teacher” on her grade level because I had not observed anything that approximated traditional teaching and I certainly had not seen students reading from the basal.

After spending more time with Mrs. Rohl, I discovered that she incorporated four different types of reading instruction into her weekly literacy routine and that children were spending a great deal of time reading in texts that were at the appropriate level of difficulty for each child. In accordance with county guidelines, students read from the basal each week. Students had “choice reading” opportunities to select texts from the classroom library, which they read in the room as well as at home. Student also participated in readers’ theater where student groups were formed according to reading

level and students selected the parts they would read. The fourth type of reading was from practice passages that were provided at school but assigned for homework with parents or siblings.

Certainly, when the students were focusing on the basal story of the week, the story was only appropriate for a modicum of the children. Although I was not in favor of the basal for reading instruction, Mrs. Rohl seemed to compensate by providing many other opportunities for students to read at their own level on daily basis. The other important piece to the reading block was that comprehension played a major role in the time spent with books; Mrs. Rohl often reminded her students, “Do a good job reading because you know as soon as you’re finished you’re going to have to tell me about it. Do a good job reading.”

Choice Reading

Choice Reading was another aspect of reading instruction in Mrs. Rohl’s classroom. Depending upon the time of year, this reading was handled in a few different ways. Earlier in the year, Mrs. Rohl would use her own classroom leveled library to fill student boxes with books that she felt were at an appropriate reading level for students. Although the book boxes themselves were new for Mrs. Rohl because they were purchased with state reading initiative money, Mrs. Rohl was accustomed to providing students with books to read at their own level. She enjoyed using the book boxes with her students, however, because she felt it was important for them to have a selection of texts readily accessible that were at their appropriate level so that as they finished classroom work, they could read from these books without spending time looking for books in the

leveled library. Mrs. Rohl also enjoyed using the book boxes because they encouraged the children to reread stories, causing students to gain in fluency and accuracy. For the first part of the school year, Mrs. Rohl would restock the book boxes after school hours, but eventually students were allowed to fill their own book boxes with books appropriate for reading independently. From time to time, however, even though students were able to choose their own books well, Mrs. Rohl would still go back to each child's book box, restocking the books to ensure there were new materials at an appropriate level and that some of the books that had been in the boxes too long were returned. Mrs. Rohl's use of leveled texts differed in a significant way from Mrs. Sein's. Mrs. Rohl used broader definitions of "appropriate" text than the Fountas and Pinnell or Reading A-Z levels. From my observations, students were given wider access to varying levels and types of text and also benefitted from the expansive periods of time allowed for the reading and rereading these books in class and at home.

Readers' Theater

Readers' Theater was another way that Mrs. Rohl recycled stories read during other parts of the year or stories pulled from out-of-adoption readers that Mrs. Rohl typed up and divided into parts. This approach differed from choice reading because in choice reading, students self-selected text. With readers' theater, Mrs. Rohl selected the text but the students within the group selected their parts. Her approach to readers' theater was an interesting one because she allowed the students to pick which parts they wanted. Students who were better readers chose longer parts. I never observed a lower level reader speak up and compete for a longer part against a strong reader. The groups were

mixed with students of all abilities, which meant that readers' theater provided lots of reading opportunities for students who were already stronger readers, while students who were reading at lower levels typically selected small, repetitive parts to read. One of the students who was socially mature, but struggled to learn how to read reported disliking readers' theater because it meant that she was forced to read in front of her peers and she often lost track of her place and was called out for her lack of attention. To exacerbate the situation, the other students were allowed to correct her without being reprimanded.

Mrs. Darden: So, what are, what are those kinds of things that you don't like to do as much.

Kara: Uh, (pauses)

Mrs. Darden: Or that make you nervous

Kara: Uh, getting in front of people while we do plays in our classroom.

Mrs. Darden: Really? Tell me more about that.

Kara: Uh, sometimes I get shy when I get up there. And, uh, I forget my lines so some of the other people laugh at me.

Mrs. Darden: Oh, they do and that's hard.

I anticipated students having a hard time paying attention to one another during my observations of readers' theater, but I was surprised. Mrs. Rohl spent her time floating among the groups, listening in. When Mrs. Rohl was not present students listened attentively and prompted one another when attention wandered and readers lost track of when it was time to read. Students were expected to perform their group plays and were often videotaped, so there was certainly incentive for students to attend and learn their parts well. It was also understandable that for students who struggled as readers, readers' theater was a daunting task.

Literacy from the Student Perspective

In preparation for conducting student interviews, I asked Mrs. Rohl to group her students according to where she felt they were performing in her classroom with respect to reading and writing. I interviewed students in groups of two and three because I felt students would be more comfortable talking in small groups and might remind one another of aspects of classroom life they might not think of if interviewed alone. This was the same procedure used more Mrs. Sein's and Mrs. Foi's students. Several interesting trends emerged across all groups.

The first notable area was the way in which children talked about reading time. The comments were directed toward the fact that reading was about learning new information and about understanding the story. Several students commented that they liked learning new information as they read. Students spoke specifically about their favorite genres during reading and what they got out of reading those kinds of texts.

