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Teachers' Perceptions of Guided Reading in Elementary Education

Janice Francis

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Department of Education, University of Portland

Deirdre Hon (PhD) (Chair), Sally Hood (PhD), Katie Danielson (PhD)

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by

Janice Francis

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Redacted   3/29/2023

Chairperson   Date

Redacted   3/29/2023

Committee Member   Date

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Committee Member   Date

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Additional Committee Member   Date

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Dean of the Unit   Date

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Abstract

The current study examined teachers' perceptions with regard to the Guided Reading (GR) approach in elementary level education. Specifically, this study examined the following research questions: a) What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about the GR approach? b) What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom? and c) What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR? This study utilized a mixed methods research approach to examine Alberta teachers' perceptions about GR in a single separate Alberta elementary school. Thirteen teachers completed demographic and survey questions relating to the GR approach and the research questions noted above. A further six teachers from grades one, three, and five participated in focused interviews to further elaborate and elucidate teachers' perceptions with regard to GR in the elementary grades. Three main themes that emerged from the study were as follows: a) teachers have mixed feelings about the GR approach; b) implementing GR can be a challenging process; and c) training and support for teachers could impact the way GR is implemented. Eight subthemes emerged from the study, including positive attributes of GR, negative attributes and challenges associated with GR, GR for ELL students, GR enactment, challenges with implementation in classrooms, the planning process, training components, and teaching resources. Findings of the study revealed that overall, teachers' perceptions of the GR approach are overwhelmingly negative with a few positive aspects.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my home school and the staff, including the Principal, Assistant Principal, staff, and administration, who have supported me, given me the time to complete this work, and participated in my research. Their insights were invaluable, and I hope that I have reflected their thoughts as they intended them to be. It is my hope that this research will contribute to improved student outcomes in the elementary grades.

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Chapter 1 Teachers' Perceptions of Guided Reading in Elementary Education

Reading is considered to be one of the most important skills for individuals to acquire in order for them to be functional in society (Iaquinta, 2006). Lesaux (2012) described reading as a vigorous and multifaceted process requiring students' engagement in ongoing activities that help develop the necessary skills to be successful readers. Reading is deemed to be an essential skill for every student to acquire, as it has an impact on almost every situation in their life-long journey (Shang, 2015). Given the importance of reading and literacy skills, any factors that impact on students' acquisition of knowledge and skills should be considered. In recent years, Armes (2022) noted that there has been increased focus on the science of reading approach to reading and literacy as a result of journalist Emily Hanford, who began arguing that reading is being taught the wrong way in 2018. As a result, many states in the United States are passing new laws to facilitate increased use of research-based reading instruction, which focus on the science of reading approach to literacy (Armes, 2022). The science of reading approach to reading and literacy is focused on phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Moats, 2020). This approach contrasts with the whole-language Guided Reading (GR) approach that encourages children to learn to read through the recognition of words, rather than the components set out by the science of reading league (Armes, 2022). However, despite the increasing focus on the science of reading as an approach to reading and literacy, this dissertation focused on teachers' perceptions of the GR process in one school in Alberta, Canada, because it is one of the reading and literacy approaches endorsed there.

One factor proposed as a main attribute and fundamental component of successful teachers and classrooms is teacher enthusiasm (Frenzel et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2021; Thommen et al., 2021). Teacher enthusiasm has been defined as "a strong liking for a subject matter, something, or activity, and a searing soul, fuel, or the blasting fire of something new" (Liu et al., 2021, para. 11). Lipp and Helfrich (2016) asserted that teachers who are efficient and enthusiastic about teaching reading and literacy skills are necessary in order for students to become strategic problem solvers. Kunter and Holzberger (2014) stated that enthusiasm focuses teacher attention on students and contributes to improved learner relationships and student outcomes. In student populations, including the "academically vulnerable" population (children who are English language learners [ELL], have ELL parents, and/or are reading below their expected level), teacher enthusiasm, as demonstrated by both verbal and nonverbal cues during student interactions, has been shown to have significant positive effects on student success, increasing levels of student performance, confidence, and autonomy, while decreasing anxiety (Liu et al., 2021).

Among student populations, research has demonstrated that children who get off to a poor start in reading and literacy skills rarely catch up (Iaquinta, 2006). Iaquinta (2006) demonstrated that 88% of students identified with reading and literacy difficulties in grade one still demonstrated deficiencies at the end of grade four, even with targeted intervention. The tendency for literacy difficulties to persist long beyond the point at which they are identified and intervention implemented underscores the need for reading and literacy programs used in the earlier grades to be effective (Iaquinta, 2006). In order for students with reading and literacy difficulties to catch up

and thrive, it is critical that the mechanisms utilized for reading and literacy be optimized (Liu et al., 2021). According to Lesaux (2012), the academically vulnerable population requires an instructional approach to reading focused on conceptual, skill, and knowledge-based reading competencies to improve student levels of achievement and help students become successful in school. In addition to reading approaches that focus on these competencies, teachers can engage and support struggling readers by ensuring that classroom activities are embedded in intentional rich language experiences (such as students becoming curious, asking questions, and so forth) that are developmentally appropriate to the learner (Lesaux, 2012).

While early reading interventions are important, Iaquinta (2006) emphasized the need for balanced literacy programs that place as much importance on *how* teachers teach as on *what* they are teaching. Frenzel et al. (2009) demonstrated that there was a significant positive correlation between student enjoyment in grades seven and eight ($r = 0.53$; $p = 0.01$) and an additional, significant positive effect of teacher enthusiasm ($r = 0.31$; $p = 0.01$). Teacher enthusiasm is particularly important in Alberta, where 44% of students in grades two and three have been found to have reading and literacy difficulties. Since teacher enthusiasm has been linked to how teachers teach, as well as successful student literacy outcomes, it is critical that teachers are enthusiastic about the GR process used to foster reading and literacy skills in elementary level students (Frenzel et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2021; Thommen et al., 2021). Examining teachers' perceptions about the reading and literacy strategies they utilize is important because it provides insight into teacher enthusiasm, enjoyment, comfort, and competence with instructional materials and strategies and promotes

successful student outcomes (Frenzel et al., 2009). Thus, studies examining teachers'

perceptions about the reading and literacy strategies they use in their classrooms are of

particular importance with respect to optimizing the efficacy of literacy programs.

GR is "a small-group instructional context in which a teacher supports each

reader's development of systems of strategic actions for processing new texts at

increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. During GR, students in a small-group

setting individually read a text that (the teacher) has selected at their instructional

reading level. (The teacher) provides teaching across the lesson to support students in

building the in-the-head networks of strategic actions for processing increasingly

challenging texts. Through GR, students learn how to engage in every facet of the

reading process and apply that literacy power to all instructional contexts" (Fountas &

Pinnell, 2022, para. 1). Guided reading is based on Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of

Proximal Development and the notion of scaffolding proposed by Bruner (1986).

According to the Department of Education (2023), "GR is based on the belief that the

optimal learning for a reader occurs when they are assisted by an educator, or expert

'other', to read and understand a text with clear but limited guidance. GR allows

students to practice and consolidate effective reading strategies" (para. 4). Although

GR has been criticized for struggling readers, it is one of the strategies that has been

suggested to improve reading and literacy skills is GR (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996;

Shang, 2015; Vaites, 2019). Iaquinta (2006) noted that GR "has become one of the

most important contemporary reading instructional practices" in North America and

"is accepted as a particularly appropriate strategy for children who are moving toward

fluency in the early years of literacy development" (p. 413). In GR, learners are

engaged in activities that are geared towards developing skills in comprehension, critical thinking, problem solving, and questioning (Fountas & Pinnel, 2021). The National Education Association (NEA) (2015) asserted that students' levels of achievement in reading comprehension can be improved if they are taught using the GR framework. Therefore, GR is an important approach to reading and literacy in the elementary grades (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Since teachers' enthusiasm has been correlated with improved student outcomes, it is imperative to examine teachers' perceptions about the GR approach, effectiveness, and any factors they perceive to have a bearing on their personal teaching efficacy (Liu et al., 2021). Researchers have demonstrated that teachers with more professional development, classroom support, and feedback are more likely to be enthusiastic, motivated, and have more positive perceptions with regard to the reading and math programs they utilize in their classrooms (McCollum et al., 2013; Varghese et al., 2016).

This chapter presents an introduction to the study and covers the following components: problem statement, gaps in research relating to teachers' perceptions on GR, purpose statement, study research questions, the theoretical framework, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, and definitions used in the study.

Problem Statement

The need for successful reading and literacy strategies has never been more imperative. Many students already continue to pass through the elementary school system without mastering important reading and literacy concepts (Government of Canada [GOC], 2022). According to the GOC (2022), 49% of Canadians and 45% of Albertans between the ages of 16 and 65 score below the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development's (OECD) reported average literacy level for the year of 2013. Additionally, according to Junker (2021), Alberta students in grades two and three have recently been identified as having suffered reductions in literacy and numeracy skills as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to some students in these grades being identified as an academically vulnerable population (Junker, 2021). Many Alberta schools have adopted and/or encouraged teachers to use the GR approach to reading and literacy in their classrooms, although few provide professional education about GR to teachers (Alberta Education, 2008; Marchard-Martella et al., 2015). GR has been shown to lead to improved outcomes for average elementary school students with respect to reading skills, such as comprehension, critical thinking, problem solving, and questioning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2013; Marchard-Martella et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2013).

As noted previously, teacher enthusiasm has been linked to improved student outcomes, teacher performance, and teacher efficacy in the implementation of instructional strategies, and the organization of activities (Liu et al., 2021). Since it has been demonstrated that teacher enthusiasm is correlated to student reading performance, it is important to ensure that teachers are enthusiastic about the reading and literacy strategies they use in their classrooms (Frenzel et al., 2009; Keller et al., 2014, 2016; Lazarides et al., 2019). By extrapolation, it is important for Alberta teachers to be enthusiastic about teaching reading and it is critical to examine their perceptions about the reading strategies they have been asked to implement in their classrooms, such as GR. Even though the GR approach to reading and literacy appears to be widely used and is encouraged in many Alberta schools, there is a paucity of

information about how enthusiastic teachers are with respect to GR and/or their perceptions about GR. This research study is designed to explore Alberta teachers' perceptions with respect to GR in elementary education.

Gaps in Research on Teachers' Perceptions of Guided Reading

The current study aimed to focus on Alberta teachers' perceptions of the GR process. While numerous empirical studies were located that focus on various aspects of teachers' perceptions relating to the GR process, most of the studies were found to be either dissertations or theses, with few examples of empirical research published in mainstream peer-reviewed sources. This may reflect researchers pursuing advanced degrees for the purposes of advancement within the K-12 educational system and who may not have felt compelled or motivated to publish their graduate work in peer-reviewed journals. Many of the studies located during the current search did not control for the manner in which the GR method was implemented in the classrooms studied, limiting the generalizability to different classrooms and other school districts. A notable finding was that most of these studies ultimately focused on diversities in the GR implementation process, lack of fidelity relative to the Fountas and Pinnell GR framework, support needs for the GR process, and other mechanical implementation factors unrelated to teachers' perceptions. Notwithstanding any reason for the lack of publications from these research studies, the information contained in many of the dissertations and theses has relevance to the current study. Importantly, only two studies examined teachers' perceptions and the contribution of teacher enthusiasm for the literacy process (Gibson, 2009; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). These studies illustrate the importance of passionate teacher investment in the GR approach and the positive

effects on the teachers' ability to implement differentiated/scaffolded instruction tailored to the individual students' needs. Given a) Bulunuz and Koç's (2019) observation that GR is one of the most important contemporary approaches to reading in the early years of literacy development, b) the importance of implementing effective literacy programs in the early years, and c) the relationship of teachers' enthusiasm to student literacy outcomes and effectiveness of literacy programs, it is important that studies examining teachers' perceptions towards GR be undertaken in order to address the gap in research that exists in this area and elucidate the role of teacher enthusiasm.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine Alberta teachers' perceptions (experiences; decision making; beliefs; enthusiasm; and awareness) about: a) the GR process; b) how GR is enacted in the classroom; and c) how they learned about GR. This study proposed a mixed method exploratory research design using surveys and focused interviews to examine Alberta teachers' perceptions. The study also included demographic characteristics (age, gender, grade taught, years of experience, professional preparation, time spent in preparation for GR sessions, classroom time spent in GR activities) of elementary classrooms and teachers in Alberta from grades one through six.

Research Questions

The intent of this research was to gather information on Alberta elementary teachers' perceptions of the GR process. The research questions examined in this study were:

RQ1: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about the GR approach? (qualitative and quantitative)

RQ2: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom? (qualitative and quantitative)

RQ3: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR (qualitative and quantitative)

Theoretical Framework

"The process of designing a qualitative study begins with the broad assumptions central to qualitative inquiry, a worldview consistent with it, and in many cases, a theoretical lens that shapes the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 42). The theoretical framework chosen for this study was based on Dweck's (2012) "mindset theory", which focuses around two possible mindsets: fixed or growth. Dweck (2012) stated that the "hallmark of human nature is each person's great capacity to adapt, to change, and to grow" (p. 614), which she suggested is related to the world an individual finds themselves in. Mindsets affect what people believe and think "about themselves and others and what they can do and become" (Moon & Young, 2021, p. 4). Since mindsets impact what a person believes about themselves, it is important to consider whether a person adopts a fixed or growth mindset. Mindsets have been shown to make a difference in academics, social relationships for adults and children, in the workplace, and in emotional and physical health (Dweck, 2012). Dweck (2012) asserted that mindsets can significantly influence people's willpower and therefore, alter their beliefs and how they work.

Individuals with fixed mindsets believe that their core qualities are built in and fixed by nature (Dweck, 2012). Dweck (2012) notes that people with fixed mindsets about their own traits and abilities tend to avoid challenges out of the fear that failing in the challenge will highlight weakness or incapacity in themselves. Such people also demonstrate lower levels of resilience to setbacks, relating their setbacks to a failure or lack of ability (Dweck, 2012). For those with fixed mindsets, fear of failure or actually failing at something can lead to the individual becoming discouraged, defensive, and resistant to change (Dweck, 2012). If a person has a fixed mindset, they also tend to make rapid, trait-based judgments about others, and tend to reject the idea that people are capable of change (Dweck, 2012). They are quick to label people with stereotypes and have a tendency to reject any information that demonstrates their information or viewpoint is incorrect (Dweck, 2012). On the other hand, those with growth mindsets are more understanding of others' behaviors in terms of situations and psychological needs, beliefs, emotions, goals, and so forth (Dweck, 2012). These people are unlikely to affix labels or stereotypes to others and believe that others are capable of growth (Dweck, 2012). Individuals with a growth mindset, believe that their qualities are constantly developing through their interactions with the environment and their own efforts (Dweck, 2012). These individuals will seek out new challenges and learning opportunities, and demonstrate initiative and resilience when confronted with setbacks, viewing setbacks as integral parts of learning and opportunities for growth, rather than evidence of failure or incapacity (Dweck, 2012). Dweck (2012) contended that an individual is never exclusively of a "growth" or "fixed" mindset, but rather, each person has a mix of both mindsets and that the nature of a person's mindset

depends on a variety of personal and environmental factors relating to the situation and circumstances. For example, the person may have a growth mindset to something they feel favorably about, but a fixed mindset in regard to something they feel negatively about. Dweck (2012) notes that there may be fixed mindset triggers that foster a fixed mindset approach in an individual. Blad (2016) suggests that in the educational setting, it is particularly important for both teachers and students to identify triggers and responses that might not be productive or which may contribute to less productive outcomes.

The theory of two mindsets is important to understanding teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and the factors that motivate them to enthusiastically embrace changes in curriculum and dedicate themselves to implementation of a given program (Dweck, 2012). According to Dweck (2012), teaching a growth mindset to people and students can significantly boost their motivation levels and increase their achievements under challenging circumstances, as well as help alleviate the impact of negative stereotypes and beliefs on achievements. Furthermore, increasing a person's motivation can affect their enthusiasm for a given thing or activity (Dweck, 2012). The theory of "mixed mindset" and "fixed mindset triggers" form the basis for Dweck's (2012) argument that it is important to identify a) when a person is operating from a fixed mindset, and b) if there are opportunities to address those fixed mindsets. Relative to the current study, these factors could be restated as follows: It is important to a) identify teachers' perceptions about GR, and b) determine what factors or supports are needed to ensure that teachers are enthusiastic about GR.

Different schools and teachers have different philosophies about teaching and early reading instruction (Blad, 2016). According to Blad (2016) "the larger culture of a school can influence mindset formation" of teachers and students. Regardless of where teachers work or the strategies used, teachers seek new and innovative educational approaches to inform their teaching style and promote optimal learning outcomes among students (Moon & Young, 2021). Moon and Young (2021) demonstrated the importance of teachers' holding positive perceptions about a core literacy reading program for children in elementary grades. They noted that teachers with positive attitudes are more likely to have a growth mindset and a greater capacity for implementing and adapting programs to meet the diverse learning needs of individual students (Moon & Young, 2021). These individuals are more likely to seek out ways to optimize the approach in order to maximize student outcomes (Moon & Young, 2021). Harrison (2016) demonstrated that favorable, positive views, growth mindsets, and an enthusiastic approach to curricula have positive impacts on student outcomes. On the other hand, teachers with a fixed mindset may be more reluctant to embrace a new reading and literacy strategy if they lack the professional preparation for the specific approach (Moon & Young, 2021). Nevertheless, teachers with both fixed and growth mindsets are more likely to implement a reading and literacy approach with fidelity, if the program aligns with their belief system, teaching style, and their personal philosophy of education (Moon & Young, 2021).

In summary, Dweck's theory is particularly relevant with respect to teachers' perceptions about GR, since those with positive feelings and a growth mindset are more likely to be enthusiastic and immerse themselves in the GR process in ways that

optimize student outcomes (Harrison, 2016). Conversely, teachers with negative

feelings and a fixed mindset are less likely to be enthusiastic. As a result, student

outcomes may not be as good as those obtained by teachers who are enthusiastic about

GR (Iaquinta, 2006). Understanding teachers' perceptions and lived experiences with

regard to the GR process, how they enact GR, and how they learned about GR can

elucidate whether teachers possess positive or negative views of GR. It can also help

unlock the key to: a) identifying positive and negative attitudes with respect to GR for

the purposes of designing targeted interventions to promote teacher enthusiasm; b)

identifying areas and processes that teachers perceive as beneficial and/or problematic

in regard to either enacting GR or their professional preparation for GR; and c)

maximizing supports and professional preparation programs to support GR activities

in the classroom.

Significance

The primary beneficiaries of this study are students and teachers in the

elementary classrooms of the chosen Alberta school. Teacher perceptions about the

GR process will inform the choice of approach to reading and literacy skills (Blad,

2016). Secondly, this study benefits the parents of students, since they have a vested

interest in the efficacy of literacy programs and processes that impact their children,

including those processes that impact teachers. Thirdly, this study benefits Alberta

school administrators and policy makers, who are responsible for overseeing the

reading and literacy education of students in the elementary grades. The results of this

study will inform their decisions about whether to require GR processes in the

classrooms, what resources are needed to ensure that the implementation of GR is

successful, and what teachers require in order to maximize reading and literacy outcomes from the GR approach. Fourthly, the information derived from this study will be helpful to the designers of GR programs, since it may help inform designers about recommendations that will support teachers in the implementation process. Finally and most importantly, the results of this study benefit the teachers in Alberta, since it elucidates perceptions about the GR process and teacher preparation for utilizing GR in their classrooms. The information derived from this study can provide the teachers with guidance as to what they need to do in order to be better teachers.

Definition Of Terms

Academically Vulnerable Population. Children who are English language learners (ELL) and/or have parents who are ELL or are reading below their expected level. (Lesaux, 2012)

Differentiated Instruction. Is taking differences between students into account in the process, product and content of teaching, whether proactively or reactively. (Stollman et. al. 2019)

Efficacy. The ability to produce a desired or intended result. (Efficacy, 2006)

English Language Learners (ELL). English-language learners are those students whose primary spoken language is not English and "are in the process of acquiring English language skills and knowledge (NAEP 2005).

Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS). Fountas and Pinnell BAS is a formal assessment of students' reading levels using text gradient (A-Z), composed of leveled books and recording sheets from grade levels kindergarten

through eighth grade; it measures decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

Guided reading. Based on the work of Fountas and Pinnell (2022), GR is "a small-group instructional context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of systems of strategic actions for processing new texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. During GR, students in a small-group setting individually read a text that (the teacher) has selected at their instructional reading level. (The teacher) provides teaching across the lesson to support students in building the in-the-head networks of strategic actions for processing increasingly challenging texts. Through GR, students learn how to engage in every facet of the reading process and apply that literacy power to all instructional contexts" (para. 1).

Mindset. "A mindset is what someone believes and thinks about themselves and what they can do and become" (Moon & Young, 2021, p. 4).

Perception. Given's (2008) defined perception as the vehicle through which individuals process a present condition based on information acquired through the senses. Meaning and significance are modified based on perceptions, which then impact judgements and decision making.

Professional development. Any organized activity that teachers attend for the purpose of improving their curricula and teaching practices in order to help students achieve at an increased level of ability.

Reading recovery. Reading recovery is a 12-20 week evidence-based intervention that helps struggling readers catch up to their peers (Reading Recovery, 2022).

Scaffolding. "A process that enables a child or a novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts'' (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90).

Teacher enthusiasm. Is a strong liking for a subject matter, something, or activity, and a searing soul, fuel, or the blasting fire of something new (Liu et al., 2021)

Chapter Summary

Chapter One presented an introduction to the study and covered the following components: the problem statement, gaps in research relating to teachers' perceptions on GR, purpose statement, study research questions, the theoretical framework used to guide the research, significance of the study, and definitions used in the study. Chapter Two presents the literature review for the current study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter presents the literature review undertaken for the current study. Specifically, the chapter contains the following components: literature search strategy, Fountas and Pinnell's Conceptual Framework for GR, the application of GR, effectiveness of GR, variations in GR, reading recovery, and student achievement as measured by Fountas and Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment System (BAS). After the literature review relating to GR, research studies relating to teachers' perceptions about the GR process, how GR is enacted in the classroom, and professional preparation relating to GR are presented. Specifically, the following topics are addressed: teachers' perceptions about the GR process, differentiation and scaffolding, how GR is enacted, strategies used for GR engagement, how they enact GR with ELL students, how they learned about GR, and the GR professional preparation process. The limited studies examining teachers' perceptions about GR in Alberta are also included in this literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

An extensive literature search strategy was used, encompassing the following databases: ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and ProQuest through the University of Portland library system. The following keywords and phrases were used to locate peer-reviewed titles relevant to the current study: a) teachers' perceptions (76 articles), b) GR (3,112 articles), c) GR with English language learners (ELL) (13 articles), d) GR with academically vulnerable (articles), e) GR with struggling readers (52 articles), f) GR in elementary education (articles), g) GR to build reading comprehension (594 articles), h) GR and

differentiated instruction (16 articles), i) GR and scaffolding (70 articles), j) GR and teacher efficacy/self-efficacy (11 articles), k) GR and teacher effectiveness (139 articles), l) reading instruction in elementary schools (9,888 articles), m) reading programs (58,371 articles), n) effectiveness of GR instruction (168 articles), and o) GR and classroom management (71 articles). Approximately 150 studies/articles were found to be relevant to the current study. Articles referenced at the end of relevant titles also provided a useful resource to expand search criteria.

Literature Review

The following section presents the findings of the literature review examining teachers' perceptions of the GR process (experiences; decision making; beliefs, and awareness) including: a) how teachers feel about GR; b) what are teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom; and c) what are teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR. In the following literature review, the following topics are addressed: Fountas and Pinnell's conceptual framework for guided reading, application of guided reading, effectiveness of guided reading, variations in guided reading, reading recovery, student achievement as measured by Fountas and Pinnell's BAS (BAS) teachers' perceptions about the GR process, theoretical framework for GR, Fountas and Pinnell's conceptual framework and applications for GR, differentiated and scaffolded instruction, student achievement using Fountas and Pinnell's BAS, and teachers' perceptions about professional preparation for GR.

Guided Reading

This section of the literature review presents studies and literature relating to GR and the GR process. Specifically, this section includes information on Fountas and Pinnell's Conceptual Framework for GR, the application of GR, effectiveness of GR, variations in GR, reading recovery, and student achievement as measured by Fountas and Pinnell's BAS. The section on GR is followed by literature relating to teachers' perceptions.

Fountas and Pinnell's Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on Fountas and Pinnell's GR framework. GR is a well-known reading strategy initially conceived of by Fountas and Pinnell (1996) for the development of reading and literacy skills in the early grades (Delacruz, 2014; Denton et al., 2014; Ford & Opitz, 2008b). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2017), GR is "a context within which students engage with a rich variety of texts and are taught how to build an effective and efficient reading processing system" (p. 10). GR was envisioned as "small-group reading instruction designed to provide differentiated teaching that supports students in developing reading proficiency" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010, p. 2). GR is one of the most widely used reading strategies for developing independent reading and thinking skills (Denton et al., 2014; Young, 2019) and is "part of a balanced literacy program in the elementary classroom" (Delacruz, 2014, p. 64). The GR approach "deemphasizes decontextualized instruction" "in favor of extended time spent reading text under the guidance of a teacher who supports the development of effective reading strategies" (Denton et al., 2014, p. 269).

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) originally described the GR approach as consisting of a comprehensive process that helps teachers develop targeted lessons (15 to 20 minutes long) for small groups of students (four to six students) grouped according to their current reading levels and behaviors. The GR process allows teachers to work with small groups of children to facilitate reading strategies and be successful with independent reading (Hornsby, 2000; Young, 2019). The small groups allow teachers to model reading and literacy behaviors, reinforce and enhance reading skills and behaviors, and allow students to assume more responsibility for independent processing of texts (Burkins & Croft, 2010; Shang, 2015). The Department of Education, Victoria State Government (2023) provides a graphical representation of the GR conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Graphical Representation of Conceptual Framework for GR
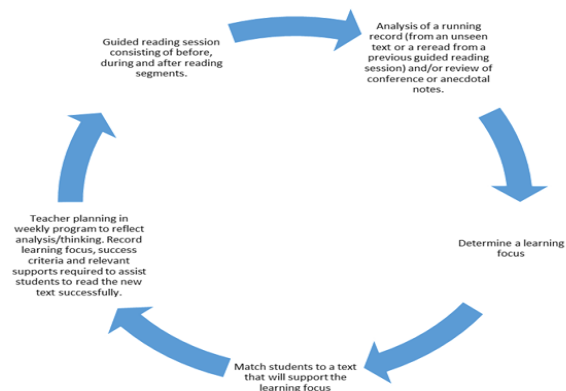
From: "Guided Reading" by Department of Education, Victoria State Government, 2023.

Teachers plan lessons following a detailed framework described by Fountas and Pinnell (2005, 2012), which incorporates careful text selection and strategic

activities to develop proficient, independent reading and literacy skills among students. In GR, the teacher carefully plans the teaching/learning interactions, considers group composition, selects text(s) and lesson objectives according to the students' reading behaviour, and uses strategic behaviors, prompts, demonstrations, and questions focused on student opportunities to strengthen reading and literacy skills, behaviors, information processing, and comprehension (Clay, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Gaffner et al., 2014). Fountas and Pinnell (2010) stated that the GR framework "provides for rich language-based experiences with a variety of texts in whole-group, small-group, and individual settings" (p. 3).

Fountas and Pinnell's conceptual framework for GR is widely used for literacy instruction in elementary classrooms because it: a) supports readers in expanding their processing competencies, b) provides a context for responsive teaching grounded in the teacher's detailed knowledge of, and consideration for, each student towards developing the students' processing system, c) allows students to engage with a rich variety of texts, d) helps students learn to think like proficient readers, and e) enables students to read more challenging texts with support (Piercey, 2009).

Application of Guided Reading

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) originally described three phases of GR: before, during, and after reading activities. Goodman (1996, 2015) notes that GR builds on what readers know. In 2005, Fountas and Pinnell also described GR as having the following components: introducing text, supporting effective reading, teaching processing strategies, and discussing/revisiting text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2005). Teachers may also extend the meaning of the text and/or work with vocabulary

(Fountas & Pinnell, 2005). In 2012, Fountas and Pinnell divided the GR process into six lesson steps with an optional seventh step, which they described as follows: 1) text selection based on group reading level, 2) introduction to the text (oral and written), 3) reading the text (silently or orally with teacher support), 4) discussion of the text with teacher-led discussion, 5) teaching points geared towards expanding strategies, 6) vocabulary work (explicit and strategic), and the optional 7) extension of comprehension and writing skills.

Due to the instructional format suggested by Fountas and Pinnell (2005, 2012), Ascenzi-Moreno and Quiñones (2020) stated that "when teachers hear 'guided reading', they often think of forming small groups, choosing teaching points, selecting texts, differentiating for a variety of readers, and moving students to higher reading levels" (p.138). The conceptual framework for GR proposed by Fountas and Pinnell (2010) allows teachers to provide strategic differentiated and scaffolded instruction that supports critical thinking and deep comprehension using strategies such as word solving, searching for and using information, self-monitoring and correcting, summarizing information, maintaining fluency, adjusting for purpose and genre, predicting, making connections (personal, other texts, and world knowledge), synthesizing, inferring, analyzing, and critiquing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010).

Effectiveness of Guided Reading

There has been some suggestion that GR is not the most effective approach to teaching reading and literacy skills in the elementary grades (Vaites, 2019). Vaites (2019) asserted that there is no evidence that GR instruction works. The author attributed the lack of research on GR instruction and the general consensus and belief

that GR is effective, to the following factors: a) people not being familiar with the research and lack of discussion regarding the lack of evidence supporting GR, b) GR *sounds* like it makes good sense because it targets learners at their current instructional level and adapts with student progress, c) it 'feels' like differentiation but in reality it is "faux differentiation" because "teachers tend to do similar activities, and ask similar comprehension questions, across groups, varying only the text" (n.p.), d) some leveled work is appropriate some of the time but not appropriate at other times, e) common programs promote GR (Vaites 2019 refers to the pervasity of Fountas & Pinnell's marketing and familiarity among teachers), and f) GR instruction is easier than the alternatives because it groups learners based on reading levels rather than on grouping learners on the more challenging characteristics that they are missing (Vaites, 2019). Yet Vaites is incorrect in asserting that there has not been empirical studies on the effectiveness of GR intervention. Denton et al. (2014) used an experimental design to examine GR intervention, explicit intervention, and the traditional classroom approach to teaching reading and literacy. Both intervention groups (GR and explicit instruction) demonstrated significantly greater achievement using the interventions as compared to the traditional classroom approach (Denton et al., 2014). Ultimately, explicit intervention proved superior to both GR and the traditional classroom approach (Denton et al., 2014).

Hoffman (2017) also questioned the theoretical and practical underpinnings of GR instruction. Hoffman (2017) addressed what Vaites (2019) refered to as "faux differentiation", noting that the current form of "differentiation" employed in GR instruction is not as comprehensive as it needs be (Hoffman, 2017). Rather, Hoffman

(2017) argued that there are two major problems with using a descriptor of the "just right" level for the differentiation process. Specifically, he suggested that scaffolding tends to be of a unidimensional, fixed nature that does not adequately challenge learners on the multidimensional skills they need challenged at any given time (Hoffman, 2017). In other words, the "just right" level referred to in GR is not adequate for learners and that teachers need to be aware of the need for a flexible, multidimensional scaffolding approach to GR instruction (Hoffman, 2017). Hoffman (2017) asserted that there are connections made between Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Bruner's theory of learning with respect to GR, which supports the contention that learners require not just a single level of challenge, but a range of levels that cannot be achieved with a unidimensional level of scaffolding. However, Hoffman (2017) did not dismiss the value of GR instruction and he stated the following:

> I am not suggesting that we totally abandon narrative texts for GR to support strategy development in ways that value readers and build on what they know. I am suggesting that we need to recognize that what we are currently doing to support literacy development with leveled texts is not having the effects we desire, that we take account of the serious unintended consequences of the path we are on, that we expand our understanding of reading skills and strategies to include what Paris (2005) described as unconstrained meaning-based skills (Stahl, 2011), that we welcome the challenges of informational texts used in inquiry as spaces for growth in teaching and learning, and that we engage with

teachers in exploring alternative approaches that focus on issues important in

the lives of students today and in the future (p. 271).

