2024

FIRST GRADE TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY DURING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGES IN LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SPECIALTIES

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
New York
by
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Date Submitted November 28, 2023 Date Approved January 31, 2024

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ABSTRACT

FIRST GRADE TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY DURING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGES IN LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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Schools across the county are transitioning from balanced literacy to researched based reading instruction. This shift impacts not only instructional practices in reading, but the fundamental understanding of reading development. Teachers are on the frontline of this huge endeavor. This research examined five first grade teachers' self-efficacy through this transformational change. One-on-one interviews were conducted to explore teachers' perspectives as they make this shift. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis, (IPA) four themes emerged; lack of training, feelings of disconnect, teacher overwhelm, and passion for change. Recommendations for practice include clear and concise communications of the shifts that are necessary when moving away from balanced literacy to research-based reading instruction. Districts should work to ensure that all educators including school level leadership, receive in-depth professional development that includes linguistic and basic reading skill knowledge. Findings have indicated that peer models and cohorts should be leveraged to support teachers through this process.

DEDICATION

"If the light were not so gradual at dawning, the relationship between speech and print might count as one of the most remarkable discoveries of childhood" (Ehri, 1979)

I have had the privilege of knowing and teaching with, amazing educators who teach with passion and love. Who come to work every day to teach students and to teach them well. This is no small feat, as any seasoned teacher will tell you. It is challenging, overwhelming, and rewarding every day, and I am constantly motivated and inspired by your dedication to teaching. As the quote above illustrates, learning to read is a huge and amazing endeavour. This dissertation is dedicated to all the teachers who lead their students to this discovery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey has been an all-encompassing challenge to say the least. Certainly, the most difficult thing I have ever opted into. I have learned so much about myself through this process and I am so grateful. Through this process I have learned so much that fill these pages, but the most substantial discoveries were of myself and my ability to persevere. At times I was convinced that I wouldn't finish. But here I am, at the end and I couldn't be more grateful for what I have learned and gained from this process.

Jenn and Beth- There are no words to express what your friendship has meant to me. You are amazing teachers who have continued to inspire me and push me to be better in every way. In many respects you walked this journey with me, listening to me work through ideas, reading articles, and venting right alongside me. This support kept me going even when I felt completely bogged down. Working with you has been a privilege for me and I am so thankful for you!

Mom- There has never been a single minute in my life that you didn't believe in me. Through all challenges in my life, you always had my back, and a person couldn't ask for anything more from a mom. Thank you for supporting me through so much. I would not be where I am in life, without you.

Dad- You have always been my person. The person that I go to when I need advice or encouragement. You gave me the gift of high expectations which has always pushed me to see past the fog of my challenges. At times these high expectations seemed impossible or unfair, but I can say for certain that I would not be where I am today without your confidence in me. I am not even sure I could have dreamed this for myself

had it not been for you. You have felt like a pillar for me, and I am so grateful that I got so lucky to have you as a dad. Wendy- I am so thankful to have you in my life and I appreciate all the support you have always given me.

Dr Rachael Helfrick- I am so grateful that all the stars aligned and brought you into my life. As a mentor, you walked me through the ups and downs of the past three years. You supported me through the content of my research and talked me through all the ideas that I had. As a friend, you have supported and listened to me in all things. Even as you had your own challenges, you were always a text away. You are the strongest women I know, and I am lucky to know you.

My kids, Christian, Mya, and Benjamin, I know that the past five years have been a challenge. There have been many days that I have had to check out to focus on my work. I was here physically but my brain was in a million other places. You have borne the brunt of my sacrifices, and I am so sorry that I put that on you. I hope that you have been able to witness my struggles and see my perseverance. I hope that you find your passion and work hard to achieve all your dreams in life.

Chris- My love, what a journey this has been for us. There was not one day that you didn't believe in me. You have been my partner through this process. Listened to me talking through ideas and many times through tears and complete overwhelm. There is something so isolating about a doctoral program and specifically the dissertation process. No one can really walk this path with you, it is an individual event. You have walked alongside me to the extent that is humanly possible in this process. You have pulled me up when I needed it and continually highlighted my ability and strength. I am so thankful to have you as my teammate in life.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

There is a huge shift in the country that is bearing down on widely used approaches to reading instruction as being ineffective and not providing reading instruction that encompasses all children. This has become increasingly evident in looking at the bi-yearly National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which tests students in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade on reading comprehension. In 2019, the 4th grade scores dropped two points from 2017 with only 35% of fourth graders reading at or above proficiently, with that number dropping to 34% for eighth graders commonly called the nation's report card. These scores have hovered below the NAEP proficient score every year that this assessment has been administered. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) found that those who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. Despite the decades-long persistence of low NAEP scores not much has changed in reading instruction throughout the country. Years of research has suggested that ineffective teaching methods that are without "enough research evidence" limit students' ability to master essential skills (Moats, 2007; Rosenshine, 2012; Sweet, 2004). The same flawed reading approach has been at the forefront for more than a decade. This has been highlighted by education journalist Hanford (2019, 2022).

Over the past five years Hanford (2019, 2022) has shown a bright light on the ineffective reading approaches so prevalent in our schools. In her article and podcast, At a loss for words: What's wrong with how schools teach reading, Hanford (2019) reports how schools have used an approach to reading that has been debunked by cognitive

scientists for several decades. She went further in a five-part podcast, Sold a Story (Hanford, 2022), in which she reports on the reading crisis further, shining a light on how educators were led to believe something that was not based on evidence or research.

Reading researchers have been battling back and forth how best to teach reading. Swinging between a code focus (bottom-up focus) and whole word reading (top-down focus). In the mid 1800's Horace Mann, often referred to as "the father of American education" railed against using the alphabet code and considered any focus on the alphabetic code gets in the way of the meaning of reading (Kim, 2008). Fast forward and many of the same "wars" are still being waged. Except now, we have the benefit of established reading research that includes many hundreds or thousands of studies that have been tested and retested. The fields that include neuroscience, cognitive science, psychology and others have built up a body of research that now includes brain imaging that allows us to see what is going on in the brain. Despite this vast interdisciplinary body of research that has been referred to as the science of reading, students are being taught using unproven or disproven methods. Seidenberg (2013) asserts that "the main problem is that many of the basic assumptions about how children learn to read that have guided teacher education, classroom practices, and curriculum development have been contradicted by the basic research that led to modern synthesis" (p. 16). The culture of education is insular and reading science struggles to penetrate it.

Teachers are not being equipped with the decade's old science of how skilled reading occurs. The amount of time spent on the understanding of reading development is insufficient (Snow et al., 1998). Pre-service teachers are exposed to a hodge podge dissemination of the five pillars of literacy with most, 74 percent, pre-service schools

covering four of the pillars or less (Greenberg et al., 2013) A study published by the National Center for Teacher Quality found that only 15 percent of education schools trained future teachers in science-based reading strategies (Moats, 2007). So, out of those minimal mandatory reading classes only 15 percent are teaching science-based content? Furthermore, in two studies, Joshi, Binks, Graham, et al. (2009) administered surveys to 78 teacher instructors to determine how familiar they are with concepts of linguistic features of the English language. This study found that instructors performed poorly on areas related to morphemes and phonemes (Joshi, Binks, Graham, et al. 2009). The second study conducted by Joshi, Binks, Graham, et al. (2009) included interviews of forty instructors about best practice in teaching components and skills. The results showed that eighty percent of those interviewed wrongly defined phonological awareness as letter-sound correspondence (Joshi, Binks, Graham, et al. 2009). The professionals charged with teaching our teachers to teach reading do not themselves, have an adequate understanding of reading development. Even in the best of circumstances, this is extremely troubling and impacts not only student success but also teacher retention. Teacher candidates are leaving their teacher preparation programs with many doubts of their own knowledge of the content area/s that they are expected to teach. According to Feistritzer (2010), only 44 percent of teacher candidates felt “very competent” in their content area.

Elementary in-service teachers are faced with many challenges once they are in the classroom. A classroom full of students with varying abilities, four to six subjects taught daily, and very little time. Furthermore, it all comes down to each individual district in deciding how students are taught to read, what training teachers can and must

attend, and what resources teachers can use. Two adjoining districts may be approaching reading on opposite sides of the so-called "reading wars." Professional development offered to in-service teachers is aligned with the approach that each district or school subscribes to and varies greatly (Snow et al., 1998).

Many teachers in today's classrooms were taught, in their pre-service training and their in-service training, that reading is a natural occurring process. In 1999, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) published *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science* in which they stated that there was a "chasm" between research and practice (Kilpatrick, 2015). As previously illustrated this chasm exists at the college level, at the district level, and as a result, at the school and classroom level. Studies have shown that elementary teachers in K-3 and reading teachers/literacy specialists do not adequately understand reading acquisition (Cunningham et al., 2004; Moats, 1994, 2009). These are the professionals who should be the most well-versed in reading acquisition and reading difficulties. This profound disconnection has been harmful for children. Seidenberg (2017) states that "methods commonly used to teach children are inconsistent with basic facts of human cognition and development" (p. 9). He goes on to assert that educators are "deeply immersed in their worldview and well defended against incursions from outside" (p. 10). Reading science is not infiltrating educational practices, and what is happening in schools. Many teachers are skeptical of the scientific perspective of reading, thinking that it is too sterile and does not take the learner into account (Coles, 2000). Educators value observations and classroom experiences as being valuable to them as teachers, and they know what their students need. The reality is that if teachers inherently knew what their students were doing while they were reading there wouldn't be so many students

struggling with reading. There has been a feeling among teachers that teaching basic skills is unnecessary and boring and would stifle the love of reading out of children (Seidenberg, 2013). I would argue that children can't love to read, if they can't read.

Despite a prevailing, multi-decade body of research, school districts are deeply entrenched in the balanced literacy approach and the three-cueing system. This entrenchment and deep commitment to this form of literacy instruction has made change difficult at all levels with very little consistently across the county. This lack of consistency and unwillingness of many to even accept the basic tenets of reading acquisition has contributed to the feeling of pendulum swinging. It comes down to where you live, where you get your teaching degree, and your administration's personal philosophy. Because of this, students are subject to a roulette type experience in acquiring reading especially if they are one of the 60 percent of students who need systematic and sequential reading instruction. Maybe they will get what they need but many will not and the consequences of not being able to read are many and all are deeply life-affecting.

How could such a widely used approach to teaching have such a sparse backing in research? Many assumed that they were "research-based" and went in full force along with the support of districts. The past ten years have seen a slow shift in the pervasiveness of these programs with an even more substantial shift happening in the past five years. As of July of 2022, 29 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws that align various education policies with research-based reading instruction according to Education Weekly reporting. These laws vary in their scope, but many include teacher prep, professional development, and the instructional programs that can be used. Two

states, Arkansas and Louisiana have banned the three-cueing system altogether. We cannot equate the passing of a law to quality reading instruction, it is a mere small step in the process of systematic and structural change. It does signify however, some monumental state level shifts that are substantial. Change is coming, albeit slow and inconsistent, but it is coming, nonetheless.

In September of 2023 a lawsuit was filed by Reading Recovery in response to an Ohio state law banning programs that use three-cueing. Such a law would have monumental consequences as Ohio State brought the program to the United States and is where the headquarters is located.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was to examine first grade teacher efficacy through the first four phases of transformative learning, as they experience a core change to literacy instruction. Change is a constant in education, changing students, changing colleagues, and even changing curriculum. The change that many districts (including the district in this study) are currently going through is a change to the core belief system of how students learn to read and subsequently how teachers teach students to read. Districts are moving away from a balanced literacy approach that includes the three-cueing system to instruction and toward a research-based approach that supports how the brain learns to read. As teachers grapple with this new approach to reading, they are faced with the oftentimes arduous task of unlearning and relearning something they thought they already knew. This unlearning and relearning will be examined through the lens of transformative learning theory.

This research will further the understanding of how an educator's self-efficacy may be impacted by core changes within the landscape of education. Teacher self-efficacy plays a key role in their ability to influence student motivation and achievement as well as job satisfaction and overall teacher retention (Barni et al., 2019).

Justification

As the "reading wars" rage on, reading scores remain consistently low. NEAP scores have either stayed put or gone down over the 30 years that the assessment has been in place. "20 percent of elementary students nationwide have serious problems learning to read; at least another 20 percent are at risk for not meeting grade-level expectations" (Moats, 2020, p. 4). Stanovich (1986) has pointed out that the "rich get richer and poor get poorer" (Matthew Effect) regarding the failure to attain early word reading skills. Students who struggle to read in first grade will almost invariably continue to struggle (Torgesen, 1998). Researchers have found that 74% of students who are poor readers by the end of third grade were likely to be poor readers at the end of ninth grade (Shaywitz, 1996). There are studies that indicate that students who are poor readers have a higher risk of depression in later grades (Maughan et al., 2003), have more behavior concerns (Kilpatrick, 2015), and "students who are poor readers in third grade are 4 times more likely to become high school dropouts" (Kilpatrick, 2015, p. 3).

In a 2003 study the National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that 93 million adults read at basic or below basic (Seidenberg, 2013). Adults who cannot read are much less likely to vote or get the news. They are less likely to be steadily employed and if they are employed there is a limit to the income that can be earned over a lifetime. According to some juvenile records, 85 percent of kids who are interacting in the juvenile system are

functionally illiterate. Furthermore, the Department of Justice has stated that the link of violence and crime is "welded to reading failure" and 70 percent of the county's prison population cannot read above a 4th grade level. This is not altogether surprising as it has become well known that illiteracy severely impacts an individual's quality of life as well as their future children.

This is an injustice that impacts millions of people. And to add even more to this societal failure, it doesn't have to be this way. According to EAB (2019), "95% of elementary students, regardless of background, are cognitively capable of learning to read when they receive sufficient direct instruction of the foundation skills of reading" (p. 7). Kids can learn to read, and it is incumbent upon schools to teach them. Students deserve to be taught to read in our public schools.

There is a urgency that students learn to decode words fluently and accurately in first grade (Stanovich, 1986). Research across many decades has concluded that if students do not gain the necessary decoding skills by first grade "it may be very hard to change the direction that reading achievement takes" (Gough & Juel, 1991, p. 55). Children who do not successfully decode words by first grade, read less often and as a result do not develop fluency which is vital to reading comprehension (Stanovich, 1986). They spend precious time and cognitive resources laboring over reading the words and they fall behind in vocabulary acquisition and comprehension (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). First grade is a vital year for reading development and we must ensure that all students can decode words as they move on to second grade.

Over the course of my own teaching career, it has become very clear to me that phonological awareness knowledge is not understood or even shared with all elementary

school teachers. This has been witnessed across different states and school systems with primary teachers entering the classroom with little to no understanding of this pillar of literacy development. Many educators confuse phoneme awareness with phonics. It has been widely researched that many primary teachers do not understand the structure of spoken language or the English writing system which are necessary when providing instruction to students who are beginning readers (Brady & Moats, 1997; Kilpatrick, 2015; Moats, 1999; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000).