Ben: Um, that you can, that you understand what's in the story. That, and that it's very interesting.

Laura: You can learn something, too.

Shelly: And that there's, that you can hear lots of fun stuff –

Mrs. Darden: Hmm...

Shelly: Like magical stories

Mrs. Darden: It's funny – somebody mentioned that earlier – that they liked magical stories.

So what kinds of things do you all like to read about?

Ben: I like to read about fiction things, 'cause I like lots of, um, make believe dragons and things, like that.

Mrs. Darden: Hmm

Laura: I like to, um, read fiction books 'cause they're more fun than nonfiction.

Mrs. Darden: Really? What makes them more fun?

Laura: Because they're, um, they don't tell about real things. And –

Ben: And everything can be different

Laura: And when like Jack and the Beanstalk, where he climbs up one of the beanstalks, people can't really do it.

Other students also had plenty to say on the topic of what they liked to read. Some students said they liked “realistic books” because they enjoyed reading about things that could really happen. Others noted they liked “fantasy books” because “kind of funny stuff is in those fantasy books.”

An interesting twist to the topic of what children liked to read occurred during the interview with Kara and Stefan who were considered at-risk readers. Kara noted, “I think, uh, when I read, I like when I get the words right and not wrong.” When pushed to talk about the kinds of books she liked to read, she cited *Junie B. Jones*, which was clearly above her reading level without some serious support, but these were the books that meant the most to her. She agreed that her other favorite kinds of text to read were the National Geographic magazines they often viewed during class. She referred to the wonderful photographs and interesting topics featured in the magazines. Stefan, who was a native Spanish speaker and acquiring social language but struggling to take on academic language, stated that he enjoyed reading *Power Rangers*, but those kinds of books were only found at home. He also noted, with great pride, that his big sister was the person who was teaching him how to read. She helps him to practice his homework and study for things in class.

Stefan: Ooh, my sister is teaching me to read, also.

Mrs. Darden: Oh, she is? What does she do to teach you how to read?

Stefan: She is practicing.

Mrs. Darden: She is practicing with you.

Stefan: Mmm hmm.

Mrs. Darden: What kinds of things does she practice with you?

Stefan: [hard to make out] practicing my homework, so I can faster

Mrs. Darden: What kinds of things do you read with your sister? Do you pick what you read or does your sister or is it something that Mrs. Rohl gives you?

Stefan: We both pick. My sister and me.

Mrs. Darden: Pick things from home?

Stefan: Yeah.

Mrs. Darden: What are some of your favorite things to read from home?

Stefan: Martian Tales, [inaudible], scary books.

Just as Stefan and Kara had strong preferences for certain types of books, other students did as well. Students were clearly aware of the purposes of reading, ranging from entertainment value to increasing understanding of a topic. Students often referenced favorite books by title, reflecting their love of books. Two accomplished readers from Mrs. Rohl's classroom began to expound upon the humorous aspects of books – dogs wearing tutus and elephants that used funny language like, “bottompt,” instead of “bottom.” Quickly, though, the conversation turned to *Magic Tree House* and *Junie B. Jones*. This did not surprise me because of the emphasis upon reading in Mrs. Rohl's classroom. Chapter books were a natural focal point in the spring of first grade as children who loved to read began to set their own goals in terms of where they wanted to be as readers.

One particularly poignant example of the power of chapter books was highlighted as I observed Peter. Peter was a shy and rather intense small boy. He was fairly quiet in class in front of others, but had a penchant for finding other things to do with his time in the classroom. In the spring as I spent time taping the class, I would notice Peter sneaking chapter books out of his desk at various times throughout the day – especially during Open Court lessons. When Peter was asked what he liked to read, he responded by saying, “my library book and chapter books.” It was obvious to me that a big part of Peter's growing identity as a reader was that of chapter book reader. He could even name some of the chapter books he had started to read. However, Peter was at the beginning point of being able to handle the language and structure of chapter books, including

dialogue. He was vaguely aware of the *Magic Tree House* books, but referred to them only as “the Jack and Annie books.” Not quite there yet, but hoping to be.

Kara was the only child in interviews who spoke specifically about aspects of reading she did not enjoy. Her comments were laced with a preoccupation to read flawlessly, to read without making mistakes in front of others, and a fear of being laughed at by her peers. She was also the only child to provide examples of her favorite reading materials drawing upon texts that were above her reading level. She loved the idea of reading *Junie B. Jones* and *National Geographic*, but the text reading was beyond the grasp of her reading level. Certainly there were other ways these texts could be accessed, but in terms of citing books she was currently reading or specific types of texts she could read, Kara referred to “wish texts” – those she could look at in the privacy of her home or at the privacy of her desk, but did not have to read aloud in front of anyone in the classroom. Kara said if she were given a choice regarding what to do during class that she would let the kids draw. She would also put sentences up on the board and ask people to find all the mistakes.