Hoffman (2017) acknowledged that there are limiting factors with GR (such as

the validity of the Fountas & Pinnell BAS, as noted later in this document) and at least

12 potential unintended consequences associated with GR instruction. According to

Hoffman (2017), these include readers adopting reading levels as their "reading

identity" and for gauging their performance and teachers' effectiveness; leveling

programs may support publishers more than readers and tend to focus attention on

deficits rather than accomplishments; there are limitations of levels and materials

classified at each level; focus on achieving levels rather than skills; the leveling drives

a focus on reading as compared to other subjects; it focuses readers on leveled texts

only, which comes at the expense of missed exposure to other media; and leveling

takes away student autonomy and drive to read more challenging books independent

of teacher guidance (Hoffman, 2017).

Polk (2020) used a mixed methods study to examine elementary teachers'

understanding of GR within the first-year of implementation in the school. Polk (2020)

concluded that GR "nestled in the balanced literacy framework, provides differentiated

instruction to optimize student growth" (p. iv). Polk (2020) echoes Hoffman's (2017)

concerns with respect to the potential unintended consequences of GR instruction.

Specifically, Polk demonstrated that there is a need to clarify aspects of the GR

approach (ie. texts used, grouping methods, scheduling, and assessments) for teachers

within the first year of implementation of a GR curriculum. Wall (2014) also noted

that during her professional practice, her colleagues and her had identified key issues

with GR instruction, citing a) a focus on mastery of skills rather than changing student behaviors and b) a significant effect of subtle changes in teacher language with respect to student success (Wall, 2014). Wall (2014) suggests that if GR instruction is not having the desired effect on students' learning outcomes, then teachers need to examine methods of instruction to determine where the problem lies and what instructional modifications/adaptations need to be made in order to ensure student success. This may also impact how teachers feel about GR.

In empirical research, Hansen (2016) examined the efficacy of GR on reading comprehension in struggling, average, and accelerated students in grade five. In this action research study, GR significantly increased reading comprehension levels in average readers, but not in struggling or accelerated level readers (Hansen, 2016). Hansen (2016) found three themes present among teachers: a) inconsistent application of GR strategies, which was found to hinder student achievement levels, b) students need to be equal partners in learning, and c) GR is beneficial for average readers but not for struggling and accelerated readers. Hansen (2016) concluded that "GR should not be the only component of a balanced literacy program within a classroom" (p. 2). The findings of Wall (2014) and Hansen (2016) suggest that even minor differences or variations in the GR approach may have substantial impacts on student outcomes.

Finally, EdReports (2021) issued a scathing review of the Fountas and Pinnell resources for kindergarten through grade six, noting that the alignment and usability of the materials and texts provided are poor. Specifically, it was noted that the materials

do not meet the expectations for text quality and complexity and alignment to the standards. The program does not include complex texts and texts do not

reflect the distribution of text types required by the standards. The majority of

questions and tasks do not provide students with opportunities to utilize and

apply evidence from the text during speaking and listening activities or

writing. There is limited instruction for grammar and vocabulary called for by

the standards (para. 1).

Furthermore, while the program cited some general research, Fountas and Pinnell did

not present an evidence-based explanation for the hierarchy in which skills are

presented, the acquisition of phonological skills, and sequence of phonics (EdReports,

2021). In addition, EdReports (2021) cited the limited explicit instruction of phonics,

word recognition, and word analysis. Moreover, EdReports (2021) noted that the

Fountas and Pinnell approach recommends that foundational skill lessons be practiced

for ten minutes a day, which "may not provide sufficient time for students to receive

daily explicit instruction to work towards mastery of foundational skills" (para. 2) or

spelling patterns.

Variations in Guided Reading

Ford and Opitz (2008b) identified 11 variations of GR across its history.

Notwithstanding the variations, Ford & Opitz (2008a) identified eight commonalities

amongst the different variations of guided reading. The commonalities are: a) all

children can learn to be literate and it is the responsibility of the teacher to design

methods that focus on each child's specific reading level, b) GR reading should be

taught by teachers, c) a central concept of GR is to help the child become independent

and relate their reading to personal experiences and then diverge from that point, d)

children learn by doing and need to read rather than be read to, e) GR helps children

construct meaning and relate what they have read with their own experiences and other reading activities, f) GR helps teach children strategies and behaviors to use when reading something that is unfamiliar or unrecognized (eg. what strategy do they use when they come across a word they don't know?) g) GR sessions should focus on helping children find the fun in reading, as a life-long strategy for literacy, and h) GR follows a 3-step process: before reading, during reading, and after reading.

Using treatment and comparison groups, Young (2019) performed a year-long quasi-experimental study using two variations of GR with grade two students. The treatment group received GR more frequently and in more variable manner, while the comparison group received a balanced literacy program. After one year of intervention and using the Developmental Reading Assessment in pre-post test fashion, Young (2019) demonstrated the equivalent of one year's improvement in reading and literacy for the treatment group. Data analysis revealed that the improvement in the treatment group reached a level of statistical significance. These findings confirmed those of Wall (2014). Notwithstanding any differences attributable to variations in GR intervention, Wall (2014) stated that when used optimally, "guided reading can be one highly effective method for creating thinking, confident readers" (140). However, in Wall's (2014) study, the researcher utilized GR in its prescribed form and applied a more intensive approach to GR to two different groups. Findings confirmed that the students who received a more intensive and varied approach to GR made significantly greater gains in reading and literacy. Unfortunately, Wall (2014) did not undertake any data analysis, and therefore, these findings remain in the realm of subjectivity.

Hanke (2014) also suggested that GR allows teachers to teach reading and literacy skills in a more efficient manner than other literacy methods and it has the flexibility to meet a variety of needs. For example, Hanke (2014) used GR with two mixed grades of one and two students. In the one group, Hanke (2014) followed the strict rules of GR for ability grouping, while the other group received a much more variable ability grouping level and also received a more variable approach to GR. Using a mixed method approach, Hanke (2014) undertook thematic analysis of student perspectives of the two different groups. Findings demonstrated that students preferred the variable grouping and variations to GR. However, there was no analysis of the magnitude of improvement or the differences in themes between the two groups.

In any case, Hanke (2014), Wall (2014), and Young (2019) demonstrated that variations to GR can result in improved student outcomes. These studies also demonstrate that it is not necessary to follow the strict rules of the GR approach in order to see increases in student reading and literacy skills. Furthermore, these authors demonstrated that regardless of the educational context, it is possible to vary the approach to GR to meet the students' needs and still positively impact student achievement levels.

Reading Recovery

An approach similar to Fountas and Pinnell's GR is the Reading Recovery program. Serry et al. (2014) stated that the Reading Recovery program is an early intervention program for at-risk readers that has been used around the world for four decades. According to Tunmer and Chapman (2003), the Reading Recovery program was developed by Clay in the 1970's. It is an early reading intervention aligned with

the literacy curriculum of New Zealand, but utilizes a more intensive approach than what is used in the actual classroom (Tunmer & Chapman, 2003). The program has been described as follows: "Reading Recovery is a 12-20 week evidence-based intervention that helps struggling readers catch up to their peers" (Reading Recovery, 2022, para. 2). Reading Recovery (2022) stated that the program "targets the lowest-achieving first graders and students who are not connecting with complex concepts necessary for reading and writing" (para. 2). Led by specially trained teachers who receive extensive professional development, Reading Recovery is designed for one-on-one lessons tailored to meet the student's individual needs and interests" (Reading Recovery, 2022, para. 1). The Reading Recovery program focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding skills, fluency, and vocabulary as learners gain increased skills in these areas (Clay, 2002).

The Reading Recovery process mirrors the GR process along many of the outlined components, which include: student self-monitoring of reading, what they are aware of and what they do not understand; using information in text to gain meaning (e.g., letter sequences, word sequences); using prior knowledge to support meaning; taking the initiative to self-correct when the text does not make sense; discovering new things within the text; asking questions about the text; and building concepts about how books and stories work (Clay, 2002). Similar to GR, Reading Recovery teachers facilitate literacy skill development by: a) selecting texts and having discussions that support the child's present knowledge and skills, b) promote the flexible use of the child's knowledge in new situations, c) activate prior knowledge about the story and building experiences needed to enhance understanding, d) emphasize what the child

already knows that will help in solving words and interpreting the story, e) build

connections during and after reading to support understanding, f) hold the child

accountable for meaning during oral reading through such prompts as "Did that make

sense?", g) examine records of oral reading behavior for evidence of meaning-making

and adjust teaching objectives accordingly, and h) teach for comprehension when

children are writing as well as when they are reading (Clay, 2002). The main

differences between GR and the Reading Recovery program are: a) the length of time,

and b) the number of students that the teacher works with at one time (Serry et al.,

2014).

Like GR, the efficacy of the Reading Recovery program has been questioned.

Hanford and Peak (2022) noted that 2,000 schools in 41 U.S. states have dropped the

Reading Recovery program, due to research that shows that children make initial gains

with the Reading Recovery program but fall behind in later grades than children who

did not participate in the program. Further critics have noted that children who

participate in a Reading Recovery program are not given enough opportunities to

develop the skills needed to decode words. Similarly, Serry et al. (2014) found that

teachers perceived the program to be suited for children with mild maturational delays,

but they were not convinced about the program's ability to meet the needs of students

with clinical conditions and significant reading delays.

Guided Reading (GR), Special Populations, and ELL Students

The dynamic and responsive nature of Fountas and Pinnell's GR approach

renders this approach highly adaptable and applicable to any situation. Although there

have been criticisms about the applicability of GR for populations with disabilities and

ELL students, it can accommodate a range of student needs, difficulties, and expertise levels (Ascenzi-Moreno & Quiñones, 2020; Avalos et al., 2007; Couch, 2010; Dorn & Soffos, 2009; Kamps et al., 2007; Lesaux, 2012; Lyons & Thompson, 2012; Pegram, 2019; Suits, 2003). GR allows important exposure for language acquisition for all students (including ELL) in the process of learning language (Ascenzi-Moreno & Quiñones, 2020). GR has been shown to have promise as an effective intervention for poor readers in the early grades. Marchand-Martella et al. (2015) noted that GR activities can be readily and easily adapted to provide additional support to students with learning and behavioral challenges who are at risk of failure. Oostdam et al. (2015) examined the effects of individualized and small-group guided oral reading interventions on reading skills and the reading attitudes of readers performing below the expected reading level in grades two to four, demonstrating improvements in reading skills among students who read aloud and are given guidance and feedback from teachers. Using two experimental tests, students were randomly assigned to either a group of three students receiving reading intervention or a control group. In the first experiment, the intervention groups received one-to-one instruction in a repeated oral reading or continuous oral reading format, while in the second experiment students in the intervention group participated in group-based guided oral reading. Findings demonstrated that students in both the one-to-one and group based guided oral reading had increased fluency and reading attitude. However, there were no significant differences with respect to reading comprehension or vocabulary. While these findings are interesting, the groups are too small to extrapolate findings to larger group or classroom settings.

GR also has the potential for use in new and emerging technologies. For example, Van Allen and Zygouris-Coe (2019) performed a qualitative exploratory case study design to examine how the teacher modified her GR class for internet inquiry purposes. The authors asserted that employees in the 21st century must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to process information from online and print sources (Van Allen & Zygouris-Coe, 2019). The authors suggested that many students struggle with comprehension and online research skills, which disadvantages them with respect to college, university, and careers (Van Allen & Zygouris-Coe, 2019). Using GR instruction, the teacher adapted many aspects of the GR framework to facilitate learners' online inquiry skills, and as time progressed, the teacher became more of a facilitator. It was noted that some of the skills (ie. computer/internet search techniques, choosing keywords, etc.) introduced to students were not well-matched with GR and adaptations had to be made. However, the teacher continually commented on the high levels of student enthusiasm and motivation, and at the same time commented with respect to the opportunities for distraction offered by the digital media. The teacher also perceived that students had a high level of choice via the digital platforms as compared to traditional GR instruction. The findings of this study suggest that ongoing research is needed to inform educators with regard to online research and comprehension skills within the context of GR. This may provide information as to how to develop upper elementary students' ability to perform online research and develop comprehension skills. Further research may also provide teachers and administrators with information about curriculum supports that may assist teachers with the incorporation of digital activities in GR instruction.

Several other authors have postulated adaptations to the GR approach in order to meld the process with current technologies (ie. internet research, etc.) for improving reading and literacy achievement in ELL learners, but none of these authors have undertaken specific empirical studies (Bauer & Arazi, 2011; Jiménez et al., 2015; Mendoza, 2016) with more than one student. Mendoza (2016) conducted a qualitative case study to examine strategies, resources, and approaches that could be used to promote parental engagement with ELL students in kindergarten through third grade. Findings revealed six themes to increase parental engagement, which included GR, visual aides, reader's theater, and modeling/oral reading fluency as strategies that contribute to ELL students' reading proficiency. Further thematic analysis identified inviting parents to volunteer in the classroom, sending home a reading log to track ELL students' reading at home, and inviting parent participation in extracurricular activities. The results of this study suggested that teachers be provided with specific professional development to help them increase parental engagement in reading development tailored to the students' and parents' language needs. Bauer and Arazi (2011) noted that "comprehensible input, repeated exposure to the target language, and interaction with native English speakers are not sufficient for ELL children to develop L2 literacy" (p. 385). The authors suggested that to facilitate ELL students' progression to L2 literacy levels, teachers need to: a) support students in previewing texts and discussing essential vocabulary; b) link and write sentences that connect characters in the text with personal experiences; c) create bilingual dictionaries to support word learning, simple expressions, and English grammar; d) use ELL students' native language to elucidate concepts and ideas for the students; e) promote

story retelling and rewriting the text; and f) utilize GR instruction. Yang (2015) demonstrated that story retelling and rewriting, content area integration, direct vocabulary instruction, higher-order thinking skills, and ESL strategies can facilitate improved performance in oral fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and listening comprehension among ELL students. Although the recommendations of Mendoza (2016) and Bauer and Arazi (2011) suggested years of dedicated study and the teacher creation of bilingual dictionaries customized to ELL students' needs, these recommendations are not practical for classrooms that have a diverse multicultural student population.

Jiménez et al. (2015) discussed how to support teachers of ELL students by leveraging students' linguistic strengths. The authors suggested that teachers of ELL students need to have deeper knowledge about foreign languages through formal study and extended contact with native speakers of other languages. They further recommended that ELL teachers complete at least two years of dedicated foreign language training with at least one year spent studying at least one other specific language. They postulated that teachers' translation of texts during GR activities with ELL students will facilitate improved transfer of native language skills, English reading comprehension, and mental connections.

As part of the National Literacy Panel (NLP) Report, August and Shanahan (2010) have suggested that effective approaches to literacy instruction for ELL students is similar to effective instruction for non-English-speaking students and should be: a) adjusted to meet their needs, b) comprehensive and multi-dimensional, c) differentiated, e) respectful of the home language, and f) develop oral proficiency.

Note was made that literacy programs for ELL students require well-prepared teachers with programs that support teacher development and contain intensive, elaborate, and enduring teacher support systems (August et al., 2014). With further regard to ELL students, the role of background experience and prior knowledge in comprehension and learning have been well documented (August et al., 2014). Consequently, any differences that exist must be reflected in the instruction that is designed for ELL students (August et al., 2014). According to August et al. (2014), some adjustments to literacy instruction that should be made for ELL learners include: a) strategic use of the first language; b) enhanced instructional delivery routines including small groups; c) adjustments for differences in knowledge; and d) increased scaffolding. For example, it has been suggested that literacy instruction for ELL students include encouraging reading and writing, reading to children, tutoring and remediation, instructional conversations, and other interventions (August et al., 2014). Takanishi and Le Menestrel (2017) also provided recommendations for literacy instruction for ELL students in kindergarten to grade five. Specifically, they recommended that literacy instruction: a) provide explicit instruction in literacy components; b) develop academic language during content area instruction; c) provide visual and verbal supports to make core content comprehensible; d) encourage peer-assisted learning opportunities; e) capitalize on students' home language, knowledge, and cultural assets; f) screen for language and literacy challenges and monitor progress; and g) provide small-group academic support in literacy and English language development.

Genesee et al. (2005) reported that research on literacy skill development in ELL students shows that: a) there are important similarities between early and

intermediate English language skill development, and b) ELL students draw on a variety of linguistic, meta-cognitive, and experiential resources. Some of these skills are associated with the target language, while others are associated with the native language (Genesee et al., 2005). Still other factors relate to underlying cognitive development and common non-language specific underlying abilities which are likely to affect language acquisition, such as phonological awareness, inferencing, and monitoring comprehension (Genesee et al., 2005). However, Genesee et al. (2005) noted that translation and cognates are unique to the experiences of ELL students. Genesee et al. (2005) argued that the overall tone of research on ELL students suggests that ELLs actively use all "resources, skills, and strategies at their disposal to acquire literacy skills in English" (p. 374). The findings of Genesee et al. (2005) suggested that the approach to developing literacy skills in ELL students should include: a) interactive and direct approaches, and/or b) a combination of the two.

In summary, the reports by the NLP (August and Shanahan, 2010) and Genesee et al. (2005) noted that empirical literature relating to the development of literacy among ELL students is scant and that much more research needs to be done in order to capitalize on the assets of these students. Nevertheless, studies have suggested that ELL students acquire literacy skills in much the same way as non-ELL students, although they tend to draw on all resources available to them and they incorporate translation skills into their literacy acquisition. It has, however, been suggested that literacy approaches for ELL students should follow a structured approach with explicit and implicit components and that visual and verbal support be provided to facilitate

literacy development. Small group academic support has been recognized as beneficial for these students.

Student Achievement as Measured by Fountas and Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment System (BAS)

Fountas and Pinnell's BAS Kit (2016) was designed by Fountas and Pinnell for directing and evaluating the reading levels and behaviors of learners from kindergarten to grade eight. The BAS determines student reading and literacy levels on a continuum from "pre-reading" to level Z (on a scale of A to Z). The Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Gradient is a defined continuum relating to the support and challenge levels of texts used in the assessment process. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2016), texts are analyzed (levels A to Z) using ten characteristics including: genre/form, text structure, content, themes and ideas, language and literary features, sentence complexity, vocabulary, word difficulty, illustrations/graphics, and book and print features. The Benchmark Assessment is administered as a one-on-one, student-teacher assessment process in which the student reads aloud and talks about the Benchmark Assessment books used for assessment, while the teacher observes and codes the reading behaviors on standardized forms. Three reading levels are determined for each student: independent, instructional, and hard.

While Fountas and Pinnell (2016) asserted that the Benchmark System has good reliability and validity, Saha and Cutting (2019) noted that the criterion validity of this system has been questioned for decades and there is limited evidence of validity in the assessment of students with regard to core competency skills in reading and literacy. In addition, a large majority of teachers have reported that the Fountas

and Pinnell BAS does not adequately describe student reading and literacy performance. Hence, teachers have indicated that the BAS can only be used as one component of the assessment process (Toney, 2017). Heinemann (n.d.) Publishing, which published the Fountas and Pinnell BAS, reported test–retest reliability between fiction and nonfiction texts as 0.97, while convergent validity with Reading Recovery Texts was 0.94. Correlations between the BAS and the Degrees of Reading Power assessment were 0.44 and the BAS and the revised Slosson Oral Reading Test were 0.69 (Heinemann, n.d.). Walker (2016) found a significant correlation between the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment and reading comprehension scores on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test for students in grades three ($r = 0.70$, $p < .001$), four ($r = 0.61$, $p < .001$), and five ($r = .59$, $p < .001$). In any event, there are concerns about Heinemann (n.d.) Publishing's reported test-retest and validity findings, since there is a significant conflict of interest and motivation to report good values in order to promote sales of resources.

Klingbeil et al. (2015) used hierarchical regression and receiver operating characteristic curves to examine the reliability, validity, and diagnostic accuracy of the BAS with 500 grade two and three students. The researchers utilized scores from the BAS, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), and students' oral reading fluency (ORF). Klingbeil et al. (2015) demonstrated that the BAS had good test-retest reliability ($r = 0.86$), however, results indicated that while the MAP predicted 60% of students' ORF, the BAS scores did not meet standards for diagnostic accuracy.

Based on the literature review, evidence supporting reliability and validity of the Fountas and Pinnell BAS is limited. The findings reported by Heinemann (n.d.)

seem to suggest that the BAS is both reliable and valid, they provide no data to support this claim, but stand to profit off sales of the system. Combined with the EdReports (2021) review, this calls into question the credibility of the Heinemann (n.d.) research.

Teachers Perceptions About the Guided Reading Process

Numerous researchers have examined teachers' perceptions with respect to GR strategies in the elementary grade classrooms, however, too many variations on GR approaches have limited the empirical studies on teachers' perceptions of GR because groups cannot be easily compared (Ford & Opitz, 2008b; Presley, 2019; Puzio et al., 2020; Reeves, 2011). Presley (2019) investigated teachers' perceptions of GR but was unable to make any empirical comparisons due to the extensive variations in fidelity to the GR approach. However, Ford and Opitz (2008a) suggested that while teachers have differing views about the primary purpose of GR, teachers' perceptions about GR can be compared as they are all working on the same model, hold the same viewpoint with regard to GR for teaching reading comprehension and literacy skills, and agree on the foundation and principles of GR (Ford & Opitz, 2008a).

It has been reported that teachers' perceive that the implementation and facilitation of GR instruction in the preschool and primary grade levels may have some benefits (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Hanke, 2014). Nevertheless, teachers have also perceived the GR process as being problematic (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Hanke, 2014). Summarized, the perceived benefits of GR are a) improved student progress due to small group instruction and differentiation; b) strategies to assist students' reading progression; c)

focus on student weaknesses and one-on-one instruction; d) improved comprehension skills, fluency levels, and reading achievement scores; e) improved student thinking, learning skills (listening, observation, problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, and recognition), interest, attention levels, behavior, engagement, confidence, and motivation; f) increased active participation of students and willingness to learn; g) improved student-teacher relationships; h) permits immediate positive feedback and correction; and i) the variety offered by GR activities (visuality, content, and variety of activities) (Bulunuz & Koç, 2019; Ferguson & Wilson, 2009, Lyons & Thompson, 2012). Perceived limitations of GR are a) preparation time (planning interventions and activities, designing activities, and materials); b) insufficient time to work with each small group (duration and frequency of GR sessions); c) insufficient professional preparation (ie. especially for multicultural learners), d) difficulty accommodating the time required for GR; e) complications facilitating student self-direction; f) dissatisfaction with a particular GR reading program adopted by the school; g) beliefs that GR is inappropriate for their specific classroom; h) challenges with classroom interpretation and implementation; i) insufficient space; j) disruption to other students; k) difficulty adapting GR to accommodate absenteeism; l) insufficient quantity and variety of independent work to maintain student interest/attention at some levels; m) inadequacy of methods to address problematic behaviors; n) integrating past and present knowledge with predictions for future outcomes; and o) decreased utility with the upper grade levels (Bulunuz & Koç, 2019; Brown, 2007; Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Hanke, 2014; Lyons & Thompson, 2012). Despite any identified challenges, these studies suggest that overall, teachers have mixed feelings about GR instruction

in preschool and primary grades and that they are committed to GR and perceive it to be beneficial to student learning (Underwood, 2010).

Teachers' perceptions of student success and factors that promote or inhibit reading development in grades six through eight, have been shown to be impacted by instructional factors (ie. student motivation, diversity of student texts) and infrastructure factors (ie. institutional leadership, staff assistance for students needing instructional support, school-wide focus on literacy, and teacher support) (Nahmias, 2010). Lyons and Thompson (2012) noted that teachers frequently commented that the success of the GR approach was dependent upon: a) availability of instructional and human resources, b) in-class assistants with the right preparation and attitudes, c) access to the correct books and materials for GR implementation without the need for additional work outside of school, and d) sufficient time and space (Lyons & Thompson, 2012).

In a study by Toney (2017), the researchers reported that most teachers agree that the GR process helps them to become better teachers of reading and literacy skills. One hundred percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that GR instruction is a successful strategy for increasing reading achievement. Most teachers (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that GR instruction is a valuable part of their reading program and that GR instruction was being used effectively by teachers in grades three through five (Toney, 2017). Overall, Toney (2017) reported that teachers perceive GR instruction benefits both strong and struggling learners with development of reading comprehension, building confidence, developing higher level deep thinking, making connections, and focusing writing skills.

Teachers' Perceptions About How Guided Reading is Enacted

This section contains information and research relating to teachers' perceptions about how they specifically enact GR strategies within their classrooms.

Teachers' Perceptions About Differentiation/Scaffolding

A key component of GR is differentiated/scaffolded instruction. Teachers can use the scaffolding technique to support learners while they are learning new concepts (Shang, 2015). Scaffolding is described as "a process that enables a child or a novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts'' (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90). Differentiation/scaffolding breaks learning into smaller pieces to incrementally improve and build upon the reading and literacy skills of each student until the student is able to read the required text independently. Scaffolding requires careful intervention, planning, and dynamic assessment by the teacher to guide learners to higher levels of reading comprehension and skills (Ankrum et al., 2013; Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). Continuous guidance, dynamic assessment, and modification of scaffolding levels, depending upon each child's current reading and literacy levels at the time of interaction, are needed for learners to become better at existing skills as well as learning new ones (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). Fostering student independence is the central goal of successful scaffolding, and the teacher may use high or low levels of scaffolding depending upon the students' abilities.

Scaffolding is one of the important components of GR and has been conceived of as a flexible conceptual framework that supports the cognitive development of the learner and which changes with the needs of the learner (Ball, 2000; Gould, 2005;

Poluga, 2007; Putambekar & Hubscher, 2005). Mikita et al. (2019) noted that scaffolding is more than simple prompting and requires that the teacher adjust the type and amount of information provided to the student based upon the teacher's dynamic assessment of the student's needs at that moment in time. Poluga (2007) noted that scaffolding supports learning by "a) focusing on the learner's conception, b) extending or challenging the conception, c) refocusing by encouraging clarification, and d) redirecting by offering new possibilities for consideration" (p. 18). According to Mikita et al. (2019), scaffolding during the GR process requires the teacher to offer collective (to the small group) and individual scaffolding for problem solving. In scaffolding, the assignment itself does not change but the level of support provided to the learner does (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, 2016). Verbal scaffolding and prompts provided by teachers support student learning and are an essential ingredient in differentiated instruction (Ankrum et al., 2013; Fountas & Pinnell, 2010).

Expert teachers build various scaffold levels into their instruction, slowly removing the scaffold as the student progresses in order to allow the learner to independently utilize newly learned concepts. While working in peer groups, the teacher facilitates learners making connections to prior knowledge and experiences, highlights new and/or difficult vocabulary, and encourages the children to make predictions, scaffolding each child's use of strategies in word solving and comprehension and providing flexible support based on each student's needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). According to Mazzoni and Gambrell (2003), in the first stage of scaffolding, the teacher generally models and describes specific skills or strategies. This is followed by the second stage wherein the teacher and student assume joint

responsibility for the student practicing the application of the skill or strategy, supplemented by assistance and feedback from the teacher (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003). The third stage involves the student assuming all or almost all of the responsibility for applying the new skill and/or strategy in a reading activity (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003). Differentiated or scaffolded instruction of GR is a way to offer students targeted instruction at different instructional levels to ensure that each child progresses efficiently and effectively as independent readers (Morgan et al., 2013).

Teachers' Perceptions of Guided Reading Strategies Used for Engagement

Another important factor in reading instruction is teachers' perceptions about the strategy used in GR and student engagement levels, since it has been shown that a teacher's enthusiasm and excitement about a given topic is reflected in their teaching practice and the likelihood of student engagement with a topic (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Building on Harvey and Goudvis (2007), Gibson (2009) reported that student engagement with topics occurred all or most of the time with teachers who were enthusiastic about the GR approach. In studies with kindergarten to grade five teachers, results demonstrated that teachers perceive their success to be in a) choosing just the right books for differentiation and scaffolding, and b) facilitating the prior knowledge during GR lessons to generate student interest and understanding (Davis, 2017; Miranda, 2018). Underwood (2010) also found significant correlations among grade four and five teachers with respect to: a) GR instruction and student reading achievement levels, b) teacher commitment to GR and perceived benefit of GR instruction with students, and c) the amount of professional preparation and support for GR and outcomes achieved. Nevertheless, Gibson (2009) demonstrated that in

spite of enthusiasm, teachers a) may not be not fully aware regarding the purpose and objectives associated with the implementation of GR instruction, b) need access to a broader range of texts in order to address reading skills and interests of learners, and c) may omit essential GR components in their lesson plans.

Teachers' reported that their GR instruction is "affected by their perceptions of differences among students and classes" (Piercey, 2009, p. iv) and their ability to provide "background knowledge to students when teaching GR lessons to pique their students interest and help them better understand what they are reading" (Miranda, 2018, p. 4). Teachers have also reported that their ability to manage and organize GR activities during class time was affected by the continuous need to maintain balance and focus of small groups and the rest of the classroom during GR instruction (Piercey, 2009). Varghese et al. (2016) reported significant, positive correlations between teachers' perceptions of GR and classroom management self-efficacy, student reading achievement levels, and professional preparation. Classroom dynamics (including student differences, classroom composition) can result in adaptations to and deviations from GR practices in order to meet classroom demands, thereby impacting upon teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of the GR process (Brown, 2007; Piercey, 2009). Brown (2007) concluded that classroom dynamics may be important and relevant with regard to teachers' perceptions about the GR process and GR implementation in the classroom. In general however, teachers feel pressure relating to their responsibility for students' academic literacy learning and their responsibility to teach curriculum standards (Nahmias, 2010). Studies by Rizzuto (2017) and Kempf (2018) suggest that teachers' perceptions about the efficacy of GR may also be

impacted by classroom diversity (including cultural and socioeconomic differences) to a greater degree than the actual effectiveness of the GR process. Such findings suggest that teachers' perceptions about the value of GR may be affected by difficulties with adapting the GR approach to the needs of a widely diverse classroom population (ie. GR groupings) (Kempf, 2018; Rizzuto, 2017). Hence, teachers may require additional professional support to effectively meet reading and literacy needs of diverse classrooms and/or to develop teaching self-confidence with diverse groups.

Experience with the GR process also appears to affect teachers' perceptions about GR. Poluga (2007) demonstrated the value of constructivist thinking, reflection, and participation in professional learning communities among elementary school teachers using the GR approach in their classroom, noting that teachers perceived these activities as important to the enhancement of the GR classroom environment. Poluga (2007) also found that teachers who have acquired experience and reflect on experiences with GR are better able to modify their teaching to meet the needs of each learner during the GR process. Among teachers having experience with the GR process, Reeves (2011) reported that 88% of kindergarten through grade six teachers did not see any limitations to GR instruction, while the remainder had some concerns about leaving the remainder of the class alone during GR instruction or the time constraints associated with the GR process. Reeves (2011) concluded that teachers recognize the benefits of GR instruction and in general, do not perceive any limitations to the GR program.

Nevertheless, even teachers having experience with the GR process perceive that GR instruction could be improved by increases in: planning and instruction time,

flexible grouping, peer observations, and word study resources (Toney, 2017).

Teachers chose GR instruction for the following reasons: providing demonstration of

skills, strategies, responses, and/or procedures (greater than 69% of teachers);

providing scaffolded instruction to learners (15% to 54% of teachers); facilitating

group responses to shared text (15% to 46% of teachers); and facilitating a group

response to shared texts (31% of teachers) (Toney, 2017). Toney (2017) concluded

that teachers have favorable perceptions about the GR approach, although teachers

believe that more time is necessary for planning, implementation, and professional

development relating to GR instruction.

Teachers' Perceptions About How They Enact Guided Reading with ELL Students

Rizzuto (2017) explored teachers' perceptions with respect to the efficacy of

reading programs with ELL, including GR programs. According to Rizzuto (2017),

ELL students may struggle with English as a second language and this can be

problematic for the teacher, since the teacher may not be able to provide optimal

prompting and scaffolding because of a lack of skill with the child's first language

(Desimone, 2009; Nieto, 2013; Sandvik et al., 2013). Consequently, the teacher may

perceive that they are unable to deliver optimal literacy experiences to ELL children,

thereby affecting the teachers' perceptions of reading and literacy outcomes with those

students. In other words, the teacher may feel that optimal reading skills have not been

achieved with a specific child because of a language barrier preventing the teacher

from helping the child make connections. Souto-Manning (2016) recommended that

meaningful and culturally relevant teaching and selection of materials can help

overcome teachers' perceptions of inadequacy relating to language barriers. For

example, Souto-Manning (2016) suggested four practices: teaching from childrens'
names; learning childrens' histories; valuing artifactual literacies; and valuing family
funds of knowledge. Freeman and Freeman (2004) have also endorsed the use of
culturally relevant texts in literacy education with ELL students.