The deep misunderstanding of student phoneme awareness and the effects it has on reading development is problematic. The very teachers who should be experts on this topic are often unaware of its existence. Seidenberg (2017) suggests that many teachers still think that reading is a visual task, and it is the poor readers that "phonology is something that poor readers fall back on" (p. 126). There is a vast knowledge base that teachers need to adequately teach students to acquire phoneme proficiency. According to Brady et al. (2009), teachers should understand the why of phonological awareness and the what and how it develops in students. This knowledge will give teachers the ability to create appropriate activities, differentiate for students who are making varied progress, and the ability to provide meaningful feedback to students (Brady et al., 2009). Without this in-depth knowledge a teacher may not understand that the digraph /ch/ is one sound whereas a blend /sl/ is two separate sounds /s/ /l/. The misunderstanding of the skill would confuse students and could have an impact on their ability when students try to access that word in reading and writing tasks.

In a study conducted by Cunningham et al. (2004) teachers were asked to rate their own knowledge of various beginning reading skills such as phonological awareness

and phonics. They researchers believed that the better knowledge calibration a teacher had the more open they would be more receptive to seeking out or receiving information they did not have. They found that 20 percent of the teachers could not identify phonemes in any of the eleven words presented. They found that teachers overestimate their knowledge level and skills in this foundational aspect of reading (Cunningham et al., 2004). Teachers believed they knew more and were overconfident in their instruction which may hinder their receptivity to more information. They then split the group into two groups: novice (0-3) and experienced (15+). They found that novice teachers were able to more accurately calibrate their knowledge level better than veteran teachers. This provides evidence that novice teachers may be more self-reflective in their abilities. Whereas veteran teachers' instructional practices are more stagnant, and they are less willing to change their views.

Significance and Context

The 2022 NEAP scores were three points lower than the 2019 scores. Although some of this can be attributed to learning loss from the worldwide pandemic and school closures and the momentous effort of online learning this cannot be accepted. A Center for School and Student Progress research brief determined that in the spring of 2021 the 5.5 million students analyzed scored three to six percentage points lower than pre-pandemic. Scores were dropping before the unprecedented pandemic began. The pandemic exacerbated an already substantial decades-long declining or stagnant scores on the NEAP. There is an exception to this trend. Mississippi was the only state in the country to show substantial growth in 2019. They went from a 214 in 2017 to a 219 in 2019 (NAEP, 2019). In 2013, Mississippi passed a law that all mandated the use of

science-based reading instruction to occur in all schools. Many states have looked to Mississippi as a model and are passing similar laws.

To implement this momentous change of reading instruction teachers and entire school systems must rethink what has been the prevalent assumption, of how students learn to read. In an already overloaded profession, teachers are now being asked to go through transformational change of their instruction but also their basic understanding. This carries some implications in teacher well-being, retention, and effectiveness. Teaching is a challenging profession without considering a change such as this. According to Teach Thought teachers make 1500 educational based decisions per day. The RAND research group has found that teacher and principal stress is twice the rate as the general working public. This study aims to examine teachers' feelings of self-efficacy as they are going through transformational change. This data will add to the literature in teacher self-efficacy in professional growth and transition. This research will also further add to the research of primary teachers' knowledge level of beginning reading.

Positionality

Identities

I began teaching in 2009, at the tail end of the Reading First initiative, which was an arm of the NCLB law that then President George Bush implemented in 2002. This initiative attached federal money to research-based literacy programs. Schools that followed certain criteria and federal scrutiny in data and instructional methods, would get more federal money. My first job was at a reading first school. Due to this I received an abundance of professional development and coaching in reading in general, and early developmental reading specifically. My understanding and passion for early reading grew

from here. I completed my Master of Education in Reading during these early years. I was extremely fortunate to begin my teaching career at a school in which good reading PD was available. I moved around the country every few years for a while teaching kindergarten. My passion and drive to understand reading never waned and prompted me to begin my PhD program.

I have taught first grade for the past four years in the same large district where my study will take place. When I first arrived at this district, it was full on balanced literacy in its philosophy. I saw first-hand how some students struggled to make growth in reading. I also witnessed the struggle that teachers felt when their students were not making the reading growth that they thought they should. During these short four years, this district has completely changed its understanding of how reading is acquired. I have been a part of district level committees and adoption panels that have helped to move this work forward. In a large district so immersed in balanced literacy it takes time, and immense effort to align professional development with the science of reading.

I have witnessed the struggles and persistence needed to completely disconnect oneself from a long-held philosophy towards a completely new paradigm of understanding. I have also witnessed the resistance that some teachers have when being asked to change their thinking. I have mentored fellow teachers in their transition as we have worked to teach students to read. My goal for this study is to examine the process teachers go through when being asked to make such a shift.

Exploring Bias

I have worked in primary (Kindergarten and First grade) education for fourteen years across four different states. I have taken impactful professional development,

worked to get my M.Ed. in Reading, and pushed myself to learn all that I can about early reading. When I began at my current district, I was in complete shock at the district wide approach to reading. I, of course, heard about the balanced literacy approach. I even agreed with it from afar. It truly "sounded" ideal. Sure, we all want "balance" in our approach to teaching kids to read. I however, never actually taught in a balanced literacy approach. I taught in a very "science of reading" way before that term was mainstream. I was never directed to use the three cueing system or believed that students should guess the word. When I started at a school immersed in balanced literacy I was in shock. Phonics was only taught in the context of the leveled book, and I met some, highly devoted, first grade teachers who didn't know what phonological awareness was or why it was important. Throughout my time researching this topic and coming to understand the known science behind reading I have developed a passion for mentoring teachers in their transition from balanced literacy to science-based practices.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

A theoretical framework is the roadmap for a research study as it provides a lens in which I will look at the data through. Grant and Osanloo (2014) liken a research theoretical framework as the "blueprint" for your house, or study. All aspects of the study are built up around the theoretical framework. Choosing a theoretical framework gives me a structure to the research and allows me to realize my own presumptions and educational blind spots (Butin, 2010).

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1977) developed the social cognitive theory that states that one's motivations are built on social influences and self-processes (Alvermann et al., 2013).

This theory focuses on human agency and experiences that shape behavior and motivations and human learning (Bandura, 1977). In Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavior Self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) established that "cognitive processes play a prominent role in the acquisition and the retention of new behavior patterns" (p. 192). Self-efficacy or one's belief that their efforts and actions can make a difference in context specific goals has been studied through various lenses over the past 40 years including student self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy. Researching these different domains of efficacy in teaching and learning is highly valuable. Better understanding how different stakeholders perceive their abilities in different skills or tasks can inform learning, instruction, and systems to foster achievement.

In Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory Bandura (1989) looked at the issues of human agency and self-reflective and self-regulatory processes. Among the mechanisms of personal agency, Bandura (1989) states "none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives" (p. 1). Self-efficacy beliefs affect motivation, effort, and ultimately action that an individual does or does not take. People who have high self-efficacy beliefs can visualize future success, which then go on to provide the support and goal setting that supports their actions (Bandura, 1993).

Social cognitive theory has been used to connect leadership behaviors and ways to use self-efficacy in leadership training (McCormick, 2003). Teachers are often leaders in schools and are certainly leaders of their classrooms. Teachers make many decisions a day that range from classroom management, instructional, and personalized learning of each student. Jackson (1990), author of Life in Classrooms, has said that elementary

teachers make anywhere between 200 to 300 decisions an hour or about 1200-1500 unplanned decisions each day. A teacher's self-efficacy can impact the decisions that are made in the classroom.

Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to have stronger feelings of job satisfaction and open different or varied instructional approaches. This is impactful to teacher retention as teachers face many challenges in their classrooms and with instructional changes. Self-efficacy is an important aspect in teaching and should be cultivated. Bandura (1977) states that people develop self-efficacy by interpreting information from four main sources of influences: mastery experiences, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion. These influences can either positively or negatively affect a person's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is context and task specific. A teacher may have high self-efficacy beliefs around reading instruction and low self-efficacy beliefs in math instruction. The sources of influence both are separate from each other and can also be intertwined.

Mastery Experiences. Mastery experiences are the most impactful source of self-efficacy. A person's previous experiences and previous successes create a more self-efficacious teacher who is more willing to problem solve and feels that she can solve the problems that arise. "Mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy information because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed. Success builds a robust belief in one's personal efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). Mastery experiences are typically cultivated over

time and are the result of successes and at times failures. This positive mindset of belief that one can learn and overcome can help to create resilience in one's life.

Vicarious Experience. Vicarious experience is the second most influential source of self-efficacy. Vicarious experience refers to the social modeling of "someone like yourself" having success in a particular task. A social role-model can be a variety of people and can vary depending on the task. Peer-modeling and peer observations can be helpful in promoting vicarious experiences.

Verbal Persuasion. The third most influential source of self-efficacy is verbal persuasion. This source refers to the encouragement and/or discouragement that a person receives relating to performing a task. If a teacher is told that she is a great teacher and can teach all her students to read, she is more likely to continue to push forward in that task. Verbal persuasion can be influential at any age or in any phase of a teacher's career.

Emotional Arousal. Emotional arousal refers to a person's overall mental well-being. If a person is experiencing anxiety and depression, then that person may have a much more difficult time boosting her self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) states, "it is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions that is important but rather how they are perceived and interpreted. People who have a high sense of efficacy are likely to view their state of affective arousal as an energizing facilitator of performance, whereas those who are beset by self-doubts regard their arousal as a debilitator" (p. 3).

Discussion. These sources of self-efficacy can help boost a teacher's self-efficacy which is vital to the long-term happiness and retention of teachers. Each hour, day, week, and year push teachers to make decisions that impact individual student learning and more broadly future student success. This is a monumental and often unfair demand of

teachers who enter education bright-eyed but mostly unprepared to tackle this task. Teachers spend their first years as teachers painstakingly building self-efficacy and those that do not often leave teaching within their first five years in the field. Building and enhancing teacher self-efficacy should be a priority for school systems and for teachers themselves. Teachers with high self-efficacy can move through challenges and "make use of obstacles to build on existing strengths" (Bowles & Pearman, 2017, p. 59). Teachers across the country are facing a myriad of challenges and obstacles, and it is vital to research and examine how self-efficacy can be leveraged or strengthened to support teachers.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative Learning Theory is a theory of adult learning that focuses on structures of learning and focuses on the idea that learners can adjust their thinking when they acquire new learning by using critical self-reflection to consider their beliefs and experiences. Transformational learning theory is a "a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions" (Transformative Learning Centre, 2004, p. 1). The theory's assumptions are constructivist which says that the way in which a learner interprets and reinterprets their experiences is central and vital to understanding their world which extends to learning (Mezirow, 1994).

Mezirow began developing what would be later called transformational learning theory in 1978. Mezirow (1978) conducted a qualitative study of women who resumed their college education after spending time away from higher education (Kitchenham, 2008). This research interest stemmed from Mezirow's own wife who enrolled at Sarah Lawrence college later in life to finish her undergraduate degree. Once this initial study

was done Mezirow (1978) developed the first ten phases of personal transformation. These phases are often linear but not all phases happen each time there is transformational learning. The ten phases are: disorienting dilemma, self-examination of assumptions, critical reflection on assumptions, Recognition of dissatisfaction (shared problem), Exploration of alternatives, plan for action, acquisition of new knowledge, experimentation of new roles, competence building, and reintegration of new perspective into one's life.

This study will consider the first four phases of transformative learning along with the individual's critical self-reflection which Mezirow (1978) saw as a requirement for transformational learning and examine how this affects teacher self-efficacy.

Mezirow (1978) found that adult learners do not just bring their old ideas and thinking with them; instead, they need to examine new ideas and perspectives as they learn new information that may alter their worldview. As learners expand on their experiences, they can challenge existing beliefs and form new perspectives. He believed that "transformation was a cognitive, rational process" (Cranton, 2016, p. 17).

Disorienting Dilemma. A disorienting dilemma is an event or experience that triggers the transformational learning process. This event will often cause the person to question ideas, perspectives, and beliefs that a person is holding. This event can be external such as a death, job loss, or sickness or it can be internal such as reading a deeply moving impactful book or being exposed to new ideas in a classroom or as a teacher. Teachers often spend many years, as far back as preservice thinking and writing about their teaching philosophy and what kind of teacher they want to be. In job interviews teachers are asked about their teaching philosophy in which they answer how

they think teaching and learning should look. Which is of course all influenced by the perspectives of the teacher prep program, their professors, and their supervising teacher. Teacher's move into the classroom with built up assumptions of what students should be doing in the classroom, how they should be learning, and how to teach kids to read. These same teachers are now having to come to terms and deal with a disorienting dilemma that some of their instructional practices and beliefs about reading and learning were wrong. This realization can come from district level professional development, graduate level classes (depending on the institution), exploration of personal development, experienced students in the classroom, and often, their own children struggling with reading. I have heard many reading advocates reference their own child being diagnosed with dyslexia later in childhood which triggered their own disorienting dilemma. Teachers are passionate and their identity as a teacher extends deeply to who they are not just merely teaching as a job.

Self-Examination of Assumptions. After the disorienting dilemma comes the triggering of self-reflection which includes feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and shame over the realization that their understanding and assumptions were wrong. This phase can be devastating and can threaten one's sense of self and self-efficacy. Teachers who have experienced a disorienting dilemma have to contend with the harm that may have been done to students as a result. This can be debilitating and requires deep reflection. This is challenging because often we build a web of related assumptions that then lead to another assumption. The saying "my whole life was built on a lie" may accompany a person's reflections as she has built her assumptions on an idea. The idea that was perpetuated by

Goodman (1976) and F. Smith (1973), and others, that reading is natural is one such assumption that many other ideas built upon.

Critical Reflection on Assumptions. As a person goes through some self-reflection of one's assumption then that person goes through examining one's assumptions and biases. These assumptions then resulting biases can be long held assumptions that were acquired in childhood. Or assumptions can be built over time through schooling, social understandings, or social norms. True transformation will occur when the person understands and acknowledges that there are other perspectives that are more valid (Willard, 2022). This phase can include feeling alienated from what one thought was a social norm or at least in this person's social/professional circle. It can feel like you are on an island and there is no possible way that you can even go back, however the path forward is not clear and maybe lonely. When considering a teacher who has devoted her life to teaching students how to read, she often has deep seeded assumptions of how students learn to read. These assumptions may be rooted in the five decades long science of reading, but it may be more likely that this person's assumption is based on an approach to reading not based in science.

Recognition of Dissatisfaction (Shared Problem). This phase often comes after critical reflection of assumptions. Once an individual critically reflects on those assumptions and why they are no longer valid or maybe were never valuable at all, they can search for others who may be in the same process or have gone through all of the phases to transformation. This realization that there are others helps to create a possible path forward.

Critical Reflection. Transformational learning happens in phases described above. These phases usually happen in an order described above however not all phases are experienced for every person for every transformation change a person goes through. Within these phases there are different types of reflection and Mezirow (1991) maintained that reflection is central to transformational learning (Cranton, 2016). Reflection is "seen as a process of reconsidering experience through reason and reinterpreting and generalizing the experience to form mental structures" (Cranton, 2016, p. 26). The ability to be critically self-reflective and have reflective self-judgment is uniquely adult. Adults can question content, asking such questions as What is the problem? What is the problem (Cranton, 2016). Mezirow (2000, 2012) suggested that only adults can develop the reflective judgment that makes transformative learning possible by assessing their own reasonings and expectations. A teacher who has observed that her first-grade students are not progressing can question why. Why is the student not learning how to read even though she is doing everything she has been taught to do in reading instruction? Through the push for equitable and research-based reading instruction many teachers have been asking themselves these types of questions.

