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REFINING READING INSTRUCTION THROUGH TEACHER
INPUT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe teacher perspectives on reading instruction within professional development. The major premise is that teacher input should be utilized to improve and shape specialized professional development. This research seeks to contribute to 21st century reforms for the advancement of teacher practice in the core academic area of reading. It illuminates the need for schools to build a culture of collaborative, targeted, organized, and prescriptive professional development for reading instruction within school communities that will improve teaching and learning in all school sites.

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To my amazing children, Christian, Sochi (Honor), and Jidechi (Justice),

and

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Education is a complex and demanding profession, and operating in this complex environment are accountability reforms such as the Common Core State Standards. No longer undergirding these reforms is the now defunct No Child Left Behind act, which has been replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The Every Student Succeeds Act was signed into office on December 10, 2015, by President Barack Obama. This new law promises to advance the educational rigor of American students in key subject areas, such as reading, and it is especially designed to assist students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds so that all students can be college and career ready and have equal opportunities to reach their true potential (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In addition to facing the expectations inherent in this new law, the field of education has grown more complex because principal and teacher roles have become subject to strict adherence to government accountability goals at a time when students are failing to meet the national average in reading skills. Therefore, the need to include best practice and pedagogical support through professional development has become a big part of this 21st-century landscape of accountability reform (Fullan, 2011; Slayton & Mathis, 2010; Supovitz, 2006).

The National Reading Panel and Partnership for Reading has documented that reading achievement is a major problem in the United States; 8 million U.S. students in Grades 4 through 12 do not read fluently. In addition, this report also states that 3,000 students in the United States drop out of school daily, often driven by poor reading and writing skills (Joshi et al., 2009; Kena et al., 2015). These findings have increased the level of educational scrutiny and damaged the reputation of American schools (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013; Joshi et al., 2009; Kena et al., 2015), and as a result, accountability reforms have been put in place to address the problem. Additionally, principal and teacher roles have had to expand in America to meet the demands for 21st-century reading skills (Slayton & Mathis, 2010; Supovitz, 2006). Principals charged with meeting the accountability measures found in the California Professional Standards for Education Leaders have had to put systems in place to improve the state of literacy in schools (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014). Such educational guidelines were written for principals to help them provide teachers with effective opportunities for professional development in all subject matters. These guidelines address the core foundational subject of reading, an area in which it is glaringly obvious that the nation's students are deficient (Berliner & Glass, 2014; Joshi et al., 2009; Kena et al., 2015; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Mehta, 2013)

Background of the Problem

Every three years the Program for International Student Assessment tests 15-year-old students from all over the world in core academic subjects such as

reading, math, and science (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015; Umphrey, 2010). This test has indicated that America's educational system is functioning below its international counterparts in the core academic subject areas, especially in the subject of reading (Umphrey, 2010). In addition, Asia and some European countries outperform America in all core subject areas (Umphrey, 2010). The research indicates that if America does not properly define and refine its national achievement in the key academic area of reading the nation could lose its global respectability in education (Berliner & Glass, 2014; Lieberman & Miller, 2001). The American government needs to assist all schools in defining how teachers should acquire the knowledge to educate students to improve their academic success in reading. This could make a difference in improving the national perception of our educational system (Berliner & Glass, 2014; Mehta, 2013).

The American education system has shown a steady decline in academic achievement for years (Mehta, 2013; Supovitz, 2006). In 1983, in an effort to bring awareness to the need for educational reform in America, the report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was presented to President Ronald Reagan by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Denning, 1983; Koppich, 2000; Mehta, 2013). This report stated that American schools were in need of educational reform and were ineffective in preparing students for social and national advancements in core academic areas (Denning, 1983; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Mehta, 2013). As a result, students were inadequately prepared for higher education and did not have the necessary

skills to contribute to America's changing workforce (Denning, 1983; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Mehta, 2013). The details outlined in *A Nation at Risk* set the accountability wheels in motion and highlighted the need for systematic reforms across the nation. Furthermore, as society changed, educators were expected to accommodate these changes by improving their instructional practice in schools (Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Mehta, 2013). The information contained in *A Nation at Risk* gripped the American public, much as the launching of Sputnik did in 1957, because it awakened American society to the realization that it was behind in the core academic subject of science. America had to face the social responsibility of refining its stance on how it should proactively educate its masses to ward off the dangers of being globally and academically regressive (Koppich, 2000; Mehta, 2013). This report also played a pivotal role in shaping how education is provided in American schools today. Currently, America still faces the dilemma of how to educate its populace to ensure global viability. According to Slayton and Mathis (2010), educational reforms should continue to identify, standardize, and define teacher actions that will establish competent teaching to improve literacy in schools.

Since not all students are making adequate yearly advancements in core academic assessments in reading, much of our society blames teachers and views some teachers as insufficiently trained and in need of effective professional training (Otaiba et al., 2008; Supovitz, 2006). Hollins (2011b, 2015) and Moats (2009) have all reported that there is a widespread concern that too many elementary-aged American students, especially those in high-poverty

schools, do not read at grade level, making it impossible for them to achieve present and future academic success. In addition, in 2003 the National Center for Education Statistics reported that there has been little progress in the reading performance of fourth graders since 1996 (Podhajski, Mather, Nathan, & Sammons, 2009). Evidently, teachers do not have the professional capacity to meet the needs of English language learners or the needs of poor students in low-socioeconomic urban areas who need additional instructional attention in classrooms (Moats, 2009; Panero, Talbert, & Fullan, 2013; Podhajsk et al., 2009; Supovitz, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics' ranking of American students' academic achievement further implies teachers need further professional training (Hollins, 2011b; Moats, 2009). Also called into question is the effectiveness of teacher certification programs and whether these programs adequately prepare teachers to teach (Hollins, 2011b; Mehta, 2013; Panero et al., 2013; Podhajski et al., 2009). Hence, there is a demand for the educational system to continue reforming its methods to improve the teaching practice that will support student achievement in reading, starting at the level of teacher certification programs (Hollins, 2011b; Joshi et al., 2009; Moats, 2009). Mehta (2013) states that when schools work on improving professional development for teachers, then society's negative view of teachers can slowly be improved.

Since there are a high number of educational practitioners who are displaying the need for more targeted educational training in reading, schools have to supply that support so that student instruction and student achievement in reading improves (Joshi et al., 2009; Mehta, 2013; Moats, 2009; Panero et al.,

2013). Doherty and Jacobs (2013) have recommended that educational improvement should start with revamping teacher practice by taking actions that improve the reputation of the teaching profession through the institution of organized professional development in schools. Doherty and Jacobs (2013) also state that adopting andragogic support with trained personnel and the use of academic data to drive and inform instructional practice are necessary actions that schools should take to improve reading instruction. Hall and Hord (2015), Odden (2011), and Panero et al. (2013) assert that professional development that utilizes research-based inquiry methods can guide students' academic growth in reading.

Since teacher roles are demanding and overloaded with a multitude of expectations, school leaders need to remain focused on improving teacher practice in reading (Slayton & Mathis, 2010; Supovitz, 2006). In section 2A of the California Professional Standards for Education Leaders (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014), school principals are charged with providing teachers with professional development that directs collective learning, inquiry, and engagement around students' needs in reading. This practice will improve teacher performance and in turn improve student achievement in reading (Leithwood et al., 2004; Panero et al., 2013; Slayton & Mathis, 2010).

Increasingly, schools are tasked with a range of responsibilities in addition to education, such as ensuring the physical and emotional health and safety of student populations, but the primary function of the educational system remains classroom training and the advancement of student literacy rates and academic

achievement. (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). The primary responsibility for instructional leaders is to maintain a focus on instruction that improves student learning in reading through effective andragogic support (Slayton & Mathis, 2010). Additionally, the teacher's role is to teach and continuously refine their practice, and a school's responsibility is to help teachers maintain that focus (Supovitz, 2006). School leaders need to provide teachers with an environment that has a sustained focus on instruction that improves pedagogical practice over time and minimizes distractions that could hinder the focus on reading (Panero et al., 2013; Supovitz, 2006). To enrich student learning, schools must intentionally carve out time to devise a plan of action to perfect students' yearly progress through effective implementation of professional development in reading because reading is the core foundational skill that assists students in accessing other academic subjects (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Panero et al., 2013). Hence, Moats (2009), Fullan (2011), Panero et al. (2013), and DuFour (2006) have documented that, in order for instruction to improve in schools, districts must use targeted professional development that is wrapped around a collaborative community of learners.

Problem Statement

The problem that this study addresses is K-1 teacher perspectives on professional development in reading. Without professional development, teachers will not learn their craft effectively and cannot improve student achievement in Reading. Teacher perspectives needs to be addressed in

educational literature to support the educational arena in improving its practice. There is a need for teacher perspectives in education, and teacher perspectives is not sufficiently addressed in the vast literature in education and in educational policy.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to understand K-1 teachers' perception of professional development for reading instruction.

Research Questions

1. How does the professional development experience of K-1 teachers impact their pedagogy in reading at a school site?
2. How do K-1 teachers perceive their professional development in reading instruction at a school site?

Significance of the Study

This research is important because it adds to the understanding of effective teacher andragogy in reading. It identifies teacher perception of the professional development they receive in reading so schools can reflect, review, and refine their process to improve their pedagogical practice in reading. The research contributes to the field of educational leadership because it provides districts with a description of the effectiveness of professional development as perceived by K-1 teachers. District superintendents, principals, and teachers may use this research to refine the organization and implementation of professional development in elementary schools. In addition, this research will illustrate the value of teacher perceptions and the value of including their input in

both planning and implementing professional development for teachers (Cook, 2000). It adds to the body of knowledge regarding instructional efficacy that improves student outcomes in reading (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Karhanek, & Harrison, 2004; Moats, 2000; Panero et al., 2013).

Scope of the Study

This study addresses K-1 teacher perceptions of professional development in reading instruction. It describes teachers' perceptions of the impact of their instructional pedagogy on student success in reading. It was conducted at a K-5 elementary school in Riverside County in Southern California and was implemented over a period of one month.

Assumptions of the Study

Teachers were available to assist me in identifying perceptions of practices that may help the school improve the professional development action for reading. I assumed that teachers provided honest answers in their interviews. Often participants have difficulty expressing their honest opinion about situations, especially when it relates to the quality of tools or assistance offered to them at their job. It was my hope that by alerting participants regarding the confidentiality of the interviews I could allay worries that they may have about openly sharing their perspectives regarding the impact of professional development in reading.

Study Delimitations

This study was delimited to K-1 teachers at a school site in Riverside County because instruction in the K-1 grades lays the foundation for reading skills (Nelson-Walker et al., 2013; Otaiba et al., 2008; Podhajski et al., 2009;

Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013). In addition, focusing on teacher perceptions in these two grade levels could inform the field of education on how teacher perceptions influence their professional development and affect student achievement in reading.

Study Limitations

Teachers are inundated with many duties during the day, duties such as lesson planning, classroom organization, and grade-level meetings. Unfortunately, these duties may dissuade teachers from participating in this research. Some teachers may not be available after school, may be distrustful of the research experience, or just do not want to participate and may not have the time during the week to provide their input. These issues could possibly influence the availability of participants who agree to engage in a one on one interview. The data collected on the perception of teacher professional development was relevant to understanding how teachers used their professional development experience to improve their reading instruction.

Definitions of Key Terms

Andragogy. Is “an organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their ability to function as self-directed learners” (Slayton & Mathis, 2010, p. 38).

California Professional Standards for Education Leaders. These are policy standards that principals and school leaders use to guide their practice and implementation (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2014).

Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards are the new state standards that a majority of U.S. states have adopted to guide student academic instruction.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are “a set of procedures and measures for assessing early literacy acquisition skills from kindergarten through sixth grade” (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2016, p. 1). They comprise short, one-minute fluency measures, seven of which function as indicators of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, accuracy, fluency with connected text, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. These measures are designed for identifying students who are having difficulty with basic early literacy skills. These measures help teachers methodically detect, monitor, and prevent early reading deficits (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2016).

Inquiry stance. The collaborative practice model for teachers to examine student’s instructional deficits to learn how they can improve their instruction to improve student skills is described as an inquiry stance (Panero et al., 2013).

Pedagogy. Pedagogy is “often the language applied to didactic teaching practices used with children” (Slayton & Mathis, 2010, p. 38) and is a term of dependent, directed learning, commonly referred to as student learning (Fornaciari & Dean, 2014).

