2023

Instructional Practices that Promote Reading Growth in K-3 Students: A Qualitative Study of Highly Effective Reading Teachers

Valora J. Unowsky
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Instructional Practices that Promote Reading Growth in K-3 Students:

A Qualitative Study of Highly Effective Reading Teachers

By

Valora J. Unowsky

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Educational Doctorate

In

Educational Leadership

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

July 2023

June 28, 2023

Instructional Practices that Promote Reading Growth in K-3 Students:
A Qualitative Study of Highly Effective Reading Teachers

Valora J. Unowsky

This dissertation has been examined and approved by the following
members of the student's committee:

_____

Dr. Melissa Krull, Advisor

_____

Dr. Mary Clarkson, Committee Member

_____

Dr. Natalie Rasmussen, Committee Member

Acknowledgements

This project is the result of the inspiration and preparation provided to me by countless numbers of people, both in my personal and professional life. I am grateful to those I have been fortunate enough to work with and learn from throughout my doctoral work at Minnesota State University Mankato. Each of the members of my dissertation committee has provided me with significant guidance and encouragement. I am indebted to Dr. Natalie Rasmussen and Dr. Mary Clarkson for their support, candor, and responsiveness. I would especially like to thank Dr. Melissa Krull, my doctoral advisor, for her unwavering encouragement, confidence in me, and willingness to go along with me at an ambitious pace. Her support and belief in me has been inspirational and life-changing. Finally, I am indebted to Dr. Antonia Felix for her generous guidance, editing, and willingness to serve in my place as interviewer. Her example set the bar high, and made my work better.

I would like to sincerely thank my friends and colleagues for their confidence in me, my leadership, and my scholarly pursuits. I am fortunate to be surrounded by caring and passionate people who inspire me but also provide relief, humor, and distraction from my seriousness when I need it most. I'd like to express a special thanks to Jessica Busse, my partner in this program and this process.

Finally, the people with the greatest indirect influence on this work are my family. I would like to thank my father, Eugene Wallman, for setting an example of high integrity, both in education leadership and in life. I would like to thank my mother, Vallory Wallman, whose love, support, and encouragement allowed me to pursue this

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE
READING GROWTH IN K-3 STUDENTS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE READING TEACHERS

VALORA J. UNOWSKY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO

MANKATO, MN
JULY 2023

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to examine the effective instructional practices, philosophies, values, and beliefs of highly effective reading teachers, as evidenced by their students' rate of reading growth over the course of one academic year across all demographic subgroups. Teacher instructional strategies, approaches to tier one and tier two instruction, planning, preparation, and philosophical beliefs about teaching were investigated. The primary goal of this study was to identify and examine teacher practices and characteristics which result in high reading growth, so as to benefit students. This qualitative grounded theory study used targeted teacher interviews and extensive coding methodologies to isolate the specific teacher practices and beliefs resulting in high student reading growth. Study results suggest that a teacher's commitment to their students, ownership of student learning, and actionable instructional planning and design are the most critical elements necessary to promote the greatest reading growth in primary students. The findings of this study may be generalizable to suggest specific teacher characteristics, beliefs, values, and instructional strategies which impact students' reading growth, ways in which school districts can embed professional development and additional educational opportunities for teachers to develop their reading pedagogy, and the call for a broader conversation about teacher quality as it relates to the preparation, hiring, and retention of the high quality teachers that our students deserve.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of the Problem

Students "reading well by third grade" is a well-documented goal of many public school systems across the country. However, in many schools, this goal is not achieved, and often large achievement gaps exist between White students and students of color. Major initiatives in the past two decades have aimed to address this alarming trend in reading proficiency, such as No Child Left Behind (2001), Reading First Grants (2002), and the Race to the Top (2009) legislation. Yet despite these state and federal efforts, the level of reading proficiency has stalled in many states, with Minnesota being no exception. The most recent data for Minnesota documents that only 48.8 percent of Minnesota's third graders meet reading proficiency standards on the MCA (MDE Report Card, 2022). Further, when disaggregating the data there is concerning evidence that "achievement gaps remain apparent between higher and lower-income students, and between White and ethnic minority students" (Scammacca et al., 2020, p. 718). In fact, recent research states that the achievement disparity gaps as a result of income inequality based on household income exist at the start of kindergarten and do not significantly change as students move through school (Reardon & Portilla, 2016).

Since the mid-1950s, educators and politicians have expressed concern about the state of reading proficiency in the United States. In the late 1990s, California lawmakers passed a bill outlining requirements, or standards, that must be fulfilled by students in order to avoid retention. A few years later, Florida passed a similar bill, focusing on third

graders, which became the template and inception of the *third-grade reading laws*, which have since been adopted in some form by 27 additional states. Third-grade reading legislation has led to laws and programming that have brought literacy into the forefront of lawmakers, resulting in "meaningful changes to the pending legislation, including research-supported provisions such as literacy coaches and additional professional development for classroom teachers" (DellaVecchia, 2020, p. 17). However, it has also ushered in the inception and use of high-stakes testing, now in its third decade. Over the past two decades, the amount of time dedicated to standardized testing has steadily increased, including the expansion of testing into grades K–2 (DellaVecchia, 2020). Concerns about standardized testing include the time spent on testing, the impression of reducing students to data points, and the financial burden per student for a district for these assessments, which average approximately ten dollars per student.

The Rise of High-Stakes Testing

A typical elementary student in the United States will be screened with a universal screening reading assessment three times per year. Universal screening involves administering brief, sensitive assessments to all enrolled students to identify those who are at risk for academic failure (VanDerHeyden et al., 2018). These assessments provide teachers with up-to-date information and a current picture of the student's literacy level and category of risk related to reading proficiency. There are opposing narratives around this amount of testing, with some researchers asserting that the "amount of screening that commonly occurs in U.S. schools may undermine its value, creating more error in decision making and lost instructional opportunity" (VanDerHeyden et al., 2018, p. 62).

However, most schools employ these assessments, often because they are required to report to the state on student reading progress and erring on the side of caution to ensure that they catch students at risk of reading difficulties. Screening is a core component of "prevention science" (Hoskyn, 2009), which is based on the premise that if students are identified early by indicative measures that they might be at risk for difficulty and are then provided instruction based upon these data points. Students at risk of low or inadequate reading proficiency are screened and given further diagnostic assessments to pinpoint their instructional gaps, in the hopes that they will make significant progress, or growth, in their next screening metric. For these students below benchmark, or the grade level standard, it is imperative that they make growth that outperforms that of their grade level peers, in order to help these students catch up to their peers or to begin to close the achievement gaps that presently exist.

Highlighting Achievement Disparities and the Matthew Effect

The reading achievement gap was certainly a concern among educators and lawmakers prior to COVID-19, but the pandemic has increased this worry. Achievement disparities exist among high- and low-income students, White students and students of color, and native English speakers and English language learners. A concern among educators is that COVID-19 has increased these gaps, with analyses of data on the short-run impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's learning gains through a portion of the 2020–2021 school year starting to appear (Bailey et al., 2021).

Clearly, action is needed to address these troubling statistics. Fast action is needed to address student reading growth and achievement. The stark reality is that for students

reading below grade level, they will need to make aggressive growth in order to reach reading proficiency, and closing the achievement gap requires this aggressive growth as well (Kiefer, 2012). Encouraging research has determined that students who start out the school year with very low scores on math and reading assessments gain knowledge and skills at a faster pace than students who start with higher scores. However, some studies show that the lower-scoring students do not grow at a rapid enough pace to catch up to their higher-scoring peers (Scammacca et al., 2020). The result is that the achievement gap disparities remain.

The Matthew Effect, the phenomenon that decrees "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer," has been a topic in education research for decades. Contradictory studies have indicated inconsistent results, yet the most recent research presents that high-achieving students grow at a slower rate than low-achieving students. Further, in a study of students in high-poverty schools, Huang et al. (2014) reported that high achievers in kindergarten grew at a slower rate in reading skills than low achievers. But are the growth patterns enough to close the gaps and bring students to proficiency? The most current studies say no. Research has found that children from lower-income families have shown lower initial achievement and a slower growth rate across many studies (Scammacca et al., 2020). In most schools, the gaps remain. Thus, "efforts to raise the achievement of struggling students will need to involve educational interventions that accelerate growth to a much greater degree to make progress in closing achievement gaps" (Scammacca et al., 2020, p. 718).

Closing the Gap

The responsibility of closing these gaps and generating this aggressive growth lands squarely on schools' and ultimately on teachers' shoulders, with the data showing a varying degree of teacher success in supporting students' reading growth across an academic year. Concerningly, many teachers are not adequately prepared to address the reading instruction needs of their students (Risko et al., 2008), and in many cases, students fall further behind. When students do not receive the targeted reading support needed to meet their reading goals, the result is often a reliance on Title 1, RtI, and/or reading intervention programs which are often underfunded and over-referred. Ultimately, if students do not receive the necessary and precise instruction to make significant reading growth, these students may be referred for special education services, which is an area currently experiencing shortages of licensed and experienced teachers. Due to these teacher shortages and other factors, many states have created alternative pathways to teacher licensure. This, and growing criticism of teacher preparation programs, have resulted in significant decreases in traditional teacher preparation programs. At the same time "the student population has increased and become more diverse, leaving shortages of qualified educators in some subject areas and in high-needs geographic areas such as urban and rural schools (Risko & Reid, 2019, p. 427). A growing number of teachers may not have the necessary instructional expertise to pinpoint student instructional needs, which perpetuates the cycle, maintains the status quo, and exacerbates the achievement gap.

Teacher Pedagogy and Professional Development

Thus remains the question: what works in primary reading instruction to support student reading growth across a year? Is it curriculum or material resources? Is it teacher pedagogy or professional development? Culturally responsive teaching? MTSS and RtI models? Indeed, across all 50 states, schools and districts have begun to organize elementary reading instruction around multi-tiered response to intervention (RtI) models for guiding instruction, intervention, and early identification of students with reading difficulties (Al Otaiba et al., 2015). These models have brought to light the importance of intervening early and often, while also monitoring student progress. Yet student reading proficiency and growth still lags, and the achievement gaps persist. A recent focus on effective, high-leverage, evidence-based pedagogical practices has emerged. Research on these practices is abundant, including a focal point on the five pillars of reading instruction emerging from the *Report of the National Reading Panel* in 2000. The five pillars of the Report detail the components of effective reading instruction, including a focus on the explicit instruction of phonemic awareness and phonics borne out of the research of the National Reading Panel's work. This research became known as The Science of Reading, which has itself been the focus of much debate and additional research, spawning new standards in teacher preparation, instructional practices, and curriculum focusing on the technical instruction moves based on reading research (Shanahan, 2020). However, the science of reading and teacher craft are each insufficient without the other (Paige et al., 2021). These components and instructional pedagogical practices are taught in preservice teaching programs to varying degrees, but teachers who

completed their education prior to the National Reading Panel's report likely have not benefited from this research. On-the-job teacher professional development varies from school to school, with varying degrees of effectiveness and teacher buy-in. Encouraging research does exist to support the idea that professional development can make a difference in teachers' ability to meet student needs, especially when accumulated over time (Al Otaiba, 2015). A meta-analysis of thirty-five research studies by Darling-Hammond found that the "*quality* of a professional development initiative implementation has implications for its overall effectiveness in enhancing teacher practice and improving student learning" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 6). This then requires additional research into the characteristics of professional development that are able to inspire change in teacher practice with the ultimate goal of affecting student achievement and growth outcomes, which are the crux of this study and critical to student success both as readers and productive citizens of the twenty-first century.

The Importance of of Teachers' Beliefs and Values

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge and effective instructional practices are essential components of ensuring that students 'crack the code' of learning to read in the primary grades, but another critical element is possibly even more essential for student success: the values and beliefs that a teacher brings to the classroom each and every day. In his research of over 1200 meta-analyses of effective teacher practices, John Hattie's research suggests that collective teacher efficacy is the most influential element for student success among over 250 educational practices. Collective teacher efficacy, the belief that collectively a teaching staff can positively influence student outcomes,

including those who are disengaged or disadvantaged (Hattie, 2016), is often held up as a goal to which all teachers and schools should aim or work toward. Yet in order to have collective efficacy, all teachers must bring with them the belief that they each 1) have the skills to effectively meet the needs of their students, and 2) that teachers have the power to reach even the most difficult or resilient students (Protheroe, 2008).

Teacher efficacy has been the subject of educational discussion and research for decades, becoming a buzzword in the 1970s when Albert Bandura published his theory of self-efficacy as a theory of behavioral change. In his theory, he suggests that humans' efficacy expectations for themselves determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences (Bandura, 1977). The transference of this theory to education is clear, and made most commonplace by John Hattie's work on effect size. Yet, where a teacher's belief in his/her own ability to meet their students' needs is certainly important, and valid according to research, teachers also bring their own complicated combination of personal beliefs and values about students, teaching, and their work into school each day. Does a teacher truly believe that *all students can learn*? Does a teacher seek to *inspire each student every day*? Does a teacher believe in their heart that *all students can reach their full potential*? These common tag lines and mission statements are often listed on websites and recited by teachers, but do all teachers believe them? Do effective teachers, more than ineffective ones, believe that they can *disrupt academic disparities*, make *a difference in the life of a student*, or *close the achievement gap*?

In most urban public schools in America, classrooms have become increasingly diverse. Suburban districts continue to grow in racial and cultural diversity, while many schools are actually growing even more segregated due to school choice models and open-enrollment policies. Inclusive classrooms host learners with disparate educational needs, from English language support to special education services. Religious, racial, and cultural diversity is the norm in many urban and suburban public school systems, and school districts spend time and money on cultural proficiency training initiatives to prepare their teachers to meet the needs of their diverse learners. Educators who value diversity are better able to make learning meaningful to students of various backgrounds and cultures (Spiess & Cooper, 2020). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education are thus paramount to their success, as well as to the success of their students. One recent study found that student teachers whose personal beliefs about inclusivity were more likely to to notice and respond to students in a diverse classroom (Keppens et a., 2021). Similarly, a study which measured teachers' adaptivity of beliefs about teaching in relation to students' ability levels found that "belief adaptivity may be a source of teaching effectiveness since it may cause a better fit between beliefs and related instructional needs according to students' varying levels of reading abilities" (Egloff & Souvignier, 2019, p. 969). Further, a 2020 study on the effects of teacher mind-set which examined the impact of teacher attitudes and beliefs to their cultural proficiency found that "teachers with a fixed mind-set are more likely to judge students to have lower ability and are less likely to engage low-ability students in rigorous work (Spiess & Cooper, 2020, p. 262). This then speaks to the importance of teacher beliefs and values as

of at least equal importance to teachers' pedagogical understanding and instructional

effectiveness in the primary classroom. But which beliefs and values matter? Do effective

teachers of reading share certain beliefs and values in common? What are the key beliefs

and values that accompany the most truly effective primary literacy teachers into school

each day, and how is this success measured?

Problem Statement

A significant amount of research has been done to identify the high-leverage,

effective instructional strategies in reading instruction that will make an impact in

supporting students with the skills they need to become proficient readers. Equipping

classroom teachers with the pedagogical knowledge and ability to determine student

reading skill gaps and to then provide the correct instructional match is also paramount

in these efforts (Allington, 2002). Specific and targeted training in reading instructional

pedagogy for primary classroom teachers, specifically in foundational literacy skills

(Hudson et al., 2021) can help to meet student instructional needs in the primary grades,

resulting in less reliance on intervention, fewer referrals to special education in the

intermediate grades, and a narrowed achievement gap between our White students and

students of color. We know that to close gaps and to bring students to grade level, we

need to support students in growing aggressively over the course of a year. However,

even among teachers with similar education, training, licensure, and curricular

resources, wide discrepancies exist in the growth rates of students across classrooms.

There is a need to further understand the characteristics and specific classroom practices

of teachers who are able to support their students in achieving aggressive reading

growth from fall to winter. How is it that some teachers encourage more growth out of

students than others, with the same curriculum, instructional materials, and similar student classroom makeup? What instructional practices encourage aggressive growth in primary students? Are the practices different for White students or students of color? What really works in primary reading instruction?

Purpose of the Study

The focus of this study is to determine the effective instructional practices, philosophies, and characteristics of highly effective reading teachers, as evidenced by their students' rate of reading growth over the course of one academic year. This study will examine the specific teacher instructional practices that promote high reading growth in primary students across all demographic subgroups. Teacher instructional strategies and approaches to tier one as well as tier two instruction, planning and preparation, and philosophical beliefs and attitudes about teaching will be investigated. The goal of this study is to identify and replicate teacher practices and characteristics which result in high reading growth, so as to benefit students. The findings of this study may be generalizable to suggest methods and strategies to be replicated for students in need of significant reading growth, or ways in which school districts can embed professional development and additional educational opportunities for teachers to develop their reading pedagogy and approach to teaching reading to all of their students.

Research Questions

The primary research questions for this study are:

RQ1: What are the instructional practices used by effective reading teachers that promote the highest rate of reading growth over one year among all student demographic groups?

RQ2: What beliefs, values, and characteristics do highly effective teachers hold about reading and learning?

These two questions together address the *how* and the *what* in terms of what works in primary reading instruction in supporting reading growth for students in grades kindergarten through third grade.

Significance of the Research

The significance of this study is impactful for students, first and foremost. Our current reality is that many of our students are reading below benchmark and need teachers who can help them make aggressive growth in order to become proficient readers, or to catch up to their grade-level peers. Efforts to address student reading growth will need to include ways in which to increase the rate of aggressive growth in order to begin to close the gaps between White students and students of color (Scammacca et al., 2020). Further, the effectiveness of teachers varies widely in student reading growth and proficiency, resulting in student success often hinging upon which classroom they are placed into in the fall. van der Merwe and Nel (2012) assert that "there is a need for a comprehensive curriculum to guide teachers toward a coherent knowledge base for the effective teaching of reading, as many teachers do not have an understanding of what to teach" (p. 137). Due to this, colleges and universities that offer teacher preparation programs may find this study significant in their effort to ensure that

teachers are prepared to tackle the complex work of teaching students to read. In school districts' efforts to close the achievement gap and to promote reading achievement goals by third grade, isolating the factors that can influence these outcomes are significant. Determining which instructional strategies and/or teacher characteristics that encourage high reading growth, if replicable, would be a step toward closing the achievement disparities that presently exist in many schools.

Delimitations/Limitations

This study is limited to elementary classroom teachers of students in kindergarten through third grade in a suburban school district of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul. It is further limited to teachers who have taught in the same grade in the district for three years or more, to account for consistency in historical growth patterns when compared to their grade level colleagues. In addition, teachers identified for this study will be based upon FastBridge reading assessment growth data showing their ability to support their students in high growth across the academic year compared to their colleagues.

Limitations of this study include the inability to isolate effects of additional student instructional support from intervention teachers, ELL staff, paraprofessionals, and outside tutoring services. These forms of additional support are difficult to track and measure for their effects in an academic setting, and are similar among classrooms. Further limitations of student placement and classroom makeup also exist, in the form of student race, socio-economic status, or placement in cluster classrooms for students receiving English Language support or Special Education services. Though present in the

study, these limitations are lessened by the inclusion of teachers based upon the choice to use historical trend data from three recent consecutive years.

Definition of Key Terms

Key terms in reading and literacy are present in this study as follows:

Aggressive growth

This term refers to a growth rate over 75% growth during one school year. The majority of students entering a grade level in the fall below benchmark will need to grow at an aggressive rate over the course of that year in order to catch up to their peers or to reach proficiency in their reading.

Benchmark

This term refers to the standard level of proficiency expected for a student at a certain time of year, in a certain grade level. On-track or at-standard are synonyms. The benchmark, or expected proficiency level, grows across each year as more skills are taught and expected to be mastered by students at each corresponding grade level.

FastBridge Assessment

This term refers to the assessment measure by which this study determines the effectiveness of a teacher in student reading growth results. FastBridge is a research-based suite of universal screening and progress monitoring assessments used in many Twin Cities school districts, including the one used in this study. Fall to spring reading growth will be measured by classroom-level reading growth trends and patterns using the appropriate FastBridge assessment which applies to each grade level.

FastBridge aReading

This term refers to the FastBridge online screening assessment which measures student reading proficiency and progress in grades one through twelve. This assessment is administered to students three times over the course of a year, in fall, winter, and spring. An adaptive test which adjusts to the test-taker, this assessment measures student reading skills, vocabulary, morphology, and comprehension. Risk level and growth can be tracked using the aReading assessment.

FastBridge earlyReading

This term refers to the FastBridge screening assessment which measures Kindergarten and first grade reading proficiency. This assessment is administered one-on-one by a teacher or proctor to students three times over the course of a year, in fall, winter, and spring. Subtests such as letter sounds, letter names, blending and segmenting, and sentence reading are measured across the year to determine a student's instructional level and reading proficiency. This assessment contains a finite number of items and it is possible to complete all test items correctly. The FastBridge earlyReading assessment can measure both risk level and growth across a school year.

Highly effective reading teacher

For the purpose of this study, this term refers to a teacher who is able to impact student reading growth at an aggressive pace (in all demographic subgroups) compared to their grade-level colleagues.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Also referred to as Tiered Instruction, Tier 1 instruction refers to the core reading instruction that *all* students in a class receive. Tier 2 instruction refers to the instruction that *some* students receive, typically in small groups who need similar skill building. Tier 3 instruction refers to instruction that a very small number, or *few*, students receive that is targeted and pinpointed to their exact reading needs.

Preservice teacher education

This term refers to the baseline of reading education that an initial license teacher receives in their teaching license program to become a licensed teacher. This is typically a baseline of a four-year college or university program, or a master's degree with initial teaching license.

Professional development

This term refers to the advanced training in reading pedagogy that a teacher receives, typically from a school district, inservice course, or further graduate study once teaching in the field.

Reading growth

For the purposes of this study, this term refers to the growth of a student or group of students during one academic year, from fall screening to spring screening. See 'typical growth' and 'aggressive growth' for further details and delineation of growth methods.

Response to Intervention (RtI)

This term refers to an instructional model that identifies students at risk of reading difficulties in early stages. Students are provided instruction at the point of error, and their progress is monitored weekly or biweekly to ensure that they are receiving instruction to meet their unique learning needs.

Screening

This term refers to the administration of a standardized assessment (FastBridge earlyReading or aReading for this study's purposes) at three times across an academic year. Sometimes called *universal screening*, screening is completed for all students to ensure that students are meeting benchmark or the expected standard, as well as making the growth expected across the year to ensure that they are on track to make progress toward end of year goals.

Tiered Instruction (Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3)

Tier 1 instruction refers to the core reading instruction that *all* students in a class receive. Tier 2 instruction refers to the instruction that *some* students receive, typically in small groups who need similar skill building. Tier 3 instruction refers to instruction that a very small number, or *few*, students receive that is targeted and pinpointed to their exact reading needs. Also called MTSS, or Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

Typical growth

This term refers to a student growth rate of at least one year's reading growth during one school year. National norms indicate a 40-74% growth rate is considered typical growth across one academic school year. Typical growth is enough growth for a

student who is entering the year on grade level/meeting standard, but it is not enough growth for students entering the year below grade level. These students need to make more aggressive progress (see 'aggressive growth').

Summary

The state of reading proficiency in many schools, districts, and states is very concerning, and the effects of COVID-19, which likely exacerbate the problem, are only just beginning to be apparent. Action must be taken quickly to disrupt the troubling pattern of falling reading proficiency scores and increasing achievement gaps among White students and students of color, and among economically higher-income and lower-income students. Everyone from teachers to administrators, school superintendents to policymakers and lobbyists, are concerned and looking for ways to fix the problem and disrupt this troubling trend. However, it is the students who are reading below grade level, who may or may not ever become proficient readers or catch up to their peers, who are impacted the most. It is for their sake that we must continue to search for the answer to the questions . . . How is it that some teachers encourage more growth out of students than others? What instructional practices encourage aggressive growth in primary students? Are these effective practices different for White students and students of color? What really works in primary reading instruction?

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Vast amounts of research exists in the increasing need to understand and to interrupt the crisis of falling student reading achievement in the United States. The most current literature can be grouped into several key categories, including the realities of our current data and the persisting achievement gap between White students and students of color, and the income inequality gap that persists among low- and high-income students. Literature on literacy assessment, its connection to U.S. laws and legislation, and the recent focus on data-driven decision making is plentiful. Research on effective reading instruction is the subject of countless studies, with quantitative and qualitative studies analyzing what is working and not working in schools across the country. Teacher preparation, both pre-service and ongoing, is a dominant theme in the literature. The research goes deep into teacher professional development and the importance of equipping teachers with the tools they need to meet the needs of their readers. The needs of struggling readers, special education students, and students with dyslexia is also examined, and a significant amount of research focuses on teacher pedagogy, effectiveness, and beliefs, and how these translate to student reading growth and outcomes. Here, I present a review of the literature with an explicit focus on the current state of reading proficiency in the United States, deep research on effective reading instructional strategies and teacher preparation, and the impact of teacher beliefs on student achievement. Finally, I will conclude with implications for future research and the grounding for my study.

The State of Reading Proficiency in the United States

Educators, politicians, and public and private sector organizations have been involved in determining both the cause and possible solutions to our nation's literacy crisis. Many studies have attempted to discover the source, the cause, and an antidote to this issue, which contributes to an ever-present achievement and opportunity gap. Despite the efforts of initiatives in the past two decades aimed to address concerning trends in reading proficiency, such as No Child Left Behind Act (2001), Reading First Grants (2002), the Race to the Top legislation (2009,) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), the level of reading proficiency has stalled in many states, with Minnesota being no exception. Racial, ethnic, and income disparities in performance on standardized tests of academic achievement are a stubborn feature of the U.S. educational landscape (Reardon & Portilla, 2016). Most public school systems are currently battling this alarming persisting trend, focusing their resources, both human and financial, on attempting to disrupt these persisting statistics. State and federal dollars are spent each year in the way of grants and subsidies to address these gaps, and although there are pockets of success, the trend continues. In the United States, the Nation's Report Card (2022) found that just 33% of the nation's fourth graders were proficient on the NAEP reading assessment. Although this percentage sounds low and is indeed lower than in 2019, it is actually five percentage points higher than in 1992, when the NAEP began tracking this data country-wide. Here in Minnesota, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) measure determined that currently just 48.8% of Minnesota third graders were reading at grade level in the spring of 2022 (Minnesota Report Card, 2022).

This number is over six percentage points lower than the number reading at grade level in 2019, with a widening disparity between Minnesota's White students and students of color. COVID-19's impact on this data is beginning to be studied, and school systems are faced with counteracting this and other contributing factors while being mindful of the urgency and timeliness needed to bring students to proficiency.

The Reading Achievement Gap

In Minnesota, 57.7% of White third graders were reading at grade level in the spring of 2022. By contrast, just 28.8% of Minnesota's Black students, 29.3% of Minnesota's Hispanic students, and 24.7% of Minnesota's Native American students were reading proficiently by the end of third grade in the Spring of 2022 (MDE, 2022). Across the nation, the data is even more bleak. Pre-pandemic results of the 2019 NAEP documented that approximately 20% of Black and Hispanic students were reading at proficiency in fourth grade, compared to about half of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). NAEP reading scores had declined in the years leading up to 2019, and the decline was "most observable among the lowest performers, who are largely Black and Brown children and children growing up in poverty" (Terry, 2021). Concern has been growing for Hispanic and Native American students over the past decade, who tend to enter kindergarten with less readiness than their White or Black peers (Reardon, 2009), and the widening achievement gap between the 20% of United States students identified as multilingual learners and their English monolingual peers (Reid & Heck, 2020). The nation's public schools are growing increasingly diverse, with fewer White students and more students of color enrolling each year (Husser & Bailey,

2019). Closing or reducing achievement disparities has been at the center of federal education initiatives for decades, most recently the famed No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 and the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. These legislations have aimed to create equitable academic opportunities for all students, especially students of color and those students in poverty, as similar gaps are present between affluent students and lower-income students when comparing reading proficiency.

Interestingly, racial achievement gaps between White-Black and White-Hispanic students were actually larger in the 1970s than they are today. These gaps narrowed in the 1980s and 1990s, plateaued at the turn of the century, and have narrowed again slightly in the past twenty years. By contrast, the income achievement gap increased by 40% when comparing cohorts born in the 1970s and 1990s (Reardon & Portilla, 2016). Since then, research has continued to document the impact of family socioeconomic status and financial resources on reading achievement in adolescents (Yeung et a., 2022). Yet in America's public schools, which are growing more racially and ethnically diverse each year, these "young learners are also increasingly more likely to be growing up in poverty and low-income households (Terry, 2021). In some studies, "children from low SES families have shown lower initial achievement and a slower growth rate" compared to their average or higher SES peers (Scammacca et al., 2020). Although some encouraging research has documented a narrowing of racial achievement gaps when removing SES status as a factor, the reading achievement gap between low- and high-income students remains. In 2014, Leu et al. (2014) investigated the impact of income inequality on students' online student reading ability. Students from two districts were tested and

surveyed, and although pre-Covid, the research was clear. Results indicated that there was a significant achievement gap favoring students from the higher-income district in offline reading scores, offline writing scores, and online research and comprehension scores than in students from the lower-income district. The results were attributed to student access to internet, technology, and family resources, as well as access and requirements of technology use at school (Leu et al., 2014).

The gap in achievement is not just present between cultural or income-based groups. For students at risk for reading difficulties, Ferrer et al. (2015) suggested that the reading achievement gap is present as early as first grade and persists throughout students' academic years. In a study of dyslexic and typical readers, Ferrer and his colleagues sought to determine if the trajectories of these readers converge at a later time through typical academic intervention. Their findings, based on a longitudinal study of 414 participants in grades one through twelve, document that "the achievement gap between typical and dyslexic readers is evident as early as first grade, and this gap persists into adolescence" (Ferrer et al., 2015). This study suggests the importance of early detection of dyslexia and other reading disorders, as well as early intervention programs such as high-quality preschool and intervention programs so as not to exacerbate a gap that begins in the primary grades and continues through high school and beyond.

Post-pandemic, the effects of COVID-19 are now beginning to show and to be studied, and concern for low-income students is great. In a survey of 221 education researchers, Bailey et al. (2021) sought to predict how the academic achievement gap

would change between high- and low-income students in the wake of COVID-19. Survey

respondents overwhelmingly forecasted that gaps would grow between these groups

(Bailey et al., 2021). Rationale for why learning disruptions from COVID-19 would

disproportionately affect lower-income students include the likelihood that low-income

parents were more likely to be in frontline work with less access to health care and that

low-income families may be less likely to have technology, computers, and internet

access in the home. Further, low-income students are more likely to attend public schools

that lack resources, and low-income parents are less able to afford to supplement their

children's education with tutoring or enrichment programs. Although just forecasts, these

findings are in line with Kuhfeld et al. (2020), whose study of over three million

elementary school students from fall 2019 to fall 2020 showed less academic growth than

typical for students in both reading and math, with the lowest growth in lower-income

students in high-poverty schools (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The authors go on to report that

although students showed some reading growth, the early estimate of learning loss is

likely an underestimate since many students in their sample did not take the fall 2020

assessments. The effects of COVID-19 are only beginning to be studied and for the

effects to be fully understood, but there is clear evidence that its effects will need to be

addressed by educators across the country, only adding to the urgency surrounding the

reading achievement crisis in the United States.