Self-reflection can be difficult as it forces people to really look at their experiences and assumptions and question if they are correct or even how they developed their assumptions in the first place. Questioning long held assumptions and beliefs can be painful and full of grief (Cranton, 2016). Social media groups have been popping up in which teachers have been able to ask these questions and go through some of the transformational process as sort of a team or group who can say "I have had the same questions too. or We have your back through this all."

These social media sites and groups provide a safe environment for educators to express their thoughts as they may be going through a disorienting dilemma, self-examination, critical reflection, and especially recognizing discontent in others. They provide a place in which meaningful dialogue can occur that may support educators. Mezirow (1991) stated that dialogue fosters transformative learning (Baumgartner, 2019). Safe places to experience and reflect is essential to problem solving and critical self-reflection.

Application for This Work

This study combined Bandura's (1967) social cognitive theory with Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory to arrive at a framework for exploring how first grade literacy teachers approach changing literacy instruction and their perceived self-efficacy. "The process of enhancing teacher self-efficacy in adults' parallels Mezirow's Transformative learning theory" (Bowles & Pearman, 2017, p. xv). It is through both theories that I will examine how teachers engage with transformative learning and how their self-efficacy may or may not be affected. Cranton (2016) states that "by definition, transformative learning leads to a changed self-perception" (p. 7). When a teacher changes her assumptions and habits of mind, she is re-evaluating their sense of self in the teaching world. They may have had high feelings of self-efficacy which may have been jeopardized once they went through a disorienting dilemma.

> Teachers would need to re-evaluate what they believed they knew and what they actually knew (epistemic), what specific language was used in educational technology settings (sociolinguistic), and what they perceived about their own

ways of learning (psychological) through critical discourse with other learners or mentors. (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 113)

Synthesis

A theoretical framework is essential as it frames and guides this study and provides a roadmap as I examine interviews. A theoretical framework clarifies and provides a vision for the proposed research. "The theoretical framework provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 12) This study will look at the tenet of self-efficacy as an aspect of the social cognitive theory in conjunction with transformative learning theory. Teacher self-efficacy has a substantial impact on many aspects of teaching and learning, including teacher retention, student achievement, and willingness to try new instructional approaches. As literacy instruction is shifting, teachers are experiencing transformation in their assumptions of reading. There is a need to examine this phenomenon as it can help systems understand how to better support teachers and as a result student.

Method

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) will frame this dissertation research. IPA is a qualitative method in which I will examine teachers' lived experience of transformational learning and change and if that affects their self-efficacy. IPA will allow me, as the researcher, an opportunity to interpret the lived experiences of the participants of unlearning an approach to reading while relearning a different approach which is unique and challenging phenomena. Smith et al. (2009) assert that "when people are engaged with 'an experience' of something major in their lives they begin to

reflect on the significance of what is happening" (p. 3) In-depth interviews will allow me to interact with the participants and create a rapport that will help facilitate participant comfort level. IPA is a double hermeneutics as I will interpret the information, I gather from the teachers I interview while they interpret their feelings and experiences with the changing landscape of reading instruction.

Research Questions

How do first grade teachers perceive their self-efficacy as they are going through the transition from balanced literacy to research-based word reading?

1. What is the relationship, if any, to a teacher's self-efficacy and their switch from balanced literacy to research-based practices in the classroom?
2. What is the relationship, if any, of classroom teachers' phonological awareness knowledge and their self-efficacy?
3. What is the relationship, if any of classroom teachers' word reading knowledge and their self-efficacy?

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of this literature will be organized in five parts. The first part will look at the beginnings of the research on self-efficacy, teacher self-efficacy, and collective efficacy. The second part will outline the history of reading research and how we have veered away from the research. The third section will look at the research of differing theories of word reading, emphasizing Ehri's phases of word reading. The literature review will then move on to orthographic mapping and its importance to sight word reading. The review will then look at the requisite to sight word reading, phonological awareness. Lastly, the review will then look at the importance of teacher knowledge.

Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's perceived capabilities in a specific task. The effects of self-efficacy have been researched across various domains such as health, stress, education, and leadership. Self-efficacy can influence the choices that a person makes and the plan of action they choose to take. Self-efficacy can also affect the overall self-esteem that a person has in general. People with low self-efficacy experience more stress and depression, and people who have high self-efficacy tend to feel more confident as they approach difficult tasks (Pajares, 1996). The research of self-efficacy in education has spanned over five decades and has included students' self-efficacy, teachers' self-efficacy, and the role of collective efficacy in a school or school system.

Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy has been researched and redefined throughout the last 40+ years. Teacher efficacy emerged from Rotter's (1966) work on locus of control and later in Bandura's (1977) work on self-efficacy and closely aligning with social cognitive

theory. Rotter looked at internal and external control and the perception of the reward that follows. Internal control refers to a person's perceived actions in which the outcome is contingent upon. External control refers to the idea of chance, luck, fate or outside of the persons' perceived control. In his article Generalized Expectancies for Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement Rotter (1966) hypothesized that if a person perceives the "reinforcement as contingent upon his own behavior, then the occurrence of either a positive or negative reinforcement will strengthen or weaken potential for that behavior to recur in the same situation" (p. 2). This early research on self-efficacy established that a persons' internal feelings and beliefs of their skill can impact their motivation and achievement (Rotter, 1966).

Bandura (1977) wrote "Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change, in which he detailed the psychological procedures that alter the "level and strength of self-efficacy" (p. 191). Bandura (1977) looked at how behavior patterns are established and how they can be adjusted. Within this article Bandura (1977) further defined outcome expectancy and personal efficacy expectancy. Outcome expectancy, Bandura (1977) explained, is a person's estimate that a behavior will lead to an outcome. Efficacy expectation is a person's conviction that he/she can execute the behavior that is needed to produce the desired outcome (Bandura, 1977; Coladarci, 1992). This is important as it differentiates the understanding that actions can produce outcomes and an individual's own ability to carry out that course of action that will produce those outcomes. Within this paper Bandura (1977) also presents four sources of efficacy expectations: Performance accomplishments, Vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. These sources of self-efficacy have been outlined in chapter one

and late in this chapter. These have been further defined and developed since Bandura (1977) included them. These four sources of self-efficacy have been shown to be consistent across all arms of efficacy research.

A person's perceived self-efficacy can either be positive or negative. A person's choices are influenced by their perceived self-efficacy (Zhou, 2019). A timid driver may choose not to drive in the snow because her perceived self-efficacy tells them that they are not as capable of doing it as they would like. These choices can often keep people safe in situations that can potentially be harmful. Self-efficacy can also influence how a person copes with situations and how long they should persist once those situations become challenging (Zhou, 2019). A person's perceived self-efficacy impacts how they see and interact in the world.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy beliefs contribute to the effectiveness of their teaching and their ability to transfer skills and in their levels of professional commitment (Coladarci, 1992). Teachers with high self-efficacy will exude a sense of motivation and excitement toward their instruction and their students. Moreover, teacher self-efficacy is impactful in promoting student learning and achievement (Bowles & Pearman, 2017). Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2001) asserted that teachers with high-self-efficacy have a greater ability to inspire students to achieve their potential. Teachers with high self-efficacy will be more likely to work through difficult situations with student academic or behavior struggles. These teachers will be likely to try new instructional approaches (Coladarci, 1992). Self-efficacious teachers may increase the school's climate, culture, and effectiveness which are factors in the Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) of the school

(Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Collective teacher efficacy will be looked at further in the section on collective efficacy later this chapter.

Conversely, teachers who have low feelings of self-efficacy may blame or criticize students for their inability to grasp the content (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Teachers with low self-efficacy will be resistant to changes being proposed, often seeing it as a threat to themselves or see the change as superficial (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). The research indicates there are instances in which self-efficacy wanes as teachers work to implement a change in instruction (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) conducted a study of primary grade teachers' implementation of a new decoding strategy. They found that about half of the teachers experienced a substantial drop in their self-efficacy in their literacy instruction. The drop was partially remedied by professional development as teachers were further supported by reinforcing the teachers' understanding of the change.

In a longitudinal study of teachers' self-efficacy and its relation on the instructional quality the researchers examined if teacher's self-efficacy changed throughout the course of the school year (Holzberger et al., 2013). They found a well-established positive relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and instructional quality. They also found that all teachers, novice and veteran, have some fluctuations in their self-efficacy (Holzberger et al., 2013).

Two studies conducted by RAND, a non-profit research and analysis group, in the late seventies specifically asked questions that brought teacher efficacy into the conversation of student performance (Armor et al., 1976; Berman et al., 1977). These studies looked at factors in reading success in inner cities (Armor et al., 1976) and the

other examined factors in continuation of innovation programs (Berman et al., 1977). The studies found that teacher efficacy was related to student performance. These studies also established that there are external or internal controls, or elements within teachers' control (personal efficacy) and elements that are not within the teacher's control (general efficacy). The RAND studies inspired interest among researchers in teacher efficacy and specifically elements that are within teachers' control. These studies helped to spark an interest in teacher-efficacy.

Coladarci's (1992) randomized quantitative study looked at teachers' sense of efficacy and their commitment to teaching as a profession. 364 Maine elementary teachers were mailed a survey with a five-point Likert scale which asked if they would still choose teaching as a professional, with their present knowledge. The study found that "general and personal efficacy were the two strongest predictors of teaching commitment" followed by teacher-student ratio (Coladarci, 1992, p. 334). General self-efficacy refers to a person's general perceptions of their ability to cope with what is thrown their way. Their general feelings of competence. Personal efficacy refers to a persons' perception of their ability to impact the outcome. A teacher's personal efficacy may impact their efforts in helping students overcome academic or behavioral issues. This study indicates that teachers who are most likely to stay in teaching have a higher sense of self efficacy (Coladarci, 1992).

Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) indicated that there are four sources of teacher-efficacy information: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and emotional

arousal (Goddard et al., 2000). These sources give the individual information about their abilities in certain activities.

Mastery experience explains when teachers or teams experience mastery and understand that success was a product of the team's effort and work and the results can be repeated (Donohoo, 2016). Mastery experience is the most powerful of the four sources of CTE (Goddard et al., 2004). The success that teams have had go on to affect their beliefs in their capabilities of future success. Bandura's (1977) research of self-efficacy and later in collective efficacy is in direct support of social cognitive theory, in which future behavior can be influenced by past behavior. The implications that a literacy professional may have on mastery experience can be found in the role of literacy coach. Literacy coaches may use mastery experiences to build CTE in their school.

The second source of teacher efficacy is vicarious experience. This source speaks to the importance of seeing an effective model of the task. When teachers and teams can see the success that others have had when faced with similar challenges, they are then more likely to overcome those obstacles (Donohoo, 2016). Literacy coaches have used modeling as a strategy to engage classroom teachers in the cognitive process in both positive and negative teaching practices. Opportunities for collaboration in this work can be beneficial in both teacher self-efficacy and CTE. In Donohoo's (2016) book Collective Efficacy: How educators' beliefs impact student learning she discusses the benefits of teachers knowing about the work of other teachers and postulates that co-constructing knowledge about teaching practices can be motivating and would likely lead to CTE.

The third source of teacher efficacy is social persuasion which explains that idea that "credible and trustworthy persuaders to innovate and overcome challenges"

(Donohoo, 2016, p. 8). This source of CTE can be seen in workshops, professional development opportunities, and feedback can inspire action by the group (Goddard et al., 2004). Social persuasion helps to encourage school staff to collaborate and think through the problems that they may face.

The last source of teacher efficacy, and the least influential, is affective states. This source includes the individual's perceptions of capability or incompetence which include feelings of anxiety or excitement (Donohoo, 2016). Affective state refers to "the emotional tone or organization" (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p. 190). Individuals can be affected by stressors that may occur. Organizations can also be affected by stressors that may occur such as testing windows within a school or even the recent cross-country school closings and subsequent dive into 100% virtual learning. The collective state of the school can affect the CTE of the school.

Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE)

Collective teacher efficacy is a relatively new topic in education. Collective efficacy is a group's shared belief in their collective ability to do the job or meet their goal. Collective teacher efficacy is the belief of the collective staff in a school and their ability to meet the needs of their students. The research has looked at how collective teacher efficacy impacts student achievement (Donohoo, 2018). The formation of the collective teacher efficacy model was built on a model of self-efficacy developed from Bandura (1997) and further developed teacher efficacy, by Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (1998). They looked at the group level dynamics and the impact of shared beliefs in their collective capabilities.

Eells's (2011) meta-analysis of the relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement found they are strongly related. This was the first large scale meta-analysis on this construct of efficacy. In Hattie's (2016) Meta-analysis of 1500 studies on collective teacher efficacy studies, it was determined that CTE has the greatest impact on student achievement above factors such as prior achievement socioeconomic status with an effect size of 1.57 as determined on Cohen's d (Donohoo, 2016). Collective teacher efficacy has a significant effect on student achievement. Donohoo (2018) further researched patterns of behaviors in schools that were affected by CTE. These behaviors include "implementation of school improvement strategies and teachers assuming leadership roles" (Donohoo, 2018, p. 329).

History of Reading Research

The area of reading science has been well researched over the past 60 years. Research has been built upon research to reveal a strong scientific consensus among reading researchers (Castles et al., 2018). The overwhelming body of research should adequately silence the "reading wars." The following studies are seminal around reading research of the last half century. Although, there is a steep hill yet to climb regarding widespread implementation, the sturdy foundation has been set for that work to continue.

In Flesch's (1955) book *Why Johnny Can't Learn to Read* he pleads for the ending of whole word memorization and guessing, and a return to phonics. This was over 65 years ago. Flesch (1955) writes "Memorization or guessing the meaning of whole words is not reading…. it is an acquired bad habit that stands in the way of your child's ever learning to read properly" (p. 110). Flesch (1981) wrote a sequel called *Why Johnny still can't read: A New look at the Scandal of our Schools* in which he continues to call

for a phonics centered curriculum. The sequel highlighted the reality that no meaningful change had occurred in over twenty years since the original.

In 1959, four years after the publication of Flesch's (1955) controversial book, education psychologist Chall was tasked by the National Conference on Reading Research to identify important aspects of beginning reading. Chall's committee determined that they needed a large-scale cooperative experiment to evaluate issues of beginning reading. (Adams, 1990). This plan was later carried out by Bond and Dykstra described later in this chapter. After her work in this subcommittee, she was hooked on the issues of beginning reading. She, with the Carnegie Corporation, embarked on a three-year long project "evaluating existing methods and synthesizing previous research" in early reading (Adams, 1990, p. 11). Chall published her seminal work *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* in 1967. Chall (1967) found that an emphasis on the code tends to produce better readers in fourth grade rather than a meaning emphasis. Chall (1967) found that this was clearer at the end of first grade as the emphasis on meaning tended to negatively affect comprehension and vocabulary, mainly because the child has weaker word recognition skills (p. 137). Chall (1967), a distinguished Harvard researcher and literacy scholar, believed that reading instruction should be above all based on research and evidence (Semingson & Kerns, 2021).

During this same year Bond and Dykstra (1967) conducted a set of large-scale longitudinal studies for the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) Cooperative Research program (Kilpatrick, 2015). They looked at the findings of 27 independent studies which included 20,000 students. These studies had a closely aligned methodology, to establish the early reading instruction that resulted in better reading and spelling achievement at

the end of first grade (Bond & Dykstra, 1967). These studies are generally referred to as the "first grade studies" (Adams, 1990). After analyzing the data, they found that the second-best predictor of reading achievement in first grade was the ability to discriminate between phonemes, or the smallest unit of speech. They also found that word study skills need to be explicit and systematic and basal programs that emphasized phonics produced better readers than basal programs that taught word memory (Kilpatrick, 2015). They also found that direct instruction was the most effective way to teach reading.