Special consideration needs to be given to ELL students and the use of GR
approaches. Goldberg (2008) reported that the National Assessment of Educational
Progress (2007) found grade four ELL students to be 36 points behind non-ELL
students in reading. The gap was even larger among grade eight students, with ELL
students 42 points behind their non-ELL counterparts. The reasons for these gaps are
not clearly understood, but the fact that the gap increases as ELL students progress is
worrisome and has implications for vocational and educational options for these
students, as well as implications for society (Goldberg, 2008). Goldberg (2008)
acknowledges that while teaching both content and language is a challenge for
teachers and requires "very careful planning and effective instructional practices" (p.
13), attention needs to be directed at determining the best way to teach English
language literacy skills to ELL learners.

McGinnis (2007) approached multicultural literacy from the perspective that
"effective literacy learning involves engaging with and creating a range of texts
building on the languages, experiences, cultures, and other assets of students and
communicating and expressing understanding in multiple ways, both independently
and with others" (Neumann & Rao, 2004, p. 7, as cited in McGinnis, 2007). Although
this study did not address GR processes or enactment and it examined an older student
sample, McGinnis (2007) recommended the use of inquiry-based projects to permit

diverse cultural student groups to choose topics of their interest and allow them to incorporate culturally meaningful content. This approach could be used by ELL teachers using a GR process to encourage students to incorporate literacy skills in self-selected reading, research, science, and social projects.

Couch (2010) also investigated first grade teachers' perceptions and expectations with regard to reading programs for ELL students and noted that previous evidence has suggested that lower achievement scores for ELL students are impacted by teachers' perceptions of and their expectations for ELL students. However, Couch (2010) demonstrated that in spite of educational disparities between ELL and non-ELL students with regard to math and reading, teachers did not view ELL students as inferior to native English-speaking students with respect to learning and were considered to be similarly capable of achieving the same level of reading achievement as any other student in the classroom. Nevertheless, teachers expressed a need for more training to address ELL learning and communication styles. Teacher perceptions were not found to be a factor in ELL student achievement or the expectations for ELL students (Couch, 2010).

Kempf (2018) examined teachers' perceptions with respect to reading instruction in diverse and inclusive elementary classrooms. In keeping with Rizzuto (2017), Kempf noted that teachers influence student learning through a variety of factors, including teaching style, resources, activities, attitudes, and their level of knowledge regarding the diversification of instructional techniques. Kempf (2018) noted that many teachers expressed the view that they struggled to meet the reading and literacy needs of diverse student populations. Hence, they perceived their

effectiveness and the efficacy of reading programs to be decreased, thus leaving gaps in the education of their students. Despite recognizing that a gap in instructional diversification exists within diverse classroom populations, teachers became frustrated when they were "not aware of how to adjust instruction to increase the reading competency skills" for these students, leading to perceived incompletions of planned lesson objectives (p. 127).

Citing a demonstrated gap in reading achievement between African American and non-African American males, a more focused case study by Gregory (2011) was undertaken with respect to teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of using literature specific to African American kindergarten to grade three students during GR instruction. Teacher perceptions about the incorporation of multicultural texts were focused on concerns relating to how the use of GR and multicultural literature impacted the learning of all students, including non-African American students. Specifically, teachers perceived issues related to making connections to multicultural texts that were relevant to African American students but not necessarily the other students within the classroom.

Robinson (2017) examined factors that teachers use to foster motivation among students and how teachers perceive their self-efficacy with respect to GR in multicultural classrooms. Using the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), teachers for students in grades seven and eight rated their perception of self-efficacy with regard to their GR skills and abilities. Results demonstrated that teachers perceived themselves as having high self-efficacy in GR instructional strategies and classroom management. However, teachers rated themselves as 6.8 out of 10 on the TSES for student

engagement with multicultural classrooms as compared to scores of 7.3 out of 10 for non-multicultural classrooms, reflecting the reduction in confidence with student engagement among multicultural class demographics. The findings of Robinson (2017) are important because teachers in the study expressed concerns about how to best motivate struggling students when student engagement is compromised by factors such as language barriers, cultural, and experiential differences. This study supports previously cited research findings that address teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and the effectiveness of GR programs in culturally diverse classrooms.

Similarly, Pegram (2019) studied teachers' perceptions of implementing differentiated instruction for ELL students. According to Pegram (2019), teachers in grades one to three advised that they are not always certain how to differentiate instruction for ELL. Results of interviews, open-ended surveys, and lesson plans identified the following themes: a) that differentiation is important to GR instruction with ELL students, b) that teachers employ numerous strategies to address needs of individual ELL students, and c) that teachers cited professional development needs to meet instructional needs of ELL students. A three-day professional preparation session was designed to provide teachers with guidance and strategies for modification of differentiation and scaffolding to improve reading achievement outcomes with ELL. However, teachers who participated in the study did not find the three-day seminar helpful because it did not address the fluency and language barrier issues.

While Rizzuto (2017) and Kempf (2018) have suggested that the diverse nature of classrooms may impact on teachers' perceptions about their effectiveness and efficacy of GR due to limitations imposed by language barriers, Foeckler (2019)

examined whether there are any discernible patterns in teachers' perceptions, attributions, and responsiveness to students learning to read with regard to the socioeconomic status of students. Specifically, Foeckler investigated whether teachers had any pre-existing expectations about student success based upon socioeconomic background and known risk factors associated with lower socioeconomic status. The main findings were that socioeconomic status does not impact teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of GR and that the benefit of the GR process is that it builds upon each students' specific skills at that point in time. Themes that emerged from the study were that teachers: a) work towards developing independent student reading behaviors based upon teacher knowledge and perception of student learning needs, b) utilize reading achievement and performance data to inform their teaching practice, set reading goals to facilitate independence, improve reading behaviors and skills, and differentiate/scaffold reading instruction, c) adjust instruction based on learning needs, and d) provide reading interventions and supports for young readers regardless of a student's socioeconomic status.

The findings of the studies reviewed with respect to diverse classrooms suggest that teachers' perceptions with respect to the efficacy of GR in diverse classrooms is primarily impacted by language barriers that exist between the teacher and ELL students (Gregory, 2011; Kempf, 2018; Pegram, 2019; Rizzuto, 2017; Robinson, 2019). Specifically, teachers perceived that they are unable to provide an "optimal" GR experience for these students because they were unable to make connections or help students make connections in language that the student fully understands or comprehends. In spite of the perceived problems with language barriers, Couch (2010)

demonstrated that teachers do not perceive ELL students as having lower levels of ability with regard to learning as compared to non-ELL students. Thus, teachers' perceptions of decreased efficacy of GR interventions in ELL learners appears to be confined to teachers' perceived inability to overcome language barriers in order to optimize GR outcomes. Foeckler's (2019) study provides comparable evidence for classrooms with socioeconomic diversity in that teachers also do not perceive any difference in the abilities of students from lower socioeconomic status with respect to the efficacy of GR intervention. Kempf's (2018) observations that teachers expressed unrealistic and unmanageable expectations with regard to meeting the GR needs of a diverse student population may be the basis of any negative perceptions relating to GR in culturally diverse classrooms.

Teachers' Perceptions About How They Learned About Guided Reading

It has been suggested that increased coaching, mentoring, and administrative support is required for the GR process to be successful (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Lyons & Thompson, 2012). Poluga (2007) and Skinner (2021) have suggested that more knowledgeable and experienced teachers possess greater skill at dynamic assessment and scaffolding. Some studies have suggested that teachers' perceptions about their self-efficacy and/or the efficacy of GR interventions are impacted by the level of professional preparation that the teacher has for GR (Ford & Opitz, 2008a; Froniere, 2010; Lesley, 2009; Moats, 2017; Rowan Christensen, 2017; Worthen, 2021). Indeed, Toney (2017) reported that 15% to 20% of teachers did not perceive themselves to be adequately trained in GR instructional techniques, while only approximately 62% of teachers believed themselves fairly well-informed with regard

to implementing/understanding GR techniques. McCollum et al. (2013) demonstrated that teachers provided with professional coaching demonstrated significantly more instructional literacy skills in the classroom. Underwood (2010) and Varghese et al. (2016) suggested that teachers with more professional development, support, and feedback may be more likely to have positive perceptions with regard to GR. Reeves (2011) also concluded that teachers recognize and appreciate the benefits of GR but perceive that there is a continual need for additional professional development opportunities relating to advanced differentiation and other GR techniques in order to optimize GR implementation in the classroom. Reeves also cited teachers' perceptions for professional development relating to group management and organization.

Moats (2017) examined approaches to reading instruction, including GR. The author concluded that successful implementation of any reading program is dependent upon the teachers knowing enough about the program, the psychology behind the program, testing and measurement of student achievement, linguistics, and the instructional approach (Moats, 2017). Hence, Moats (2017) concluded that educational preparation for teachers needs to be standardized and comprehensive with respect to providing teachers with sufficient and appropriate preparation in different reading programs and instructional approaches. The confusion teachers experience with regard to the GR process and implementation was also cited by Ford and Opitz (2008a), who surveyed 1500 kindergarten to grade two teachers to describe and understand teachers' perceptions relating to GR practices. The researchers focused on teachers' perceptions with regard to: a) the purpose of GR groups, b) grouping techniques, c) texts that should be used, d) instructional planning, and e) how learners are assessed. Findings

revealed "confusion among teachers about the purposes of GR, variability in grouping methods, static membership of groups, over-reliance on narrative texts, inconsistent use of instructional level texts, extensive use of centers, independent seat work to engage learners away from the teacher, and frequent use of informal assessments" (Ford & Opitz, 2008a, p. 309). Ford and Opitz (2008a) concluded that increased focus on professional development for teachers utilizing GR instruction is required.

Gonzalez et al. (2020) examined teachers' perceptions regarding the fidelity of reading programs in middle school. Using semi-structured interviews, and publicly available reading data, the findings demonstrated that teachers perceive a need for teacher professional preparation, technical support, and understanding of the GR program. Further, it was noted that teachers get distracted by student progress and forget about their own progress. Teachers reported that greater expertise and professional preparation allows teachers to be more skilled in the differentiation process. Moreover, teachers perceived that the quality of teacher preparation affected both implementation of GR instruction as well as the quality of teacher instruction and the teachers' responsiveness to students.

Skinner (2021) also investigated teacher's perceptions of how professional development supports literacy instruction. The researcher reported that teachers perceive professional development to be essential to the success of teachers with respect to implementing GR effectively. Teachers identified that they perceived there was a lack of the professional development needed for consistent implementation of GR, which they perceived as resulting in the reduction of the effectiveness of literacy education (Skinner, 2021). Findings demonstrated that teachers perceived professional

development to support the effective implementation of GR, increase their self-efficacy, and that additional support was required to improve their ability to plan GR with fidelity (Skinner, 2021). These findings are consistent with Froniere (2010), who examined teachers' perceptions of balanced literacy in first grade classrooms using teacher interviews, classroom observations, and environmental checklists. Findings revealed that teachers implement balanced literacy in a variety of ways, with three themes emerging including the: a) individualisation of balanced literacy, b) variety of implementation strategies, and c) the need for professional development (Froniere, 2010). The finding of relevance is the teachers' perceptions about the need for professional development with respect to providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to appropriately and consistently balance the differentiation and instructional strategies required for GR implementation in the classroom.

Worthen (2021) performed a collective case study using observations, post-observation interviews, and guided reading lesson plans to understand the decisions teachers make for GR instruction and context. Findings revealed teachers are confronted with a multitude of decisions during the GR process and therefore, understanding their decision-making process and methodologies for advanced or in-the-moment decision-making in GR instruction is important. Worthen (2021) concluded that more focus is needed on supporting the teachers' instructional planning process, refining skills in how to best scaffold instruction, and raising awareness to educators, administrators, and stakeholders on how GR can provide individualized support to students. The findings of Worthen (2021) were echoed by Broemmel et al. (2021), who examined the career literacy and praxis development of teachers over the

first seven years of their teaching practice. Elementary teachers perceived that their literacy-related instructional practices and the factors that influenced their instructional choices changed over time with the internalization of beliefs and practices. These findings have implications for teacher preparation in reading programs prior to and throughout their teaching career, since they suggested that teachers are not adequately prepared on a professional basis for the decision-making and instructional demands of the GR process.

Teachers Perception of Training for GR

The only study that could be located with regard to teachers' perceptions about the professional preparation process for GR, was Pegram (2019), who examined teachers' perceptions of their professional preparation for differentiated instruction with diverse student populations in elementary grades. Pegram (2019) noted that teachers believe that purposeful and relevant professional development in GR is needed in order to prepare teachers to meet the reading, literacy, and differentiation needs of students in diverse classrooms. In an attempt to address the teachers' desire for additional professional development regarding GR, Pegram (2019) designed a 3-day professional development program. Although the teachers responded positively to the professional development, all teachers perceived that three days were inadequate to address the teaching skills necessary to meet the GR needs of students in a diverse classroom setting. This study underscores teachers' perceptions that there is a need for comprehensive professional preparation with respect to teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and teaching skills with GR instruction. The findings of Rowan Christensen (2017) further supported those of Pegram (2019). Rowan Christensen (2017) explored

novice teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy with GR implementation and demonstrated that there is significant variability in novice teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and preparedness with regard to GR instruction. Rowan Christensen's (2017) study illustrated the need for adequate preparation with respect to implementing GR instruction in the classroom and highlights the impact of professional preparation on teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy, their preparedness for the GR instructional process, and the effectiveness of GR in elementary classrooms.

The foregoing studies highlight the need for professional education that prepares teachers for the rapid and flexible decision-making process required for GR instruction and implementation. With respect to professional preparation, it is important to consider the format and intensity of the professional preparation for GR implementation in the classroom. Based on an examination of teachers' perceptions relating to professional preparation for GR, these studies underscore the fact that teachers consider professional preparation for GR instruction to be important and relevant to their self-efficacy and the effectiveness of GR in the classroom.

Summary of Literature Review Findings

Based on the literature review and even though GR instruction has been around for some time, and in spite of a number of dissertations and some limited peer-reviewed journal articles which have set out to examine teachers' perceptions about GR, the vast majority of these studies do not actually contain data about teachers' perceptions. Hence, numerous researchers have concluded that little is known about the relationship between teachers' perceptions and various aspects of the GR process

(Bogard et al., 2017; Brown, 2007; Bulunuz & Koç, 2019; Couch, 2010; Davis, 2017; Ford & Opitz, 2008a,b; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Gregory, 2021; Kempf et al., 2018; Miranda, 2018; Nahmias, 2010; Parkerson, 2017; Pegram, 2019; Poluga, 2007; Rizzuto, 2019; Skinner, 2021; Toney, 2017; Varghese et al., 2016; Yates, 2010). In particular, there is a significant gap in peer-reviewed research articles that address teachers' perceptions about: a) the GR process, b) how they enact GR in the classroom, and c) how teachers learn about GR. Given the focus of the Alberta Educational system with respect to the importance of reading and literacy, and given the focus on GR endorsed by Alberta Education (Alberta Education, 2008), and finally, given the even greater gap in the literature with respect to teachers' perceptions about the GR process in Alberta classrooms, a study examining teachers' perceptions about the GR process in Alberta classrooms is long overdue.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology and plan used in the current study. The primary focus of this study was a mixed methods research design examining Alberta teachers' perceptions of the GR process in elementary classrooms in Alberta. The sections covered in this chapter include: the purpose and research questions, research design and methodology, rationale for the methodology and research design, pre-study preparations, setting for the study, participants and recruitment strategies, instrumentation, data collection activities and the research schedule, and data analysis. A thorough discussion of the ethical considerations, role of the researcher and researcher's positionality, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study complete the chapter. Appendices are included after the reference list.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to examine Alberta elementary grade teachers' perceptions about the GR process, how they enact GR in their classrooms, and how they learned about GR. The study utilized a survey and focused interviews with teachers of grades one to six to examine teachers' perceptions and demographic characteristics. The research questions that were examined in this study are:

> RQ1: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about the GR approach?
>
> RQ2: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom?
>
> RQ3: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR?

Research Design and Methodology

This study used an exploratory mixed methods research design with a survey and focused interviews to examine teachers' perceptions. Demographic characteristics of the participants, including age, gender, grade taught, years of experience, professional preparation, time spent in preparation for GR sessions, classroom spent in GR activities, and so forth, were collected from those elementary teachers from grades one through six who consented to participate in the study. The research timeline is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Research Timeline

Proposed Time/Date	Activity
August 2022	Field tested survey questions
September 2022	Introductory letter and request for research sent to School Division
September 2022	Sent letter to school re: research study
October 2022	Met with Principal re: Implementation of research study
October 2022	Met with staff at staff meeting with researcher script
October 2022	Letter of invitation to participate in study sent to teachers.
October 2022	Consent forms obtained from participants
October 2022	Online survey forms were sent to participants
November 2022	Reminder email/text message sent to participants
November 2022	Second reminder email/text message sent to participants
November 2022	Surveys & demographic forms were collected from participants
December 2022	Focused interviews conducted
December 2022 - May 2023	Data transcribed, coded, analysed

Rationale for Methodology/Research Design

This research study used a mixed methods research design to capitalize on the strengths of each approach in order to "understand a phenomenon more fully than is possible using either quantitative or qualitative approaches alone" (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 8). Mixed-methods research yielded a comprehensive explanation of the research problem (Ary et al., 2010). Regnault et al. (2018) noted that a mixed-methods approach allows the researcher to study the research questions from a variety of perspectives, while the strengths of either approach complement the limitations of the other approach. mixed-methods can be employed to "enhance the creation of conceptual models and development of new instruments, to interpret the meaningfulness of outcomes" (p. 1) in field outcomes (Regnault et al., 2018).

Setting

The study was undertaken in a single Alberta, Canada separate elementary school in an urban school district within the Province of Alberta, Canada. School enrollment was approximately 450 students enrolled in kindergarten through grade six. Students enrolled in the school were predominantly Catholic (approximately 90%) and came from nine surrounding communities of low to middle income socioeconomic status. The school had a diverse student population, with a high proportion of ELL students (approximately 25%); Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, Inuit) (approximately 5%); refugees (approximately 1%); and special students (<1%). There were approximately 42 staff members consisting of the principal, assistant principal, learning coach, behavioural specialist, 22 teachers, 12 teaching assistants, two administrative support staff, and three custodial staff. Approximately 5-10 student

teachers were assigned to the school each year from a variety of post-secondary institutions. There were also divisional educational consultants who provided consulting services to the school as needed. Limited support was also provided to the school in the form of speech language pathologists and occupational therapists through the provincial health authority.

Students in grades one to six attended the school full days, Monday to Wednesday and Fridays from 8:10 am - 3:00 pm; and Thursdays 8:10 am to noon. Kindergarten students attended either in the mornings or the afternoons on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday (8:10 am to 11:30 am and noon to 3:00 pm). Classes are offered from September through June every year, with three weeks break at Christmas and one week at Spring Break. Teachers received two days for teachers' convention, in addition to designated statutory federal and provincial holidays. Teachers also received two classroom preparation periods of 30 minutes each per week. Teachers were assigned to three scheduled playground supervision shifts each week. Students and teachers had 40 minutes for lunch break and one 15 minute morning recess break. Staff meetings and professional development sessions for teachers occurred once weekly on Thursday afternoons.

There is an active Parent Council in the school, which met monthly. Their role was to look at the school, teacher, and student needs and plan activities (hot lunches, special days for teachers/students, fundraising) to meet those needs. Whenever the school made changes to the curriculum, school regulations/rules, attendance, and so forth, the school consulted with the Parent Council. The school sent out regular

communication to parents and teachers and there was a bulletin board maintained for the teachers.

Pre-Study Preparation

This study was submitted to the Internal Review Board (IRB) for ethics approval, received on July 25, 2022 (Appendix A). The letter of introduction and request for research application was made to the appropriate Alberta Catholic School Division in September 1, 2022 (Appendix B). Any necessary forms required by the Division were completed in accordance with the Division's policies. The letter of introduction was sent to the school Principal in October, 2022 (Appendix C). The researcher met with the school Principal to provide in-person information regarding the study and answer any questions that arose. After meeting with the school Principal, the researcher attended a staff meeting at the school in order to introduce the study to the potential teacher participants. The script used for the introduction is provided in Appendix D.

Participants and Recruitment

The researcher utilized a sample of convenience and purposeful sampling. The participants for this study were elementary teachers from grades one through six who were currently utilizing the GR approach in their classroom to teach reading and literacy skills. Thirteen teachers from grades one through six volunteered to participate in this study. Booker et al. (2021) reported participation rates for survey-based studies as varying from 10.3% to 61%. Based on the number of teachers at the selected school (N=20), the participation response rate was 65%, which is greater than the 10.3% to 61% estimated by Booker et al. (2021). Teachers were recruited through a staff

meeting (Appendix D) after which a letter inviting them to participate was sent from

the researcher to each teacher's email address (Appendix E). A Google interest form

(Appendix F) was attached to the letter for teachers to advise whether they chose to

participate in the study or not. The letter sent to the teachers described the study and

also included a consent form (Appendix G). Teacher consent forms for participation

were obtained from those teachers wishing to participate in the study. Teachers were

asked to complete Parts A & B of the survey (Appendix H). Six of the teachers agreed

to participate in focused interviews (Appendix I).

Inclusion Criteria/Assumptions

According to Roberts and Hyatt (2018), assumptions are those elements,

conditions, and factors that are relevant to a study, which are taken for granted by the

researcher. van der Westhuizen (2013) also states that assumptions are "not only

socially constructed knowledge, but a holistically created reality and knowledge" (p.

694). The general assumptions for this study were that all teachers want: a) the best

reading and literacy outcomes for all of their students and b) to perform at their

optimal level for the benefit of their students. The inclusion criteria for the current

study were as follows. Teachers must a) have consented to completing surveys,

participating in a focused interview; b) consented to have the information provided by

them with respect to the GR process used for the purposes of the study and for the

reasons explained to them by the researcher; c) have held a valid Alberta Teachers'

License; d) have implemented the Fountas and Pinnell GR framework as the primary

approach to teaching reading and literacy in their classroom; e) been provided with the

GR resources outlined by Fountas and Pinnell as necessary to effectively plan and

implement the GR approach within their classroom; f) utilized the GR resources outlined by Fountas and Pinnell; g) agreed to share only their personal experiences with GR in their classrooms and not the perceptions shared with them by other teachers, parents, colleagues, administrators, consultants, or otherwise; and h) agreed not to discuss their answers or the information provided to the researcher with any other study participants.

Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion criteria included any failure to meet the inclusion criteria set out above, as well as the following: teachers must not have a) been involved in any other research study examining the GR process and/or outcomes; b) utilized any other approach as the "primary" approach to reading and literacy other than the GR process; and c) been student teachers.

Instrumentation

Data collection is very crucial to the success of a research study and may include the use of questionnaires, focus groups, tests, interviews, observation, or surveys (Christensen et al., 2013). For the purposes of data triangulation, enhanced understanding, increased the validity and credibility of results, and improved trustworthiness, this study employed multiple sources for gathering of information, including surveys and focused interviews. The survey consisted of open-ended and Likert questions and the focused interview used probes and open-ended questions.

Field Test

Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggested that it is useful to develop an interview guide, scripts, and protocols to be used during the focused interview process to

enhance the data collected and ensure an effective and efficient interview process. It is

further recommended that the interview guide be developed from field testing data

collection instruments. Further, they recommended that the focused interview guide be

developed based on information collected during a field-test process (Moser &

Korstjens, 2018). The preliminary interview guide containing 18 open-ended questions

was developed for this study based on previous researchers in this area (Appendix I)

(Miranda, 2018; Poluga, 2007; Presley, 2019; Reeves, 2022; Rowan Christensen,

2017; Schenck, 2019; Smith, 2020; Toney, 2017). Prior to commencing the current

study, the surveys were field-tested with five teachers from a different school and

twelve doctoral students (who were formerly teachers). After completion of the field-

test, minor revisions to the focused interview guide were made in accordance with the

answers provided by the field test teachers.

Surveys

Studies examining teachers' perceptions have used a variety of custom-made

surveys using a mix of both open-ended and Likert questions. The number and type of

questions utilized in previous studies with teachers' perceptions have included 13 to

28 open-ended questions, 10 focused interview questions, and five Likert questions

(Miranda, 2018; Poluga, 2007; Reeves, 2022; Rowan Christensen, 2017; Schenck,

2019; Smith, 2020; Toney, 2017). The survey questions in this study were designed to

examine Alberta teachers' perceptions relating to: a) how they feel about GR; b) how

they enact GR in their classroom; and c) how they learned about GR. Questions for

this study have been designed based on previous studies with teachers' perceptions

and linked to the research question they address. The sources utilized to design each

question in this study have been set out in table format in Appendix J. The survey was designed in two parts: Part A contained 26 - items (25 demographic questions and one Likert question); Part B contained two open-ended questions and 11-question Likert questions (Appendix H). Likert survey questions were graded by participants on a scale of "1" to "5" with respect to how they feel about each statement ("1" = strongly disagree; "2" = disagree; "3" = neutral; "4" = somewhat agree; and "5" = strongly agree). Both parts of the study were electronically provided to the participants in the form of a single survey fashioned through Qualtrics©. This software allowed for the creation of surveys and their responses. One week after the surveys were sent to participants through Qualtrics©, the first email and text message reminder to complete the survey was sent to participants. Two weeks after distribution of the surveys, the second reminder was sent to participants via email and text message.

Qualtrics© is a simple to use web-based survey tool to conduct survey research, evaluations and other data collection activities. No experience is required to use this research survey tool to prepare and build surveys, send surveys to participants, and analyze survey responses. Advantages of this survey tool were as follows: a) there was no cost to use the survey tool; b) there was no software that needs to be installed; c) there was an easy to use point and click interface; d) surveys with graphics, complex branching, and randomization were easily created; e) there were over 85 different question types to select from; f) there were question and survey templates to choose from; g) there were tools to design both basic and advanced surveys; h) graphics and multimedia content could be and was uploaded into the surveys; i) surveys could be and were posted and delivered to participants online; j) there was no requirement for

participants to complete the surveys in one-sitting and they could stop mid-survey and return to complete the survey at a later time; and k) there were built-in dynamic reporting tools.

Quirkos Cloud (www.quirkos.com) (Turner, 2014), is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) cloud-based software package designed to support the qualitative analysis of coded text data. The Quirkos Cloud (2022) program has been extensively used for qualitative research in a number of different fields, including education, human geography, sociology, health, and media studies (McKee, 2016; Rodriguez, 2016). All of the participant transcripts were imported into Quirkos Cloud (2022) into a password-protected folder created for the study. Quirkos (2022) provided a graphical interface that facilitated the presentation of themes in "bubbles", called "quirks". The thematic analysis was then shown in patterns of circles, with the size of each circle reflecting the amount of data coded to them. The program provided a visually colorful way to interact with the data and engage in the coding process. Colors were extensively used in the program to indicate thematic bubbles within the coding stripes on text sources.

Data from the interview transcripts were directly imported from Microsoft Teams® into the Quirkos Cloud Qualitative Analysis Software (2022) (hereafter referred to as Quirkos Cloud) (Turner, 2014) package for coding cycles, no-cost training webinars were provided for the software, and live support was available from Qualtrics© and Quirkos staff. The analysis process using the Quirkos software provided an alternative way to manually coding with highlighters. During the data coding analysis process, key words, phrases, and/or passages were highlighted,

dragged, or used to create quirks to represent the codes, include descriptions, and identify relationships and categories. The Quirkos Cloud program allowed the researcher to focus on transitional coding processes.

Focused Interviews

Focused interviews/follow-up were conducted after completion of the participants' surveys. Gill et al. (2008) stated that the purpose of research interviews is to: a) "explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters , b) provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (p. 291), c) where little is already known about the study phenomenon (in this case, teachers' perceptions), and d) exploring sensitive topics" (p. 291). Focused interviews were conducted with two teachers in each of the following grades: one, three, and five.

Data Collection

The research and data collection timelines are outlined in Table 1. Brandon (1998) suggested validity can be increased by collecting data from stakeholders who are experts in their field. In this case, the teachers were the primary stakeholders and users of the GR instructional process. Therefore, collecting data from this group of individuals (as opposed to administrators, students, parents, non-GR teachers, etc.) with regard to the GR process, implementation of GR in the classroom, and professional preparation with respect to GR, directly contributed to the validity of the current research study findings.

Data Collection Procedures

After the School Division approved the research study, a letter of introduction was sent to the school in which the study was to be conducted. A meeting was scheduled with the Principal to review the study protocol, survey distribution process, and answer any questions. After discussion with the Principal, the invitation to participate in the research study was sent to teachers. Teachers were asked to indicate their interest to participate via a Google reply form. After the Google reply form was received from each participant, a signed consent form was obtained. Once the consent form was received, the online survey and demographic collection form were sent to participants via the process established in conjunction with the school Principal, with a request to return it to the researcher within two weeks. The researcher sent emails and text messages to remind participants to complete their survey five and ten days after the survey was sent out. Responses on the surveys were reviewed by the researcher and the researcher arranged to perform focused interviews with six participants, for the purposes of clarifying survey responses. Microsoft Teams® Software (Version 12.0, Microsoft Corporation, 2022, WA, USA) was used to record and transcribe participants' responses to eliminate any bias in transcription. Transcripts from Microsoft Teams ® transcripts were imported directly into Quirkos ® for analysis.

Data Analysis

In this study, the survey required quantitative analysis for the Likert responses and qualitative data analysis for the surveys and focused-interview data. The responses from the teachers' surveys and focused interviews were analyzed by transcribing the data and coding responses, after which thematic analysis and deductive reasoning was

used to identify themes, subthemes, and patterns in the data. Results of this study were analyzed using demographics, frequency calculations, distributions, and thematic analysis via coding. Qualtrics® provided complete and robust data tracking, reporting, and tabulation metrics for each question. Data from Qualtrics® was outputted in several formats: frequency tables, lists, pie charts, and bar graphs.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative survey findings were also used to inform the focused interview process. In addition, quantitative data was utilized to enhance the qualitative data and give context to the proportion of agreement with specific concepts at the time of the data analysis and interpretation. In other words, the proportion of survey participants who "agreed" or "disagreed" with concepts such as effectiveness of GR, fidelity with Fountas and Pinnell approach, and so forth. Data gathered from the Likert-scale response items are reported in frequency tables. These data were analyzed using frequency counts and descriptive statistics. Pie charts were used for elucidation of survey question data.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data was utilized to enhance the quantitative data and give context to the survey responses at the time of the data analysis and interpretation. For example, the responses provided by focused interview participants were used to elucidate the "agreement" and "disagreement" provided by the survey participants. The survey data in this study measured teachers' perceptions with respect to a) the GR process; b) the enactment of GR in their classrooms; and c) professional preparation for GR. Qualitative data analysis for this study involved the analysis and coding of

transcribed interviews and open-ended focus-question data for general themes and subthemes. As noted previously, the Quirkos Cloud (2022) software program was used for the coding process. The coding process required labeling and organizing qualitative data for the purposes of identifying themes and the relationships between them (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña (2016) has suggested that three to four different coding processes be applied for qualitative analysis, which was applied in this study. In this analysis, data were analyzed using a) first cycle coding (to identify codes or "quirks", b) second cycle coding (to identify patterns/commonalities), and c) third cycle coding (to identify themes) (Saldaña, 2016). After the data was collected, the researcher highlighted, circled, and underlined quotes that were considered important for the purposes of elucidating the data for reporting.

First Level Coding

First level (NVivo) coding was undertaken after the data were collected from the interviews in order to determine codes/quirks. Inductive coding creates codes based on the data collected and the survey responses (Saldaña, 2016). Coding was performed by breaking qualitative data into smaller samples, after which, a sample of the data was "read" and the researcher created codes/quirks to cover and reflect the obvious content of the data sample (Saldaña, 2016).

The data from this study was found to contain important and relevant words and phrases from the transcribed interviews, reflective thoughts, and questions written by the researcher, which provided some initial insight into the main themes (Mason, 2002; Saldaña, 2016). Where applicable, field notes gathered by the researcher while

listening to interviews were incorporated. Table 2 shows where the level one indicator follows in the process.

Second Cycle Coding

Once the first stage NVivo coding was completed, pattern and axial coding was completed for the second cycle coding stage. Pattern/axial coding allowed for a large amount of data to be divided into more meaningful categories for ease of handling (Saldaña, 2016). In the current study and after the first stage of coding, the researcher examined the data to identify patterns (commonalities/similarities) in the data, from which similar items were grouped together. Patterns deemed by the researcher to be important were used to derive categories, which later became "subthemes". If outliers were identified, the researcher created a new category labeled as "to be listed", after which the researcher reviewed that data to see if the information should be recoded to fit into one of the other categories. Some of these outlier data were placed in other categories, while any remaining outliers data that could not be grouped into an existing category were placed in a category labeled "other". Table 2 shows where the level two indicators follow in the process.