The Matthew Effect

The Matthew Effect is a phenomenon that has been attributed to reading for the

past few decades. In a 2014 study, Pfost et al. (2014) reviewed 25 years of studies of the

Matthew Effect. The Matthew Effect refers to the Bible's *Parable of Talents* (New American Bible, Matthew 25:29) and describes the notion that those who begin with advantage grow in advantage while those who begin behind remain behind. When attributing the Matthew Effect to reading, many educators and researchers have suggested that good readers advance to become better readers and that poor readers stagnate or increase their skill levels more slowly, thus contributing to widening achievement gaps between White students and students of color, and/or advantaged students and students less economically advantaged. Proponents of the Matthew Effect posit that better readers thus enjoy reading more, and this additional reading practice results in better reading.

Additional assertions are that the Matthew Effect is more likely to be visible when students struggle with reading difficulties, in low-income students during the summer months, connected to parent reading practices, and in adverse child-rearing situations. However, in their extensive review of the research, Pfost et al. (2014) did not find strong support for the Matthew Effect overall. They did, however, find a subtle Matthew Effect in primary students' decoding speed and efficiency, yet their study limitations cautioned an over-reliance on this outcome, especially since measures of reading proficiency in primary students are generally based upon composite assessments of many reading skills. That same year, in a similar study, Huang et al. (2014) studied 1573 students in underperforming schools, looking for evidence of the Matthew Effect. Their research also showed no evidence of such an effect, and in fact, they found the opposite, where compensatory data showed the closure of gaps over time. This study tracked students from kindergarten through second grade, with a large achievement gap existing between

the high and low-performing groups at kindergarten that narrowed by the completion of second grade. However, by Cohen's standard, the difference between the two groups was still significant at the conclusion of the study. (Incidentally, the group most likely to begin kindergarten below proficiency were low-income Black boys who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (Huang et al., 2014). In another study in 2020, Scammacca et al. found that students who began the year with low proficiency scores made achievement gains at a faster rate than their higher-scoring peers. However, their rate of growth was not fast enough to catch up to their peers, and the achievement gap remained (Scammacca et al., 2020).

Combatting the Gap

Many efforts exist in an attempt to combat the achievement and opportunity gaps seen across the nation. In addition to No Child Left Behind (2001), Reading First Grants (2002), Race to the Top legislation (2009,) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), there are countless local efforts implemented to address the growing needs of students across the country. Pasini (2018) describes one such example in *The Big Lift*, a collective impact approach to solving the reading crisis in San Mateo County, California. In a collective impact approach, organizations from a variety of sectors come together to address a social issue. *The Big Lift* grew out of the Peninsula Partnership Leadership Council (PPLC), a public-private task force comprising school districts, local government agencies, non-profits, and local businesses (Pasini, 2018). San Mateo county is in the top 1% of wealthiest counties in the country, yet three-quarters of the students of color who reside there are not reading at proficiency. The Big Lift identified seven school districts

in the county with a combination of the lowest third-grade reading scores and the highest concentrations of poverty to be the focus of its work, which included free high-quality preschool, a summer learning academy for qualified students in kindergarten through second grade, targeted attendance work for chronically truant students, and a focus on increasing parent engagement. The results of these efforts were positive in that students entering kindergarten were 27% more ready than students not attending the targeted summer program, students who attended the summer academies were found to have a net gain of over three months of reading progress, and families were more likely to be engaged in their students learning (Pasini, 2018).

Currently, districts across the country are now using Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to attempt to contradict any learning loss from COVID-19, especially for students at risk due to racial, income, or special education learning gaps. Similar efforts at the state and local levels are seeking to interrupt the worrisome trends of falling reading achievement and growing achievement gaps between white students and students of color and between low- and high-income students. These efforts are measured by assessments at the state, district, and school levels as educators try valiantly to correct the downward trend and find a solution to the nation's literacy crisis.

Current Reading Research

So, what really works in reading instruction? This is a complicated question with a complicated answer. It is made even more complex as reading instruction is not one-size-fits-all, and an approach that works with one student or group of students will not

necessarily work with another. Fortunately, much research has been done to determine what does work in reading instruction, and studies are plentiful that document the strategies that are proving most effective in equipping educators to help students make progress in the complex task of learning to read.

What is Effective Reading Instruction?

How does research on effective reading instruction merge such important strategies of reading instruction, including the rise of evidence-based practices, explicit instruction, early intervention, balanced literacy, and the Science of Reading? Effective reading instruction encompasses all of these domains as it seeks to find the key to helping students to crack the code of learning to read. Richard Allington's research looms large in this area. Allington has studied effective reading teachers for decades as a professor and reading researcher. In a decade-long study of first and fourth-grade teachers across several states, Allinton concluded that teacher expertise is paramount to the success of their students (Allington, 2002). Allington and his team studied, observed, and interviewed teachers who were successful in teaching students to read and, from these observations, identified six common characteristics of reading instruction found in these teachers' classrooms. These features included an increased amount of time spent reading and writing during the day, a rich supply of texts available to students, explicit modeling of reading strategies for students to use while reading, an increase of student-to-student talk rather than teacher-to-student talk, the use of longer, more extensive assignments rather than multiple shorter tasks, and assessment of student learning that focused more on growth and effort than on achievement (Allington, 2002). Of course, each of these

features could be researched and dissected in and of themselves as strategies, but form the basis of Allington's assertion that teacher expertise is a key component of student success.

In a study in the Netherlands specific to struggling readers, Houtveen and van de Grift (2012) found that teachers who implemented a program that improved core instruction and provided early intervention for struggling students significantly reduced the percentage of students struggling with reading at the conclusion of the study.The researchers hypothesized that adapting to the needs of struggling readers could prevent reading difficulties. Their quasi-experiment consisted of a three-tier response to intervention (RtI) system called the Reading Acceleration Programme, or RAP, which is similar to RtI programs used across the United States. Fundamentals of their experiment were explicit instruction, differentiated flexible grouping, increased and effective use of time dedicated to reading instruction, and assessment, which effectively monitored student reading progress through screening and progress monitoring, which are eerily similar to the findings of the Allington study mentioned above.

In 1998, the National Research Council was commissioned to complete a study of reading difficulty prevention in students in kindergarten to third grade, entitled *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (National Reading Council, 1998). This study preceded the National Reading Panel's report in 2000, a meta-analysis of what works in reading instruction for students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. In 2012, Duke and Block completed a study of U.S. classrooms to gauge whether specific key recommendations from the NRC study had been implemented in U.S. classrooms

(Duke & Block, 2012). Their findings were mixed. Where increased access to kindergarten and specific word reading skills had increased, instruction in vocabulary and comprehension, as well as a focus on content and conceptual knowledge, was lacking in the primary grades (Duke & Block, 2012). These findings likely contribute to the general stagnation in fourth-grade reading scores across the country, which were then and are now consistent with the Nation's Report Card (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Duke and Block (2012) went on to examine some of the key instructional recommendations from the NRC study and identified three components that serve as obstacles to providing effective instruction in reading: a focus on instructional and intervention reform and skill-building rather than a focus on comprehension and vocabulary, a lack of teacher expertise in the pedagogy required to teach these more complex skills, and the limited time afforded within the school day and year to meet the increasing needs of students, and the accountability required of teachers to do so (Duke & Block, 2012).

One notices an interweaving pattern in reading the findings of this and the previous studies. One study will offer confirmation and contradiction to another study, which does the same to the next. This is where the research on reading instruction is complex, as a multitude of factors are present and, in some cases, indistinguishable from the study at hand. In 2002, Taylor et al. published a study that focused on the *how* as well as the *what* in effective reading instruction. The authors studied eight high-poverty schools which were geographically and culturally diverse, observing teachers in the

teaching of reading three times across the school year and assessing student reading growth across the year in these schools with a focus on reading growth from fall to spring. The authors found several instructional components that were consistent with higher reading growth across the grades, including the use of small group instruction, a balance between word work and comprehension focus, the use of higher-level questions, a teacher style of coaching rather than telling, and an increased amount of student active response activities in the form of reading, writing, and manipulating, rather than passive response activities such as listening to the teacher or oral turn-taking (Taylor et al., 2002).

Almost 20 years later, a similar study by Paige et al. (2021) asserted that teaching reading is both a science and an art. Eerily similar to the 2002 study by Taylor et al., Paige and his fellow researchers assert that although the building blocks of reading instruction have been researched and documented, they have not been successfully integrated into practice (Paige et al., 2021). The authors suggest that the findings of the National Reading Panel's report in 2000 have been well integrated into practice in some areas of the country, but that this is not enough, calling out that the art of teachers' ability to respond to student needs at the point of error and to make in-time instructional decisions drawing on an extensive repertoire of evidence-based strategies is key to ensuring that student reading needs are met (Paige et al., 2021).

Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

Research on evidence-based instruction in reading has been the focus of many education experts and researchers. But what makes an instructional strategy evidence-based? Simply put, this is a strategy that has been researched and studied to be effective,

ideally with similar students and demographics. Slavin (2013) reviewed research on primary reading instruction, as well as research on struggling readers, compiling studies with the commonalities of control group comparisons and durations of over twelve weeks. In his research on reading programs and evidence-based strategies that produced the highest student outcomes, Slavin (2013) found that the studies on reading programs that produced the highest effect size shared the component of including extensive professional development for teachers in implementing effective instruction in their classrooms, furthering their instructional pedagogy. Further, he stated that interventions that change the core teaching practices of classroom teachers using extensive training, coaching, and follow-up to help teachers make effective and lasting changes in their daily teaching, no matter which evidence-based strategy in use (Slavin, 2013).

Many studies have shown that explicit, direct instruction can profoundly impact student reading growth. Explicit, direct instruction has been shown to be efficacious in learning and teaching the major components of the reading process: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Rupley et al. (2009), drawing on research of teacher effectiveness, describe the process of explicit instruction in six steps: 1) reviewing previous work, 2) presenting new material, 3) providing guided practice, 4) providing feedback, 5) providing independent practice, and 6) providing frequent review of student learning. They go on to support the notion that reading instruction is either taught as skills or cognitive strategies. In skill learning, students bear a lower cognitive load and practice discrete skills such as phonics and decoding skills, word structure analysis, and

literal comprehension skills. They suggest that in direct skill learning, the teacher is in complete control and employs a high degree of structure, with explicit explanations, modeling or demonstrating, and guided practice. In cognitive strategies, the teacher has less control, and students bear a higher cognitive load, tackling more complex processes such as predicting and making inferences (Rupley et al., 2009). The authors support the idea that the heart of direct instruction is centered on explicit explanations, modeling, and guided practice, where the teacher begins with high control and gradually releases the control to the student as they practice repeatedly. However, this approach works primarily with skills that can be explicitly taught in a step-by-step, sequential manner and is less effective with elements of reading that are less discrete.

Explicit instruction, a reading instructional approach that teaches discrete phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding skills, has been recommended by literacy experts and educators for the past two decades. In this approach, students are taught sequential phonics and decoding skills with high repeated practice. Despite this research, a common form of primary reading instruction in the United States, guided reading, is commonly practiced and is promoted by teachers as well as some literacy experts such as Fountas and Pinnell (1996). In guided reading, students practice previously taught explicit skills in connected text under the guidance of their teacher in text at their instructional level. In a study by Denton et al. (2014) with the goal of comparing two reading instruction approaches, researchers examined the effects of explicit instruction versus guided reading upon the reading outcomes of second-grade at-risk readers and compared both approaches to traditional reading instruction without these intervention

models. Denton et al. (2014) concluded that there was not a statistical difference in the two intervention models of explicit instruction and guided reading in student growth of word reading, decoding, fluency, or comprehension, yet both approaches were statistically stronger in their efficacy compared to traditional instruction. Further, Denton et al. (2014) found that students across all research groups showed an increased need for fluency instruction and further recommended that "consistent, long-term supplemental instruction is likely needed by students who struggle with word reading" (p. 290).

Reading instruction and reading intervention are often used interchangeably when discussing struggling readers. Many reading interventions can improve student reading ability, but research has shown that the greatest impact is made when the intervention treatment matches student need. In a study by Szadokierski et al. (2017), the authors sought to determine the effectiveness of reading intervention skill instruction based on students' pre-intervention reading skills, also called skill-by-treatment interaction. In this study, student performance on an oral reading fluency assessment determined whether they were in the acquisition phase of reading, which is characterized by reading slowly and inaccurately, or in the fluency phase, which is characterized by being accurate yet slow. From there, the intervention was assigned to each student by skill level. The instructional strategy of *modeling with error correction* was assigned to students in the acquisition phase, and *repeated reading with reward* was assigned to those in the fluency phase. The authors sought to replicate previous studies which had found that students in the acquisition phase (slow and inaccurate) responded to modeling and error correction, but students in the fluency phase (accurate and slow) responded best to repetition and

practice (Szadokierski et al., 2017). The authors used curriculum-based assessment, which consisted of a timed reading to determine student accuracy as well as fluency to determine their phase at the start of the study as well as their improvement at the conclusion. The findings of the study determined that struggling readers who did not read at least 85% of the words correctly on the pre-assessment (determined to be in the acquisition phase) benefited from a modeling intervention to increase their accuracy, and students who had read over 85% of the words correctly on the pre-assessment (determined to be in the fluency phase) benefited most from a repeated reading intervention to increase their fluency (Szadokierski et al., 2017). A key takeaway from this study is also the clarity that the hierarchy of reading instruction matters for systematic reading instruction. Accuracy precedes automaticity and should be explicitly taught first for the most effective student reading outcomes.

Although adapting instruction to student instructional needs is at the core of most effective reading interventions and instructional strategies, especially when targeting struggling readers, students' primary reading instruction occurs at the classroom level. Tier one classroom foundational reading instruction is focused primarily in the kindergarten, first, and second-grade years, with grade one being the grade known for the most intensive foundational work. In a recent study by Ruotsalainen et al. (2022), the authors studied 616 students in 35 classrooms to determine which lesson activities were associated with the highest average reading growth. The authors also considered the type of support provided to students in these classrooms, pointing out that while it is important to match the content of literacy instruction to a student's current skill, it is also important

to adapt the type of instructional support (Ruotsalainen et al., 2022). While students are in the early stages of reading development, known as the acquisition phase, teacher support must be at its highest, gradually releasing as the student grows in ability and independence. As students master skills associated with decoding and phonics, less support is needed from the teacher, while increased practice is associated with greater autonomy and mastery of reading fluency goals. The results of this study out of Finland showed that more rapid reading growth was aligned with classrooms in which the teacher directed more time providing instruction to individual students or small groups, and that slower growth occurred in classrooms where more whole-group instruction was the norm (Ruotsalainen et al., 2022). In addition, the authors found that early readers benefited more from code-focused activities with high levels of teacher support, and that students with more advanced reading skills benefited more from independent reading and practice time (Ruotsalainen et al., 2022). This aligns with other current research presented in this review of the literature.

In a synthesis of a study on effective reading teacher practices, Slavin (2009) asserted that "what matters for student achievement are approaches that fundamentally change what teachers and students do together every day" (p. 1453). This article discussed the importance of teacher practice adjusting to meet the needs of students in a responsive way that aligns to best practices as well as individual student needs and that fundamental changes are needed in many classrooms if we are serious about reading reform. In a recent study in Germany by Peters et al. (2022) to determine what 'business as usual' reading instruction looks like across second-grade classrooms, the authors

sought to determine if broad changes have been made in reading instruction practices since Slavin et al.'s 2009 study. The authors included 52 second-grade classrooms across 30 schools in their study, which focused on whether evidence-based elements were present consistently in reading instruction. Classroom reading instruction was observed, and teachers completed a questionnaire about the content of their lesson. The authors' findings showed that what they termed business-as-usual reading instruction was "predominantly teacher-centered and characterized by many phases in which students worked independently" (p. 1569) and that evidence-based elements (defined for this study as explicit code-focused instruction such a systematic phonics, decoding, and syllable-based reading, fluency instruction such as repeated reading and paired reading, and explicit comprehension instruction such as generating questions and making predictions) were infrequently incorporated into lessons. Further, teachers rated themselves as having higher levels of differentiated instruction than did the observers (Peters et al., 2022). The implications of this study suggest that teacher quality, knowledge, and pedagogy are related to the use of evidence-based instructional practices that are used in a typical classroom during 'business as usual' instruction.

Balanced Literacy

For many years 'balanced literacy' has been a buzzword in educational preparation programs, school systems, and teacher professional development. Balanced literacy refers to the idea that students need all elements of reading instruction, from explicit, direct instruction of systematic skills to the more global, language-rich and comprehension focus of a whole language approach, where teachers are expected to

provide a literacy-rich environment for their students and to combine speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Bowers, 2020). Balanced literacy sought to 'bridge the gap' between these approaches after the publication of the National Reading Panel (2000). Proponents of balanced literacy support the idea that students interact with real-world, authentic texts and literacy experiences, including class discussions and meaning-making from context. Further, some of these educators are concerned that the recent focus on phonics and direct instruction is limiting students in their ability to read and interpret text holistically, so the review of the concept of balanced literacy must be included in this synthesis of the research.

The National Reading Research Center published an article in 1997 that synthesized the results of two large-scale studies of effective reading teachers as identified by their supervisors or principals. Eighty-nine general education teachers and 34 special education teachers were asked to list the ten most important elements of their reading instruction, which were then turned into a large survey of these same educators. According to authors Metsala et al. (1997), the most striking finding from the study was the frequency that the study participants reported integrating explicit skills instruction while offering students the opportunity to read, write, and experience authentic text. The highly effective teachers were naturally providing what would later become evidence-based practices of direct instruction through modeling, explanation, and code-focused practice, while also offering students immersion in diverse and authentic literacy experiences. The authors determined that their study strongly "supported the position that teachers should be educated to blend perspectives, to weave together a variety of methods

rather than to adhere strongly to one perspective or another" (Metsala et al., 1997, p. 520). This, in a nutshell, is balanced literacy instruction at its best.

Proponents of balanced literacy also typically believe that writing and reading are reciprocal processes and that when taught together produce better results. For example, the instruction of phonics and decoding to develop a student's reading ability should also result in the student being able to encode or spell and form words correctly. Similarly, writing instruction in the craft and organization of writing should help a child to comprehend organizational text when reading. A 2017 meta-analysis by Graham et al. focused on this idea, surveying programs that integrate the teaching of reading and writing to determine if student reading and writing performance would be boosted. Programs where no more than 60% of content devoted to reading or writing were included in the analysis, which was designed to determine whether the research showing that reading instruction boosted writing performance and that writing instruction boosted reading performance. Graham et al. (2017) sought to determine if the two content areas taught together would result in higher performance in both areas. The authors reported findings supporting their hypothesis and that student participation in programs where reading and writing instruction were presented in fairly equal measures had statistically significant results in reading and writing achievement. According to the authors, these findings "demonstrated that literacy programs balancing reading and writing instruction can strengthen reading and writing" (p. 279) and support a basis of alignment between reading and writing instruction at the elementary level.

The Science of Reading

A significant amount of the recent literature, both in teacher preparation and student academic learning needs, centers on findings from the National Reading Panel's report in 2000, which states the importance of explicit instruction of the five pillars of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Research has repeatedly found that "teacher preparation programs can statistically significantly increase teachers' understanding of phonological awareness, phonics, and morphological awareness" (Hudson et al., 2021, p. 311) and that emerging readers need explicit instruction in these areas in order to become proficient readers. These two tenets make up the core of the science of reading, which has shaped reading instruction over the past twenty years.

The five pillars of reading instruction, as determined by the National Reading Panel (2000), are commonly developed left to right. Phonemic awareness, which refers to the ability to hear, produce, and manipulate phonemes, or discrete sounds, is necessary for readers to develop before beginning to learn the complex code of decoding or learning phonics. Phonics refers to the ability for students to have letter-sound correspondence, or the ability to connect the grapheme (the letter or letter combination) to the phoneme (the sound), and must be systematically taught for many readers to successfully decode words. Fluency refers to the ability of a reader to read in a smooth and fluent manner. Once the complex task of learning to decode has been mastered, the focus of reading connected text in a smooth and prosodic manner is key. If a student is to belabor the decoding of too many words in a passage resulting in a laborious pace of

reading, ultimately their comprehension will break down. Thus, fluency is a key piece of proficient reading that results in comprehension of text. Vocabulary refers to the importance that students are exposed to and understand a variety of types of words: Tier 1 words that make up most oral and written communication, Tier 2 academic vocabulary encountered in school settings, and Tier 3 vocabulary that centers on specific areas of focus and study, such as word associated with content areas such as science. Finally, comprehension refers to the meaning-making of reading and arguably rests on the other pillars. The National Reading Panel Report (2000) recommended that explicit instruction in all five of these areas is necessary to develop fully proficient readers.

Of the five pillars of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), phonics is most commonly associated with the science of reading. Countless studies have been conducted on the importance of teaching phonics, and a rise in phonics curricula has flooded into the education marketplace and into districts across the nation. These curricula often provide explicit lessons in which teachers can teach systematic, sequential phonics lessons, but some educators are concerned that teachers are not aware of the pedagogy behind the lesson plans. Ehri and Flugman (2018) examined the results of a study that aimed to build teachers' understanding of the instruction of phonics over the course of one year. The study consisted of a mentoring approach, and the results based on student outcomes in reading and spelling improvements. For this study, which focused on low-income, urban schools, teachers completed a lengthy training program followed by monthly mentoring sessions, which included specific feedback and the opportunity to apply the feedback in real-time

with students. Over the course of the year, significant gains were made by students in all demographic groups, and teacher ability to teach phonics increased strongly from fall to spring. In addition, teachers' belief in phonics instruction as an important component of reading instruction remained high or grew across the year. The authors' findings centered around both the importance and necessity of the explicit instruction of phonics for students in low-income, urban areas, as well as the scaffolds needed to equip teachers in how to develop their pedagogical skills in teaching phonics.

A study in England by Flynn et al. (2021) concurred. Policy directives in the explicit instruction of phonics dictate that teachers must systematically teach phonics as a primary component of reading instruction, yet this varies depending on region and practitioner. Flynn et al. (2021) pointed out that some teachers have limited metacognition when it comes to phonics teaching; they are unaware of their lack of subject knowledge and skills or overestimate what they do know. More concerning is the fact that some teacher educators with responsibility for preservice teacher training have weak subject knowledge in this area as well (Joshi et al., 2009). In this 2021 study, locally nuanced "Phonics Roadshows'' were implemented to ensure that teachers were equipped with the pedagogy needed to instruct students in evidence-based phonics instruction. These one-day professional development sessions aimed to provide teachers with explicit instruction in the importance of and delivery of phonics instruction. Researchers sought to determine what teachers deemed valuable after the training and how long the impact of the training lasted. At the conclusion of the study, the authors reported a varying degree of success. Flynn et al. (2021) found that the locally nuanced

training when using local data, led by local experts, and followed by opportunities to watch instruction with similar student demographics, teacher buy-in was high, yet teachers internalizing of content was heavy on practical application and "quick wins" rather than deep understanding of pedagogy (Flynn et al., 2021). This follows the research that teachers need ongoing support, practice, and feedback to change practice and to truly deepen their instructional pedagogy.

Once a student has mastered phonics and decoding as an accurate reader, they are ready to focus on their automaticity or fluency. Kuhn (2020) provides four principles of fluency development. She stated that modeling by fluent readers is the first component of effective fluency instruction, followed by providing students opportunities to read, recommending that students read connected text in an academic setting for up to thirty minutes each day (Kuhn, 2020). Scaffolding student reading of increasingly complex text is her third principle, focusing on the support needed for students to tackle reading more complex texts. This is most typically accomplished with repeated reading or partner reading routines, where students read and reread a passage of text multiple times to feel how fluent reading feels. Finally, Kuhn (2020) stated that prosody elements must be instructed specifically, where students are coached on their pacing and expression and not just their speed. Vocabulary and comprehension skills must be explicitly taught in a similar manner, with focused attention paid to the skills needed to learn, internalize, and practice new vocabulary, and the *Systems of Strategic Actions* (Fountas and Pinnell, 2015) which outline the many comprehension skills needed to think within, about, and beyond a text.

Although the research is clear on the significance and efficacy of the need to explicitly teach the foundational reading skills of the five pillars, researchers and school leaders question whether teachers who have been teaching for many years, as well as recent graduates into the field, are equipped with the pedagogical knowledge needed to effectively teach these skills to students. Hudson et al. (2021) published a synthesis of 20 empirical studies on the impact of teacher preparation programs on teacher knowledge of the science of reading, with a focus on teacher understanding of phonological awareness, phonics, and morphological awareness. The authors also examined student outcomes as affected by teacher understanding of these concepts and program characteristics that resulted in increased teacher pedagogical skill in applying these foundational skills. The authors of this study found that extensive training on the foundational pillars of literacy could statistically significantly increase teachers' understanding of phonological awareness, phonics, and morphological awareness (Hudson et a., 2021). Even more importantly, their research determined that this learning could result in student outcomes at the word reading and decoding level. Limitations of this study included a relatively small sample size and inability to track whether or not teachers are able to retain the knowledge gained from training and preparation so as for their knowledge to be generalizable. However, their research into the characteristics of programs that result in the greatest skill acquisition for teachers found that programs in which teachers had the opportunity to learn and then practice new skills in hands-on experiences with explicit instruction were able to most effectively turn theory into practice (Hudson et al., 2021). The authors asserted that "targeted training accompanied by practice under expert

guidance produces the largest effects on teachers' content knowledge levels" (Hudson et al., 2021, p. 310). The authors concluded with their recommendation that teachers receive ongoing professional development in the science of reading with the opportunity to apply their learning to maximize the impact on student reading outcomes.

Hindman et al. (2020) agreed. In a recent article on the difficulties of preparing teachers to be ready to teach reading in the two to three years of pre-service teaching preparation, the authors make three distinct claims. They assert that key instruction is needed in the tenets of the science of reading, that preservice teachers need specific and explicit instruction in these foundational skills, and that teachers need the opportunity to practice and apply these skills in a classroom setting. The authors further assert that reading is a complex issue that requires more than the science of reading and propose that two to three years is not a sufficient timeframe in which preservice teachers are equipped with the skills necessary to meet student reading needs. Hindman et al. (2020) worry that embedding the science of reading into curriculum and syllabi is not enough to equip teacher candidates with the knowledge of reading instruction, and that teachers need robust and extensive training. Hindman et al. (2020) conclude that a possible solution is to embed preservice teaching programs with ongoing opportunities to apply skills with students under the guidance of experienced master teachers. The authors propose that this training should be (a) learner-centered on the teacher candidate, (b) knowledge centered around read-world relevant classrooms and curricula, c) assessment centered with opportunities to practice and receive feedback, and finally, d) community centered with supports from mentors and peers over time (Hindman et al., 2020).

In a slightly different take, Timothy Shanahan dives deep into the science of reading's history, importance, and controversy. Shanahan, professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois, is regarded as an expert in the field of reading instruction, and his research on this topic is extensive. In a 2020 article, he presented research supporting the science of reading as the basis for reading instructional practice, but also discussed what it means for instruction "to work", what is meant by "meta-analysis" of research, and presented the complications and limitations of studies on teacher practice. Shanahan solidified the importance of reading research with his statement that teachers "are not in a position to evaluate the opportunity costs of their pedagogy. They can see the actual outcomes of their teaching, but they cannot evaluate the possibilities of doing it differently" (Shanahan, 2020, p. 119). He presented a concrete method in which educational leaders can critically analyze reading research to evaluate its validity to avoid the common trap of overgeneralizing results from a study to students to whom the results might not apply (Shanahan, 2020). Shanahan concluded the article with the assertion that teachers and educational leaders must not only understand and buy into the science reading but that they must understand how to make sense and evaluate the research that continues to center around reading instruction (Shanahan, 2020).

Teacher Preparation

There is mounting evidence that "teachers are inadequately prepared to teach reading, lack the knowledge of how children learn to read, and have limited expertise in literacy acquisition and instruction" (Clark et al., 2017, p. 221). This worry has made its way from schools to policy makers, to institutes of higher education, where the

conversation of how to best prepare teachers for the daunting task of not only teaching emergent readers to read, but also to intervene with students not at proficiency, has reached a critical level. Teacher preparation exists in two primary domains: preservice teacher preparation at the college and university level, and the ongoing professional development that teachers in the field receive during their time as practitioners. There is significant research into preparation at both levels, and how effectively preparation prepares teachers to meet the needs of their students.

Pre-Service Teacher Preparation

Approximately half of all U.S. teachers are novice, inexperienced teachers with limited knowledge and expertise in evidence-based reading instruction (Clark et al., 2013). These teachers are likely to spend their beginning career in diverse urban settings where student need is highest, and the importance of effective instruction high. Clark et al. (2013) stated that although preservice teachers educated in traditional programs report greater preparation than those prepared in alternative programs, there is other evidence to suggest that teacher preparation programs are not adequately preparing students for the realities of teaching. Further, in previous research, Clark et al. (2008) asserted that teacher educators are frequently out of touch with the needs of preservice teachers and question how closely the curriculum, methods, and practices found in teacher education programs align with the realities of what beginning teachers feel they need to become effective teachers.

In a study out of Australia, where literacy rates have been steadily declining, Meeks et al. (2017) sought to determine how prepared preservice teachers in their final

year of study were prepared to teach reading to primary school children. Their study included surveys to determine the participants' perception of their readiness for reading instruction, as well as of their understanding of basic literacy components of early literacy instruction such as phonemic awareness and alphabetic principles (Meeks et al., 2017). Study findings showed that most participants ranked themselves as well-prepared to teach reading, yet the majority of participants demonstrated minimal to very poor knowledge of the components of early reading, indicating a substantial discrepancy between the general confidence of preservice teachers to teach, and their limited content knowledge of beginning reading skills (Meeks et al., 2017). In a related study from 2005 of graduate teacher education students, teachers with high and low levels of experience were asked to rate their knowledge and ability in three areas (reading development processes, phonemic/phonological awareness, and structural analysis). The higher-experienced teachers rated themselves significantly higher on all three knowledge areas, and indeed outperformed the lower-experienced teachers in each area (Spear-Swerling et al., 2005). However, even the higher-experienced teachers performed under the ceiling on the knowledge tasks. Most concerning was the fact that "these educators were often specialists teaching the most seriously impaired readers in a school or helping other teachers teach reading effectively" (Spear-Swerling et al., 2005, p. 289) which is a large concern when we consider the reading proficiency rates and achievement gaps that we are trying to close in schools across the United States, and who we are employing to fill them.