The report Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson et al., 1985) was published after a two-year long process of examining the previous two decades of research in reading processes and comprehension of language. Members of this commission were across an array of disciplines in academia and beyond and identified research topics that could help inform reading policy. The findings specific to this study are that classrooms that are taught phonics have a better start to learning to read than students in classrooms that are not taught phonics (Anderson et al., 1985). They also concluded that students that receive instruction in phonics did better than the whole-word approach (Kilpatrick, 2015).

Gough and Tunmer (1986) developed the simple view of reading (SVR) as a theoretical framework. According to the SVR reading comprehension is a product of both decoding and listening comprehension. L X C = R (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). The SVR's aim was to simplify the very complex task of reading. Each of the components work separately and then intertwine as decoding is developed in the later years. Listening comprehension begins in infancy as children begin to hear language from those around them and develop through their early years. This is the aspect of reading that does occur

naturally. Once a child begins elementary school, she has typically mastered her native language (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Decoding is also vital to reading and does not come naturally (Gough & Tunmer 1986). The code needs to be explicitly taught. This framework highlighted the importance of decoding during a time that many educators believed that it was not necessary for reading (Reading Rockets).

Just five years later, Adams (1990), sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, published her seminal book Beginning to Read: Thinking and learning about print in which she examines a rich array of research to help educators who may be trapped in the "reading war" dilemma. She found when systematic phonics instruction was taught alongside meaning emphasis and language instruction resulted in superior reading achievement (Adams, 1990, p. 49).

In 1998 a committee was commissioned by the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education and the National Research Council to examine reading difficulties in young children and how to prevent them. The resulting report *Preventing reading difficulties in young children,* outlined the predictors of reading failure, preventing reading difficulties, and instructional strategies to support this work (Snow et al., 1998). They reported that early intervention makes a substantial difference for young students who are at-risk for reading failure, however some interventions are better than others. The variations in the explicitness of the instructional method can impact the level of improvement of the student (Snow et al., 1998). This report also highlights the knowledge that pre-service teachers should know to best teach all their students to read, acknowledging that neither pre-service nor in-service teachers are getting the knowledge that they need. They go on to state that, "it is absolutely essential that teachers at all grade

levels understand the course of literacy development and the role of instruction in optimizing literacy development" (Snow et al., 1998, p. 329).

In 1997, Congress commissioned the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), along with the Secretary of Education, to appoint a panel that would assess reading research and the effectiveness of various approaches to reading instruction (NRP). The NRP (2000) concluded in its report that there are some instructional methods that are more effective at teaching reading and identified the five main pillars of early literacy and reading instruction. These pillars are: Phonological awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. The panel highlighted all these pillars as being an integral part of reading development and instruction. After the publication of the NRP's report and the subsequent No Child Left Behind (NCLB) the push for scientifically based reading research in schools was prioritized tying federal money to the use of these programs.

In 2002, a National Early Literacy panel was commissioned by National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) to research and identify the factors in early literacy. They conducted an extensive meta-analysis of approximately 300 studies that looked at early literacy variables that impact later literacy achievement (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2010), The National Early Literacy Panel published its report in 2008. It identified six variables with at least a moderate impact on reading. The variables are alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid naming of letters and digits, rapid naming of objects and colors, writing or writing name, and phonological short-term memory (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). They found that students who received decoding instruction scored high on phonological awareness tasks.

Stanislas Dehaene (2009), a French neuroscientist, published the book Reading in the Brain: The new science of how we read. In this book he outlines what is going on in the brain as people are learning to read through brain imaging. Although it appears that skilled readers read words as though the brain sees the word as an image, the reality is that a series of "mental and cerebral operations must occur before a word can be decoded" (Dehaene, 2009, p. 219). Our brains take the strings of letters apart and then reassemble them in meaningful ways and are unconscious and automatic. This suggests that students should be instructed in the sounds of words and how to decode. His work really does give us an in-depth as to what is going on in the brain when a person reads and how those processes develop as automaticity is gained. This research corroborates Erhi's work in phases of word reading and orthographic mapping that has been researched and parsed out over many decades and is discussed later in this chapter. Dehaene (2009) puts to bed the idea that reading is a natural occurrence. He also posits that the idea that there are hundreds of ways to learn to read is incorrect and goes on to say that "when it comes to reading, all have roughly the same brain that imposes the same constraints and the same learning sequence" (Dehaene, 2009, p. 218).

The steady stream of research outlined here has illustrated that the science of how kids learn to read has been partially established, and although researchers are still searching out more clarity and answers on many questions related to reading there is a clear roadmap in how educators should instruct kids to read.

Controversy Around Whole Language

The reading approach championed by Goodman (1976) and F. Smith (1973) in the 1970's and 80's called whole language, "stressed meaning, context, and good

literature." Goodman (1976) referred to whole language as a philosophy rather than an instructional method providing some ambiguity in what it was and what it was not. The whole word reading theory was a top-down method that consisted of memorizing sight words and guessing words, using cues, within "authentic texts" (Moats, 2000). This approach has virtually no explicit focus on phonological awareness and phonics, and the phonics that is included is incidental and haphazard (Dehaene, 2009). Goodman (1986) theorized that attending to the sounds and letters was counterproductive to reading and should be avoided. He stated, "matching letters with sounds (decoding) is a flat-earthed view of the world, since it rejects modern science about reading and writing and how they develop" (Goodman, 1986, p. 371). Goodman (1976) believed that children learn to read by relying on three cues that help them make a good first guess based on language structure, conceptual understanding and experience (Hanford, 2019). In fact, Goodman (1967) described the reading process as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" with little need to focus on the individual letters and sounds in words (p. 1). F. Smith (1997) stated, "Reliance on phonics-or spelling-to-sound correspondence- is dysfunctional in fluent reading and interferes with learning to read" (p. 57). They believed that children who learn to read by phonics become poor readers which was backwards (Seidenberg, 2017). It has been established that this idea was wrong. It is in fact, good readers who rapidly master sound spellings and can read words automatically and accurately which allows them to attend to comprehension (Seidenberg, 2017). When Goodman (2019) was challenged by the lack of scientific evidence of the efficacy with his theory and approach he responded with "my science is different" (p. 1). Whole language advocates "value of

any evidence, scientific or otherwise, is in the eye of the beholder: truth is relative and framed by one's own experience and culture" (Lyon et al., 2005, p. 213).

Goodman (1967) and other whole language proponents believed that reading was as natural as learning to speak, and children discover all that they need to read and write through literacy experiences and being surrounded by books. This basic belief, that reading is natural, has been a pervasive assumption with teachers in the last 30 years. This assumption has been the impetus for much of the reading philosophies and instructional practices taught in teacher prep programs and in schools. Reading is in fact not natural (Gough et al., 1998). Alphabetic writing systems are a new development in the history of humans. Human brains are not "biologically specialized" to read (Moats, 2000). Whole language was embraced by teachers at the time, and aligned with the formally International Reading Association, now the International Literacy Association (ILA), National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE), University reading departments and state agencies (Moats, 2000). The idea of children discovering reading and writing while surrounded by literature appealed to educators. There was less pressure on teachers to plan every single second of the day in the whole language approach. Goodman, along with others, insisted the whole language philosophy empowered teachers and practitioners (Kim, 2008).

Whole language spread like wildfire across the country and the world. However, it has been difficult to rely on any clear definition of what whole language was but, there are some consistent underpinnings of whole language; teacher empowerment, child centered, integration of reading and writing, the disavowal of the teaching or learning of phonics, and reading is natural (Bergeron, 1990; Adams, 1991).

In the 1970's cognitive scientist Stanovich (1993) along with colleagues began to study the underlying premise of whole language and what behaviors readers engage in as they are reading. They began this study with the feeling that the whole language camp was on to something. He found that the behaviors that Goodman (1967) promoted as being behaviors of good readers, were in fact the behaviors of poor readers (Stanovich, 1993). They found that "the word recognition processes of the skilled reader were so rapid and automatic they did not need to rely on contextual information" (Stanovich, 1993, p. 282). Although these findings were replicated over many years and across different paradigms it has been difficult to infiltrate the education space.

In a quantitative study, Stahl and Miller (1989) compared studies of whole language/language experience approaches and basal programs being used at the time. They found that when looking specifically at the end of first grade, phonics and linguistic approaches "produced strikingly larger effects than language experience programs" (Stahl & Miller, 1989, p. 108). They found that the effect size of whole language programs on word recognition was a mere d = 0.17 and reading comprehension was d = 0.09. They went on to conclude that although some whole language practices may be useful in the pre reading phase, students move through the early phases and the usefulness decreases. Students need to be able to decode words fluently and independently and appear to be better served by direct and systematic instruction (Stahl & Miller, 1989). This study prompted some backlash that Moats (2020) attributed to reading researchers' unwillingness to accept the objective measure indicating their approach is not effective. Moats (2000) went further to say that whole language researchers "criticized traditional achievement tests as unauthentic and replaced them

with measures of motivation, enjoyment, or self-esteem" (p. 19). Hattie (2008) conducted a synthesis of 800 meta-analyses of different influences of achievement in schools. Hattie (2008) found that whole language had an overall effect size of d =.06 indicating that the whole word method is not valuable to the process of learning to read.

Yoncheva et al., (2010) conducted a study to test the efficacy of whole language vs a code focused approach with a new artificial alphabet. The artificial alphabet consisted of interconnected "letters" that at first sight looked like a picture of patterned lines. One experimental group was told to approach the images as one would in whole language and were told to memorize them as whole words. The second group was taught the code (Yoncheva et al., 2010). They would be taught that each particular squiggly line represented a letter. Initially the whole language group learned the words faster allowing those participants to read faster. The analytic group was still painstakingly learning each letter to read the words. Once the groups began to learn an additional set of 30 words the whole language group began to break down. They were able to eventually learn the second set of words, they did however, lose the words on the initial list. They could not retain the words as they learned new words. This was the pattern the whole language group maintained throughout the study. The analytic group meanwhile started out slow but once they figured out the code of the letter-to-sound correspondences they were able to retain the words. This study highlighted two problems in the whole-language approach. One, the mere knowledge of these words does not inherently transfer to the understanding of any patterns of letters in the words. Two, readers need to have access to the patterns of letters in words to reach the point of "self-teaching" which is needed for independent reading (Dehaene, 2009).

In 1987, California adopted whole language statewide with many states following their lead. A mere 6 years later in 1993, California's fourth graders were fifth from the bottom and in another three years they would find themselves at the bottom of the pack with 77% of fourth graders ranked below grade level.

In all their theorizing and assertions F. Smith's (1973) and Goodman's (1976) ideas on reading were not researched. They were not backed by science. They were personal arguments on what they believed to be true and just expected to be known for their expert view (Seidenberg, 2017). They pushed policy and instructional change that would fit into their ideas of how reading occurs. Goodman's (1990) focus on teacher empowerment led to the adoption of whole language by practitioners (Seidenberg, 2017). Seidenberg (2017) asserts that Goodman's (1967) "psycholinguistic guessing game was a good theory- of poor reading" (p. 270).

Three Cueing

Shanahan (2019) was asked on this blog *Shanahan on Literacy* why he never writes about the cueing systems he answered that he doesn't write about them because he is not a fiction writer. In his blog Shanahan (2019) goes on to assert that the idea of using miscues or errors to teach word reading is evidence free and the theory itself is "based upon some pretty weak- and certainly evidence-free- suppositions." (p. 2) Cueing systems have never been supported by research.

Goodman (1976) and separately Clay (1991) theorized those good readers gain meaning from texts by using three sources of information. They both believed that readers integrate these three cueing mechanisms (semantic, syntactic and graphophonic) as they interact with text (Hempenstall, 2003). The reader would employ each of these

cueing mechanisms as needed within a text. The idea was that people do not attend to every single letter in every word, instead they sample from the word and use semantic and syntactic knowledge to gain meaning from the text.

Semantic

It is theorized by advocates of three cueing systems that readers use semantic cues, or meaning, to decode words and even predict what word may come next in the text (Hempenstall, 2003). For three cueing advocates the semantic or meaning cue is the most important, because that is what reading is after all, making sense of the text. Teachers would guide their students in asking "does this make sense?" as they are reading in the hopes that readers would ask themselves this question as they are independently reading. In fact, proficient readers do not use meaning to determine what a word is as they read. Word reading happens too quickly for content to be a factor in identifying unknown words (Stanovich et al., 1985). Neuroimaging studies have added to this research establishing that when a word is read the areas of the brain that are responsible for orthography and phonology activate sooner than areas of the brain responsible for meaning (Forster, 2012; Kilpatrick, 2015; Maurer & McCandliss, 2008; Perfetti, 2011). Good readers can identify the word before the ability to use meaning would be effective. Using meaning as a mechanism to decode words is not how the brain reads words. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that the central tenet of three cueing and the backbone of many reading approaches is not backed by research and is incorrect (Kilpatrick, 2015).

Syntactic

In three cueing, readers use syntactic cues when they monitor the grammatical structures of the sentence or text. The grammatical rules would help the reader understand the unknown word by considering the word order, endings, or tense (Hempenstall, 2003). Researchers have found that a reader's syntactic knowledge has nothing to do with reading words and do not distinguish between good word readers and poor word readers (Shankweiler et al., 1995; Vellutino et al., 1996).

Graphophonic

The third cue is the graphophonic cue. Readers use the letter sound correspondences, often only looking at the first letter to help them figure out the word. In 3 cueing models, such as whole language, balanced literacy and Reading Recovery the graphophonic cue is seen as a last resort (Hempenstall, 2003), with students actively discouraged from sounding out the word. F. Smith (1997) went on to say "the first alternative and preference is- to skip over the puzzling word. The second alternative is to guess what the unknown word might be. And the final and least preferred alternative is to sound the word out. Phonics, in other words, comes last" (p. 153).

Clay (1991) developed running records to analyze a student's miscue or errors while reading. As students are making errors teachers would then mark whether the error was due to meaning (M), syntax (S), or visual information (V). Teachers who use reading recovery, balanced literacy, or other meaning-based approach would recognize this as MSV. Running records are widely used in balanced literacy, reading recovery, and other popular reading approaches despite the lack of evidence that it means anything productive in reading instruction or identifying reading difficulties.

As a result of the focus on the three cues, students are encouraged to guess and/or the result is guessing. Students guess from semantics asking themselves; Does this make sense? Students would guess from syntax; Does this sound right? And finally, the last resort, look at the first letter asking themselves could it be this word? Guessing the unknown word is much less efficient than sounding the unknown word out. F. Smith (1973) went as far as saying "Reading without guessing is not reading at all." It has been well studied that skilled readers can identify unknown words with a high degree of accuracy by sounding them out (Frost, 1998; Kilpatrick, 2015; Share, 1998). Researchers also found that proficient readers were not skilled at using context to guess unknown words, at only 25% accuracy (Hempenstall, 2002; Tunmer et al., 1998). "No amount of guessing will close the gap between poor readers and their typically developing peers, despite the strong and persuasive claims used to promote the three-cueing approach" (Kilpatrick, 2015, p. 41).