Perception. Perception can be understood as “the processes that organize information in the sensory image and interpret it as having been produced by properties of objects or events in the external, three-dimensional

world” (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2002). Fullen (2011) noted that in “MRI scans of the human brains, perception is a function of our feelings, desires and memories” (pp. 3-4). It is the “realities as perceived by the participants” (Galvan, 2013, p. 58). Perceptions in the context of this research include teachers’ feelings about their professional development experience and their opinion of whether the professional development met their professional needs.

Professional development. Is an informal or formal training that a teacher or any professional receives on the job site. Professional development in reading instruction It is a professional education program that provides mentorship for teachers to improve their instructional ability in reading. Professional development in reading is individually, divisionally, or departmentally implemented (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998).

Professional learning communities. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are groups of teachers or educators who use research-based techniques to methodically inquire and collaborate regarding ways to improve student achievement (DuFour, 2006; Hollins, 2011b, 2015; Panero et al., 2013).

Unit of Study (UPO). A UPO is the instructional guide that the district directed volunteer teachers to write during an apportioned time period. Teachers collectively wrote these UPOs with other grade-level groups within the school district. The overarching curricular guide for the district.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the problem statement, background of the problem, and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews current relevant literature and outlines the theoretical concepts and historical underpinnings related to the topic. Chapter 3 outlines the study's research methodology. In Chapter 4, I analyze the interview questions and examine the criteria used to determine professional development and teacher perceptions of the usefulness of the professional development on their reading instruction. Chapter 5 summarizes the study's research findings and suggests other applicable research that could expand the body of literature regarding professional development in reading instruction.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to Supovitz (2006), professional development as an instructional practice for advancing the instructional capacity of American schoolteachers has digressed from its intended purpose. Even in the face of new reforms, the implementation of the professional development service is not meeting the needs of teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Supovitz, 2006). Instead, schools utilize professional development to present district accountability expectations, state initiatives, and yearly school site functions (Supovitz, 2006). With reforms such as the Common Core State Standards, teacher practice is now placed under the microscope of accountability standards (Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Slayton & Mathis, 2010; Supovitz, 2006). Furthermore, since student achievement is not improving at the same pace as technological advancements, teacher instruction is identified as the cause of the problem; teachers are charged with the responsibility of improving their teaching to improve student academic achievement (Mehta, 2013; Supovitz, 2006). Additionally, professional development in form and function was designed to improve the professional capacity of teachers, but it is highly criticized by teachers because they seem to believe it does not provide them with specific and timely knowledge with which to improve their instruction (Supovitz, 2006).

With 21st-century reform initiatives in effect, it has become apparent that something should be done to improve the educational achievement of students in reading, and school sites must begin with developing teachers' professional capacity. Teachers need improved professional development workshops to guide their practice and effectiveness (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Panero et al., 2013; Supovitz, 2006; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). Educational policies like the Common Core State Standards require teaching instruction to be more flexible and differentiated to improve student instruction, and this adds to the rigor required for improved instructional outcomes (Moats, 2000, 2009; Supovitz, 2006).

Examining the impact of professional development in reading instruction for teachers in Grades K-1 at a school site will illuminate the link between teachers' perceptions about the quality of professional development that teachers receive and the learning outcomes of their students. This case study research focused on one school site and on the content area of reading. Reading was selected as the core content area to analyze the dynamics between teacher professional learning and student achievement because reading is the principle academic foundation for all content areas (Moats, 2000; Sailors & Price, 2010). Additionally, reading was selected because it also "serves as the major conduit for all learning. Reading is the groundwork for both school and life-based knowledge" (Podhajski, Mather, Nathan, & Sammons, 2009, p. 403).

Podhajski et al. (2009) have stated that a teacher's knowledge of reading instruction affects that teacher's instruction, and they proposed that teachers

should have a solid foundational theory in the research-supported concepts regarding teaching students to read. These researchers asserted as well that this process requires mentorship in all reading components, and more mentorship, such as classroom coaching that is engaging to the teachers, inspires commitment to more learning. They also added that increased knowledge breeds teacher confidence and leads to higher student achievement. Podhajski et al (2009) conducted a study of kindergarten teachers who received a year-long intervention training on phonological awareness and phonics instruction and found that the explicit training in those skills improved kindergarten students' achievement in reading. It is important to note that the Podhajski et al. program did not focus on a specific prescribed curriculum, but on how professional development was used to train teachers in English language structures to ensure their students' reading acquisition (Podhajski et al., 2009). According to Moats (2009), teachers should be well versed on the components and pedagogical skills that improve reading instruction. Podjaski (2009) and Moats (2010) asserted that all K-12 teachers need to know these components in order to improve their literacy instruction and, most importantly, to improve student achievement in reading.

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation for the planned study and an assessment of the relevant literature regarding professional development, teacher perceptions about their professional development, professional development training, and the type of training structure that teachers need to

develop and improve their pedagogy in reading. I review the empirical research that is related to this dissertation topic. I conclude with a chapter summary.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation that underpins the current study is social constructivism. Philosophically, the social constructivist links culture, knowledge, and reality within individual learners (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002). Researchers who rely upon social constructivism do so because, as Hatch (2002) asserted, “These scholars see their participants as co-constructors of the knowledge” (p. 49). A social construct in an educational setting also allows for the greatest layering of meaning making and allows for the multiple realities that are constructed from personal experiences and interactions between people (Creswell, 2014). The philosopher whose work undergirds this theoretical constructivist foundation is Lev Vygotsky because he believed that social interaction and collaboration helps the learner to “perform tasks in social settings” (Noddings, 2012, p. 16). Vygotsky posited that collaborative learning allows the learner to be more engaged and reflectively responsive to learning (Noddings, 2012). While the social constructivist model has been widely received in the academic arena, little research exists detailing how its ideas and practices are tied to teacher professional development training and student achievement results (Creswell, 2013). With professional development moving away from a teacher-focused approach toward a student-directed approach, how can the myriad experiences of adult and student learners be captured and capitalized upon to improve student achievement? Is there a link between teacher input and

their perception of professional development to student learning outcomes? The research attempts to shed light on these questions.

Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature

The next section will identify the literature that pertains to the purpose of this research.

Conceptual Framework

Although the scope of the scholarship on teacher professional development is vast, this study is organized into five sections of inquiry, including (a) the global perspective on professional development; (b) change initiative action in professional development for the improvement of core instruction; (c) the basic function of professional development in reading instruction; (d) teacher perceptions of professional development, including perception of their professional development as input; and (e) professional learning communities as the vehicles through which to strengthen the impact of pedagogical practice in reading.

Global Perspective on Professional Development

In order for educators to understand the magnitude of illiteracy, it is important to look at this topic through a global lens, to examine what other countries view as the best form of collaborative learning that will improve teaching and learning in schools. Mourshed, Chijioke, and Barber (2010) and Collinson et al. (2009) have observed that global educational trends in America, Europe, Asia, and Australia also reflect this directional change where educators are expected to be lifelong learners. Mourshed et al.'s (2010) global report on

education focuses on a global perspective that spans from Singapore to California. Their report examines the processes that school systems implement to become “good to great,” and they assert that the process itself is the movement catalyst that propels school systems out of the abyss of inefficacy. They have proposed six main actions that drive school districts to improve their instructional implementation, and professional development was posited as the main process that schools needed to improve their action plans. Mourshed et al. (2010) state that teachers should be collaboratively responsible for each other’s learning by working together to plan lessons for all subjects. These authors state that teachers should observe each other, co-teach, and evaluate their pedagogy to improve their practice.

According to Collinson et al. (2009), “professional development, while a critical piece for transforming education in the 21st century for teachers and their students, is integrally connected to a country’s broader educational and social policies” (p. 3). Collinson et al. (2009) seem preoccupied with current educational trends that make student achievement synonymous with continuous professional development for teachers. These researchers argue that teacher professional development design must incorporate the global perspective and the local perspective. For example, Collinson et al. (2009) called it “glocalization,” the “blending of global and local or an adaptation of the global with a local twist” (Collinson et al., 2009, p. 5). Concerned about how recent social and economic upheavals in certain countries have made the world a much smaller place, Collinson et al. (2009) delineate three educational trends that make it necessary

to present teacher professional development within a global paradigm: glocalization, mentoring, and rethinking teacher evaluations. The researchers based their study on a comparative analysis of educational trends in six different countries: Australia, England, Latvia, Ireland, Scotland, and the United States. They have concluded that through professional development teachers could become active agents in transforming the educational system throughout the world by being engaged in policy-making and working collaboratively (Collinson et. al., 2009).

Collinson and colleagues (2009) emphasize that teacher professional development needs to be organized around a global worldview, while other scholars emphasize some aspect of the social science discipline. Dubinsky, Roehrig, and Varma (2013) stress that quantitative data should guide teacher professional development. These researchers have offered professional development to a select group of teachers in order to help them understand the skills they would need to teach students effectively. The researchers have initiated government-funded workshops on behalf of the school because the school needed to realize its goal of promoting student-centered learning by providing an authentic learning environment for the students (Collinson et. al., 2009; Dubinsky et al., 2013). To determine if the goals had been met, the researchers scheduled training sessions in which teachers were taught the academic content. They then collected data from elementary teachers in weekend workshops. Teacher feedback not only revealed that they experienced a renewed understanding of the topic, but it also revealed that teacher perception

of the professional development was positive. The teacher participants stated that the only negative aspect of the professional development implementation was that workshops were held on weekends. In subsequent follow-ups, the researchers sent external evaluators to observe teachers teach the content to their students. The implications here suggested that teacher engagement was an important part of professional development because it ensured that teachers grew in their practice (Dubinsky et al., 2013).

Social scientists Wessels and Nieuwoudt (2011) have also asserted that professional development initiatives should be informed by research. While subscribing to the view that teacher professional development is imperative, these authors also agree that teachers needed to be knowledgeable of the subject matters they teach. However, they note that many factors could affect teacher efficacy, including school leadership, professional development, the availability of technological resources, and program coherence. They argue that “meaningful professional development is necessary to build a picture of the teacher’s strengths in the classroom” (Wessels & Nieuwoudt, 2011). To illustrate that teachers need professional development, the researchers amassed data from self-reporting surveys completed by teachers. The results reflected two major trends. One trend showed that 81% of teachers who attended professional development workshop geared toward their specific needs, felt more confident when teaching in their classrooms than those who do not attend such workshops (Wessels & Nieuwoudt, 2011). Another trend revealed that positive changes in teacher knowledge and classroom practice require ongoing professional

development. Teachers were encouraged to use contact sessions, online support, and reflection, as engagement for professional learning community's practices. Research by Hanegan, Friden, and Nelson (2009), promotes both a qualitative and quantitative approach. These scholars argue that classroom teachers could only reproduce what was modeled for them. Therefore, professional development should simulate the experiences that teachers will later recreate for their students. Using a mixed method research design that combined qualitative and quantitative analysis, the researchers worked with science teachers to compare two professional development programs. One program was called UBEST and the other was called Gen Ed. In the Gen Ed group, the teacher participants trained in a university computer room setting. During this summer course, the teachers visited on-campus research laboratories and attended expert lectures that involved the specific content and computer-based technology. Gen Ed follow-up sessions included two Saturday workshops and monthly after-school meetings in a classroom throughout the school year. The experimental UBEST group focused on authentic inquiry where the teachers designed their own small-scaled scientific research study. In UBEST, professional developers assisted as facilitators and mentors. This course consisted of a two-week summer lesson with additional follow-up sessions in the fall (Hanegan et al., 2010). The researchers discovered that teachers who participated in the workshops felt that they had experienced intensive professional development working in the academic program and reported improved knowledge of the subject matter. However, after the summer

session the UBEST participants experienced more engagement and actually participated in higher questioning between the teachers and the facilitators. In both professional development groups, the teachers felt like they understood the content better and they were more confident about their teaching abilities. Accordingly, the data indicated that greater teacher confidence could lead to greater student learning (Hanegan et al., 2010).