Thus, the question—are preservice teachers adequately prepared to teach students how to read? A 2017 study by Clark et al. examined two teacher preparation programs to determine whether program A, which consisted of 5 courses, would more effectively prepare students for success as reading educators than program B, which consisted of two courses. Over the course of the study, researchers found that both programs produced students who had an understanding of the five pillars of reading instruction. However, although program A had more courses and time devoted to reading instruction, program B produced teachers who had higher levels of pedagogical knowledge and understanding of reading instruction (Clark et al., 2017). The authors concluded that it was not the number of classes provided to students within the program that mattered for preservice teacher reading pedagogy, rather the content of those classes. Although program A did have one entire class devoted to phonics instruction, the other pillars were not robustly present in course content, and preservice teachers in program B, which included instruction in all five pillars of reading instruction, outperformed those in program A in the other foundational elements of reading instructional knowledge (Clark et al., 2017) . These findings then speak to the preparation of college and university instructors and the organizational components of teacher preparation courses. Van der Merwe and Nel (2012) in a synthesis of a study on preservice teaching programs, stated that "teacher preparation programmes often cannot meet the challenge in preparing teachers for highly complex and increasingly diverse learning contexts; the challenge of keeping abreast of current developments in research and practice; the complexity of the knowledge base; the difficulty of learning many of the skills required to enact the knowledge base; as well as

work with children who experience learning difficulties" (van der Merwe & Nel, 2012, p. 140). Illustrating this last point, in a 2022 study, Washburn et al. (2022) conducted a study to determine whether preservice teachers are prepared to teach struggling readers. The study's aim was to examine preservice teachers' understanding of language constructs and understanding of dyslexia, a neurological condition that affects between 15-20% of learners. The authors found that preservice teachers had a basic understanding of language constructs such as syllable counting but lacked pedagogical knowledge of phonics principles. Further, the teachers misunderstood dyslexia to be a visual processing disorder rather than the neurological condition that affects phonological processing (Washburn et al., 2022).

Proponents of the science of reading are concerned that many teachers are not adequately prepared to address code-related reading skills. Tortorelli et al. (2021) completed an analysis of 27 studies that examined teacher preparation in code-related instruction, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling. The authors found that over half of the studies were quantitative, focusing on the technical knowledge of teachers, which tended to come up short on identification of elements of the science of reading and the findings from the National Reading Panel's report. In addition, many of the studies tended to present "preservice teachers from a deficit perspective, focusing on what they did not know and concluding that code-related skills were not being effectively taught in teacher preparation programs" (Tortorelli et al., 2021, p. 5332). Hikida et al. (2019) analyzed 38 studies between 2000-2018 from the CITE-ITEL database, which curates articles specifically focused on the preparation of preservice teachers in literacy

instruction. From their analysis of these articles, which were peer-reviewed and appeared in 22 different journals, key findings emerged. First, preservice teachers believe in the importance of knowledge of reading processes. Second, preservice teachers' foundational knowledge is lacking despite their beliefs in the importance of this knowledge. Third, preservice teacher knowledge is able to be increased by professional development, and finally, there is evidence to support the use of ongoing classroom practice to support their growth (Hikida et al., 2019). Interestingly, these findings are similar to the findings of Rickford (2002), almost two decades before, whose study on the effects of teacher education on the reading outcomes of at-risk students determined that "when teacher education preparation strives to be conceptually strong, interactive and engaging, emphasizing both content and pedagogy, promoting discovery and understanding, and providing opportunities for practice and reflection, the results can transform their teaching" (Rickford, 2002, p. 147).

Bomer and Maloch (2019), both deans of college education, provided a perspective that allows for some responsibility on the part of preparation programs, but also pointed out the intricacies of educating college and university staff as well. They stated that university faculty require opportunities to grow in their pedagogical knowledge and practice in both preservice teacher learning and literacy research. They "see tensions around structuring professional development in ways that are inviting and rewarding to faculty" (p. 261), including adjunct faculty members who may move in and out of our teacher preparation programs (Bomer & Maloch, 2019). Thus, the issue of teacher preparation exists at all levels.

In their 2011 study, Wold et al. sought to determine effective qualities of effective teacher educators. Successful literacy teachers were surveyed to determine who and what characteristics were associated with furthering and developing their instructional expertise and pedagogy in the teaching of reading. Three key findings resulted from this study. Literacy educators' mentoring and interpersonal skills were cited as the primary component of developing teacher practice. Second, explicit modeling, imparting of knowledge, and providing feedback were noted as influential (Wold et al., 2011). A third and interesting finding of this study was the low rating of a university professor's research work on the impact of preservice teacher preparedness to teach reading.

In a 2008 study, Risko et al. reviewed 298 empirical studies of teacher preparation for reading instruction and chose 82 quality studies on which to base their critique and analysis. Their aim was to identify if and how teacher preparation programs were effective in preparing students for the complex task of teaching students to read. Findings of their analysis showed that in the years leading up to 2008, reading teacher programs had been increasingly successful at impacting teacher knowledge and beliefs, yet few studies documented student academic success as a measure by which programs were deemed successful. Overall, the authors determined that "practices that benefit applications of pedagogical knowledge provide explicit explanations and examples, demonstrations of practices, and opportunities for guided practice of teaching strategies in practicum settings with pupils" (Risko et al., 2008, p. 252).

In an effort to determine once and for all what really matters in reading preparation, Risko and Reid (2019) investigated the elements of a quality reading

preparation program. Through their research, they identified core components that must be in place in order to prepare students to be effective teachers of reading. These components include a) knowledge development, b) preparation to teach diverse students, c) authentic practice, d) engagement in learning communities, and e) ongoing assessment of their instructional practices. Risko and Reid point out that the critique of teacher preparation programs from a deficit lens is not a new phenomenon and assert that the criticism has increased exponentially as a result of large-scale relief efforts and local pressures to raise test scores and close achievement gaps. They worry that "significant decreases in traditional teacher preparation programs have occurred while the student population has increased and become more diverse, leaving shortages of qualified educators in some subject areas and in high-needs geographic areas such as urban and rural schools" (Risko & Reid, 2019, p. 423). As alternative pathways to licensure, grow-your-own programs, and multi-tiered license options gain in number and prevalence, how will we best ensure that all teachers preparing to teach our most vulnerable students are equipped with the necessary pedagogical knowledge to meet their needs?

Professional Development

Professional development for teachers is common in most academic settings, though there are questions about whether it works, and if it does, what elements of professional development create pedagogical change. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) reviewed 35 studies that showed a statistically significant link between professional development, teacher practice, and student achievement to determine common effective features of professional learning in each study. The researchers found seven features that

were shared by the effective professional development. The effective professional development was 1) content focused, 2) based on adult active learning, 3) job-embedded and collaborative, 4) used models of effective practice, 5) provided coaching and support, 6) provided feedback and reflection, and 7) sustained in duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). These elements are in line with the features of preservice preparation outlined in the previous section of this paper.

McMaster et al. (2021) sought to determine the effect of target professional development on teacher ability to implement intensive reading interventions. Twenty-six studies were evaluated for essential professional development elements based on Desimone's (2009) essential elements, specifically, content focus, active learning, coherence, sustained duration, and collective participation (McMaster et al., 2021). In the 26 studies analyzed, all included a beginning professional development session, and most included ongoing coaching or mentoring. Most of the studies incorporated one or more of the essential elements yet these elements were not always robustly explained in the review. The most common elements included were ongoing and active learning, where study participants had access to support as they implemented new forms of instruction. Study results were based primarily on the fidelity of the professional development rather than on the effectiveness of the instruction itself. The authors observed that "it seems critical that PD for intensive reading intervention emphasizes specific content related to reading development, approaches to reading assessment and instruction, specific difficulties encountered by readers with intensive needs, and how best to support those readers" (McMaster et al., 2021, p. 338).

In a case study on a rural school district, Aiken et al. (2020) investigated the effects of a targeted reading intervention (TRI) certification aimed at increasing both teacher pedagogy and student reading growth. Explicit instruction in a systematic certification was provided to teachers, along with weekly online support. Teachers and students completed exercises together during the intervention timeline in an educational curriculum designed to further the teacher's expertise and ability to respond to student needs. At the conclusion of the certification process, both students and teachers had grown, and teachers reported greater feelings of competence and efficacy, suggesting that this design might be well-suited for rural schools with limited access to professional development opportunities and advanced coursework (Aiken et al., 2020).

Impact upon Student Achievement

Building teacher professional pedagogical knowledge is important, but building teacher capacity that results in student outcomes is key. Using a pretest/posttest design, Mechteld et al. (2015) studied the effects of a professional development program on the outcomes of second-and third-grade students in the Netherlands. Professional development in a program, including the use of goals, data, and instructional strategies was provided to study participant teachers, whose students were assessed both before and after the professional development period. The researchers found that the experimental group scored significantly higher on the provided standardized assessment, and by the end of the year, this group was a half year ahead of the control group (Mechteld et al., 2015). Similarly, Otaiba et al. (2016) investigated the effects of professional development over a three-year period to train kindergarten teachers to differentiate their

tier-one instruction. Teachers were provided professional development in differentiation, the five pillars of reading instruction, and the use of data in instructional decision-making. Teachers participated in a full-day training in the summer before the first year, monthly workshops, and bi-weekly coaching sessions. Students were assessed in word reading and vocabulary growth to determine the effectiveness of the professional development on the students themselves. Otaiba et al. determined that the teachers improved in their ability to differentiate instruction within their classrooms, and that students improved in their word-reading skills compared to the control group. No significant difference was noted for student vocabulary growth (Otaiba et al., 2016).

In a previous study, Podhajski et al. (2009) conducted an experiment on a small group of teachers to determine whether professional development in science-based reading instruction would result in student reading achievement outcomes. Four experimental teachers were compared to three control teachers. The experimental group received 35 hours of professional development in the code-focused skills of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency), followed by a year of coaching. The authors found that although the experimental group's understanding of reading concepts was lower at the start of the experiment, by the end they had surpassed the control group in knowledge, and the reading growth of the students in the experimental group exceeded the growth in the control group (Podhajski et al., 2009). Although this was a small experiment, the authors concluded that the findings indicated a positive correlation between professional development and student reading outcomes (Podhajski et al., 2009). However, in a more recent experiment, Martinez et al. (2021) designed a study to

determine the effects of teacher professional development on student fluency outcomes. Their aim was to determine which modality and intensity of professional development was more effective. The experimental group was provided 24 hours of initial professional development with coaching, and the control group was provided eight hours of instruction with no follow-up coaching. Student improvement on a code-focused fluency assessment found gains in both groups over the time period but showed no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control group, thus leading the authors to conclude that there is a "greater efficiency in a lower intensity format of PD without a coach in the development of code-focussed skills" (Martinez et al., 2021, p.1).

In a study of fifth-grade teachers and their students, a quasi-experimental design was employed in which professional development in an autonomy-supportive teaching style was provided to an experimental group, while the control group continued with their current teaching style. Effects of the professional development were measured using fifth graders' increased recreational reading practices using a pretest/posttest design. According to the study authors, "autonomy-supportive teachers attempt to identify, nurture, and develop their students' inner motivational resources" (de Naeghel et al., 2016, p. 234). Experiment teachers were provided professional development in direct instruction and work time elements of the autonomy-supportive teaching stance in a half-day workshop designed to improve student autonomy and recreational reading. Teachers received a booklet and completed weekly journals as a measure of fidelity to the professional development, and all teachers reported engaging in the autonomy-supportive strategies over the nine-week experiment period. The authors' analysis determined that

the experimental group's motivation for autonomous reading was significantly greater than that of the control group, which suggests that the professional development was effective in impacting students recreational reading (de Naeghel et al., 2016). Finally, Basma et al. (2018) completed a thorough synthesis of teacher professional development and its effects on student growth. This synthesis itself was a review of the literature, yet only 17 studies were included in the analysis which sought to determine the effect of typical professional development on student literacy growth. These studies were then coded and analyzed by the authors, and a Weight of Evidence (WOE) was used for data analysis. In their findings, Basma et al. found that quality of the professional development had more influence than the duration, and that high-quality professional development with shorter duration produced a larger effect size than longer professional development of medium quality (Basma et al., 2018).

Teacher Effectiveness, Knowledge, and Beliefs

How critical are the elements of preparation, professional development, and literacy pedagogy to a reading teacher's effectiveness? What other factors influence the quality of a teacher's ability to instruct and impact student learning? And how is this best measured? In this section, the elements of teacher effectiveness, knowledge and pedagogy, and teacher beliefs and values are explored to determine their impact on teacher effectiveness and student success. Value-added measures are explored as to their ability to measure teacher efficacy, and literature is reviewed which seeks to explain how we determine what effective teaching means, and how it can be best measured.

Teacher Effectiveness Based on Value-Added Measures

It seems obvious that the quality of a teacher matters upon the success and outcomes of their students. However, much is also made about student background, income level, race, and cultural background when discussing student achievement and outcomes. How important is a teacher, really? Do high-quality teachers influence student outcomes and growth at a statistically significant level compared to lower-quality teachers? A 2011 study in London by Slater et al. (2011) sought to determine this with a study designed to compare the outcomes of 7305 students by studying the specific teachers who taught them in the year of their high-stakes accountability exams. Student growth was tracked over a two-year period, with their growth attributed to the teachers to whom they were assigned. The authors attempted to discover whether a high-quality teacher was associated with higher student outcomes, and whether observable qualities such as teacher certification, gender, age, and years of experience were significant in these outcomes. The study controlled for student demographics and teacher quality level, comparing within-school and between-school variability of subjects. The authors' findings resulted in the claim that teachers do indeed matter, and that having a one-standard deviation better teacher raised a student test score by 27% of a standard deviation (Slater et al., 2011). Further, none of the observable variables of teacher certification, gender, age, or years of experience played any statistically significant role in explaining teacher effectiveness as related to student outcomes (Slater et al., 2011).

In 2013, a study by Wiswall sought to determine whether teacher quality grew over the course of a teacher's career as evidenced by impact upon student achievement.

Drawing on previous literature which found that other than the initial few years of teaching practice, teacher improvement was not consistent, Wiswall (2013) used data from all fifth-grade teachers in North Carolina to attempt to replicate the previous research. Using teacher quality and experience as key points of study, Wiswall's study of fifth-grade students found that although teachers have some gains in effectiveness in their first few years of teaching, later teaching experience contributes little or nothing to a teacher's quality or effectiveness in the classroom (Wiswall, 2013). Wiswall's conclusion centered on the suggestion that teacher quality is most varied at the point of entry into the field, and that professional development effects were small enough to not make a statistical difference over the long-term of an experienced teacher's career. Wiswall's work went on to suggest that current educational models of tenure and salary schedules ought to be in question as to their effectiveness in employing the best teachers for students. In a related study in 2015, Swain et al. (2015) researched the effects of teacher quality on pre-K student growth in state-funded preschool in Tennessee. Student data was aligned with teacher observation scores from Tennessee's state-wide teacher evaluation system to determine whether a correlation was present between student outcomes and teacher quality. Controlling for student characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, the authors' analyses indicated a "small positive interaction between teaching quality and state pre-K exposure on some but not all early elementary cognitive measures" at the conclusion of first grade (Swain et al, 2015). Additionally, although the study's primary finding was the significant correlation between student attendance in pre-K and first-grade outcomes, the students in the highest-rated pre-K

teachers' classrooms continued to slightly outperform students in the control group (Swain et al., 2015). This study's analyses suggest that there is an important correlation between teacher quality and student achievement from the start of a student's academic experience which might be studied and examined further.

Determining teacher effectiveness has been the subject of much literature, as well as how best to determine effectiveness. A study in 2007 attempted to link teacher performance on state licensing tests to their students' achievement. Using licensing tests as a measure of teacher quality is a debated practice, and certainly questionable through the 2023 lens of teacher scarcity and the push to increase teachers of color in the workforce, as research since Goldhaber's study has determined that using score cut-offs typically results in the exclusion of a percentage of effective teachers. In this study, Goldhaber (2007) indeed found a positive relationship between some teacher licensure tests and student achievement, but also found, long before the studies by Wiswall (2013) and Swain et al. (2015), that teachers experienced the largest gains in their effectiveness over their first three years of teaching and found little evidence of statistically significant productivity gains associated with increases in experience beyond five years (Goldhaber, 2007). In a related study based on licensure alone, Shuls and Trivitt (2015) examined teacher licensure paths related to teacher effectiveness based on student performance data. Historically in the United States, the government has imposed increasingly stringent standards for teacher licensing, leading teachers to be among the most licensed public personnel in the U.S. workforce (Shuls and Trivitt, 2015). In the 1980s, alternative paths to teacher licensure became available, with states following suit and creating their own

alternate paths to licensure, typically most popular in hard-to-fill teaching areas. In this study, the authors examined the impact of traditional licensure compared to alternative licensure, and whether higher-scoring teachers on state exams had a greater effect on student outcomes than lower-scoring teachers. At the conclusion of the study, Shuls and Trivitt (2015) determined that there is little difference in terms of value-added quality between traditionally and alternatively certified teachers, but found that on state licensing exams, "higher scoring teachers tend to be significantly more effective at increasing student achievement" (Shuls and Trivitt, 2015, p. 663). It is important to note here that state licensure exams have not been created to be predictive of student achievement, rather they are used as a method by which states establish a threshold for new teachers entering the profession. Studies such as this one introduce the notion that perhaps state licensure might be looked at differently as we welcome new educators to the teaching field, and that there is a possibility that they could be helpful in predicting teacher effectiveness.

Thus, how are teachers evaluated as to their effectiveness? Principals are typically teachers' primary observers and are most often the determinants of whether or not a teacher is effective. Teacher evaluation has recently gained traction as a topic in the research, with value-added measures being introduced into some state and district evaluation expectations. Harris et al. (2014) studied 30 schools to determine the correlation between teachers with high value-added scores based on their students' test performance with their performance evaluations completed by their school principals. In this study, Harris et al. found that value-added teachers, or teachers who influence higher

levels of student achievement based on student test performance, were positively, yet weakly, correlated with principal evaluations (Harris et al, 2014). The authors suggest that this topic needs to be addressed more extensively as they also discovered large discrepancies in the subjective ratings of principals for teachers in areas such as personality characteristics, ability and interest to team with others, and volunteering to play extra roles in the school community (Harris et al., 2014), calling into question the subjectivity of anointing of a teacher as a quality teacher using anything other than value-added measures. In a related study, Chingos and Peterson (2010) sought to determine whether teachers with high value-added measures were correlated to higher levels of education and/or experience. In this study, researchers studied teachers' value-added measures based on fourth- through eighth-grade student performance in their classrooms over an eight-year period, controlling for student characteristics. Teacher experience, education, and selectivity of university attended were explored as factors contributing to value-added scores. At the conclusion of the study, the authors determined that "teacher classroom performance is correlated neither with the type of certification a teacher has earned, nor with the acquisition of an advanced degree, nor with the selectivity of the university a teacher attended" (Chingos & Peterson, 2010, p. 449). The authors also found only modest differences in the efficacy of teachers through typical professional development and on-the-job training, and that at a certain point of experience, the trend of value-added scores starts to turn downward (Chingos & Peterson, 2010) leading to the authors' assertion that it is easier to "pick a good teacher than to train one" (Chingos &

Peterson, 2010, p. 449). Further, with the increasing focus on racial achievement gaps, the question of teacher effectiveness for all students is rising in focus.

A recent study by Kim and Lee (2020) sought to determine two things: First, do effective teachers contribute to student overall excellence, including narrowing the achievement gap between their White students and students of color, and second, what are the characteristics and practices of teachers who are associated with high levels of excellence and equity in their classrooms? This study relies on the premise that student growth matters as much as proficiency, and the impact of a teacher's effectiveness rests on growing students below benchmark at a greater rate than those already proficient, thus narrowing the achievement gap. At the conclusion of the study, the authors concluded that teachers with higher scores on teacher effectiveness measures had a greater positive effect on student achievement overall, narrowing gaps between achievement groups, but not necessarily among racial groups (Kim & Lee, 2020). Further, teacher characteristics and attributes such as gender, race, and years of experience correlated to teacher quality as measured by student overall performance, but did not contribute significantly to gaps in equity (Kim & Lee, 2020).

Studies such as those presented above demonstrate the importance of data at the classroom level rather than the school level. Individual teacher effectiveness matters and is the topic of countless studies and literature. Teacher effectiveness models have risen to promote both a scaffolding for teacher improvement as well as a system to gauge teacher effectiveness. One of the most common models is Charlotte Danielson's (1996) framework for teaching, which organizes effective instruction into four domains:

planning, classroom management, instruction, and professionalism. Muijs et al. (2014) synthesized 35 years of research on teacher effectiveness to highlight key findings in the area of teacher effectiveness. Through their research, they determined that teacher effectiveness models have rapidly grown from the solidification of basic skills to the generalization of student identification as life-long learners who are able to self-regulate and participate in the construction of their education with teachers as guides. Teacher effectiveness models were explored which, when applied to teachers based on student outcomes, pointed to greater value-added efficacy of teachers scoring at the higher ends of these models (Muijs et al., 2014). Similarly, Hamre et al. (2013) studied a developmental framework of teacher effectiveness in over 4,000 classrooms. Their systematic review of the Teaching through Interactions framework, which supports the notion that teacher-to-student interaction is a basis for effective instruction, sought to conceptualize these interactions to determine their effectiveness by analyzing the three domains of the model: emotional support, classroom management, and instruction (Hamre et al., 2013). The authors synthesized research from seven national studies of over 4,000 preK- through sixth-grade classrooms, using the observational data from the studies to determine the efficacy of the three-domain structure of the Teaching through Interactions model. Hamre et al. (2013) determined that the "organization of classroom interactions into three broad domains of effective teaching 'fits' the reality of preschool and elementary classrooms across the country" (p. 479). Studies such as this one are helpful as we consider not only how we measure the effectiveness of teachers, but also how we plan to develop teachers over the course of their careers.

In a 2009 town hall meeting, President Barack Obama asserted that the "single most important factor in the classroom is the quality of the person standing at the front of the classroom" (Shuls and Trivitt, 2015, p. 645). Skourdoumbis (2014) concurred. Skourdoumbis synthesized the literature and research on teacher effectiveness and the notion of teacher efficacy through the shifts in education policy in Australia. He examined as a catalyst of student achievement the causes of educational inequality, the push toward autonomy of schools, and the movement toward the examination of teacher-level rather than school-level efficacy. His paper focused on student learning as impacted by teachers, and the power of an individual teacher to make a difference. Skourdoumbis, following his synthesis of the literature, asserted that classroom teachers have the highest efficacy in impacting individual and collective student achievement, more so than schools or larger educational initiatives. He further suggested that "teacher effectiveness makes the difference to student achievement, to the exclusion of social class and decentralized school restructuring" (p. 113).

In a slightly different take, an integrative review by Bardach et al. (2021) synthesized the findings of a meta-analysis of studies on teacher psychological characteristics such as personality, enthusiasm, and emotional intelligence upon teacher effectiveness as evidenced by student achievement. Twenty-four quantitative studies were examined, all of which focused on the relationship between teachers' psychological characteristics and effectiveness. The authors synthesized this literature to determine the overall impact of teacher psychological characteristics on teacher effectiveness, well-being, and attrition rates. Teacher characteristics including personality, self-efficacy,

emotional intelligence, enthusiasm, and the ability to manage one's emotions were linked to increased teacher effectiveness (Bardach et al., 2021).

In 2011, Stronge et al. (2011) completed a cross-case analysis between teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Using student achievement data, the researchers studied the classroom practices of effective teachers versus less-effective teachers to determine teacher characteristics and practices of highly effective teachers. Using a three-phase approach that gathered student data from over 300 fifth-grade students, as well as observations and interviews with 32 teachers in the top (17 teachers) and bottom (15 teachers) quartiles, teacher effectiveness was compared with classroom observational findings to determine what constitutes effective teaching. At the conclusion of their research, the authors determined that teachers in the top quartile scored high in characteristics such as fairness, respect, and relational skills, in addition to the ability to manage student behavior and use time and space effectively. In addition, "top quartile teachers had fewer classroom disruptions, better classroom management skills, and better relationships with their students than did bottom quartile teachers (p. 349). The authors did not find significant differences between effective and less-effective teachers in assessment and instructional practices, although the authors acknowledge this is likely due to the relatively small sample size of their study (Stronge et al., 2011).

Knowledge and Pedagogy of Effective Teachers

The research is clear that teacher effectiveness is related to student outcomes. Much of the research has focused on characteristics of teachers, or teacher ability to create classroom routines that set students up for learning. But how important is

knowledge and pedagogy to effective instruction? Do teachers with higher levels of content knowledge deliver higher levels of instruction? A study by Van den Hurk et al. (2017) examined the relationship between teachers' pedagogical knowledge of reading and their fluency instructional practices. Fluency, one of the five pillars of reading instruction, is a critical component of students' reading foundational skills (National Reading Panel, 2000). It develops gradually and can be impacted with instructional strategies and practice designed to promote speed, phrasing, and prosody. Teacher knowledge of these strategies is paramount to student results in fluency improvement, yet teacher pedagogy in this area is varied. In the study by Van den Hurk et al. (2017), 109 teachers in 19 schools were studied to determine the link between pedagogy and practice. Teachers were given a questionnaire based on the science of reading designed to gauge their knowledge of reading fluency content knowledge. The teachers were then observed in two areas, including the teachers' modeling of fluent reading practices and their methods of support of student fluent reading behaviors. The teachers were then assessed on a third measure which took into account student self-efficacy and competence during reading. At the conclusion of the study, using a factor analysis the authors concluded that content knowledge had a limited effect on fluency instructional practices, and that teachers who had lower scores on the pedagogy questionnaire were almost equally able to promote effective fluency instruction for their students (Van den Hurk et al., 2017). The authors concluded that "as a consequence, the focus in preservice and in-service teacher training should not be limited to transfer of knowledge but should preferably address the application of this knowledge base in designing and performing fluent reading

instruction" (Van den Hurk et al., 2017, p. 1244). This then promotes the idea that

pedagogy alone is not enough to result in effective teaching practices. In a similar study

by Griffith et al. (2015), researchers studied eight highly effective primary grade teachers

as they made in-the-moment instructional decisions, drawing upon their reading

pedagogical knowledge in both whole and small group contexts. The goal was to study

the instructional decisions made by the teachers as a group, and how they differed within

the context of whole group, small group, and individual instruction. All eight teachers

were asked to teach two reading lessons, which were observed and videotaped, then

followed by an interview. The researchers found that during whole-group instruction, the

majority of instructional decisions related to reading comprehension, with a smaller

amount centering on encouragement or engagement (Griffith et al., 2015). During small-

group instruction, a greater variety of instructional decisions were observed. Teachers

prompted for comprehension, word-solving strategies, and fluency, and noticing and

praising effort and strategy use. In the individual conferences, word study and problem-

solving strategies were coached primarily (Griffith et al., 2015), which is likely due to

primary readers' foundational work and those in an independent group needing the most

support in these areas. The authors concluded that although their findings could not be

generalized, they assert that effective teachers:

> drew upon their personal and professional knowledge of reading as a process as
>
> they made instructional decisions. They knew that these young readers needed
>
> instruction in phonics, concepts about print, phonological awareness, word
>
> recognition strategies, comprehension, and fluency. Thus, teachers in this study

possessed strong subject matter knowledge, which was transformed into

pedagogical content knowledge during instruction (p. 454).

Pedagogy clearly matters, but how is pedagogy developed? A study by Burnett et

al. (2015) focused on five preservice teachers in the United Kingdom who were studying

to be teachers and were the first to volunteer for the study. Each participant was

interviewed twice by the entire research team about their experiences in teaching literacy

through fieldwork, and in their own literacy experiences and reflections. All researchers

were also university teachers who were teaching the participants in their literacy

coursework based on the most current research in reading pedagogy and were aware of

the pedagogical content that the participants were receiving as students. The researchers

sought to examine the commonalities of the participants "range and scope of literacy

practices and teaching episodes the participants chose to describe" and "what their

positioned accounts suggested about their priorities, beliefs and assumptions about

literacy and literacy teaching" (p. 280). Coding and analysis found that students shared

similar literacy pedagogical practice and experiences, but due to their individual values,

experiences, and beliefs, their interpretation of reading instruction activities differed,

leading the authors to assert that teachers' own literacy experiences need to be taken into

account "if we are to encourage students to become critical, reflective practitioners who

understand the diverse and changing nature of literacy and the implications of this for

literacy learning" (p. 290). This then speaks to the role of pedagogical development as

fluid and dynamic. Christianakis (2018) explained literacy pedagogy and practice as two

important components of literacy teacher education yet called out that in their first years

of teaching, novice teachers often negotiate between their content knowledge, practical and pedagogical understanding, and the curricular resources available to them, which are often at odds with what they learned in their teacher education program. She states in a forward in *Teacher Education Quarterly* that we must focus on literacy and teacher education as a way to improve the pedagogy and content knowledge of preservice and in-service teachers if we are to disrupt falling achievement in reading across the nation and that the development of this pedagogy is not only critical but possible (Christianakis, 2018).

Johnston and Harper (2021) present a different perspective on current reading pedagogy issues facing teachers today. These authors assert that elementary teachers are led to follow specific curricular manuals for literacy instruction, often which are scripted and heavily scaffolded for them and their learners. They point out that professional learning for these teachers often focuses more on assessment data and less on supporting teachers in studying their own practice in relation to student data (Johnston and Harper, 2021), and that what they need is specific instruction and professional support in how to help students at the point of error as they tackle the complexities of learning to read. Johnston and Harper proposed that this support might take the form of professional development or coaching, but presented the notion of practitioner inquiry partnerships. In inquiry partnerships, teachers take an active role in developing curriculum and instructional activities suited to their student needs, using student-centered instruction to engage in the inquiry cycle of wondering and problem-solving, collecting and analyzing data, taking action, sharing results, and repeating the cycle. Johnson and Harper (2021)

assert that this method rests on the dynamic and responsive practices of teachers, stating that "research-informed practitioner inquiry is significant for refining literacy pedagogy in the midst of policies and outside agencies that tend to constrain what literacy pedagogy means and looks like in the classroom" (p.171).

This is a recent call to action by some literacy educators, who assert that when teachers are encouraged to question texts and traditional methodologies in the vein of valuing diversity, they are able to engage their students in more powerful ways. In a study on six literacy teacher educators with a critical stance, Dharamshi (2018) presented the idea that teachers today need to be able to respond to the instructional needs of their students, ensuring that traditional literacy skills are taught alongside out-of-school literacy practices such as home and community literacies. Her qualitative study focused on six literacy teacher educators with a critical literacy stance. Through interviews and analysis, commonalities among the teachers were found. She uncovered teaching practices such as educators "including a wide range of texts in their courses, including videos, blogs, spoken word, spaces, theater, and social media" while "creating invitations for student teachers to disrupt their assumptions of literacy" (Dharamshi, 2018, p. 7). Disrupting the typical pedagogies of literacy instruction was found to have an energizing effect on the student teachers, whose pedagogies were enriched by community influence, a focus on equity, and the confidence to increase awareness of their own involvement in current systems of injustice (Dharamshi, 2018).