Extensive research and evidence over the past 50 years have indicated that the strategies and behaviors that three cueing promotes are inconsistent with how students learn to read (Ehri, 1998; Hempenstall, 2002; Stanovich, 1993). Not only are they inconsistent but they are counter to what students, especially at-risk readers, need to become good readers (Tunmer & Chapman, 2002). The three cueing model reinforces the behaviors that naturally occur in poor readers (Kilpatrick, 2015).

This practice is used by an overwhelming majority of K-2 teachers. A 2019 research survey put out by Ed Week found that 75 percent of elementary and special education teachers use this method and 65 percent of the professors in college prep programs (Schwartz, 2022). The idea that students figure out unknown words this way is

extremely pervasive and the dominant ideology amongst elementary educators in the United States despite the overwhelming research to the contrary.

Balanced Literacy

Whole language was officially abandoned but the philosophy was not and was absorbed into "balanced literacy" in an "unhealthy compromise" promising to include a balanced approach of the five pillars laid out in the report (Dehaene, 2009). These pillars are phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Moats (2007) asserts that "rather than fight the five components, trendy reading gurus have placed them under the banner of 'balanced instruction' while continuing to promote the failed whole-language practices of yore" (p. 13). This allowed the education establishment, who were pedagogically aligned with whole language, to diffuse the controversy while remaining unclear as to how practices would change (Seidenberg, 2017). This sounded ideal and districts and teachers jumped on this idea of balanced and constructivism. It gave teachers room for spontaneity and creativity. Reading researcher Seidenberg (2017) said that "balanced literacy" is a Treaty of Versailles solution that allowed educators to declare the increasingly troublesome "wars" over without having seriously addressed the underlying cause of the strife" (p. 10).

There was some difficulty defining balanced literacy. Shanahan (as cited in Luscombe, 2022), a member of the NRP and early-literacy expert, explained that what resulted was that "balanced literacy came to mean whatever anybody wanted it to mean" (p.1). Balanced literacy was as obscure as whole language, in its ambiguity. There was virtually no guidance for teachers regarding any of the five pillars that they were balancing (Seidenberg, 2017). Teachers, schools, districts, and states jumped on this train

with an idealized theory on how kids learn to read and was based on untested theories and assumptions (Lyon et al., 2005). Whole language proponents "argued that children learned to read naturally, largely through "literacy experiences" and exposure to authentic text" (Moats, 2007, p. 10).

Although balanced literacy programs said they were research based, they would simultaneously balk at them, throwing out cliched criticisms that whole language advocates leveled (Moats, 2007). Phrases like "skill and kill," "scripted programs," and "one size fits all" were said to undermine reading research and the instructional practices that align with them.

The fact is, many students, 60 percent, will learn to read, at least modestly, regardless of and despite, the type of instruction that they receive or who instructs them (Olson, 2004). The other 40 percent need highly systematic and explicit instruction to become modest or proficient readers which they will likely not get in a balanced literacy classroom.

Balanced literacy uses the three-cueing system which has been overwhelmingly ineffective and actively works against the reader as she is trying to read new words. Kilpatrick (2016) states that the whole language/ balanced instruction approach "puts insufficient emphasis on phonological awareness and word study, virtually guaranteeing poor reading among about one-third of our students" (p. 42). Ed Week Research Center (2020) surveyed a random sample of 700 elementary and special education teachers what reading approach they use in their classrooms and balanced literacy was far and away the most used approach.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is an intensive one-to-one intervention program created by New Zealand educator Clay (1991) in the mid-70's. Clay (1991) developed this program with theories of how students learn to read that mirrored Goodman's (1967) whole language ideas. Reading Recovery is essentially a more intensive version of the whole language instruction that was happening in schools in New Zealand at the time (Tunmer & Chapman, 2010). The ideas were based on observational research of what they thought students were doing or thinking as they had miscues during oral reading. Clay (1991) and Goodman (1967) both believed that attention to graphemes should be the last resort as students encounter an unknown word. Clay (2001) wrote, "In efficient word perception the reader relies mostly on the sentence and its meaning and some selected features of the forms of words" (p. 8). Clay (1991) believed that in fluent word reading, a reader relies on the sentence and its meaning, and some features of word forms to read rapidly (Tunmer & Chapman, 2010).

In 1984, Ohio State University brought Reading Recovery to the United States and by the late 1980's they began to branch out to other states around the country. According to the Reading Recovery website 145,000 first grade students had received the Reading Recovery intervention and at the end of the second decade over a million students had received the intervention. Shanahan (1995) reviewed the program in the late 1980's and determined that the research studies used to justify its efficacy were misleading. By the mid-90's, as RR was sweeping the nation, Shanahan and Barr (1995) reviewed the program once again. They again determined that the research that was used

in the RR literature was “seriously biased”, and the study design flaws “systematically made reading recovery appear more effective than it was” (Shanahan, 2022, p. 1).

Reading Recovery is aimed for the first graders performing below 20 percent of the students at their school (Tunmer et al., 2013). The idea of reading recovery is to give these students targeted work on “flexible use of multiple cues to detect and correct errors while constructing meaning from text” (Tunmer et al., 2013, p. 338). This one on one 30–40-minute lesson is conducted by a specially trained reading recovery teacher. During a typical Reading Recovery lesson students would read a known book and the teacher would take a running record analyzing the miscues that students make. They would then move on to some sort of letter identifying activity (if necessary). This would not be systemic in nature and would typically be words embedded in the students’ leveled readers. Then they read a new book in which the teacher would conduct another running record and take notes on the student’s miscue (Snow et al., 1998). Tunmer et al. (2013) wrote that children that are engaged in Reading Recovery are “urged to use context as their primary strategy for identifying words in text” (p. 342).

There is some data to suggest that Reading Recovery does work for some students. The individualized attention of a one-on-one setting may be a factor. Those students who were successful were typically more advanced in their phonological processing skills (Tunmer et al., 2013). Reading Recovery celebrates their success rate indicating that this program works exceptionally well. Snow et al. (1998) reported that although they do show growth on the measure that Clay (1991) herself designed for this program, there is no indication that this growth would transfer to other reading measures.

Also, there have been study design questions regarding the exclusion of students who did not successfully finish the program, skewing the data (Snow et al., 1998).

Chapman et al. (2001) conducted a longitudinal study of beginning literacy development. They found that students who were selected by their schools to participate in Reading Recovery experienced severe difficulties in phonological awareness skills and the alphabetic code before they began the intervention. After one year in the program many still showed the same difficulties in these skills. The student who did succeed in Reading Recovery still showed difficulties a year after exiting the program as successful, calling into question the long-term effects of those students who appear successful initially (Chapman et al., 2001).

In 2010 Reading Recovery received a 55-million-dollar grant from the Department of Education. The Investing in Innovation (i3) grant was 5 years long and the purpose was to increase the number of schools using Reading Recovery (Hay et al., 2022). In 2016, the Research in Education and Social Policy (CRESP) in collaboration with the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania conducted a large multisite Randomized Control Trial to look at the short-term gains of students in the Reading Recovery intervention (May et al., 2016). They found when looking at short term skill growth students did well with a .68 effect size.

In a follow up study on the long term effects of Reading Recovery, May et al. (2022) found that students who participated in Reading Recovery on average did poorer on a state reading test in 3rd and 4th grade then the control group participants who did not participate in Reading Recovery (at the time, May was director of the Center for Research in Education and Social Policy at the University of Delaware). This study

looked at 9000 students across 700 schools and included less than 25 percent of the original sample. May et al., (2022) presented this yet to be published paper to the Annual Conference of the Society for Research in Educational Effectiveness (SREE), in Washington, DC on September 23, 2022.

Examining Skilled Word Reading

Skilled readers can decode and read words on sight. The research and understanding of developmental word reading has been well studied and has evolved over the past 40 years. Researchers have looked at the understanding of the process in the brain and the needed components to fluency word reading.

Gough (1980) was one of the first researchers to propose a stage model in in word reading (Ehri, 2004). In his article published in the Bulletin of the Orton Society entitled, learning to read: an unnatural act, Gough and Hillinger (1980) discuss the process a child goes through to learn to read. Their research of early reading abilities of six-year-olds lead them to determine that although some have claimed it to be true, learning to read is not natural and can be difficult for children (Gough & Hillinger, 1980). They proposed that there were two stages in word reading: cue reading and cipher reading. The first stage identified was the Paired-associate stage or referred to as cue reading. They posited that the child forms associations between aspects of printed words and the name of the word. These connections are made as young children learn to connect printed words in their world to what they already know the word says. This can be linked to environmental print (Neumann et al., 2012). Young kids can “read” the word Target before they understand that the word has five phonemes and corresponding graphemes. They can associate that spoken name Target with the letters they see on a sign. This stage of word

reading cannot be sustained as this strategy "will eventually break down amid error and confusion" (Gough & Hillinger, 1980, p. 193). Students then move to the second stage which is Cryptanalysis or cipher reading. Once a child can no longer sustain the paired-association stage of reading they then understand then there is a cipher or code that they must learn to continue to read. The child must crack the code to read all of the thousands and thousands of words that they may encounter once they enter college (Gough & Hillinger, 1980).

Mason (1980) separated Gough's cue reading stage into two separate stages and proposed that there are three separate stages to word reading. Her first stage is contextual dependency in which she posited that young readers use the same process as they use to look at pictures (Ehri, 2004). They would treat the "Target" sign the same way that they would treat the picture of a dog. The child would then move into the visual recognition stage. In this stage the child understands that they must use letters to read words however she is not able to decode the word. She would see the Target sign and notice the T and understand that it has meaning. Once she moves into the letter-sound analysis phase she is fully able to decode using letter-sound correspondences. (Ehri, 2004).

Chall (1983) identified five stages of reading development starting from birth to adulthood. The initial stage includes small children in letter and book exposure. This stage continues until they move toward the contextual guessing. In stage 1 children need to be "glued to print" and work to process letters and sounds (Ehri, 2004).

Frith (1985) determined that there was a transition between the visual stage and the alphabetic stage (Ehri, 2004) She proposed a three-phase theory on different word reading strategies. The first phase is the logographic phase in which children recognize

words by district visual features and contextual features (Ehri, 2004). In the second phase, alphabetic, children learn and use letter sound correspondences to read words. The final phase is the orthographic phase, children learn larger spelling patterns and can use units, such as morphemic, to read words.

Stuart and Coltheart (1988) conceptualized word reading slightly differently abandoning the visual or contextual phases of the other scholars. They believed that children do not use these cues to read even in the earliest phases. Instead, they separated word reading in two phases: partial orthographic and complete orthographic (Ehri, 2004). In the early phase children acquire phonemic segmentation and knowledge of the letter-sound connection to begin to read (Stuart & Coltheart, 1988). In the later phase children begin to use their understanding of vowel patterns to form complete representations of words to memory (Ehri, 2004).

Ehri's Phases of Word Reading

Ehri (1998, 1999) developed a four-phase view of word reading in agreement with much of the researchers previously highlighted. Ehri's four phases are still widely accepted in current research and practice. Each of these 4 phases by the "prominent type of connection that written words to their other identities in memory" (Ehri, 2004, p. 140). The phases are pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic.

In the pre-alphabetic phase children use visual and contextual cues to read words. Gough et al. (1992) conducted a study in which preschoolers would be taught four words, with one of the words being taught along with an image (thumbprint). The preschoolers were able to pronounce the word. When the researchers moved the image to a different

word, the children would pronounce the thumbprint word and not the actual word. Gough et al. (1992) found that children's earliest phase of word reading consisted of visual form and cues. Young children can pronounce words as they see the word in conjunction with a specific font or color. Most American preschoolers know what the McDonalds sign says the moment they see the golden arches (Mason, 1980). Students in the pre-alphabetic can often recognize their own names and at times even name or their classmates even if they are unable to name the letters in their name. They often rely on the visual of the first letter, recognizing that it is the first letter in their name (Ehri, 2004). Children in this phase use visual cues because they do not have the letter-sound knowledge that is needed to begin reading words (Ehri, 2004).

Children move from the pre-alphabetic phase to the partial alphabetic phase as they begin to learn letters and sounds and attempt to use them in their writing. Ehri (2004) asserts that children in this phase use the letter knowledge and their ability to segment and blend phonemes (phonemic awareness) to partially read the words. For example, they may only use the initial, or initial and final letters to read the word. They see the connections to letter sounds and the positions of those sounds in the words. They can partially identify the word they are reading. Due to their limited ability to read the words children in this phase often do use context to help them read the unknown word. They may often substitute the word based on the initial letter. Ehri and Wilce (1985) argue that there is a form of word reading before a child can decode the word. They use phonetic cue reading to identify the word they may work based on their limited understanding of the alphabet. As children acquire more letter name knowledge, they begin to connect more sounds as they are reading words. The transition from the partial

alphabetic phase and the full alphabet phase is dependent upon their acquisition of letter names/sounds and their proficiency with phonemic skills (Ehri, 2004). As children move through the phases their reliance on visual cues goes down and their reliance on phonology goes (Ehri, 2005).

In the full alphabetic phase students can connect all the graphemes to all the phonemes to remember how to read words (Ehri, 2004). Students in this phase can use their understanding of phonemes and graphemes to read more words and commit them to memory. "Parents were unable to estimate their children's sight word vocabularies because the growth was so rapid" (Ehri, 2004, p. 148).

Consolidated alphabetic is the last of the word reading phases. According to Ehri (1998, 1999), students move from full alphabetic to consolidated phase when letter strings are being consolidated in a larger form or graphosyllabic (Ehri, 2004). Students can understand affixes, suffixes, prefixes and read and write multisyllabic words.

"Sight Words" Orthographic Mapping

Orthographic mapping is a mental process of how readers store printed words in long-term memory. This process allows readers to store words for immediate and effortless retrieval. Orthographic mapping improves over time as students move through the phases of word reading. This process explains how readers build a sight word vocabulary, spell words from memory, and to acquire vocabulary words (Ehri, 2014). Kilpatrick (2015) asserts that for orthographic mapping to occur three things must present: advanced phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, and phonological long-term memory (Kilpatrick, 2015). "Efficient orthographic mapping will only occur if the student has adequate phonemic awareness/analysis" (Kilpatrick, 2015, p. 100).

Ehri (2014) refers to words available on sight as sight words. This tends to conjure a different meaning for classroom teachers who have historically used the term "sight word" for irregular words that they felt needed to be memorized. In many primary classrooms teachers ask students to memorize stacks of words, arranging them on a word wall in their classrooms (Castles et al., 2018). The term "sight word" according to reading scientists refers to any word that has been orthographically mapped and can be retrieved by "sight." The connections that occur are like glue that attach spellings to their memory along with the pronunciations (Ehri, 2014). "Readers must form connections between the spelling and the pronunciations of specific words by applying knowledge of general writing systems" (Ehri, 2014, p. 6). As students are building their sight word repertoire, they can spend more time attending to the meaning of the text that is being read. They have less and less need to decode words as the words are orthographically mapped and are available by sight. Share (1999) proposed the self-teaching hypothesis which says that once students establish an understanding of the grapheme-phoneme relationships, and the phoneme skills of blending and segmenting phonemes readers begin to apply that knowledge to new and novel words. Share (1999) conducted an experiment in which he asked 8-year-old students to read passages which contained novel words. After several exposures to the word over several days, student was able to recall the spelling of the novel words in the passage (Share, 1999).