Change Initiative Action for the Improvement of Core Instruction

A question in the research that the professional development literature addressed was which group should be targeted, the teachers, the students, the facilitators, or the principals for improving the presentation of professional development? It is widely accepted that the end goal of teacher professional learning is increasing student achievement. Collinson et al. (2009) argues that just as professional development is transforming the role of the classroom teacher, the roles of other adults in the building must also be transformed, this includes the principal and support staff (Collinson, et al., 2009). Recent studies place greater significance on the facilitator's responsibility for disseminating information. Johnson (2014) focuses on the role of the facilitator as being responsible for making sure that the professional development experiences were meaningful and effective, arguing that these facilitators must not only balance training objectives with the real need to make participants feel like they are leading the course but also simultaneously make teachers feel that they are not receiving a lecture. It is important to note that the researcher encouraged the facilitators to draw upon their own personal experience while implementing

workshops to teach teachers techniques for deepening their content knowledge (Johnson, 2014). It is likely that Johnson emphasized the facilitators because these individuals were used to empower teachers. Facilitators who led professional development trainings typically served concurrent roles in maintaining a learning community by inspiring teachers to learn techniques to maximize their content instruction and learn more about their students (Johnson, 2014). Visnovska and Cobb's (2013) research on STEM yielded some fruitful indicators about teacher attitudes when they felt empowered through professional development workshops. These researchers obtained data from K-5 STEM teachers who participated in professional development seminars sponsored by a summer institute. Facilitators of the workshops taught teachers how to develop their confidence and how to use inquiry-based techniques with their students. In order to achieve this goal, facilitators used a variety of teaching strategies, including lectures, small group discussions, hands-on activities, and individual assignments to prepare the teachers for inquiry-based instruction (Visnovska & Cobb, 2013). The participating teachers reported positive perceptions of the workshop and said that the STEM training was useful. The researchers used correlation analysis to determine that participants had significant increases in their knowledge, confidence, and efficacy in relation to teaching STEM. The authors hypothesized that professional development that appeals to teachers can positively affect teachers' knowledge and perceptions of the learning. The study illustrated how meaningful design on the part of facilitators can produce teacher professional development training that can

positively affect teachers' knowledge and perceptions of professional development.

A professional development study by Sailors and Price (2010) emphasized both the facilitator, as mentor, and the reading content researcher. This study suggested that professional development trainers could teach teachers cognitive development as an approach. Although these researchers used social science applications, their chief concern was testing the overall effectiveness of cognitive strategy instruction. The subjects of this study included 44 teacher participants in two professional development seminars offered to elementary and middle school educators who taught low-income students (Sailors & Price, 2010). At the outset, the authors were convinced that students needed to be taught how to become "strategic readers," but they felt that teachers lacked the wherewithal to do so. The teachers were divided into two training groups; one group received training in a two-day workshop, and a second group attended the same workshop and received follow-up support in their classrooms in the form of mentoring. The group that received additional classroom supports from academic coaches (comprising 329 minutes of support) also experienced greater student learning outcomes (Sailors & Price, 2010).

According to Smith (2000), facilitators who plan professional development curricula must adopt a "multi-way vision" perspective because teachers need to have an assortment of teaching strategies in order to differentiate instruction. Smith's study engaged teachers in a multiple view experiment and obtained data by discussing their satisfaction during the process. One technique that the

teacher participants spoke favorably about was the facilitator's inclusion of professional development stories in the workshop. It was used as a starting point for each discussion about classroom practice. The major finding indicated that activities selected for teacher professional development must be presented in a manner that teachers feel is intellectually challenging and engaging and helps them expand their teaching capacity (Smith, 2000).

In the third cohort of teacher professional development literature, social science researchers stressed specific content areas as the focus of professional development seminars. What is taught at a teacher professional development workshop varies from the latest technology to applications of behavioral strategies, such as constructivism, to a specific academic content. Nevertheless, reading and teacher attitudes about the professional development training that teachers received are the subject of this research project. Therefore, the literature in remaining sections focuses on these areas.

In the search for targeted change actions that harness and grow teachers' instructional capacities toward closing the achievement gap, Panero et al. (2013) presented a form of professional development where teachers collectively focus their attention on students' instructional deficits. The research arose out of a 10-year documented study that centered on the need to ensure that teachers employed an *inquiry stance*, an approach that stringently examines and targets student improvement through strategic planning within consistent workshops to assist teachers with digging deeper into their instructional practice and provide

them with the opportunity to collaborate with trained facilitators who serve as a conduit for change.

Panero et al.'s (2013) research described a school process where teachers in New York City used trained facilitators to help teachers identify individual student's instructional deficiencies. The crux of this professional development undertaking involved the use of teacher inquiry and collaboration to help teachers focus their instruction to improve student achievement. Panero et al. (2013) assert that, in order for schools to change their educational practice and improve student achievement, schools must immerse teachers in collaborative practices that are sustainable, timely, and prescriptive. This type of teacher practice addresses all core aspects of instruction, especially when coupled with the expectations underlying the Common Core State Standards (Panero et al., 2013).

Basic Function of Professional Development in Reading Instruction

In order to close the achievement gap, school districts and teachers are accountable for improving the reading levels of struggling students from all economic backgrounds. Podhajski et al. (2009) have stated that adequate teacher training should involve (a) research based preservice and in-service training, (b) solid theoretical constructs, (c) literacy development and instructional responsiveness to teacher's teaching needs, (d) opportunities for beginning teachers to receive supportive mentorship from coaches before and after all workshops, and (e) classroom support for teachers that will impact their instructional capacity, their commitment, and engagement in reading instruction.

Since teacher preparation programs must improve, special education and general education teachers must receive supportive, professional development that is systematic and explicit, especially those teachers who have reported that they have limited knowledge of how to teach reading. Podhajski et al. (2009) use the 1995 and 2004 work of Louisa Moats to explain the concept of “explicit” instruction in reading. Moats (as cited in Podhajski et al., 2009) reports, “Knowledge of language structure is as fundamental to a reading teacher as anatomy is to a physician” (p. 414). Podhajski et al. (2009) and Moats (2009) assert the critical need for professional development that is rich in preparing teachers to teach the foundational reading components. These components are knowledge of language structure and reading development structure. The researchers posited that teachers need to sequentially teach language structures, such as phonological awareness (an “oral language skill) and phonics (Podhajski et al., 2009, p. 205). First, teachers need to learn how to respond and remediate the errors that students make while learning (Podhajski et al., 2009). In order for teachers to implement effective instruction in reading they must (a) choose appropriate examples during instruction that will drive sound-symbol relationships, (b) provide organizational sequence for reading instruction, (c) know how to use morphology to teach students to spell, and (d) incorporate meaningful word study for reading and writing practice (Podhajski et al., 2009). “Through preservice preparation, ongoing professional development, teachers must be prepared to deliver linguistically informed, code-based reading instruction” (Podhajski et al., 2009, p. 405).

In addition, in order to reduce or eradicate the achievement gap in reading between the privileged and marginalized students, teachers should focus on instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency, especially for low-performing students. Podhajski et al. (2009) have noted that these low-performing students seem to benefit when instruction in word recognition and reading comprehension is explicitly taught. The authors also state that, the achievement gap cannot be closed in schools without closing “the knowledge gap in our profession” (Podhajski et al., 2009, p. 414). They also state, “Teachers can become agents of change rather than objects of educational reform” (Podhajski et al., 2009, p. 414).

This disparity in reading outcomes has become the driver for several state reading programs, including the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Kent, 2003; Podhajski et al., 2009). This massive reading initiative that involved advancing reading levels of all state students in Grades K -12 resulted in an overhaul of professional development in most school districts (Kent, 2003). According to Kent (2003), the objective was mainly to produce highly-skilled reading teachers and conduct teacher professional development training that is based on the latest lesson demonstration protocols and ongoing support at the state level (Kent, 2003). Kent (2003) reported that ARI is a successful program, pointing to teachers’ positive disposition about its implementation; however, data to support claims about the program or teachers’ attitudes was not provided. While Kent’s (2003) survey of the ARI program yielded little statistical evidence about the success of the reading program, the longitudinal study examined the

effects of professional development in scientifically based reading instruction by comparing it to student outcomes at a high-risk school. The researchers relied mostly on statistical analysis and quantitative research. The experimental group consisted of eight elementary teachers and their students. In addition, three teachers and their students from a neighboring, affluent community served as a control group in the study. The experimental groups received training in phonics and fluency and extra help from reading coaches; the control group did not. Major findings of the study were surprising, because the deficits that the low-income students demonstrated at the outset had disappeared after their teachers completed the professional development training. One shortcoming of this study was the limited sample size in the test groups (Kent, 2003). Another shortcoming of this study was the emphasis on quantitative data that does not address teacher attitudes. Nevertheless, the study did allow teachers to self-reflect and analyze their strengths and weaknesses (Kent, 2003).

Teacher Perception of Professional Development

Few studies have delved into the area of teacher disposition about the professional development training they received in reading. An exception to this was a study conducted by Kindle (2013). Kindle's study of the mandatory implementation of shared reading at a Midwestern preschool illustrated how the individual personality of a teacher affects how that teacher experiences learning (Kindle, 2013). Wessels and Nieuwoudt (2011) corroborated the view that more study in this area is needed. A clear trend that emerged was that teachers who had attended professional development workshops felt more confident in

teaching their classroom concepts than those who had not. Data showed that 81% of teachers indicated high confidence levels after they participated in professional development (Wessels & Nieuwoudt, 2011). In compiling their research, the scholars uncovered significant insights into teachers' attitudes about embracing professional development training. They found that teachers were unwilling to commit to all the professional development methods because of personal factors (Wessels & Nieuwoudt, 2011). For instance, if the teacher's professional development workshops were far from their school or residence, then they grudgingly attended the workshops and did not fully accept the lessons from the workshops, leading to less effective and lower quality professional development.

In related research by Visnovska and Cobb (2013), an examination of classroom video recordings of teachers sharing how they deliver instruction provided insight on teacher dispositions and practice (Visnovska & Cobb, 2013). The institute utilized classroom videos as a resource to investigate reflective methodology while reviewing previously collected data. Video clips were used to enable teachers to compare and contrast classroom events, and participants viewed the videos as an opportunity to develop insights into their own teaching practices and school contexts (Visnovska & Cobb, 2013). In future professional development collaborations, researchers might ask teachers to explain why certain aspects of the classroom videos struck their attention over others, and why it was relevant to their teaching (Visnovska & Cobb, 2013).

In order to get a better grasp of the subject of teacher perception of professional development, more research needs to be conducted (Worawuth et al., 2014). Such an inquiry will examine various aspects of teacher attitudes and teacher confidence in employing the concepts they learn in professional development seminars. In addition, such inquiries may reveal teachers' willingness to commit to the strategies and differentiated instruction that improves their pedagogy. Worawuth et al. (2014) have stated that there is a positive correlation between high-quality professional development, teacher implementation, and better student achievement. Worawuth et al. (2014), addressed student outcomes and showed that teachers who were actively involved in professional development implementation reported positive results.

Many studies have shown that students who had a confident teacher understood the topics better (Joshi et al., 2009; Otaiba et al., 2008). As a result, the students who had teachers who were involved in professional development performed better on standardized tests (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013; Podhajski et al., 2009). In addition to the research on grades and standardized test scores, numerous studies have shown that students who had teachers with concept-based professional development training were better able to explain their work than those whose teachers only went through a lecture-based learning environment (Collinson et al., 2009; Doherty & Jacobs, 2013).

Out of necessity and in the interest of reform, teachers have become career-long learners and participants in professional development (Collinson et al., 2009). Yet mandated professional development training does not

automatically translate to practical usage or improved student achievement (Supovitz, 2006). Collinson et al. (2009) contend that teachers must be confident and perceive that the training they receive will eventually help them to improve student academic learning. Like teachers, school districts and educational leaders are also pressed to make professional development training relevant and meaningful. School leaders are required to replace the former professional development training that some critics classify as the “run of the mill workshops aimed at training teachers to be uncritical consumers of prepackaged commercial programs with the ultimate goal of boosting students’ scores on high stakes tests” (Fu, Fang, Lamme, Eisenberge, & Shelton, 2005, p. 396) and increase teacher engagement.