Students spoke about reading and writing workshop (when students had the freedom to choose what to read and what to write about) with absolute glee. Across all of the groups students referred to this time as “not doing any work.” During reading and writing workshop students seemed unconcerned with writing in a certain way or reading particular types of books. Collin noted that reading was a great way to exercise his brain and that was why he enjoyed it so much.

Mrs. Darden: How about writing? What do you like the most about writing in class?

Collin: Which one? Drawing pictures or like drawing words?

Mrs. Darden: Writing.

Collin: Mmm... I think it's fun because (said slowly, like he's composing his thoughts as he's going), um, when you write words it's like, (long pause) it's like you're drawing imagin- (like he was going to say something about *imagination*), it's like your imagination is coming out of your head.

I like readers' workshop, too, because it's just fun. And you make up your own stories, your own title. And she checks it to make sure it's a story, a really good one, like periods and stuff you get make it, to make a story out of it. She, um, puts it into a book and we get this, we sketch and then we go over with a dark pen and then, then we color it and it's our story.

Mrs. Darden: Ohhh. Hmmm... How about you Karina, what do you like about writing?

Katrine: I like writer's workshop, too.

Mrs. Darden: What do you like about writer's workshop?

Katrine: Because we get to do our own books and...

Amy said that reading was easy and fun for her and that was why she liked to spend time reading. The atmosphere in the room was very different during this time. Mrs. Rohl circulated throughout the room checking in on students, but her interactions with them were much more casual than during other academic times. Students openly spoke of the books they were reading and stories they were writing and how proud they were of these products.

In summary, Mrs. Rohl's children had two interpretations of literacy: literacy that was characterized as "work" and literacy that was characterized as "fun." Mrs. Rohl also had these bounded spaces within her classroom as well. Tasks that were related to formal instruction included Open Court, worksheets, response journals, comprehension question sessions, and readers' theater; there was one "right" way to do them and a judgment or evaluation of student work was involved. Reading initiative tasks were characterized under the work category and students like Kara and Stefan did not enjoy participating in them because of the element of evaluation and the public nature of the tasks.

On the other hand, tasks that were characterized as being fun were open-ended and did not have as much of an evaluative component. Tasks such as independent reading and writing workshop could not be evaluated as “wrong.” Therefore, students were much more willing to engage in the open-ended tasks. Students across all levels of reading and writing proficiency stated they preferred being given the time to read and write over the other “school only” literacies (handwriting practice, Open Court) that were a part of their regular routine. This open resistance brought up a question for me with regard to the nature of reading initiative-influenced lessons, such as Open Court, which fit the requirement of an explicit phonics component. If the lessons like these were supposed to guarantee students would learn to read, but students tuned out of the lessons, occupying themselves with more interesting activities (as did Kara and Stefan, among others), how were these lessons supposed to help achieve 100% literacy?

DIBELS

Mrs. Rohl’s students performed extremely well on the DIBELS assessment, making large gains on the reading accuracy and fluency portions as well as on the story retelling sections. Kara and Stefan, the two children I was most concerned about from Mrs. Rohl’s classroom were able to read the end of first grade level passage with enough fluency and accuracy to meet the end of year criteria. I attribute their success not to phonics lessons, but to the extended periods of time both students were engaged in reading both in school and at home.

The chart below details both the oral reading fluency score and the number of words retold by Kara and Stefan. The 06-07 columns only contain data for Mrs. Rohl’s

class as a whole, because both Kara and Stefan were in Kindergarten during the 2006-2007 school year and Kindergarten students do not take the reading or comprehension portions of the DIBELS assessment.

Table 6: End of Year Class Averages for Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) & Story Retell

	07-08 ORF Goal (40)	06-07 ORF Goal (40)	07-08 Retell	06-07 Retell
Haynes Class	80.3	65.2	26.4	24.7
Stefan	66	-	11	-
Kara	56	-	16	-

LOOKING BACK

Thinking back upon my time in each of the focus teachers' classrooms, I am struck by how varied their practices were and how each of them brought such different understandings of developing readers and writers. If I were to judge them strictly on the degree to which they adopted the modules from the state reading initiative program, I would have missed out on such a rich opportunity to examine a wide spectrum of literacy practices, dismissing each of them, instead, as being largely out of compliance. Each of these three teachers needed the freedom to support students in the manner that fit each of them best – which translated into three very different classrooms. Mrs. Foi, Mrs. Sein,

and Mrs. Rohl were each able to find aspects of the state reading initiative that met their needs and teaching styles, while also making strategic decisions regarding which practices were not an appropriate fit for their existing classroom structures or their students. Mrs. Foi loved the comprehension strategies that allowed her children to think deeply about books and authors. Mrs. Sein thrived on the assessment and vocabulary routines. Explicitly taught phonics lessons bolstered Mrs. Rohl's belief in the importance of phonics instruction through Open Court.