Phonological Awareness: A Requisite for Sight Word Reading

The NRP (2000) indicated that acquiring phonemic awareness is a means rather than an end, highlighting the value that it has on helping children understand and use the alphabetic system. They also indicated that many reading difficulties have been caused

by inadequate phonological awareness skills and/or the lack of systematic instruction in phonological awareness (NRP, 2000). Many scholars have studied the importance of phonological awareness to early word reading, establishing the understanding that word reading is highly influenced by phonological awareness skills. Stanovich (1993) states that "they are the best predictors of the ease of early reading acquisition-better than anything we know of, including IQ" (p. 284).

Phonological Awareness is the conscious awareness of the sounds in words from larger to smaller speech units and includes skills to manipulate those speech units. Phonological awareness is a key component to reading development particularly in the primary grade levels (k-2). In Kilpatrick's (2015) book Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties, he states that "every point in a child's development of word-level reading is affected by phonological awareness skills" (p. 65). The development of the skills acquisition moves through the larger units of speech (rhyme and syllable) to the smallest units of speech (phonemes). Within some of the phonological skills there lies smaller developmental spectrums that need to be considered as teachers are teaching. Students need to be able to recognize if two words rhyme, which is a receptive skill, before they can move to producing a rhyme which is an expressive skill. The understanding and mastering of these skills allow readers to attach letters and then phonics skills to read and make words. "Letters are the anchors to which articulatory gestures and approximations of phonemes to be attached" (Juel, 1988, p. 419).

Phonological awareness, as stated above, is the conscious awareness of sounds in words from large too small. Nestled under the umbrella of phonological awareness is the most difficult, yet most important level, phoneme awareness. A phoneme refers to the

smallest unit sound in spoken word (Kilpatrick, 2015). Within the phoneme level, students must be able to blend phonemes, (/b/ /e/ /d/) isolate phonemes (What is the first sound in bed /e/, segment phonemes (tell me the sounds in bed /b/ /e/ /d/, and manipulate phonemes within words (change the first sound in bed to /h/. This is where the real magic happens as "storing words in permanent memory requires phoneme-level skills" (Kilpatrick, 2021, p. 27). Of course, it is important for students to master syllable-level and onset-rime level as they serve as the foundation to phoneme level skills that students must master to become good readers. Ehri et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis stemming from the initial NRP that looked at 53 experimental studies on how phonemic awareness affects reading. The findings were overwhelmingly positive with an overall effect size of d .86 which indicates a large impact on reading that can be translated to a student going from the 50 percentiles to the 79 percentiles around reading.

Brady et al. (2009) looked at first grade teachers' knowledge level in phonological awareness and code concepts before and after an extensive form of professional development. They gave 57 first grade teachers a knowledge survey and an attitude survey to better understand the connection of teachers' knowledge level on foundational reading concepts and self-efficacy, instructional approach, and outlook on professional development. They found that teacher knowledge on foundational reading skills increased from 48 percent (pre) to 70 percent (post) questions correct on Pa, and 38 percent (pre) to 80 percent (post) code concepts. Furthermore, this study examined teachers' self-efficacy relating to teacher knowledge and attitudes of professional development. The teachers who had a higher level of self-efficacy on the attitude survey had a higher level of motivation to participate in PD and engage in activities related to the

PD (Brady et al., 2009). Lastly, this study found that teachers who learned more and who post PD had a better understanding of foundational reading concepts had more confidence in their own teaching abilities to teach students how to read.

Students who have developed good phoneme awareness are better positioned to understand and make sense of the alphabetic system. They will acquire the sound correspondences needed for independent reading much more readily. Stanovich (1986, 1993) found that students who struggle with early phonological skills will progressively spiral with slow reading development. Further, Ceci (1991) found that slow reading development can then develop into widespread language and cognitive delays. "If a student is not attuned to the sounds within oral words, there is no efficient way for printed words to become familiar letter strings" (Kilpatrick, 2016, p. 37).

The importance of phonological awareness has been well established despite many primary educators being unaware or miseducated of its foundational impact. Torgesen (1998) asserts that the discovery that early word reading difficulties are connected to phonological weaknesses is the most important of the past twenty years. He asserted this more than twenty years ago and there are many educators who still do not understand its importance.

There has been some debate among reading scientists focusing on whether phonemic awareness instruction should be done "in the dark" or if educators should add letters as soon as possible (Clemens et al., 2021). This paper asserts that there is not much research to substantiate the need for "advanced phonemic proficiency" that they believe some researchers call for. As I write this paper has not been tested or peer-reviewed and

there is pushback from other researchers as well. These lines of questions and research are valid and should continue to be waged in the reading science space.

Teacher Knowledge

Teachers have done training and professional development expected of them, many acquiring advanced degrees in their pursuit of continued education. Despite this, and the long line of research and consensus of skilled word reading, many teachers remain in the dark. Moats's (1994) seminal work found that many teachers do not have adequate content knowledge in the language system to support students in word reading. These findings have been corroborated many times over (Bos et al., 2001; Goldfeld et al., 2021; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Porter et al., 2022). Further, the National Research Council (1998) stated that the best weapon against reading failure, in the primary grades, is quality classroom instruction (Snow et al., 1998). Studies have shown that when teachers are provided specific language structure knowledge their student scores increase. McCutchen et al. (2002) conducted a survey in which they provided a two-week instructional course for their experimental group of kindergarten and first grade teachers. They found that the students taught by the teachers in that experimental group had increased reading scores compared to the students who were taught by teachers who did not receive the instructional course. Teacher knowledge matters in student achievement.

Although most teachers do not have the liberty to make decisions on programs that are brought into their schools. Having the foundational knowledge gives them a stop gap of sorts. They are better prepared to stand up against programs that follow unproven philosophies (Moats, 2020).

Preservice Teachers

With much of the research on how reading is acquired and the instructional practices that undergird that research, being considered settled science (Castles et al., 2018), it is surprising then, that preservice teachers do not learn it (Moats, 2020). Much of the content taught in teacher preparation programs does not align with what is consistent with reading research. In fact, what is taught in these programs contradicts the research outright (Moats, 2020). Bos et al. (2001) aimed to examine the knowledge level of both pre-service and in-service teachers. They administered two questionnaires to measure both their perceptions of early reading and their linguistic knowledge. They found that fifty three percent of preservice teachers and sixty percent of in-service teachers could not accurately answer half of the questions correctly (Bos et al., 2001).

The act of reading is a complex cognitive process that engages many processes (Castles et al., 2018; McCutchen et al., 2002). Learning to teach reading requires an understanding of the language system that it represents (Castles et al., 2018; Moats, 2020). It is not realistic to believe that preservice teachers would be able to acquire the necessary content expertise with a mere class or two in college (Moats, 2020). A 2006 report by the National Council on Teacher Quality found that the content that is being presented in schools of education was not arming them with the knowledge required to teach literacy skills (Walsh et al., 2006). Colleges of education are graduating teachers who are not prepared to teach children how to read. There is a gap in what researchers know and what is being taught.

Teacher Educators

Educators in teacher preparation programs should be the most knowledgeable in reading concepts. After all, they are teaching future teachers the most important subject matter. This is however not the reality of teacher preparation programs across the county. Joshi, Binks, Hougen, et al. (2009) conducted two studies; one which looked at teacher educators' knowledge of reading skills and the other looked at the reading methodologies with which those educators most closely aligned. The first study concluded that participants were able to answer questions regarding phonics correctly only half of the time. Further, they concluded that they were not aware of linguistic constructs necessary to teach literacy skills (Joshi, Binks, Hougen, et al. 2009). They also found that twenty percent of the participants could not correctly define phoneme awareness, which further corroborated previous studies (Moats, 2000; Spear-Swerling & Brucker, 2004). In their second study Joshi, Binks, Hougen, et al. (2009) asked participants about their ideas and philosophy in teaching reading. Seventy-four percent responded that balanced literacy fit their philosophy, followed by twenty percent choosing the whole language approach, and fifteen percent reasoning with the language experience. These approaches are outlined earlier in this chapter along with the problematic aspect of them. They are not adequately preparing their preservice teachers because they themselves are not prepared to teach reading. Preservice teachers are often depended solely on their professor's knowledge, beliefs, and philosophies (Moats, 2020) of the content which has been outlined above and not congruent with what research has settled.

In a study titled "The Peter Effect," Binks-Cantrell et al. (2012) highlighted that preservice teachers who were taught by educators who had attended professional

development on language constructs did better on a survey. Conversely those preservice teachers trained by educators who did not receive instruction did not have that knowledge. Teacher educators cannot give to their students what they do not possess themselves, “The Peter Effect” (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012). The origination of the “The Peter effect” came in 2004 from researchers Applegate and Applegate (2004) referring to the Bible story in which Peter could not give money to a beggar because he did not have any money.

Inservice Teachers

Once teachers attain a job and a classroom full of students, they are largely left to their own devices. Some teachers will get a program to follow, some will get coaching and collaborative meetings, and some will get neither. Teachers often feel unprepared to teach their students how to read, especially those that require interventions to be successful (Moats, 2009). As mentioned above, teaching reading is a complex cognitive process (Castles et al., 2018; McCutchen et al., 2002) or “rocket science” as coined by Moats (1999, 2020).

Many teachers have not received the instruction that they need to teach students how to read in their teacher preparation programs or in in-service professional development opportunities (Moats, 2020).

The study by Bos et al. (2001) found that two thirds of the in-service teachers wrongly believed that phonological awareness was a teacher method and not the essential building block to skilled work reading. They also found that in-service teachers overestimated their knowledge of the essential skills needed to teach students word reading (Bos et al., 2001); this was later corroborated in subsequent studies (Cunningham

et al., 2004). They are not fully calibrated to what they know and therefore are not aware of what they do not know. Moreover, Brady et al. (2009) found that it was the more experienced teachers that were more skeptical of professional development and more inclined to reject the information presented. This highlights a very precarious situation. Teacher knowledge of early reading is not adequate; however, they are not aware of those deficits and are resistant to change. Interestingly, teachers who have higher levels of linguistic knowledge tend to underestimate their knowledge (Cunningham et al., 2004; Moats, 2009). This highlights the Dunning-Kruger effect, in which educators do not know what they do not know. Teachers live in a bubble that has been created for them from preservice and beyond, and where much of the education system surrounding them have contributed too. However, once teachers begin to know better, they can ask more questions and understand what they still need to learn.

Teacher Knowledge and Professional Development

Teachers engage in a myriad of professional development each year from workshops, coaching, to professional learning meetings. The National Education Association communicates on their website that teaching, along with medicine, and aviation, along with a few other professions requires continued growth to stay abreast of new research and instructional approaches. Much of the professional development that teachers regularly engage in are professional learning meetings in which peer teams come together to discuss students and practices (Zuo et al., 2023).

As indicated in the sections above, many in-service teachers are not armed with the teacher knowledge necessary to address the reading needs in their classroom. Moats (2020) suggests that current professional development is not rigorous enough and does

not align with research. Teachers are not getting what they need, and as a result students are not getting what they need. They are spending a lot of time in professional development situations and still not getting the knowledge that they need to address student needs.

Podhajski et al. (2009) conducted a study in which they provided an experimental group of first and second grade teachers professional development in English language structure and early reading skills. They found that the students who were taught by the teachers who received the professional development did better on the assessments used. This draws a line from teacher knowledge to increased student achievement. They state, "An implication from our finding is that effective professional development which informs teacher knowledge, can have a positive effect on children's reading performance" (Podhajski et al., 2009, p. 12).

Teacher Knowledge and Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy can influence what a teacher does and what a teacher neglects. As explained earlier in this chapter self-efficacy, is nuanced and can fluctuate depending on the task or circumstance.

Sharp et al. (2016) looked at the relationship between teacher knowledge and self-efficacy. Sharp et al. gave 70 preservice teachers a survey that included attitude questions as well as content knowledge questions. The survey was given three times during their participation in their reading methods class. They found that preservice teachers' self-efficacy increased with their ability to teach reading (Sharp et al., 2016). They did acknowledge that the participants self-efficacy started out high and continued to rise throughout the study.

It can be tricky to consider teacher knowledge and self-efficacy as established earlier in this chapter. Teachers are not aware of what they do not know (Cunningham et al., 2004; Moats, 2009) referred to as the Dunning Kruger Effect, thus it is possible for teachers to lack adequate knowledge of early reading skills and also have high levels of self-efficacy. This is certainly an area worth researching further.

Parrila et al. (2023) conducted a study in which they looked at the connection between teachers' knowledge level and their perceived ability in their literacy practices and student outcomes. Teachers in this study attended three sessions of professional learning focusing on early reading skills: phonological awareness, phonics, phases of word reading, orthographic mapping, and morphology. They concluded that teacher knowledge was associated with high quality instruction and differentiated instruction. They found that teachers did report that their perceived ability increased each time they underwent a professional development session. Researchers were careful to note that teachers' perceived ability scores did not always correlate with observational data of quality instruction (Parrila et al., 2023). They also concluded that teachers having knowledge in early reading skills does not guarantee that they will use that knowledge which corroborated early research by Arrow et al. (2019).

Chapter Summary

The body of research of reading acquisition is substantial with many components of reading established decades ago, beginning with researcher Chall (1967), who in her research established that children learn better when they are taught with a code focus. Study after study, this study was substantiated and built upon. F. Smith (1973) and Goodman (1967) entered the reading scene in the late 1960's with new and exciting

theories of how kids learn to read. Their theories were tested by other scientists and found to be not only ineffective in teaching students to read, but also worked against students as they tried to read (Stanovich, 1993). It would impede the orthographic mapping of words (Kilpatrick, 2015).

Reading scientists continued to design studies and research to gain more understanding of reading. Over the course of two decades different governmental agencies funded research and committees to study reading and how to implement those practices in classrooms. Meanwhile reading gurus were establishing themselves as experts in reading, dispersing unstudied, or misleading, claims about reading acquisition. They didn't bother with the research or at least not their own research. Goodman, in an interview with Hanford (mentioned in chapter 1) exclaimed "my science is different" when she questioned him about the mountains of research that is counter to his approach (p. 1). This kind of response has led to the mudding of the waters that gives time to all theories or approaches despite the evidence otherwise. Cognitive scientist Seidenberg (2018) stated that "the reading wars are over, and science lost" in an interview with NPR journalist Claudio Sanchez (p. 2). There is reason to believe that this is not the end of the story. Many states over the past five years have changed their laws to reflect the science of reading. There are also efforts at the teacher preparation level to remedy this situation.

Meanwhile, teachers are, as usual, the people on the frontlines trying to make heads or tails of all the information. It has been well established that teacher self-efficacy impacts teachers. Whether in their instructional methods or classroom management self-efficacious teachers are more likely to be persistent in addressing challenges they may face. This study aims to examine how transformational change in reading instruction

impacts teacher self-efficacy. This data will add to the literature in the areas of primary reading research, teacher self-efficacy, and transformation learning.

Approaches such as whole language, balanced literacy, and Reading Recovery, all highlighted in this literature review, do not adequately include the necessary components for word reading instruction. When students show a deficiency, they are often labeled learning disabled, when really, they have not been given the instruction that we know leads to reading for the greatest number of students.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

Teachers across the country are in transition from balanced literacy to research-based reading instruction. This transition is substantial and requires teachers to change their paradigm of how reading is acquired and the instructional practices that undergird that change. I, as the researcher, examined teachers' experiences through this transition giving me insight into participant perspectives. I utilized social cognitive theory alongside transformative learning theory to create a unique framework to approach this study. This lens provided me a framework to gain teachers perspectives through change in reading instruction.