Professional Learning Communities and Pedagogical Practice

Professional development in schools is a practice that schools define according to their internal culture and the accountability expectations (Hollins, 2011a, 2011b). Lower socioeconomic schools must subscribe to a specific level of implementation that fits the academic needs of their school site (DuFour et al., 2004). In the era of accountability and reform, schools require more targeted practice that should address their specific school needs. Hollins (2011a) has stated that schools should subscribe to implementing different professional development constructs that produce results (DuFour et al., 2004; Fullan, 2011; Panero et al., 2013). Hollins (2011a) has presented three different types of PLCs: one as the *teacher learning community*, the second the *culture of practice*, and last the *community of teacher learners*. She states that the first two are the

most culturally supportive of the teacher, the students, and the school accountability reforms because this structure develops influential teacher learning groups with collective practice and purpose to improve instruction, especially in reading (Moats, 2009). Moats (2009) asserts that teacher learning communities and the culture of practice work because the systematic collaborative culture of teachers moderate how their peers plan and implement instruction. Hollins (2011a) suggests that effective professional development works because it is a norm-based movement that is organized around clear goals and the respect of the community and culture of the student. Hollins (2011a, 2011b, 2015) believes that when teachers build a collaborative culture that sets instructional objectives and uses academic data to target results, this can build a reciprocal learning culture of shared practice. She also believes that schools should build a community with positively pervasive ideology that improves reading instruction. She describes this as a collaboratively modulating system that should thrive on sharing strategies and instructional structure that will improve literacy (Hollins, 2011a, 2011b).

Slayton and Mathis (2010) and Lieberman and Miller (2001) claim that professional development should be the vehicle that provides teachers with the information, practice, and training to do their job effectively (Supovitz, 2006; Slayton & Mathis, 2010). Supovitz (2006) and Panero et al. (2013) have stated that school leaders need to provide teachers with an environment that has a sustained focus on instruction that improves pedagogical practice over time. Effective attention on teacher instruction through the systematic process of

professional development, district-mandated curriculum, research-based methods, academic data as a monitor, and instructional standards may provide teachers with a unified vehicle of study through which to focus on building student's reading skills (Podhajski et al., 2009). Attention on teaching practice on reading could improve student learning and affect their proficiency in the reading expectations addressed in the Common Core State Standards (Moats, 2009; Panero et al., 2013; Supovitz, 2006).

The effective focus on the implementation of professional development in reading could address new and ongoing state standard measures for accountability and equity and improve teacher's professional learning while simultaneously affecting student achievement (DuFour, 2006; DuFour et al., 2004; Fullan, 2011; Otaiba et al., 2008). Since professional development could address teachers' professional needs in reading instruction, it could also improve how teachers provide education to the populations they serve (Hollins, 2011a, 2011b, 2015; Otaiba et al., 2008; Panero et al., 2013). Additionally, instituting the practice of systemized strategic professional development for reading instruction could help teachers improve their reading instruction by making their instruction more targeted to their students' needs. In essence, this specialized professional development could improve student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Paris & Alim, 2014; Panero et al., 2013).

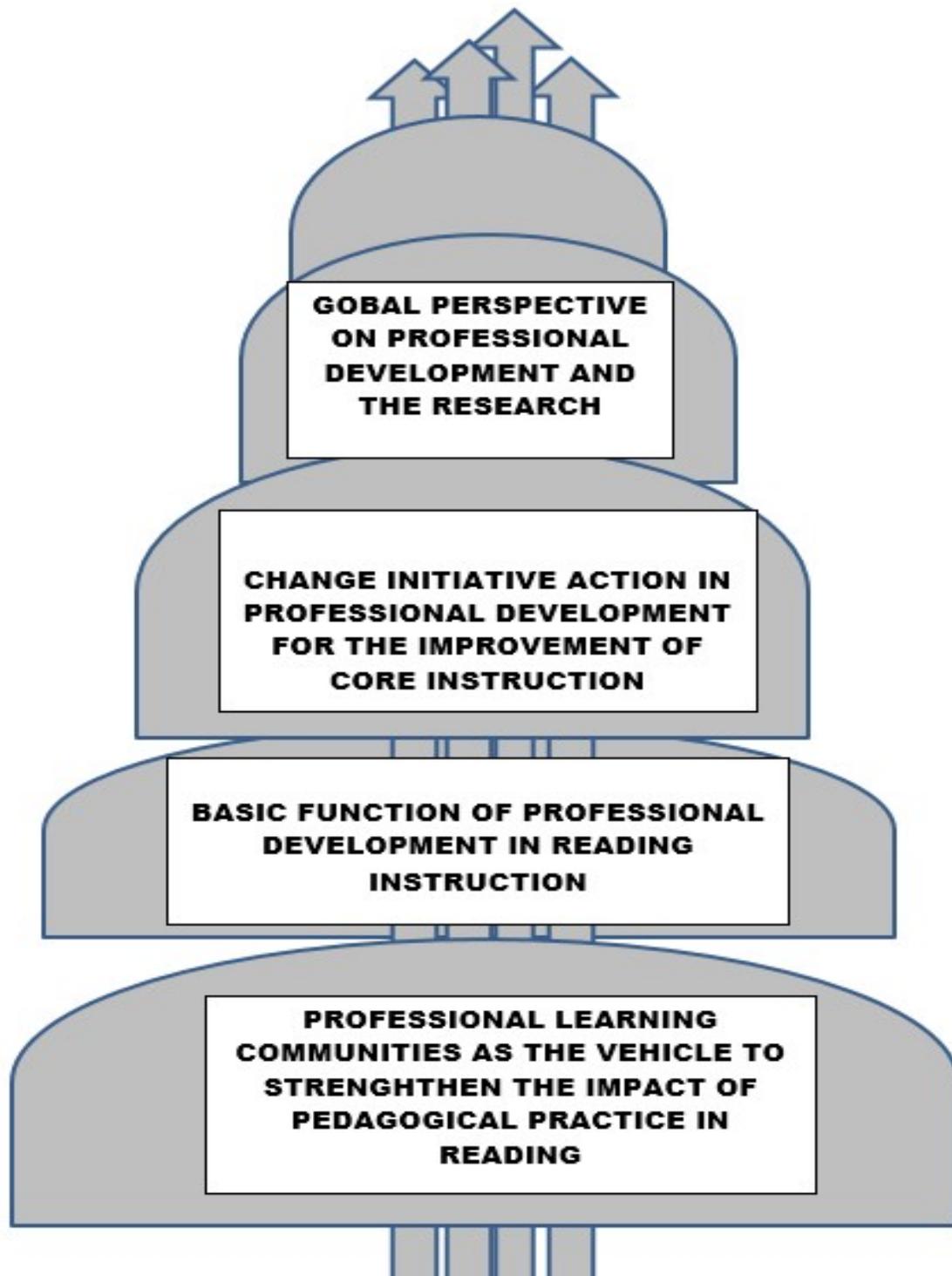


Figure 1. Visual demonstration of the conceptual framework.

Chapter Summary

Professional development is still evolving and is becoming a standard feature in some American schools (DuFour, 2006; DuFour et al., 2004; Fullan, 2011). Educational policies and trends such as ESEA and the Common Core State standards necessitate that teachers become life-long learners. In order to facilitate teachers' professional development mandates, school districts must address the needs of its instructional staff so that professional development is effective and meaningful. A review of the scholarly literature indicates that schools approach professional development asking three different questions: What philosophy should govern its design? Which groups are the targets of professional development training? What should be taught? However, mandating professional development training does not automatically translate into student achievement. The current study contends that teacher attitudes and types of professional development can be factors in student learning outcomes. Teachers need to feel confident that the professional development training they receive will help their students. Concentrating on K-1 reading classrooms in one school district helped to answer the research questions and examine the implications in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study was to describe teacher perceptions of the reading instruction they are currently receiving within the constructs of professional development in a Southern California elementary school in Riverside County. In addition, this study explored the impact of teacher perceptions of their professional learning in this era of current school reforms. This chapter will discuss the methods, procedures, population panels (sample), and questions that uniquely inform the researcher or “expert eye witness to an event” (Creswell, 2014, p. 97). This research followed inductive reasoning and focused on uncovering themes that emerged to describe teacher perceptions of what the principled practice or implementation of professional development is and should be. The rationale was that teacher perception of professional development directly influences reading instruction.

In the era of accountability, the Common Core State Standards and other reform acts regulate academic practice in schools. It has become imperative that schools review and refine the professional development offerings for teachers. According to Supovitz (2006), professional development experiences shape teacher learning, influence their teaching, and affect students. Based on the findings of the literature review in Chapter 2 and the greater intellectual expectations of these new reform mandates, teachers need to improve their

instructional practice to improve student achievement (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Slayton & Mathis, 2010; Stein & Nelson, 2003).

This study examined schoolteachers' perceived impact of professional development on the enhancement of their skills and their ability to deliver meaningful instruction in reading. The research questions this study sought to answer were

1. How does the professional development experience of K-1 teachers impact their pedagogy in reading at a school site?
2. How do K-1 teachers perceive their professional development in reading instruction at a school site?

In this chapter the methodology is presented first, then the philosophical foundations are discussed. A description of the research design within the selected methodological approach is provided, followed by an explanation of the research design methods used in this study. This description includes information about the setting, sample, data collection and instrumentation, procedure, and data analysis, including validity and the role of the researcher. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Qualitative Research

The methodology chosen for this research is qualitative research. This research not only takes an inductive approach but also develops an evolved conceptual theory first and then works from that theory. Qualitative research “focuses on specific situations or people and emphasizes on descriptions” (Maxwell, 2013). The theoretical foundation of the qualitative study is social

constructivism because this study will focus on the multiple realities constructed by lived experiences and interactions between people (Creswell, 2013).

There are strengths and limitations in qualitative research methods. Problems are examined in-depth through observations, information, and themes that can emerge as the study progresses. The strengths in this type of research is that the researcher has the flexibility to construct questions to understand a phenomenon and to use interview questions to provide an opportunity to acknowledge nuanced experiences. The researcher interprets these nuances to look for deeper conceptual meaning. In studies that examine individuals and groups, it may be harder to generalize about populations, but similar research with similar situations can be extrapolated to other situations (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is often considered not as rigorous as quantitative research because in qualitative research the quality of the information is determined by the skill of the researcher, and various amounts of data have to be interpreted and checked for embedded bias (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002). Findings may be difficult to explain, and these findings are left to the interpretation of the researcher; this adds to the limited respectability of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002). In addition, participants may not be as forthcoming with responses because the researcher's presence poses a threat to participant's comfort. Participant anonymity could be compromised in a qualitative study; however, quantitative research data does not identify any specific participant, and it is easier to conceal participant identity (Hatch, 2002).

Qualitative research fit this particular study because it allowed me to observe how teachers view their professional learning experience. Furthermore, this type of research allowed me to dig deeper into the human phenomenon of teachers' lived experiences to examine and interpret their educational experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Research Design

A case study design was used to conduct this study. A case study is a qualitative research method that details an investigation of a single individual or a single organized group to understand their reality within a setting. Case studies investigate contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context; a well-executed case study answers how and why situations occur in a process or experience (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2014). The data in this study was descriptive and was collected through observations and interviews designed to consider the dynamics of an event in this specific setting. To refine the research questions, protocols were used as part of the design process to organize the procedure and to stay on track. As part of the protocol, sample testing with sample participants were used to ensure that data was effectively collected and valid. Interview questions were also constructed to help effectively gather information about participants and their lived experiences.

Research Methods

In this section, the specific research method used for the case study is described, including the setting, sample, data collection, data analysis, and the actions was taken to ensure validity. In this study, I was a participant observer

and gathered evidence through note taking, memos, collection of handouts, and recordings of the interviews (with permission) in order to formulate and interpret what was being observed. Credible investigated data is presented in this study because good case study research clearly investigates data and experiences to define situations.

Setting

I used a case study design to study one elementary school in Riverside County. The school in this study was a pre-kindergarten to fifth grade school site with 25 teachers and one RSP teacher, one project specialist/instructional coach (myself) and the principal. The setting is a middle- to low-socioeconomic school site with approximately 600 students. Student population demographics break down as follows: 460 Hispanic-Latino, 81 non-Hispanic White, 88 students who did not indicate their heritage, 23 Asian, five Filipino, 22 African American, two American Indian or Alaska Native, and one Native Hawaiian. The information provided indicates the number of students that teachers serve at this school site. For the purpose of this study, there are 110 kindergarten students and 106 first-grade students. The students do not have higher reading achievement scores than other similar schools within the same local area, though this district uses a teacher-developed curriculum to drive instruction.