As a reading coach, I benefited from working with each of them in very different ways. Mrs. Foi filled the creative need I had to push the notion of reading and writing workshop in new directions I had not yet explored. Mrs. Sein helped bring to the forefront the importance of introducing practices that were relevant in the grand scheme of literacy today, such as the importance of common assessments and systematic data review. Mrs. Sein's presence also reminded me that cultivating leadership in classroom teachers is part of the obligation and responsibility as a reading coach – share the load and the burden while opening leadership opportunities for others. Mrs. Rohl helped me to remember that there is a wealth of knowledge distributed across all the classrooms on campus and that sometimes the teachers who are the quietest about their practices have hidden treasures that are most worth exploring and sharing with others.

Chapter 7: Summary, Limitations, Discussions, & Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of collaboration among ten first grade teachers, as well as my own influence as the campus reading coach, as part of a staff development initiative mandated by the state department of education in the southeastern state in which the campus was located. Careful documentation of the professional development experiences – both those that were part of the state reading initiative and those that were initiated as a result of teacher interests and my background experiences in literacy - were documented and studied in order to gain insights into the various ways teachers and coaches navigate among their own interests and the influences of top-down staff development mandates. The kinds of literacy activities students engaged in were documented to examine how the combination of reading initiative modules and teacher beliefs regarding early literacy instruction translated practice at the level of the classroom.

Another consideration in this study was the issue of power that existed on the campus as teachers sought to have their individual and group practices recognized as legitimate. At times the teachers were in open conflict with one another regarding their definitions of what counted as appropriate literacy instruction for young children, and eventually formed their own planning groups. Power was also addressed through the examination of the role of literacy coach as well as a nod to campus administration and their impact upon how literacy practices were promoted across the campus.

The findings of this study were based on teacher observations during the state reading initiative staff development sessions, collaboration in smaller planning group

meetings that were self-initiated by the teachers, teacher interviews from the three focal teachers, as well as interviews from members of the smaller planning groups. Classroom observations were another important data source for this study. Observations of students engaged in various reading and writing tasks were conducted in the classrooms of the three focus teachers.

In this chapter I will provide an overview of the study, the rationale for this study, and its design. Next I will summarize and discuss the findings of the study. Third, I will discuss the theoretical and practical implications. In the last portion of the chapter I will suggest recommendations for future research.

MANDATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LITERACY COACHING

With the ever-increasing emphasis on accountability, “research-based” professional development models that promise to raise student test scores are looked to as an answer for schools that are struggling to make the necessary gains as defined by state and national accountability systems (Allington, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Trachtman, 2007). This over-emphasis upon scores blurs the line regarding what matters in terms of literacy education, as high test scores are treated as a sign that children have achieved important gains, when in reality what is tested are often isolated skills that do not equate to strategic reading or writing.

At the same time, schools moved away from staff development models comprised of isolated, single event trainings because of the haphazard nature of what teachers chose to attend and the minimal likelihood that isolated staff development would influence any appreciable changes to classroom instruction or impact student learning. The shift away

from one-shot trainings has been marked by a trend toward staff development that is ongoing and sustainable at the campus level, and provides opportunities over an extended period of time for teachers to study their practices and receive support as they attempt to take on new practices (Rodgers & Rogers, 2007).

Long-term staff development programs, which seek to make instructional changes, rely upon instructional coaches for a variety of purposes. Well-trained, instructional coaches are not only capable of deepening the knowledge of teachers by presenting in-depth information on strategies and resources, but they also facilitate teacher collaboration as faculty members study and experiment with new practices as a group. In the collaboration model that is at the foundation of instructional coaching, both the reading coach and classroom teachers aspire to serve as members of a learning community. Ideally, the goal is to create the type of community that Lave and Wenger refer to as a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In communities of practice, “participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Lave and Wenger make the point that the theoretical construct of communities of practice offers a way of showing that people are related through activity and deed.

The need for this study lies in the voids that exist in the literature regarding in the four following areas. The first void in literature on coaching exists because studies typically present neat and tidy situations where coaches work with teachers who are committed to taking on the new practices espoused by the staff development program. The messiness involved in convincing teachers with various beliefs to discontinue their current set of practices in favor of new ones is not mentioned.

A second void in the literature is that coaching studies that address the inequity of power inherent among the relationships between teachers and coaches are difficult to find. Coaches are often painted as working side-by-side with teachers without conflict. If coaches are willing to follow certain well-defined protocols, then coaching is a flawless interaction between the more knowledgeable and less knowledgeable. Coaching studies that do address conflict on a campus list strategies that are helpful in overcoming conflict, but the coach is never presented as part of the messiness, but instead, a part of the solution or as a neutral party.

A third area with little information available deals with the conflict that naturally occurs among teachers or groups of teachers on a campus as they attempt to engage in collaborative work. Conflict is typically portrayed as existing between the current practices of classroom teachers and the goals and aims of the staff development program, but relationships among teachers are not discussed.

The fourth area of need involves the examination of how teacher collaborative groups are formed in light of each classroom teacher's secret stories of being an educator. In examining the collaborative groups that formed at Canyon Primary, little information was available prior to this study regarding how the construction of teacher personal narratives could provide insight into factors that drew particular teachers together into relatively stable collaborative groups.