Third Level Coding

In the third stage of coding, pattern and axial coding was repeated to identify the main themes and ensure that codes were attributed to the correct theme or subtheme. Some new codes were identified and the researcher determined which existing themes or subthemes the codes needed to be placed under. Table 2 shows where the level three indicators follow in the process.

Table 2

Coding Output for Level One, Two, and Three of the Coding Process

	Coding level	
First level coding "Codes/Quirks"	Second level coding Categories/subthemes	Third level coding Themes
"Quirks"	1	1
"Quirks"	2	
"Quirks"	3	
"Quirks"	1	2
"Quirks"	2	
"Quirks"	3	
"Quirks"	1	3
"Quirks"	2	

Ethical Considerations

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the application of ethical principles in the research process includes consideration of the "protection of subjects from harm, the right to privacy, the notion of informed consent, and the issue of deception" (p. 261).

This study was submitted to the University of Portland IRB for approval and permission to conduct this research study. After IRB approval, the study was submitted to the School Division with a request for approval to conduct research in the identified school. Once approval from the School Division was obtained, discussions were held with the Principal of the identified school to allow an opportunity for concerns to be expressed and addressed. An invitation to participate was sent to all

teachers by email, with a specific statement noting that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that all findings, survey responses, and interview data gathered during the study would be kept confidential. The invitation to participate included information about the purpose of the study, the handling and protection of data, confidentiality of responses, and what the data would be used for. After teachers agreed to participate, the researcher met with each participant in-person in order to provide the participants with an opportunity to ask clarifying questions. Teachers were advised in the meeting that they could opt out of the study at any time, for any reason, without consequence, and that any data collected is destroyed if they so wished. A signed consent form was obtained from teachers who indicated that they wished to participate. Data from all collection methods in this study were saved on a password protected computer and removed following study completion in compliance with record retention guidelines. All data was anonymized and participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity, maintain confidentiality, and ensure an added layer of data protection. Participants were advised that they could have a copy of the research findings at the conclusion of the study. From the beginning, the purpose of the study was made transparent to the participants and the parents/guardians to avoid the perception of conflict of interest given my role with the district. For the purpose of reporting data in the dissertation or in future articles prepared for publication, each participant was assigned a completely new and different pseudonym after the study in order to maintain confidentiality and complete anonymity.

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

Creswell (2014) reminded researchers of the importance of noting potential biases they may bring to the research and the impact this may have on the researcher from the outset. In mixed-method research, the perceptions, experiences, and biases of the researcher can significantly influence the interpretations of results and findings of the study. To combat these biases, this study was designed to incorporate a quantitative component through the use of Likert scale surveys. To date I have spent 21 years teaching in elementary school and was first introduced to the GR approach five years ago. Since then, I have implemented this approach within my own classrooms and I have developed my own perceptions about the GR approach to teaching reading. One of these perceptions is that I think GR is very effective in the earlier grades when students are just learning the foundations of reading and require one-on-one support. I believe that the GR approach has a place in teaching reading with older students who are struggling or reading below grade level. In the upper elementary student group, I think it should be used on a case-by-case basis.

I have also found that the GR approach requires extensive planning, especially finding creative ways to keep the rest of the class meaningfully engaged while working with the small groups prescribed by Fountas and Pinnell. I have found that there have been times when I have had many different reading and literacy levels within a single class. If I implement GR with all of the different levels in the manner recommended by Fountas and Pinnell, I have found that the GR approach takes up most of the time I have allotted for Language Arts. This leaves a minimal amount of time to attend to the other components of the Comprehensive Literacy Framework

adopted by my school division. Another experience that I have had with the GR process is that in conversations with other teachers, colleagues have described many different variations in the GR approach and how it is implemented within others' classrooms, as well as teachers having different understandings or beliefs about how GR should be done. This is consistent with the literature review and one of the pitfalls of previous studies on teachers' perceptions.

I work in the setting where the study was undertaken and one of my aspirations is to get into school leadership. Since the GR approach is endorsed by my school administration and school division, this may potentially introduce a personal bias in favor of the GR process, in spite of my beliefs about its limited value with children in upper elementary grades. However, the experiences I have had, with the GR approach taking away from the time that can be dedicated to the Comprehensive Literacy Framework, should temper any potential bias in favor of the GR program, since I consider the many other facets of reading and literacy to be important as well. Therefore, I held both positive and negative personal perceptions about the GR process, which vary based upon the specific children that I have in my classroom, the number of reading levels within the classroom, and the level of instructional support provided.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Amankwaa (2016) suggested that one way to strengthen the value of a research study is to take intentional steps to build trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is a vital component within the research process. Amankwaa (2016) further stated that "attending to the language of trustworthiness and the important activities of reliability,

add to the comprehensiveness and the quality of the research product" (p.123). In this mixed-methods research the role of the researcher was to make an effort to access and understand the thoughts and feelings of participants. Since the information participants shared is important to them, it was important that interview protocols and interview responses were understood by both participants and the researcher. To optimize trustworthiness, the researcher read the interview protocol to each participant at the beginning of the interview. For consistency all questions were asked in the same manner with each participant. As noted earlier, Microsoft Teams® application was used to record and transcribe the interviews. Participants were reassured that data collected in the course of the study would be anonymized and not provided to the school Principal or the School District in any identifiable way.

To address researcher bias, the researcher employed bracketing to minimize any bias imposed by the researcher during the clarification and interpretation process and enable bracketing of my own perceptions and thoughts relating to the GR process, enactment of GR in the participants' classrooms, and the professional preparation of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was accomplished by the researcher keeping a journal that contains reflective journal entries and analytical memos gathered during data collection and analysis, as well as throughout the research process. Throughout the data collection process, strict adherence to capturing and utilizing raw data and material was observed. Member-checking was used following the interviews; transcripts were sent to each participant for them to sign off on the information. Participants were offered an opportunity to edit, clarify, elaborate, and if necessary, delete their own words from the narrative in order to maximize

trustworthiness, ensure confidence in the responses obtained during the interview process, and ensure that the transcripts were free from bias.

Trustworthiness was further strengthened through a focus on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). *Credibility* was established through triangulation of data from the pre-interview activity, open-ended survey questions, Likert questions, and focused interviews. This allowed the research questions to be examined from different perspectives and increased understanding and validity of the study. *Confirmability* was established through clearly stated research questions, clear explanations of decisions made in regard to the theoretical framework, methodology, data analysis, and data interpretation supplemented by detailed documentation of the study findings, so that readers could judge the study's credibility for themselves. *Dependability* of the study was demonstrated through a clearly articulated research process and a reflective journal that was kept and included detailed field and study notes, questions that arose during the study, decisions made relating to the study, memos and notes specific to each participant and the various research processes, and detailed records of the data collected. Additionally, notes relating to study highlights, developments occurring during the course of the study, progress of the study, and interactions relevant to the study and data analysis were also kept. The researcher's thoughts, feelings, and hypotheses were also added to the reflective journal. *Transferability* of this study was enhanced through detailed descriptions of the individual participants' circumstances, demographics and experiences, as well as data unique to them, which allowed the

researcher and readers to determine the external validity and transferability of the current study to their own contexts.

Summary

This chapter detailed the methodology used in the current study. The chapter began with the purpose and research questions. This was followed by the research design, methodology, and rationale for the methodology and research design. Details regarding the pre-study preparations and setting for the study were provided. Participants and recruitment strategies were outlined, including the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Instrumentation, including the field test protocol, pre-interview activities, open-ended and surveys, and focused interview procedures were detailed. Data collection activities and the research schedule were provided. A discussion of the ethical considerations, role of the researcher and positionality, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study complete the chapter.

Chapter 4 Research Findings

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine Alberta teachers' perceptions (experiences; decision making; beliefs; enthusiasm; and awareness) about: a) the GR approach; b) how GR is enacted in the classroom; and c) how they learned about GR. This study used surveys and focused interviews to examine Alberta teachers' perceptions. The study included demographic characteristics (age, gender, grade taught, years of experience, professional preparation, time spent in preparation for GR sessions, classroom time spent in GR activities, etc.) of teachers in one Alberta separate school from grades one through six. The intent of this research was to gather information on Alberta elementary teachers' perceptions of the GR process. The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about the GR approach? (

RQ2: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom?

RQ3: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR

Results

This section addresses the results from the surveys and the focused interviews. The first part of this section presents the demographics of the sample. The second half of the section presents the findings of the surveys and the responses to the focused interview questions.

Participants

The survey was distributed electronically to 20 potential participants, all of whom were currently teaching in the school in which the study was conducted. Of the 20 potential participants, a return rate of 65% provided a final N-value of 13 participants. Specific age demographics are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Age Groupings of the Participants

Demographic	*n (%)*
23-30	2 (15.4)
31-40	4 (30.8)
41-50	5 (38.5)
>51	1 (7.7)
Unspecified	1 (7.7)

The sample consisted of 13 participants (*N=13;* 11 females, 2 males) ranging from 23 to 57 years of age (*M* = 42.9; SD = 8.5), with one participant's age unspecified.

Teacher Education and Experience

The majority of participants have been licensed teachers for greater than or equal to six years. The specific number of participants and the years they have been licensed is as follows: 1 to 5 years (*n* = 2; 15.4); 6 to 10 years (*n* = *3*; 23.1%); 11 to 20 years (*n* = 4; 30.8); 21 to 30 years (*n* = 3; 23.1%); and greater than 30 years (*n* = 1; 7.7). Participants reported having been licensed as teachers for one to greater than 30 years (*M* = *16.4*; *SD* = 9.5). The vast majority of participants (*n* = 10; 76.9%) reported

having a Bachelor's degree while the remaining three participants (23.1%) reported

having a Master's degree. The teaching experience reported by the participants over

their teaching careers is as follows: Kindergarten ($n = 6$; 11.3); Grade 1 ($n = 10$;

18.9); Grade 2 ($n = 9$; 17.0); Grade 3 ($n = 7$; 13.2); Grade 4 ($n = 8$; 15.1); Grade 5 ($n = 7$; 13.2); and Grade 6 ($n = 6$; 11.3).

Teacher Preparation and Experience in GR

Five participants (38.5%) reported formal preparation in GR, seven

participants (53.8%) reported no formal preparation in GR, and one participant (7.7%)

did not specify whether they had any GR preparation or not. The length of time spent

in formal GR preparation and the type of GR preparation reported by the participants

is reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Formal Preparation in GR

Length of time spent in GR formal preparation	n (%)
1-4 months	3 (23.1)
5-10 months	1 (7.7)
>10 months	1 (7.7)
Type of GR preparation	
Courses	3 (23.1)
Workshops	5 (38.5)
Conferences	5 (38.5)

All participants ($N=13$) reported having used GR in the past. The participants'

GR teaching assignments at the time of the current study are listed in Table 5. There

was one participant for each of Kindergarten and Grade 6, two participants for Grades

1, three participants for Grade 3, and two participants for each of Grades 2, 4, and 5.

The participants' GR teaching experience at the current facility over past years is

shown in Table 5. The greatest amount of GR experience was in Grade 2 while the

least amount of experience was in Grade 3. The participants' GR teaching experience

at all facilities over past years is shown in Table 5. With the exception of

Kindergarten, the participants' experience with GR is approximately evenly

distributed across Grades 1 through 6.

Table 5

GR Teaching Experience of the Participants

Grade	GR teaching assignment at time of current study (*n; %*)	GR teaching experience at the current facility over past years (*n*; %)	GR teaching experience from all facilities over past years (*n*; %)
1	2 (15.4)	5 (38.5)	8 (61.5)
2	2 (15.4)	6 (46.2)	8 (61.5)
3	3 (23.1)	2 (15.4)	7 (53.8)
4	2 (15.4)	5 (38.5)	7 (53.8)
5	2 (15.4)	3 (23.1)	5 (38.5)
6	1 (7.7)	4 (30.8)	4 (30.8)

Classroom Dynamics

Participants reported having class sizes ranging from 20 to 37 students, with

most of the participants' classes having between 20 and 30 students (*M* = 25.3 ; *SD* =

4.6). Number of ELL students in each classroom ranged from three to 17 students (*M*

= 6.9; *SD* = 3.8), with most participants having 3 to 7 ELL students in their

classrooms. The class breakdown is summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Classroom Dynamics: Number of Students in Current Classroom

Total number of students	*n* (%)
20-23	5 (38.5)
24-30	6 (46.2)
31-37	2 (14.3)
Number of ELL students	
3-7	9 (69.2)
8-12	2 (15.4)
13-17	2 (15.4)

Mechanics of GR Instruction During Present Study

Participants reported spending an average of 24 minutes per day (*M = 23.8; SD =19.1*) in preparation for GR activities, while an average of 40 minutes per day (*M = 40; SD = 19.9*) are spent in actual GR activities. The average number of students per GR group was reported as 5 students (*M = 5; SD = 0.82*), while the average number of GR groups per participant per day was reported as two (*M = 2.4; SD = 1.4*). The vast majority of participants reported not having instructional support in the classroom for GR activities, with four participants (30.8%) reporting instructional support and eight participants (61.5%) reporting no instructional support for GR. One participant (7.7%) declined to answer whether they had instructional support in the classroom for GR activities or not.

Participants in the current study reported using a variety of activities to teach reading skills during their GR instruction. Teachers reported using phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, composition, spelling, other word identification strategies, comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics, and other activities during their GR instructional sessions (Table 7). A variety of methods were reported for transitioning students between GR groups, including students' reading level, similar student reading behaviours, reading progress, and professional judgment. Teachers reported using a variety of methods to assess student reading achievement, including reading, leveled books, questioning, running records, reading behaviours,

Table 7

Skills Taught During GR Sessions

Skill	n (%)
1. Phonological & phonemic awareness	11 (84.6)
2. Phonics	10 (76.9)
3. Fluency	13 (100)
4. Composition	8 (61.5)
5. Spelling	6 (46.2)
6. Other word identification strategies	12 (92.3)
7. Comprehension	13 (100)
8. Vocabulary	12 (92.3)
9. Grammar/Mechanics	8 (61.5)
10. Other	2 (15.4)

anecdotal records, t-series, and Fountas and Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment System (BAS). Activities assigned to students not participating in the GR sessions included literacy centres, reciprocal teaching, independent reading, journaling, reading applications (ie. Raz Kids, Lalilo, etc.), reading skills (ie. phonics, etc.), and English language arts (ELA) (including writing, assignments, computers, projects, etc.).

Definition of GR

Twelve participants (*n=12*) responded to the first question: In your own words, define GR. Participants gave definitions for GR as shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Teachers' Definition of GR

Participant	Survey Responses
1	*"It is a small group reading instruction, targeted to the current level of student achievement. It incorporates instruction that focuses on a variety of literacy skills. It also provides opportunity to assess student reading progress more frequently than say one on one reading"*
7	*"GR is systematic, routine-based, reading instruction for a small group of students. It exposes students to a variety of text genres and gives students specific language to use when they want to talk about their reading experiences. It requires a strong home-school partnership as students must practice and review their learned reading strategies after the in-class sessions"*
8	*"Guiding small groups of students to read. Grouping them according to their reading strategies or needs. Example: students who decode word by word but struggle with comprehension might be grouped together. GR also provides an opportunity to look more closely at features of texts and discuss details seen in the pictures or captions etc. Often following GR, there may be some guided writing activities as well"*
11	*"GR is small group instruction where the teacher explicitly teaches strategies that will help move students forward in their reading and students have the opportunity to practice skills in a scaffolded environment"*

The majority of participants defined GR as being instruction based on small groups. Based on the Quirkos Cloud (2022) analysis software, the five "quirks" identified in the question that asked about the definition of GR were: small groups, targeted instruction, a variety of literacy skills, assessing reading progress, and home

support. For example, eight participants (*n*=8) defined GR as instruction based on small groups. For example, sample responses included: *"GR is small group instruction where the teacher explicitly teaches strategies that will help move students forward in their reading and students have the opportunity to practice skills in a scaffolded environment"*. Six participants (*n*=6) identified targeted instruction as being a feature of GR. Responses that reflect the perception that GR provides targeted instruction include responses such as: *"GR is when a teacher leads a small group in reading the same text one person at a time. The teacher makes observations and offers support to students to foster good reading behaviors"*. Four participants (*n*=4) identified GR incorporates a variety of literacy skills. Responses that reflect this perception include: *"It is a small group reading instruction, targeted to the current level of student achievement. It incorporates instruction that focuses on a variety of literacy skills. It also provides an opportunity to assess student reading progress more frequently than say one on one reading"*. Four participants (*n*=4) also identified the assessment of reading progress as a component of GR. Responses that reflect this perception included: *"GR is a process of teaching, supporting, and assessing not only students' reading skills but also their communication skills in small group lessons, respective to students' reading levels"*. Finally, one participant (*n*=1) identified home support as part of the GR approach. The response that was obtained which reflected this perception included: *"It requires a strong home-school partnership as students must practice and review their learned reading strategies after the in-class sessions"*

Themes and Subthemes

There were three main themes identified from the open-ended survey questions and focused interview process; these were enhanced by the Survey responses. The themes and subthemes identified in the second and third levels of coding are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Emergent Themes, Subthemes, and Quirks

Themes (*n=3*)	Subthemes (*n=8*)	"Quirks" (*n=46*)
Theme 1: Teachers have mixed feelings about the GR approach	1. Positive attributes of GR	Improved reading, confident, grouping in GR, experience teaching GR, assessment, student confidence
	2. Negative attributes and challenges associated with GR	Dislikes, frustration, time constraints, non-GR students, length of lesson, need for proper resources and preparation, classroom environment, classroom management, students with learning challenges
	3. GR for ELL students	What students know, effectiveness for ELL, ELL challenges
Theme 2: Implementing GR can be a challenging process	1. GR enactment	Enactment likes, enactment dislikes
	2. Challenges with implementation within classrooms	Rest of the class, Classroom management, student time management, teacher time management, GR grouping
	3. Planning process	Planning for learning, strategies for GR, skills for GR, materials to teach GR
Theme 3: Training and support for teachers could impact the way GR is implemented	1. Training components	Learning about GR, training effectiveness, personal training initiatives, ongoing training, ongoing research
	2. Teaching resources	Other literacy approaches, resources, division focus

The three main themes identified from the Quirkos Cloud (2022) software analysis are as follows: a) Theme 1: Teachers have mixed feelings about the GR approach; b) Theme 2: Implementing GR can be a challenging process, and c) Theme 3: Training and support for teachers could impact the way GR is implemented. There were eight (*n*=8) subthemes identified, which were broken down as follows: a) Theme #1: three subthemes; b) Theme #2: three subthemes;, and c) Theme #3: two subthemes. The subthemes for Theme #1 are: a) positive attributes of GR, b) negative attributes and challenges of GR, and c) GR for ELL students. The subthemes for Theme #2 are: a) GR enactment, b) challenges with implementation in the classrooms, and c) planning process. The subthemes for Theme #3 are: a) training components, and b) teaching resources.

Codes/Quirks

Using the Quirkos Cloud (2022) software, there were 252 codes initially derived from the first stage of the coding process, from which 46 "quirks" were identified. A total of six participant quotes were chosen per subtheme to illustrate the teachers' perceptions. A copy of the Quirkos Cloud (2022) output for the first (InVivo) stage of coding is provided in Appendix K. The 46 different "quirks" reflected the different perceptions of the participants within the themes and subthemes identified above. The "quirks" are grouped according to the subthemes identified during the coding process and reflect common perceptions identified by the researcher.

Research Question #1: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about the GR approach?

Data from the open-ended survey questions, Likert responses, responses from the focused interviews identified the main theme that teachers have mixed feelings about the GR approach. However, the focused interviews identified themes and subthemes which reflect a more comprehensive and considered view of GR. There is a distinct difference in the overall tone of the responses between the survey results and the focused interviews, but overall, this study demonstrated that the participants' general perception of the GR approach is that it is good, but there are a significant number of negative aspects and challenges associated with the approach. Subthemes identified under the main theme were: positive attributes of GR, negative attributes of GR, and GR for ELL students.

Theme #1: Teachers Have Mixed Feelings About the GR Approach

Based on the survey responses in the current study, the majority (69.3%) of participants perceive that GR is a valuable part of their reading instruction. Although one participant (7.7%) expressed the perception that GR is not a valuable part of their reading instruction and not effective in the upper grade levels, the majority of participants in this study expressed the perception that GR is useful across the different grade levels. Focused interview responses supported this contention. For example, one participant noted the following "*I think that GR is incredibly valuable*". However, while participants viewed GR as valuable (69.3%), 23.1% do not perceive GR to even be a successful reading strategy. Only approximately one third (38.5%) of participants perceived that GR is the *best* approach to reading instruction. Moreover,

15.4% of survey participants perceived that GR is not useful at all for ELL students, while all six (*n*=6) focused interview participants expressed concerns about the utility of GR for ELL students. Focused interview participants also noted the inability of the GR approach to target those learners with disabilities. For example, one participant stated the following: *"Since GR is not a literacy intervention program, I have not encountered a lot of growth with students who are cognitively delayed, diagnosed with a learning disability, or another (disability)"*.

Positive Attributes of GR

All six (*n*=6) focused interview participants identified positive attributes relating to the GR approach, with the exception of GR for ELL students. Within the subtheme of "positive attributes", the "quirks" identified were improved reading, teacher confidence, grouping in GR, experience teaching GR, assessment, and student confidence. Some of the positive attributes of the GR approach identified by the participants include relationship-building, increased student confidence, and improved literacy outcomes for the learners (Table 10). Participants also reported positive perceptions about GR with regard to the ability to group students according to their skill levels, which allows for targeted instruction. Teachers' reported that their GR instruction is affected by their perceptions of differences among students and classes.

Overall, participants also reported increased confidence in the level of skills on the part of both the teacher and student. For example, most participants perceive the benefits of GR to be the opportunity to work in small groups, the opportunity to perform continuous and ongoing assessments, the chance to provide targeted instruction to meet the needs of the learners, and increased engagement and learner

confidence. Another positive aspect of the GR approach cited by participants in the

current study was the improved literacy outcomes for learners and increased reading

fluency.

Table 10

Theme #1: Teachers' Perceptions About GR Subtheme #1: Positive attributes

Participant	Verbatim Participant Responses
#1	*"I like the part when we make connections to students reading before, during and after the reading"*
#2	*"I like the fact that I can work with smaller groups and see where and how I need to proceed"*
#3	*"I can target more students than trying to read one-on-one with a student and having to repeat myself if they are working on the same strategies"*
#4	*"I feel there are quite a few positive aspects of GR that benefit students in education across the grades"*
#5	*"I like the positive growth that academically average students demonstrate, over time, in comprehension, accuracy and fluency"*
#6	*"I find the students feel less intimidated, "safety in numbers"*

Negative Attributes and Challenges Associated with GR

The second subtheme identified in this category was negative attributes and

challenges associated with the GR approach. The "quirks" delineated in this subtheme

were dislikes, frustrations, time constraints, non-GR students (ie. the rest of the

classroom), the length of the lesson, the need for proper resources and preparation, the

classroom environment, classroom management, and students with learning

challenges. In the current study, there were a significant number of negative attributes

and challenges associated with the GR approach. The vast amount of responses and perceptions in the current study centred around either classroom management, classroom environment, time constraints, or catering to learners who are not in the GR groups (ie. non-GR learners). For example, one participant noted that,

> *"I feel that it takes a lot of time to prep for the GR sessions and that more can be done to support readers with the individual reading behaviours that need support. GR is not necessarily the way to assist students with reading - especially the struggling students. Sometimes there is too much focus on GR as if this was the only way to get students to improve reading behaviours".*

One participant expressed the perception that GR loses its value in the older grade levels. Classroom management was also a major consideration for most of the participants in the current study. One participant reported that *"it causes excess stress for myself as a teacher"* citing issues such as front loading, preparation for the GR sessions, and finding resources that match the students' abilities. Over half of the participants (53.9%) in the current study perceive that classroom management with GR is too difficult, while approximately one third (30.8%) perceive that it is not. For example, one participant stated that

> *"I am constantly juggling to get the group going on meaningful activities so that I can pull for GR. Classrooms are full of distractions, disruptions that can get in the way of the teacher being able to execute GR as frequently as it should be"* and another stated *"the teachers spend a great amount of time searching resources and creating tasks to differentiate for GR".*

Classroom management was such a significant consideration that one participant noted the following:*"I feel like GR is an ideal that I fail to meet. I can guide students' reading, and I can manage the classroom, but I am not effective at doing both"*. Participants also noted that it is difficult to get the rest of the class working on the same task or on a task that they can work independently on, while others noted that preparing and managing centers for those not in the GR groups can be challenging.

Some participants noted that the GR approach fosters an attitude amongst non-GR students, who perceive that they have the freedom to engage in whatever activities they desire while the teacher is with the GR groups. For example, one participant noted that *"some students take the inch and make it a mile by not self-starting and not remaining on task, resulting in lack of learning and gaps between students"*, while another participant noted the following *"very challenging given the issues with student behaviour, physical space, noise level, and general interruptions of a school day"*. Still other participants noted that the classroom environment is affected by the GR approach, with participants noting *"not being able to roam around the room to assert order through non-verbal cues and physical presence does imply more freedom for the students"*, *"class sizes are becoming larger and larger, creating either more groups or larger groupings",* and *"classes are very diverse, with different needs, learning levels, and range of behaviours"*.

In addition to classroom management and classroom environment, a number of participants noted challenges with the GR groups themselves, specifically commenting on the amount of time they have to work on GR activities. For example, one participant stated *"the amount of time you can realistically spend in GR always feels*

too short to complete every aspect of a 'good' GR lesson". Another participant cited challenges around grouping of the GR students, taking into consideration the size of the classrooms and the diversity of students within the class. For example, the participant stated that "*given the huge range of diversity of my students, it is difficult to make uniform groups".*

Approximately one third (38.5%) of survey participants perceived that GR requires too much out-of-class preparation time, though notably, the same number of participants (38.5%) feel that it did not. For example, one participant stated *"I feel like GR has great potential for making a significant impact on a learner's overall success. However, without planning time being built into a teacher's schedule, it is difficult to actually maximize the learning experience".* Participants noted that teachers spend a significant amount of time searching for appropriate resources to meet the needs of the learners within the groups. For example, one participant stated that *"the teacher spends great amounts of time searching resources and creating tasks to differentiate for GR".*

In summary, the vast majority of participants in the current study identified negative perceptions and challenges associated with the GR approach. These concerns tended to centre around dislikes, frustrations, time constraints, non-GR students, the length of the GR lesson, the need for proper resources and preparation, complications facilitating student self-direction, the classroom environment, classroom management, and an insufficient quantity and variety of independent work to maintain student interest/attention at some levels.

GR for ELL students

The third and final subtheme identified from the surveys and focused interview

responses was that of GR for ELL students. The "quirks" identified from this group

include what the students know, the effectiveness of GR for ELL, and challenges with

ELL students. Notably, a majority of survey participants (61.6%) perceived that GR is

an effective strategy for ELL students, while 15.4% perceived that it is not.

Interestingly enough, while some participants perceived that GR is an effective

strategy for ELL students, the comments elicited from the focused interview

participants tended to be mostly negative. Notably, all six of the focused interview

participants ($n=6$) identified some challenges with the GR approach for ELL students.

Some of the participants cited the level of language acquisition among the ELL

students as one of the challenges associated with GR in this group, since the level of

language acquisition impacts upon the students ability to grasp the concepts.

Table 11

Theme #1: Teachers' Have Mixed Views: Subtheme #3: GR for ELL Students

Participant	Verbatim Participant Responses
#1	*"He/she doesn't understand the instruction and the expectation of what GR looks like"*
#2	*"They require a different approach to learning language……brand new ELL students do not benefit"*
#4	*"The less structural and context awareness and experience of the ELL student the less impact GR will have"*

Level of language acquisition was also cited as problematic with respect to grouping

the learners into appropriate groups. Another concern expressed by the participants

was the inability to be able to offer additional guidance and scaffolding based upon the teachers' understanding of the ELL students' first language. A sample of the comments obtained from the focused interview participants is included in Table 11.

Some of the comments offered by the participants in the present study spoke to the level that the ELL students are at the time of the GR instruction. For example, one focused interview participant noted that *"background knowledge the student has will depend on how well they can participate in the group".* Additionally, participants noted that ELL students often enter the program with no English skills at all and as such, they require a more targeted approach to reading and literacy. Participants in the current study noted that regardless of the level of literacy that ELL students show, the GR approach operates at the level that the ELL student is at. For example, comments offered by the focused interview participants include: *"ELL's will be taught at their level"*; *"instructions will be differentiated relative to their reading needs"*; and *"helps them with certain vocabularies, reading behaviours, and comprehension at their individual level".* Focused interview participants noted that ELL students tend to be at a much lower literacy level than the other non-ELL students in the groups, which makes it harder to place them into GR groups. One participant noted that *"I have had students who do not know any English whatsoever and it wouldn't help them if I solely paired them with students who had a few years of English immersion. Those students still require some one-on-one instruction".* Another participant stated the following:*"sometimes the ELL students are much lower than the rest of the group and don't fit so they have to join a group working at a higher level than they are".*

In summary, participants in the present study had mostly negative perceptions about GR for the ELL population. While survey participants viewed GR as an effective strategy for ELL students, this is likely because the GR approach targets students at their level. However, the focused interviews highlighted the main problems with the GR approach for ELL students, primarily that the teachers lack the ability to help students make connections in their first language. Furthermore, the ELL students' lack of background knowledge and their existing level of language acquisition were significant limiting factors with respect to utilizing the GR approach in this population.

Summary Research Question #1

Overall, the responses from the surveys and the focused interviews suggest that teachers' perceptions about the GR approach are mixed. There were both positive and negative attributes associated with GR, and specific challenges associated with using GR in ELL reading and literacy activities and also, in students with disabilities. In addition, participants noted that there were challenges with planning for the small groups and developing and implementing lessons for other children during the GR activities. Positive aspects of the GR approach as identified from the current study include improved reading among students, smaller groups for teaching in GR, continuous or ongoing assessment of student progress, and increased confidence among students and teachers. Negative attributes and challenges associated with the GR approach include time constraints, what non-GR students (ie. the rest of the classroom) are doing during the GR sessions, the length of GR lessons, the need for proper resources and preparation for GR, the classroom environment created by GR,

and classroom management. Participants also expressed mostly negative attitudes towards GR for ELL students, with participants identifying ELL students' prior knowledge, level of language acquisition, and teachers' lack of ability to communicate with ELL students as factors in the effectiveness of GR for the ELL group.

Research Question #2: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom?

Data from the open-ended survey questions, Likert responses, responses from the focused interviews identified the main theme that implementing GR can be a challenging process. However, as with Research Question #1, the focused interviews identified themes and subthemes which reflect a more comprehensive and considered view of GR implementation. Within the second theme of implementing GR can be a challenging process, there were three subthemes, which included: GR enactment, challenges with implementation in the classroom, and the planning process. Overall, participants reported both likes and dislikes with the implementation process. Aspects of GR enactment that are "likes" include the whole-school approach and instructional support. Aspects of GR enactment that fell into the "dislikes" group included issues around classroom management (ensuring non-GR students are productively engaged), non-GR student time management, teacher time management (planning and preparation), and how to manage grouping for GR (ensuring that all students are at the same level). Other issues pertaining to the GR planning process included the time required for planning for GR sessions, strategies for teaching and enacting GR, teachers' skills for GR, and materials to teach GR.

GR Enactment

The first subtheme identified under the theme of implementing GR can be a challenging process, is GR enactment. Within the subtheme of GR enactment, there were two "quirks" identified: enactment likes and enactment dislikes. The vast majority of survey participants (61.6%) perceived that they are enacting GR effectively within their classrooms, while 23.1% perceived that they are not. A large proportion of participants (46.2%) also perceived that they are enacting GR with fidelity to the Fountas and Pinnell GR approach within their classrooms, while almost as many (30.8%) participants perceived that they are not. A large number of survey participants (46.2%) also perceived that they have enough support to implement GR in their classrooms in the way that they want to, while almost as many (30.8%) perceived that they do not. In the current study, focused interview participants identified things that they like to have in order to ensure effective enactment of the GR approach. All six (*n=6*) focused interview participants reported having some aspects of GR enactment that they either liked or disliked. Some focused interview participants reported enactment "likes" to be when GR is a whole-school initiative and there is a focus on everyone doing the same thing, with associated professional development support. Three focused interview participants (*n=3*) cited having a whole-school approach to GR as a significant factor. For example, one participant noted the following:*"I feel it is helpful when the whole school is on board with GR - or if it is implemented or supported by the school administration".* Two focused interview participants (*n=2*) cited administrative support as being important to enactment of the GR approach in their classrooms. For example, one participant stated *"Classroom*

support….having an (educational assistant) *helps the program to be more successful".*

Both of these factors, a whole-school approach and administrative support, speak to

continuity, whether there is a common language across the different grades amongst

the teachers, and whether there is support from other teachers and administration.