What else contributes to teacher effectiveness in relation to pedagogy? In 2020, Bardach and Klassen conducted a systematic review of studies of teacher cognitive

abilities as connected to teacher effectiveness, as defined by positive student achievement outcomes. In this study, 27 articles were screened using criteria set by the researchers and were analyzed to determine whether a relationship existed between teachers' cognitive abilities, as defined as both general intelligence and cognitive ability related to job performance, and teacher effectiveness. Interestingly, the authors' findings determined that half of the studies did not show any statistically significant effect of intelligence, whereas the other half reported negative effects (Bardach and Klassen, 2020). The authors warned against the misinterpretation of this data to assume that there is a negative correlation between teacher intelligence and effectiveness, and suggest that further study is needed in this area. Kosnik et al. (2017) explored the connection between literacy educators' goals and pedagogy at the teacher preparation level. Many questions have been raised in the recent past as to how to prepare future teachers of literacy for an evolving landscape of literacy in the 21st century. Preparing student teachers to be effective literacy teachers has become even more complicated due to the rapid increase in digital technology tools (Kosnik et al., 2017). The authors suggest that many teachers or preservice teachers feel the pressure to teach from current government mandates, resulting in an approach that is disjointed at best and ineffective at worst. Thus, new teachers to the field may simply teach as they were taught, missing the 'big picture of literacy' and not developing the necessary pedagogical skills to fully meet the needs of their students. In this study, the nine literacy teacher educators focused on instilling not only pedagogical knowledge but values and beliefs in their teacher candidates, with "the goal for the students to see the standards as the floor, not the ceiling" (Kosnik et al.,

2017). The authors suggest that in order to best prepare future teachers, literacy teacher educators must engage in research on graduates entering the teaching practice to serve as a practical critique of the literacy methods courses, and to highlight whether there are areas that are falling short of the pedagogies needed to meet student needs in the real world (Kosnik et al., 2017).

Finally, Moats (2014) analyzed the research with a focus on what teachers don't know, and why they aren't learning it. The author focused on the poor preparation of teachers to address student reading disorder needs, asserting that the typical teacher is unprepared to meet the needs of students with reading disabilities. She suggested that science-based instruction is neglected in many college preparation programs and that the content that is presented is often elusive and theoretical, not allowing for hands-on practice or visible learning. Her analysis revealed that although there is much evidence linking teacher knowledge, practice, and student outcomes, more attention needs to be given to how students are prepared to be effective teachers. She refocuses the attention away from ideological wars, stating that the "disciplinary knowledge base required to teach students with reading and related difficulties must be unambiguously explained in the standards by which teachers are educated and evaluated, building teachers' insight as well as their knowledge of basic reading psychology, language structure, and pedagogy" (Moats, 2014, p. 75). This then suggests that although teacher candidates are primed to develop pedagogical knowledge, they may not be developing the necessary pedagogical skills to meet the needs of their future students.

Effective Teachers' Beliefs and Values

Beyond literacy pedagogy and knowledge, what other factors contribute to teacher effectiveness and student success? According to the research, effective teachers share similar beliefs and values about students and how they learn. Teachers' beliefs about students matter. Their beliefs about teacher-student relationships, students' backgrounds and abilities, and their beliefs and values about teaching and education, in general, contribute to effective teaching and student learning.

Teachers' beliefs about students matter. In a study on the correlation between teacher beliefs, mindsets, and their impact on cultural proficiency, 853 public educators were surveyed about their beliefs on mindset, knowledge, and teaching. Teacher gender, age, ethnicity, education, experience, income, and their beliefs about mindset and knowledge were correlated with their responses to survey items designed to measure cultural competency. Results from this study showed that individuals with more fixed mindsets are more likely to have lower levels of cultural proficiency development, and teachers who have fixed mindsets about others were more likely to hold deficit mindsets of their students and set lower-level goals for them (Spiess & Cooper, 2020). Skourdoumbis (2014) asserted that classroom teachers have the highest efficacy in impacting individual and collective student achievement, thus the findings from this study suggest that teacher beliefs and values are not only a direct contributor to student academic achievement outcomes, but essential to the closure of the achievement gap between White students and students of color.

In a recent study, Kwok et al. (2021) examined preservice teachers' beliefs about equity, inclusion, and diversity, and how these beliefs changed through their teacher preparation process. Due to the authors' stance that teachers who have limited understanding or biases about students of color tend to transfer that perspective into an educational setting, they surveyed 114 preservice teachers at the beginning and end of their teacher preparation programs around their beliefs about students' cultural backgrounds in the context of literacy education. Study findings found that preservice teachers' beliefs around equity and diversity as they relate to the impact of literacy education were strengthened throughout their educational experience. Students demonstrating an equity mindset on the survey went from 19% on the pretest to 41% on the post-test (Kwok et al., 2021). In addition, the authors noted that preservice teachers' "describing equality and diversity throughout their literacy responses were richer and stronger in tone and stance toward an equity- or equality-based perspective" (p. 898). This is a significant finding due to the inherent connection between literacy and culture, as the understanding and engagement in literacy is contextually bound and effective teachers understand and teach with this in mind. The authors end with the statement that "equity and equality are not opposing forces in effective teaching of diverse groups of students'" (p. 903), calling to action the necessity in preparing preservice teachers to meet the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Teacher beliefs about students' backgrounds related to their academic abilities also matter. Souvenir and Egloff (2019), in an effort to determine whether teachers' beliefs about student ability resulted in student reading fluency and comprehension

outcomes, conducted a study of 25 teachers and 451 students over an academic year. The study sought to determine whether the adaptability of teacher beliefs about how students learn best would occur, and if this adaptability would result in student learning. The researchers wondered whether teachers might provide more direct, code-focused instruction to lower-ability learners, and provide more autonomy and freedom to high-ability learners through a constructivist approach. They hypothesized that student outcomes would be greater when teachers' constructivist beliefs are lower for low-ability compared to high-ability students, and when direct-transmissive beliefs are higher for low-ability compared to high-ability students (Souvenir & Egloff, 2019). At the conclusion of the study, the authors found that the adaptability of teacher beliefs in utilizing a constructivist approach was advantageous for fostering students' reading comprehension, but they found no correlation to student reading fluency, likely due to the more concrete approach needed for developing student fluency. Regardless, the authors determined that teacher beliefs were directly related to student comprehension outcomes, concluding that "belief adaptivity may be a source of teaching effectiveness since it may cause a better fit between beliefs and related instructional needs according to students' varying levels of reading abilities" (Souvenir & Egloff, 2019, p. 969).

Teachers' beliefs and values about teacher-student relationships matter, too. Hamre et al. (2012) completed an 18-month study of 440 teachers, where half participated in a 14-week class on effective teacher-child interaction. At the beginning of the study, teachers were assessed on their understanding of effective teacher-student interactions, beliefs about language and literacy instruction, and quality teaching

practices. At the conclusion of the study, the teachers who participated in the study demonstrated greater knowledge and skills in identifying effective interactions than those in the control group (Hamre et al., 2012). Teachers in the study also displayed greater knowledge about language and literacy skills and held higher beliefs in the importance of these skills in children's development compared to those in the control group (Hamre et al., 2012).

Teachers' mental health and their beliefs of their own ability to impact student academic outcomes matter. As has been established previously, research suggests that a teacher's impact on students is of extreme importance. Thus, it stands to reason that teachers' mental physical health may contribute to their efficacy. In a recent study (Capone and Petrillo, 2018), researchers examined teacher mental health, burnout, depression, self-efficacy, collective efficacy and job satisfaction. 285 teachers were included in the study, completing a questionnaire based on the above factors which the authors then analyzed. Study findings showed that based on teacher self-reports, teacher self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and job satisfaction were positively correlated with mental health, and that flourishing teachers performed better than individuals who were languishing or who had moderate mental health (Capone and Petrillo, 2018). Further, the authors suggested that improving the well-being of teachers might also have implications for students' educational outcomes, and also for their social and emotional development (Capone and Petrillo, 2018).

Teachers' belief in their own self-efficacy matters as well. Teacher self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to bring about the desired outcomes of student

engagement and learning (Keppens et al., 2021). In their study which was designed to explore the extent to which student teachers' beliefs and self-efficacy around inclusive teaching related to their beliefs around teacher-student interactions and differentiated instruction, Keppens et al. (2021) used video and survey data to measure teacher-student interactions and differentiated instruction within the classrooms of student teachers. These teachers completed a questionnaire about their beliefs and practices relating to diversity, self-efficacy, and instructional inclusive practices, while also completing a task that required them to view and rate video clips for greater inclusive instructional practices in teacher-student interactions or differentiated instruction. At the conclusion of the study, researchers found that teachers who scored lower on beliefs about diversity also scored lower in the areas of self-efficacy and their ability to notice teacher-student interactions and differentiated instruction (Keppens et al., 2021). Data also indicated that the higher a teacher's constructivist beliefs, or their belief that students must attach new learning to previous learning in a way where the student is able to construct their own learning, the more they notice aspects of inclusive classroom characteristics related to differentiated instruction, yet this same correlation was not found for the noticing of teacher-student interactions (Keppens et al., 2021). This study's findings are especially important as they suggest that pre-service teachers need explicit training in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence in order to cultivate belief systems that transfer to their self-efficacy to meet the needs of their students, who are increasingly diverse in most school districts, and that without this explicit training, student needs may not be met, leading toward widening achievement gaps.

How do teachers develop this sense of efficacy? Protheroe (2008), in a synthesis of research on teacher efficacy, states that efficacy is developed through experience, especially during student teaching and the first years of their career. Teachers who believe they can teach all children in ways that enable them to meet these high standards are more likely to exhibit teaching behaviors that support this Goal (Protheroe, 2008). Research shows that 'vicarious experiences' of watching other teachers is an effective means for teacher development, as is 'social persuasion' of observations and feedback on teacher practice and coaching for improvement (Protheroe, 2008). In addition, working in a school with a culture of risk-taking and collaboration, and with shared group-purpose and cooperation, can help inspire and foster teacher efficacy (Protheroe, 2008). Collective teacher efficacy, or the ability of a group of teachers to believe that they can impact student learning positively, is a familiar term to most educators. Hattie's work on effect size of instructional practices has labeled "collective teacher efficacy" as one of the greatest influences on student achievement for many years (Hattie, 2015). Because teachers in a school characterized by the belief that their efforts matter are typically more likely to accept challenging goals and be less likely to give up easily, there is a positive relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement (Protheroe, 2008).

In a recent study of 426 teachers in K-12 schools, Er (2021) examined the link between teacher beliefs and professional development and how they impact student outcomes. A survey designed to measure teacher beliefs, as indicated by their levels of trust, optimism, affective commitment, professional learning, and changed practices as a

result of professional learning, was administered to all study participants. Results of these measures were analyzed by the researchers, who found that effectively committed teachers with high levels of positive belief attributes were more likely to engage in professional learning activities, which in turn stimulated them to adopt more effective instructional practices (Er, 2021). The authors presented research that suggests that the more principals engage in leadership activities that promote teaching and learning objectives, the greater the trust, optimism, and collective efficacy of the staff. This research highlights the importance of teacher beliefs and professional learning in promoting teacher change in instructional practices, and leveraging teacher beliefs to engage teachers in professional learning activities to improve teaching and increase student outcomes is paramount (Er, 2021).

Summary

Across the nation, falling reading achievement and widening reading achievement gaps between White students and students of color have been well documented. The effects of COVID-19 cannot be underestimated, and research is just beginning to document the learning loss that has resulted from the pandemic. The chasm between high- and low-income students is also increasing, and state and federal legislation continues to try to combat the problem. Currently, ESSER funds are being used to attempt to correct the downward trend of student reading achievement. Research on effective reading instruction is plentiful, with the Science of Reading and the phonics debate a current issue in literacy education. The trend toward evidence-based literacy instruction as an anchor to 'what works' in reading instruction, has swept the nation's

classrooms as well as university teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs are grappling with preparing students to meet the needs of a changing demographic of students as our country continues to grow more racially diverse, and the changing landscape of who becomes teachers, and how they become teachers, continues to evolve. The continuing quest as to how to best prepare preservice teachers to meet student reading needs, and how to diagnose and address reading difficulties, remains a heavily debated and researched topic. Professional development and its impact upon teachers and ultimately students will need to continue to be studied and improved if it will be able to equip teachers with the tools and resources needed to meet the needs of students and struggling readers. Teachers' beliefs and values must also continue to be examined for their role and link in promoting effective student learning outcomes in reading.

Although the research is comprehensive and indicative of the problem that underlies my study, both in the problem of student growth and proficiency and in the inconsistent ability of teachers to meet these needs, there is a clear gap in the literature. What remains to be explored is a deeper examination of the specific instructional practices employed by teachers who are able to produce higher reading growth than that of their grade-level colleagues, while serving similar populations of students, using the same curricular resources and district materials, and with the same time constraints. Furthermore, the philosophies and beliefs of these highly effective teachers might be analyzed to determine characteristics or secondary variables that might be assisting in creating successful reading outcomes for students.

CHAPTER III

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to determine the effective instructional practices of highly effective reading teachers as evidenced by their students' rate of reading growth over the course of one academic year. This qualitative grounded theory study sought to determine the common beliefs, values, philosophies, and practices by teachers who consistently produce the greatest reading growth in their students compared to that of their teaching peers. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is characterized by data collection in a natural setting, interacting with or observing participants in the field. The researcher is an active participant in the study, drawing on open-ended questions that they devise themselves. A researcher often uses multiple methods of data collection, which might include interviews, observation, and questionnaires, then organizes the data into categories or themes that cut a through line across the multiple data sources through an inductive, 'bottom-up' process. The researcher's own perspectives are not central to the study; rather, the participants' multiple perspectives and meanings are the focus of the analysis, which may evolve and adjust the study as it emerges. Finally, qualitative research requires the researcher to 'position themselves' within the study, explaining how their own background and experiences inform their analysis and interpretation of the information gathered in the study. This approach matched this study due to the active, exploratory, and solution-seeking nature of the research questions. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the

central research question(s) of a qualitative study are open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional (p. 137).

The central research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. RQ1: What are the instructional practices used by effective reading teachers that promote the highest rate of reading growth over one year among all student demographic groups?

2. RQ2: What beliefs, values, and characteristics do highly effective teachers hold about reading and learning?

Grounded Theory

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of theoretical frameworks to study the meaning that individuals or a group of people ascribe to a problem. Where other forms of qualitative research focus on the description of stories and common experiences, grounded theory research moves beyond description to generate or discover a theoretical explanation grounded in data from human observation or action (p. 82). Grounded theory research originated in 1967 by Glazer and Strauss, who believed that the available frameworks for qualitative study at the time were often ill-suited or inappropriate and that research theory should be grounded in observational data from the field, providing for the generation of active theory by the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Corbin and Strauss (2007), grounded theory methodology is designed to guide researchers in producing dense theory based upon patterns of action and interaction. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that in grounded theory, the researcher is an active participant who generates a

theory of process, action, or interaction shaped by the views and experiences of participants (p.82). Despite the co-creation of grounded theory as a research framework, Glazer and Strauss eventually parted ways in their view of grounded theory research, with Glazer criticizing Strass's view of grounded theory as too prescribed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the past two decades, Charmaz suggested a more constructivist and interpretive view of grounded theory, and Clarke argued that social theory informs grounded theory research, advocating for the researcher's role as a participant rather than an all-knowing analyst (p.83).

Defining Characteristics

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), grounded theory research focuses on a process that evolves over time. A grounded theory study thus has 'movement' or distinct action which it is attempting to explain. The researcher seeks at the conclusion of the study to develop a theory or understanding of this process or action. The researcher uses memoing to develop their theory as data is collected and analyzed constantly through data collection. Grounded theory research is also characterized by the simultaneous collection and analysis of the data as the researcher moves between interviews, observations, and analysis in a fluid motion. Finally, data collection can be systematically organized and structured, or less so, yet is typically characterized by the use of open, axial, and selective coding in the development of the researcher's final theory based upon their interaction with participants.

For the purposes of this study, I relied upon the approach advocated by Charmaz, which emphasizes the development of theory based on a "co-construction process

dependent upon researcher interactions with participants and field" (p.84). This approach

allowed me to construct a general theory from interviews and interactions with

participants while simultaneously analyzing and interacting with the data, refining my

theory as I completed my research in the field.

Rationale

I chose to use a grounded theory approach due to the active nature of my research

questions. The process of teaching reading is a fluid and responsive process, complex in

nature, yet with clear results in student data and achievement outcomes. I sought to

determine the most effective practices, beliefs, and values which translate to student

learning. In my study, I interviewed highly effective teachers, used open and axial codes

to develop themes, and finally used selective coding to help me form a hypothesis

describing the data and information gathered during the study. Creswell and Creswell

(2018) stated that grounded theory research often includes a 'storyline' which helps to

explain the central problem or action, generated by the researcher from multiple

interactions with those experiencing or contributing to the action in the field. My study

and its central research questions focused on the teachers who are working to create the

conditions for students to make advanced reading growth, seeking to make a new

contribution to the research of this current problem.

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Elger's Theory of Academic Performance (2007).

Elger's theory grounds readers in the understanding that while "some factors that

influence improving academic performance are immutable, other factors can be

influenced by the performer or by others" (p. 20). This was the crux of my research, which focused on the specific instructional practices of highly effective reading teachers and their direct impact on student reading growth during one academic year. Elger (2007) stated that academic performance and improvement "depends holistically on six components: context, level of knowledge, levels of skills, level of identity, personal factors, and fixed factors" (p. 19). This theory resonates with my research considering the teaching moves, values, and beliefs of highly effective teachers. Although the educators themselves were the focus of my study, the impact on students is what drove my research. Equipping all teachers with the tools, strategies, and instructional practices that effective teachers use to meet the complex reading needs of students would then be a goal of schools, districts, and colleges and universities. As Elger stated, "When people learn and grow, they are empowered to create results that make a difference" (p. 22).

Participants

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that in grounded theory research, the investigator selects a sample of individuals to study based on their contribution to the development of the theory (p. 318). This method of sampling is called theoretical sampling and was used for this study. Participants were chosen from one Twin Cities suburban school district, based on student reading growth data collected from five school years in the same district. Teachers across grades kindergarten through third-grade were identified by their students' average reading growth from fall to spring. For the purposes of my study, I relied on within-year fall-to-spring universal screening assessments to determine student reading growth across an academic year. Student baseline reading data

was collected in the fall, and student reading growth was again measured in the spring through a subsequent assessment to determine effective instruction and student progress across that academic year.

Research documents that student achievement and reading growth depend in large part on their teacher and the school they attend (Anderson, 2019). The majority of research centers on spring high-stakes assessments, tracking year-to-year student proficiency measures. Schools and teachers are judged on these numbers, which fail to tell the whole story of the students and instruction occurring in classrooms. Classroom makeup, demographics, resources available, and many other factors are present in this data. However, students' within-year reading growth tells a clearer story of the efficacy of instruction within a classroom, and it is this data in which I based my study. It would not be fair to judge a teacher as effective simply by spring accountability scores that do not take into account contributing factors such as classroom makeup, socioeconomic status, district resources, demographics, etc. Rather, comparing students' within-year reading growth from fall to spring provides a way to look at teacher effectiveness in reading instruction. In a recent study immediately preceding the pandemic, researchers found a greater variance among student achievement as determined by classroom teacher than as determined by school, supporting the claim that achievement is connected to the teacher to whom the student is assigned (Anderson, 2019). Another study found that student baseline proficiency levels play an important role in their within-year reading growth. In this longitudinal study of third-grade students over three years, researchers found that high-achieving students grew more slowly across the year, compared to

average or lower-performing students who grew steeply from fall to spring (Rambo-Hernandez & Coach, 2015). Another study indicated that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds progressed at faster rates of reading growth during the primary grades, but after third grade, their rate of growth slowed (Kieffer, 2011). The findings of this particular study questioned the intense focus on primary reading growth and suggested that more emphasis should be placed on reading intervention programs in the intermediate years and beyond when within-year student reading growth stalls. Regardless of student age, the focus on within-year reading growth underscores the impact and importance of a teacher who is able to use assessment data to pinpoint a student's instructional gaps and to correctly identify the specific and targeted instruction to fill them. Effective reading instruction does just this, with student fall-to-spring reading growth as the measure of effectiveness.

The district where my study took place uses the FastBridge Assessment System (Illuminate Education Inc., 2022), a suite of reading assessments that target specific reading skills within each grade level. In kindergarten and first grade, the FastBridge earlyReading assessment assesses students on reading skills such as concept of print, letter names, letter sounds, onset sounds, decoding, segmenting, and sentence reading. In grades two through twelve, the FastBridge aReading assessment assesses students on their ability to decode reading passages, recognize sight words, determine vocabulary meaning, and answer comprehension questions. Students are assessed three times per year, with the assessment itself adjusting to the expectations of a student in a particular grade level in the fall, winter, and spring of each year. The district data analyst used the

reading growth measure from fall to spring to determine the rate of student reading growth, then identified those teachers who consistently were able to encourage reading growth from all of their students. She provided me with this list, and the two of us determined the participants on which to focus my attention and study.

To determine study participants, teachers were ranked by rate of all students' average reading growth during the three focus years, then by rate of reading growth among White students only, then by students of color only. The teachers consistently present in all three data sets as high growth-getters were then analyzed for rate of growth. Depending on the number of teachers and the average growth rates present, twelve participants were chosen as focus teachers for the study. All participants were licensed Minnesota teachers with greater than six years of experience in grades kindergarten through third-grade in the focus district, and most were White, mid-career females, as this is the demographic that makes up the majority of teachers in this suburban school district. A consent form that includes details about the research was shared with identified teachers and confidentiality measures were outlined at this time.

Data Collection

Data was collected through interviews of participants chosen from one Twin Cities public suburban school district. Student K-3 FastBridge reading growth data (*earlyReading* and *aReading* assessment data) was used to determine which teachers consistently demonstrated the highest rate of growth among their students from fall to spring, based on fall baseline and then spring screening scores. Participants were chosen from reading growth data collected from three school years: 2022-23, 2021-22, and 2020-

21(Data from 2019-20 was intentionally not included as the COVID-19 shutdown interrupted standard testing procedures. In the spring of 2020, this district only assessed students below benchmark, and rather than being assessed at school students were assessed at home, resulting in assessment reliability and less-than-optimal testing environments for some students.) This historical data was collected with the goal of identifying teachers with the highest overall student average reading growth across these three years, then by rate of reading growth among White students only, then by students of color only. The teachers consistently present in all three data sets as high growth-getters were then analyzed for rate of growth.

Once participants were identified, I reached out by email to explain the study. I provided a letter that detailed the study, explained the confidentiality measures, and what I planned to do with the findings. To ensure confidentiality for participants, I utilized a guest interviewer. This accomplished two important aims, including providing confidentiality to the participants and assisting me in maintaining objectivity in data collection and analysis. A pilot interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 165) took place before formal interviews with study participants to ensure that the questions were open-ended and clear. This allowed me to adjust any questions or protocols in advance of participant interviews. Interviews began with a review of the study purpose, an opportunity for the participant to ask questions, and an offer of a copy of the transcription of the interview. Interviews were conducted with these teachers to determine common characteristics, beliefs, values, instructional practices, and philosophies and mindsets of teaching that have led them to support their students in high rates of reading growth

across one academic year. Interviews were transcribed and provided to me without participant names to ensure confidentiality. I then analyzed the transcripts through memoing, notes, and reflections, then finally the coding process occurred and themes emerged and were identified. Finally, the themes were described using a "narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis" (Creswell, J. & Creswell, J.D., 2018, p. 195).

Instrumentation

Interviews play a central role in the data collection in a grounded theory study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, interviews consisted of six consistent questions and subquestions. From these interviews, memoing and coding occurred and themes emerged. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that "memoing during each and every analytic session is a way of tracking the evolution of codes and theme development" (p. 188). Interviews were structured and approximately 60-90 minutes in length, held on Zoom for ease of transcription. Permission was granted by the focus district, and lead principals of the focus participants were asked for and granted permission once participants were identified. The same interview questions were administered to all participants by an outside interviewer and focused on teacher beliefs, philosophies, and pedagogy of reading instruction (see Appendix A). Six central questions with sub-questions related to characteristics, philosophies, and instructional practices of the teacher as practitioner, and were intentionally open-ended to encourage teachers to share their beliefs and values, as well as pedagogical knowledge and practices, as related to reading instruction.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that the role of the researcher is viewed as the instrument in qualitative studies. Therefore, it is important to note that the researcher is a female school principal in the focus district, and recognizes that her own experiences may influence her analysis of the data and information collected. The researcher holds a K-6 elementary teaching license, a K-12 reading license, and a K-12 administrative license, and approached this study with preconceived beliefs and philosophies about reading instruction and effective teaching. However, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted, the researcher will "keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researcher(s) bring to the research" (p. 44). This aim was supported by the use of an outside interviewer to maintain confidentiality as well as researcher objectivity.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research is based upon careful, reflective analysis of data collected in natural settings. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), data analysis involves organizing data, conducting a preliminary examination of the data, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and formulating an interpretation or analysis. These interconnected steps form the basis of data analysis, which in a qualitative study can be depicted as a spiral figure beginning with data collection and narrowing to a representation of findings (p. 186). These authors advise researchers to "immerse themselves in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts" (p. 187). Scanning or rapid reading of the text allows the researcher to get a sense of the interview before beginning to break the information into codes. In grounded

theory study, the researcher reads and reviews, writing memos consisting of short phrases, ideas, or key concepts, in the margins of field notes and transcripts. Glaser and Strauss (1967) asserted that grounded theory research is characterized by constant comparison of data through the analysis process. The constant comparison of interviews, notes, memos, and codes throughout the analysis process helps the researcher to stay close to the data, noticing similarities and differences, and ultimately assists the researcher in seeing new patterns and developing a theory from the data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) advise researchers to prioritize memoing throughout the analysis process, beginning with the initial read and continuing through the writing of any conclusions. They advocate for creating a system of memo organization and memo retrieval before moving into the process of coding. Coding is a way of categorizing data and is the "heart of qualitative data analysis" (p. 189). According to the authors, coding involves making sense of the text or data collected from interviews, and aggregating the data into categories before assigning a label to the code. Grounded theory research consists of three phases of coding. The process begins with open coding, where codes or categories are assigned to the information gathered from the text. Next, in axial coding, a central phenomenon is determined from the open codes, and the texts are reviewed once again for additional insight to explain the central phenomenon. Finally, in selective coding, a theory is generated from the interrelated categories. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that researchers use lean coding, beginning with five or six categories which expand as data analysis expands, then working to reduce these categories to five or six themes upon which to base their final narrative.

For the purposes of this study, I followed the spiral model presented by Creswell and Creswell (2018). In this model, organizing the data, memoing ideas, coding into themes, and interpreting and representing the data are fluid actions that result in a synthesis of data analysis. In a pictorial representation of coding, the authors present a visual representation of initial codes growing to expanded codes before moving these codes into categories, to finally a theme (p. 191). This visual model resonated with me as grounded theory research is built upon the creation of a primary theory based on data that is grounded in the field through the perspective of the participants. Following these data analysis procedures helped me as a researcher to remain outside the data, as an unbiased instrument. At the suggestion of the authors, I planned to read briskly before coding, using memoing to capture emerging ideas, highlighting noteworthy quotes as I coded, created visual diagrams representing observed relationships among concepts, and noticed patterns in the data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), while engaging in constant comparison as I moved through the data analysis.

Although some qualitative researchers incorporate the use of technology into their data analysis, I did not do this. The use of computer programs can provide a method for data organization and provide visual representations for codes and themes, but also present challenges such as a time commitment for program learning, the possibility of hindering creativity, and possible barriers against implementing changes within the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The authors make it clear that although some researchers might find electronic resources helpful, they are not necessary, quoting Marshall and

Rossman (2015) who stated that by avoiding computer programs for analysis, "the hard

analytic thinking must be done by the researcher's own internal hard drive" (p. 208).

CHAPTER IV

Emergent Themes

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to determine the specific instructional practices, characteristics, beliefs, and values of highly effective reading teachers as evidenced by their students' rate of reading growth over the course of one academic year by all demographic groups. Twelve focus teachers were chosen based on their student growth data (see Figure B1) and interviews were conducted by an outside interviewer to encourage candor in responses. Participants (11 women and one man) ranged in age from 28 to 62 years of age. The average number of years taught was 20 years, with a range from four years to 35 (see Figure B2). Eleven of the 12 participants hold a master's degree, and three-quarters of the participants earned their initial teaching license during their undergraduate degree. Only one of the 12 participants possess any type of advanced preparation in reading. All 12 participants participated fully in the interviews and answered all interview questions. Participants were asked the same six questions with sub-questions (see Appendix A). Three of the questions were designed to solicit information regarding specific teaching practices and teacher moves, and three were designed to uncover teachers' values, beliefs, and philosophies. However, the coding process was intentionally flexible to allow for answers that supported both research questions.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative data analysis involves organizing data, conducting a preliminary examination of the data, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and finally formulating an interpretation or analysis. Data

analysis for this study followed Bryman's (Gibbs, 2010) four stages of qualitative

analysis. First, the interview transcripts were read as whole entities. Second, the

transcripts were reread, marked, and coded. Open coding, axial coding, selective coding,

and theoretical matching was employed in this study. In alignment with grounded theory

research, in vivo coding was included in this research, drawing on participant words as

exact codes during the open and axial coding stages of data analysis (Creswell & Poth,

2017). Next, codes were eliminated for repetition before finally identifying the

interconnectedness of the codes, relating the codes to the research, and determining

overarching themes, which were organized by the two central research questions:

RQ1: What are the instructional practices used by effective reading teachers that

promote the highest rate of reading growth over one year among all student

demographic groups?

RQ2: What beliefs, values, and characteristics do highly effective teachers hold

about reading and learning?

Fifty-eight initial in vivo codes were distilled into nine common themes. Themes were

determined when a majority of participant responses contributed to a common code,

group of codes, or broader idea. See Tables 1 and 2 for a list of the codes, categories, and

themes that emerged during the open-coding and data analysis process.