In an attempt to fill these voids in the literature, this study addressed the following questions:

- (1) What is the nature of collaboration and learning among teams of first grade teachers as they study their literacy practices as a grade level?

(2) In what ways do professional development and collaborative experiences influence their classroom practices?

To address these questions, I employed methods that were ethnographic in nature. Data sources included teacher and student interviews and observations, as well the collection of student and teacher artifacts documenting the kinds of literacy-oriented products that were created in these classrooms. Using the constant-comparison method, I analyzed the formal and informal team planning sessions as well as the reading and writing instruction of the three focus teachers, including the kinds of literate activities their students engaged in during the ninety-minute reading block. Before moving into the findings of this study, I first present limitations.

LIMITATIONS

There were three limitations of the study that were particularly salient. The first limitation of the study was the dual nature of my role as reading coach and researcher. Because I was personally involved with the subjects, and occasionally at odds, philosophically, with a few members of the first grade team, I had to be careful to avoid bias as much as possible. Due to the fact that the first grade team was fairly large with ten members, there was a tendency to work more closely with some teachers because of philosophical alignment and because I had easier access to their classrooms due to their willingness to embrace new practices and engage in the coaching cycle.

The second limitation of the study was that the data collection took place solely during year two of the state reading initiative, as opposed to starting with year one. There were distinct differences in the nature of collaboration amongst the teachers between

years one and two, and marked differences in the role played by the campus principal, which directly impacted teacher collaboration. Documenting this staff development model beginning with the summer reading academy would have enabled me to examine the kinds of messages concerning top-down mandates the teachers and I received at the kick-off training, and the ways in which teachers initially responded to these directives. Following the transition from whole group collaboration during year one, to small self-selected groups for year two would have been an important format for examining the conditions under which collaboration transforms from a whole group initiative to one involving splintered groups.

The final limitation of the study was that data collection was confined to Canyon Primary solely; this study only represents the reading initiative from the point of view of one campus. All twenty-nine of the elementary schools in Scott County entered into the reading initiative at the same time, which would have provided a much larger scale examination of the nature of collaboration and coaching. The findings of this study would have been enhanced by the additional data generated by other campuses.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

As a result of the first grade team's participation in the state reading initiative, I noted a major shift, overall, with regard to beliefs about young children learning to read and write. This shift was marked by a change in the structure of team collaboration as the members of the group transitioned away from viewing themselves as individual teachers coming together for staff development and began to realign themselves in smaller, supportive groups of teachers, who came together in an attempt to build a common

understanding regarding literacy practices. These groups gathered not for the purpose of perpetuating the aims of the reading initiative, but rather for the pursuit of their common interests. At times the teachers created hybridized forms of the reading initiative aims, and at other times the teachers rejected the aims of the reading initiative altogether. Teachers began turning to one another for more intimate forms of support, interpreting the mandates and formulating novel teaching experiences out of their collective expertise. Teachers also began turning against one another, as members of distinct groups with vastly differing philosophies regarding teacher collaboration and the nature of literacy activities appropriate for developing readers and writers.

As the larger grade level team moved into small groups of like-minded teachers, the social nature of learning began to influence how the members of each group viewed one another and their time with me. We grew from a culture of tolerating the whole group meetings to a culture of interest in growth and discovery in the smaller groups. People began to see that the construction of understanding that took place during the planning sessions was far more than the sum of our individual thoughts and ideas – we were creating unique understandings, building a collective sense of agency that transformed the way people taught, worked with children in their classrooms, and viewed one another. As the smaller planning groups became more purposeful and well-planned, however, their philosophical differences became more noticeable and with these differences, there was increased tension and hostility among the members of these new competing groups (Achinstein, 2002).

The findings concerning coaching and teacher collaboration that emerged from this study seem to suggest that the nature of collaboration is dependent upon the attitudes

and dispositions of the members of the planning group and the coach. Careful examination of transcripts and artifacts generated by the two micro-teams suggest that these two groups held quite different aims for their collaboration efforts, and as coach I felt as though I needed to publicly support them both. The team that was more focused on measuring student results against a single standard such as a target score or minimum reading level tended to plan lessons and student activities that had a singular, tight, testable focus. Their planning goals included extreme efficiency in their efforts – once they understood the goals of the group, they ceased to meet in person and communicated solely through e-mail. The lessons they collaborated on each week followed the same exact structure. Although they had identified areas that needed change for the upcoming school year, the members of the group agreed to make no changes until the summer to avoid disrupting their efficient planning routine.

The team that was focused on accommodating a wide range of student needs within their plans tended to use a group reflection process to determine the extent to which their teaching was successful. Reflection was on-going in these groups as the members found other ways to collaborate and reflect outside of these official planning meetings. Their reflection and analysis of student work products (published books, anecdotal records) fueled their planning efforts for the following week. This group also debriefed constantly throughout the week, tweaking lessons and making adjustments based on group member feedback. This group was significantly different from the first group because their goal was to try new ideas and find new resources throughout the year, spending extended time planning for the upcoming week, engaged in problem-solving and forward-thinking discussions. Although both groups rejected many aspects of

the state reading initiative, both groups were not very approving of the other group's aims and goals, either.