While school-wide support was perceived by the current study participants as

being important; enactment "dislikes" noted by focused interview participants include

classroom dynamics while working on GR activities. The overall perception of

participants in the current study is that the negative aspects of GR enactment outweigh

the positive aspects of enacting GR in the classroom. Consistent with these reports

were the focused interview comments about enactment "dislikes", which include when

there is no in-class support for the teacher. Another aspect of enactment "dislikes"

reported by focused interview participants were components of literacy instruction that

are not included in the GR approach. For example, this includes phonics, phonological

and phonemic awareness, and spelling.

Focused interview participants also noted that aspects of classroom dynamics

have a bearing on how they perceive GR enactment. For example, one participant

noted the following "*having to entertain students, needing to have eyes on the back

and sides of my head".* Still other focused interview participants (n=5) in the current

study cited an enactment "dislike" to be the number of students in the class. One final,

but significant comment pertaining to GR implementation was obtained from a

focused interview participant (n=1), who noted that the amount of time required to

provide one session of GR instruction to the number of students in the class exceeds

the amount of mandatory literacy minutes set out by the Province of Alberta. For

example, one focused interview participant stated that *"due to the amount of groups,*

you are unable to work with each group daily to consistently reinforce the skills

taught". Therefore, it is impossible to ensure that all students receive more than one

GR session per week. Another participant stated "*Sometimes the number of groups can*

be overwhelming depending on the reading skills" and *"it can take some time to get*

the groups just right". A sample of the comments obtained from the focused interview

participants is presented in Table 12.

Table 12

Theme #2 Implementing GR can be Challenging; Subtheme #1: GR Enactment

Participant	Verbatim Participant Responses
#1	*"Only teacher in class, it is harder to manage disruptive behaviors in class"*
#2	*"Amount of prep time, looking for resources and books to support and the reading skills takes a long time and then finding the time to do whole group instruction and making up centers regularly to target other literacy skills"*
#6	*"Classroom support...having an (educational assistant) helps the program be more successful as they can manage the students who are not in your GR group or review some of the concepts with the GR students later. Time...especially in the younger grades, having more 'Literacy Minutes' would give you more time to include GR more frequently as part of the Literacy instruction. Class size…"*

In summary, during the current study, participants overwhelmingly cited a

variety of enactment "likes" and "dislikes", with a significant majority focusing on the

dislikes. Focused interview participants cited some enactment "likes" that included a

school-wide approach and having classroom and administrative support. However, a

majority of focused interview participants (*n=5*) also cited enactment "dislikes" to be

the number of students in the class, classroom dynamics, and that the GR approach

does not cover all components of a comprehensive language and literacy program.

Overall, the enactment "dislikes" outweighed the enactment likes.

Challenges with Classroom Implementation

Within the second subtheme of challenges in classroom implementation, there

were five "quirks" identified: rest of the class (non-GR students or rather, students <u>not</u>

in the GR group with the teacher), classroom management, student time management,

teacher time management, and grouping for GR. All of the focused interview

participants (*n*=6) perceived that the initiation of the GR approach can be difficult

with significant challenges. Although this section seems to overlap with the enactment

likes and dislikes, there is a differentiation that was identified amongst the current

study participants in that enactment likes and dislikes implies a subjective and

emotional response to GR enactment in the classroom. In contrast, a *challenge* with

the GR approach suggests a difficulty (but not necessarily a dislike), of some

particular aspect of the GR approach. This differentiation was identified through the

responses obtained from the focused interviews. In other words, focused interview

participants emphasized the fact that the enactment "challenges" are based on

objective criteria relating to actual management of the class with respect to the GR

approach.

Two of the challenges identified include student and teacher time management.

Some of the perceived limitations of GR include insufficient time to work with small

GR groups (especially for ELL), difficulty accommodating the time required for GR,

challenges with classroom implementation, complications facilitating student self-

direction, disruption to other students, insufficient quantity and variety of independent work to maintain student interest, and inadequacy of methods to address problematic behaviours. For example, one focused interview participant noted that *"students need to be taught the expectations during GR..Getting it all started up can be a bit of a challenge"*, while another noted *"it takes time, constant reminders of expectations and rigid structure to set up"*.

In the current study, the focused interview participants perceive that it is challenging and time-consuming to find resources that match the level of the students in the GR groups. This perception was impacted by the amount of experience the focused interview participants have had with the GR approach. For example, those participants (*n*=3) with a significant amount of experience reported that they had developed an extensive bank of resources that could be used with their GR groups. On the other, several participants (*n*=3) reported that they had to spend significant amounts of time working on the development of resources for their GR activities. For example, one participant stated *"having resources that target these behaviors along with the books for each group would be beneficial. This way, I am not scrabbling to find lessons and books"*, while another participant stated that *"it is a lot for the teacher to accomplish and quite stressful and energy-draining"*. Finally, another participant stated the following: *"when you compare the benefits of GR to the negatives of the time spent not in GR, I question whether it is worth it"*.

Another challenge with GR implementation cited by participants in the current study was maintaining balance in the GR groupings, including the size of the groups and the literacy levels of students within the groups and ensuring that all learners in

the particular group are working at the same instructional level. Balancing the needs of students in the GR groups as well as the rest of the class can also be a challenge. One focused interview participant noted that running a GR group in the classroom can be difficult due to the various interruptions that occur from the non-GR students in the classroom: *"it is challenging because I need to ensure that my GR groups are not interrupted while at the same time my class is also staying on task".* Another focused interview participant cited concerns about the amount of wasted time for the non-GR students: *"I think there is a lot of wasted time for those not actively in GR".*

Another area in which study participants cited challenges with implementation of the GR approach was with regard to classroom management. All six focused interview participants (*n=6*) commented that there are challenges with implementation of GR in the classroom. Seven of the survey participants (53.8%) "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement that classroom management for non-GR students is too difficult while four participants (31.8%) did not think that classroom management for non-GR students is too difficult. These findings were supported by the focused interviews. For example, one focused interview participant noted the classroom management problems to include "*interruptions, only one educator in the classroom, a wide range of reading and writing levels, student behaviour distractions, start of year set up difficulties, and time constraints".* Another focused interview participant noted that a challenge related to *"classroom management for the students not actively engaged in GR".* Strategies recommended for this challenge included the following: *"ignoring muscles, quiet voices, data informed practices, teaching sprints, collaborative response model, just right books, and anchor charts".* Overall,

participants perceived that a wide variety of strategies is required in order to be able to enact GR effectively in the classroom.

Participants spoke about the amount of wasted time among students who are not part of the GR groups. Additionally, participants commented that the less experienced a teacher is with respect to GR, the more challenging it is to be able implement the GR approach in the classroom. Similarly, at the beginning of the year, it was reported that it is more difficult to get students on-board with what is expected of them in relation to the GR process. Perceptions noted by the participants included: *"The challenge that I find is that I need to take a few weeks running through the centers that each group will be doing, so that they have an understanding of the expectations at each centre".*

In summary, the overall perception of participants in the current study was that there are challenges, in addition to dislikes, with implementing the GR approach in their classrooms. In general, the challenges and dislikes associated with enacting GR in the classroom far outweigh the positive aspects of enacting GR in the classroom. Challenges identified tended to fall into the following areas: classroom management, student time management, teacher time management, and grouping for GR.

Planning Process

Within the subtheme of planning process, there were four "quirks" identified: planning for learning, strategies for GR, skills for GR, and materials to teach GR. The overall perception of participants with respect to the GR planning process was that it takes a significant amount of time to plan and prepare the GR lessons for learning. In the current study, 38.5% of survey participants perceived that GR takes too much out-

of-class preparation time while the same number perceived that it did not, while 67%

of focused interview participants reported the perception that GR takes too much out-

of-class preparation time. These perceptions were reflected in the present study in

focused interview comments such as the following: *"It takes a long time to prepare*

and do the reading assessment so I can put my students in their proper groups

according to their reading level", while still another stated that: *"it takes a lot of time*

to gather materials, plan and record after the fact then to also reread what was

recorded from the last session". One participant even noted that the GR planning

process is the most time consuming aspect of the GR process, as illustrated by the

following quote: *"planning for GR in the classroom is important and perhaps the*

longest".

With respect to planning for learning, focused interview participants noted that

it can take a significant amount of time to find the resources that match with the level

of the groups and their reading behaviours. For example, one focused interview

participant stated that GR *"takes a long time. By the time I find lessons and books to*

match for each reading behavior for the groups, this has taken up a couple hours of

my time to have things ready". In addition, there is teacher experience that needs to be

taken into consideration with respect to the planning component for the rest of the

class that is not engaged in the GR sessions. For example, experienced focused

interview participants expressed perceptions such as: "*I have planned and prepared a*

variety of tasks over the years for GR, resulting in a larger storage to pick from. As a

result, the planning time is less than when I first began with GR years ago". In

contrast, a participant with less experience reported the following: *"It takes too much time, I wish I had more prep time or time set aside in our workday to help with this".*

In regard to strategies for GR, a number of the participants commented that they had to employ a wide variety of strategies to ensure GR is successful. In the current study, focused interview participants noted the following:

"teachers need to gather data for each student. Data for reading and writing that will tell the teacher what level the student needs to begin at, what areas of focused instruction and what skills need to be practiced. From there the teacher creates small groupings, and researches resources to design the learning tasks. Finally, the teacher creates the tasks for the different stations".

Another participant explained that *"having a program with the end in mind/working backwards - from what you want to achieve with a group of students"* is the way to approach the GR process, while another participant described strategies for the GR process as follows: *"making connections, picture walk, summarizing, understanding the big idea or moral lesson, identifying text features, and sounding out words".* Another participant noted that: *"I believe that teaching/modeling strategies that focus on the area(s) that the student is struggling with either comprehension or decoding or both, optimizes the academically average students' success".*

The next "quirk" identified by the participants included skills the teachers require for the GR process. In terms of teacher skills, one participant noted that with experience comes increased skill with regard to the planning process and development of resources and materials for the GR approach. With respect to the number of years of experience, thirteen participants (*n*=13) reported a total of 39 years (*M* = 16.4 yrs;

SD = 9.5) of experience teaching using the GR approach. In particular, participants

noted the value of years of experience in regard to having had an opportunity to

develop a "bank" of materials that could be used for GR in addition to the resources

recommended by Fountas and Pinnell. For example, it was noted that: *"it has become*

manageable with my years of experience, at the onset of being a teacher I found

planning very challenging and taxing", while another participant noted the following:

"I have planned and prepared a variety of tasks over the years (for) GR, resulting in a

larger storage to pick from. As a result, the planning time is less than when I first

began with GR years ago" and *"the more experienced you get, the faster and easier*

planning becomes". Some of the resources that teachers can develop over the years of

experience include: *"teacher resources, multiple leveled books, mini white boards, U*

shaped table" and *"manipulatives, letter tiles"* and *"use of writing board supports*

students in building vocabulary through consistent practice". Overall, participants

perceive that it is important for teachers to have experience with GR so that they can

develop a bank of GR materials and resources, as well as modify and adapt their

teaching plan to meet the needs of the students.

       Other participants focused on the skills that the learners need to have with

respect to the GR approach. In the current study, one focused interview participant

noted that *"targeting on the reading skills rather than a level really works"*, while

another participant cited the learners' abilities to work independently and develop a

variety of skills, as illustrated in this comment: *"independent skills, focus skills,*

engagement skills, interpersonal skills, remembering, application, and analysis".

Overall, participants perceived that it is important to create opportunities that focus on

learning partnerships that engage the learner and work from the skill set that the

learner possesses.

In summary, there were four "quirks" identified in this category, including

planning for learning, strategies for GR, skills for GR, and materials to teach GR.

Inherent in all of these areas was the underlying theme of teacher experience, which

was perceived to be important for planning and learning and developing strategies,

skills, and resources for GR.

Summary Research Question #2

With regard to how teachers perceive how they enact GR in their classrooms,

the overall perception was that the challenges associated with implementing GR in the

classroom outweigh any benefits of the GR approach. Aspects of GR enactment that

are "likes" include the whole-school approach and instructional support, which were

perceived as being important to teacher motivation and enthusiasm. Furthermore, it

was noted that when there is a whole-school approach to GR, there is a perception that

there is more professional support available for GR. Aspects of GR enactment that fell

into the much larger "dislikes" group include issues around classroom management

(ensuring non-GR students are productively engaged), non-GR student time

management, teacher time management (planning and preparation), and how to

manage grouping for GR (ensuring that all students are at the same level). Other issues

pertained to the GR planning process and specifically include planning for learning,

strategies for teaching and enacting GR, teachers' and learners' skills for GR, and

materials to teach GR. Based on the responses of all of the participants in the current

study, it was evident that teacher experience plays an important role in the planning

process. Participants reported that the greater the number of years of experience, the easier it is to plan and prepare for the GR approach. Challenges that came through loud and clear are that GR requires a lot of out-of-class teacher planning time. When considered with all of the other subjects that teachers need to prepare for, the amount of time required to plan and prepare for GR may be unrealistic and unreasonable.

Research Question #3: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR?

This section addressed the overall perception of how teachers learned about GR. Contained within this section are responses to the survey questions from the survey and the responses from the focused interviews which relate to professional preparation for GR instruction. Within the third theme of "training and support for teachers could impact the way GR is implemented", there were two subthemes which included: training components and teaching resources.

Training Components

With regard to the first subtheme of training components, there were five "quirks" identified: learning about GR, training effectiveness, personal training initiatives, ongoing training, and ongoing research. In general, with regard to learning about GR, participants perceived that it is important for teachers to have formal training in the GR approach in order to be able to implement the program effectively and utilize the GR approach with fidelity and expertise. Based on the survey responses, 38.5% of participants perceived that they were adequately trained to implement GR, while 23.1% of participants feel that they were not adequately prepared for GR implementation. Only 15.4% of survey participants believed that

there is sufficient ongoing training for the GR approach, while 46.2% of participants

perceived that there is insufficient ongoing training for GR implementation and use

within the classrooms. A further 38.5% have no particular feelings one way or the

other with respect to ongoing training. Many participants noted that their learning

about GR had come from personal experience and personal initiatives outside of the

learning environment. In the current study, only 38.5% of participants (*n*=5) reported

having any formal training in the GR approach. Of those five participants, all five had

attended workshops and conferences, while only three (*n*=3) attended actual courses.

This is consistent with the findings of the focused interviews, where participants

reported limited training in GR. One half (50%) of the participants who responded to

the focused interviews reported not having received any formal training for the GR

approach, with most of them having self-taught themselves. For example, one

participant noted that: *"I wasn't really trained in GR, a consultant modeled it once at*

my school many years ago", while another noted *" I must admit, I have not had* (the

district) *focused training for GR in quite some time"*, and *"in regards to resources, in*

my 20 years of teaching, I have never been trained or given a teacher resource for

GR". Other focused interview participants cited the expectation that teachers would

find their professional training opportunities. For example, *"they expect us to find the*

GR (professional development) *session on our own during our own district wide*

(professional development)*"*.

   With regard to training effectiveness, focused interview participants generally

indicated that they had questions about the effectiveness of their training, leaving them

with questions about whether or not they were fully trained to implement GR, or if

there were better ways to approach GR implementation. For example, one participant noted: *"when I attended a GR* (professional development) *session, I was not fully trained to implement GR"*, while another stated that *"I know that things constantly change and often wonder if there is a better way of doing things".* Other participants cited issues with the number and types of training available for GR. For example, one participant noted that: *"I am not too happy with the lack of opportunities for teachers to be on the same page, use similar assessment tools, and support from the division".* Another participant noted that the focus of the school division has an impact on the number and type of training sessions available to the teachers, noting that they were *"not satisfied because it depends on the focus program of the school if we will have some* (professional development) *sessions".* Overall, participants in the current study perceived that it is important to have appropriate training opportunities for the GR approach in order to ensure that GR implementation is optimized. Absent formal training, participants questioned whether they were using GR to the best of their ability.

With respect to personal training initiatives and ongoing training, many participants in the current study indicated that they had learned about GR through personal training initiatives. Most participants also cited a need for ongoing training in the GR approach. For example, some participants noted the following: *"I have had 1 training about the GR and the rest of it is based on my own experience and support from colleagues.....I have to ask for help from my colleagues and our school's learning coach"*, while another noted that: *"I educated myself on the implementation of GR through research, reading and dialogues with colleagues".* Another participant

cited the value of computer access and computer literacy in the development of GR teaching skills: *"being in the digital age, I am able to fulfill my responsibility as an educator and find current trends and professional development for GR",* while another participant reported the perception that there is an expectation for teachers to find professional development opportunities in the respective areas of learning.

In specific regard to ongoing training, participants generally reported the perception that there was/is insufficient ongoing learning opportunities with respect to the GR approach. For example, one participant stated: *"I feel that there is not a lot of ongoing professional education with regards to GR. I think all educators would benefit from a refresher course at least once a year",* while another noted that: *"I feel that over the last few years, there has not been much of a focus on GR or discussions about it ….I think there are more resources out there and feel that more of these should be shared with the schools",* while another noted that it had been at least five years since there had been any ongoing training with respect to GR: *"As of now, we haven't had any* (professional development) *sessions in school for 5 years".* Still another participant noted that GR had been the district's focus a number of years ago, and hence, there had been ongoing training sessions. However, as the district's focus has waned with regard to GR, so too have the ongoing training opportunities. For example, one participant noted that:

> "*A couple of years ago that was the District and our school's focus so there was an abundance of* (professional development) *on it. I find now that the district and school's focus has changed to phonemic awareness that there is*

> *not that much GR training available …….I think new teachers should have*
>
> *more training and resources available".*

In general, participants in the current study perceived that there is a need for ongoing training in the GR approach in order to optimize scaffolding, group composition, approaches to GR, and resources for GR. Some participants also addressed the type of ongoing training, noting that it would be beneficial for teachers to observe GR sessions as part of their ongoing training: *"more hands- on instruction where we can actually see teachers doing GR sessions with students - rather than just talk about it in person or over a TEAMS[1] call",* while another participant was particularly specific with regard to the ongoing training needs relating to GR:

> *I believe there is a need for more time given to teachers to collectively attend*
>
> *and develop GR at a grade level….. collaboration time, videos, time to read,*
>
> *watch and explore, what does GR look like from beginning to end, different*
>
> *parts of GR, what* (knowledge learning outcomes) *does GR cover, and*
>
> *assessment of GR*

However, in spite of the fact that participants perceived that there is insufficient ongoing training for GR, most of the participants in the current study reported perceiving that they do not feel that they require any further training in the GR approach.

Other participants expressed the view that there are likely other resources available for GR that should be shared and which other teachers would benefit from having access to. For example, one participant stated: *"I think there are more*

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[1] TEAMS - Microsoft® online virtual business communication platform meeting software.

resources out there and feel that more of these should be shared with the schools……….. I feel that over the last few years, there has not been much of a focus on GR or discussions about it…......I would like more support in how to address the really low students, and the reading behaviors of the students". One other aspect that was addressed by participants in the current study was the need for ongoing education with respect to ELL students.

In regard to ongoing research, participants expressed the perceptions that ongoing research is necessary to ensure that the GR approach remains effective and that the approach to GR is optimal. For example, one participant noted: *"I feel that ongoing research is the only way to ensure that the GR approach is still working. Also new implementation on ways to do GR helps to keep the method current and beneficial".* Other participants expressed the view that it is important to continue research into GR in order to help optimize ways to implement GR and manage the rest of the class at the same time. For example, one participant expressed the sentiment that it *"is significant to support the implementation of GR because it will help teachers determine a better way to manage the class, better support the ELLS, provide better running records, and improve formative feedback",* while another stated the following:

> *I know that things constantly change and often wonder if there is a better way of doing things. ………I am curious to see if students that received regular and daily GR instruction really improved in their reading abilities. I think that this research would tell us whether GR is working or not*

Finally, one participant expressed the perception that it is important to blend GR into current and traditional methods of teaching, and that this blending can only occur through the application of research. For example, the participant stated the following:

> *it is important to balance the old ways of teaching with new ways of teaching………Ongoing research and reflection is the only way to evolve. By doing so, a teacher is able to create many opportunities for students to succeed in the learning environment*

In summary, there were five "quirks" identified in this section, including learning about GR, training effectiveness, personal training initiatives, ongoing training, and ongoing research. The vast majority of participants did not receive formal training in the GR approach, and the vast majority of participants perceived that there is insufficient ongoing education with respect to GR. However, in the current study, a large number of participants reported having a significant amount of years of experience with the GR approach, which may have impacted their perceptions about whether more training is needed. Nevertheless, the majority of participants still agreed that there is insufficient ongoing training with respect to GR. In regard to ongoing research, most participants in the current study reported the perception that ongoing research is necessary in order to ensure that the GR approach continues to be effective. Furthermore, a number of participants expressed the view that it is important to ensure that GR continues to be a good approach to literacy instruction as opposed to other literacy approaches.

Teaching Resources

Within the subtheme of teaching resources, there were three "quirks" identified: other literacy approaches, resources, and division focus. In the current study and with regard to the other literacy approaches, participants perceive that a combination of approaches is the most beneficial and effective approach to literacy education. For example, one participant stated succinctly that a *"combination of approaches is more beneficial"*, while others expressed the view that they wished they had access to other literacy instructional approaches. One participant stated that: *"I wish as a teacher, I had training and access to the 'Empowering Reading' program, which is extremely effective for struggling readers",* while others expressed the view that students from a special population, such as ELL students. may require a more targeted approach. For example, one participant noted *"sometimes I feel that* (ELL) *students require a more in-depth approach - such as one-on-one instruction".* This perception may be impacted by the fact that there are a wide variety of reading and literacy instructional approaches, and that teachers want to maximize the effectiveness of any approach they use in the classroom, in order to optimize reading and literacy outcomes. This may also reflect the view that there needs to be a way to balance the other components of reading and literacy to complement GR so that all aspects of literacy instruction are addressed. This may mean pairing the GR approach with other approaches in order to obtain the best possible outcome. For example, one participant stated the following:

> *It is important to balance the old ways of teaching with new ways of teaching………Ongoing research and reflection is the only way to evolve. By*

> *doing so, a teacher is able to create many opportunities for students to succeed*
>
> *in the learning environment*

Overall, participants in the current study cited a need for balancing GR with other literacy approaches in order to maximize the reading and literacy outcomes.

All six focused interview participants (*n=6*) expressed the view that having structured resources would be beneficial. Some participants also expressed the opinion that it would also be beneficial if colleagues and those who have experience with GR would share their resources to alleviate the amount of time required to gather and prepare resources for a given classroom. For example, the following comment reflects the perception of the participants: *"There should be more resources for reading behaviours".* In regard to resources, participants in general expressed the belief that there are more resources out there that could/should be made available to teachers for the GR process. This is a different concept than the teachers having to develop resources or having to find resources for their classrooms. Instead, this speaks to the knowledge that there *are already* resources not readily available out there that could be used in the GR approach in their classrooms. In particular, participants cited the perception that there are resources out there that are simply not being shared with and/or provided to them for the GR instruction they are using in classrooms. For example, one participant noted the following: *"I think there are more resources out there and feel that more of these should be shared with the schools……..There should be more resources for reading behaviors",* while another participant commented that literacy programs with a bank of resources eases the frustration and time constraints imposed on teachers: *"resources make it 100% easier. It is nice to follow a particular*

program". Still other participants expressed frustration with the lack of resources available for GR, leading to somewhat unpredictable results. For example, one participant noted the following:

> *I feel the written resources I have used have been informative for the program although there is not just one particular resource that has included everything that works for me…....I have developed my own program that I use in the classroom that is effective….I used a variety of resources to put something together that works for me*

Based on the perception of the participants, having access to numerous resources and/or varying GR resources would reduce the amount of out-of-class time teachers must spend searching for resources.

The last area identified was that of division focus. Some participants expressed the view that the division focus seemed to be on parts of the GR process, without fully embracing the approach. For example, one participant stated that the *"focus of our division seems to have been on aspects that are a part of GR",* while another participant noted that *"as of now, we haven't had any* (professional development) *sessions in school for 5 years"* even though teachers in the district were encouraged to use the GR approach. Still another participant noted the following: *"I feel that over the last few years, there has not been much of a focus on GR or discussions about it, so I don't see very many* (professional development opportunities) *if any at all about GR".*

Overall, this section addressed the subtheme of teaching resources. There were three "quirks" identified with this subtheme: literacy approaches, resources, and division focus. With respect to literacy approaches, participants in this study generally

expressed the perception that they wanted to have the ability to balance the reading and literacy activities in their classrooms with a variety of different approaches. Specifically, they expressed the view that it is important to have access to different components of literacy that the GR approach fails to address. Hence, they need to have access to the different literacy approaches that allow them to tailor the GR approach to their specific classroom and specific learner needs. In regard to resources, the overall perception of participants in the current study was that resources for GR are currently lacking, and that there may be other resources available that they are not aware of or which are not being made available to them. Finally, the participants in the current study noted the importance of a whole-school or whole-division approach to reading and literacy, as this will impact the level of ongoing training provided and the availability of resources.

Summary Research Question #3

With regard to how teachers perceived how they learned about the GR approach; attitudes fell into two categories: training components and teaching resources. In specific regard to training components, participants identified the following factors: how they learned about GR, effectiveness of their training, need for ongoing training, and need for ongoing research. One aspect that participants heavily focused on was the fact that most of their learning about the GR approach and/or preparing resources came from personal training initiatives. In regard to the teaching resources, participants identified the following: the need for other literacy approaches to ensure a balanced literacy program, resources that are available for GR, and the division focus.

Chapter Five

This chapter discusses the results of the findings from the surveys and focused interviews used to examine Alberta teachers' perceptions. The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about the GR approach?

RQ2: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom?

RQ3: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR?

Analysis of survey activities and focused interviews detailed in Chapter 4 clearly indicated three emergent themes that ran throughout the participant responses. The three emergent themes from participant responses were as follows: (Theme #1) Teachers have mixed feelings about GR; (Theme #2) Implementing GR can be a challenging process; (Theme #3) Training and support for teachers could impact the way GR is implemented. There were three subthemes associated with Theme #1, three subthemes associated with Theme #2, and two subthemes associated with Theme #3. Overall, the perceptions relating to the GR approach were mostly negative, although participants did identify some positive aspects of GR.

This study was approached through the Mindset Theory advanced by Dweck (2012). Through this lens, it can be seen that the participants' perceptions of GR align with either the fixed or growth mindsets described by Dweck (2012). A discussion of how the Mindset Theory applies to this study is relevant because it has been identified that teacher enthusiasm is one of the most important components of a reading and

literacy program (Frenzel et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2021; Thommen et al., 2021). The GOC (2022) reported that 45% of Albertans scored below the 2013 OECD average literacy level, while Junker (2021) reported that Alberta students have suffered reductions in literacy and numeracy skills due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Alberta schools have adopted and/or encouraged teachers to use the GR approach in their classrooms, since GR has been shown to lead to improved outcomes in reading and literacy skills, including comprehension, critical thinking, problem solving, and questioning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2013; Marchard-Martella et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2013). Therefore it is important that Alberta teachers perceive and are enthusiastic about GR as an effective approach to reading and literacy, in order to help bridge the gaps evidenced in elementary literacy levels caused by the pandemic and to elevate Albertans literacy levels over the long-term. Moon and Young (2021) have noted that mindsets impact what people believe about themselves and others, and influence what they can become. Mindsets have been shown to make a difference in academics and Dweck (2012) asserts that mindsets can significantly alter people's willpower, beliefs, and their approach to work. Fixed and growth mindsets were evident among the participants in the current study, and hence, a discussion of mindsets and their impacts on participants' perceptions in this study is presented below.

Mindset Theory

Many factors influence reading and literacy and impact on students' acquisition of knowledge and skills. As noted previously, teacher enthusiasm is a critical component of the classroom dynamics. Iaquinta (2006) has stressed the need for balanced literacy programs that place as much importance on *how* teachers teach as

on *what* they are teaching, which speaks to teacher enthusiasm. Notwithstanding

Iaquinta's reasoned suggestion, it remains critical for teachers to ensure that they

utilize a balanced literacy approach, which also focuses on *what* they are teaching,

since the GR approach does not cover all aspects of literacy. Numerous authors have

indicated that enthusiasm is a critical component of the GR approach (Frenzel et al.,

2009; Liu et al., 2021; Thommen et al., 2021). Dweck (2012) highlighted the

relevance of mindsets with respect to challenges and/or challenging situations.

During the current study, teacher enthusiasm was reflected in many of the

comments solicited by the teacher surveys and the focused interviews. In addition,

these comments illustrated whether there were fixed or growth mindsets present. In

response to the survey question that asked participants how they feel about GR and

whether ongoing training was required, participants offered comments that clearly

illustrated fixed mindsets and a fixed approach to GR. For example, one of the

participants stated the following: "*I have developed my own program that I use in the*

classroom that is effective. I used a variety of resources to put something together that

works for me" and with regard to ongoing training noted "*none needed for me at this*

point in my career however I think new teachers should have more training and

resources available". Another participant said "*At this time, I am not in the need of*

professional development regarding implementing GR in my classroom. With that

said, 20 years ago, it definitely would have been nice to have received professional

support in implementing the GR process". These responses suggest that the teachers

perceive that they already know enough about GR to not require any ongoing support,

with no thought given to the notion that continuing education might offer new

strategies to the GR approach or new materials to be used in the implementation process.

In contrast, there were other participants who demonstrated growth mindsets. For example, one participant stated the following: "*I am curious to see if students that received regular and daily GR instruction really improved in their reading abilities*". Another participant stated the following: "*Currently, I try to follow the basic procedures of GR instruction, but I use my professional experience and judgement to adjust the expectations of a pure, rigourous GR program*". Finally, a third participant stated: "*it is important to balance the old ways of teaching with new ways of teaching*". These comments suggest that the participants are both open and willing to try new approaches to GR in order to optimize the learning experience for their students, while also demonstrating a degree of enthusiasm for the GR approach.

As noted by Dweck (2012), individuals tend to have a mix of both fixed and growth mindsets. This is important from the perspective of teacher enthusiasm, since it suggests that individuals have the capacity to become enthusiastic about what they are teaching, which is ultimately desirable. However, according to Blad (2016) individuals have "triggers" which trigger them to exhibit either a fixed or growth mindset. The key is to identify the triggers that are not productive and associated with fixed mindsets and find a way to reduce or eliminate those triggers (Blad, 2016). Blad (2016) also noted that it is equally important to identify those triggers that are positive, productive, and associated with a growth mindset and find ways to utilize these triggers to keep teachers enthusiastic and/or motivate those who find their enthusiasm flagging. With respect to the current study, only five participants (*n=5*; 38.5%) reported having any

formal preparation for GR, while eight participants ($n=8$; 61.5%) reported having no formal training in GR. This suggests that both the participants with fixed and growth mindsets could benefit from ongoing professional development relating to GR, since professional development could introduce new strategies, approaches, and resources for GR instruction that could facilitate teacher enthusiasm and promote improved effectiveness in the classroom. Broemmel et al. (2021) and Worthen (2021) noted that teachers' perceptions with respect to their literacy-related instruction and their instructional practices changed over time with the internalization of beliefs and practices. The internalization of beliefs and practices can be impacted by factors such as participating in ongoing professional development, school-wide focus on a specific literacy approach, and so forth. This perception is consistent with that of Underwood (2010) and Varghese et al. (2016), who suggested that teachers with more professional development, support, and feedback may be more likely to have positive perceptions with regard to GR. The following sections address the responses to the questions that asked about the definition of GR and participants' perceptions about GR.

Definition of GR

According to Fountas and Pinnell (2022),

GR is a small-group instructional context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of systems of strategic actions for processing new texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. During GR, students in a small-group setting individually read a text that (the teacher) has selected at their instructional reading level. (The teacher) provides teaching across the lesson to support students in building the in-the-head networks of strategic actions for

processing increasingly challenging texts. Through GR, students learn how to

engage in every facet of the reading process and apply that literacy power to

all instructional contexts (para. 1).