Sample

This study focused on a case study research with six K-1 teacher participants. According to Mason (2010), keeping the sample size of participants small in a case study allows the data to be extractable and attainable. He notes

that having many participants in a case study does not necessarily mean that the answers or phenomena being examined would be comprehensively obtained. Three of the participants were kindergarten teachers and three were first-grade teachers. In this study, I specifically engaged grade-level chairs in grades K-1, because they could provide access to the inner workings of professional development within the school site. This research necessitated multiple interactions with the teachers, the principal, and the school office secretaries in order to ascertain and retrieve professional development plans and expectations (Creswell, 2013). The six participants provided enough context to ascertain teacher perspectives about the impact of the new reform professional development model. This research did not disclose the identity of teachers, and prior to interviewing teachers, I requested that teachers sign a consent form, which explained the study and detailed participant rights and responsibilities. Confidentiality was important in this research because participants have the right to privacy. The participants' right to know their rights and the content of the interview was important because a researcher's actions have to be clear and transparent throughout the research. My experience with past and present professional development models helped inform the research process and assisted me in logging necessary activities that pertained to the professional development for reading. My professional background and interest in reading instruction in schools helped fuel my interest in researching and working within a new and unfamiliar geographic school district. The reading achievement of this

school served my interest because this school demonstrated lower performance scores than similar schools in the same local area.

Data Collection and Management

The interviews were 25 to 30 minutes in length. Participant email addresses were obtained by contacting all participants in person. Emails were accessed with the help of the office staff and email server. After data was collected, all participant responses, interviews, and data for the research were stored in windows documents and Dedoose cross-platform application for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research. All files were duplicated and backed up to ensure availability. After the research was concluded the data was destroyed to ensure confidentiality. Notes, memos, and observation tools were typed daily, dated, labeled, and uploaded to a password-protected Word document file on a personal home computer. In addition, a personal audio tape recorder was used to transcribe data and then saved in a locked file cabinet in my home. All data collected from observation, interviews, and meetings were filed as a Word document, dated, and labeled. Artifacts were securely locked away in a personal file cabinet in my private home office. Finally, when all data was ready to be used, all data was compiled and uploaded to Dedoose, which allowed for easy import of qualitative data from Word files. This process also provided easy searching, sorting, analyzing, and retrieval of data for data grouping and triangulation. Participant data was kept in a private file cabinet in my home, and then destroyed after the research had been completed and approved.

Instrumentation. The instruments used in this study were interview questions, observations, note taking, memos, collected handouts, collected artifacts, and recorded interviews with permission. Data came from interviews, questions, and group interactions (Maxwell, 2013). Initial research questions and observation data protocol were drafted and used on a practice test group to refine direction of the research questions and for the development of probes (see Appendices B and C). These actions produced targeted research questions that captured teachers' perceptions of their professional development (see Appendix E).

Observations were used as instruments and were recorded weekly on observation sheets to document collective group perceptions of professional development (see Appendix D). Prior to conducting the observations, research data was assessed on an ongoing basis for appropriate direction, for refinement of the research protocol, and for accuracy of interpreting perceptual data. Artifacts from professional development meetings and the Dedoose data analysis system were used to triangulate the teacher perception data at the school site. I collected all research data and artifacts.

Document review. The documents in this research were used to add depth and context to the research. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy data was used to describe student demographic and academic data for reading (Yin, 2014, p. 107).

Procedures. First, the human resources department was contacted to gain permission to conduct research at the school site. Field logs were kept to

plan and record observations. I obtained approval from the university's IRB committee ensure that legal and appropriate steps were taken to protect the human rights of participants, or subjects, in this research study. I attended district-mandated meetings on Tuesdays, observed experiences in the meetings, and obtained notes from those meetings. Descriptive and reflective notes were used for coding purposes. Finally, I interviewed participants to learn teacher perceptions of professional development in reading instruction. Participants were asked to provide descriptions of their experience of professional development geared toward the support of reading instruction. Teacher and coordinator interviews were 25-30 minutes in length. In case of recorder failure, notes were taken in conjunction with the recording of the participants. It is important to note that all participants were recorded with consent.

Notes from interviews and meetings were transcribed and uploaded to Dedoose for the organization of themes. The notes were also recorded to ensure thematic accuracy. Descriptive and reflective memos of interviews and observation were written after work to ensure the confidentiality of information and to maintain the professionalism of the participant observer (Yin, 2014). Artifacts were collected from meetings and documented with memos and dates. The IRB approval was obtained prior to the collection of data. The participant consent form clearly stated that the study was confidential, and mentioned that the participants may stop participating in this research study at any time.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This research used objective data from interviews, observations, and narrative analysis to reveal the perceptions of participants in the setting. Dedoose was used to construct codes to develop themes related to teacher perceptions of professional development, and sequential coding was used to determine themes. In addition, all research data from meetings, observations, and interactions with teachers, which yield field notes, were transcribed, categorized, and analyzed. Furthermore, data was reviewed, (memos, interviews, artifacts, Dedoose, recordings of participants) to explain and interpret the perceived impact of professional development in reading instruction. There was strategic focus on the data, to disregard unnecessary information, to winnow the data (Creswell, 2013).

The data analysis was conducted by collecting meeting and interview notes, artifacts, coded information, and coded teacher's responses. I then uploaded information, organized themes onto Dedoose, read through notes to create codes for the data, transcribed all notes, and triangulated the data and all notes to look for teacher perspectives on professional development in reading instruction. I used the themes from the notes to describe teacher perspectives. Conceptual categories were used to identify themes. Dedoose was used to interpret data, analyze observations to identify, and add richer context and deeper identification of the meaning of the data. The data was used to identify and interpret the two emergent themes of school culture for professional development and training and support for professional development in reading.

Data was coded according to themes, structured for description, and placed under the two categories to describe teacher perspectives on professional development for reading.

Procedures to Ensure Validity and/or Trustworthiness

In order to deal with “reactivity” (a researcher’s influence on environment) (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2014), I emphasized support for teachers as an actively engaged learner and participant. Conclusions were tested by triangulating data, member checks, checking memos, participant interviews, and artifacts (meeting minutes, agenda) to avoid inaccurate conclusions. Triangulating data was done by cross-referencing data from multiple sources to build themes. Member checking assists in understanding and assessing participant’s intent and actions. Memos are short notes taken to record information and were used to save key thoughts or ideas for richer connection and context. This data was used to produce richer data and recorded into Word files to make sure that conclusions were documented before analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Data was triangulated to address the issue of internal validity by using more than one method of data collection to answer the research questions. Notes from meetings, recordings, and interviews were reviewed to ensure validity of the document and were checked consistently for accuracy. To understand the environmental contexts, extra time was spent in the setting for better observational data; feedback was solicited from the participants to form accurate theories. When some individuals chose not to participate, or changed their

minds about participating, all available K-1 participants were invited to participate.

Professional development for teachers was held on the first and third Tuesday of every month. The research interviews of all participants were conducted in quiet rooms after school on the school campus. In an effort to be transparent with participants, all participants were informed about all data collection activities. As an ethical consideration, participants were given the opportunity to view the content of their own interviews. Participant engagement was difficult, because some participants did not feel comfortable being recorded, hence I presented open-ended questions that sounded like a natural conversation. Some teachers were not available due to time constraints and were given interview questions, other teachers agreed to be interviewed over the phone. Contact was maintained with potential participants to schedule times that fitted participant's schedules.

Role of the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher is the sole instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2013).

Participant observer. For richer observational context in the professional development experience, my positionality was that of participant observer (Bourke, 2014; Yin, 2014) for the purpose of gathering data and holding discussions with teachers to obtain their perception of reading instruction during professional developments (Reed, 2006).

Bias. The objective lens was used to observe the environment to ensure that all observations were seen through the eyes of the participants so as not to

obstruct or contaminate the data with my own bias (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2014). I objectively gathered information about what was present and visible in the environment irrespective of my own experience or perspective. I was open to the new experience for the purpose of the research (Yin, 2014). Bias was removed by describing information as presented.

Trust. When I gained approval from the district and the university to conduct research at this school site, I made my intentions clear by putting it in writing with the consent form, and I clarified my role to participants verbally while trying to build and maintain trust and professional comradery (Creswell, 2014, Maxwell, 2013).

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the process and method used to examine teacher perspectives for professional development in reading instruction. This chapter provided the interview protocol that was used to plan the research process. I acted as a participant observer and collected data for this qualitative research. The data was triangulated to ensure validity and then the data was used to inform the findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to examine teacher perceptions of the reading instruction they received within the constructs of professional development in a Southern California elementary school in Riverside County. This study explored the impact of these perceptions, especially in the context of current school reforms, because understanding teacher perspectives is imperative for improving student achievement in reading (Cook, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015; Fullan, 2011; Jiang, Spote, & Luppescu, 2015; Mourshed et al., 2010; Podhajski et al., 2009; Umphrey, 2010). The methodology used in this research was a case study design. Questions that guided the research were presented first. This research could contribute to understanding how schools meet the literacy needs of students by taking an in-depth look at teacher perceptions and actions within professional development at school sites.

As the researcher, I was a participant observer. Maxwell (2013) claimed that participant observation provides complete and specific data that no correlative quantitative study could provide because repeated observation, interviews, and sustained presence in the setting “can rule out spurious associations and premature theories” (p.127). As participant observers, researchers can closely examine environments to add a richer context to

research (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). These descriptions could help us improve school practice of professional development for reading. This research used objective data from interviews, experiences, observations, and descriptive narrative form rather than scientific reporting to create a deeper lens into the environment and to narrate the perceptions of participants in the setting (Creswell, 2014). Dedoose was used to construct codes to develop themes related to teacher perceptions about professional development and sequential coding was used to determine themes. The data was transcribed and the themes were analyzed for content that correlated with the information in the literature review.

Included in this chapter is a description of the participants' setting, data collection, and the analysis of the instruments based on the research design that was explained in Chapter 3. Three of the participants were recorded and this information is presented in this research. The topics discussed in this chapter describe six kindergarten to first-grade teachers' perspectives and my own lived account of a teacher's experiences within professional development. Other discussion topics include research question findings and a summary that recaps the significant points discussed in the chapter.

In this section, the participants in this research are described. The Participant teachers were labeled as K1, K2, K3, F1, F2, and F3 to protect the identity of the participants. The two themes that emerged from this research were (a) school culture for professional development and (b) training for

professional development. The research questions and interview questions were used to describe the findings.

Demographic Summary of Students

A descriptive narrative of student demographic data was obtained from the official district program for literacy, the DIBELS database (Yin, 2003, 2011). Kindergarten through first-grade learning communities use data to address students' instructional needs in reading as along with knowledge of students' linguistic and economic backgrounds to ensure that all students receive sensitive and specialized instructional support (California Department of Education, 2015; DuFour, 2016; Hollins, 2011b, 2015; Panero et al., 2013; Podhajski et al., 2009; Warren-Little, 2006). Hollins (2011a) has asserted that professionals working within professional development in schools should understand students' linguistic backgrounds to build better educational context to educate all students. At the study site, 79.2 % of students participate in the free and reduced lunch program. It has a diverse student population with a total of 210 K-1 students: 104 kindergarteners and 106 first-graders. Within this group, there were 140 Hispanic/Latino students, 20 non-Hispanic White students, four African Americans, and seven Asian students in Grades K-1. In kindergarten, there are 61 Hispanic/Latino students, three Asian students, 12 non-Hispanic White students, and 28 students with unspecified cultural background (Yin, 2011). In first-grade classrooms there were four Asians, four African Americans, two Filipinos, 79 Hispanic/Latinos, eight non-Hispanic White students, and nine students with unspecified cultural background.

Participant Data

In this study, there were a total of three kindergarten teachers and three first-grade teachers. When seeking participants to join the study, six out of eight teachers agreed to participate in this research, three of these participants were kindergarten teachers, three were first-grade teachers, and all the participants were female. The kindergarten teachers agreed to face-to-face interviews; while all the first-grade teachers requested questionnaires and one of the first-grade teachers volunteered to answer any additional questions when needed. My roles included the participant observer, teacher leader, and project specialist (instructional coach).

Training and Support for Professional Development in Reading

Training and support is a theme that emerged in this study and Research Question 1 drove this theme: “How does the professional development experience of K-1 teachers impact their pedagogy in reading at a school site?” This section recounts information from transcribed data regarding the first research question. The first research question and questionnaire Questions 2, 4, 5, and 6 were used to describe this theme.