A second finding that emerged from the study was the importance of examining the various ways that campus coaches navigate the messy role of supporting multiple aims and goals at any given time. On the one hand, I was hired to support the state reading initiative to fidelity, but another crucial role I held was that of *advocate* for teachers and their practices. Truscott & Truscott (2004) argue that advocates keep their teachers' interests and needs visible to campus administrators in order to help ensure that teachers have a voice in the midst of mandated reading initiatives. 'Coach as advocate' is a critical role because it keeps teachers functioning as decision makers on their campuses because they have a voice to express concerns and needs. It is also important to school climate that staff development mandates focus on student learning, not teacher remediation (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi's, 2000). Staff development should be focused on shifting away from the idea that teachers need *fixing* to a model that promotes *building* teacher knowledge and confidence in order to better serve students. Staff developers should be placed in a complementary position next to classroom teachers, not against them. Through the examination of my role as campus coach I discovered that being an advocate for teachers was a delicate balancing act. When providing support or making others aware of interesting work that was occurring in the smaller team groups, some teachers felt I was displaying favoritism, which created a climate of jealousy and mistrust.

The research available up to this point looks at the ways in which coaches are advocates for their teachers with respect to helping teachers negotiate new literacy

practices into individual classrooms, but little research exists that describes the scope of advocacy that coaches engage in as part of their jobs. What are the aspects of negotiation that coaches take part in among teachers, campus administrators, and officials outside of the school? In my role as a coach I spent time trying to promote teacher ideas and strategies in front of the larger faculty, which at times was viewed as showing favoritism. I also fought to maintain as much of the original coaching structure from the first year as possible, but the campus administration declined to support this decision in the face of a constricted budget. Outside of the school I attended coaching trainings trying not to betray the very different direction we headed as a campus. I spent time in meetings planning the future trainings as if I had the time to deliver them as they were intended. I also found ways to change the modules to better fit the needs of the campus.

The third finding was that in this study, teachers' secret stories varied widely from one another and from what they presented publicly in relation to the state initiative. In their groups, and sometimes with me as a coach, they found opportunities to share these secret stories and grow in their teaching. Safe places are places that Clandinin and Connelly (1995) refer to as *secret places*, which afford teachers private places to share and learn together, which become a critical part of the learning process, and can be pivotal in the development of teaching practices over time. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). The importance of having official time for teachers to work with others they felt comfortable with and could talk openly and honestly about their instructional decisions, provided teachers with an important sense of control in midst of a mandated reading initiative. Secret places afford a space where teachers can consider new practices, and continue to value their existing ones. Mandated reading initiatives can be crippling to

classroom teachers when the lessons and strategies espoused conflict severely with teachers' natural inclinations toward specific styles of teaching. In this study, secret spaces allowed for the careful reconsideration of practices – a place to renegotiate what these practices would look like in classrooms, as well as within the smaller teams that formed, giving teachers a sense of control over top-down initiatives.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Here, I explore three theoretical implications of this study. The first theoretical implication considers teachers as curriculum makers. The second implication examines conflict that is a natural and important part of communities of practice, and the third area delves into the notion that coaches are not neutral characters working with teachers on a campus – the role of instructional coach is far more complex than that.

Teachers as Curriculum Makers

When examining the roles of teachers in the context of this particular state mandated reading initiative, teachers served as their own curriculum makers in order to make sense of what they held closely in terms of beliefs about classroom instruction and in light of the new strategies and lessons introduced as part of the state mandated reading initiative modules. Teachers found ways to maintain their practices that they cherished and worked to make sense of them, at times, within the context of the state reading initiative. Other times, teachers blatantly rejected the state reading initiative in order to continue practices that were germane to their beliefs about literacy instruction with young children, or to develop new ones. As referenced in Lave and Wenger's (1991) research on

communities of practice, it is not uncommon for communities to delineate themselves from other another through specific ways of talking about their practices. In this case, the two major groups of first grade teachers at Canyon Primary (Group Sein and Group Roma) went to great lengths to present themselves as members of different groups because they created curriculum that differed vastly from each other. The ways they talked about their literate practices and enacted those ways of talking into curriculum that translated at the level of the children, were vastly different across each of the groups.

Because the state reading initiative modules were geared toward “fixing” teachers, the teachers worked to create a curriculum that met the higher standards they set for themselves and their students. Gutiérrez (2008) writes about the notion that academic literacies are often “narrowly conceived” and are oriented toward “weak literacies” – isolated skills, presented out of context. The teachers of both groups at Canyon Primary rejected the over-simplified notions behind the reading initiative modules and found other spaces available to them where they could gather to create their own more rigorous curriculum that better met their beliefs and the needs of their students.