Table 1

Bryman's Coding Stages 1 and 2: In Vivo Codes (58)

Love kids	Importance of work
Collaboration with other teachers	Urgency
Collaboration with families	Seize moments
Informal assessment/daily	Learning all day
Just right books	Knowing the students
Individualized instruction	Understand the whole child
Collaboration with paras	Sense of urgency
High expectations	Responsibility
Perseverance	Student success
Reading enjoyment	Classroom community
Student efficacy	Developing a love of reading
Grit	Paraprofessionals
Make an impact - student future	Constant/daily/regular instruction
Relationship with student	Student confidence
Parent connection	Data-driven
Student confidence	Stamina
Small groups	All children can succeed
Conferring	Choice
Meet students where at	Learn at high levels
Growth	Phonics
Light bulb moment(s)	Science of reading
Modeling	Fluency
Adjust to needs	Vocabulary
Explicit instruction	Comprehension
Flexibility	Phonemic awareness
Visuals	Practice
Creativity	Independent reading/work
Differentiate	Read alouds
Fun	Passion

Table 2

Bryman's Coding Stages 3 and 4: Interconnected Codes (19)

1. Love kids/Importance of work/passion
2. Urgency/responsibility
3. Make an impact on student futures
4. Collaboration with other teachers
5. Paras/parents as partners
6. Individualized instruction/Meet students where at/adjust/flex to needs/differentiation
7. Informal daily assessment/Data-driven instruction
8. Small groups/1:1 teaching
9. Conferring/just right books
10. High expectations for students
11. All children can succeed/learn at high levels
12. Student efficacy, confidence
13. Perseverance/grit
14. Student confidence/growth/lightbulb moments
15. Relationship with students
16. Knowing the students/whole child
17. Modeling, use of many strategies, use of visuals and realia
18. Make learning fun/love of reading
19. Seize moments/learning all day/building on learning

Table 3

Bryman's Coding Stages 3 and 4: Emergent Themes (9)

1. Personalized Learning:	Individualized instruction/Meet students where at/adjust/flex to needs/Honor whole child
2. Targeted Instruction:	Use of Small groups/One-to-one instruction /Conferring
3. Assessment:	Informal daily assessment/Data-driven instruction
4. Literacy Practices:	Five pillars/Modeling/Use of many strategies/Use of visuals/Explicit pedagogy
5. Active Learning:	Make learning fun/Love of reading/Use of movement/Seize moments/Learning all-day
6. Commitment to Teaching:	Love kids/Importance of work/Passion/ Urgency/Responsibility/Make an impact
7. High Expectations:	High expectations/All children can succeed/Learn at high levels
8. Student Efficacy:	Student efficacy/Perseverance/ Student confidence/Growth/Honor whole child
9. Collaboration:	Collaboration with other teachers, paras, families

Ultimately, five themes were distinguished for Research Question 1 and four themes identified for Research Question 2 based on all 12 participant responses and narratives. See Table 4 and Table 5 for alignment of themes to research questions. Emergent themes are noted in boldface type, with interrelated codes in italics. Pieces of data collected from participant interviews follow, listed by participant codes A-L.

Table 4

Alignment of Themes and Evidence to Research Question 1

RQ1: Instructional Practices
What are the instructional practices used by effective reading teachers that promote the highest rate of reading growth over one year among all student demographic groups?

Personalized Learning: *Individualized instruction/Meet students where at/adjust/Flex to needs/Honor whole child*	**Targeted Instruction:** *Use of Small groups/1:1/Conferring/Just right books*	**Assessment:** *Universal screening/ Informal daily assessments/ Data-driven instructional practices*	**Literacy Practices:** *5 Pillars/ Modeling/ Use of many strategies/Use of visuals, Explicit pedagogy*	**Active Learning:** *Make learning fun/Love of reading/Use of movement/ Seize moments of learning all day/Constant daily instruction*

Table 5

Alignment of Themes and Evidence to Research Question 2

RQ2: Beliefs and Values
What beliefs, values, and characteristics do highly effective teachers hold about reading and learning?

Commitment to Teaching: *Love kids/ Importance of work/Passion for teaching, Urgency/responsibility/ Make an impact on student future*	**High Expectations:** *High expectations/All children can succeed/Learn at high levels*	**Student Efficacy:** *Student efficacy, Perseverance/ Student confidence/ Growth/Lightbulb moments*	**Collaboration:** *Collaboration with other teachers/ paras/parents and families*

Although many of the codes and evidence collected could relate to either central research question, they aligned most closely with one or the other and were cross-referenced to the interview questions posed. The exception is the theme of Collaboration, which arguably could be included in Research Question 1 (Instructional Practices) but was chosen to support Research Question 2 (Beliefs and Values) due to the intentional action of the participants and value placed upon collaboration as a mechanism and strategy to support student reading achievement and growth.

<div align="center">

RQ1 Themes: Instructional Practices

</div>

A Mission to Personalize Student Learning

Each study participant stated their view of the importance of meeting students' individual needs and meeting each student at their current level in order to move them forward academically. Sixty-five pieces of data collected from participants contributed to this theme, making it one of the most robust themes within this research. Sub-themes of individual instruction, flexing to student needs, and honoring the whole child and all they bring with them were present in participant responses.

Meeting the specific needs of each student was a commitment shared among all study participants. Several participants mentioned that teaching is not "one size fits all." (Note that transcripts were received by the researcher without personal identification to minimize assumptions and/or bias, and pseudonyms are used here to ensure participants' privacy.) Several study participants mentioned that teaching is not "one size fits all." Amy, 57 years old with 33 years of teaching experience stated, "You have to look at each student. Every method, every thing, is not right for each student. So the first thing is

looking at each student and what their needs are, and then matching their needs with the reading piece." Jane, age 58 with 35 years of teaching experience commented, "I know my students and find those moments to help them practice their skills. Really sitting with the kids that just need a little more attention and giving them that time." Isabelle, age 28, with seven years of teaching experience stated, "My favorite part is meeting students where they're at and finding out what skills they need and working on a specific plan to help that child feel successful and confident."

Clare, age 53, with 30 years of teaching experience reflected on her instruction, which she gears to the "middle of the road." "I teach to the middle. Then we talk about those kids who need extra support and what interventions we can use." Brooke, age 29, with four years of teaching experience shared her thoughts about the curriculum's ability to meet the needs of her students, stating, " I think our curriculum works for about 80%, maybe 90% of the kids, and then for those who need more I do a lot of targeted instruction in letter sounds, sounding out words." Isabelle concurred, stating, "The foundation for reading is not a linear process. It's not this, then this, then this. Something might work for one student but not the next." Kyle, age 29 with six years of experience commented, "We start where they're at coming in, and that helps us throughout the year go through and teach exactly what they need . . . differentiating where each learner is."

Lynn, age 62 with 12 years of experience stated, "It's never one size fits all, and what applies to one child might not apply to another." Faith, age 46 with 21 years of teaching experience) concurred, "Personalized learning is really important. . . . We plan

instruction for each of our students, no matter where they're at." Gia, age 39 with 21 years of experience, reflecting on students with special education needs, stated:

> I make sure I am meeting whatever accommodations that they need according to their IEP to help them be successful… and I am helping the other students as we go. We have built into our schedules independent work time so that I can meet and work with those students that might need that additional boost or those extra interventions.

The need to flexibly address student needs by adjusting one's instruction was a common theme among study participants. Brooke stated, "Every kid needs something so different." Isabelle agreed and commented, "I always say some students are four-piece puzzles, and I put them together real quick. And some are 1000-piece, and it takes all year because you just have to keep meeting needs." Kyle agreed and stated, "It really depends specifically on what they need. Having the background knowledge of knowing what gaps they have." Amy commented:

> You get these kids who are kind of outliers. I've had several of them where you start them somewhere, and it's not their level. So we've had to back them up. It's really about making sure that the kids are getting what they need and are at the level they need to be. So basically, it's looking again at each individual child and each individual child's needs.

Participant D (Danielle, age, 28, with six years of experience) agreed, "It's really about interacting with children and being adaptable. And just continuing to adapt as the day goes on." Considering the varied needs of students at her grade level, Lynn stated:

> All kids learn at different paces. And kids learn in different ways. I'm a big fan of the Vygotsky Zone of Proximal Development, so I think with every child, the trick for me is those little, little steps of success. Small, tiny steps of success and celebrating, I make a big deal out of celebrating every success.

Danielle reflected on the responsibility of the teacher to adjust their instruction for students, commenting, "Not all students are going to learn the same. It's our job to change what we do so that they can be successful." Participant E (Ellen, age 56 with 32 years of teaching experience) agreed, "You have to look at both ends and the kids in the middle and what their needs are, and to make sure that they're being challenged and continuing to learn. I just really believe that you can meet the kids wherever they are."

The notion of nurturing the whole child was lifted by participants. Lynn began by stating, "The biggest challenge is really knowing each kid at a very deep level and building your relationship with the child." Jane agreed, commenting on the importance of knowing her students, "It's important that I understand the whole child and knowing what each of my students needs." Ellen shared her thoughts on the importance of building upon a child's strengths, stating, "With students, I have that struggle, I always find something they're really good at and start with that . . . finding where they can be successful and building on it with something that might be a bit more difficult." Lynn continued, lifting the importance of building on a child's interests, stating, "I think the other really important piece is the interests of the child… Getting to know a child and what makes him tick, what motivates them." Faith agreed:

Finding their interests is important… I think about all of the background

information I have gathered about students first, who they are, what they like to

do, what they are interested in, what their culture is. I think you have to have all

that before you can successfully teach them how to read because you know the

child so much better.

Kyle commented on the connection between knowing students as people and as readers

and how these ideas are connected: "I just try to figure out who they are as a person, and

then that builds into who they are as a reader, and then try to incorporate this into their

instruction." He continued, discussing his belief that creating a community of readers

benefits all students and how he encourages students to read and share with their

classmates: "That's been fun to see their classroom community as readers become so

strong, where they're cheering for each other and wanting to see each other learn and

grow." Jane echoed this notion and reflected on the importance of classroom community

as a part of supporting student growth, stating, "We have a strong culture and community

in our classroom. We support each other and are patient with each other and help each

other and celebrate each other's successes." Faith also reflected on the importance of

sharing successes as well as building trusting relationships with students: "They have to

trust that you are there and it's okay to make mistakes. You are there to help them and

support them; you believe in them. Pointing out their successes is really important."

Lynn connected instruction with the need to know her students:

For me, teaching is so much an art and a science. The science is this is where the

child should be, but the art of it is knowing that every child is different and every

child is unique, and every child learns differently. And every child has different

interests, a different pace, and a different story.

Isabelle reflected on her students' need for completely different skill development:

Everyone is here to learn different things. Some kids come in reading, and they

need to learn how to share with a friend and manage their emotions. And some

come in able to manage their emotions and share but have never seen a letter

before and can't write their names. We all have our own focuses.

Jane continued on the topic of classroom community and student status and shared that

she has worked hard to build students' status in her classroom, especially those who

struggle academically: "I have worked really hard the past couple of years to help kids

understand that I am not the only teacher in the room, and to elevate student voices."

Isabelle pointed out that for her, her teaching begins when her students walk through the

door in September, "Depending on not only academically where they're at, but where

students come in as a whole child and really following them that way… I think that's

kind of where my belief is now about how they are going to be the most successful not

just this year, but in the future." Lynn echoed this commitment, "We never hold them

back. We ask them what their dream is, and we inspire, inspire, inspire. That is so big to

make each child feel so special and so loved and so unique; that is what I think we need

to do."

The Impact of Targeted Instruction

Study participants all specifically spoke about the importance of meeting with

students in a smaller setting. Whole group instruction was discussed as a necessary

component of classroom instruction, but meeting the needs of students in small groups or one-on-one settings in the form of conferring about books and reading was presented as a key component in the literacy classroom by all interviewees. Small group or individual instruction was mentioned 43 times by participants, all who placed a high value on this instructional strategy to meet their learners' individual needs.

Small Group Instruction

Considering the needs of the whole group, Gia spoke of her daily schedule, which is to teach a whole group lesson, then differentiate for groups of students based on their needs: "We figure out where the students are with their reading and then put them into skill groups based off that… working on the same skill and at the same reading level." Other participants echoed this strategy, calling attention to the efficiency that this creates for a teacher who is able to target instruction to groups of students with like needs. Isabelle shared her approach to considering whether the skill she is presenting is best taught in whole group or small group, asking herself, "Is this a full-class need or a small-group need?" Amy commented that her small groups range from two to five students, depending on student needs, and shared that small group time is:

> Important because I have kids who are reading at third-grade level or higher in my classroom, and I have kids who are still reading at the kindergarten level. So again, when I can pull those kids together, and I can pull those kids individually, that's where I can make a difference for each one.

Clare also commented on the importance of noting whether a skill is a whole-group or small-group need, noting that she often pulls students into small groups to focus on

specific phonics skills like long vowel sounds or complex phonics patterns that the whole group might not need.

Kyle and Danielle shared that they rely on assessment data to help place students into groups. Danielle stated, "I meet with those students three times a week for 15 minutes in a small group to meet them at their level and continue growing them in phonics, fluency, or comprehension." Ellen reflected on how this strategy is able to help her to differentiate, focusing on her students who struggle with reading. "Kids that are struggling, maybe they are going to meet with me more often, and maybe we're going to take just little pieces at a time instead of having a bigger lesson like another group might have." Lynn shared her approach to challenging her students while working in small groups:

> I work with them in small groups to really dig in. I work with kids at the same level and we work through our books. We work on passages and we did through those passages to build comprehension strategies… the most important part is for us to dig in and challenge their thinking.

Ellen shared a similar strategy of targeting student comprehension needs, stating, "I always make sure that students who I'm more concerned with read more frequently, so I'm strategic about meeting with these students… and then just adapting what I'm doing to make sure they are getting what they need." Isabelle echoed the importance of adaptation and keeping groups fluid: "If a student is not being successful, I look at the data, and I might switch their group." She further explained that sometimes students

struggle in a group setting, and in this case, she will "take them out, meet one-on-one with them at a different time during the day."

The Role of Conferring

Conferring, or one-to-one instruction centered around student reading, was mentioned by ten of the 12 participants. Amy stated at three different times during her interview that the most important piece is individual conferring with students, "We're discussing the text, I'm asking them questions, making sure that they understand it." Clare also finds individual conferring sessions to be one of the most effective methods in her reading instruction and stated the importance of conferring about just-right books in the following excerpt:

> I confer with the kids I know that are struggling a little bit. I am heavily involved in their book choices. I confer with my high-needs kids first, almost every day or every other day, and I have a schedule and a notebook that I keep. And so if I have a struggling reader, I keep track of what books they've chosen, and I will redirect them if it's not a good fit book. I meet with them, talk about their book. When they read a book that fits them, they will be more successful in reading.

Gia agreed with the importance of conferring and using conferring to support students in making good book choices, but also in capitalizing on these conversations to advance their reading skills:

> I listen in on students as they're doing their independent reading, doing independent reading conferencing where I'm getting to hear them read what they've chosen, and from there I can do lots of different kinds of skills, whether it

be just appropriate book choice or asking and answering questions as they are

reading, making connections, and just listening to their thought process as readers.

Amy agreed, further illustrating the role that conferring plays in her instruction:

I'm a huge believer in conferring. I have the kids come up to me and read a little

bit to me. I'm asking them questions. A lot of it depends on what unit we're

working on. It could be, what are you wondering? What are you inferring?

Getting them to understand more than it's just words on the page, making sure that

they really are understanding that.

Brooke shared that she makes it a point to read with each of her students at least once a

week, more if she possibly can, and stated:

I try to dedicate time to really read with each student every week, to really sit and

listen to them grapple with the new skills that we've taught that week, whether it's

a new blend, or a vowel sound, or a sight word, whatever it is, and that's usually

where I get the most information. Are they able to apply what we're learning

while reading a book? That really guides where I go with them moving forward.

Clare echoed this strategy, and shared that she keeps notes to track student progress:

I keep track of notes and whatever I took notes on last time. I always follow

through, asking questions such as, "Last time when you were reading, you were

on page 57. What page are you on now? We also learned that this was the main

character. Are there any new characters in the story you want to tell me about?

What's the most exciting part?" I always take those notes so I can follow through

the next time I meet with them.

Finally, Faith spoke about the role of conferring in ensuring her students' fluency growth by modeling fluent reading during her one-on-one sessions with students as well as providing individual instruction in word-attack skills and how fluent reading should sound. Jane talked about fluency as well, and the importance of spending time one-on-one with students, modeling fluent reading at the student's level. She shared her intention during IDR (Independent Daily Reading) time each day:

> I try to get to everyone, but I might spend more time with somebody more often that needs more support to continue to grow, and I can be that cheerleader. No matter what little progress there is, I can celebrate that and help that reader see that. I have seen that go a long way.

The Role of Assessment in Reading Growth

Assessment, both formative and summative, was discussed and deemed important as a tool for reading instruction by each participant. Opinions varied as to the importance of universal screening, but all participants placed importance on daily observations, formative assessments, and anecdotal data. Fifty-five pieces of data were collected from participants around data and its use in targeting student reading needs. Interestingly, participants tended to rely more heavily on a specific form of assessment to drive their instruction, independent of partner teachers or district guidance.

Gia stated her strong belief in the importance of using baseline screening data to guide instruction with her students, right from the beginning of the school year: "In the fall we get baseline data to find out where the students are after the summer, so we can then take that data and start our instruction for each of those students, and then

track and measure as they go." She also stressed the importance of using formative assessments and mini-assessments along the way to pinpoint student skill gaps and guide her next steps with a student. "We do weekly progress monitoring for our students to track their progress, especially with reading fluency and accuracy." She also spoke to the importance of assessment to confirm whether her instruction is working with a student: "Based on the work I am doing with them each day, their progress monitoring, like their reading fluency, accuracy, and that automaticity should be rising each week as well."

Clare shared that assessment data is important for her as it provides her with feedback on not only how the student is doing, but how her instruction is landing. "It gives me feedback. Is the child able to show mastery or understanding of the concept? If not, it might indicate a reteach or for me to remodel. And it gives me a lot of feedback as to what to do the next day." She appreciates her district's assessment tools and universal screening tool, FastBridge, as it helps her to pinpoint the reading instructional needs of her students, as well as across the grade level with her PLC (Professional Learning Community). At this weekly meeting, she and her fellow third-grade teachers meet to discuss student data and instruction for those who are not mastering content. "The assessment data is critical in these conversations." She continued to discuss the importance of constantly monitoring progress, not just in reading, but in all subjects, and all day long. "It gives me feedback and helps me determine which direction I'm going to go using that assessment in every subject."

Jane's approach to using assessment data is similar. She discussed her approach of using formal assessment tools like FastBridge and her daily informal observations to

give her a true picture of each of her learners. She mentions the fall beginning-of-year baseline FastBridge assessments, but also talked about mini assessments through the reading curriculum, which gives her spot-checks to gauge whether or not her students are making the progress they need. She stated, "I'm grateful for the assessments because they really do help me. . . . It really drives my intentional instruction. . . . It helps me cater independent instruction for each child." She mentioned her PLC, and how data analysis is the focus of her Kindergarten team's conversations each week. She further went on to thoughtfully consider how assessment data also helps her to monitor her efficacy as a teacher, sharing her thoughts about her own teaching practice and how it is assisted by data:

> I think data is important to continuously see where kids are, to monitor, adjust, do instructional matches. It helps with that. But the progress monitoring also helps me to see… is what I'm doing working? If not, is it me and my practices? Because I believe it's important for me to look in the mirror and be reflective.

Faith echoed the other participants' thoughts about the importance of data and stated near the beginning of her interview, "I think the most important thing is to find out where kids are at." She relies more on informal assessments than formal, universal screeners and takes notes on her students' progress. She shares the importance she places on progress monitoring and recording student progress often. "We progress monitor kids every week. It's a great tool so that we know what they are doing well and what they aren't doing well. What intervention technique can we try?" She continued on, discussing the importance of using data to adapt her instruction, "If something's working, we keep

going. If something's not working, we modify and adjust. We use data to drive everything we do."

Kyle echoed the importance of using data to progress monitor students but shared that he recently began to involve students in this work as well. "I used to personally progress monitor and keep that data for myself, but I noticed once we become teammates in that, and students get to watch the graph go up, that it really motivates and excites them." He discussed his approach when the graph sometimes goes down, which happens, and at these times he works with students one-on-one to address skill gaps shown by the data. "If I have students whose data took a little dip, or if I notice a common trend, I'll take the next day to pull them together in a group or individually to reteach or backfill any skill gaps." Kyle also referenced his fellow team members and supports available to him and the students, and how everyone works together to analyze data to best support each student's individual instructional plan.

Lynn's approach is similar. She came to her current district from a Charter school, and is in awe of the tools for assessment at her disposal. She begins with a universal screener to determine her class-wide needs, then zeros in on individual student goals. She assesses each of her readers for their accuracy, automaticity, and fluency, and progress monitors when students are under benchmark. She stated that she follows the district guidance for how to use data to drive her instruction, how often to progress monitor, and how to analyze the data:

You have this graph and you can see whether the graph is going up in the right

direction, so that is what is informing us about whether the instructional match that we're using is working, or whether we need to try a different instructional match. I do this every week to see whether a child is progressing or not.

Isabelle's understanding of data has evolved. She discussed that learning to interpret and analyze data has been a growth area for her in the past years. Her use of both universal screening and daily formative assessments have increased exponentially in the past few years and admitted that she used to look at data as a reflection of the student themself, and not as a reflection of her teaching. She went on to say:

That's not how I look at it anymore. And I'm really thankful for that because it's really changed how I teach. I use it as a way to evaluate my teaching and my effectiveness. If a student is not getting it, and is struggling with something, that is not on them. There's no other way they could have learned that besides me. If they're not learning the way I'm teaching, then that's on me to change the way I teach, or to give it to them in a different way to see if that will make a difference. It's a result of me, not them.

She concluded with her reliance on using data as a place to begin with students, and to monitor their progress: "I think with the data it's constantly reflecting on what's working, what's not. And how do we keep meeting their needs? What do we do next?"

Brooke, a kindergarten teacher, uses smaller, informal check-ins to guide her instruction with students. She relies less on the universal screening assessments as she believes that her informal daily formative assessments are a better gauge of student growth. She employs monthly checks of the number of letter sounds or letter names that a

student can provide in a minute. She assesses their ability to blend, segment, read sight words, and decode new words, and uses this data to help her know what each student needs next. However, she is clear when she explained her thoughts on the limitations of this data from the informal check-ins: "Those aren't as helpful to me as just reading with kids. It doesn't tell me as much about if they can really apply it in a book, where it matters." She discussed the importance of progress monitoring, especially kids who are "on the bubble" to ensure that they are growing and making progress in the areas expected. If not, she reads with their reading groups more often or plans an intervention or instructional match to address any skill gaps, as determined by her informal assessments. However, she maintains that her most valuable assessment comes from simply reading with her students, as she explained in the following excerpt:

> Are they able to apply what we're learning, actually just sitting down and reading a book? That really guides where I go with them moving forward. Do they need a little bit more teacher time, a little more practice time? Are they ready to rock for their next skill? So reading with them tells me the most. It also tells me a lot about some of the softer skills that come with reading. Can they sit and focus on a story? Are they looking at the picture and excited about it? When they get to something hard do they just sit and give up? Did they skip that word or do they keep muscling through it, which is also really good information to work on if my goal is that they're going to be a 'read for fun' kind of reader. So I read with them. That's my biggest piece of assessment, I think.

Amy's approach to assessment and the use of data differed from most of the other study participants. She recalls that in her memory, assessment has only been a focus in the last five years. She commented: "Before, when we were teaching reading, it was kind of like, are they reading, are they not reading? And if they're reading, you just keep going." She went on to declare that the formal universal screening assessments that her district uses don't provide her with the information that she finds most helpful, which are the smaller check-ins that are part of the reading curriculum. She finds most beneficial the data she gathers from the small group work and individual instruction sessions with students, and claimed, "I don't put as much weight on when I'm looking at my students on the standardized tests as I do with the stuff that I do with them myself in one-on-one or small group sessions." She does, however, appreciate the progress monitoring tools that her district equips her with and recognizes that she can use this to determine her students' rates of growth. She clarified that she follows the guidance of her district and looks at the data but reminds herself it is simply a snapshot of a student as she explained, "I remind myself, that's just one data point. We always say, triangulate the data, right? So you're looking at that, and what's the other data point, and what's the other data point." She continues with her frustration surrounding standardized testing, and how not all students are good test takers, but are making gains in daily reading and enjoyment, and concluded:

> I know that is probably not what I'm supposed to be saying, but sometimes we put too much emphasis on standardized tests. And it's even harder when district money or things are tied to hitting your goal based on how your kids do on these

standardized tests. We've got to look at each kid as a whole child, and celebrate

each kid's success, because that's what matters.

Danielle stated that her understanding of data has grown from helpful district

professional development, her PLC, and talented coaches that she has benefited from

working with over the years. She discussed how she uses FastBridge as a universal

screener at the beginning of the year to get a baseline for each student, and from there is

able to target instruction to meet her students' needs: "I use this data to group students

and then I meet with those students three times a week for 15 minutes in a small group, to

meet them at their level to continue growing them in phonics, fluency, or

comprehension." She commented that as an analytical person, she likes to use data to

solve problems or to figure out how to approach a student, especially one who is

struggling, as she stated:

> I like to figure out what is causing the struggle, because I know that if it's
>
> frustrating for them, they're not going to want to do it. So I always go back to one
>
> of the assessment tools that I have to determine what is causing the struggle, and
>
> then I provide the support. Supporting them at their current level, so it's not
>
> frustrating.

Danielle continued by reflecting on the variety of assessments that she uses, including the

universal assessments provided by her district, her curricular check-ins, daily formative

assessments, and "also just conferring with students and reading with them regularly. I

always make sure that students who I'm more concerned about I read with more

frequently." She progress monitors students who are below grade level before meeting

with her PLC to look at each student's scores to determine if they are making expected

growth, and if not, to determine new instructional matches. She concluded:

> I would say our district believes firmly that all students can make growth when
>
> given the support that they need, and students who are at grade level should make
>
> at least a year's worth of growth. Students who are below grade level at the
>
> beginning of the year should make more than a year's worth of growth, because
>
> otherwise, we all know they will never reach where they're supposed to be.

Ellen, like Amy, doesn't put as much emphasis on the formal assessments like the

FastBridge universal screener, and said that "it doesn't do a lot to inform my instruction."

She does, however, put her faith into the daily formative assessments which let her know

if the skills she is teaching are being generalized by her students: "I'm constantly pulling

kids to the side, stopping at their table, assessing skills that we're working on. The groups

of kids I'm calling are constantly changing as students make progress and move on." She

continued, reflecting on her district's emphasis on using data to drive instruction, which

her own beliefs align with more closely:

> We keep data on lots of things. If I see from the data that kids are getting it, I
>
> know I can move on. Sometimes I can't move on because I see information that
>
> tells me there are quite a few kids still working on it. It also helps me know if it's
>
> something I need to continue working on as a whole group, or something I need to
>
> start pulling small groups for to work on specific skills.

Similarly, Hope's approach to using data relies more on her own observation

and anecdotal noticings. She prefers to gather information daily rather than weekly, as she explained:

> I would rather do a little mini-assessment as we go, and it might be something very simple. As the kids are working on an assignment, I can walk all around the classroom and figure out who has this, who doesn't, and then if there's a small handful of kids who don't have it, I can pull them back and work with them. That gives me a lot more information than waiting a week and then trying to figure it out.

She continued by expanding her thoughts on what kinds of information needs to be monitored in students at her grade level: "There's a lot of other things to monitor. I monitor how involved they are in instruction. Are they able to focus? Are they able to listen? Are they able to apply? I'm constantly assessing throughout every day."

Literacy Practices Employed by Highly Effective Teachers

Study participants' comments on the specific literacy practices they employ were among the most varied of responses. Seventy-one pieces of data were collected in this area from participant interviews. From specific pedagogical knowledge such as the inclusion of the five pillars of literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) to the role of modeling and the importance of explicit instruction, a key takeaway from the majority of participants was the importance of being equipped with and ready to use a wide variety of strategies to meet all students' needs.

Literacy Pedagogy

Although 71 pieces of data were collected from participants in this area, it was the most varied theme, comprising a wide variety and breadth of responses. All participants shared their preferred methods and pedagogical ideas for reading instruction, but they were widely varied. Common themes of pedagogy most often included elements of the science of reading, specific examples of the inclusion of the five pillars of literacy, specific focuses on independent reading, read-alouds, just-right book choice, and the importance of providing a literacy-rich environment.

Hope shared the importance she places on the five components of reading, stating that a mix of approaches is critical to student reading development. She mentioned phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, before she concluded, "You have to have a mix of those…. coupled with whole language and listening to someone read. So I read aloud every single day to my kids. I'm adamant about it." Ellen echoed the importance of the inclusion of phonics and fluency in the early elementary years and shared that her students come to her widely discrepant in needs in this area, with some students entering her classroom as readers and others not understanding that a letter is a visual representation of a sound. "Some kids come in and they don't know if it's a letter or a number. You get the student who, when you show them the letter and ask what sound does it makes, they put their ear down by the letter!"

Danielle also noted the importance of phonics, fluency, and comprehension, using her small group time to expand upon these skills for her students. She is clear that even with her students who are emergent readers where the focus is on phonics, she also works

on comprehension because of its importance. Amy agreed and noted, "Everything is not right for every student." She pointed out that she has students at varied ability levels in her class who need vastly different things, but as a second-grade teacher, phonics is a big part of her instruction. She discussed the importance of digging deep for students who struggle to determine what is holding them up - is it phonics, sight words, fluency, or a combination of things. She begins with short vowels, moves to long vowels, then on to digraphs and blends before moving on to sight words, and explained:

> It's important to make sure the kids have all of the strategies they need to be a good reader. Do they have a phonics background? Are they confident in their reading? Are they able to read fluently? Are they able to choose 'just right' books? Do they have the strategies to be able to read independently? Do they understand? Is this book too hard? Is it too easy? Do they have those strategies down?

The first participant to mention phonemic awareness, Brooke worries there is not enough emphasis on the building blocks of sounds in their curriculum. To address this, at the beginning of the year she "does a lot of songs and poems and chants and silly rhyming riddles" to build students' ability to hear and produce the sounds they will need for reading. She reflected further on the need for phonemic awareness work with her multilingual students, whom she ensures receive targeted work in learning letter sounds and building phonemic awareness. She stated, "I think that there's a tendency to want to let them learn more English… but I think the longer we go without kids knowing their letter sounds, the harder all of school is going to be for them." Gia agreed and shared her

perspective of the importance of phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study for emerging readers:

> Teaching different phonics and spelling patterns and syllabication for words, so the kids can continue to learn how to tackle all those new words as they encounter them in their independent reading. Also teaching vocabulary separately and very specifically, trying to use the vocabulary words that are coming up, and what we're doing in class so it's within context and more meaningful to students.

> Lynn shared her thoughts about instructional pedagogy in a different way. Rather than relying on the district curriculum, she prefers to utilize elements she has used and seen work in the past, which might be connected to phonics, fluency, or comprehension, or simply tailored to student fluency practice. She referred to resources such as Raz-Kids, which is a resource of predictable phonics instruction focusing on letter patterns and sounds: "You build on sound and sound and sound, and phonics and phonics and phonics." Her district doesn't use this for instruction, but she believes it hits the skills that her students need most, which is the ability to decode words and complex letter patterns. She is firm in her convictions that "the important part about it was practice. Practice building muscle memory of the sound. It had to be a daily routine and that regularity, consistency was very important."