Based on the survey results, the participants' perceptions of what GR is are

generally consistent with the definition given by Fountas and Pinnell (2022), which

specifically described GR as being composed of small groups. The definitions of GR

offered by the participants of the current study are compatible with the definitions

given by Hornsby (2000) and Young (2019). In general, teachers' perceived GR to be

small group work with content leveled according to the learners' abilities. Similarly,

participants' perceived the nature of the GR approach to also be generally consistent

with Fountas and Pinnell (2022). For example, participants tended to describe GR as

follows: "*targeted approach to teaching reading skills to students*". The definitions

provided by participants in the current study closely align with the descriptions given

by Fountas and Pinnell (2005, 2012, 2022), which noted that GR incorporates careful

text selection and strategic activities to develop proficient, independent reading and

literacy skills among students.

The function of the GR groups, as perceived by the participants, was also

consistent with the descriptions offered by Fountas and Pinnell (2022), which includes

a variety of literacy skills and continuous assessment of reading skills. For example,

participants offered comments such as "*it incorporates instruction that focuses on a*

variety of literacy skills", to describe the variety of literacy skills targeted by GR. With

respect to the continuous assessment of students, participants offered insights such as

"*I assess student reading progress more frequently than say one on one reading*". One

participant, however, offered a perception that is not part of the Fountas and Pinnell (2022) description of GR, noting that "*(GR) requires a strong home-school partnership as students must practice and review their learned reading strategies after the in-class sessions*". In consideration of the Fountas and Pinnell (2022) definition, it is interesting and notable that none of the participants identified anything about the children reading the whole text or that the children can read the text at their GR level (or an increasing level) on an individual basis. This is perhaps because the participants may not have given much thought to their definition of the GR approach, or perhaps because their own impression of GR is that the main components are small group instruction, targeted instruction, a variety of reading skills, and continuous assessment of reading improvement. The fact that the participants of the current study have a generally compatible definition of GR as contrasted against Fountas and Pinnell (2022), is important because it suggests that those who are utilizing GR in the classroom have a general understanding of how Fountas and Pinnell (2022) envisioned the GR approach to be. This speaks to the aspect of fidelity and whether or not the GR program is being implemented in the classrooms as it was intended by Fountas and Pinnell (1996; 2005; 2022).

However, the mention of the home-school partnership, as indicated by one participant, is an interesting diversion from the definition and description of GR as it was envisioned by Fountas and Pinnell (1996; 2022). The concept of a home-school partnership has never been a part of the Fountas and Pinnell (1996; 2022) definition, and therefore, it is interesting that it appeared in the results of the current study. However, it may have appeared in the findings because the participant believes that

the concepts taught in GR need to be reinforced in the home setting. This is generally consistent with the overall perception that reading and literacy concepts taught in the classroom should also be reinforced in the home setting (Gavidia-Payne, 2015). Gavidia-Payne et al. (2015) argued that parental involvement is essential to the academic success of their children. Mendoza (2016) postulated that strategies that enhance the home-to-school connection, including GR, visual aides, reader's theater, and modeling/oral reading fluency can help facilitate improved literacy skills. Hamlin and Flessa (2018) have also noted the importance and value of home-based parental involvement (including shared reading experiences and parental guidance/communication) with respect to influencing student outcomes. It is perhaps the general acceptance of the home-to-school connection that resulted in the participant mentioning the need for parental involvement and home influence as part of the GR strategy.

As noted previously, Ford and Opitz (2008b) identified 11 different variations of GR across its history. In spite of the variations, Ford & Opitz (2008a) concluded that there were eight commonalities amongst the different variations of GR. Although there are many variations on GR approaches, Ford and Opitz (2008a) suggested that groups can be compared as long as the teachers agree on the foundation and principles of GR (Ford & Opitz, 2008a). Since all of the participants agree on the foundation and principles of GR, their perceptions can be compared in spite of the one perception that there be a home-school connection.

Research Question #1: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about the GR approach?

This section presents a discussion of Research Question #1 and the theme and subthemes that were identified in this section. There was one theme and three subthemes identified with this Research Question. The theme identified is that "teachers have mixed feelings about the GR approach". The three subthemes identified were as follows: positive attributes of GR; negative attributes and challenges associated with GR; and GR for ELL students. Overall, this study demonstrated that the participants' general perception of the GR approach was negative due to the number and magnitude of challenges the approach presents. Although there were some positives identified with the GR approach, the negative perceptions far outweighed the positive perceptions.

Theme #1: Teachers Have Mixed Feelings About the GR Approach

Within the first theme, there were three subthemes identified: a) positive attributes of GR, b) negative attributes and challenges associated with GR, and c) GR for ELL students. Overall, the results of this study demonstrated that participants have mixed feelings about the GR approach. Though some participants expressed the view that GR is "*incredibly valuable*", the majority of participants expressed the view that the negative attributes of GR outweigh the benefits. For example, one participant stated, *"I feel like GR is an ideal that I fail to meet. I can guide students' reading, and I can manage the classroom, but I am not effective at doing both"*.

Among some of the participants, there is a perception that GR is not effective in the upper grade levels. This perception stands in contrast to the views of numerous

researchers, who consider GR to be effective in the upper grade levels (Bulunuz &
Koç, 2019; Brown, 2007; Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Hanke, 2014; Lyons &
Thompson, 2012). The difficulties and negative attributes of GR appear to be focused
around implementation struggles, including planning and preparation, classroom
management, and gathering of materials and resources. With regard to
implementation, participants perceive that while GR is beneficial, it is a struggle to
implement in the classroom, particularly when they must also manage the rest of the
class (with or without support). In keeping with Piercey (2009), teachers' reported that
their GR instruction is "affected by their perceptions of differences among students
and classes" (p. iv), which was a sentiment offered by the following participant, who
elaborated in great detail as to the implementation struggles, particularly with regard
to the diversity of students within the classroom:

> *"I was trained to guide up to 5 students at a time in a lesson. Given the huge
> range of diversity of my students, it is difficult to make uniform groups. Hence,
> I had some groups with 2-3 kids, some with 4-5 and as the groups had to be
> fluid (moving up/down book levels), it quickly became a logistics nightmare
> with a class of 28 students! Currently, I try to follow the basic procedures of
> GR instruction, but I use my professional experience and judgment to adjust
> the expectations of a pure, rigorous GR program".*

This perception was also described by Kempf (2018) and Rizzuto (2017), who noted
that teachers' perceptions about the value of GR may be affected by lack of ability to
adapt to the needs of a widely diverse classroom population and that "many teachers
expressed unrealistic and unmanageable expectations to meet the reading needs of all

the diversified students in the class" (Kempf, 2018, p. 127). One participant in the current study expressed the sentiment that they were not trained to implement GR alongside the remainder of the class, and as such they found GR very challenging, tedious, and time-consuming.

It was also noted by participants that GR is not for all children. The current study shows that students who have special learning needs may not necessarily benefit from the GR approach. These views are consistent with those of Hansen (2016), who noted that GR significantly increased reading comprehension levels in average readers, but not in struggling or accelerated level readers. Additionally, these views concur with Vaites (2019), who suggested that for the elementary grades, GR may not be the most effective approach to reading and literacy. Of particular note was the overall perception that GR should not be confused with a literacy intervention program, since it is intended to be a general approach to teaching reading and literacy.

Subtheme #1: Positive attributes of GR

The first subtheme identified was that of positive attributes of GR. The literature revealed that positive attributes associated with the GR approach are as follows: a) improved implementation and facilitation of GR instruction in the preschool and primary grade levels (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Hanke, 2014); b) improved student progress due to small group instruction and differentiation; c) strategies to assist students' reading progression; d) focus on student weaknesses and one-on-one instruction; e) improved comprehension skills, fluency levels, and reading achievement scores; f) improved student thinking and learning skills, confidence, and motivation; g) increased active participation of students and

willingness to learn; h) improved student-teacher relationships; i) immediate feedback and correction; and j) the variety offered by GR activities (visuality, content, and variety of activities) (Bulunuz & Koç, 2019; Ferguson & Wilson, 2009, Lyons & Thompson, 2012). The vast majority of participants perceived that GR is a valuable part of a balanced literacy approach, although it is not the *best* approach to literacy instruction.

Positive attributes of GR expressed by the participants included ease of assessment, improved reading among learners, improved skills and interactions between teacher and students, grouping of students, and the ability to provide continuous assessment of learner skills, in keeping with the attributes cited by Fountas and Pinnell (2022). For example, one participant stated that "*you can assist and assess more students in a shorter amount of time".* Other participants reported positive perceptions with respect to the interaction between teacher and student during the learning process, in keeping with Bulunuz and Koç (2019), Ferguson and Wilson (2009), and Lyons and Thompson (2012), noting "*I like the part when we make connections to students reading before, during and after the reading*" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2022). Participants also reported positive perceptions about GR with regard to the ability to group students according to their skill levels, which allows for targeted instruction.This sentiment is consistent with Marchand-Martella et al. (2015), who noted that GR has been established as an effective intervention for poor readers in the early grades and that GR activities can be readily and easily adapted to provide support to students with learning and behavioral challenges who are at risk of failure.

Overall, participants also reported increased confidence in the level of skills on the part of both teachers and students, such as increased personal confidence in the ability to create and present a GR program and building a foundation of literacy teaching skills. These perceptions are consistent with other researchers in GR (Bulunuz & Koç, 2019; Brown, 2007; Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Hanke, 2014; Lyons & Thompson, 2012). Other participants expressed perceptions in keeping with Oostdam et al. (2015), who noted the effects of individualized and small-group GR interventions on reading skills, reading attitudes, and fluency among students who read aloud and are given guidance and feedback from teachers. Overall, participants in the current study reported perceptions about the positive attributes of GR that are in keeping with the benefits and advantages cited in the literature. For example, most participants perceived the benefits of GR to be the opportunity to work in small groups, the opportunity to perform continuous and ongoing assessments, the chance to provide targeted instruction to meet the needs of the learners, and increased engagement, learner confidence, improved literacy outcomes for learners, and increased reading fluency. Overall, participants in the current study identified some positive aspects of the GR approach. However, the perceived positive attributes of GR are few and far between. This suggests that GR may not be a practical approach to reading and literacy in the diverse classrooms of Alberta.

Subtheme #2: Negative Attributes and Challenges Associated with GR

The second subtheme identified in this category was negative attributes and challenges associated with the GR approach. The literature reveals that others perceive the GR approach as being problematic (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Fountas &

Pinnell, 2012; Hanke, 2014). Some of the perceived challenges and limitations of GR include a) preparation time (planning and designing interventions/activities, gathering materials); b) insufficient time to work with each small group (duration and frequency of GR sessions); c) difficulty accommodating the time required for GR; d) complications facilitating student self-direction; e) dissatisfaction with a particular GR reading program adopted by the school; f) beliefs that GR is inappropriate for their specific classroom; g) challenges with classroom interpretation and implementation; h) insufficient space; i) disruption to other students; j) difficulty adapting GR to accommodate absenteeism; k) insufficient quantity and variety of independent work to maintain student interest/attention at some levels; l) inadequacy of methods to address problematic behaviors; m) integrating past and present knowledge with predictions for future outcomes; and, n) decreased utility with the upper grade levels (Bulunuz & Koç, 2019; Brown, 2007; Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Hanke, 2014; Lyons & Thompson, 2012). In the current study, there were a significant number of negative attributes and challenges associated with the GR approach. Approximately one third of participants reported the perception that GR is not a valuable part of their reading instruction or even a successful reading strategy. For example, comments such as "*GR is not necessarily the way to assist students with reading - especially the struggling students*".

In the current study, classroom management was also a major consideration for most of the participants. The vast majority of responses and perceptions in the current study centred around either classroom management, classroom environment, and/or catering to learners who are not in the GR groups (ie. non-GR learners). In addition to

negative perceptions about the GR approach, teachers cited frustrations with the time constraints, consistent with those concerns raised by Reeves (2011). Reeves (2011) reported that 12% of kindergarten through grade six teachers had concerns about the time constraints associated with preparation for the GR approach and/or leaving the remainder of the class alone during GR instruction. Contrary to the findings of Reeves (2011), over half of the participants (53.9%) in the current study perceive that classroom management with GR is too difficult, while approximately one third (30.8%) perceive that it is not.

Piercey (2009) and Varghese et al. (2016) reported that teachers' ability and perceptions of self-efficacy with respect to managing and organizing GR activities during class time were affected by the continuous need to maintain balance between the GR and non-GR groups during the GR instructional period. Participants reported feeling stress associated with the GR approach, citing issues such as classroom management, front loading and preparation for the GR sessions, and finding resources that match the students' abilities. Brown (2007) concluded that teachers' perceptions about the GR approach and classroom implementation may be impacted by human behavior factors associated with classroom management. Participants in the present study also expressed feeling pressure to ensure that their students achieve specific academic literacy levels and that they are responsible for getting them to that level, in keeping with literature by Nahmias (2010).

Some participants noted that the GR approach fosters an attitude amongst non-GR students, who perceive that they have the freedom to engage in whatever activities they desire while the teacher is with the GR groups. In addition to classroom

management and classroom environment, a number of participants noted challenges with the GR groups themselves, specifically commenting on the amount of time they have to work on GR activities. For example, one participant stated *"the amount of time you can realistically spend in GR always feels too short to complete every aspect of a 'good' GR lesson".* Another participant cited challenges around grouping of the GR students, taking into consideration the size of the classrooms and the diversity of students within the class.

Approximately one third of participants perceived that GR requires too much out-of-class preparation time. Participants noted that teachers spend a significant amount of time searching for appropriate resources to meet the needs of the learners within the groups. This perception is consistent with findings of the literature review in which teachers commented that there were not sufficient resources for the range of students. For example, Lyons and Thompson (2012) noted that teachers frequently commented that the success of the GR approach was dependent upon access to the correct books and materials for GR implementation without the need for additional work outside of school.

In summary, the vast majority of participants in the current study identified negative perceptions and challenges associated with the GR approach. These concerns tended to centre around dislikes, frustrations, time constraints, non-GR students, the length of the GR lesson, the need for proper resources and preparation, complications facilitating student self-direction, the classroom environment, classroom management, and an insufficient quantity and variety of independent work to maintain student interest/attention at some levels. However, some negative aspects of the GR approach

cited in the literature were not identified in the current study. For example, factors such as beliefs that the GR approach is inappropriate for their specific classroom and challenges with classroom interpretation were not identified by the current participants in spite of these having been cited by Brown (2007), Bulunuz and Koç (2019), Ferguson and Wilson (2009, Hanke (2014), and Lyons and Thompson (2012). Remarkably, although this has been identified as an issue in the literature, no participants in the current study identified difficulties adapting the GR approach to accommodate absenteeism, even though this can be a significant issue when students are absent and then return to the classroom behind the rest of their group, which results in frequent regroupings. Overall, the negative attributes and challenges of the GR approach overshadowed any perceived benefits associated with GR. This supports the contention that GR is not an effective approach to reading and literacy in Alberta classrooms.

Subtheme #3: GR for ELL students

The third and final subtheme identified from the surveys and focused interview responses was that of GR for ELL students. Notably, a majority of participants perceived that the effectiveness of the GR approach for ELL students is dependent upon the literacy level of the learners. For example, one participant stated that the *"background knowledge the student has will depend on how well they can participate in the group"*. The findings of the current study are compatible with those of Gregory (2011), Kempf (2018), Pegram (2019), Rizzuto (2017), and Robinson (2019), who suggested that teachers' perceptions with respect to the efficacy of GR in diverse classrooms is primarily impacted by language barriers that exist between the teacher

and ELL students. In particular, teachers may perceive that they cannot provide an "optimal" literacy experience using the GR approach with ELL students because they are limited with respect to the connections they can make for the learners in their native language. In keeping with other researchers, participants in the current study appear to perceive difficulties with ELL students to be confined to language barriers between teachers and learners (Couch, 2010; Gregory, 2011; Kempf, 2018; Pegram, 2019; Rizzuto, 2017; Robinson, 2019). Additionally, participants noted that ELL students often enter the program with no English skills at all and as such, they require a more targeted approach to reading and literacy. Some researchers have postulated that GR programs are effective with ELL students, since GR targets the level that the students are at, regardless of whether they are ELL or non-ELL students (Rizzuto, 2017). This would be in keeping with the NLP (August & Shanahan, 2010) report and that of Genesee et al. (2005), who have suggested that literacy acquisition is similar for both ELL and non-ELL students. In this regard, it has been suggested that literacy instruction for non-English-speaking students should be: a) adjusted to meet their needs, b) comprehensive and multi-dimensional, c) differentiated, d) respectful of the home language, and e) develop oral proficiency

Participants in the current study in general agreed with Rizzuto (2017), and noted that regardless of the level of literacy that ELL students show, the GR approach operates at the level that the ELL student is at. However, other researchers note that ELL students may struggle with English as a second language, which can be problematic for the teacher, since the teacher may not be able to provide optimal prompting and scaffolding because of a lack of skill with the child's first language

(Desimone, 2009; Nieto, 2013; Sandvik et al., 2013). Nevertheless, studies have suggested that ELL students acquire literacy skills in much the same way as non-ELL students, although they tend to draw on all resources available to them and they incorporate translation skills into their literacy acquisition.

GR with for Learners with Disabilities. Participants noted the inability of the GR approach to target those learners with disabilities, such as learning disabilities. These perceptions are in contrast to researchers who assert that GR can accommodate a range of student needs, difficulties, and expertise levels and allows for language acquisition for all students, including ELL and disabilities students (Ascenzi - Moreno & Quiñones, 2020; Avalos et al., 2007; Couch, 2010; Dorn & Soffos, 2009; Kamps et al., 2007; Lesaux, 2012; Lyons & Thompson,2012; Pegram, 2019; Suits, 2003).

In summary, participants in the present study had both negative and positive perceptions of GR for the ELL population. In general, the perceptions identified in the present study were overwhelmingly negative with respect to ELL students. Furthermore, the perceptions of the GR approach were so negative that participants felt compelled to address GR for students with disabilities. Based on the current study, it can be concluded that the GR approach is not an effective approach for ELL or students with disabilities. Overall, the perceptions identified that GR is not flexible and adaptable enough to suit the needs of these students.

Summary Research Question #1

Overall, the main theme associated with Research Question #1 is that teachers have mixed feelings about the GR approach. Within this theme, there were three subthemes: positive attributes of GR; negative attributes and challenges associated

with GR; and GR for ELL students. In general, the negative attributes and challenges associated with the GR approach far outweigh any benefits perceived by the participants in this study. Moreover, participants in the current study perceived that the GR approach is not beneficial or as effective as it could be with ELL or students with disabilities. Given the size and diversity of Alberta classrooms, the GR approach does not appear to be a favorable approach to reading and literacy in the elementary grade levels.

Research Question #2: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom?

This section addresses the overall perception of GR enactment in Alberta classrooms and presents a discussion of Research Question #2 and the theme and subthemes that were identified in this section. There was one theme and three subthemes identified with this Research Question. The main theme identified with this section is that "implementing GR can be a challenging process". The three subthemes identified were as follows: GR enactment, challenges with implementation in the classroom, and the planning process.

Theme #2: Implementing GR Can be a Challenging Process

In general, implementing GR in Alberta classrooms encompassed three main areas: GR enactment, challenges with classroom implementation, and planning process. Overall, participants in the current study expressed the perception that there are considerable challenges with enacting GR in Alberta classrooms, including an overwhelming amount of time to plan and prepare for GR, as well as find resources for GR activities. Benefits including the whole-school approach and administrative

support were overshadowed by the amount and type of challenges identified by the participants, including classroom management, GR groupings, classroom dynamics, need to maintain balance among the GR groups and the rest of the classroom, student and teacher time management, teacher skills and experience, and student skills.

Subtheme #1: GR Enactment

The majority of participants in the current study perceive that they are enacting GR effectively and with fidelity within their classrooms. Gonzalez et al. (2020) reported that teachers perceive the need for professional preparation, technical support, and understanding of the GR program in order for teachers to implement GR with fidelity. In the current study, participants identified things that they like to have in order to ensure effective enactment of GR in the classroom. Specifically, having a whole-school approach to GR was cited as a significant benefit. The whole-school approach was noted by Blad (2016) as being a positive factor with regard to the mindset theory, with Blad (2016) indicating that "the larger culture of a school can influence mindset formation" of teachers and students. During the current study, it came to light that the whole school is not currently utilizing the GR approach to reading and literacy. As such, the culture of the school has changed, and the culture no longer fully endorses the GR approach. As per Blad (2016), "the larger culture of a school can influence mindset formation" of teachers and students. Similarly, Moon and Young (2021) have emphasized the importance of teachers having positive perceptions about the core literacy program for children in elementary grades. If the overall focus of the school is no longer dedicated to the GR approach, this may have an effect on teachers' commitment to the GR approach. This would in turn impact

their mindset and could potentially foster a closed mindset among the teachers. If there is a closed mindset towards the GR approach, this could also impact teachers' enthusiasm, thereby having consequences for student learning outcomes.

Administrative support has also been reported to be necessary for successful enactment of the GR approach in classrooms (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Lyons & Thompson, 2012). These perceptions are consistent with the participants in the current study, who noted that administrative support is helpful in ensuring that a program is successful. Both the whole-school approach and administrative support speak to continuity, whether there is a common language across the different grades amongst the teachers, and whether there is support from other teachers and administration for the GR approach. Nahmias (2010) has also addressed the importance of administrative support and infrastructure on the successful implementation and outcomes relating to GR, including institutional leadership, staff assistance for students needing instructional support, a school-wide focus on literacy, and teacher support.

Participants also included classroom dynamics (including size, diversity, support, etc.) as an important component of GR enactment. Piercey (2009) has argued that teachers' perceptions about GR and their self-efficacy with GR is impacted by their ability to manage and organize GR activities and the continuous need to maintain balance between the small groups during GR instruction. The perceptions of participants in the present study were consistent with the literature in this regard. For example, participants indicated that the lack of educational support in the classroom

makes it harder to manage disruptive behaviours, limit distractions, and organize

activities within the classroom.

Additionally, Brown (2007) and Piercey (2009) noted that classroom dynamics

(including student differences and classroom composition) can result in adaptations to

and deviations from GR practices in order to meet classroom demands, thereby

impacting upon teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of the GR approach. If

teachers believe that the dynamics of the class would not facilitate effective

implementation of GR, this could lead to a closed mindset perspective with regard to

GR. Moon and Young (2021) noted that teachers with positive attitudes are more

likely to have a growth mindset and a greater capacity for implementing and adapting

programs to meet the diverse learning needs of individual students. Therefore, it is

important for teachers to have a positive mindset with regard to planning for and

implementing the GR approach in Alberta classrooms. However, the negative

perceptions elicited from the participants in the current study suggest that it may not

be possible to achieve positive mindsets among teachers in Alberta classrooms with

respect to GR.

Participants further noted that classroom dynamics have a bearing on how they

perceive GR enactment in general. For example, participants commented on the size

of the classrooms as being a factor in being able to effectively enact GR activities. As

a result, some teachers may elect not to incorporate GR activities into their classroom

literacy program, and if they do, they may not do so with fidelity. In summary, during

the current study, participants cited a variety of challenges with enacting GR in the

classroom. Although a whole-school approach and administrative support are

considered beneficial, challenges including classroom dynamics are significant

detractors from the appeal of the GR approach.

Subtheme #2: Challenges with Classroom Implementation

This section addresses challenges with the GR approach, which suggests a

difficulty with some particular aspect(s) of the GR approach. Within this subtheme,

major challenges with classroom implementation included rest of the class, classroom

management, student time management, teacher time management, grouping for GR,

and GR for ELL students. Although this section seems to overlap with the preceding

subtheme, there is a differentiation that was identified between the preceding section

of enactment likes and dislikes and the current section of enactment *challenges.*

The first four challenges in this subtheme relate to challenges with maintaining

balance between the GR groups, the rest of the class, general classroom management,

and student time management. Some of the limitations of GR identified by the

literature, include insufficient time to work with small GR groups (especially for

ELL), difficulty accommodating the time required for GR, challenges with classroom

implementation, complications facilitating student self-direction, disruption to other

students, insufficient quantity and variety of independent work to maintain student

interest, and inadequacy of methods to address problematic behaviours (Bulunuz &

Koç, 2019; Brown, 2007; Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Hanke, 2014; Lyons &

Thompson, 2012). Similar perceived challenges with the GR approach were also

identified in the current study. For example, a large proportion of survey participants

perceived that they do not have enough support to implement GR in their classrooms

in the way that they want to. In the current study, the vast majority of participants also perceived that classroom management with GR is too difficult.

Another challenge with GR implementation cited in the literature is grouping for GR. These concerns relate to the size of the small groups and ensuring that all learners in the particular group are working at the same instructional level. Piercey (2009) has noted that there are five instructional component themes that are important to teachers' perceptions about effective implementation of the GR approach in the classroom, which includes knowledge and beliefs, grouping, management and organization, dialogue, and assessment. This held true for the current study, with participants citing challenges relating to the size of the groups and the literacy levels of students within the groups. Some participants cited the perception that the number of GR groups makes it untenable to work with all of the students on a daily basis, meaning that not all students get to work on literacy skills each day, which may impact the acquisition of skills. According to Moon and Young (2021), it is important for teachers to see the ongoing progress and achievement of their students in order to facilitate teacher enthusiasm. If the acquisition of skills is limited by the amount of time teachers have to provide GR group activities, then teachers may perceive that their students are not progressing optimally. As a result, this may foster a negative or closed mindset with respect to the GR approach. Furthermore, participants in the current study also cited the need to balance the literacy needs of students in the GR groups, noting that the size and diversity of Alberta classrooms is making it increasingly difficult to match the skill levels of students within the GR groups. This may be why the Science of Reading proponents do not favor the GR approach; the

amount of time students spend in GR groups versus the amount of time students spend outside of GR groups. Stated another way, the amount of time the teacher spends in GR activities with some students takes away from the time the teacher could be spending with all of the students on literacy tasks and activities.

Another factor noted by the participants was that running GR groups in the classroom can be difficult due to the significant number and variety of interruptions that occur from the non-GR students in the classroom. In the current study, participants cited the amount of wasted time for non-GR students, which impacts on the meaningful learning that these students can experience. Given that there is so much content to incorporate into daily classroom activities, the wasted time that is imposed on non-GR students by GR activities, may be a significant loss of educational opportunities. This is particularly concerning when there are so many different curriculum standards that students need to prepare for throughout the year. Once again, the burdensome nature of the GR approach may foster a closed mindset and lack of enthusiasm among teachers using this particular approach to reading and literacy.

A final challenge relating to this subtheme was enactment of GR with ELL students. Although 61.6% of survey participants reported that they believe the GR approach to be a successful approach for ELL and non-ELL students, focused interview participants expressed very negative perceptions about GR for ELL students. This perception was linked to the limitations on time that participants have with respect to working on literacy in the classroom. As classrooms in Alberta become larger and more diverse, study participants perceive that the GR approach may no

longer be applicable or practicable. Although the National Literacy Panel (NLP)

Report (August & Shanahan, 2010) and Genesee et al. (2005) have suggested that

effective approaches to literacy instruction for ELL students is similar to effective

instruction for non-English-speaking students, participants in the current study cited

specific challenges with ELL students relating to the teachers' lack of ability to

interact with students in their native language as a barrier to making connections

between the students' background experience and prior knowledge in comprehension

and learning. According to August et al. (2014), research has shown that some

adjustments to literacy instruction need to be made for ELL learners including: a)

strategic use of the first language (which teachers cannot do without having the

language of the learner); b) enhanced instructional delivery routines including small

groups (which is compromised by the size and diversity of Alberta classrooms); c)

adjustments for differences in knowledge (difficulties in grouping for GR); and d)

increased scaffolding needs (which was also cited as a challenge due to the language

barrier).

It has been suggested that literacy instruction for ELL students include

encouraging reading and writing, reading to children, tutoring and remediation,

instructional conversations, and other interventions (August et al., 2014). For example,

it has been suggested that literacy instruction for ELL students include: a) implicit and

explicit instruction in literacy components; b) development of academic language

during content area instruction; c) provision of visual and verbal supports to make core

content comprehensible (which is difficult given the lack of Fountas & Pinnell

resources in a variety of languages); d) encouragement of peer-assisted learning

opportunities (which is difficult in the diverse classrooms in Alberta); e) capitalization on students' home language, knowledge, and cultural assets (which participants in the current study emphasized as problematic); f) screening for language and literacy challenges and monitoring progress (which again relates back to the learners' background knowledge and the teachers' inability to access that knowledge in the learners' own language); and g) provision of small-group academic support in literacy and English language development (which was cited as particularly problematic given the diversity of the learners and the number of small groups that are required in Alberta's large classrooms).

In summary, the overall perception of participants in the current study is that there are significant challenges with implementing the GR approach in Alberta classrooms. Challenges identified tended to fall into the following areas: classroom management, student time management, grouping for GR, and GR for ELL students. Overall, the challenges identified in the current study are consistent with those reported in the literature. However, the burdensome nature of implementing the GR approach in large and diverse Alberta classrooms may explain the negative perceptions of participants in the current study with respect to the GR approach. This is particularly true of enacting GR with ELL students, since the diversity of students and the number of different languages being encountered in Alberta classrooms, combined with the increasing volume of students, suggests that the GR approach for ELL students is neither realistic or practicable. Taking into consideration the enactment struggles associated with the GR approach, it would seem that GR is not a viable approach for the current state of Alberta classrooms. If the GR approach is to be

utilized in Alberta classrooms, it would be beneficial to address these challenges, including the challenges associated with enacting GR with ELL students, since this may improve the overall perceptions relating to GR enactment in Alberta classrooms. With regard to teacher mindsets, it would also seem necessary to improve features relating to GR enactment in Alberta classrooms, in order to facilitate improved teacher enthusiasm, and specifically, improve teacher perceptions relating to the GR approach.

Subtheme #3: Planning Process

Within the subtheme of the planning process, there were a number of items identified including planning for learning, strategies for GR, skills for GR, and materials to teach GR. The overall perception of participants with respect to the GR planning process is that it takes a significant amount of time to plan and prepare the GR lessons for learning. In the current study, a large proportion of participants perceived that GR takes too much out-of-class preparation time, noting that the GR planning and preparation processes are the most time consuming aspects of the GR process. These perceptions are consistent with the literature, which reported that perceived limitations of GR include preparation time (planning interventions and activities, designing activities, and materials), especially for multicultural learners, (Bulunuz & Koç, 2019; Brown, 2007; Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Hanke, 2014; Lyons & Thompson, 2012). These perceptions were consistent with the present study, wherein a large proportion of the participants also cited the amount of out-of-class preparation time required for GR as a significant challenge. This could mean that teachers are using up a lot of their personal time in order to prepare for GR activities in their classrooms. Given that teachers also have other subjects and curricula to

implement in their classrooms, the amount of out-of-class preparation time required by GR may be too burdensome and may ultimately limit the amount of time teachers have to prepare for the other subjects and other components of a balanced literacy program. Classroom size and diversity, growing features of Alberta classrooms, would also act to increase the amount of out-of-class preparation time required for GR. These findings are similar to those of Toney (2017), who noted that teachers perceive that more time is needed for planning and implementation of the GR approach. In the current study, participants also perceived that the challenges and time-constraints imposed by the GR approach outweigh any benefits there may be to this literacy approach. Among other factors, finding resources that match the level of students in the GR groups can be especially challenging. Many participants complained that finding resources that are aligned with reading behaviours can take a significant amount of time, especially when there are many different reading behaviours to address. These concerns are consistent with those cited by Gibson (2009). It would appear that teachers have to find time outside of their regular schedules in order to plan and prepare for GR activities, which could lead to why the participants question whether the benefits of the GR approach are worth the challenges associated with enactment.

In addition to the amount of time spent in planning and preparation, a number of the participants commented that they had to ensure that they employ a wide variety of strategies to ensure that GR activities are successful. These comments are consistent with those of Worthen (2021), who concluded that teachers need to be able to refine their skills to best scaffold for instruction. Kempf (2018) also noted that teachers

influence student learning through a variety of factors, including teaching style, resources, activities, attitudes, and their level of knowledge regarding the diversification of instructional techniques. In the current study, participants noted the need to gather data for each student and then plan resources and activities that target each students' needs. In doing so, teachers need to ensure that they have a comprehensive grasp on each learner's abilities in order to ensure that they are planning activities to help students achieve maximal learning outcomes, which in turn can be very time-consuming.