Question 2

The second question was: “*What type of training have you received for reading instruction during your professional development?*” In this section, I sought to describe where and how the teachers received training in reading.

Four out of the six participants stated they had received professional development training that was most useful to their practice the previous year; the

same number of participants stated that they received training from the district this year and also stated that the type of training they received was peer-to-peer support. Both K-1 grade level had similar responses. The previous year training that the teachers referred to was the district reading program and the construction of the new reading curriculum guide (UPO). All six participants were asked on a different day how they felt about the one-day professional development training on foundational skills. Based on my descriptive notes, the participants stated that the foundational skills training lacked examples, and needed intervention support to implement. Participant F1 said it was “theoretically helpful,” but lacked substance in terms of assistance and academic support. In addition, she stated she preferred more hands-on real, examples for intervention and did not receive that during her professional development. Participants K1, K3, and F3 were asked the same question again, and they said that they needed more intervention for the presented learning. One out of the two first grade teachers said they attended a one-day district training on SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words), a district-adopted phonemic awareness program. Two of the six participants in this research actually attended the SIPPS program: one kindergarten teacher and a first-grade teacher. Of the two participants, F1 felt that the training was relevant for her reading instruction, saying she needed more interface and training with the program. Kindergarten teachers K1 and K2 led by K3 (the grade-level chair) stated that they did not feel the SIPPS was relevant for reading instruction. The grade-level chair added that she would not have her kindergarten commit to

using the district's mandated SIPPS phonological program because she was worried that they were in the month of February and students still did not know their alphabets. (It is also important to note that a stipulation for using this program is that students must know their alphabets. The district bought this program as the prescribed and stipulated program for reading intervention.) In order to describe events that pertained to this question it is important to note, as two participants stated, that K2 and K1 did receive two separate 30-minute modeled lessons and follow-up lessons on blending, dictation, and segmentation from the participant observer/instructional coach. Teachers also received DIBELS data from throughout the year with differentiated reading groups, and they were informed by the participant observer coach that it should help them plan instruction for their small groups because DIBELS already groups students according to their reading performance and by reading skills. Teachers were unaware of DIBELS data constructs because this was K-1's second official year using DIBELS. Kindergarten through first-grade teachers had participated in a recommended professional development on phonological awareness organized by the coach and attended by the principal in October. Within that meeting, the teachers informed the principal and the participant observer coach that they would find their own intervention support for phonological awareness. Table 1 indicates that teachers mentioned the training they received in training occurred the previous year, present year training, and peer-to-peer support training as the professional development they received in reading. The table also indicates a

low number for present year coach support to minimal perception of reading support.

Table 1

What Type of Training Have You Received for Reading Instruction During Your Professional Development?

Grade level and # of participants	Previous year district training	Present school year district training	Present coach training	Peer-to-peer support	Minimal/none
Kindergarten (3)	2	2	2	2	1
First grade (3)	2	2	0	2	0

K1:

The coach mentors developed a foundational skills seminar and presented the information to all district personnel administrators and coaches. We've had that one they used to send us to the HM [Houghton Mifflin, curriculum writers] workshops that were at least a week eight hours a day that was intense.

K2:

We've built on training that we have had in the past more dedicated specific instruction.

K3:

Minimal... during professional development actual reading instruction.

F1:

Over the years, I have had many trainings on teaching reading such as Reading Mastery, Houghton Mifflin, accelerated reading, and most recently SIPPS.

F2:

I also have received training by my peers. I also have read many books on reading instruction throughout my career.

F3:

The Foundational skills and Accelerated Learning for fluency training.

Question 4

The fourth question was: *“What type of professional development do you think could improve your capacity to improve student’s reading skills?”* Four of the six participants stated they needed to learn how to teach reading, especially for struggling students. The other most prevalent finding was that teachers wanted a systematic form of intervention modeling and curriculum that supports their reading instruction. Kindergarten participants did not indicate the same number of responses as those from the first grade; however, in Table 2 both grade levels stated a similar need for modeled support for struggling readers.

Table 2

What Type of Professional Development Do You Think Could Improve Your Capacity to Improve Students' Reading Skills?

	Kindergarten (3)	First grade (3)
Time Management/ modeling		0
Intervention/modeling	1	2
Peer support modeling	0	1
How to teach reading especially for struggling kids. Need modeled instruction	2	2
Materials/Curriculum content		
Needed training on specific foundational skills	0	1

K1:

. . . We don't have time to find all the material we need . . . We need professional development on finding what we need to teach these kids.

K2:

I need to know how to modify and adjust more accurately the materials I need to deliver.

K3:

Unless it is how to manage your classroom when you are working with a small group . . . [Anything else to add?] not really . . . I need to learn how to manage my class while I am doing small group instruction.

F1:

I wish we had a more systematic program for intervention at our school. That is my honest answer. I don't think there is enough being done and these kids are still struggling.

F2:

Smaller sized classes in the K-1 population would be beneficial. An independent four to six-year-old is still only four to six years old. They have their attention limits. [Later stated at another time] I believe that a quieter environment would be beneficial when teaching reading. Smaller groups would be ideal so that you could work without question interruptions and distractions. Professional growth refresher classes.

F3:

definitely phonemic awareness so that students know how to begin reading words and sounding out their words. We need assistance in that area and materials to help us to do that.

Question 5

The fifth question was: *"What do you recommend or perceive other teachers need to learn during professional development to improve their instruction in reading?"*

In Table 3, five out of the six participants indicated that they needed real time, accurate training, and modeling for ELD instruction during professional development for reading. Three of the participants indicated phonemic awareness training, phonics, chanting, and decoding for professional

development was what other teachers needed to learn in their grade level. The findings indicated a slight difference in teacher perception between kindergarten and first grade, because kindergarten teachers recommended other teachers needed more training on ELD instruction, while first-grade teachers indicated a need for specific recommended practice in the kindergarten foundational skills of phonemic awareness, chanting and decoding.

Table 3

What Do You Recommend or Perceive Other Teachers Need to Learn During Professional Development to Improve Their Instruction in Reading?

Grade level and # of participants	More techniques and accurate training and modeling for ELD	Phonemic awareness training/ Phonics chanting/ Decoding	How to apply data to remediate	More materials
Kindergarten (3)	3	1	1	0
First grade (3)	2	2	0	1

K1:

Learning more techniques . . . at other schools . . . I would say a refresher course more EL training for kids who do not know the language. Learn how to be explicit and how frequently they hit those concepts of letter and sound relationships, the phonics, and the phonemic awareness. I noticed that there are some holes in that too [pause]. What sounds that they are hearing that the letters are making. . . . Frequency . . . and how explicit we approach teaching that very critical component before they get to us.

[K1 later added] ELL training is probably the big one for this school for the district. K1 stated that their grade-level needed to address the problem of a lack of practice in phonemic awareness and phonics strategies.

K2:

How to specifically target a deficit area and offer any corrective recommendations to bring a student up to grade level [She paused, so I repeated the question, and asked for more clarification] . . .

K3:

Watching other teachers is a strong recommendation in my opinion.

F1:

We need to hone in on a lot of phonics and chanting, a lot of call and response. Of course . . . rhyming. I would go into word families.

F2:

I think “real time” modeling of intervention programs would be ideal. Training is important; seeing the intervention in place, not on a video with five children.

F3:

They need to learn the rudiments of teaching students to read. There are holes in some of our student’s instruction. They do not have phonemic awareness. They do not know their sounds.

Question 6

The sixth question was: “*What type of reading training do you think your grade-level needs to address during professional development so students learn to read at grade level and beyond?*” When teachers were asked to address what they thought their grade level needed to address during professional development, the consensus was varied. As indicated in Table 4, two out of six of the participants in both Kindergarten and First grade wanted training on classroom management techniques, refresher training for EL instruction, a diagnostic to check student’s reading progress, and one First grade participant identified foundational skills as the training, and Kindergarten did not indicate Foundational Skills for this question.

Table 4

What Type of Reading Training Do You Think Your Grade Level Needs to Address During Professional Development So Students Learn to Read at Grade Level and Beyond?

Grade level	Trainings for classroom management	Diagnostic to check on class progress/ Need to know how to address specific needs	Refresher class for EL instruction	Foundational skills
Kindergarten	1	1	1	0
First grade	1	1	1	1

K1:

We need more training for ELs (English language learners) that would be helpful for our school and the district.

K2:

Anything now that gives me quick diagnoses. . . . [Snaps her finger] I don't think we have anything like that anymore. The grade level needs quick diagnostic.

K3:

I don't know if you can get your classroom under control or under a routine when you have 26 kids. . . . If it were smaller numbers, it would be easier.

F1:

I feel the training we could use is classroom management to keep all students working while we focus on each of our reading levels. A lot of classroom . . . time is wasted on students that are off task or misbehaving.

F2:

Professional growth "refresher classes" are always beneficial, so any new teaching strategies can be shared. The observation of one another, professional while they are teaching a reading lesson would be beneficial as well.

F3:

We need to know how to address their specific needs. The basic foundations for teaching kids to read.

School Culture for Professional Development

Culture for professional development was the second theme that emerged in this study. The second research question drove this theme: "How do K-1 teachers perceive their professional development in reading instruction at this

school site? This section recounts the described information from the transcribed data for the theme of school culture for professional development. This theme was guided by Research Question 2 and questionnaire Questions 1, 3, 7, 8, and 9.

Question 1

Question No. 1 sought to ascertain the number of years the participants had specifically focused on reading instruction. Table 5 indicates that four of the six teachers taught reading for more than 16 years and two of the six participants taught for less than four years of K-1 teaching experience in reading.

Table 5

How Many Years Have You Taught Reading?

Participant	Years of reading instruction at this school site	Years in K-1 reading instruction	Educational background/ Teaching experience
K1	16	16	Has multiple subject credential/Has taken classes to get a degree as a reading specialist and has some Masters coursework.
K2	24	20	Masters in curriculum and instruction. This teacher taught other grades, and was a reading specialist at a private school for 4 years. Twenty of those years were spent teaching kindergarten
K3	25	14	Has B.A in child development and a Masters in special education. Worked as an instructional aide for 11 years. Has a total of 25 years in education.
F1	18	1	Multiple subject credential. Has taught 4th grade and other grades for 17 years. First year in first grade.
F2	20	18	Multiple subject teaching credential. Taught 4th grade for 2 years, Kindergarten for 2 years, and taught first grade for 16 years.
F3	17	3	Master's in education/ Multiple subject credential

Question 3

The third question was: *“In your professional development, what does your grade-level perceive to be the goal for teaching students how to read?”* One first grade participant (F2) opted for a questionnaire. Table 6 indicates that five of the six participants stated that reading comprehension was the goal for teaching students to read, four out of six of the participants said fluency, and two participants stated both reading fluency and comprehension. Table 2 also indicated that kindergarten and first grade teachers had differing views on the goal of teaching students to read. Kindergarten teachers mostly indicated fluency and first grade teachers indicated reading comprehension.

Table 6

In Your Professional Development, What Does Your Grade-Level Perceive to Be the Goal for Teaching Students How to Read?

Grade level	Decoding (Blending CVC)	Fluency	Reading comprehension	Sound letter correspondence
Kindergarten	1	3	2	1
First grade	0	1	3	0

K1:

The goal is that they can read fluently that’s the goal. . . . Therefore, that’s the goal for them, to be fluid and comprehend what they are reading.

K2:

At this level, it is a combination of recognizing that letters go together and that they make sounds.

K3:

To be able to decode students will be able to decode blend CVC words . . . know the alphabetic principal letter sound correspondence.

F1:

Reading comprehension.

F2:

My goals are for the students to reach a level of proficiency so they're able to read at grade level with fluency and have a high level of comprehension.

F3:

To increase fluency and comprehension skills.

Question 7

The seventh question was: "*What do you think are the benefits of your reading instruction on struggling readers after collaborating in professional development for reading instruction?*" Four of the six participants stated that they needed more time to collaborate and more training time to give a specific response. The question was posed to teachers again later, and according to Table 7, more kindergarten than first grade teachers wanted collaboration with peers and needed more training and time to collaborate.

Table 7

What Do You Think are the Benefits of Your Reading Instruction on Struggling Readers After Collaborating in Professional Development for Reading Instruction?