Methods and Procedures

Teaching is a challenging and complex endeavor. The challenges keep coming and compounding adding to teachers stress level and retention of teachers in school. Despite these challenges, correcting the deep misunderstanding of reading instruction should be at the top of the list. It is the job of educators, especially primary educators, to make sure students can read. As was highlighted in chapter one, the consequences of not meeting this challenge are unacceptable. The question becomes, how can we meet the challenge of shifting teachers' understanding of reading, and as a result, instruction, in a sustained way that supports teacher growth and self-efficacy. The literature review provides a deep look at self-efficacy, a timeline of reading research, how reading instruction has veered award from good research, and finally how word reading develops. The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to determine teachers' understanding of phonological awareness and word reading through

the lens of transformative learning theory and examine how it may affect their self-efficacy.

Research Questions

How do first grade teachers perceive their self-efficacy as they are going through the transition from balanced literacy to research-based word reading?

1. What is the relationship, if any, to a teacher's self-efficacy and their switch from balanced literacy to research-based practices in the classroom?
2. What is the relationship, if any, of classroom teachers' phonological awareness knowledge and their self-efficacy?
3. What is the relationship, if any of classroom teachers' word reading knowledge and their self-efficacy?

Research Design and Data Analysis

Research Paradigm

A qualitative design was used to explore and investigate the lived experiences of first grade teachers. Qualitative researchers are generally using an emic perspective (insider perspective) as they are immersed directly in the study (Terrell, 2022). Although there are typically interview guidelines and other research specific tools, the qualitative researcher "can be viewed as their own data collection tool" (Terrell, 2022, p. 147). Through interviews and observations qualitative researchers can dig down to the substantive details of the participants perceptions and experiences. "Qualitative research is uniquely positioned to provide researchers with process-based, narrated, storied, data that is more closely related to the human experience" (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 1).

This study is situated in a constructivism-interpretivism research paradigm. The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm assumes that multiple and equally valid realities exist (Schwandt, 1994). This approach asserts that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual and should be brought to the surface with deep reflection (Ponterotto, 2005). Deep reflection can be "stimulated" with the rich dialogue of the researcher and participant (Ponterotto, 2005). This approach aligns well with the tenets of interpretative phenomenological analysis as it is philosophically engaged in the lived experiences of participants and the hermeneutical approach of deep reflection and thoughtful interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005; Smith et al., 2009).

The proposed study examines first grade teachers' experiences, challenges, and perspectives with a changing approach to reading. I conducted one-on-one interviews with participants to gain an understanding of and insight into their perspective of their lived experiences. A qualitative interview has been described as a "conversation with a purpose" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57).

Research Design

IPA is situated in research in a much narrower focus than either qualitative or other qualitative methods. Quantitative methods are often used to generalize to large populations and include a broad approach. Qualitative research methods begin to narrow the focus of research as they tend to be less generalizable. This is, however, a tenant of qualitative research. IPA is situated at a very narrow focus within qualitative research focusing on few participants and their convergence and divergence with the targeted phenomena (Smith et al., 2009).

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen for this study due to the method's three key philosophies of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology, the first underpinning, focuses on the study of human experiences and an individual's perception of that of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). "An unfurling of perspectives and meanings, which are unique to the person's embodied and situated relationship to the world" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21).

Hermeneutics, the second underpinning of IPA, refers to the theory of interpretation. IPA researchers interact with their participants in a non-linear fashion, moving back and forth through the interview and the analysis of the data (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutic is the catalyst that moves phenomenology (lived experiences) of the participants to the interpretation of those experiences ascertained through interviews. Further, IPA is a double hermeneutic in which the researcher is interpreting the participant while the participant makes sense of their experiences within the context or phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Finally, ideography refers to the commitment of detail which then leads to an in-depth thorough and systematic analysis of the data. For this to happen, IPA studies typically have small sample sizes to give the researcher ample opportunity to analyze the data. IPA researchers situated participants in the context of the phenomena of the study and explored their personal experiences and their personal perspectives.

As a qualitative method, IPA's benefits increase as the approach allows the researcher the best opportunity to explore the participant's innermost deliberations of their experiences (Alase, 2017). IPA is a participant focused research method that allows

participants to speak without constraints. This is vital to the present study as participants were asked to reflect on challenges that they may be experiencing as they are transiting away from a balanced literacy approach to a research-based approach to reading. This transition may elicit a variety of feelings and perspectives or the participants and will require time and researcher/participant connection. Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes.

The Sample and Population

The Virginia school district under study required an in-depth review process to gain approval to conduct research of teachers. I obtained IRB approval and then sought out approval from the participating district. I was obligated to attain a district level sponsor to support my research. I was successful in obtaining approval with specific schools and within a set timeline. I reached out to the approved school principals who distributed the "Call for Participants" (see Appendix A) to their first-grade teachers. I was able to get into contact with five first grade teachers from three different elementary schools who, after first contact, agreed to participate in the present study. Upon further contact, I was able to schedule interviews with participants in place and time of their choosing.

Sample

IPA focuses on the detailed account of individual participants' experiences in each context, thus requiring a smaller sample size (Smith et al., 2009). The purposively selected smaller sample size gives the researcher greater ability to concentrate on quality not quantity. In IPA the sample represents a particular perspective rather than a particular

population (Smith et al., 2009). The sample size for this study consists of five first grade teachers.

Population

For the present study, data was collected from a purposeful sample of five first grade teachers in an urban school district in northern Virginia. It is known that the teachers in this county will be experiencing the transition being examined in this study and will provide their perspective. Smith et al. (2009) indicates that in an IPA study participants should be carefully chosen based on their ability to grant the researcher access to a particular experience that is being studied. All participants were first grade teachers, which while being a homogeneous sample, provided me with meaningful information in the study. I reached out to principals within the county to find my participants for this study.

Instruments

IPA interviews elicit detailed stories from the participant which provide rich data to be analyzed. I collected this data via oral semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Interviews are the preferred method for IPA and will allow for me and the participants to engage in dialogue and will allow for personal in-depth discussion (Smith et al., 2009). I created both, a questionnaire to ascertain demographic information from each participant, and interview questions for the semi-structured interview (see Appendix B).

Procedures for Collecting Data

This study examines the lived experiences and unique perspective of first grade teachers immersed in a transition from balanced literacy to research-based approach to word reading. IPA is an appropriate method as I will be interviewing participants to

ascertain detailed and in-depth personal accounts of this phenomena. This was accomplished through 45–90-minute one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant.

After I received IRB approval and the required district level approval, I reached out to five different schools within the same urban school district with a "call to participants" (see Appendix A). This call to participants informed the participants of an overview of the study and what their involvement would entail. I asked that principal to send the call to participants to their first-grade teams.

I gave participants the IRB informed consent (see Appendix C) form which was signed prior to the interview taking place. I offered participants in-person or virtual interviews. I asked when and where the participant would like to meet, and I let them know that interviews will be 45-90 minutes in length. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled as needed. Prior to each interview I took field notes detailing how I anticipated the interview would go.

I conducted one-on-one interviews in a location of the participants choosing. I used a Sony digital voice recorder and a secondary recording device to capture each interview. I began by asking the participants various demographic information such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, years in education, and how long in their current district. I took detailed notes during the interview.

The semi-structured interview took between 45-90 in length. Questions were open ended to allow for participant elaboration as she/he sees fit. Follow up questions were asked during the interview as I followed the lead of the participants. As Smith et al.

(2009) state that "there is a phenomenon ready to shine forth, but detective work is required by the researcher to facilitate the coming" (p. 35).

After each interview I took detailed field notes to reflect and document my initial thoughts of the interview. These notes allowed me to write my observations of their body language or overall mood throughout the interview.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed line-by-line verbatim by using the program Rev.com, as IPA requires a semantic, or word for word, record (Smith et al., 2009). Participants identities were changed along with any other identifiers that may reveal a participant's identity.

I listened to audio-recording, and then conducted a first reading of the transcript followed by a second reading. This phase of data analysis centers the participants as the focus of the analysis. I took copious notes during this phase, as my own reflections and thoughts may become overwhelming and will help to focus the transcript. Through the subsequent readings I examined semitic content and language and made notes and comments. This process facilitated the focus on the core comments that are phenomenological and drew attention to why the participants had these concerns or made certain comments. Descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments were made as I read through the transcripts. Conceptual comments allowed me to look at my participants' overall understanding of the instructional shift that is being made and their feelings about the shift.

Once initial notation was completed, I developed emergent themes across interviews. I manually coded each interview in an excel spreadsheet. I used in vivo

coding (repeated words and phrases), emotion coding (looking for participant emotions), and then I used abstraction to pull themes together and subsumption to bridge themes together with major themes and subthemes (Saldana, 2016).

In this phase of data analysis, the whole interview becomes a set of parts which is an aspect of the hermeneutic circle. These themes were used to construct an analysis of my interpretations and the participants' words. I began to look at connecting themes across the participant interviews. During this phase I developed superordinate themes to find similarities and areas of polarization within the participant interview. This process was repeated for each participant in my study. The last phase of data analysis is to identify and interpret themes between participants. I looked for connections and divergence among participants and their context as teachers.

Reflexivity Journal and Field Notes

Analytic notes were used throughout the study to garner a depth of understanding of the phenomena being studied. This provided me with a multi-faceted perspective of participants as they were engaging in interviews. I wrote detailed notes of participant body language and tone of voice as they were talking including pauses in conversation, which proved to be valuable as I was creating participant profiles and parsing out themes.

Reflexivity journals allowed me, as the researcher, an outlet to record my assumptions and perspectives before and after interviews. They gave me an opportunity to acknowledge any biases that I had and to address them head on. Revisiting the journal post interview allowed me to reflect on the interview and to close the loop on my initial assumptions and thoughts. These notes were taken in a spiral bound notebook by hand.

I took field notes during each interview where I was able to focus on the interviewee and their mannerisms throughout. I was able to provide some context to the audio recordings by notating specific observations made.

Limitations

This includes a small sample size of first grade teachers in a large urban school district in northern Virginia. This school district has about 150 elementary schools which include a diverse group of students and teachers. Due to the small sample size the generalizability will be limited as IPA relies on a small number of in-depth interviews. I included the participants' descriptive information that I gained from their interviews to get a full picture of each participant.

Another limitation to this study is to the specific phenomena studied. This district was chosen because of its shift from balanced literacy to a more structured literacy practice. Many school districts are making similar shifts however, each individual district has its own method of professional development and dissemination of new learning. This study gives an in-depth look at how first grade teachers are working through this shift and will add to the overall extant research in transformational learning and instructional practices.

I am currently teaching in this school district as a first-grade teacher. I was diligent in my efforts to keep my personal biases in check as I am completing my interviews. Participants' willingness to have an honest conversation about their own feelings is of utmost importance to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomena.

Reciprocity

Participants in any research study have placed themselves in a position that can positively benefit the field or greater population. In an IPA study, participants are encouraged to tell their own stories and perspectives, which involves trust and vulnerability. I ensured that I provided support for participants throughout the study, including interview specifics and any follow up interview necessary to create a trustworthy relationship for the participants. This study will help to support other teachers going through transformational change.

Trustworthiness

Over the past 14 years I have taught in multiple districts serving a diverse student population which includes Title 1, military, and private school locations. Throughout my experience, I worked with many devoted educators whom I have engaged in mentoring and learning. I will be available to connect with participants before their interview to ensure that they are comfortable with the process and with myself.

I kept a journal in which I recorded my own assumptions and thoughts before and after each interview. This allowed me to acknowledge my own thinking, biases, and preconceived notions going into each interview.

I was able to conduct a pilot interview in the district in which my study will take place. This process allowed me to reflect on my interview questions and reflect on the process in general. The feedback I was able to ascertain provided me some clarity on the interview procedure. I will, of course, not use any of the information gleaned from this pilot interview in my study.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participant interviews were held in person at a location of the participants choosing. Online interviews, via Cisco Webex, were offered and not needed as each participant agreed to meet in person. Pseudonyms were used to provide anonymity for participants. This anonymity allowed participants space to provide honest and reflective responses during the interview.

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The nature of IPA gave me the opportunity to engage with participants to make sense of their experiences as they are working through translational change. Participants were forthcoming about their perceptions and personal feelings during interviews which gave me insight to their experiences. Participants in the current study are at different phases in the transition and all have provided eye opening information that contribute to the field.

Participants

Sophia

Sophia is in her third-year teaching first grade. She has taught third, fourth, and fifth grades for a combined 24 years in three states. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in education leadership. Sophia has spent much of her career teaching upper grades in elementary school. She later moved to first grade with a desire to "be a part of the change that was taking place at the younger grades."

Sophia's career has been deeply entrenched in balanced literacy and the workshop model of teaching reading. She explained that she has a "terrible college experience for being prepared to teach reading" and as she started teaching, she was "unaware of what I was supposed to do." She said this matter of factly and did not mince words.

When Sophia began teaching, she received training that aligned with balanced literacy and "latched on" to resources that followed this approach. In fact, each of the three states that she taught in followed this approach. Sophia feels as though there are gaps and flaws in the balanced literacy approach; however, she believes that there are

some aspects that are worthwhile in the classroom. Sophia shared that her understanding of the power of a quality read aloud came from balanced literacy resources. She has remained consistent in providing daily read alouds to her class whether she is a teacher in upper elementary or her current first grade students.

> Especially with our students that can't access strong literature yet because they don't have the foundational skills of reading to be able to access great literature, those read alouds are everything to them and create such background knowledge for them as well, that they're going to need to grow.

She began noticing however, the disconnect when she would get students in fifth grade who didn't know how to decode. She didn't have much in her toolbox, at the time, to help them. She would work with the student on reading and rereading following the understanding that she had at the time. "And we're going to just reread, thinking if you reread, that they're just going to know the word eventually." This round and round felt disheartening and she felt "powerless" in ability to help her students.

Her daughter being diagnosed with dyslexia was the final push for her to begin her research and shift. She witnessed the intense struggle of her child and all the things that come with that.

> It felt as if I was powerless. And it wasn't until here and having my own daughter who's dyslexic, and seeing no matter what I did, no matter how many books we read, that his poor child was never going to be able to tell the difference between and and can unless there was something more. And that's when my journey really started.

This has fueled her passion for early reading and equity in the classroom. She was a pioneer in the participating district pushing for change before they were on board. She would often get push back when she would suggest implementing new practices. Determined to give her students the instruction that they needed she would purchase the resource with her own money, shut the door, and teach her students. She has a passion for reading. She has made sure that she is researching and looking for answers in reading development and what implantation looks like in the classroom.

Leah

Leah is a first-grade teacher in the participating district. I have had a working relationship with Leah for the past two years. My proximity to her has afforded me the ability to provide her some support in literacy during that time. This is her tenth year of teaching. Before coming to the participating district, she worked at an urban charter school where she taught kindergarten. Leah is a product of public school and attended college in which she double majored in elementary education and special education. She later earned her Master of Arts degree in education. She did not always aim to be a teacher. She was surrounded by teachers growing up, her mother and grandma notably, as well as others in her family. “I actually said I’d never be a teacher because of that.” Leah wanted to do something different than what everyone around her had done and what was so familiar to her growing up. Despite these feelings and starting her college career out on a different path, she was drawn to teaching. She witnessed the engaging classes that her friends were working on which was a contrast to her business classes in which she was “miserable.” She recalls “I was always kind of jealous of their creative homework

and they got to make up lesson plans and they got to design bulletin boards and all this stuff, and I thought it sounded really fun."