These “third spaces” where teachers are free to create their own curriculum and enact their own beliefs are written about by Gutiérrez (2008) in terms on this context; teachers support one another when their beliefs conflict with those being pushed elsewhere. Teachers functioned as curriculum makers in these “third spaces” by way of particular artifacts the teams used during planning. One of the groups, Group Roma, wrote curriculum that drew upon artifacts associated with authentic adult literacy: writing journals, published books, computers, anchor charts. The other group, Group Sein, used artifacts based on school-only literacies: vocabulary and comprehension tests, running

records, data notebooks. These “third spaces” were also important because they allowed safe and private locations for members of these groups to rehearse their written curriculum – to watch it play out in a less public way. In this way, teachers were allowed to be creative in a safe environment.

Conflict in Communities

Conflict within communities of collaboration is a normal, but unpublicized aspect of working together (Achinstein, 2002), particularly with respect to coaching models. Rarely do coaching studies reference the conflict that exists as teachers with differing philosophies and styles of teaching are asked to adopt and implement practices bureaucratically determined elsewhere (Allington, 2006). Top-down mandates are designed to align each participating teacher’s practices within the same set of values. Initially the conflict that exists is much easier to manage because at the beginning phases of the implementation, the teachers and coach are on one side and the mandate is on the other. People are able to rally together against a common enemy that is initially faceless. However, as coaches begin to work with teachers to foster collaboration, people begin to differentiate their stance toward the initiative, and because the coach is in place to support the initiative, the rejection of the initiative is often associated synonymously with the rejection of the coach.

Conflict in communities can also be influenced by a lack of transparency with regard to how the larger model of staff development ultimately impacts the campus teachers. In systems where coaches work to support staff development initiatives, access to the reading coach and access to particular kinds of powerful activities such as teachers

who are chosen to present their classroom practices to their peers, widen the chasm of access, creating further cause for teachers.

In systems where collaboration among teachers is fostered, teachers are often encouraged to meet together to plan and develop lessons. These communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that work in collaboration can cause conflict when outsiders are not sure how to access membership within the group. Even in cases where people are not necessarily interested in joining a community of practice, knowing how to gain an entry point can deescalate a sense of conflict that exists on the surface level.

In situations where structured groups are already in existence, Lave and Wenger write about the conflict that occurs as people's identities change within the context of the group based on the changing notions of participation. Newcomers to a group are given particular access rights and eventually a time comes when newcomers to a group will replace the functions of the oldtimers. This was the case at Canyon Primary with several members of the first grade team who served as leaders were trumped by younger members of the team or by people new to the campus with more knowledge.

Groups will tend to defend themselves from new members by tightly defining the border's of the group, if the nature of the group is that of preserving status quo, that is, privileging the practices that are already in place in favor of experimentation. Achinstein (2002) talks about this in terms of the notion of group cohesion as the nature of the "outside enemy" is defined – in this case, by the kinds of literacy practices they espouse and their attitude toward testing students. As much as some groups try to shield themselves from change, other communities embrace change and view disruption as an opportunity to build new understandings (Gutiérrez, 2002).

Coaches as Non-Neutral Entities

In the literature on coaching, coaches are presented as neutral beings whose personal feelings with regard to various teaching practices on their campuses are not discernable. The reality, however, is that coaches, by their very nature cannot be neutral. Each coach walks into his or her job with certain background knowledge and certain beliefs about his or her content area. Each coach enters with certain predispositions toward particular types of practices. Because of the messiness of broaching individual preferences of coaches, this notion is often left out of studies on coaching. What is messy is often difficult to write about.

One of the functions that coaches serve is that of gatekeeper, deciding who gets access to support or opportunities of particular kinds. If coaches have been working on campuses for extended periods of time, they often influence which teachers gain entry into particular literate communities or practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Will you participate in the group that presents staff development? Will you be given access only to the group of teachers on growth plans?

Coaches are often described in studies as faithful servants to the aims of the program and that coaches navigate their role to fidelity with teachers, giving all teachers the same amount of attention. However, coaching is not an experience that runs accordingly to the description in the coaching guide. There are hundreds of decisions that are made moment-to-moment regarding who should be coached, which goals should be met?

Achinstein (2002), who writes about conflict in collaborative environments, addresses an important construct to consider when examining the lack of neutrality in a

coach's stance toward professional development. Achinstein defines *ideology* as a framework of common beliefs about education, schooling, and students. It is impossible for coaches – no matter how much they commit – to share the same ideology with teachers across the campus. One of the ways in which coaches define who participates and who does not is based on ideology. Are the beliefs of the teacher “enough” in-line with the beliefs of the coach that the coaching relationship will be a pleasant one allowing the coach to foster growth that would occur any way? Are the beliefs of the teacher so distant from that of the coach or the initiative that the campus principal has directed mandatory intervention? How likely will it be that this “forced” participant view the coach as a strong resource?

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The intent of this study was to examine the nature of collaboration among classroom teachers and the campus reading coach as we navigated a top-down reading initiative mandated by the state department of education. Based on the data from this study, there are several practical and educational implications for coaches, campus administrators, and classroom teachers.