Grade level	Perceived benefit of reading instruction (Isolating student deficits for improved instruction)	Collaboration with peers in professional development getting a new perspective	Need more collaboration time and training to know the answer
Kindergarten	0	3	3
First grade	1	0	1

K1:

This year I kinda wish we had more time to collaborate, we just did not get more time; usually we have more time. . . . I know that it is not part of the question . . . at least we used to get more time we did not get much time we need more time to collaborate, but we benefit from each other.

K2:

Talking to other teachers to see what is working for them.

K3:

I think when you talk to other people you get different ideas from different people, you see what they use, what has worked with one child.

F1:

We have started a new program at our school for struggling readers [Referring to SIPPS the district stipulated intervention module for schools that are failing to improve students reading instruction]. The program is

making a difference with our lower students. Only two of the four teachers at this grade level have had any training using it. I feel we need more time to put this program in real action with all my grade levels.

F2:

It has helped me to identify or isolate problems that students may have and formulate instruction to meet their needs.

F3:

There is still a lot of work to be done.

Question 8

The eighth question was: *“Describe your perception of the professional development that you receive for differentiating instruction in reading?”* Four of the six participants stated that they needed more materials, targeted, real life, differentiated and systemized modeled techniques in professional development to improve their differentiated instruction. Table 8 indicates that first grade teachers perceived that they needed more targeted differentiated, modeled, and systemized real life techniques in professional development than kindergarten teachers. The next main perspective in this table was that more first grade teachers than kindergarten teachers stated they felt overwhelmed.

Table 8

Describe Your Perception of the Professional Development That You Receive for Differentiating Instruction in Reading?

	Kindergarten	First Grade
Need more targeted differentiated and systemized real life techniques in professional development in reading OR Needs modeled systemized support from professional development OR Need materials	1	3
Challenging/difficult to implement reading professional development recommendations because it only focuses on small group instruction	1	0
Overwhelmed by various internal school factors	1	2
Professional development not is not used as intended	1	0
Professional development is used to scaffold kids	0	1

K1:

I wish we get to see more you know what I mean? I wish we could see more you can talk about different things but when you see it. It gets in your brain. I wish we had more time to see real live examples to see real life things, real life techniques or perfect examples or real life examples for struggling students in our district.

K2:

I have received lots of information, but find it challenging to apply it. [I asked Why?]. Unless I utilize it in a smaller intervention groups at the

school and there are not too many distractions. A majority of my intervention is reading skills.

K3:

Okay now the professional development [I restate question] honestly . . . [Laughs] yah, when I have read articles or books of what happens in professional development it is not what is happening in our professional development it is not what is happening . . . [Laughs] . . . not at all. [Do you want to expound?] Not really . . . [Laughs] well you know.

F1:

Our professional development's seem to place focus on our lower readers. We tend to focus on their needs. We spend little time on our students that can read above grade level and are making strong progress.

F1:

[This was a follow up interview] I think it goes along with back to the other question where I wish there was a more systematic and organized system in place that everyone is buying into that everyone is going to say yes and do it.

F2:

Ideally, the children are grouped according to their needs and I guide my instruction to meet those needs.

When this question was verbally posed to F2 later, she stated that she did not want to be recorded. She said that the kids do not stay still, and that there were so many disturbances at the school site and that she felt too overwhelmed

by fire drills, assemblies . . . when implementing the collaborative group prescribed interventions from professional development, but stated, “I am doing my best, that is all I can do.”

F3

We need a guided program to help us with reading. We need more materials and time to work together. We need more support so that we know and understand what is going to help us to assist these students. We need to focus. Too many things at once.

Question 9

The ninth question was: *“Do you have other comments or concerns about your perception of professional development for reading instruction?”* Most kindergarten teachers responded by stating they felt that they needed more time to learn how to teach new reading skills during professional development. Table 9 indicates that teachers perceive that both Kindergarten and First grade teachers felt family involvement is needed to support student’s reading acquisition.

Table 9

Do You Have Other Comments or Concerns About Your Perception of Professional Development Professional Development in Reading Instruction?

Grade level	More time needed to implement new skills	Peer-to-Peer collaboration is needed	Family involvement should help professional development work in reading	None
Kindergarten	1	0	1	0
First grade	0	1	1	0

K1:

I think it is a very important topic to always discuss how we will have professional development because it has so many factors.

K1:

No, I honestly just wish we had more time to get together to talk about those things and see real life examples of what we are doing like real life techniques for ELs [English language learners] and struggling students in our district.

K2:

The reason I have my family Fridays is because I want to give the parents the skills at home.

F1:

Those that don't have families that help them with reading at home seem to be the ones that struggle the most. How can I strongly influence their growth during the short time that I have with them?

F2:

There have been so many vastly different methods of reading instruction during my lifetime. Even before I went to college, I knew that a well-balanced reading program was vital. As a professional, I decided years ago to do what I thought best for the student. That being said, I have been open to trying new ideas, but I don't let go of the old, unless I feel its replacement has merit.

Chapter Summary

The most significant findings in this research were that teachers felt that reading comprehension was the primary goal for teaching students to read, with fluency mentioned as the secondary goal. Participants in this study also stated that they wanted more instructional techniques for ELD instruction, including "real life" actual applicable interventions; systematically modeled techniques for instruction; and differentiated instruction. Other significant findings were that teachers needed support and training for classroom management, consistent curriculum with systematic hands on training support, and peer-to-peer collaboration.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study described six kindergarten and first-grade teachers' perspectives on the impact of professional development within their professional development for reading instruction. The research was conducted at a lower middle class elementary school district in Riverside County. The methodology used for this research was a case study approach, with the researcher as participant observer. The participants in this study were asked to respond to interview questions or questionnaires and were asked to be part of observations to describe and elucidate their perspectives on their professional development for the core academic subject area of reading. The K-1 teacher perspective was chosen for this research because these two grade levels lay the foundation for literacy in schools. Two research questions and nine questions within a questionnaire were used to direct the focus of this research. In addition, the content in the literature review was incorporated into the discussion (see Appendix F). The two research questions were:

1. How does the professional development experience of K-1 teachers impact their pedagogy in reading at a school site?
2. How do K-1 teachers perceive their professional development in reading instruction at a school site?

The literature review examined (a) the global perspective on professional development and the research; (b) change initiative action in professional development for the improvement of core Instruction; (c) basic function of professional development in reading instruction; (d) teacher perceptions of professional development, including perception of their professional development as input: and (e) professional learning communities as the vehicle to strengthen the impact of pedagogical practice in reading. The theoretical constructs that grounds this research was rooted in social constructivism because participants in education are the co-constructors of their knowledge and experiences (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002). The philosopher whose work undergirds this theory is Vygotsky. He believed that social interaction and collaboration helps the learner to “perform tasks in social settings” (Noddings, 2012, p. 16). Vygotsky asserted that collaborative learning allows the learner to be more engaged and reflectively responsive to learning (Noddings, 2012).

The current trend in professional development shows that it is moving away from a teacher-focused approach toward a student-directed approach. As a result, adults have to learn new ways to improve student achievement (Supovitz, 2006). The two themes that emerged from this research were culture and training support within professional development. These themes were used to construct this chapter and the questions were interspersed within the content to build meaning and understanding from the findings.

The second research question was, “How do K-1 teachers perceive their professional development in reading instruction at a school site?” Research

Question 2 was guided by questionnaire Questions Nos. 1, 3, 7, 8, and 9. It is important to note that each of the six participating teachers has taught for more than 10 years, yet all have stated that they still needed to learn skills to teach students how to read. A teacher's overall goal for teaching students to read is to produce students who comprehend text and are fluent readers. Podhajski et al., (2009) have stated that teachers have to know all parts of reading instruction to improve student's reading skills. When Questions 7, 8, and 9 were posed to the participants, they collectively expounded on their instructional needs rather than answering the questions directly, so Questions 7, 8, and 9 were repeated. This led me to believe that they were still questioning whether they were making an impact on struggling readers. In response to Questions 8 and 9, most participants said that organizing group instruction was difficult because there were too many students in their classrooms, and there was not enough time to implement any new skills they learned within professional development. The teachers stated that students had behavior problems that affected classroom instruction and some students had reading deficiencies in the foundational skills for reading. Teachers also struggled with ways to keep some students engaged during small-group instruction. All teachers indicated that they were collectively struggling with providing small-group instruction and intervention. As one participant said, they wanted "more real life examples to support their real-life students." In summary, teachers of both grade levels felt that professional development was a space in which to share their ideas and plan instruction.

Teachers at the Riverside school site perceived that they needed support to understand the best way to teach the specific components of reading instruction to ensure that all students were learning to read effectively. One participant in this study echoed the same sentiment as participants in the Podhajski et al. (2009) research when she stated that she did not know how to teach students to read and did not thoroughly understand the foundational skills for reading, and she compensated by trying to teach other curricular areas better. Most K-1 participants stated that they were just doing their best with the students they had but felt overwhelmed by students' reading needs. All first-grade teachers stated they could do a better job with more training and support.

School functions such as assemblies and various other school activities affected each of the teachers' day and served as barriers to instruction. All teachers felt that professional development was a place in which to collaborate, plan, and share their concerns and seek answers from each other, but all of the participants felt strongly that the professional development training could be strengthened with consistently targeted, modeled professional development in the foundational skill. The findings in this research indicate that this school needs professionalized, systematically prescribed professional development that develops an endemic, purposeful culture of professional training and support.

According to the findings of research conducted by Hanegan et al. (2009), teachers can only reproduce what has been modeled for them. Kent (2003) has asserted that the most confident teacher is a trained teacher. Podhajski et al. (2009) contend that there is a need for intensive teacher mentoring and coaching

with cyclical classroom observation and feedback on the foundational skills in reading. They asserted that their data identified that coaching helps teachers diagnose problems and develop classroom management for the improvement of student teaching (Podhajski. et al., 2009). This is consistent with the research done by Panero et al. (2013), which confirms that effective mentoring and coaching helps teachers diagnose students learning needs, and develops classroom management skills and pedagogy specific to their subjects. It is important to understand the purpose of professional development, so that we can ensure that the teaching process is effective. Schools must answer the question, “What is professional development and how should it be done?” Once the clarification systems and protocols are put in place then schools must make sure that the culture of professional learning is established to enrich, inform, and embolden teacher process and student learning (Hollins 2011a, 2015). This process will help schools create an improved culture of literacy in schools.

Interpretations and Conclusions

The study participants had personal access to data, coupled with the Common Core State Standard instructional support to drive instruction, and an instructional coach (Podhajski et al., 2009). They have their own personal access to DIBELS benchmark assessment data. In addition, the coach and the administrator have a version of that data and the coach has provided and can continue to provide systematic DIBELS data that differentiates and groups students according to their specific areas of weakness or strength in reading. Panero et al. (2013) and Supovitz (2006) have stressed the importance of using

data to drive instruction; this allows the teacher to plan ways to help the students within professional development.

Research Question 1, “How does the professional development experience of K-1 teacher impact their pedagogy in reading at a school site?” will guide this section. Based on my observations, five of the six participants viewed data as an evident piece of knowledge but did not consistently use it to plan their instruction because they felt undertrained, did not have enough time in the day to teach reading, felt overwhelmed, and needed more regular support to intervene in their students reading instruction.

These findings are consistent with Johnson’s (2014) research, in which teachers were provided with engaging professional development that that met teachers’ professional needs and improved instruction. Podhajski et al. (2009) has stated that helping teachers where they need it most creates an openness for inquiry and support. This study’s sample school needed cyclical intervention follow ups that addressed their concerns and questions. Professional development targets students’ needs at school sites. This requires questioning our current practices, focusing on data, and establishing a structure to reach that goal (Fullan, 2011; Hollins, 2015; Panero et al., 2013).

Hollins (2011b, 2015) has stated that picking the most beneficial structure for a school team’s collaborative process is best left to the interpretation of a trained group of teachers. She states that the most important aspect in achieving reading success within professional development is empowering teachers to believe that they are driving their success and seeking the knowledge they need

to improve their practice. This requires strategic management and leadership. The ultimate goal is to embolden teachers to be more inquisitive and inspired to work toward reflective productive inquiry (Johnson, 2014; Podhajski et al., 2009). Worawuth et al. (2014) have asserted that there is not enough research on teacher perception.