> Kyle echoed the importance of addressing the five pillars of reading that he learned about in his college methods courses, but he reflected on his own understanding of how readers develop from early readers to proficient readers as more recent: "I think a huge importance to that wasn't necessarily strictly talked about in our methods courses,

but you see it play out when you're in a classroom." He continued, explaining that reading development isn't linear, and that it takes a teacher who understands child development, in addition to reading pedagogy, to be fully prepared to address the reading needs of all students. Jane agreed with this and added that she sees the skills of phonics and phonemic awareness woven together, like reading and writing as reciprocal processes. She also places a high importance on independent reading for her students, who are kindergartners, and insists that even her non-readers enjoy and are able to practice their skills during this sacred time of quiet reading with books of their own choosing. Gia echoed this philosophy and summed up with:

> You need the comprehension strategies, how to make meaning. You need the word study phonics piece and the vocabulary, and then along with that really trying to help students find books that they enjoy, because if they can't find those books, it's not going to matter. So that passion for learning part of it too.

The Importance of Modeling and Explicit Instruction

Jane and Danielle both noted the importance of specifically teaching and modeling skills for students and then providing them the opportunity to practice the skills immediately in small groups. Danielle stated:

> Both modeling and practicing the skills are really important. High quality modeling but also making sure students understand why they're doing it, why it makes sense, and then giving students the opportunity in a moment to practice the skill. Because as much as we talk to them about it, it doesn't help if they can't do it on their own.

Ellen echoed this approach:

> I do a large group lesson three days a week. I would say that's modeling skills and followed by individual reading where they're practicing those skills with the text that is at their level during that time. They have books in their bins that are at their level that they can practice their skills with, and then we have word study which practices spelling, but also being able to code word based on patterns, prefixes, suffixes, and then breaking apart by syllables, and vocabulary, just introducing new vocabulary words for the week to increase their vocabulary.

Isabelle also spoke about the importance of phonics instruction and stated that at her grade level she begins with letter names and letter sounds as a foundation for instruction. She commented that her students come in with vastly different amounts of readiness and knowledge, and that it is her job to ensure that she is building background for students who come in with less readiness. She believes that exposure is what matters, and that for students who have exposure to books and reading at home, school is easier. For the students without this foundation, she said:

> We are listening to reading, we're exploring, reading in different ways. I tried to find as many fun ways for them to interact with either big books or small books or poems, or finding things, just finding words, finding environmental print, all those different things to show them that they really are reading before they're reading. So it's making that process exciting and introducing them to as many different things as I can, and then once they are excited and we start, then really being on each student in terms of knowing where they're at – if they have their sounds

down, their sight words, and words they're struggling with. Am I going to hold them back and keep doing flashcards? No, they would benefit more to keep going with their peers and reading books and following along even if they're not quite ready for that.

Kyle extolled the virtues of simply ensuring that students are given enough time to practice the skills they are learning and stated, "Modeling and practice, modeling and practice. All day, every day." Faith also spoke of the importance of modeling, following a scope and sequence of letter sounds and letter names and commented, "Students need a lot of modeling: This is fluency. This is what it should sound like when you're reading." She also reflected on the role of reading purpose with her students, expanding on this idea to explain her understanding of the importance of explicitly teaching reading purpose:

I think for kids, it's important that they know their purpose for reading. Why am I reading this book? Do I want to read this book because it's fun, or funny, or it's got silly characters? It's going to make me laugh? Or I might be reading this book to answer some questions about whatever the story is about or to learn more about dolphins. Whatever it is, I think having a purpose is really important for kids to want to read.

Jane presented an approach she uses for explicit instruction during daily read-alouds and shared reading: "We teach comprehension skills and do shared reading and learning about punctuation and syllables and rhyming and those kinds of things." She also discussed her focus on phonics and high-frequency words that students encounter in the texts they are reading at their level. She continued by reflecting on her growth and

understanding of how emergent literacy works, and how it is not a linear process, but rather cyclical. She believes her role of teacher is to explicitly model and scaffold for students so that they are able to generalize the skills in their reading. She laughed and provided an example of her modeling, "Really again that modeling for young readers, like 'look at what my mouth is doing!' Or 'stick out your tongue!' The 'th' sound is hard for kids, especially kids where English isn't their first language, so showing them and being silly. . . like 'are you sticking your tongue out at me?' She went on to discuss her approach for students who are multilingual or receive special education services. For these students especially, she believes:

> Using visuals is really important. Modeling, acting, finding pictures, books that they can point to so that they can still communicate with me and I can communicate with them. Partnering with other kids so that they have models of what we're practicing, and just thinking during read-alouds when we are doing comprehension strategies of predicting or wondering, that a student can model that for them as well as I can. Having sentence frames that they can use to help them use their words, that they can still share their thinking, that they are still contributing, even though this might be hard right now.

Clare also discussed the use of visuals for her third-grade multilingual learners: "It's important to build their background knowledge and increase their vocabulary. Sometimes adding a picture, a pictorial support, will really help those kids. I do that a lot in reading and math." Gia, too, mentioned the use of visuals for her multilingual learners, with additional support for vocabulary and language development.

Flexible Strategy Use

Many of the participants spoke to the need for teachers to nimbly adjust, both in response to student needs and to the changing nature of curriculum and standards. A common theme in this area was also the fact that reading is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and that teachers must have a variety of strategies in their arsenal to be able to teach and reteach all of their students. Hope reflected that although she currently teaches second grade, she has taught third and fourth grade as well, which has helped her to understand where her students are going. She stated:

> Knowing what the kids need to learn later on is helpful. For example, we don't talk about synonyms in second grade, but I can integrate that easily into lessons and make those higher-level strategies or even just higher-level words very familiar to them. I'm constantly teaching the curriculum but looking for ways to weave in things I can do to make it more interesting or higher level.

Brooke, who reflected on the needs of her multilingual students, also explained how she approaches her students who receive special education services and how the use of visuals has helped her to make learning accessible for them:

> One thing I do is when making CVC words, having a little stoplight on their page, there's a 'go' and a middle sound and an ending sound. Having that visual so that they slow down a little bit in their writing. I think there are just so many little things for every kid. Every kid needs something so different.

Isabelle reflected on how there is constant talk about whether there is a better approach to teaching reading, but she believes that there is no 'right' approach since all

students need different skills and strategies to learn them. She believes that all five components of reading are essential for her kindergarten students, but also explained that her students have different needs: "Some students have the phonemic awareness, some don't." She shared her belief in the importance of adequate time for students to practice new skills, and explained that students have different strengths and that it is her job to uncover these and build upon them, and concluded, "There are many building blocks of reading... I think that's the best way to meet the needs and make sure that they are going to feel successful."

Lynn commented that because she believes vehemently that students need a variety of strategies and focuses to become successful readers, she often considers the instruction that her students might be getting from other teachers, such as an intervention teacher or an ESL teacher. When this occurs, rather than doubling up on the skill target, she addresses a different component of reading, so that her students are receiving instruction in all areas of reading and literacy. Faith agrees on this approach and explained her method of weaving all of the essential components of reading together to best meet her students' needs: "You weave it all together and give them tools so that they can carry forward and do it when they're reading on their own... I feel like there are so many things that go into it."

Clare reflected on the pedagogy she has acquired in her 30 years of teaching, explaining that she follows the district curriculum, but that she is grateful to have the ability and knowledge to supplement it when her students need more. She stated, "Sometimes you've gone through a lot of different reading approaches and reading series

when you've taught for 30 years, and so you pick and choose what's worked in the past."

She considers herself a reading expert and is proud of her ability to differentiate for her

students' needs, noting, "Sometimes you have to do a little on the side." Clare's approach

as a third-grade teacher focuses more on fluency and comprehension than on phonemic

awareness and phonics. She discussed how her students might come into school in the

fall and sound like proficient readers, but are unable to comprehend at deep levels: "Yes,

you can read. but are you thinking about your reading? Your fluency is very high. But

what did the text say? Did you think about the text? What message was the author trying

to tell us?" This is her focus with students all year long, to get them ready for the more

challenging reading work they will encounter in fourth grade, which she has also taught

and feels responsible to prepare them for.

Active Learning as a Catalyst to Reading Growth

Finally, several study participants spoke of their reliance on active learning as a

key strategy to engaging students in learning. Although this particular theme was the least

discussed by participants with just seven of the 12 responders reflecting on it as an

important component of their instruction, it was included as a theme here due to the

significance it was given by these participants, with 25 pieces of data collected from

these seven teacher interviews. The importance of making learning fun for students, using

movement as a learning tool, and seizing the teachable moments all day long were

common sub-themes of this element of reading instruction.

Ellen shared her belief in the importance of not limiting reading to a certain time

each day. She likes to weave reading through the entire day, "trying to pull it into

everything we do so that they see a meaning and purpose for it." She shared her belief

that reading instruction can and should occur at all times and in short bursts, even in

times while students are in line or transitioning from one activity or space to another. She

pulls sight words, or 'star words' as she calls them, into the day in every capacity she can.

She also integrates these words into the environment, and explained:

> I have sight words hanging above our tables, a different word above each one, and
>
> I'll have a word of the day. I'll say, "If you work at the 'some' table, you can line
>
> up." So they're practicing throughout their day, not just during that one little
>
> reading chunk.

Hope believes that it is important to draw students into her instruction in order to

fully engage them in the standards that are important for them to master. She stated, "I

love to look for ways to hook the kids, get them excited about something that may not be

truly exciting, like vowels for example. Sounds pretty dry, but to beef it up and make it

exciting is so much fun. I love that." She went on to discuss how crucial she believes it is

that students are presented with real-world, authentic learning experiences that help them

connect to and engage in the learning activities she presents, and how, like Ellen, she

likes to weave lessons throughout the day to link one element of learning to the next for

maximum instructional impact.

Brooke mentioned the importance of seizing each moment as an intentional

opportunity for instruction, either for the whole group or for an individual student. She

spoke of specific strategies she uses for her students who are struggling:

Those kids that I know are struggling, I have post-it notes on their desk

with CVC words. I have sentences written on whiteboard strips on their

locker that I change every day. Every time I walk by their chair I say, 'Tell

me the sounds in bug', or I have a little girl who has an 'a' post-it and an

'e' post-it on her desk, and every time I walk by her I'll say 'yet' or 'cat'

and she'll have to slap the one for the /a/ sound or the /e/ sound.

 Brooke went on to discuss how she approaches students who receive special education

services or students who are still learning how to be in school, where it is hard for them

to sit and learn with other students. She shared her firm belief that a teacher needs to be

able to be flexible and to employ a variety of strategies:

I think being able to adjust and adapt – sometimes we do our reading at the table

with everyone else. Sometimes we do it while they are jumping on the trampoline.

Sometimes we do it hiding under the desk, laying on the floor. Just being able to

adapt.

 Brooke concluded by restating her belief that reading instruction must occur all day long

and at every available moment, especially for her emergent readers. She reflected, "For

those students who are struggling, I just really try and surround them. There's no

escaping letter sounds and reading words. It just has to be constant, I think."

Faith and Isabelle agreed with Hope's philosophy of making reading fun. Faith

builds games and activities into her teaching in any way she can as a way to draw

students in, to connect with their innate sense of playfulness and discovery. As a

kindergarten teacher, Isabelle also places great value on play as a vehicle for learning,

especially in the first few months of school as new kindergartners are transitioning from preschool to kindergarten. She shared, "I love making it super hands-on and fun, and a play with discovery piece in terms of practice in those skills, and repeated exposure." She continued by expanding on how this looks in her classroom, and stated, "They're getting songs, they're getting hands-on things. They're making them. They're seeing different cards. They're tracing. We're trying to get it in as many ways as possible for them, and that repeated exposure is how I start." She reflected on her progress this year, where for the first time in a couple of years she is expecting all of her students to end the year where they are expected to be. She gives credit in part to the ways she has learned to engage students in learning and by building fun into learning activities all day long:

> I've just learned so many different and new things and ways to keep them engaged. You think about boys in kindergarten. They don't want to do fine motor. They don't want to sit and read. So you've got to be extra creative. Okay, we're getting up. We are jumping out the sounds. We are making them with Play Dough, you're smashing them, segmenting this word. All those other things, put this race car, blend the words together, trying to make that an exciting process for them and it has been really fun watching them take it on… I think modeling as much as possible and then just pushing that exploration into reading is fun.

> Kyle agrees. As a primary teacher, he enjoys witnessing the 'light-bulb moments' and "seeing magic through kids' eyes" as they learn. One of his favorite things is how everything is "new and exciting" at this stage. Twice in his interview, he mentioned wanting to foster in students a love of reading and learning. He believes that the way new

skills or materials are presented to students is the key to their engagement, and thus learning, stating, "If I phrase it this way, or if I put on this silly outfit to make it more fun, they'll love it." This then, he shared, fuels his own feelings of efficacy, which help him to continue to bring his passion for teaching and planning future lessons. Reflecting on his 'why', he stated:

> I would describe myself as kind of just a big kid. I love to have fun and do things that are maybe out-of-the-box and creative. And I love being able to make magic happen with kids, too. I want to create for my students a complete love of coming to school every day. It's fun to be here and I feel proud of myself when I achieve things. That's my goal every day and what I love about this job.

Similar to Isabelle, he believes that offering students multiple ways in which to interact with reading and learning are key to their generalization of skills. The use of hands-on activities and movement are built into his lesson plans to assist in holding student engagement and solidifying skills. He shared a story about a student who was still working on blending letter sounds, who also loves Legos. Kyle had the student build the letter shapes with Legos, and then the two used one of the student's favorite toy cars to roll through the sounds to blend it. He shared his philosophy of meeting students where they are: "Start where the needs are instead of just pounding through it in a way that might not be interesting or where they feel kind of discouraged… trying to make it fun and take the wins when you see them." Kyle has seen great success with this approach of focusing on the wins and building on students' strengths, planning his lessons around

"what students are able to do that day versus the repetitive practice that can be challenging or discouraging."

Jane, a kindergarten teacher, discussed the importance of building reading activities into the day during transitions and other opportune times. Her intent is to make the learning "continuous all day long, but in a playful way." Some of her go-to methods are using rhyming words for transitions, singing a song and changing the beginning sounds for their exit ticket to line up, or having students tell her the sounds they hear in a word as they walk to another part of the building. She shared that none of these things are in the curriculum, rather, they are things she has read about, tried on her own, or learned about in a workshop. She added, "There really aren't many minutes in the day where there isn't learning going on, but I don't feel like the kids necessarily know that they're learning because it's fun and playful." She echoed Isabelle and Kyle's convictions of making learning fun and using play and silliness to engage students in learning. She shared examples of modeling how the mouth looks when making the '*th*' sound, asking students, "Are you sticking your tongue out at me?" and feigning shock. She states, "They just think it is silly and funny, but then they do it more. Those theatrics and that fun and silliness I think are really important to keep learning fun. It's hard and it's fun. It can be both."

Jane also discussed the importance of movement as a learning tool for primary students who are learning the foundational pieces of how to read:

Singing, playing games are a great way to do phonemic awareness, phonics, movement. I really believe movement is important. I was trained in Smart Room

and I really try to bring in a lot of that and crossing the midline as we're spelling

words or doing sounds, or doing Superman and doing word ladders, reading up

and down. I think there are a lot of ways to make sure all of those pieces stay

fun.

Continuing the importance of movement, Jane shared that she reinforces reading skills by

incorporating instruction even at recess time, and laughed, "Before they can go to recess,

they have to segment a word or blend a word or spell a word. Or when I'm pushing them

on the swing, before I'll push them, they have to tell me the vowel sound." Serious again,

she restated her belief in the importance of finding the moments throughout the day to

continuously reinforce skills and practice what they have learned in as many ways as

possible, and building fun and movement into the day for herself and her students.

<center>**RQ2 Themes: Beliefs and Values**</center>

A Shared Belief in the Commitment to Students and Teaching

All study participants declared that their love for kids or passion for teaching was

a primary driver in their commitment to helping students succeed. This was one of the

most robust themes uncovered in the study, with 12 of the 12 participants stating that this

commitment propelled them to work hard each day on behalf of their students. Fifty-six

pieces of evidence were collected to support this theme, with common sub-themes of

keeping students at the center, a shared importance of the work, and a commitment to

making an impact in students' lives underscoring participants' comments. This theme,

more than the others, emerged through participant emotions, emphatic statements, and

common references as a through-line among all participant interviews.

The intention of wanting to inspire students, often from an early age, was a common thread among participants. Clare stated, "I was 18 or 19 when I decided to go into teaching. I wanted to inspire, be a role model. Where I grew up, there were no teachers of color, so I felt that could be a role that I played." She continued to explain that her family was the only minority family in her town, and she believes that this influenced her decision to further her education to thus inspire students like her who might not have seen themselves in their teachers. She discussed her desire to make an impact on not just her students, but also for herself, and that feeling efficacious in her work with students is very important to her. She works very hard, and many hours a day, reflecting on her teaching and thinking of ways that she might teach a lesson differently the next time or the next day if she suspects that some students didn't quite master the concepts. She reflects that her colleagues sometimes try to tell her to do less, or cut a corner or two, or lower her expectations. However, she can't imagine this, and exclaimed:

> To me, it's like, ok, how do I do less and feel good about it? That's the hard part. I keep thinking that if I did more I would feel good about what I'm doing and I'm going to make an impact for all 22 of them. I'm always thinking about that one student and how I can connect with them. I think it's internal for me.

The weight of the responsibility of a teacher is something that Lynn referred to multiple times in her interview. Starting her teaching career in a Charter school, Lynn stated, "In charter schools, a lot of times we're all they have. We're all the kid has and so much is dependent on us for all their needs, and that did it for me." When asked where her motivation to teach originated, she reflected that she had always known she wanted to

teach. She loves kids, and always liked the idea of teaching, but it wasn't until she was teaching that she realized that she had a fierce determination and sense of responsibility for ensuring student success. She feels rewarded from her students' success yet is even more driven to help a student who is struggling, to feel that reward. She shares anecdotes of seeing students taste success, which motivates them to want to achieve even more success, and that watching students master skills, and the confidence that results from this is one of her driving forces in the hard work to which she dedicates herself on a daily basis. This, she commented, makes students "want more and more success and then it becomes intrinsic in them, the belief grows in them: I can do this. I am good enough. I can succeed. She deemed witnessing this the most "amazing, incredible, rewarding experience" that a teacher can have, and paused for a moment before she shared her belief that her students' success becomes her success. Reflecting again on her own motivation, she shared:

> I think it comes from within. I think it's a hunger inside. It's a determination. It's a drive or you make it your own goal that I've got this kid and I'm going to get this kid to read. So I think it's inside. It's a self-driving thing. It's not external, it's internal.

However, with this internal drive and reward also comes pressure, which Lynn discussed openly. The responsibility of being such an important part of a child's life weighs heavily upon her shoulders. She acknowledges that she works long hours, which at times cuts into her own family time. She takes her work very seriously, and like Clare, is constantly

reflecting on her teaching to determine if she was successful or if she needs to adjust her approach for a student or lesson the following day. She concluded:

> And that's where stress or pressure or challenge is in being a teacher because I'm constantly questioning myself, constantly questioning whether I'm helping each child achieve their potential. Am I using the right match? Am I doing enough? Am I pushing this kid? That's the constant reflection, constant thinking about what more I can do. Am I doing enough?

Ellen's motivation comes less from serious ideas like work pressure or making an impact on student lives and more from the excitement that students bring to their learning. Ellen loves working with kids. She was a Sunday school teacher, a camp counselor, and a babysitter. She believes from an early age she was primed to be a teacher and her joy for her craft comes straight from students. She stated, "I love kids. I love working with kids; they energize me most days and I think it's fascinating seeing the learning that happens. And the excitement for learning." Watching students engage in a productive struggle to problem-solve and to figure something out is a reward for her. She finds fun herself in helping her students to put the pieces of a puzzle or a problem together as they explore and make discoveries. She reflected that even when students make mistakes, this is a win because she believes that mistakes are simply a step closer to figuring out a solution. Ellen believes that her role and responsibility is to assist her student in making these discoveries, and that for both herself and her students, grit and determination are essential elements in her classroom. She believes all students can learn and that it is her role and privilege to "dig in and figure out how to help them do that."

She also mentioned her grade-level colleagues, whom she has learned a lot from during the past several years. She stated, "We are always sharing and growing together and talking about what went well or what we could try, supporting each other." She credits her team as her partners in ensuring that the focus is always on students, keeping students "at the center of all we do each day." Concluding on her work with students, she commented, "It's just amazing to watch that process of being learners and piecing things together and realizing all there is to learn about. It's just really fun."

Similar to Ellen, Hope loves kids. She considers teaching a passion, a "job of the heart." Reflecting on her first year of teaching, she remembered, "As soon as I got my job…I was hooked. I loved the autonomy. I loved the kids… I adore it." Amy also enthusiastically spoke about her love of children, recalling how as a child she played school with her sister in the basement of her parents' home. Her dad was a principal and would bring worksheets and school supplies home for her to play with, and although she tried to keep her options open, she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. As a primary teacher for over 30 years at this point, she has not lost her passion or her enthusiasm. She considers teaching the most rewarding profession there is, and stated that watching students grow is motivation for her on a daily basis. She believes that every child deserves the best, and that it is her responsibility to ensure that they have the opportunity to reach their full potential. She commented:

> That's why I like to especially teach the primary grades. It's absolutely rewarding. I mean, it's the most rewarding thing ever, because you see that big growth. I was obviously not in it for the money, not in it for anything else. I just loved kids. I

loved working with them. I loved the creativity, being able to do different things and just being with the kids, and they keep me young. I am 57, and I'm like, what other job can you go to and they make you laugh every day, and the little things they do? It's amazing.

The theme of caring for children and their futures continued with Danielle, who became a teacher because of wanting to ensure that children had teachers who cared about them and their future success. She takes this responsibility seriously and considers teaching an extremely important profession. She commented that she believes that kids need "good role models and good mentors in their lives that are highly educated and work hard for their best interests" and considers herself one of these teachers. Considering where this philosophy began, she reflected that this view likely stemmed from having high-quality educators in her own school experience, and understanding how that impacted her development and success. Similar to several of the other participants, Danielle spoke to the motivation she feels from watching students grow under her instruction, and how she takes her role seriously in ensuring students' growth over the course of a school year, and said, "Students should make at least a year's growth. Students who are below grade level should make more than a year's growth. . . . I truly believe that when they are given what they need, they will make that growth."

This sense of responsibility was echoed by Brooke, who believes that it is her imperative as a teacher to remove any barriers standing in a student's way to academic success. As a kindergarten teacher, Brooke loves kids. But perhaps more importantly, she prefers to teach kindergarten because of her view that kids have many hard things in their

lives, and at five or six years old, the hard things are the smallest they ever will be. She stated that at this age "the gap between kids who are set up for success and kids who aren't, that gap is the smallest." Because of this, she feels it is her responsibility to mold her students' attitudes toward learning, to give them the tools they need to be successful and to teach them how to love school. She finds her purpose and motivation in equipping her students with the belief that "they can do hard things, so those gaps or barriers don't get any bigger than they already might be." She acknowledged that this belief comes with pressure and responsibility, and continued:

> I think I just feel such a pressure, such a responsibility to them to not make their lives harder by not doing a good job of teaching them. I know that if I don't teach them the best, best, best way I possibly can, it's just going to make everything harder for them down the road. I don't want that for them.

> Faith also connected to the notion of being "part of something bigger"

and to make an impact on the future by supporting students' academic growth. However, like Ellen, Hope, and several other participants, she also just simply finds the profession interesting and fun! Growing up, Faith was a babysitter and the neighborhood kid-wrangler. She found it easy to make connections with kids and would often be the big kid playing with the little kids. She finds purpose in making an impact on students' lives and "preparing kids for the real world and for what came after education and after school." She also spoke about the enjoyment of getting to know her students as people:

> I love getting to know all of the diverse personalities, hearing all the multiple perspectives, being with students from all over the world, having exposure to

different families, cultures, and customs. I feel like every day is an adventure and

a challenge, and every day is different, and I really appreciate that.

Reflecting on why she teaches, she explained that she is motivated to ensure that kids

grow up to be successful, feel valued and important, and to become positive members of

society. Faith's father was also in education; he started as a social worker and then a dean

before finally becoming a principal at an alternative high school. Rather than encouraging

her to teach, he dissuaded her. She first got a degree in speech and hearing science, but

while working as a paraprofessional in a school, she was forced to admit to herself and

her father that teaching was her passion and her path. She stated, "That's when it kind of

hit me, like, oh, this is the feeling. This is the feeling that I want to feel. This is fun. I love

working with the kids."

Isabelle also went into teaching because she loved kids. She still does, she was

quick to say, but it has deepened into something more, which is a profound desire to

nurture the whole child and ensure that their trajectory to success is shaped by a caring

teacher. She loves being silly and having fun with students while also providing

consistency and stability, qualities that were lacking in her own upbringing that she wants

to disrupt for any of her students in a similar situation. She believes that the

"unpredictability of adult emotions impacted me a lot growing up, so my motivation is to

really give students stability and predictability to be able to develop their own awareness

of their emotions and skills." She takes pride in being a constant for her students,

maintaining her emotions and being the same presence for them each day when they

come to school so that they can focus on their learning and the fun and exploration of

being in school. Like many of the other participants, she discussed the responsibility she feels for the students entrusted to her care each year, and her absolute belief that they can succeed with the right tools, instruction, and love. She concluded, "They're always going to know that I'm interested and that I love them and that even if something happens and it's not great, we're learning and I'm always going to be here."

The passion for teaching and children continued with Gia and Kyle, who also spoke of playing school as a child. Growing up, Kyle didn't know he wanted to be a teacher, but he knew he wanted to help kids in some capacity, perhaps medically or instructionally. He just knew he "loved working with young humans. . . the light that they have, just the joy and making magic happen every day. I love the primary age. It makes me love coming to work." Similarly, Gia grew up working with kids in settings such as the YMCA and coaching. She spoke of "watching kids learn, working with them and problem solving with them, just getting to see all those sparks as they grow." This grew into her desire to become a teacher, to be a part of their lives and to inspire them to do great things. Like several other participants, she is motivated to make an impact upon her students and to "feel like I really make a meaningful difference for the community… to get them ready for their future careers and lives." Kyle spoke of the incredible experience he has of witnessing the joy in students' eyes as they learn new things. He used the word 'magic' three times in his interview, and reported that although he student taught in fifth grade, he has found his niche in the primary grades due to the ability to have fun with students while also ensuring that they grow and meet their developmental milestones. He spoke of the responsibility of having students come to him "young and

naïve enough to believe anything" and that "no matter where they are when they come into school, they can achieve more than they think they can." Like several of the other participants, he reflected that his work with students is motivated by wanting to make an impact on students, both in the present and in their futures, and that witnessing their growth is a constant motivation for his own drive and determination to serve students each day. He concluded that this is what makes him so passionate about the job and the age, "seeing magic through kids' eyes is my favorite thing."

In Jane's interview, there were 13 pieces of evidence in the area of commitment to teaching, the most of any participant. A kindergarten teacher, Jane began by stating that she loves 'spending my day with kids… I think the treasure of listening and learning from kids is priceless." She loves to watch the growth socially, emotionally, and academically from the beginning to the end of the year, and considers it a gift and a privilege to watch their transformation. She went on to state, "I learn as much from them as I hope they learn from me." She is clear that her motivation to teach is personal, likely stemming from her experience with a brother with Down Syndrome and a sister with cognitive and physical disabilities. She reflected:

> I've always watched how people interacted with them and cared for them and treated them, so that has been a part of my inspiration because I have seen a lot of different responses to them. I have four kids and I think of the kids at school here as my own, really, and I want to treat them as I would have wanted teachers to treat my kids.

Jane continued by stating that it is her passion to accompany her students on their journey to becoming readers and writers, and that she wishes she could teach reading and writing all day long. She believes students deserve her best and that her responsibility is to fulfill this. She spoke of her pattern of reflection after teaching a lesson, stating, "What could I have done better? What could I have done differently? What did go well and how to continue that?" This responsibility weighs on her heavily, as like Brooke, she is clear that her students are counting on her and that their challenges are the smallest that they will be at their age. She considers it her responsibility to level the playing field and to close any gaps that exist between students with advantages and students with disadvantages. She believes that this is where her "sense of urgency" originates, knowing how important it is that students' academic foundation begins successfully. She concluded:

> To live with myself, I just – that sounds dramatic – but it's just so important to me that kids learn how to read and feel successful and feel confident. So I'm going to do everything I can to make that happen. . . They deserve to learn. They deserve to have the best instruction, and that's why I'm here.

A Belief in Holding High Expectations for All Students

Ten of the 12 study participants specifically commented on the importance of having high expectations for themselves and their students and shared the belief that all children can succeed to high levels. These comments were made across questions and woven throughout their interviews, in the questions relating to instructional moves as well as teacher values and beliefs. Thirty pieces of evidence were collected in this theme, with similar phrases and language echoed by those sharing thoughts in this area.

Almost all of the study participants emphatically commented on their beliefs that children can learn, grow, and succeed. Kyle shared, "I believe that all of my students, no matter where they come into school, can achieve more than they think they can." He considers one of his primary roles as a teacher is to help children move from a place of dependence on a teacher to a being with agency who can impact their own futures, stating, "I fully believe that even if maybe a student's track record might seem a little defeating, that alone can't stop them from overcoming and achieving everything." Faith echoed this sentiment, sharing her belief that "all children can learn. Despite their backgrounds, despite their exposure."

Danielle's comments were similarly focused yet included ownership on her part. She shared, "I believe that all students can be successful and can achieve at high levels when given the support that's appropriate. . . Not all students are going to learn the same, and it's our job to change what we do so they can be successful." She went on to reflect on her district's mission and beliefs that students can make growth when provided supports that are personalized to them, and how this has shaped her own beliefs and values over the years. Amy's comments were similar. She stated, "Every student can learn. Every student has the capacity to learn. Sometimes it takes a lot to find out what's going on to get them from point A to point B, but every student can learn, and every student can grow." She discussed her expectations of her students, which she considers higher than those of some of her teaching peers, in that her expectations for students might look different from student to student, as each student's goals are different based on their own needs and starting points. She firmly believes that each student has the

capacity to grow and achieve, and echoed other participants when she stated, "I want to see every child, no matter what level they are at, be able to make for sure a year's growth, or, if not even more growth." She concluded, "Every child deserves to make gains. Every child deserves the best."

When asked about her expectations for student learning, Gia discussed the importance of not just her own expectations, but students' expectations for themselves. She shared her belief in the importance of clearly communicating her expectations of her students to them, and helping them to internalize these expectations for themselves. She stated, "I am constantly telling the students what I expect from them and how much I know they can do… having them make sure they know what the expectations are, whether it be academics or behaviorally, too." She went on to reflect on the importance of even primary students' belief in themselves as an important part of them reaching their goals. She considers the initial external expectations as a precursor to students' own internal expectations for themselves. She concluded, "I need them to know what I expect because I want to help them get where I want them to be, and I also want them to want to get there, too."

Brooke shared her perspective that adult expectations can sometimes get in the way or unintentionally interrupt student growth. She stated:

> I think that kids can do way more than we give them credit for. I think something that I catch myself doing, and I see other adults doing too, is they see kids with hard circumstances, or who have, you know, more stacked up against them, and in an effort to be empathetic and accommodating to them, they lower the bar.