Participants also cited the need for both teacher and learner skills: teacher skills with the GR approach and learner skills in terms of their reading and literacy abilities. With respect to teacher skills, participants noted that teachers with more experience with GR find the planning process less challenging, while those with less experience reported significantly more challenges. Those teachers with more experience also reported having a larger resource bank from which to choose as compared to those with less experience, who reported struggling to locate and gather appropriate resources for their GR groups. In particular, participants cited the need to find and develop resources beyond those provided and/or recommended by Fountas and Pinnell. These perceptions that experience is important to both the teaching process as well as the development of resources, are consistent with findings of Poluga (2007), who found that teachers with experience and who reflect on experiences with GR are better able to modify their teaching to meet the needs of each learner during the GR process. Overall, participants perceived that it is important for teachers to have

experience with GR so that they can develop a bank of GR materials and resources, as well as modify and adapt their teaching plan to meet the needs of the students.

Other participants focused on the skills that the learners need to have with respect to the GR approach. These perceptions are consistent with those of Wall (2014), who noted that if GR instruction is not having the desired effect on students' learning outcomes, teachers need to examine methods of instruction to determine where the problem lies and what instructional modifications/adaptations need to be made in order to ensure student success. Similarly, Hansen (2016) found that students need to be equal partners in learning in order to optimize outcomes from GR. Overall, participants perceived that it is important to create opportunities that focus on learning partnerships that engage the learner and work from the skill set that the learner possesses.

In summary, this section addressed four components necessary for the planning process, including planning for learning, strategies for GR, skills for GR, and materials to teach GR. Inherent in all of these areas was the underlying theme of teacher experience, which was perceived to be important for planning and learning and developing strategies, skills, and resources for GR. In keeping with Goldberg's (2008) observation that GR requires "very careful planning and effective instructional practices" (p. 13), teacher experience is critical to the ability to plan for GR and to develop resources and materials that can be utilized to optimize the learning environment and maximize learning strategies. Therefore, giving less experienced teachers the opportunity to collaborate and plan with more experienced teachers, may address some of the challenges with the planning process. This may help build teacher

confidence and facilitate sharing of resources. The other major underlying theme of

this section is that the GR approach requires too much out-of-class preparation time.

Given the demands on teacher time and the extensive curriculum expectations relating

to reading, literacy, numeracy, social studies, science, and so forth, the GR approach

may not be viable for Alberta classrooms.

Summary Research Question #2

With regard to how teachers perceive how they enact GR in their classrooms,

participants identified the whole-school approach and administrative support as

positive features of a successful reading and literacy program. However, the

participants in the current study overwhelmingly reported significant challenges with

enacting GR in Alberta classrooms, including issues around classroom management

(ensuring non-GR students are productively engaged), non-GR student time

management, teacher time management (planning and preparation), and how to

manage grouping for GR (ensuring that all students are at the same level). Other issues

pertained to the GR planning process and specifically include planning for learning,

strategies for teaching and enacting GR, teachers' skills for GR, and materials to teach

GR. Two aspects that were repeatedly echoed amongst the participants was the effect

of teacher experience and the amount of out-of-class teacher preparation time required

by the GR approach. In order for the GR approach to be effectively enacted in Alberta

classrooms, the challenges associated with implementing GR would need to be

considered. Since teacher enthusiasm can have positive effects on both teacher and

student achievement, it is critical that factors affecting teacher mindsets, including

negative perceptions about enacting the GR approach, be addressed.

Research Question #3: What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR?

This section addresses the overall perception of how teachers learned about GR. The theme identified for this section was "training and support for teachers could impact the way GR is implemented". Within the third theme of teachers' perceptions about training for GR instruction there were two subthemes, which included: training components, and teaching resources. It is important to consider how participants perceive their professional preparation for GR and whether they consider there is sufficient ongoing training for GR, particularly when one considers the mindset theory. According to Pegram (2019), teachers perceive that purposeful and relevant professional development is needed to prepare teachers to meet the reading and literacy needs of students in diverse classrooms. These findings are echoed by Broemmel et al. (2021) and Worthen (2021), who found that teachers perceived that their literacy-related instructional practices and factors that influenced their instructional choices changed over time with the internalization of beliefs and practices. Poluga (2007) and Skinner (2021) have also suggested that more knowledgeable and experienced teachers possess greater skill at dynamic assessment and scaffolding. Still other studies suggest that teachers' perceptions about their self-efficacy and/or the efficacy of GR interventions are impacted by the level of professional preparation that they have (Ford & Opitz, 2008a; Froniere, 2010; Lesley, 2009; Moats, 2017; Rowan Christensen, 2017; Worthen, 2021).

In the current study, approximately 23.1% of participants perceived themselves to be inadequately trained in the GR approach. This compares with the findings of

Toney (2017), who reported that 15% to 20% of teachers perceived themselves to be inadequately trained in GR instructional techniques. However, 38.5% of participants in this study perceived they were adequately trained, but this may reflect the number of participants who have obtained training independent of formal training or who have a significant amount of experience with GR. Notably however, when considering the question about whether participants perceive that there is sufficient ongoing training with regard to GR, almost half of the participants in the current study perceived that there is insufficient ongoing training for GR.

Subtheme #1: Training Components

With regard to the first subtheme of training components, there were five components identified: learning about GR, training effectiveness, personal training initiatives, ongoing training, and ongoing research. Some studies have suggested that teachers' perceptions about their self-efficacy and/or the efficacy of GR interventions are impacted by the teachers' learning about GR (Ford & Opitz, 2008a; Froniere, 2010; Lesley, 2009; Moats, 2017; Rowan Christensen, 2017; Worthen, 2021). Froniere (2010) found that teachers' perceived that formal professional development was necessary for teachers to have the knowledge and skills to appropriately and consistently balance the differentiation and instructional strategies required for GR. Many participants noted that their learning about GR had come from personal experience and personal initiatives outside of the learning environment. One of the biggest areas of concern in the current study was that participants did not perceive that they received adequate training in the GR approach. Most participants reported that they had to teach themselves or find ways to learn about GR independent of formal

training. In general, with regard to learning about GR, participants perceived that it is important for teachers to have formal training in the GR approach in order to be able to implement the program effectively and utilize the GR approach with fidelity and expertise.

With regard to training effectiveness, participants generally indicated that they had questions about the effectiveness of their training, leaving them with questions about whether or not they were fully trained to implement GR, or if there were better ways to approach GR implementation. This question was examined by Moats (2017), who looked at different approaches to reading instruction and concluded that the successful implementation of any reading program is dependent upon the teachers knowing enough about the program, the psychology behind the program, testing and measurement of student achievement, linguistics, and the instructional approach. Several participants cited issues with the number and types of training available for GR. Based on the participants' perceptions in the current study, it would appear that training for GR is based on the focus of the school or the division. Overall, participants in the current study perceived that it is important to have appropriate training opportunities for the GR approach in order to ensure that GR implementation is optimized. Absent formal training, participants questioned whether they were using GR to the best of their ability.

With respect to personal training initiatives and ongoing training, many participants in the current study indicated that they had learned about GR through personal training initiatives. Most participants also cited a need for ongoing training in the GR approach. Another participant cited the value of computer access and computer

literacy in the development of GR teaching skills: *"being in the digital age, I am able to fulfill my responsibility as an educator and find current trends and professional development for GR"*, while another participant reported the perception that there is an expectation for teachers to find professional development opportunities in the respective areas of learning.

In specific regard to ongoing training, participants generally reported the perception that there was/is insufficient ongoing learning opportunities with respect to the GR approach. However, while participants in the current study perceived that there are insufficient learning opportunities for GR, the vast majority of participants also stated that they did not feel that they personally needed any further training. Rather, they suggested that the training be provided for new teachers. This is incompatible with research by Reeves (2011), who concluded that teachers perceive that there is a continual need for additional professional development opportunities relating to advanced differentiation, group management, organization, and other GR techniques, in order to optimize GR implementation in the classroom. Ford and Opitz (2008a) also reported that teachers experience confusion about the purposes of GR, variability in grouping methods, group membership, over-reliance on narrative texts, inconsistent use of instructional texts, independent seat work, center usage, and continuous informal assessments. They concluded that there was an increased need for more professional development to attenuate the feelings of confusion reported by the teachers (Ford & Opitz, 2008a). Gonzalez et al. (2020) also reported that teachers need ongoing professional preparation in order to become more skilled in the differentiation process. Further, Pegram (2019) also noted that teachers believe that purposeful and

relevant professional development is needed in order to prepare teachers to meet the reading, literacy, and differentiation needs of students in diverse classrooms. The negative perceptions associated with ongoing training for the GR approach, as elicited from the participants in the current study, may be related to the negative perceptions about GR that the majority of participants expressed in this study. According to Moon and Young (2021), individuals with an open mindset are more likely to seek out ways to optimize the literacy approach in order to maximize student outcomes, including attending professional education opportunities. Similarly, Harrison (2016) demonstrated that favorable, positive views and growth mindsets lead to ongoing professional development and an enthusiastic approach to curricula.

Some participants also addressed the type of ongoing training, noting that it would be beneficial for teachers to observe GR sessions as part of their ongoing training. Other participants expressed the view that there are likely other resources available for GR that should be shared and which other teachers would benefit from having access to. One other aspect that was addressed by participants in the current study was the need for ongoing education with respect to ELL students. These findings are consistent with those of Couch (2010) and Freeman and Freeman (2004), who found that teachers expressed a need for ongoing training to address ELL communication styles and learning needs. Worthen (2021) also concluded that more focus is needed on professional development that supports the teachers' instructional planning process (including resources), scaffolding, and raising awareness to educators, administrators, and stakeholders on how GR can provide individualized support to students.

One additional aspect of teacher training that was noted in the literature was with regard to training teachers for work with ELL students. August et al. (2014) argues that literacy programs for ELL students require well-prepared teachers with programs that support teacher development and contain intensive, elaborate, and enduring teacher support systems (August et al., 2014). One aspect of the GR approach that was emphasized as challenging was that of the GR approach with ELL students. In particular, participants perceive that while GR is an effective and successful strategy for both ELL and non-ELL students, the large size and diverse nature of Alberta classrooms renders it difficult to provide the specific, targeted instruction needed by ELL learners. It was especially noted that the challenges with utilizing GR with ELL students relates back to the teachers' inability to make connections with the ELL learners' background knowledge in the learners' native language. Given the significant emphasis placed on immigration by the Canadian government, which has made Canada the number one destination for worldwide immigrants, participants in this study perceived that it is or will be either impossible or extremely difficult for teachers to use the GR approach with ELL students. This perception is compounded by the fact that Fountas and Pinnell have only developed literacy resources for GR in English and in Spanish, leaving teachers on their own to struggle with finding and preparing resources that are appropriate for ELL learners. In general, the findings of the current study are consistent with that of the literature with respect to the teachers' stated need for ongoing training and support for the GR approach for both ELL and non-ELL students.

One aspect of GR that was examined in the current study was with respect to teachers' perceptions about ongoing research in the GR approach. No studies could be found on this aspect of GR, however, participants in the current study were more than willing to offer their perceptions about ongoing research. In regard to ongoing research, participants expressed the perception that ongoing research is necessary to ensure that the GR approach remains effective and that the approach to GR is optimal. Other participants expressed the view that it is important to continue research into GR in order to help optimize ways to implement GR and manage the rest of the class at the same time.

In summary, the components identified in this section included learning about GR, training effectiveness, personal training initiatives, ongoing training, and ongoing research. The vast majority of participants did not receive formal training in the GR approach, and the vast majority of participants perceive that there is insufficient ongoing education with respect to GR. In the current study, a large number of participants reported having a significant amount of years of experience with the GR approach, which may have impacted their perceptions about whether more training is needed. However, the majority of participants still agreed that there is insufficient ongoing training with respect to GR. In regard to ongoing research, most participants in the current study reported the perception that ongoing research is necessary in order to ensure that the GR approach continues to be effective. Furthermore, a number of participants expressed the view that it is important to ensure that GR continues to be a good approach to literacy instruction as opposed to other literacy approaches. These findings are consistent with those of Skinner (2021), who reported that teachers

perceive professional development to be essential to the success of teachers with respect to implementing GR effectively. Teachers perceive professional development to support the effective implementation of GR and increase their self-efficacy, and that additional support is required to improve their ability to plan (Skinner, 2021).

Subtheme #2: Teaching Resources

Within the subtheme of teaching resources, there were three components identified: other literacy approaches, resources, and division focus. In the current study and with regard to the other literacy approaches, participants perceived that a combination of approaches is the most beneficial and effective approach to literacy education. Others expressed the view that students from a special population, such as ELL students, may require a more targeted approach. This perception may be impacted by the fact that there are a wide variety of reading and literacy instructional approaches, and that teachers want to maximize the effectiveness of any approach they use in the classroom, in order to optimize reading and literacy outcomes. This perception is consistent with that of Iaquinta (2006), who emphasized the need for "balanced literacy programs" to be used in the classrooms. This may also reflect the view that there needs to be a way to balance the other components of reading and literacy to complement GR so that all aspects of literacy instruction are addressed. This may mean pairing the GR approach with other approaches in order to obtain the best possible outcome. Overall, participants in the current study cited a need for balancing GR with other literacy approaches in order to maximize the reading and literacy outcomes.

In regard to resources, participants in general expressed the belief that there are more resources out there that could/should be made available to teachers for the GR process. This is a different concept than the teachers having to develop resources or having to find resources for their classrooms and instead speaks to the knowledge that there *are already* resources out there that could be used in the GR approach in their classrooms, but which are not readily available to them. In particular, participants cited the perception that there are resources out there that are simply not being shared with and/or provided to them for the GR instruction they are using in classrooms. Still other participants expressed frustration with the lack of resources available for GR, leading to somewhat unpredictable results. The perception among participants that they need to find or develop new resources in order to meet the needs of their learners should be of concern to those who have developed GR and who are proponents of the GR program, since the need to personally develop and design resources could lead to a movement away from fidelity with the GR approach. Specifically, teachers may draw from resources that are used in other literacy approaches, which participants may feel fills a gap in the GR approach, possibly leading to melding of more than one literacy approach. Based on the perception of the participants, having access to numerous resources and/or varying GR resources would reduce the amount of out-of-class time teachers must spend searching for resources.

The last area identified was that of division focus. Some participants expressed the view that the division focus seemed to be on parts of the GR process, without fully embracing the approach. The expressed concerns of the participants in the current study with respect to the division not seeming to fully embrace the GR approach,

while still having recommended it to teachers, is somewhat problematic, since the mindset theory notes that it is important to focus on a school-wide approach in order to ensure that all participants have a growth mindset. This speaks to the culture of the school and how well they have embraced a particular curriculum. As noted by Blad (2016), the culture of an institution can have significant influence on the mindset of those using the curriculum or reading and literacy approach. In other words, if it is a whole-school or whole-division approach, teachers are more likely to have a growth mindset and it is more likely that those with fixed mindsets will be able to alter their mindset. Since teacher enthusiasm is a critical component of reading and literacy instruction, it is important that all teachers are enthusiastic about the program they teach. However, as indicated by the participants in the current study, the fact that GR does not seem to be fully embraced by the division, appears to have impacted the enthusiasm with which the participants in this study view the GR approach. Another aspect of the division not seeming to still fully embrace the GR approach is that there has been a reduction in the professional development opportunities that go along with the GR approach. In any event, it is important for school districts to support the reading and literacy approaches chosen and/or utilized by their teachers by providing ongoing training with respect to those approaches that they have chosen for their students, since this will ensure that teachers are fully prepared and up-to-date with any changes or improvements in the approach that they are using.

Overall, this section addressed the subtheme of teaching resources. There were three components identified with this subtheme: literacy approaches, resources, and division focus. With respect to literacy approaches, participants in this study generally

expressed the perception that they wanted to have the ability to balance the reading and literacy activities in their classrooms with a variety of different approaches. Specifically, they expressed the view that it is important to have access to different components of literacy that the GR approach fails to address. Hence, they need to have access to the different literacy approaches that allow them to tailor the GR approach to their specific classroom and specific learner needs. In regard to resources, the overall perception of participants in the current study is that resources for GR are currently lacking, and that there may be other resources available that they are not aware of or which are not being made available to them. Finally, the participants in the current study noted the importance of a whole-school or whole-division approach to reading and literacy, as this will impact the level of ongoing training provided and the availability of resources.

Summary Research Question #3

With regard to how teachers perceive how they learned about the GR approach, attitudes fell into two categories: training components and teaching resources. In specific regard to training components, participants identified the following factors: how they learned about GR, effectiveness of their training, need for ongoing training, and need for ongoing research. One aspect that participants heavily focused on was the fact that most of their learning about the GR approach and/or preparing resources came from personal training initiatives. In regard to the teaching resources, participants identified the following: the need for other literacy approaches to ensure a balanced literacy program, resources that are available for GR, and the division focus.

Unexpected Results

There were two unexpected findings during the current study: a) that ongoing training for GR is not needed, and b) that ongoing research relating to GR is not needed. The finding that ongoing training with GR is not needed is important from a number of perspectives. First, this perception is particularly difficult to understand from a group of teachers, since one of the underlying philosophies is that learning is a lifelong endeavor. This is also difficult to reconcile with the overwhelming perceptions identified in the current study with regard to the challenges associated with utilizing GR for ELL and other students with disabilities, and the need for substantive development of GR resources. Since participants in the current study have expressed concerns and challenges with using GR to group, instruct, and assess ELL and students with disabilities students, one would expect that the same participants would be eager to see what new developments have occurred with respect to the GR approach in these groups. One would also expect that teachers would be enthusiastic with respect to discovering if there are more resources available for use with the GR approach. Finally, one would also expect that teachers would be open to learning whether there are better strategies for implementing the GR approach in diverse classrooms with large numbers of students. With regard to ongoing research, one would also expect that teachers would be enthusiastic about whether or not GR is the best approach for reading and literacy instruction and whether or not the GR approach is currently evidence-informed. However, some insight might be gleaned from one participants' comment that there needs to be "more teachers" and not more researchers, which suggests that perhaps classroom sizes in Alberta have become too

large to effectively utilize the GR approach. Another possible reason for the

suggestion that ongoing training is not needed might be found in the participants'

perceptions that the GR approach takes too much out-of-class preparation time.

With regard to the perception that ongoing research is not needed with respect

to the GR approach could be related to a lack of knowledge and experience with the

current state of research into the GR approach. This could be due to the fact that the

emphasis on using GR has waned within the division, thus leading to a paucity of

professional learning opportunities. In short, the lack of professional education

opportunities has impacted on the participants' perceptions about the state of research

into the GR approach. Logistically speaking, participants may simply feel that the GR

approach already has too much drain on personal time and that the division's lack of

focus on GR does not justify further professional development with the GR approach.

Alternatively, the new curriculum introduced in Alberta might be having a bearing on

teachers' interest in pursuing ongoing professional development with GR, although

specific comments to this effect were not elicited during the focused interviews.

Another concern might be that the investment of further personal time for the purposes

of ongoing training is either unmanageable or untenable for teachers. Again, the latter

speaks to the fact that perhaps the GR approach is not manageable for classrooms the

size of those encountered in Alberta. In summary, it is possible that teachers have lost

enthusiasm for the GR approach and hence, it appears that from the mindset

perspective, teachers have formed a fixed mindset with regard to the GR approach.

Hence, if teachers are to regain some enthusiasm for the GR approach, it is likely that

the division will need to invest further time and energy into providing the necessary

and appropriate professional learning opportunities required for teachers to develop an open mindset focused on optimizing the GR approach for the benefit of the students and to achieve maximum literacy outcomes.

One final unexpected finding with regard to the current study is that it was expected that the responses would be more positively skewed than negatively skewed. Although participants in the current had generally positive perceptions about GR, there was a significant amount of negative aspects and challenges with GR identified. This was unexpected because although it has been recommended by the division that teachers employ the GR approach, it was still a voluntary choice for teachers. Therefore, it was expected that the teachers who responded to the study would have chosen the GR approach because they, in some way, had a more positive perception about the GR strategy. Instead, the participants' perceptions were mixed, with a significant focus on negative aspects and challenges. This is discussed more fully in the following section.

Limitations of the Current Study

Some of the limitations of the current study are that the study utilizes a sample of convenience. Participants were asked to volunteer to participate in the study, with no potential participants excluded. The difficulty with a sample of convenience is that one does not obtain a random sample, and hence, there may be sampling biases inherent within the data. For example, only those participants who are a) interested in participating in studies and/or b) have something to say with regard to the GR approach, are likely to be the ones who have responded to the study. Another consideration is that participants or individuals who dislike or have a problem with

something will tend to participate in opportunities that allow them to express their concerns and negative viewpoints, while those who are happy with something will often tend to remain silent. Hence, samples of convenience can often achieve a more negatively biased outcome than samples that have been randomly chosen (Poon et al., 2004). While a number of theories regarding survey response behaviour have been proposed, one theory that might be a factor in the current study is exchange/reciprocity theory (Poon et al., 2004). This theory postulates that a person responds to a survey based on what they believe they can get out of it (Poon et al., 2004). In this regard, those responders who are unhappy with something may believe that by responding and complaining about something, this may result in a different outcome and/or changes (Poon et al., 2004; Shalice, 2020). Shalice (2020) also reported that one of the reasons that survey respondents participate in surveys is to voice opinions or because they believe that their opinion matters. In this regard, surveys may be viewed as an opportunity to raise complaints about a particular issue. Poon et al. (2004) reported that exchange/reciprocity bias is a significant factor in survey responses, with 19% of respondents reporting that they view surveys as an instrument to raise complaints and issues and indicate negative experiences while only 13% view surveys as a medium for denoting positive features. The first limitation with respect to the current study is that the exchange/reciprocity theory may have resulted in a greater proportion of participants with negative perceptions about the GR approach than would have been achieved with a random sample. The exchange/reciprocity theory may now provide an explanation for why the results in the present study were significantly more negatively skewed than expected.

The second limitation with regard to the current study is that the survey and focused interview process was limited to a single location from one urban school division. The reason for this approach was for ease of data gathering data from participants and due to time and availability constraints on the part of the primary researcher. However, the use of a single school for the study has implications for both internal and external validity. From an internal validity perspective, the survey and focused interviews appear to have achieved what they set out to achieve, which was to measure teachers' perceptions about the GR approach, how they enact GR in their classrooms, and how they learned about GR. Unfortunately, this study only considered a single school, and to be more specific, only part of a single school. On a micro-level scale, the findings of this study may not reflect the perceptions of all of the teachers in the chosen school, since not all teachers chose to participate. There were a total of 20 possible participants, but only 13 ($n = 13$) agreed to participate, for a response rate of 65%. Therefore, the findings of the current study may not reflect the opinions and perceptions of the other 35% of teachers within the chosen school. From an external validity perspective, and on a larger division-scale, this study only considered one school within the division and thus, there is no way to know whether the survey results accurately reflect the perceptions of the teachers throughout the school's entire division. On a broader (macro) scale, the results of the current study may also not reflect the perceptions of teachers throughout the Alberta Educational System. Beyond the Alberta Educational System, the study results may not reflect the perceptions of teachers outside of Alberta with regard to the GR approach. Hence, there are limitations to the generalizability of the current study.

The third limitation of the current study is that it will not be possible to prove that the things teachers say about the GR process reflect their opinion *only* and that these opinions are not contaminated by things that they have heard from others. Although the principal researcher took care to remind participants to report only their own perceptions rather than those of others, there is no way to know for certain whether or not participants' responses were contaminated by perceptions of others. A related limitation is that some of the participants were concerned, in spite of all the anonymity measures taken in the current study, that their opinions and comments might be heard by upper level management. To limit this possibility, the principal researcher specifically addressed confidentiality and anonymity in the survey mailout, as well as at the outset of the focused interview process. That said, it is possible that some participants may have held back on divulging their full perceptions out of fear that they might be "discovered" at a later date.

The fourth limitation pertains to the level of professional preparation that participants in the current study have had. Due to the small number of potential participants, no attempts were made to control for the level of experience and/or professional preparation that any of the participants may have had. However, to gain insight into the levels of professional preparation and experience with the GR approach, participants were asked to provide details about these factors at the outset of completing the surveys and participating in the focused interviews. As expected, those teachers with more experience and training with the GR approach indicated that they did not believe that they required ongoing training. Additionally and as expected, those with more professional preparation and experience reported being more adept at

preparing for GR sessions, as well as having more resources for implementation which they had prepared over the course of many years of GR experience. Also as expected, those participants with less professional preparation and experience with the GR approach, reported the perception that they needed more preparation, more ongoing professional education, and more help with gathering/preparing GR resource materials.

The fifth limitation with the current study is that it did not examine the actual effectiveness of the GR approach, and therefore, no quantitative analysis was possible. Consequently, the current study could only focus on teachers' perceptions about the GR process, the enactment of GR in their classrooms, and how they learned about GR. Since no quantitative analysis was undertaken in regard to reading and literacy outcomes, it is not possible to examine teachers' perceptions as they relate to the effectiveness of GR and student reading achievement levels. Since these analyses have not been undertaken, it is not possible to determine whether those participants who had a favorable view of GR have better student reading achievement outcome levels than those participants with a negative view of GR. Neither is it possible to determine if student achievement levels have any impact on teachers' perceptions about the GR approach.

The sixth is with regard to the level of instructional support provided to those teachers using the GR approach. In the current study, only four of the participants (n=4; 30.8%) had the benefit of in-class instructional support, while the vast majority (61.5%) had none. Therefore, it is possible that the participants with instructional support may have had a more positive perception of the GR approach as compared to

those without instructional support. This may also account for the significantly greater negative perception of the overall GR approach in the current study.

Other limitations that may have impacted the current study include the size of the classrooms, diversity of the class composition, and number of ELL students within each class. A number of participants commented on the mechanics of the GR approach with large, diverse classrooms, while other participants commented that the mix of ELL and non-ELL students in the classroom impacted upon how GR was enacted in their classrooms.

In summary, the current study had a number of limitations that may have impacted on teachers' perceptions of the GR approach, how they enact GR in their classrooms, and how they learned about GR. Limitations to the current study include the sample of convenience, limitations to internal and external validity, opinions of others, professional preparation, effectiveness of GR, Instructional support, size of the classroom, diversity of class composition, and number of ELL and non-ELL students. Where possible, the principal researcher attempted to reduce sources of internal and external bias, as well as ensuring the anonymity of responses.

Implications

The practical implications of the current study are significant. In general, the participants' perceptions of GR tended to be negative with lots of challenges. In particular, comments and perceptions solicited from the participants clearly identify concerns with the GR approach that focus around the following areas: a) diversity of students within the classrooms; b) size of the classrooms; c) lack of resources; and d) in-class support. Indeed, while there were some positive perceptions of GR, the

volume of negative perceptions elicited from the participants suggests that it is time for a comprehensive review of the GR approach introduced by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). The degree of negative perceptions provided by the participants is interesting because they had the voluntary choice to choose or dismiss the GR approach in their classrooms. That said, those who participated in the current study *did* voluntarily choose the GR approach and as such, a more positive perception of GR was expected.

Teacher Enthusiasm

As noted previously, one factor that has been proposed as a main attribute and fundamental component of successful teachers and students is teacher enthusiasm (Frenzel et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2021; Thommen et al., 2021). Lipp and Helfrich (2016) argue that for students to become strategic problem-solvers, teachers need to be efficient and enthusiastic about teaching reading and literacy skills. Further, Kunter and Holzberger (2014) state that enthusiasm focuses teacher attention on students and contributes to improved learner relationships and student outcomes. Therefore, it is critical that teachers are enthusiastic about the GR process used to facilitate reading and literacy skills in elementary level students (Frenzel et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2021; Thommen et al., 2021). The question arises then about whether or not the participants in the current study are or are not enthusiastic about the GR approach. In Alberta, many students pass through the elementary school system without mastering important reading and literacy concepts, with 45% of Albertans between the ages of 16 and 65 scoring below the OECD reported average literacy levels for 2013 (GOC, 2022). More recently, Junker (2021) reported that Alberta students in grades two and three have suffered reductions in literacy and numeracy skills as a result of the COVID-19

pandemic, leading to students in these grades being identified as an academically vulnerable population. This data concurs with a recent Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) (2022) survey, wherein 86% of teachers reported that students in their classrooms were struggling with learning and 84% of teachers reporting that students have "gaps" in their understanding of curriculum due to COVID-19. Therefore, in order to ensure that these gaps in literacy are addressed, it is critical to ensure that teachers are enthusiastic about the reading and literacy strategies that they utilize in class, since this will maximize and optimize any outcomes for students.

Professional Practice Implications

In regard to the implications for professional practice, the increased proportion of negative perceptions identified in the current study have implications for professional practice. At the school in which the study was conducted, it is important to note that the GR approach was recommended, but not enthusiastically promoted. In fact, the support for the GR approach has waned somewhat over the years, leading to a paucity of professional learning opportunities for teachers to familiarize themselves and upgrade their skills. It is therefore likely that the lack of focus on the GR approach, combined with the lack of professional opportunities and the adoption of a new curriculum, has led to an increased number of negative perceptions. In order to enhance teachers' perceptions about the GR approach in the school chosen for this study, some emphasis needs to be placed on GR at the administrative level. If there were professional opportunities provided, this would allow teachers to discuss likes and dislikes, share resources, and engage in problem-solving discussions that would enhance their enthusiasm for the GR approach. This would likely result, at best, in

increased teacher enthusiasm, and at worst, opportunities to address fixed mindsets that might be impacting teachers' perceptions and by extrapolation, their enthusiasm.

Diversity of Classrooms

One of the considerations that came through clearly from the participants' perceptions was that the GR approach does not necessarily address the needs of students in a diverse classroom. According to the International Organization for World Migration (IOW) (2020), the global estimate was that there were approximately 281 million (3.6% of immigrant population) international migrants around the world for 2020. In North America, there were approximately 58.7 million immigrants in 2020 (IOW, 2020). Specifically, 8.05 million (or 21.3% of Canada's population) people living in Canada were immigrants in 2020 (IOW, 2020). In 2018, Canada became the largest refugee destination with 28,000 immigrants for 2018, surpassing even the United States (IOW, 2020). Canada is currently ranked as the eighth most popular destination for international immigrants (IOW, 2020). Moreover, Canada has experienced the greatest change in their immigrant population over the past decade (2010 to 2020) (IOW, 2020). In addition to immigrants, in 2018, Canada was also been host to the greatest number of refugees and asylum seekers (190,000, which increased by 40,000 from 2017) in the world (IOW, 2020). According to the IOW (2020), Canada's immigrant population has predominantly come from the United Kingdom (608,000), followed by China (412,000), India (319,000), and Italy (315,000). Additional immigrant populations have come from other Asian countries such as Iran, India, Philippines, China, and the Caribbean. In Alberta, approximately 23% of the population are immigrants (Frew, 2022). In 2021 alone, there were

193,175 new immigrants to Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2022). Nearly one in three people in Calgary, Alberta were immigrants in 2021. In 2021, three out of five immigrants to Alberta came from Asia (Philippines ~ 25%; India ~ 16%) (Frew, 2022). Other countries in the top ten from which immigrants came to Alberta include: Nigeria, China, Syria, United States, Eritrea, Mexico, Pakistan, and Ethiopia (Frew, 2022). The statistics on immigration are consistent with the ATA (2022) survey, which found that 88% of school leaders and 86% of teachers reported an increase in the complexity and diversity of their classroom student populations.

Based on these statistics, it can be seen that the immigrant population of Alberta has significantly increased over the past decade, and that the diversity of countries from which they came, also increased significantly. Consequently, the diversity and changing face of Alberta classrooms has significantly changed, necessitating that teachers find ways to adapt the curriculum to accommodate non-English-speaking learners. When a review of the Fountas and Pinnell publications and resources are reviewed, it can be observed that such resources are only provided in English, with a limited amount of information provided for Spanish-speaking students and staff. This has resulted in a significant number of ELL learners for which the GR resources do not meet the needs. By extrapolation then, teachers are required to spend increasing amounts of time finding resources that will work with the diverse nature of their classrooms. In addition, the demands on teachers have increased with respect to linking resources to experiences in the learners native languages. This trend and the increased demands of non-English-speaking students was clearly verbalized by the study participants. Not surprisingly, it is clear that as immigration to North America

increases, the resources provided by Fountas and Pinnell are, and will be, increasingly

deficient for ELL students, thereby increasing demands on teachers.

Size of Classrooms

During the current study, teachers also expressed the perception that GR

challenges have increased due to increasing class sizes. According to a survey

conducted by the ATA (2022) with respect to increased stresses on Alberta teachers

since the COVID-19 pandemic, 73% of school leaders and 65% of teachers report

significant increases in class size, with nearly 40% of teachers reporting class sizes of

between 30 to 40 students (average in the mid-30's).