The first recommendation is that time be devoted to making the structure of coaching transparent to classroom teachers throughout the course of the school year. Teachers need to have a firm understanding of the parameters of a coach's role. Is the coach in place to remediate, collaborate, support, or some combination of the three? Revisiting the coach's role from time to time is also critical to maintaining trust from the teachers. Typically a fairly thorough job is done of explaining coaching models at the

start of the school year, but teachers are preoccupied setting up classrooms and making plans for the start of school. Teachers will scarcely remember the purpose of the reading coach until they begin to see the reading coach spending extensive amounts of time with particular people. By making the parameters of the coaching role explicit and overt to teachers and revisiting the topic from time to time, these steps can help negate concerns about coaches serving as evaluators, or as spies for the campus administration. Teachers need to understand that the amount of time coaches engage with someone is dependent upon the nature of the practices the teacher is attempting to take on. Providing equal access to the coach for exactly the same amount of time per classroom teacher is not an equitable or productive use of the coach.

Teachers also need to understand that coaches are not responsible for taking over the instruction for needy students; coaches serve to help teachers acquire the strategies to be effective. A more technical definition of coaching actually involves the coach modeling how to help students achieve desired literacy goals not teachers. Maintaining a focus on helping children meet particular goals tied to authentic literacy takes the pressure off of teachers and removes an evaluative tone from the coaching relationship.

Coaches and teachers alike need to understand how conflict plays out naturally in groups that collaborate. Because coaching models and the majority of studies published about coaching make it sound as if following a few simple steps will create positive interactions, coaches and teachers are often taken aback at the conflict that occurs among teachers and between teachers and coaches. Not only is it important to understand that conflict does occur, it is also important to separate out the difference between conflict

that is positive and spurs growth, from conflict that is counterproductive and creates too much tension for people to function in a healthy manner.

Campus administrators also need to be clear on the role of the coach, remembering to separate administrative responsibilities from those dictated by the coaching role. During the 2006-2007 school year, each principal was assigned a principal coach who helped campus administrators navigate the delicate situations that arose on campuses in midst of taking on significant instructional changes. During year two of the initiative the budget for principal coaches was cut, and there were times I was asked to play more of an evaluation role focused on “fixing” teachers rather than focusing on meeting the needs of students.

Structural issues related to programmatic viability need to be carefully considered in large mandates such as the state reading initiative. Are the funds in place to support the program and sustain it past the initial year of implementation? Will important positions of support such as regional reading coaches and principal coaches continue to be provided by the state? In year two of the initiative, funds were not available to support important the principal coach or to sustain substitutes needed for appropriate teacher training. Campus buy-in also suffered because of the drastic changes to the program structure – what teachers were given half a day to accomplish now received thirty-five minutes. The initiative became “one more thing” that teachers expected to quickly pass.

The final implication is the importance of supporting and encouraging teacher collaboration outside the confines of mandated initiatives. Teachers deserve the time and space to interpret initiatives in a manner that complement their teaching styles and pedagogical beliefs, as well as to pursue other interests. Although the goal of coaching

initiatives is to inform practice and at times replace ineffective practices with more effective practices, classroom teachers can be crippled by changes that are too drastic and far outside of their belief systems. Having the autonomy to say which pieces of the initiative to embrace and which pieces to leave makes the conditions more favorable for teacher buy-in.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

An important opportunity exists to study the range of strategies that coaches use to navigate mandates. In examining my own experiences as a reading coach, there were times I was expected to present and promote strategies and lessons that violated my core beliefs regarding literacy education. Other coaches I trained with had the same reaction to many of the state modules that I did. How do the backgrounds and experience levels of coaches influence how they navigate the requirements of their jobs? How does the range of a coach's experiences and training impact his or her translation of staff development mandates? What are the covert and overt ways coaches continue to eschew the beliefs of mandates while also delivering the required curriculum?

Another follow-up study might involve examining how the literate identities of young students are influenced by the practices espoused by the reading initiative. How do students view themselves as readers and writers when they engage in authentic literacy tasks such as reading books and writing stories in a workshop format as opposed to the skill-specific lessons of mandated reading initiatives designed to translate as increased scores on mandated assessments such as DIBELS or TPRI? How does reading and

writing growth compare across for students who are identified as struggling by their teachers versus students who are making strong gains as readers and writers?

With the proliferation of “research-based” literacy initiatives and reading coaches who are asked to carry out these programs to fidelity, there is a desperate need for studies that examine the impact of these programs across student growth, teacher job satisfaction, and campus climate. Research is needed that will investigate the impact of these initiatives across schools and districts.

The final recommendation for future research would be a longitudinal study following state-level mandated reading initiatives to gain a better understanding of what happens to the programs across multiple years. What criteria are used for the maintenance or elimination of positions? How are large initiatives funded for campuses in districts that do not receive federal monies? How do campuses respond across multiple years? With the proliferation of long-term staff development initiatives employing full-time coaches, and spanning entire school districts, an important opportunity exists to evaluate these mandated initiatives to gain a better understanding of these models impact levels of literacy among children as well as teacher knowledge and skill.

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Vita

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