The school could improve its reading implementation by improving teacher perceptions through (a) refining the quality of leadership to affect the culture of collaboration within professional development (Fullan, 2011; Marion & Gonzales, 2014); (b) imparting the knowledge and purpose of professional development in schools by setting structure and protocols; (c) developing shared separate vision/mission goals for each school site to improve collaborative team functions and have higher school expectations and accountability; (d) ensuring that teachers receive consistent engaging, cyclical training and practice that revolves around the foundational skills (Podhajski et al., 2009; Supovitz, 2006); (e) committing to visible, evidenced use of data and planning that uses reading data to target instruction; (f) monitoring progress of students that shows evidence of working with data to improve each individual student's reading skills within classrooms (Hollins, 2015); and (g) documenting the planning and implementation for each individual student on Response to Intervention. With effective leadership that guides the school culture's process these actions would make an impact on reading instruction and improve teacher perception of professional development in reading.

The findings describe an environment that needs authentic, transformative leadership that takes into account the need to develop and plan a truly effective collaborative foundation in literacy in a school so that students are successful in society (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). In addition, the data describe the need for a school culture that requires leaders with the moral fortitude and ethics to build the capacity of teachers through trust building. There is a need for schools to have leaders who build on the importance of targeted andragogy that supports teacher practice and improves student literacy (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Consistent with the global research conducted by Mourshed et al. (2010), the research at this school site produced data that indicate that professional development drives instruction in schools.

Implications

The findings prompted me to reexamine my beliefs regarding what a leader should do at a school site to guide professional development: Changes for reading are imperative and structuring professional development to improve the impact on teacher perception and instruction is necessary. Confident and practiced teachers who are mastering how to teach students to read can produce 21st-century contributors to the global society. I also believe that invested leadership breeds invested teachers (Podhajski et al., 2009). Principals should lead with the intention to exact change and make improvements in the lives of students by ensuring that the systems are in place to improve reading instruction and student learning.

As a teacher, I considered importance of doing the best instructional job possible in schools and reflected on why it is important for teachers to learn how to teach the foundational skills in reading with targeted guided systemized practice (Podhajski et al., 2009). I have taught for 17 years but was not taught how to teach students how to read in the credential program, nor did I learn this skill during any professional development but through a yearlong reading-coach training program conducted by Reading First, a program that was instituted during the No Child Left Behind era.

I have noticed that a lack of structured practice and growth really affects teacher perceptions and student achievement. It affects teacher morale and accomplishments. I also noticed that teachers were more open to answer research questions regarding the topic because I had worked with them on a daily basis and tried to assist them with daily concerns or requests. This persuaded me that specificity and targeted training of reading instruction is imperative in schools.

Implications for Policy

Policy for teacher practice should ensure that elementary school teachers are first extensively trained in reading at the university level. The U.S. government should ensure that all elementary school teachers receive training in all aspects of reading instruction, starting at the university level, and school sites should offer teachers weekly, extensive practice and modeling of the foundational skills and teach teachers how to specifically teach EL students with different modalities (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015; Hollins, 2011b). Teachers

should also learn how to instruct students from different economical or cultural backgrounds (Hollins, 2015; Umphrey, 2010). Districts should put systems in place so that teachers are effectively served with appropriate and prescriptive andragogic support that improves a teacher's specific needs in reading instruction. This action should ensure that teachers receive modeled tools and intervention support to meet the needs of their students. In closing, teachers need fully embedded opportunities within professional development so that they can use inquiry as a stance, employ peer-to-peer collaboration, and learn how to set standards that are in alignment with the school districts' vision and goals.

Implications for Practice

Districts must ensure that training and support includes rich modeling techniques and examples that teachers could use with their specific students. Grade-level chairs should be held accountable for working collaboratively with coaches to ensure there is consistent growth in student achievement and documentation of that growth. Principals should be present and willing to understand how to support teachers' practice in the area of reading instruction. In addition, principals should be physically present at professional development for reading instruction to ensure that teachers are meeting goals and have evidence-based data structures to facilitate their process.

Implications for Theory

The theory that informs this study is the value of school culture and professional teacher training. Training at the university level is necessary for teachers to learn how to teach the foundational skills for reading (Podhajski et al.,

2009). The need for universities to link with school districts to ensure the practice of teaching and learning for the improvement of reading instruction should be placed at the forefront of teacher training in universities. This practice of improving reading instruction through systematized professional development should be entrenched in the schools' weekly planning so that teachers feel supported (Hollins, 2011b).

Implications for Future Research

There are four implications for research. Future research could use more than one school site. It could also use a larger number of participants. Another implication is for future research to use a quantitative or mixed methods approach. This research could be conducted across the state, multiple cities, multiple states, and other countries.

Recommendations

There are four recommendations that will be stated in this section. Schools should train instructional leaders who have the capacity to lead teachers to promote literacy and ensure that their schools have an educational culture that systematically trains teachers to prepare students for 21st-century reading expectations. Schools should also have principals who are consistently trained to individualize and systemize accountable professional development that advances K-1 teacher actions that improve their perception of their practice.

- Leaders should establish and define the purpose of professional development to clarify the precepts and actions that the school sites need to implement to structure professional development.

- Leaders should ensure that the school's vision and mission is engrained into professional development through transparency and planned cycles of prescriptive development in reading that produces students who can read.
- Leaders should write down expectations within grade levels to guide responsibility for the work of teaching students to read (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015; Hollins, 2011b).
- Leaders should begin intensive professional development on the foundational skills at the beginning of each year because reading is an important skill and schools should use data to guide instruction. Schools should also include systematic grade-level articulation between K-1 to ensure that grade-level goals are being met.

Summary of the Dissertation

This research reveals that teachers perceive they need a professional development culture where they received consistent, targeted, timely, and systematic training that is relevant to the improvement of their reading instruction (Podhajski et al., 2009). The data also indicates that teachers needed hands-on training that will teach teachers how to use data and researched practices to manage their large class sizes and organize small-group instruction.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Dear Alvord Unified School District Teacher:

My name is Sonna A. Udealor. I am a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton. I am currently under the direction of Dr. Earnest Black and Dr. Ron Oliver, both Doctoral Program Chairs for the Educational Leadership program at California State University, Fullerton. I would like to satisfy the requirements for a Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I am conducting a case study research on teacher perceptions of professional development as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for reading instruction. You are being asked to take part in this research study because Kindergarten and First Grade teachers can provide a description of their perceived experiences as it relates to the beginning stages of reading instruction.

Participants will be asked to answer research questions within a 25 to 30-minute session. This research will take about one month to complete, participants will be observed within PLCs for about one month to understand K-1 teacher perspective and perception on this topic. There is no individual benefit for this research, but K-1 teachers could ultimately benefit in the future from the research because it could inform how PLCs for reading instruction could be improved with teacher perspectives. This research does not present any foreseeable risks to participants. It is completely confidential and will be submitted to California State University, Fullerton to satisfy the obligations to obtain a degree in Educational Leadership. The data for this research will not mention names or the name of the school site. All identifiable data will be kept in a private home and destroyed after the conclusion of the research. **Confidentiality will be provided to the extent allowed by law.** Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from participation at any time.

If you have any additional questions, please contact Dr. Earnest Black at California State University, Fullerton. He can be reached at erblack@fullerton.edu and telephone at 657-278-5566. My telephone number is 310-713-9919.

In addition, if you have any further questions about the rights of human research participants, contact the CSUF IRB Office at 657-278-7640 or irb@fullerton.edu.

[Consent Clause]: I have carefully read the terms used in the consent form and its significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project. You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Name of Participant (please print) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Please note: your signature also indicates that you are giving me permission to audio/video tape your responses with permission when necessary. Thank you.

All California State University employees are mandated reporters under California's Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act ("CANRA"). Whenever a CSU employee, in his/her professional capacity or within the scope of his/her employment, has knowledge of or observes a person under the age of 18 years whom the employee knows, or reasonably suspects, to have been the victim of child abuse or neglect, the employee must report the incident to the appropriate authorities.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name: Teacher ____ (Very Confidential Educational Research)

Program Dept. Department of Education

Title: _____ Confidential Number Assigned)

Interviewer: Sonna Udealor

Date:

Time:

Location:

Duration:

Research Objective: Learn teacher perspective about professional development. To interview school personnel to learn teacher perspective about professional development.

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your perspective.

My name is Sonna Udealor; I am a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton. I am going to ask you to answer a few questions regarding your perspective about professional development for reading instruction. Thank you again for agreeing to answer these questions. I know that you are busy and I appreciate your time, and the time you are taking to do this.

1. How many years have you taught reading?
2. What type of training have you received for reading instruction during your professional development?
3. In your professional development, what does your grade-level perceive to be the goal for teaching students how to read?
4. What type of professional development do you think could improve your capacity to improve student's reading skills?
5. What do you recommend or perceive other teachers need to learn during professional development to improve their instruction in reading?
6. What type of reading training do you think your grade-level needs to address during professional development so students learn to read at grade-level and beyond?
7. What do you think are the benefits of your reading instruction on struggling readers after collaborating in professional development for reading instruction?
8. Describe your perception of the professional development you receive for differentiating instruction in reading?
9. Do you have other comments or concerns about your perception of professional development in reading instruction?

APPENDIX C

ORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name:
Program Dept:
Department of Education
Title: Teacher _____
Interviewer: Sonna Udealor
Date:
Time:
Location:
Duration:

Overall Summary: To interview school personnel to learn teacher perspective about professional development for reading instruction.

Research Objective: Learn teacher perspective about professional development for reading instruction.

Introduction Script:

Interviewer: Hello _____ thank you so much for speaking with me. My name is Sonna Udealor and I would like to conduct an interview with you today. I am a student at California State University, Fullerton. Thank you so much for agreeing to interview with me. I know that you are busy and I appreciate your time, and the time you are taking to talk to me. The purpose of this interview is to learn teacher perspective about professional development for reading instruction. I hope that this is a good time to speak with you? Is this a good time?

1. How many years have you taught reading?
2. What type of training have you received for reading instruction during your professional development?
3. In your professional development what does your grade-level perceive to be the goal for teaching students how to read?
4. What type of professional development do you think could improve your capacity to improve student's reading skills?
5. What do you recommend or perceive other teachers need to learn during professional development to improve their instruction in reading?
6. What type of reading training do you think your grade-level needs to address during professional development so students learn to read at grade-level and beyond?
7. What do you think are the benefits of your reading instruction on struggling readers after collaborating in professional development for reading instruction?
8. Describe your perception of the professional development you receive for differentiating instruction in reading?

9. Do you have other comments or concerns about your perception of professional development in reading instruction?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The research protocol, question, and were:

Interviewer:

Hello _____ thank you so much for speaking with me. My name is Sonna Udealor and I am going to be conducting an interview with you today. I am a student at California State University, Fullerton. Thank you so much for agreeing to interview with me today, I know that you are busy and I appreciate your time, the time you are taking to talk to me. The purpose of this interview is to interview you to learn teacher perspective about professional development as professional development's in reading. I hope that this is a good time to speak with you? Is this a good time?

1. How many years have you taught reading?
2. What type of training have you received for reading instruction during your professional development?
3. In your professional development's what does your grade-level perceive to be the goal for teaching students how to read?
4. What type of professional development do you think could improve your capacity to improve student's reading skills?
5. What do you recommend or perceive that other teachers need to learn during professional development to improve their instruction in reading?
6. What type of reading training do you think your grade-level needs to address during professional development so students learn to read at grade-level and beyond?
7. What do you think are the benefits of your reading instruction on struggling readers after collaborating in professional development for reading instruction?
8. Describe your perception of professional development provided for differentiating reading instruction for students with varied needs?
9. Do you have other comments or concerns about your perception of professional development in reading instruction?

APPENDIX F

QUESTIONS POSED TO TEACHERS

1. How many years have you taught reading?
2. What type of training have you received for reading instruction during your professional development?
3. In your professional development, what does your grade-level perceive to be the goal for teaching students how to read?
4. What type of professional development do you think could improve your capacity to improve student's reading skills?"
5. What do you recommend or perceive other teachers need to learn during professional development to improve their instruction in reading?
6. What type of reading training do you think your grade-level needs to address during professional development so students learn to read at grade-level and beyond?
7. What do you think are the benefits of your reading instruction on struggling readers after collaborating in professional development for reading instruction?
8. Describe your perception of the professional development as provided for differentiating reading Instruction for students with varied needs?
9. Do you have other comments or concerns about your perception of professional development as in reading instruction?