At the current time, the Government of Alberta (GOA) (2023) allocates 30% of

instructional time for English Language Arts in grades one and two, which translates

into 450 minutes per week. Similarly, GOA (2023) allocates 25% of instructional time

for English Language Arts in grades three to six, which translates into 375 minutes per

week. Fountas and Pinnell (1996, 2012) recommend that GR group sizes consist of ≤ 5

students. Based on the ATA (2022) class size reports of class sizes in the mid-30's

(approximately six groups of five students each, as per Fountas & Pinnell), the GOA

(2023) recommendations would only allow for a maximum of 22.5 groups per week,

for grades one and two. Each group would be able to be seen approximately three

times a week. However, the 450 minutes recommended by GOA (2023) is intended to

cover all aspects of English Language Arts and not just GR groups and content. In

short, the class sizes have become too large to effectively manage a balanced literacy

program for English Language Arts in accordance with the GOA (2023)

recommendations, if GR is to be incorporated as recommended.

If a balanced literacy approach is taken in Alberta classrooms, and all aspects of reading and literacy are incorporated in the classroom, there would be, hypothetically, only enough time to have one GR session per group (or per child), per week, using the GOA (2023) recommendations. Based on the current GOA (2023) recommendations, and given the ATA (2022) findings with respect to class sizes, regardless of any merits that teachers in the current study perceive the GR approach to have, it is evident that the GR approach cannot be accommodated as Fountas and Pinnell envisioned. Therefore, if the Fountas and Pinnell GR approach is to be effectively utilized with fidelity in Alberta classrooms, then the size of the classes and/or the approach to GR must be modified. The deficiency between the amount of time required to implement the GR approach, with fidelity, versus the amount of time available for English Language Arts components in Alberta classrooms, may account for the significant gap in student literacy abilities as reported by Junker (2021) and the OECD 2013 report (GOC, 2022).

Resources

Since its inception, the GR approach has undergone modifications and expansion to the resources available. For example, they have added an intervention system for grades K - 12 (known as the *Leveled Literacy Intervention [LLI]*); the BAS assessment system for kindergarten to grade eight; an assessment system in Spanish fot kindergarten to grade three (*Sistema de evaluacion de la lectura for grades K - 3*). Resources that have been added include books such as *The Fountas & Pinnell Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Systems* (2017, 2019, 2020); *The Reading Minilessons Books* for kindergarten to grade six (2017, 2019, 2020); *Spanish Reader's*

Notebooks (2019); *Reader's Notebooks - Sing a Song of Poetry* (2018, 2019); *The Literacy Quick Guide* (2018); *Words That Sing: Poetry Charts* for prekindergarten to grade two (2018); *The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum* (2017) (Spanish version was released in 2020 as *Continuo de la lectoescritura*) for prekindergarten to grade eight; *Continuo de la lectoescritura totalmente en espanol* for prekindergarten to grade eight (2020); *The Fountas & Pinnell Comprehensive Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Guide* (2017); *Guided Reading: Responsive Teaching Across the Grades* (2nd edition) (2017); *Fountas & Pinnell SELECT Collections*; *LLI Choice Libraries*; *Fountas & Pinnell Reading Record Apps - Genre Study: Teaching with Fiction and Nonfiction Books* (2012); *Genre Quick Guide, A Companion to Genre Study: Teaching with Fiction and Nonfiction Books* (2012); *Genre Prompting Guide for Fiction* (2012); *Genre Prompting Guide for Nonfiction, Poetry, and Test Taking* (2012); *Literacy Beginnings* (2011); *Prompting Guide, Part 1 for Oral Reading and Early Writing* (2008); *Prompting Guide, Part 2 for Comprehension: Thinking, Talking, Writing (2011)*; *When Readers Struggle: Teaching That Works* (2009); *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency: Thinking, Talking, and Writing About Reading* for kindergarten to grade eight (2006); *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children* (1996); *Guiding Readers and Writers: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy* (2001); *Interactive Writing: How Language & Literacy Come Together* for kindergarten to grade two (2000); *Word Matters: Teaching Phonics and Spelling in the Reading/Writing Classroom* (1998); and *Help America Read and Coordinator's Guide* (1997). In addition, Fountas and Pinnell offer several online

contacts that teachers can utilize to help them develop and sustain the GR approach in their classroom.

A review of the resources cited above indicates that the work done for ELL students is confined to the Spanish language. However, as noted earlier, the immigration to Canada and Alberta has been focused on immigration from the Asian countries, including the Philippines, India, Nigeria, China, Syria, Eritrea, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Mexico (Frew, 2022). Since only the small contingent of students immigrating to Canada/Alberta from Mexico can benefit from Fountas and Pinnell's Spanish-based resources, the resource expansion that has occurred in the GR field is of minimal use to Alberta classrooms. Although there has been a focus on expanding the balanced literacy components of the GR resource library, the change in classroom demographics and diversity render these resources to be of limited benefit. In order to accommodate the growing diversity of Alberta's classrooms, attention needs to be paid towards developing additional resources directed at the immigration-based growth occurring in Alberta classrooms.

Instructional Support

Another area that participants in the current study perceive to be a challenge with GR is the availability, or lack of availability of instructional support. Obviously, as the size and diversity of classes has increased in Alberta, the need for instructional support has also increased. Paradoxically however, the Government of Alberta has decreased funding to Alberta classrooms, and for instructional support in Alberta classrooms. Porter Robbins (2020) reported that reductions to Alberta Education funding amount to a reduction of $464 per student for the 2020-2021 school year. In

spite of a slight re-injection of funding, the GOA funding has decreased throughout

the pandemic and has not recovered (ATA, n.d.; Junker, 2021). These facts concur

with 57% of teachers' who report that the level of support for students with

"exceptionalities" has decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Absent an increase in

instructional support to offset the increased size and diversity of classes, effectively

implementing GR with fidelity does not appear to be a viable option.

Instructional Practices and Time Constraints

In regard to the instructional practices, findings of the study demonstrated that

there are a significant number of negative aspects and challenges with regard to using

the GR approach in the classroom. For example, participants in the current study

commented on time constraints and teacher planning/preparation time, what non-GR

students (ie. the rest of the classroom) are doing during the GR sessions, the length of

GR lessons, the need for proper resources and preparation for GR, the classroom

environment created by GR, classroom management, students with learning

challenges, prior knowledge of ELL students, lack of ability to communicate with

ELL students in their first language, teachers' skills for GR, need for ongoing training,

need for ongoing research, need for other literacy approaches to ensure a balanced

literacy program, and the division focus. Significant factors that were identified by

most of the participants in the current study was the size of the class and the diversity

of the students within the classroom. Overall, there was a sense that the class size and

diversity has become too large for effective implementation of the GR approach.

Given these perceptions, it is critical for school administration and the division to re-

evaluate the use of GR in the current circumstances of Alberta classrooms. It may be

necessary for the administration to consider combining the GR approach with other literacy approaches in order to ensure a balanced literacy program given the size and diversity of the classes. Alternatively, it may be necessary for administration and the division to re-evaluate the size and diversity of the classrooms themselves, with a view to reducing the overall number and diversity of students in each room. Another option might be to provide more instructional support to teachers to help negotiate some of the challenges associated with the GR approach.

Assuming that some of the negative aspects and challenges to the GR approach can be addressed, those who will benefit include teachers, students, parents, and society as a whole. One of the most important considerations is to close the gap that exists with respect to reading and literacy skills among elementary level students, since that gap cannot be overcome easily. According to Iaquinta (2006), those children in the early grades who demonstrate reading and literacy skill deficits will continue to have deficits if those deficiencies are not effectively addressed by grade four. Therefore, it is imperative that administration and the division do everything possible to maximize the effectiveness of reading and literacy strategies used in the classroom, including combining the GR approach with other literacy approaches, increasing teacher enthusiasm, providing increased instructional support, and so forth. Closing the "gap" will overcome some of the damage that has been acquired as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as overcoming the pre-existing gap identified by the GOC (2022) and Junker (2021).

Future Research Directions and Recommendations

The first and most obvious research direction is to replicate this study to determine if the teachers' perceptions identified in the present study can be replicated. More importantly, this research study needs to be replicated on a much larger scale with more teachers, more schools, and more divisions. This is necessary because wherever possible, statistics from the literature were utilized, which demonstrate marked differences from the findings of the current study. Secondly, although there have been other studies which have set out to examine teachers' perceptions relating to the GR approach, those studies ended up focusing on the mechanics of GR rather than addressing the *actual* perceptions of teachers. It is also necessary to replicate the study on a much larger scale in order to determine whether the attitudes and perceptions of teachers outside of the current school studied can be extrapolated to a wider population.

The second research direction needs to be in regard to ELL students. Although there has been some investigation of the GR approach with ELL students, there have been no studies that address teachers' perceptions with respect to this population. This is necessary because a clearer understanding of what the problems are with respect to GR implementation in this group of learners is needed, from which constructive recommendations for implementation can then be made. It is also necessary because of the increasingly great diversity of classrooms in Alberta. With increased efforts focused on immigration at the provincial and federal levels, the diversity of Alberta classrooms will continue to grow, causing increasing challenges for teachers and administration alike. Relating to the use of GR with ELL students is the use of GR

with other learners with diverse learning difficulties. At the time of the current study, there were no studies that had been done examining teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of GR with these unique populations.

In specific regard to ELL students, it is recommended that the provincial and federal governments take time to thoughtfully consider the impact of immigration policies on elementary classrooms. Given the diversity of learners in these classrooms, it would be advisable for these governments to consider how schools could best be served with translation services that target students from specific countries so that those students can work together on developing English language skills whilst having the benefit of teachers who can help them make the connections in their native languages. This may, however, not be realistic, given the need for translators to also be qualified teachers.

Another area that should be developed is in the area of resources for diverse populations, including ELL students. Currently, Fountas and Pinnell have only developed resources in English and Spanish. If the GR approach is to persist in Alberta, then there is a need to develop both written, computer, and virtual resources for ELL students to utilize in their educational journey. Furthermore, it is recommended that teachers also be provided with support and training in regard to any new resources that are designed for ELL and non-ELL students that can help address the diversity of students in large scale classrooms.

The third area that is significantly lacking and in need of research is more research in the area of teachers' perceptions regarding their preparation for teaching GR. Although the current study examined teachers' perceptions about their

professional preparation, this study did not look at what teachers believe is necessary with respect to preparation for implementing a GR program. Again, a very limited number of studies could be found but only one study looked at a three-day course relating to GR preparation. The three-day program was found to be ineffective, but beyond teachers saying "more training is necessary", no specific guidance was given as to what type of training or the duration of any training. Moreover, none of the studies that explored teachers' perceptions about their professional preparation for GR actually addressed how they feel about the specific professional preparation they received and whether that professional preparation matches with what is needed in order to successfully and effectively implement GR in the classrooms.

The fourth area that could be further developed is with regard to teachers' perceptions about GR, Science of Reading, and other reading and literacy approaches. In particular, it would be useful to see how teachers perceive the value and utility of the different approaches and how they compare to one another. This would be especially helpful in light of the importance of teacher enthusiasm and mindset theory: if teachers perceive one approach to have greater value over another approach, they may have greater enthusiasm as well, which would impact upon a variety of different student and teacher performance variables. It would likely also impact upon teachers' desire and motivation to follow through with professional development and research.

Conclusion

The current study examined teachers' perceptions with regard to the GR approach in elementary level education. Specifically, this study examined the following research questions: a) What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about the GR

approach? b) What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they enact GR in the classroom? and c) What are Alberta teachers' perceptions about how they learned about GR? This study utilized a mixed methods research approach to examine Alberta teachers' perceptions about GR in a single separate Alberta elementary school. Thirteen teachers (n=13) completed demographic and survey questions relating to the GR approach and the research questions noted above. A further six teachers (n=6) from grades one, three, and five participated in focused interviews to further elaborate and elucidate teachers' perceptions with regard to GR in the elementary grades. Findings of the study revealed that overall, teachers' perceptions towards the GR approach were generally negative, with some positive aspects. Challenges that were perceived by the participants in the current study include the following: a) increasing diversity of student populations; b) increasing size of classrooms; c) lack of resources; d) lack of instructional support; e) instructional practices and time constraints; f) ELL students and students with disabilities. Three main themes were identified that corresponded to the three research questions set out for the study. With respect to the first theme relating to teachers' have mixed perceptions about the GR approach, there were three subthemes identified: positive attributes of GR, negative attributes and challenges associated with GR, and GR for ELL students. With respect to the second theme, implementing GR can be a challenging process, there were three subthemes identified: GR enactment, challenges with implementation in classrooms, and the planning process. With respect to the third theme, training and support may impact the way GR is implemented, there were two subthemes: training components and teaching resources.

In summary, this is one of the first studies that has examined teachers' unique perceptions about the GR approach and the difficulties with implementation in Alberta classrooms. At the present time, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to gaps in the reading and literacy skills of Alberta elementary students. At the same time, Alberta classrooms are growing in size and diversity. The findings of the current study highlight difficulties and challenges with implementing the GR approach in large, diverse classrooms and with ELL students. Although these challenges are present, participants still had some level of confidence that GR can be effective with elementary students who are performing at an average academic level and who do not have disabilities. Participants also indicated that GR needs to be part of a balanced literacy approach to reading since GR does not address all of the components necessary for optimal student outcomes. Finally, participants perceived that there is insufficient training for the GR approach, and that there is insufficient ongoing professional development and insufficient ongoing research. If GR is going to continue to be used in Alberta classrooms, there is a need for adjustment of class sizes, more instructional support to address increased student diversity and class sizes, and increased development and access to instructional resources.

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Appendix A

Internal Review Board (IRB) Approval

University
of Portland

Memorandum

To: Janice Francis
From: Nick McRee, Ph.D.
Date: 7/28/2022
RE: IRB Notification of University of Portland Project #2022090

Dear Janice Francis:

On behalf of the University of Portland's federally registered Institutional Review Board (IRB00005544), a member of the Board has reviewed your research proposal, titled "Teachers' Perceptions of Guided Reading in Elementary Education." The IRB concludes that the project satisfies all IRB-related issues involving human subjects research under the "Exempt" classification. A printout of this memorandum should serve as written authorization from IRB to proceed with your research.

Projects classified as exempt based on Title 45, Part 46.104 of the Code of Federal Regulations do not require further review by University of Portland's Institutional Review Board unless you modify some portion of your project. If the study is modified, you must submit a Continued Review Form (located on the IRB website) for continuing review before continuing with your project.

Please note that you are required to abide by all requirements as outlined by the Institutional Review Board.

A copy of this memorandum, along with your Request for Review and its documentation, will be stored in the IRB Committee files for three years from the completion of your project, as mandated by federal law. If you have any questions, please contact me at irb@up.edu.

Respectfully,

Nick McRee, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Sociology

Appendix B

Request for Research Approval for the School Division/Board

(School Board research request forms are to be used for this)

Date: October 16, 2022

Researcher: Janice Francis

Email:

From:

Title of Research: Teachers' Perception of Guided Reading in Elementary Education

****

Janice Francis has permission to conduct the above-named research project in the .
_____ School Division. Please follow up with the principal _____ ool to ensure
that protocol is followed for the recruitment of teacher participation. The principal of
_____ School is aware of your approved research by the school division. It is the decision of
each teacher if they would like to consent to participate in the research.

Appendix C

Letter to District/School

Janice Francis M.Ed.
Email: francisj23@up.edu

September 21, 2022

Subject: Permission to conduct research for project work

Dear Mr. _____,

I would like to advise you that I have been approved to conduct a research study entitled ***Teachers' Perceptions of Guided Reading in Elementary Education.*** I am currently enrolled in the Department of Education, Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Portland, Oregon. I am conducting this research in partial fulfillment of my doctoral dissertation. I hope to recruit teachers from each grade to complete a brief online survey. One teacher from each grade will be asked to participate in a focused interview and allow me to observe them teaching one guided reading session. The research will be conducted entirely on my own personal time. Data that is collected will be on an anonymous basis and there will be no school identifiers attached. No student data will be utilized or accessed. The observational samples will not be recorded.

I kindly request that you allow me to proceed with this research in your school.

Respectfully,
Janice E. Francis, MEd
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Education,
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research,
University of Portland, OR

Appendix D

Script for Staff Meeting

Good Afternoon Teachers,

This fall I will be conducting a study entitled "Teachers' Perception of Guided Reading in Elementary Education" as partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining my doctorate degree at the University of Portland.

Data collection for the study will last approximately 12 weeks and will be in the form of
- A typical guided reading lesson plan
- A Guided reading online survey (40 questions)
- An Interview (approximately 30 minutes)
- An Observation of a Guided reading lesson (optional).

I will be sending out an invitation to your email today, which will contain a google reply form for you to express your interest in being part of this relevant study. Teachers may opt out of the observation component.

One thing to highlight is that the study aim is to solely examine perceptions as it relates to guided reading and will follow all ethical considerations of the University of Portland Internal Review Board (IRB) as well the School Division.

I would appreciate it if all teachers consider participating as this study will help us to better understand what decisions might need to be made in order to ensure a successful implementation of guided reading within our school, as well as other schools.

I now open the floor to any questions you might have. (I will take questions at this point)

If anyone wants to talk with me about the study in more detail or may have personal questions, then we can decide on a mutual time for further discussions.

Thank you.

Appendix E

Invitation to Participate in the Research Study for Participants

Email: francisj23@up.edu

October 7, 2022

Dear Colleague,

My name is Janice Francis. I am a doctoral student at the University of Portland, Department of Education, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, Portland, OR. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: ***Teachers' Perceptions of Guided Reading in Elementary Education.*** The purpose of the study is to determine teachers' perceptions about guided reading, how you enact guided reading in your classroom, and your professional preparation for guided reading. The study will involve completing basic demographic information, one online survey, a focused interview, and a single observation of your guided reading session. Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The data will be kept completely anonymous and you may choose to use a pseudonym. No other identifying information will be requested or required.

If you would like to participate in the study please complete the Google Reply form accompanying this letter. Your participation in the research will be of great importance to designing school curricula for reading and literacy in the elementary grades and for the development of professional education for guided reading.

Thank you for your time and participation

Sincerely,

Janice E. Francis, MEd
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Education,
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research,
University of Portland, OR

Appendix F: Google Participant Reply

I, _____ would like to participate in your study

entitled ***Teachers' Perceptions of Guided Reading in Elementary Education.***

By checking the box at the end of this sentence and submitting this Google Reply

form,

I attest I am at least 18 years old.

Name: _____

Email Contact: _____

Cell Phone:_____

Principle Researcher: **Janice Francis**

                                              email: francisj23@up.edu

Appendix G

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Janice Francis, as part of the UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND School of Education doctoral program. I hope to learn what teachers' feel about using Guided Reading (GR) in their classrooms, how they utilize GR in their classrooms, and how they learned about GR. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an elementary school teacher.

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether to participate. Please read it carefully and ask any questions you have before you agree to participate.

1. Teachers who agree to participate will be expected to be involved in the study for approximately 14 weeks from September to December 2022. Participants will be asked to complete the following:

   a. A 40-question GR survey form with 26 basic information questions about your teaching experience, experience with GR, use of GR in your classrooms, and educational preparation for GR. A further 16-questions asking about your perceptions of GR, how you use GR in your classroom, and your professional preparation for GR are included in the survey. The survey will be sent to your email and returned to the principle researcher online.

   b. Participants will also be asked to provide a sample GR lesson plan.

   c. In addition to the survey form and GR lesson plan described above, one teacher from every grade will be selected to participate in a focused interview, expected to last approximately 25-30 minutes and have a GR session observed by the principle researcher. Interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription and the principle researcher will keep notes of the session and your answers. No audio or video recordings will be made of the GR observation session.

2. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to participants. For those participants who are asked to participate in a GR observation session, the only risk to your students may be some discomfort from having an independent observer in the classroom. No student identifier information will be collected

or kept.

3. There is no cost to participate in this study.

4. There is no compensation for participating in this study

5. The benefits of participating in the study are that it will provide school administrators and curriculum designers with information about GR, how teachers' utilize and feel about using GR in their classrooms, and how they feel about their professional preparation for GR. The information gained from this research study will help inform the reading and literacy strategies used in elementary education. However I cannot personally guarantee that you will personally receive any benefit from this research study.

6. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Subject identities will be kept confidential by allowing participants to choose pseudonyms and by the researcher assigning a coded identifier to each participant's survey responses.

7. Participants will choose their own pseudonyms for data. Data electronically returned to the principle researcher will be immediately re-coded. Codification and participant information will not be kept together on the same computer or on any other electronic device. All electronic data will bear the participant code/pseudonym only. Specific identifying information and the connected code/pseudonym for each participant will be kept in a manually kept file that is held by the principle researcher and maintained in a locked filing cabinet. Only the principle researcher and study Chair will have access to the hard copy of participant information and codes. This information will not be kept together on any electronic device (ie. laptop, desk top, cell phone, etc.). All data will be kept on a password protected laptop that only the principle researcher and the Chair of the researchers' committee will have access to. Information will not be released to anyone and will only be utilized for the purposes of this study and possibly for the presentation of findings in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings. All information will be kept for a three-year period, in accordance with the Internal Review Board (IRB) protocols. Participants' information will not be distributed in any manner for future research studies. Any information collected for this study, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed in future research studies.

8. After the end of the study, pseudonyms and study identifiers will be removed and information will be re-coded so that each participant's demographic information, sample GR lesson plan, online survey, focused interview, and GR

observation session have the same coded number with no identifying information. No linked identifying information will be kept after the end of the study.

9. At the end of the data analysis period and completion of my Dissertation, the codes for the study will be destroyed in accordance with the University of Portland guidelines,

10. At the end of the three-year period, the actual data will be destroyed in accordance with University of Portland guidelines.

11. Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the school, the School Division, or Alberta Education.

12. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Data Breach

13. This study will use Qualtrics® survey software, therefore, there is a risk of data breach. There is also the risk of data breach by other harms (hacking, phishing, breach, lack of appropriate security measures, etc., as among those risks encountered in daily life).

14. However, the surveys you will be asked to complete will not have any personal identifiers attached and you will be asked to choose a pseudonym so that in the event of a data breach, the responses you have provided will not be personally identifiable.

15. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact the principle researcher at the contact location and information provided at the bottom of this form or through my faculty advisor, Deirdre Hon at email: hon@up.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB (IRB@up.edu). You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims.

I,_____, understand the implications of this research project

and **agree** to participate in this study. I also agree to being **interviewed and observed / Interviewed Only** (circle one).

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Principle Researcher:

Janice Francis

email: <u>francisj23@up.edu</u>

Appendix H

Guided Reading Survey Part A: Demographic Questions

Name:	1. Age:	2. Grade Taught This Year:

3. Highest level of academic achievement in education? (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD)

4. How long have you been a licensed teacher?

5. What grades have you taught?

6. How long have you been a member of the instructional staff at this school?

7. What grades have you taught at this school?

8. How many students do you have in your class in total?

9. How many ELL students do you have in your class?

10. Have you used guided reading before?

11. Did you receive formal training in guided reading at the college or university level?
    If so, indicate how much preparation. None _____ Undergraduate preparation _____ After-degree Professional prep ____

12. Did you attend any formal courses, workshops, or conferences on guided reading?
    If so, how many courses?_____ Workshops? _____ Conferences? _____

13. Did you receive training in guided reading at the school level? (includes community of practice (COP), professional learning/development communities (PLC/PDC). Provide details

14. Have you ever participated in any research on guided reading? If so, please describe.

15. How many years have you used guided reading?

16. What grades have you used guided reading with?

17. Which of the following skills do you teach in your guided reading activities? Check all that apply
    Phonological/phonemic awareness _____ Phonics _____ Fluency ____ Composition _____ Spelling _____
    Other word identification strategies ____ Comprehension ____ Vocabulary _____ Grammar/mechanics _____ Other _____

18. How many minutes of the day do you spend in guided reading activities in your classroom?
    $\leq$40 mins/day _____ $\geq$ 41 - 60 mins/day _____ > 60 mins/day _____

19. How many minutes per day do you spend in guided reading preparation?

20. Do you have instructional support in your classroom to help you implement guided reading?
    If so, how many hours per day? _____ Per week? _____
    Please add any other details you think are important for us to know about

21. What is the average size of your guided reading groups in your classroom?

22. How many guided reading groups do you typically see daily?

23. How do students typically transition between guided reading groups in your classroom?

24. How do you typically assess student achievement levels in your guided reading process?

25. What activities do the rest of the class typically do while you are working with guided reading groups?

26. How would you rate your knowledge base of guided reading instruction? Check the one that applies

Not informed at all _____ Not very well informed _____Neutral _____ Somewhat well informed _____Very well informed _____

All questions used in the survey and the focused have been previously validated in other studies Questions were selected on the basis of their relevance to the three research questions being explored in this study (Miranda, 2018; Poluga, 2007; Reeves, 2022; Rowan Christensen, 2017; Schenck, 2019; Smith, 2020; Toney, 2017)

Guided Reading Survey Part B: Perceptions

1. In your own words, please define guided reading. (RQ #1)
2. How do you feel about guided reading? (RQ #1)

Survey Questions

Question	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Research Question
3. I feel guided reading is a valuable part of my reading instruction						1
4. I feel guided reading is the best approach to reading instruction						1
5. I feel GR is a successful reading instruction strategy for increasing reading achievement.						1
6. I feel that I am using guided reading effectively						2
7. I feel that I am implementing guided reading with fidelity relative to the Fountas & Pinnel approach						2
8. I feel that I have enough support to implement the guided reading approach in the way that I want to						2
9. I feel that the guided reading approach is the most effective reading & literacy approach for my ELL students						1
10. I feel that guided reading requires too much out-of-class preparation time						1 & 2
11. I feel that classroom management with guided reading is difficult (refers to students not in small groups)						1 & 2
12. I feel that I was adequately trained to implement guided reading instruction successfully						3
13. I feel that there is sufficient ongoing training with the guided reading approach						3

All questions used in the survey and the focused have been previously validated in other studies Questions were selected on the basis of their relevance to the three research questions being explored in this study (Miranda, 2018; Poluga, 2007; Reeves, 2022; Rowan Christensen, 2017; Schenck, 2019; Smith, 2020; Toney, 2017)

Appendix I:

Focused Interview Guide

Question	Research Question
1. What aspects of guided reading do you like?	RQ #1
2. What aspects of guided reading do you dislike?	RQ #1
3. How effective and confident do you feel in your guided reading instruction? Why?	RQ #1
4. How do you feel about student literacy achievement with guided reading as compared to other literacy methods? Why?	RQ #1
5. To what degree do you feel that the guided reading approach benefits your ELL students? Please explain	RQ #1
6. To what degree do you feel that the guided reading approach does not benefit your ELL students? Can you think of an ELL student who struggled with guided reading?	RQ #1
7. What challenges do you face in implementing guided reading in your classroom and why?	RQ #2
8. What are some factors that you feel may enable your guided reading instruction in your classroom and why?	RQ #2
9. How do you feel about the number of guided reading groups in your classroom? About the number of students in each group?	RQ #2
10. What specific skills, strategies and materials relating to guided reading do you believe optimize student outcomes/achievement?	RQ #2
11. What factors do you like or dislike about using the guided reading process in your classroom?	RQ #2
12. What do you feel about the guided reading planning process?	RQ #2
13. What do you feel about classroom management during guided reading?	RQ #2
14. How successful do you feel your training is in the planning and implementation of guided reading? Why?	RQ #3
15. How successful do you feel your training is in the use of resources in guided reading implementation? Why?	RQ #3
16. How satisfied are you with the level of ongoing professional education with the guided reading instruction?	RQ #3
17. What kind of professional development opportunities do you feel are needed to support you in the use of the guided reading approach?	RQ #3
18. How important do you feel ongoing research is to your desire to continue using the guided reading approach? Why or why not?	RQ #3

Appendix J

Development of Questions for Teacher Survey

Question	Source
1	Schenk (2019), Smith (2020), Toney (2017)
2	Miranda (2018), Reeves (2022)
3	Toney (2017)
4	Toney (2017)
5	Toney (2017)
6	Miranda (2018), Presley (2019)
7	Rowan Christensen (2017), Schenk (2019), Toney (2017)
8	Miranda (2018)
9	Miranda (2018), Poluga (2007), Presley (2019), Rowan Christensen (2017), Schenk (2019)
10	Francis (2022)
11	Schenk (2019)
12	Reeves (2022)
13	Presley (2019), Rowan Christensen (2017), Schenk (2019), Toney (2017)
14	Presley (2019), Reeves (2022), Rowan Christensen (2017), Schenk (2019)

Development of Questions for Teacher Survey

Question	Source
1	Presley (2019)
2	Presley (2019)
3	Presley (2019), Schenk (2019)
4	Smith (2020)
5	ELL (Francis, 2022)
6	ELL (Francis, 2022)
7	Miranda (2018), Presley (2019), Schenk (2019)
8	Schenk (2019)
9	Poluga (2007),
10	Reeves (2022)
11	Reeves (2022)
12	Reeves (2022)
13	Reeves (2022), Rowan Christensen (2017), Toney (2017)
14	Presley (2019), Rowan Christensen (2017), Schenk (2019)
15	Presley (2019), Schenk (2019), Smith (2020)
16	Presley (2019)
17	Miranda (2018), Presley (2019)
18	Francis (2022)

Appendix K:

First Level (in Vivo) Coding (Saldaña, 2016)

Quirks Summary

Quirkos

Quirk Title	Parent	Grandparent	Description	Author	Date	Total Codes
Perceptions/Learning			Question 3	Janice Francis	Nov 19, 2022 9:56:52 AM	0
Teaching & Resources	Perceptions/Learning			Janice Francis	Nov 19, 2022 10:10:47 AM	0
Division focus	Teaching & Resources	Perceptions/Learning		Janice Francis	Nov 19, 2022 10:09:12 AM	3
Other Literacy approaches	Teaching & Resources	Perceptions/Learning		Janice Francis	Nov 19, 2022 10:09:17 AM	4
Resources	Teaching & Resources	Perceptions/Learning		Janice Francis	Nov 19, 2022 10:10:18 AM	8
Training	Perceptions/Learning			Janice Francis	Nov 17, 2022 7:53:02 PM	9
Personal Training Initiative	Training	Perceptions/Learning		Janice Francis	Nov 18, 2022 7:33:24 PM	4
Ongoing Training	Training	Perceptions/Learning		Janice Francis	Nov 17, 2022 7:54:27 PM	13
Ongoing Research	Training	Perceptions/Learning		Janice	Nov 17, 2022	7

Order Codes by:
Quirk Title

Order Quotes by:
Default

☐ Text by Source

Quotes Style

☐ Show *Coded by* Section

☐ Show *Theme* Section

☐ Show *Coverage* Section

☐ Show *Highlight ID* Section

Highlight Style:
Coloured stripe beside quote

☐ **Include Properties in Quotes**

Grouping in GR	Positives Attributes of Guided Reading	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 18, 2022 7:58:11 PM	2
Negative Attributes for GR	Teachers Feel about GR			Janice Francis	Nov 18, 2022 8:07:25 PM	0
frustration	Negative Attributes for GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 18, 2022 8:04:41 PM	4
Time constraints	Negative Attributes for GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 18, 2022 8:04:48 PM	6
dislikes	Negative Attributes for GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 18, 2022 8:04:53 PM	9
Effectiveness for ELL	Teachers Feel about GR			Janice Francis	Nov 19, 2022 9:44:59 AM	17
English as another Language students	Effectiveness for ELL	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 19, 2022 9:44:54 AM	0
Challenges of GR	Teachers Feel about GR			Janice Francis	Nov 17, 2022 3:27:35 PM	2
classroom management	Challenges of GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 17, 2022 3:32:41 PM	3
Length of Lesson	Challenges of GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 17, 2022 3:34:42 PM	2
need for proper resources and preparation	Challenges of GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 17, 2022 3:37:47 PM	3
STudents with Learning Challenges	Challenges of GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 17, 2022 3:27:53 PM	2
Non - guided reading Children	Challenges of GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 17, 2022 3:41:45 PM	4
classroom environment	Challenges of GR	Teachers Feel about GR		Janice Francis	Nov 18, 2022 6:57:35 PM	2
TOTAL NUMBER OF CODES						252
TOTAL NUMBER OF QUIRKS						46

Properties Summary

Participant 1

17% Grade 1
33% Grade 3
33% Grade 5

Research Question 1