She went on to share her thoughts that even when students have disadvantages, or if they're stressed, or being silly, they can still achieve at high levels if provided the supports needed and taught how to work. She expects students to work hard all day long, and she makes it a priority to ensure that this is the standard in her classroom for students and adults, and stated:

> I think my kids know that. I think the paras in my room and the other teachers in my room know that, and it really sets a climate… our brains never cool off. They're always steaming because we're thinking so hard.

> Similarly, Ellen echoed Brooke's perspective and shared her expectation that her students are always working hard. She stated, "I expect all the kids to do their best, and we talk about that all the time. We call it our 'Wow Work.' 'Wow Work' means give one hundred percent." She keeps in mind that her students start from different places, come from different backgrounds and experiences, but maintains that they can all learn, and at high levels, although sometimes at different rates. What she does not believe is that students need to all reach the same benchmark or level, which she feels is sometimes at a dissonance with her district. She stated, "I don't want to get hung up on kids not being at a certain point… because I feel like that puts them into a little box. We can't put kids into a box."

Clare's perspective echoed that of the other participants and she also shared her expectations for herself as a teacher. A self-proclaimed perfectionist, she holds herself to the same high expectations she does for her students, stating, "I want all my kids to be successful no matter where they're at… I really strive to make an impact." Like Amy, she

believes that all students can be successful and that the key is to meet them where they begin and work from there, communicating her expectations and building their confidence along the way. It is her firm belief that students need to believe in themselves in order to be successful. Jane agrees and shared her thoughts that not only do students need to believe in themselves and in her, but that they need to believe in her high expectations for them. She stated:

> I believe all students are capable and deserve that guaranteed viable curriculum. I believe all kids deserve to have my high expectations and their own high expectations, no matter where they're at in the journey of learning. They all deserve that."

She went on to say that students' belief in themselves stems from their teachers' beliefs in them, and shares her strong belief that her role as a teacher is to never put limitations or assumptions on her students. Lynn echoed this sentiment and stated, "The cliche is all students can learn, which is true, but I think all students learn at different paces. And I think that kids learn in different ways." She went on to share her perspective that a teacher's role is to develop a relationship with a student in order to figure out the ways in which a child not only learns best, but is motivated to learn. She reflected on her expectations of her own children and how she learned the hard way that having too high of expectations can backfire, and how this learning has impacted her as a teacher in how she approaches student progress. She shared, "It's important to have high expectations, but it's also important to have realistic expectations of a child. I think if you have too high expectations and set the bar too high you're setting the kid up for failure." She continued,

explaining that her approach with students is to push each child as far as they can go, and declared:

> I wish to push each child to achieve their highest potential… there's no holding
>
> back. This child can read at fourth grade, why not push him to read at fifth grade?
>
> Why not push him to read at sixth grade? I never want to hold a child back, ever.

A Shared Value in the Importance of Student Efficacy

Each of the 12 study participants shared their beliefs of the importance of student efficacy, perseverance, and growth. Teacher responsibility in building student confidence was a common theme throughout all interviews, with the adjacent themes of student growth and the drive to inspire 'light-bulb moments' a common theme among all interviewees. Forty-seven pieces of evidence were collected from participants to support this theme.

Several participants spoke about the importance of a child's psychological well-being. Hope's belief is that "children first have to feel safe and loved when they come to school, and if they don't feel these two things, I think learning will not take place to the extent it could." In this effort, she makes it her mission to ensure that her students know and understand that it's okay to make mistakes, to try, to take risks, and sometimes, to fail. She stated:

> I always tell the kids, I don't care if you get things wrong. I care if you try your
>
> best. To me, that's the number one thing. If you can be into it and try your best,
>
> my job is to help you succeed. It calms them. That's where they can start taking

risks. I always tell them, I love when you ask questions. I love when you get

things wrong, because we just learned something from that.

Ellen considers it her responsibility to encourage students to be their best.
She motivates with praise and encouragement, looking for ways throughout the day to
capitalize on small wins and successes, no matter how small they are. She shared, "I try
to encourage them for any little thing, if they're finding a letter that they know, or they're
finding a sight word in a sentence, that encouragement that you can do this! Look how
exciting this is!" Ellen, the teacher who uses 'Wow Work' to motivate and encourage her
students, believes that students need to be taught how to persevere through hard things.
She stated, "We talk about how sometimes we try things that are tricky and it's really
great because it helps us grow our brain and we feel so good when we are able to do
something." She shared how important it is to build students up and to help them build
each other up, and that as a classroom community it is important to celebrate one
another's successes. She shared that her students even start to sound like her as they
encourage their classmates and recalled that she heard one of her students recently say to
a classmate, "Wow! That's 'Wow Work'!"

Brooke stated that her priority is to assist students not only learning but preparing
to and continuing to learn, regardless of circumstance or ability. She loves to watch
students grow, especially from a place of uncertainty to confidence. She believes in
developing student grit and perseverance as a priority throughout the year, and shared:

I really think my biggest job is to first ensure there's no more barriers put in their

way and then second, to give them all the tools to keep them on track, to teach

them how to love school, to teach them that they can do hard things so that those

gaps or barriers don't get any bigger than they already might be.

She also described the importance of students learning that mistakes simply mean that

one is learning and that they are not a reflection of weakness or intelligence. She reflected

that over the years she has seen students' ability to persevere lessen and that students

seem to give up more quickly when work gets hard. She says that she thinks she used to

jump in too quickly when students struggled with a skill or concept and shared:

One thing that I think I've learned in general is how messy learning to read is. I

think that the first time kids are sounding out a new book, sounding out new,

decodable words, it is really, really, really painful, and I think that I used to have

the urge to think, 'Oh, it's too hard,' and I would come in and save them too

quickly, and I think I still do that sometimes. I see a lot of teachers doing that.

She constantly looks for ways to model her own hard work and perseverance so that

students witness the reward that can result from it. She stated, "If you can convince them

that working hard, no matter how uncomfortable it is, is so worth it and that having that

hot brain, that muscly, muscly brain feels really good, yeah, they can do it."

Kyle spoke of the responsibility of building his students' confidence and

developing their academic identities. He reflected on having students come to him

"young and naïve enough to believe anything" and how they see adults as a source of

power. He thinks it is important to help students "shift that viewpoint throughout the year

to where it's not just me who can tell you you can do it, but watch, look at all this

progress you've made. . . You can do it on your own." In reading instruction, Kyle

believes that it is imperative that students see their growth and feel confident in their reading from the start, so he creates goals for and with his students, and they are celebrated throughout the year as students progress. In his opinion, developing a love of reading and student confidence go hand in hand, and in his experience, when he has focused on "building excitement and confidence as readers" he has seen greater success than when he simply focused on skill and content development. He stated:

> My expectation is by the end of the year they're seeing themselves as the owner of their own confidence in their learning and knowing that 'I didn't think I could accomplish this, but I did, and let's celebrate that.' I know and expect my students can learn and meet the expectations they have. And my biggest goal and hope is that they can see themselves that way too.

Gia focuses great attention on her students' growth, while making sure that her students themselves are aware of their progress. She communicates constantly to her students about her belief in how much they can do, "really just trying to motivate them as much as possible, and build that mindset that they can do hard things." Her priority for all of her students is for them to be "as proficient and successful as possible by the year's end. I think that's what really drives me, just to see how far I can take them every year." Clare echoed this thought, sharing her conviction that her students' growth is both a reflection on her and a motivation for her, and that nothing is as rewarding for her than "how the kids eyes up when they get it. Their faces light up and their eyes open when they get excited… so everything I do is like, how do you get them excited about that?"

She considers it her responsibility to ensure that her students learn how to push through the pain of learning, and that she uses the word 'yet' a lot with students. She stated:

Sometimes we talk about making the right book choice. You can't read this *yet*. Come January, you will. This is what you need to be reading now. That honesty is sometimes hard to hear but if I say *yet* – you can't read that *yet*, but come January, let's try it again. So *yet* just means that it's possible. I just have to work to get there.

Jane agreed. She feels responsible for helping students to develop the grit and tenacity required of them to master the complex task of reading and writing. She believes that when students see themselves master difficult tasks, using grit and determination, that it helps them to feel proud of themselves, which reinforces their ability to persevere in the future. It is Jane's belief that incorporating productive struggle into her lessons, and modeling how she faces this herself, benefits her students greatly. Like Ellen, Jane encourages her students to encourage and support each other, and celebrates students' successes publicly as a community of learners. She shared a story of a little girl who came to her classroom as a non-reader at the beginning of the year and, when able to read a book to the class, was met with applause and cheers from her classmates. Jane reflected, "Knowing that it's okay to take chances and take risks and try new things is important. That's my belief system, but I think it plays into how I interact and what I want for all of the kids."

Similarly, for Lynn, when her students support and encourage one another, she finds great satisfaction in her work. She stated:

For me, the joy comes in when these kids realize that they are just as good as the

other kids when they taste that success. And to me, success is like a drug. Once

they taste it, they want more of it. It's helping that kid taste that success, which

then they get addicted to. They want more and more success and then it becomes

intrinsic in them, the belief grows in them: I can do this. I am good enough. I can

succeed.

She likened student success with deposits into a bank account and shared how success

makes more success. She believes she is responsible for motivating and inspiring her

students, not just teaching them. She also mentioned the importance of the classroom

community of learners and supporters of one another. She stated, "It's really important

that they have these little steps of success and we make a big deal out of it. We celebrate

each success, and with each success the child's confidence grows and grows and grows."

She discussed her perspective that a child who feels good about themselves will go

farther and persevere longer than a child without as much confidence in themself. She

concluded:

I feel it's so important that the child feels good. That the child feels encouraged.

That the child feels motivated… That builds the confidence, builds the self-

stimulus, that desire to want more. The hope is to build a self-drive in the child

and a self-desire and a hunger to want to read themselves.

Amy echoed the words of several of the other participants, exclaimed her

excitement at witnessing her students' growth across the year, and shared her firm

commitment to engaging her students in seeing and celebrating their progress. She

appreciates the assessment and data tracking systems provided to her by her district that allow her to watch the growth metrics across the year. She shares this with her students as well. She exclaimed:

> Not too long ago I had them do their words per minute reading with me, and every single one of the kids made huge gains on that. Just seeing them light up and just beam about "wow, at the beginning of the year I was reading 20, now I'm reading 40. Wow! That's huge, you know.

Danielle and Faith also spoke to being motivated by watching student growth. Faith shared how watching her students persevere through challenges to see success is one of the best parts of her job as a teacher. She, like Clare and Brooke, encourages mistakes because they simply mean that students are trying. She models through her own mistakes, and talks about this openly, telling her students:

> It's okay to make mistakes. Pointing out that English is weird. Some things don't follow the rules. So they know that it's okay, it's not perfect. It's going to be messy. Building that confidence and then when you start to see that confidence, pushing them even more."

Isabelle concurred. Her philosophy is that students need to be explicitly taught how to try, how to fail, and how to try again. One of her favorite things is "working on a specific plan to help a child feel successful and confident, and also be able to just navigate their world as they start their education." She also reflected on how inspiring it is for her to witness her students' growth, and how this, in turn, motivates her to push them harder, support them more, and encourage them to achieve a higher level. She looks for

opportunities to push kids' limits when she can, give them leadership opportunities, be the "teacher" or lead the class in an activity. This, she said, is how students develop confidence in themselves as learners and people.

A Belief in the Power of Collaboration

Collaboration was mentioned as an essential mechanism to support students by ten of the 12 study participants. Of those who discussed collaboration as important, all respondents stated clearly the importance of partnering with families in the effort to increase student growth. Nine of the ten also commented on the importance of collaboration with fellow teachers. In all, 41 pieces of evidence were collected to support this theme, which could have been chosen to support Research Question 1 (Instructional Practices) but was chosen to support Research Question 2 (Beliefs and Values) due to the intentional action of the participants and value placed upon collaboration as a mechanism and strategy to support student reading achievement and growth.

Partnering with Other Teachers

Collaboration with other staff members, such as paraprofessionals, intervention teachers, special education teachers, or English language teachers was valued by many of the participants. Teachers lucky enough to have a paraprofessional supporting their classroom spoke highly of this partnership. Isabelle spoke to the ability she has to support more of her students by employing her paraprofessional to work with students on certain skills or learning activities. She reflected that it is important to use whatever resources are available, whether that's a paraprofessional, a parent volunteer, or another teacher. Her goal is to get as many students one-on-one attention as she can in the efforts to support

each student to meet their goals. She collaborates with an EL teacher frequently and explains the school and district philosophy that "all students are all of our students." She shared:

> That's always a huge thing… because it's our students, it's not just hers, not just mine. They are ours and we need to work together because she knows things that I don't, and I know things that she doesn't. So I think that collaborating with any teacher in terms of those that you share a student with is number one for addressing needs.

She went on to discuss collaboration with special education teachers, and stated, "They have an amazingly difficult and challenging job, and they're some of the best teachers I've ever worked with. I've learned so much from them in terms of just how to meet the needs."

Faith also spoke to the importance of collaboration with other teachers and staff members. She leans on interventionists for help in determining instructional matches for her students, and collaborating with them on the students that they share. She spoke highly of the EL teachers in her building, stating, "I believe they are the experts and they have a lot of little tricks up their sleeve, and I'm very flexible to trying different things." She goes on to rave about her work with special education case managers who have not only provided support to her and her students, but who have taught her many things about how to meet her students' needs. She concluded by saying, "Balancing at all, you can't do it… so you have to really lean on other people."

Gia concurred. She spoke of relying on her students' special education case managers to truly understand their IEP goals to help her make instructional decisions for her special education students, and then making sure to make the accommodations suggested by these teachers. She mentioned taking a similar approach with EL teachers, with whom she maintains constant contact in support of her multilingual students, often even co-teaching lessons in tandem with them, which requires explicit communication and collaboration. Jane echoed this, adding that she has learned so much from working with her grade-level team. She shared, "I love collaborating and working with my team. I love learning. I love continuing to learn and it just fills me with great joy most days." A kindergarten teacher, she is fortunate to have a paraprofessional with her for half her instructional day. She raved about the para's ability to support students and to assist her in meeting the needs of all students each day. She directs the para's work, but also asks for the para's feedback and thoughts about her students' learning. She considers them a team, working together on behalf of all of their students. Jane also extolled the virtues of her special education and EL teaching colleagues, and how much she has learned from them:

> We have that teamwork where we all believe that these kids are our kids. I think these teachers have a lot of extra outside training that I don't, but I'm very willing to learn and utilize the things they are practicing when they're in the classroom with me. And I think that they have that reciprocal belief as well. I think that's important.

> Ellen and Brooke also expressed their gratitude toward their special education

and EL colleagues. Brooke further explained her collaboration with the intervention teaching team, discussing their reliance on progress monitoring to ensure that their shared students are making progress and their expected growth. This partnership has assisted her in meeting the needs of some of her most vulnerable students, whom she believes have benefited greatly from this collaboration between teaching professionals who take joint ownership of student growth.

Partnering with Parents and Families

Lynn spoke to the importance of involving families. She routinely reaches out to families to enlist their help in supporting student skill practice at home. She often sends books home with her students with a note asking a parent to read the book with their child or listen to their child read the book to them. She believes that this helps involve families in their children's education in a meaningful way, and also reinforces student skills and reading behaviors. Isabelle agreed, especially for her struggling readers. She spoke to the importance of having a "strong family connection when I've had a student that's struggling" as enlisting parents as supporters can double or triple the impact and support for a child.

Clare discussed her approach to collaborating with families as well, and stated, "Fostering a relationship between home and school helps with the success of student learning. I think that the relationship that I have with the family can help a student be successful." She explained that early in the school year, she assesses the family's capacity to support at home:

> At my fall conference I always gauge, "Do you have books at home? Do you
>
> know what your role is in your child's reading every night? What's my role? How
>
> can I support you?" I ask this with every student, but with my kids who are
>
> struggling readers, I tell them "this is going to be my role. Can you do this at
>
> home?" And I involve them and recruit them, so to speak.

She then sends home resources for families to use to support their student and checks in

to ensure that the family knows how to use the resources provided. At times she provides

questions for the family to ask after reading a book with a child and at times provides the

books or a book list as well. She makes it clear that she will do whatever is needed to

involve the family on behalf of the student and goes out of her way to ensure that she is

supporting the family as they are supporting their child. She views this as a partnership,

and explained:

> I find out about the family, their involvement, what they're doing at home. I often
>
> ask if they're reading every day, and I'll ask what they read. Sometimes I come up
>
> with a plan for them, 'Every day you're going to spend 20 minutes doing this and
>
> then 5 minutes doing that. This is what it looks like.' And I write it down for them
>
> so that they know. Especially my struggling readers, if they are extremely below
>
> grade level. I've done that in the past. I put together a bag or a package or folder
>
> so it becomes very doable, manageable, and everything that parents will need is at
>
> hand. I will do all that - I put it into a cute little bag or folder marked and
>
> everything, and then I check in with them. So, parents get things from me, and a
>
> plan so they know what to do.

Ellen takes a similar approach with families. She sends little activities home with students designed to be fun and engaging, not a chore. She stated:

I'll send the sight words home and they can practice those. Or I can send pictures home and they can name the picture and make the beginning sound they hear. Just different things for different skills, and usually the kids are pretty excited to take those home. It's their little homework bag, which as crazy as it sounds, I kind of like because I think that parent connection is really strong, and most parents want their kids to succeed, but they don't always know how to help them with some of those learning pieces.

Gia pointed out that collaborating with families is not just good for the student, it is good for her and for the community. She shared her perspective that "getting to make those connections with families, and just being a part of their lives, I feel like I really make a meaningful difference for the community." Hope agreed and said, "It's a cliche, but it takes a village." She connects with families, asking what they need, what materials she can send home, and then rewards students for doing them and bringing the materials back. She believes that this partnership is benefiting the students greatly, and that it also benefits her as a teacher, as having family support is essential in her work to teach children to read.

Summary

In all, nine themes were formed from related evidence and data from interviews with 12 participants and were aligned with the two central research questions:

RQ1: What are the instructional practices used by effective reading teachers that promote the highest rate of reading growth over one year among all student demographic groups?

RQ2: What beliefs, values, and characteristics do highly effective teachers hold about reading and learning?

These nine themes were each aligned to one of the central research questions, either Research Question 1 (Instructional Practices) or Research Question 2 (Beliefs and Values). Table 4 and Table 5 show the alignment of codes to themes and themes to research questions, as well as the number of pieces of evidence aligned to each theme.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher seeks, in the end, to develop a theory addressing the central research question(s). This theory often takes the form of an explanation, understanding, or drawing together of the central study themes, grounded in the views of the participants (p. 89). In this study, the researcher's theory emerged from analysis of the participant interviews in the evidence and data collected from participant responses. A full analysis and discussion of the iterative theory generated follows in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This grounded theory study was informed by Elger's Theory of Academic Performance (2007). Elger's theory grounded readers in the understanding that while "some factors that influence improving academic performance are immutable, other factors can be influenced by the performer or by others" (p. 20). Research for this study focused on the specific instructional practices, beliefs, and values of highly effective reading teachers, based on their direct impact on student reading growth over one academic year. Elger (2007) famously stated that "when people learn and grow, they are empowered to create results that make a difference" (p. 22), which formed the basis of this study with two essential questions. These questions focused on the instructional practices, beliefs, and values of highly effective teachers related to student reading instruction. The focus of the research sought to determine the specific characteristics of highly effective teachers in an effort to generalize the findings to assist other educators in making a difference for all of their students. Equipping all teachers with the tools, strategies, and instructional practices that effective teachers use to meet the complex reading needs of students is a goal of schools, districts, and colleges and universities as we seek to determine how to address our local and national reading achievement gaps. As Elger (2007) stated, this goal is now a rallying cry, "a challenge to educators—by improving our own performance, we empower ourselves to help others learn and grow" (p. 14).

Summary of Themes

As in Elger's Theory of Academic Performance (2007), findings from this study documented themes of both immutable and adaptive factors. Themes were aligned to one of two essential questions based on participant interviews and responses. Although the study sample was small, with just twelve participants, themes constructed from interviews were based on multiple pieces of data from a majority of respondents. Elger (2007) stated that one's "current level of performance depends holistically on six components: context, level of knowledge, levels of skills, level of identity, personal factors, and fixed factors" (p.11). All participant interviews included comments, claims, and reflections that align with these six components, with the components of knowledge, skills, and identity grounding the study as the strongest elements containing the majority of themes that emerged.

Five themes were distinguished for Research Question 1 and four themes identified for Research Question 2 based on all 12 participant responses and narratives. All themes constructed from participant interviews were distilled from robust data, multiple pieces of evidence, and interwoven narratives shared by the majority of participants. Research Question 1 sought to determine the instructional practices used by effective reading teachers that promote the highest rate of reading growth over one year. The themes that emerged from participant interviews in support of this question were 1) personalized learning, 2) targeted instruction for all students, 3) the role of assessment, 4) intentional literacy practices, and 5) the importance of active learning for student cognition. Research Question 2 sought to understand the beliefs, values, and

characteristics that highly effective teachers hold about reading and learning. Themes that emerged in support of this question included 1) participants' commitment to teaching, a belief in holding high expectations, 3) the understanding of the importance of student efficacy, and 4) participants' value of collaboration as a tool of student growth.

Considering the themes holistically, what emerged from participant interviews documents the strong importance of the teachers' beliefs and values in their instructional methodology. Each individual participant was firmly committed to one or more elements represented in the above themes, though all were not strongly committed to the same element. Further, each participant was keenly aware of their own convictions and values and able to speak upon them freely. Interestingly, specific pedagogical knowledge, though woven throughout the interviews, was not lifted by any of the participants as the most critical component in the teaching of reading. Rather, more broad, comprehensive, or general ideas of reading philosophy were argued as a method for ensuring student reading growth and development. Finally, though aligned initially to the broader categories of reading instructional practices and teacher convictions, all themes supported the second research question which sought to determine the key teacher beliefs and values that contribute to greater student reading growth.

Findings/Emerging Theory

Study results suggest that a teacher's commitment to their students, ownership of student learning, and actionable instructional planning and design are the most critical elements necessary to promote the greatest reading growth in primary students. Drawing directly from interviews with study participants, the researcher proposes the theory that

a teacher's fierce commitment and/or ownership of student learning are even greater

critical components than specific instructional pedagogical strategies in the effort to

ensure that students are reading proficiently in the primary grades. This position that the

researcher advances is illustrated within the following sections.

Fierce Commitment to Students

Evidence from all participant interviews centered on teachers' commitment to

teaching, whether to students or their craft, or both. Each of the twelve participants

shared their convictions of honoring the whole child, ensuring student efficacy, the

building of their confidence, and the importance of their work. All participants shared

their love of kids, which was underscored by their examples, comments, and reflections.

The concept of making an impact on students' futures was echoed by the majority of

teachers, and the strong (and sometimes overwhelming) sense of urgency and

responsibility were lifted time and time again, suggesting that this fierce and unrelenting

passion for serving students is at the center of these effective teachers' motivation and

drive. This drive and commitment to creating a community of learners and rigorous

instructional opportunities for students dovetail with Zaretta Hammond's words in

Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain (2015). In her book, Hammond stated the

importance of creating a community of learners who are able to participate in education

fully so as to be able to carry a complex cognitive load. Hammond also clarified the

difference between assuring that kids are having fun yet also engaged in activities that

promote intellectual curiosity and cognitive capacity building. Study participants echoes

these words time and time again in their summations, reflections, and examples. Participants' commitment to their students and their futures reflected Hammond's philosophy in elements ranging from their beliefs and values to their purposeful classroom design and instructional practices.

Ownership of Student Learning

The shared belief in the ownership of student outcomes was also shared by all of the participants. The belief that all students can achieve, the value of the importance of their work as a teacher, and the commitment to building their students' confidence, perseverance, and efficacy were echoed by participants in each interview. High expectations of students (and themselves!) were demonstrated in stories, reflections, and anecdotes, as well as stated plainly by participants. The pursuit of the 'lightbulb moment' was shared by several of the study participants, with those not mentioning it specifically alluding to it in their responses, narratives, and examples. This firm desire to support and bolster students, and the essential teacher responsibility in this action, was distilled from all twelve participant interviews. This element aligns strongly with John Hattie's work on effect sizes of factors related to student achievement. In his notable work, *Visible Learning* (2017), Hattie found that "collective teacher efficacy," or the belief shared among teachers that they are able to impact student learning regardless of student background or starting point, is the most critical and effective factor in student achievement. Hattie's work built upon the original research of Albert Bandura, who found that the positive effects of collective teacher efficacy more than outweighed any negative effects of low socioeconomic status (Bandura, 1997). Later research linked the

connection between collective efficacy to teacher efficacy, and vice versa, which was visible in many participant responses as they discussed the significance of their collaboration with their grade-level teams and colleagues. According to Hattie, "a stronger collective teacher efficacy seems to encourage individual teachers to make a more effective use of the skills they already have" (Hattie, 2017). This cycle of collaboration and efficacy was evident within the majority of participant interviews, and the resulting student achievement was evident in the student growth data that was collected to determine participation in this study.

Actionable Instructional Design

Finally, all participants communicated clear philosophical beliefs about their approach to instructional design, which included strategies such as collaboration with other teachers and families to the organization of their classroom reading structure. All twelve participants were firmly centered in their belief that targeted, personalized instruction is necessary for student reading growth and success. The use of data to inform instruction, the ability to flex and adjust to students' needs, and the use of small groups were strategies participants use to develop their students' reading proficiencies. Specific pedagogical components such as the reliance on the science of reading (and specifically phonics instruction), the use of visuals, the importance of modeling and explicit instruction, and the necessity of being able to move in and out of these strategies was emphasized. The use of movement, incorporation of fun, and the importance of intentionally weaving reading instruction into all parts of students' days were extolled as critical components of effective reading instruction.

Interestingly, although actionable instructional design was emphasized by all participants, they did not all assert or place value on the same strategies or components. Rather, it was their level of conviction and intentional use of the components that they believe in which was the notable theme in this area. Further, each of the participants' reliance and assertion of a strategy's power was closely connected to that of their own beliefs and values, which underscores the importance of teacher philosophy and belief about student learning in connection to student reading growth and development. This finding aligns strongly with Elger's (2007) theory that "three axioms are proposed for effective performance improvements. . . . These involve a performer's mindset, immersion in an enriching environment, and engagement in reflective practice (p. 11). Thus, a key takeaway from this study is the critical importance of a teacher's mindset and beliefs about student learning and their own ability to reflect on their contributions and impact upon it.

Interpretations

The findings of this study support the notion, and Elger's theory, that a teacher is able to improve their performance and its impact on their students. Elger (2007) stated, "As a teacher advances his levels of performance, he is able to produce deeper levels of learning, improved levels of skill development, and more connection with the discipline." The theory of performance underscores the concept that a teacher is able to refine, improve, and evolve their practice to produce the greatest possible impact upon their students. In turn, student performance can also be improved and accelerated, as the impact of teaching is absorbed and reflected by student growth and achievement,

resulting in greater student outcomes. The understanding and generalization of Elger's Theory of Academic Performance (2007) underscores the findings of this study and suggests that the absorbance of this theory into teaching philosophy and practice could produce better results for students, teachers, and school systems.

The notion of teacher improvement is important. A resounding theme distilled from each study participant was the overwhelming commonality of teacher preparation not being sufficient to prepare teachers for the complex work of teaching children to read. Participants shared stories, reflected on failed lessons, and stated their frustration about this lack of preparation for the 'real world' of teaching. Although content around reading instruction was provided to these teachers in their pre-service programs, the application and experience of meeting students' reading needs were almost zero. Participants shared multiple ways in which they developed their teaching skills in this area, ranging from professional development to working with their teams, collaborating with coaches and colleagues, relying on provided curriculum, and simple trial and error. Each participant's commitment to their students and their ownership of their responsibility in their students' outcomes were communicated as well, sometimes clearly and sometimes simply as an undercurrent woven through their interviews, as they discussed their path to their current understanding, pedagogical convictions, and improvement of their instructional practices in reading instruction.

Similarly, all study participants reflected on the wide spectrum of needs present among their students and the diversity of students in their classrooms on a daily basis. All study participants demonstrated high reading growth among their students, regardless of

race or culture, and some study participants consistently demonstrated higher reading growth among their students of color than their White students. Although all noted the importance of differentiation and personalized learning, few of the participants connected their specific instructional practices to culturally responsive instruction. Though many of their methods and strategies would indeed be considered culturally relevant, there was a lack of verbalized evidence that teachers were aware or intentional in their practices to support their students of color, aside from the frequently mentioned importance of visuals for multilingual learners. This does not mean that they are not aware of culturally relevant strategies, just that they did not name them as such. Gloria Ladsen-Billings (2000) decreed that "teacher preparation is culpable in the failure of teachers to teach African-American students effectively" (p. 207). She went on to discuss the severe consequences of pre-service teachers not being provided with specific instructional experiences in which to help them meet the needs of their future students, as well as the knowledge of history and philosophy for approaching their students while honoring their heritage and the strengths they bring with them. Ladson-Billings stated, "Work that uses autobiography, restructured field experiences, situated pedagogies, and returning to the classrooms of experts can each provide new opportunities for improving teaching" (p. 209). Her words underscore and support several of the examples that participants used when discussing their own path to learning how to meet all their students' needs. In *DreamKeepers*, her work on successful teachers for Black students, Ladson-Billings (1995) discovered three propositional notions about how these teachers conceived of their practice, which formed the basis of what she termed culturally relevant pedagogy:

academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political critique, which speaks to the understanding of culture and its impact on students and student learning. Although not explicitly stated in these terms, study participants demonstrated these three notions in their commitment to high expectations for all learners, a commitment to growing the whole child, collaborating with colleagues and families, approaching each student with a personalized lens for instruction, incorporating movement, and belief in the importance of maintaining a flexible approach to instruction based on the individual needs of each child.

Limitations

Limitations of this study affect its ability to be fully generalizable. Limitations of this study included a small sample size, the inclusion of just one school district, and the use of data over three years in determining study participants.

The sample size of twelve participants, although robust in narrative and in line with grounded theory research, limited the generalizability of this study. The study participants were all part of the same school district, and although not all were decades-long members of the district, all participants received similar professional development, had access to the same curricular resources and materials, and served a similar student population (an equal percentage of White students and students of color). The inclusion of educators in different school districts, using a variety of curriculums, and serving different populations would be a strong addition to this study's generalizability to determine if the findings were consistent.

The determination of study participants by the use of three-year historical data also created a limitation, as it disallowed educators with fewer than three years of experience in a grade level to be included in the study. Although this factor was a mechanism to ensure the validity of teacher data, this limitation excluded excellent teachers with fewer than three years of data to be included or their contributions and practices examined. In addition, the FastBridge universal screening assessment may have been a limitation, as its adaptive nature is formative rather than summative. It is the recommendation of the researcher that this study be replicated in a district serving a different population of students, using a different universal screening assessment to determine eligibility in the study to determine if there is consistency and reliability in the study findings.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research include considerations for pre-service teacher education and teacher professional development, suggestions for future research, and the deepening of a dialogue around the importance of teacher quality. At a baseline, the researcher recommends the repetition of this study with alternate educators, districts, and student populations to determine reliability and generalizability, as well as the importance of future research that expands the findings of this study's core themes.

In this study, findings suggest that a teacher's commitment to their students, ownership of student learning, and actionable instructional planning and design are the most critical elements necessary to promote the greatest reading growth in primary students. Targeted research into each of these three elements, the specific teacher

qualities, practices, and teacher moves within each that promote the most growth among students, might be examined to determine the effectiveness of practice and impact on student learning. Further examination of these elements to isolate the specific practices or teacher characteristics could then be the focus of future research or professional development in both pre-service education and teacher professional development.

The literacy practices which resulted in the highest student growth stemmed from a variety of actionable methods. Practices that were used by all participants included personalized learning, small group instruction, active learning, and the ability to pivot among instructional approaches in response to student learning. It is the recommendation of the researcher that pre-service teachers, as well as early career teachers, be provided with not only training but hands-on practice in strategies such as data collection, data-driven decision-making, and response to intervention models. These teachers should be grounded heavily in the science of reading to ensure that they understand the brain-based research of how children learn to read and provided with essential practice opportunities in applying this knowledge. Practicums should be provided for pre-service teachers to observe, create, and teach phonics lessons to students and to fully understand the complex code-related reading and writing skill development of the English Language.

The findings of this study suggested that teacher beliefs and values, more than specific instructional practices, impact student reading growth. This is an important distinction when considering that the educators' innate values and philosophies govern their approach to teaching and interacting with students on a daily basis. Thus, pre-service education and teacher professional development must consider how adult

learners' beliefs and values are grown. Research into the development of attitudes and beliefs would need to be included if the focus were to shift from the 'what' of teaching to the 'how' of teaching. Curriculum presented in pre-service teacher education programs may need to be adjusted to focus on the development of teacher qualities and attitudes that promote student learning, with coaching and hands-on experiences designed to develop this in teacher candidates. Similarly, ongoing professional development for teachers might need to include the continual development and refinement of teacher beliefs and values, especially for those working with diverse populations. Continued engagement in authentic learning around culturally relevant education should be a requirement for teachers, with ongoing coaching and reflection as part of standard education practices and teacher evaluation methods and protocols.

Finally, it is the recommendation of the researcher that a dialogue be started that acknowledges the importance of teacher quality and the educator's role in our overall student reading proficiency levels as well as in America's growing achievement gap. The classroom teacher matters. Demands on teachers are high. Research from a study on teacher effectiveness from over 25 countries documents that:

Society now expects schools to deal effectively with different languages and student backgrounds, to be sensitive to culture and gender issues, to promote tolerance and social cohesion, to respond effectively to disadvantaged students and students with learning or behavioral problems, to use new technologies, and to keep pace with rapidly developing fields of knowledge and approaches to student assessment. Teachers need to be capable of preparing students for a

society and an economy in which they will be expected to be self-directed

learners, able and motivated to keep learning over a lifetime (OECD, 2005, p. 2).

With this in mind, it seems abundantly clear that a teacher's reading pedagogy comes

second to their fundamental approach to teaching and their beliefs and values of their role

in connection to preparing students for future success and the success of society in

general.

The question is how to begin to impact the quality of educators and when. In

many countries, including the United States, teaching as a profession is in decline. The

OECD report states that:

> As societies have become wealthier and educational qualifications have increased
>
> and employment opportunities have expanded, teaching's appeal as a path to
>
> upward social mobility and job security does seem to have diminished.
>
> Widespread concerns about the difficulties faced by many schools, fueled by
>
> often very negative media reporting, have damaged teaching's appeal.
>
> Expectations and demands on schools have been increasing, while in many
>
> countries resources have not kept pace (OECD, 2005, p. 5).

Further, shortages in many licensure areas have forced states and districts to lessen

licensure requirements and increase class sizes, among other measures, which contribute

to teacher burnout and the cycle of decline. These grim realities don't help in attracting

and retaining excellent teachers, who are essential to the success of future generations.

Local, state, and national conversations need to be started to disrupt the decline of

teaching pools and to attract top candidates with the right beliefs and attitudes about students, instruction, and their impact on the nation's future.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are encouraging. Research documents the critical role of reading proficiency in a student's educational trajectory, as well as its impact on a student's academic identity. Reading experts underscore the importance of the educator's role in ensuring student success in reading and provide ample evidence that teachers can impact student learning and growth. Elger's Theory of Performance states that "with the exception of fixed factors, any of the components of performance may be targeted and improved in order to improve overall performance" (Elger, 2007). Using Elger's performance model, which frames the act of learning as a performance in its own right, we can begin to understand, and thus shift, the way in which we help teachers develop their teaching practice to better meet the needs of their students. Perhaps if we are able to shift our view of learning to include teacher and student perseverance in problem-solving, their approach to the development of complex cognition, and consideration of both teacher and student as learners, we can begin to shift our definition of education.

References

Aiken, H., Varghese, C., Pedonti, S., Bratsch-Hines, M., & Vernon-Feagans, L. (2020). Targeted reading intervention teacher certification: An approach to building and sustaining teacher expertise in rural schools. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 59*(4)*,* 346-369*.* https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2020.1777230

Al Otaiba, S., Folsom, J., Wanzek, J., Greulich, L., Waesche, J., Schatschneider, C., Connor, C. (2016). Professional development to differentiate kindergarten tier 1 instruction: Can already effective teachers improve student outcomes by differentiating tier 1 instruction? *Racing and Writing Quarterly, 32*(5), 454-476. https://doi.org/10.1080/10573569.2015.1021060

Allington, R. (2002). What I've learned about effective reading instruction from a decade of studying exemplary elementary classroom teachers. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(10), 740-747. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20440246

Anderson, D. (2019). Exploring teacher and school variance in students' within-year reading and mathematics growth, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 30*(4), 510-530. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2019.1618349

Bailey, D., Duncan, G., Murnane, R., Au Yent, N. (2021). Achievement gaps in the wake of COVID-19. *Educational Researcher, 50*(5), 266-275. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X211011237

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control.* W.H. Freeman and Company.

Balu, R., Zhu, P, Doolittle, F., Schiller, E., Jenkins, J., & Gersten, R. (2015). Evaluation

response to intervention practices for elementary school reading (NCEE 2016-4000). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Bardach, L., & Klassen, R. (2020). Smart teachers, successful students? A systematic review of the literature on teachers' cognitive abilities and teacher effectiveness. *Educational Research Review, 30*, 100312.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100312

Bardach, L., Klassen, R., & Perry, N. (2022). Teachers' psychological characteristics: Do they matter for teacher effectiveness, teachers' well-being, retention, and interpersonal relations? An integrative review. *Educational Psychology Review, 34*(1)*,* 259-300. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09614-9

Basma, B., & Savage, R. (2018). Teacher professional development and student literacy growth: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 30*(1), 457–481. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-017-9416-4

Baumert, J., Nagy, G., & Lehmann, R. (2012). Cumulative advantages and the emergence of social and ethnic inequality: Matthew effects in reading and mathematics Development within elementary schools? *Child Development 83*(4), 1347-1367.
https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01779.x

Bomer, R., & Maloch, B. (2019). Lessons for leaders on the preparation of literacy educators. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *51*(2), 259-264.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X19833779

Bowers, J. (2020). Reconsidering the evidence that systematic phonics is more effective

than alternative methods of reading instruction. *Educational Psychology Review, 32,* 681-705. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09515-y

Burnett, C., Daniels, K., Gray, L.,Myers, J., & Sharpe, S. (2015). Investigating student teachers' presentations of literacy and literacy pedagogy in a complex context. *Teacher Development, 19*(3)*,* 275-293.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2015.1020393

Capone, V., & Petrillo, G., (2020). Mental health in teachers: Relationships with job satisfaction, efficacy beliefs, burnout and depression. *Current Psychology, 39,* 1757-1766. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9878-7

Chingos, M., & Peterson, P. (2011). It's easier to pick a good teacher than to train one: Familiar and new results on the correlates of teacher effectiveness. *Economics of Education Review, 30,* 449-465.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2010.12.010

Christianakis, M. (2018). Language and literacy pedagogy and practice. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 45*(1)*,* 3-5. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/90018180

Clark, S., Helfrich, S., & Hatch, L. (2017). Examining preservice teacher content and pedagogical content knowledge needed to teach reading in elementary school. *Journal of Research in Reading, 40*(3), 219-232. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12057

Clark, C., Jones, C., Reutzel, D., & Andreasen, L. (2013). An examination of the

influences of a teacher preparation program on beginning teachers' reading instruction. *Literary Research and Instruction, 52*(2), 87-105. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2012.754520

Clark, S., Helfrich, S., & Hatch, L. (2017). Examining preservice teacher content and pedagogical content knowledge needed to teach reading in elementary school. *Journal of Research in Reading, 40*(3), 219-232. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12057

Creswell, J., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design*. Sage Publications.

Danielson, C. (2022). *The framework for teaching.* The Danielson Group. https://danielsongroup.org/framework/

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M., & Gardner, M. DellaVecchia, G. (2017). *Effective Teacher Professional Development.* Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-prof-dev.

De Naeghel, J., Van Keer, H., Vansteenkistie, M., Haerens, L., & Aelterman, N. (2016). Promoting elementary school students' autonomous reading motivation: Effects of a teacher professional development workshop. *The Journal of Educational Research, 109*(3)*,* 232-252. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2014.942032

DellaVecchia, G. (2020). Don't leave us behind: Third-grade reading laws and unintended consequences. *Michigan Reading Journal, 52*(2)*, 7-16.*

Denton, C., Fletcher, J., Taylor, W., Barth, A., & Vaughn, S. (2014). An experimental evaluation of guided reading and explicit interventions for primary-grade

students at-risk for reading difficulties. *Journal of Educational Effectiveness, 7*(3)*,* 268-293. https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2014.906010

Dharamshi, P. (2018). Seeing the everyday through new lenses. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 45*(1), 7-29. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/90018181

Duke, N., & Block, M. (2012). Improving reading in the primary grades. *The Future of Children, 22*(2), 55-72.

Egloff, F., & Souvignier, E., (2020). Effects of teacher belief adaptability on students' reading skills. *European Journal of Psychology in Education, 35,* 955-973. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-019-00448-2

Ehri, L., & Flugman, B. (2018). Mentoring teachers in systematic phonics instruction: Effectiveness of an intensive year-long program for kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers and their students. *Reading and Writing Journal, 31*, 425-456. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-017-9792-7

Elger, D. (2007). Theory of performance: Expectations of faculty in higher education. *University of Idaho Faculty Guidebook*, 11-15.

Er, E. (2021). The relationship between principal leadership and teacher practice: Exploring the mediating effect of teachers' beliefs and professional learning. *Educational Studies.* https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2021.1936458

Ferrer, E., Shaywitz, B., Holahan, J., Marchione, K., Michaels, R., & Shaywitz, S. (2015). *The Journal of Pediatrics, 161*(5)*,* 1121-1125. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2015.07.045

Fien, J., Chard, D., & Baker S. (2021). Can the evidence revolution and multi-tiered

systems of support improve education equity and reading achievement? *Reading Research Quarterly, 56(1),* 105-118. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.391

Flynn, N., Powell, D., Stainthorp, R., & Stuart, M. (2021). Training teachers for phonics and early reading: Developing research-informed practice. *Journal of Research in Reading*, *44*(2)*,* 301-318. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12336

Foundas, I., & Pinnell, G. (2021). *What are the systems of strategic actions?* Fountas and Pinnell Literacy. https://fpblog.fountasandpinnell.com/what-are-the-systems-of-strategic-actions

Fuchs, L.S., & Fuchs, D. (1986). Effects of systematic formative evaluation: A meta-analysis. *Exceptional Children*, *53*(3), 199–208. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440298605300301

Gibbs, G. R., (2010). *Coding Part 1: Alan Bryman's 4 stages of qualitative analysis*. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X7VuQxPfpk&feature=list_other&playnext=1&list=SP14E49EDF20613008

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine De Gruyter.

Goldhaber, D. (2007). Everyone's doing it, but what does teacher testing tell us about teacher effectiveness? *Journal of Human Resources, 42*(4)*,* 765-794. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.XLII.4.765

Graham, S., Liu, X., Ng, C., Bartlett, B., Harris, K., & Holzapfel, J. (2017). Effectiveness of literacy programs balancing reading and writing instruction: A meta-analysis.

Reading Research Quarterly, 53(3), 279-304. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.194

Griffith, R., Bauml, M., & Barksdale, B. (2015). In-the-moment teaching decisions in primary grade reading: The role of context and teacher knowledge. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 29*(4)*,* 444-457. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2015.1073202

Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin, a SAGE company.

Hamre, B., Pianta, R., Burchinal, M., Field, S., LoCasale-Crouch, J., Downer, J., Howes, C., LaParo, K., & Scott-Little, C. (2012). A course on effective teacher-child interactions: Effects on teacher beliefs, knowledge, and observed practice. *American Educational Research Journal, 49*(1), 88-123. http://doi.org/10.3102/0002831211434596

Harris, D., Ingle, W., & Rutledge, S. (2014). How teacher evaluation methods matter for accountability: A comparative analysis of teacher effectiveness ratings by principals and teacher value-added measures. *American Educational Research Association. 51*(1), *73-112.* https://www.jstor.org/stable/24546670

Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning.* Routledge.

Hattie, J. (2015). The applicability of Visible Learning to higher education. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology, 1*(1), 79–91. https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000021

Hikida, M., Chamberlain, K., Tily, S., Daly-Lesch, A., Warner, J., & Schallert, D. (2019).

    Reviewing how preservice teachers are prepared to teach reading processes:

    What the literature suggests and overlooks. *Journal of Literacy Research, 51*(2),

    177–195. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X19833297

Hindman, A., Morrison, F., Connor, C., & Connor, J. (2020). Bringing the science of

    reading to preservice elementary teachers: Tools that bridge research and

    Practice. *Reading Research Quarterly, 55*(51)*.* 197-206.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.345

Hoskyn, M. (2009). The prevention science perspective: Early intervention research on

    literacy, mathematics and social competence. In Rosenfield, S. & Berninger, V.

    (Eds.), *Implementing evidence-based academic interventions in school settings,*

    (pp. 165-212). Oxford University Press.

    https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780195325355.003.0006

Houtveen, T., & van de Grift, W. (2012). Improving reading achievements of struggling

    learners. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 23*(1)*,* 71-93.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2011.600534

Huang, F., Moon, T., Boren, R. (2014). Are the rich getting richer? Testing for the

    Presence of the Matthew effect. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 30*(2), 95-115.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/10573569.2013.789784

Hudson, A., Moore, K., Han, B., WeeKoh, P., Binks-Cantrell, E., & Joshi, R. (2021).

Elementary teachers' knowledge of foundational reading skills: A critical piece of the puzzle in the science of reading. *Reading Research Quarterly, 56*(1), 287-315. https://doi:10.1002/rrq.408

Hussar, W.J, & Bailey, T.M. (2019) *Projections of Education Statististics to 2017* (NCES 2019-001). U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Johnston, K., & Harper, T. (2021). Refining literacy pedagogy through practitioner inquiry partnerships. *The Reading Teacher, 75(2),* 169-177. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2040

Keppens, K., Consuegra, El, De Maeyer, S., & Vanderlinde, R. (2021). Teacher beliefs, self-efficacy and professional vision: Disentangling their relationship in the context of inclusive teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 53*(3) 314-322. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2021.1881167

Kieffer, M. (2012). Before and after third grade: Longitudinal evidence for the shifting role of socioeconomic status in reading growth. *Springer Science and Business Media, 25*, 1725-1746. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11145-011-9339-2

Kim, T., & Lee, J. (2021). Measuring teacher effectiveness for equity: Value-added model of teachers' distributive effects on classroom achievement gaps. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 26(1-2),* 30-52. https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2021.1906708

Kosnik, C., Menna, L., Dharamshi, P, & Miyata, C. (2017). So how do you teach literacy

in teacher education?: Literacy/English teacher educators' goals and pedagogies. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 40*(1), 59-71.

Kuhfeld, M., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Lewis, K. (2020, November). *Learning during COVID-19: Initial findings on students' reading and math achievement and growth.* NWEA.

Kuhn, M. (2020). Whole class or small group fluency instruction: A tutorial of four effective approaches. Educational Science 10*(5).* https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10050145

Kwok, M., Rios, A., Kwok, A., & Matthews, S. (2021). Teacher candidates' developing beliefs about diversity and its role in effective literacy teaching. *Education and Urban Society, 53*(8). *886-908. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124520974331*

Leu, D., Forzani, E., Rhoads, C., Maykel, C., Kennedy, C., & Timbrell, N. (2014). The new literacies of online research and comprehension: Rethinking the reading achievement gap. *Reading Research Quarterly, 50*(1), 37–59. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.85

Ludewig, U., Kleinkorres, R., Schaufelberger, R., Schlitter, T., Lorenz, R., König, C., Frey, A., & McElvany, N. (2022). COVID-19 pandemic and student reading achievement: Findings from a school panel study. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13(1)* https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.876485

Martinez, V., Castejon, L., & Gonzales-Pumariega. (2022). The effect of efficient professional development on the teaching of code-focused skills in beginner

readers: Exploring the impact of professional development intensity and coaching

on student outcomes. *Reading and Writing, 35,* 1711-1730.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-021-10250-6

McMaster, K., Baker, K., Donegan, R., Hugh, M., & Sargent, K. (2021). Professional

development to support teachers' implementation of intensive reading intervention:

A systematic review. *Remedial and Special Education, 42(5)*, 329-342.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932520934099

Meeks, L., & Kemp, C. (2017). How well prepared are Australian preservice teachers to

teach early reading skills? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 42*(1), 1-17.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1161171.pdf

Metsala, J., Wharton-McDonald, R., Pressley, M., Rankin, J., Mistretta, J., Yokoi, L.,

& Ettenberger, S. (2007). Effective primary grades literacy instruction-balanced

literacy instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, *50*(6), 518-521.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/20201811

Minnesota Department of Education. (2022). *Minnesota report card.* Minnesota

Department of Education.

Moats, L. (2014). What teachers don't know and why they aren't learning it: Addressing

the need for content and pedagogy in teacher education. *Australian Journal of

Learning Difficulties, 19*(2)*,* 75-91.

https://doi.org/10.1080/19404158.2014.941093

Muijs, D., Kyriakides, L., vanderWerf, G., Creemers, B., Timperley, H., & Earl, L.

(2014). State of the art-teacher effectiveness and professional learning. *School

Effectiveness and School Improvement, 25(2)*,* 231-256.

https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2014.885451

NAEP Report Card Reading. (2019). *National assessment of educational progress.*

https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/achievement/?grade=4

National Reading Panel (U.S.) & National Institute of Health and Human Development

(U.S.). (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the*

Scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading

instruction. U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service,

National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human

Development.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2005). *Teachers matter:*

Attracting, developing, and retaining effective teachers. OECD Publishing.

National Research Council. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.*

Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/6023.

Pasini, N. (2018). A collective impact approach to the reading achievement gap. *Journal*

of Library Administration, 58(6), 605-616.

https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2018.1491186

Pfost, M., Hattie, J., Dorfler, T., & Artelt, C., (2014). Individual differences in reading

development: A review of empirical research on Matthew effects in reading.

Review of Educational Research, 84(2)*,* 203-244.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/24434234

Protheroe, N. (2008). Teacher efficacy: What is it and does it matter? *Principal, 87*(5),

42-45. https://www.naesp.org/resources/publications/principal-magazine/

Reardon, S., & Portilla, X. (2016). Recent trends in income, racial, and ethnic school readiness gaps at kindergarten entry. *AERA Open, 2*(3), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858416657343

Paige, D., Young, C., Rasinski, T., Rupley, W., Nichols, W., & Valerio, M. (2001). Teaching reading is more than a science: It's also an art. *Reading Research Quarterly, 56*(1), 339–350. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.388

Peters, M., Forster, N., Forthmann, B., & Souvignier, E. (2022). Business-as-usual reading instruction in 2nd grade: Teacher centered and rarely evidence-based. *Reading and Writing, 35,* 1569-1597. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-021-10252-4

Podhajski, B., Mather, N., Nathan, J., & Sammons, J. (2009). Professional development inn scientifically based reading instruction: Teacher knowledge and reading outcomes. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*(5), 403-417. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219409338737

Rambo-Hernandez, K.E., & McCoach, D. B., (2015). High-achieving and average students' reading growth: Contrasting school and summer trajectories. *The Journal of Educational Research, 108*(2), 112-129. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2013.850398

Reardon, S., & Galindo, C. (2009). The Hispanic-White achievement gap in the elementary grades. *American Educational Research Association, 46*(3)*,* 853-891. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40284864

Reardon, S., & Portilla, X. (2016). Recent trends in income, racial, and ethnic school

Readiness gaps at kindergarten entry. *Aera Open, 2*(3), 1-18.

https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858416657343

Rickford, A. (2002). The effects of teacher education on reading improvement. *Journal of Reading Improvement*, *38*(4), 147-169.

Risko, V., & Reid, L. (2019). What really matters for literacy teacher preparation? *The Reading Teacher, 72*(4), 423–429. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1769

Ruotsalainen, J., Pakarinen, E., Poikkeus, A., & Lerkkanen, M. (2022). Literacy instruction in first grade: Classroom-level reading associations between reading skills and literacy instruction activities. *Journal of research in Reading, 45*(1)*,* 83-99. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12384

Risko, V., Roller, C., Cummins, C., Bean, R., Collins-Block, C., Anders, P., & Flood, J. (2008). A critical analysis of research on reading teacher preparation. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *43*(3), 252–288. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.43.3.3

Rupley, W., Blair, T., & Nichols, W. (2009). Effective reading instruction for struggling readers: The role of direct/explicit teaching. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 25*(2),125-138*.* https://DOI: 10.1080/10573560802683523

Sanchez Amate, J., Luque de la Rosa, A., Caceres, R., & Serrano, A. (2021). The effects Of COVID-19 in the learning process of primary school students: A systematic Review. *Educational Science, 11,*(10), 1-16.

https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11100654

Scammacca, N., Fall, A., Capin, P., Roberts, G., & Swanson, E. (2020). Examining factors affecting reading and math growth and achievement gaps in grades 1-5: A

cohort sequential longitudinal approach. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 112*(4), 718-734. https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/edu0000400

Shanahan, T. (2020). The Science of reading: Making sense of reading. *The Reading Teacher, 74*(2), 119-125. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1940

Shuls, J., Trivitt, J. (2015). Teacher effectiveness: An analysis of licensure screens. *Educational Policy, 29*(4)*,* 645-675*.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904813510777

Skourdoumbis, A. (2014). Teacher effectiveness. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 62*(2)*,* 111-126. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26769181

Slater, H., Davies, N., & Burgess, S. (2012). Do teachers matter? Measuring the variation in teacher effectiveness in England. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, 74*(5)*,* 629-645*.* https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0084.2011.00666.x

Slavin, R. (2013). Effective programmes in reading and mathematics: Lessons from the Best Evidence Encyclopaedia. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 24*(4)*,* 383-391. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2013.797913

Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., Chambers, B., Cheung, A., & Davis, S. (2009). Effective reading programs for the elementary grades: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research, 79*(4), 1391–1466. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654309341374

Spear-Swerling, L., & Brucker, P. (2005). Teachers' literacy-related knowledge and self-perceptions in relation to preparation and experience. *Annals of Dyslexia, 55*(2), 266-293. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11881-005-0014-7

Spiess, J., & Cooper, R. (2020). Examining the relationship between beliefs about

mind-set, beliefs about knowledge and cultural proficiency development for k-12

public school teachers. *Education and Urban Society, 52*(2)*, 257-283.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124519835593

Stronge, J., Ward, T., & Grant, L. (2011). What makes good teachers good? A cross-case

analysis of the connection between teacher effectiveness and student

achievement. *Journal of Teacher Education, 62*(4)*, 339-355,

https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487111404241

Swain, W., Springer, M., & Hofer, K. (2015). Early grade teacher effectiveness and pre-k

effect persistence: Evidence from Tennessee. *AERA Open, 1*(4)*, 1-17.

https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858415612751

Szadokierski, I., Burns, M., & McComas, J. (2017). Predicting intervention effectiveness

from reading accuracy and rate measures through the instructional hierarchy:

Evidence for a skill-by-treatment interaction. *School Psychology Review, 46*(2)*,

190-200. https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0013.V46-2

Taylor, B., Peterson, D., Pearson, P., & Rodriguez, M. (2002). Looking inside

classrooms:

looking at the "how" as well as the "what" in effective reading instruction. *The

Reading Teacher*, *56*(3), 270-279. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20205191

Terry, N. (2012). Delivering on the promise of the science of reading for all children.

The Reading Teacher, 75(1), 83-90.

Tortorelli, L., Lupo, S., & Wheatley, B. (2021) Examining teacher preparation for

Code-related reading instruction: An integrated literature review. *Reading Research Quarterly, 56*(1), 317–337. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.396

United States Department of Education. *Elementary and secondary school relief Fund*. Retrieved January 15, 2023, from https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund/

VandenHurk, H., Houtbeen, A., and VandeGrift, W. (2017). Does teachers' pedagogical content knowledge affect their fluency instruction? *Reading and Writing, 30*, 1231-1249. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-017-9721-9

VanDerHeyden, A., Burns, M., & BOnifay, W. (2018). Is more screening better? The Relationship between frequent screening, accurate decisions, and reading Proficiency. *School Psychology Review, 47*(1), 62-82. https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0017.V47-1

Van der Merwe, Z., & Nel, C. (2012). Reading literacy within a teacher preparation programme: What we know and what we should know. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 2*(2), 137-157. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1187282

Van Kuijk, M., Deunk, M., Bosker, R., & Ritzema, E. (2016). Goals, data use, and instruction: The effect of a teacher professional development program on reading achievement. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 27*(2), 135-156. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2015.1026268

Washburn, E., Joshi, R., & Cantrell, E. (2011). Are preservice teachers prepared to teach struggling readers? *Annals of Dyslexia, 61*(1), 21-43. https://DOI 10.1007/sl 1881-010-0040-y

Wiswall, M. (2013). The dynamics of teacher quality. *Journal of Public Economics, 100,* 61-78. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2013.01.006

Wold, L., Young, J., & Risko, V. (2011). Qualities of influential literacy teacher educators. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 50*(2), 156-172. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071003746388

Yeung, S., King, R., Nalipay, J., & Cai, Y. (2022). Exploring the interplay between socioeconomic status and reading achievement: An expectancy-value perspective. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *92*(3), 1196-1214. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12495

Appendix A

Participant Interview Questions

1. Demographic information

    a. Participant age, years of teaching experience, years in district, education level, level when license obtained, advanced preparation in teaching or reading, type of university attended when license was granted, name of college/university when teaching license obtained

2. What is your "why"? Why do you teach?

    a. When did you know that you wanted to be a teacher?
    b. What is your favorite thing about teaching?
    c. From where does your motivation to teach come?
    d. What are your beliefs about student learning?

3. Please describe your teacher preparation/college experience.

    a. What was your student teaching experience like?
    b. What do you remember about your reading methods courses?
    c. What additional training have you taken in reading instruction?

4. What is your approach to reading instruction?

    a. What are the most important components of reading instruction?
    b. How do you approach a student who is struggling to read?
    c. How does assessment inform your instructional practices?
    d. How do you use data to inform instruction?

5. How do you address disparate needs in your classroom? Please comment on students who receive special education services, multilingual students, students who struggle, and students who receive gited services.

6. What are your expectations about student learning? Are these expectations internal/external?

Appendix B

Figure B1 documents the student reading growth data for three consecutive years for the twelve study participants. Student typical/aggressive (T/A) and average aggressive reading growth is listed from fall to spring (F/S) and fall to winter (F/W) for White and students of color (SOC). Study participants all show significantly higher than average typical/aggressive growth than that of the average teacher at their grade level for all assessment measures. Study participants are ranked high to low within each grade level section. This data formed the basis for inclusion as a study participant.

Figure B1

Participant Data

| Homeroom Teacher	20-21 F/S	21-22 F/S	22-23 F/W	T/A Average ALL	T/A Average ALL F/S	T/A White Avg F/S	T/A SOC Avg F/S	Avg Aggressive ALL F/S	Avg Aggressive White F/S	Avg Aggressive SOC F/S
ALL (TOTAL=102)	73	75	74	74	74	76	72	47	50	44
ALL KDGN (27)	87	88	75	83.3	87.5	86	88	53	51	55
K1	86	100	100	95.3	93	92	93	63	65	60
K2	89	100	95	94.6	94	88	100	58	59	58
K3	100	100	83	94.3	100	100	100	78	71	83
K4	100	89	88	92.3	94	100	89	65	73	58
ALL GRADE 1 (26)	83	80	70	77.6	82	84	79	48	50	46
1-1	91.4	89	88	89.4	87	94	81	56	56	64
1-2	86	94	71	83.6	89	92	85	61	64	54
ALL GRADE 2 (25)	66	73	78	72.3	70	72	67	35	37	34
2-1	84	74	79	79	79	82	75	45	50	40
2-2	67	94	77	79.3	79	79	80	41	42	40
2-3	78	73	71	74	75	74	77	40	41	38
ALL GRADE 3 (24)	55	62	72	63	59	63	55	20	21	19
3-1	95	92	90	92.3	92	92	92	83	75	92
3-2	74	80	91	81.6	77	77	76	33	32	35
3-3	67	70	79	72	68	65	70	29	30	29

Figure B2

Participant Years of Experience

Participant Years of Teaching Experience

12 responses
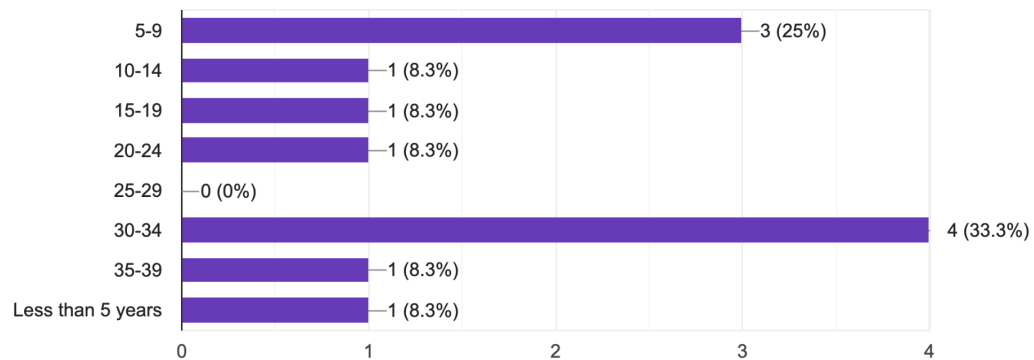
Participant Years of Teaching Experience in District

12 responses