She took some time to contemplate a change of her major and eventually put her name on the education waitlist. Her acceptance to the program made the decision for her.

> When Leah began teaching, she was pulling small literacy groups for second grade. She felt lost and "had no idea what to do."
>
> I remember just being given a list of teaching points, which weren't actually teaching points. It was an anchor chart that they were using that just had different reading skills.

Leah shared that the anchor chart she used came from teachers' college and had reading strategies that aligned with the balanced literacy approach. "I just had to figure out how to do this small groups with this anchor chart."

As Leah progressed in her teaching career, she shared that reading instruction became more confusing starting "I think five years ago I honestly would've been confused." Her school was fully engaged in the balanced literacy approach to reading, including a heavy focus on the cueing system. They did however have a phonics program that they were teaching at a different time of the day. These two instructional methods did not intersect and were asking students to engage in two very different approaches to reading.

> We'd be like "okay, kind of guess. Use these cueing skills and guess" and then they'd go and they'd independent read, and we would be reinforcing, "you need to think what would make sense," and then during our phonics time, we were like "tap it out, sound it out."

These opposing messages and approaches felt very disconnected to Leah. She does remember questioning these feelings of disconnect and was told that, “They’re going to merge eventually.” Despite this feeling of disconnect, Leah felt confident in her reading instruction. “I felt like I was a good reading teacher, and so I was confident in what I was doing of setting up these reading routines” If students were struggling in Leah’s class, she would pull them back to her teacher table and run guided reading groups. Falling on those balanced literacy 2 cueing strategies. “I would’ve just hunkered down in guided reading.” If there were students who still were not making growth Leah felt “helpless” as she was teaching them “over and over and again.” “I remember the reading coach just being like, ‘some kids just need more time.’”

Leah began working in the participating district the year that they began the transition toward research-based reading instruction. Her understanding of reading instruction was congruent with the district as the district was in its initial stages of transition. Leah’s team however was many steps ahead of the district.

> When I came in the county, I kind of felt like the county and I were on the same page in terms of we had a leveled library down the hall that we were supposed to do guided reading groups, and I was very comfortable with guided reading. And yeah, it seemed like everything I was supposed to be doing kind of lined up with everything I had done, but there were kind of murmurings of change.

Leah felt overwhelmed and increasingly concerned about the impending change and how it conflicted with what she had learned and trusted.

> And then I felt like I was on an island because I think the rest of the team had really evolved in this area a lot more. And so, I was feeling like I was the only one

> who cared about guided reading and all these things that I've been taught were really important. And then I felt like I was kind of stuck between the team that knew better and the county that was still telling me to do it this way. But then there were all these rumblings of change, and I was like "okay, so maybe we are wrong." It was really uncomfortable; it was a hard process. I just felt really insecure about my teaching.

Throughout this time Leah was working to learn and implement the programs that were in front of her. She had implemented phonics before and understood how to make that in her classroom. The learning has been difficult and "scary" with so much to absorb and often it felt like a different language to her.

> There's a lot of words and things that were just getting thrown around, and I was like, "I don't know what that means. And I've never heard of that program, and I have never heard of the science of reading. I didn't know what that was. And I think if felt really overwhelming because it felt like I should know how to teach a child to read. And now I started feeling like I don't know how to teach a child how to read.

Leah's voice gets slow and a little quieter as she makes these revelations. Leah works very hard to educate her students and give them what they need to be successful, relying on what she has learned in her career so far. As she looks back on some of her practices in the past, she gets uncomfortable saying "I remember sitting, and I hate looking back on this, but I remember in the first week of school sitting with a little girl on the carpet kind of teaching her the cueing system to guess the words." Leah's evolution

of understanding of reading instruction has been an uncomfortable and challenging time. She reflects on the last three years saying:

> It's kind of like that thing where you don't know what you don't know what you don't know, where I think my first year, I didn't know what I didn't know. And by the end of the year, I know of knew what I didn't know, and it was scary. And then my second year I was like "Okay, let me try to learn this."

Leah leaned on her teammates to guide her through as she was slogging through this transition. She has felt like her teammates had been some steps ahead of her and were able to give her a model to follow. They gave her a window into what this transition looks like and pushed her forward.

> If I hadn't been on the team, I was on I think I would still be dragging my feet into changing the way I taught reading. I think that the only reason I've been really convinced that the way I taught reading was not helpful to children and I really needed to change my practice was because I was around people who had already done it.

Leah is thoughtful of her evolution and is very thoughtful in understanding where she stands in this transition. She understands that there are still aspects of teaching reading that she needs to learn and grow in. But she can see the light at the end of slog that has been the unlearning and relearning how to teach kids how to read.

> It's easier to learn something than to unlearn something and learn it at the same time. And I think I'm almost done with the unlearning process. I feel like I've kind of gone through that and now I'm onto just the learning process. But the

middle ground where I was unlearning and learning at the same time was hard. And so that's nice to be passed, to have accepted this new way.

Victoria

Victoria is a first-grade teacher in the participating district. Her class is the homeroom inclusion class in her school. "In our school we do co-teaching, so all the special education students who are able to be taught in a whole group setting are in my class." Her role in her school coincides with her basic teaching approach. She believes in inclusion of all students and providing her students an environment in which each one of them can be successful.

Victoria is also the team lead of her seven-member team as well as the grade level literacy leader. She does disclose that she was "voluntold" to take on these extra roles on her team, but she "loves literacy" and agreed to take on these roles, even if it's "a lot of work."

Victoria has a bachelor's degree in psychology and master's degree in education. She also worked towards her special education endorsement. She pursued this for several years and in the end "I never completely finished because in the end I decided that I just…. I had originally done it because I wanted to be a really good inclusion teacher." She strives to be a good teacher for all her students.

Victoria has taught a total of fourteen years, eight of them being in the United States and this will be her fourth year in the participating district. She had previously taught abroad for six years in Dubai and Brazil. This experience provided her a different perspective especially in teaching students who are non-English speakers. She feels like students need to feel like they belong.

> Like they have a connection to where they are. They have to feel safe. It's Maslow's hierarchy. If you don't have those basic needs, you're not going to learn.

Victoria has high expectations for her students and truly believes they can all learn and grow. She always wants her students to know that "I know that they can learn it, I know that they can do it, and there's no reason why they can't." She is going to do everything that she can to get her students where they need to be. She gets very frustrated with some in education who dismiss special education students with the excuse that "they are not going to learn it. I hate it." She believes that "inclusivity leads to higher academics." Victoria lights up with a smile when she talks about her perspective on teaching and approaching students in her classroom.

> I think that a lot of the kids come in here and they're like, 'I can't read. I can't read.' And most of them can't but then as soon as you get them to read the most simple sentence and helping them tap it out, but after being done and being like, 'You just read that.' And building that confidence like, 'oh yeah, I can.' And it's like, yeah, we're going to get it, we're going to build on it and we're going to keep going. … So taking them where they are, it's the zone of proximal development, and then pushing them just a little bit further past that. And then that goes back to they feel safe, they feel confident, and then they feel excited to try something new. And we also push that it's okay to make mistakes, and if you don't make mistakes, you don't learn.

Victoria believes in the county's transition to research-based reading instruction. She does "feel like there's a pendulum swing and it's always swinging." In prior teaching

positions she was fully entrenched in the balanced literacy approach and reader's workshop. She remembers feeling that the workshop approach was "missing phonics, we don't have any phonics instruction, and in first grade you need phonics." The message that she has received from the participating county is phonics only in first grade which doesn't sit comfortably with her. She has always been an advocate for phonics in the early grade but worries that "we've really pushed to the wayside other things that are also important for those foundational skills."

Victoria herself grew up as a struggling reader and early in her career she took an in-depth course on Words their Way. This class was a semester long during which she had an "aha moment" and connection to her own struggles growing up. She reflects that "if someone had just taught it to me like in the patterns, I would've understood." She carried the importance of word study with her in her years of teaching and understood that students need to learn phonics patterns. She still uses this program as she knows it works and she is extremely comfortable with it. She does however want to keep growing and learning in her knowledge. "I'm trying not to be that old teacher who holds onto something too much."

Victoria feels like her school has been headed in the right direction in the transition to research based reading instruction. However, as she is implementing programs at the school level, she doesn't feel very supported at the county level.

> Because it's so big, I feel like they can't really do it all that effectively in the sense that everything going to be meant towards the students who are coming from the middle-income house. I feel like a lot of times they do things, and those things are set and you're like this is not taking into account our population.

Victoria is frustrated with the tier 1 lessons provided that do not meet her kids where they are. Her passion and focus on inclusivity shine through as she discusses the disconnect of reading expectation and the reality of students in her classroom.

> I know we're supposed to teach grade level, but it's a waste of time if they can't even begin to grasp it, it's like that thing where it's like if you haven't been in the classroom and you don't know what's really going on.

She is a constant advocate for the students in her class, lifting them up in their learning. She loves to focus on the growth that they do make. Their growth is "huge, I was celebrating with them. I was showing my kids projected growth. Some of them had made their projected growth mid-year."

Doug

Doug is a first-grade teacher in the participating district. He has taught for eight years in the district in both second and first. Prior to working as a classroom teacher, he worked as an instructional assistant supporting kindergarten, first, third and sixth grade. Doug believes that this position "was great because it kind of solidified my passion for wanting to be an educator because it really gave me an insight as to how schools go throughout the day." It allowed him to get a real understanding of what teachers go through.

> So, it really let me see what teachers really go through throughout the day, the behaviors, the administrative interactions, the student interaction, the interactions amongst themselves, because we got to be shadows in everything. We got to sit in on the teacher meetings and stuff like that, and it was like, this is cool. This is

scary. Prior to working in his current district, he worked in an early childhood classroom.

Doug attended community college for two years, and then transferred to a university in which he majored in education. Once he graduated, he struggled passing the state tests to gain licensure. During this time, he worked in a daycare setting along with working in museum education as a science educator. During this time Doug went on to get his master's degree. Growing up, Doug loved school. "I was a nerd all day. Even in elementary school, I was just like, man, to be able to teach kids how to do stuff, that's pretty cool."

As a male in a female dominated profession, Doug has a unique perspective in teaching. He credits having male teachers as being an important aspect to his life.

> I was exposed to male teachers very early on, not just the typical PE. I had for-real male teachers in elementary school. And I saw how different it was and how different they responded to the male teachers versus the female teachers, and I'm so grateful. I'm so, so grateful that during my student teaching experience, I taught under a guy.

He believes that he has more space to be himself in the classroom as a man. He loves that he still gets to be silly and bring himself into the classroom. He recognizes that he has a different reality in education than his female counterparts in teaching. He doesn't,

> have to really fit inside of this box that they expect female teachers to do. Because I just see the difference in how a lot of male teachers are able to be themselves, but a lot of female teachers aren't really.

He does admit that there is a "huge stigma for elementary male teachers," but believes that the presence of male teachers "change the dynamic of the entire school." Doug has modeled himself after some of his teachers growing up. He believes that he teaches in a very "old-school type of way" and he does not love to follow trends in education. He believes it does not gel with the way children should learn.

Doug remembers "The thing that really frustrated me was having a second grader who barely knew letter sounds and barely knew phonics." He goes on to admit that he knew that the approach that they were using was not working; he felt as though there was nothing he could do. "And I couldn't question it because here I am, a brand-new teacher, but I had many questions." He felt limited in his ability to really dig down to the gaps that his students had, saying,

> I didn't know how to advocate for myself as a teacher to say, "Hey I don't know if this is the right thing to do with these guys, Can you help me? I didn't know how to do that back then.

Doug remembers a specific student who helped to lift the veil of balanced literacy. He started to work with a student who had many "deficits" in reading. He remembers reaching out to the administration, "Hey, can I just work with him or can somebody pull him to give him the basic phonics instruction." He recalls how even though he didn't work with him long "he was just excited to be able to read those letters, and he could spell his name." He understood that this student as others "need basic phonics before they can write about a passage." After these realizations he remembers his team "as a group, really wanted to push for the change in phonics instruction."

Hindsight and further learning have given Doug some clarity on what he was seeing with his student.

> Sold a Story and listening to that podcast and just listening to teachers, and parents and just how the system just really broke them as an educator as well as a kid. No kid should be six, seven, eight, nine years old, and their confidence is just destroyed from trying to read a passage. … I saw it. But like I was saying with that one kid, the fact that just him being able to read letters, that restored his confidence.

Janet

Janet is a first-grade teacher in the participating district. She finished her bachelor's degree in Chinese literacy in China, and she earned her master's degree in teaching Chinese as a second language from Beijing Language and Culture University. She has been teaching, in one way or another, since she was 15. She remembers as a child; she would sit her mother down after school and teach her the way her own teacher would. She remembers her mother saying, "Wow, you're a great teacher because you explained everything very very clearly. And I think you will be a very good teacher." She remembers that this experience lit the passion in her to teach. "After that, I feel like I have a passion to teach." Her passion has only grown since then, insisting to her first-grade families, "Don't thank me because this is the thing I really want to do. It's a joy in me. I'm coming to work every day, I don't feel like it's a burden, I feel like it's a pleasure. Really, a pleasure to do. So, I enjoy teaching."

As a Chinese immigrant, Janet has focused most of her teaching, in both China and in the United States, teaching her native mandarin to both adults and children of all

ages. Her experience in the United States has been mostly in teaching mandarin to adults or in a two-way immersion program in which she taught reading and writing in mandarin. Her position in the participating district is her first teaching experience in which she teaches in English. She does still teach in a two-way immersion program; however, she teaches her section in English. Her students receive half of the day in Spanish and half in English.

Janet believes that her job as a teacher is to guide students to make connections to the real world.

> You are not a bucket to keep, to hold the knowledge to dump into your child. You are the bridge. You are the light. You light up their heart. You encourage them to learn by themselves. That's the teacher's job.

Her passion for her students emanates from her as she speaks. Her passion and drive to reach her students has been a throughline in her career. She believes that relationships are the key to good teaching. "It's really the relationship you are building with the child. If you build a relationship with the child, the child trusts you, the child loves you, you're going to learn. They're going to learn immediately."

Janet believes that her job as a reading teacher is to "bring the joy of reading and writing to my children. They cannot learn how to read, how to write without the joy into the reading and writing." She is constantly trying to help students make connections from the content to the students' lives. She builds upon what they already know to support them in both reading and writing.

Janet believes that reading instruction begins at home when the child is very young. She believes that children who struggle with reading do not have the support of reading at home. “They do not support them at home when they are little.”

> I mean like eight months, one year old, two years old. They may not have the foundation or the love of reading, which they get from their parents. Because I see them when they are six years old. I don’t know them before they are six. They are lacking of the experience, like touching the book or hold a book enjoy the pictures.

She believes it is her job to close the gap for her students. She sees phonics as the answer to closing these gaps. She sees the phonics instruction is important for her population of students. She is, however, unclear about the role that phonological awareness plays in word reading. When asked about her approach to phonological awareness in her classroom she talks at great length about what her phonics instruction looks like in her classroom and school.

Participant Synthesis

All five participants represent first grade teachers who have experienced teaching reading before and during a paradigm shifting transitional change in their county. Their varied perspectives influence how they view themselves in the classroom and how they respond to the process of change. Participants’ responses were enlightening and gave insight to how teachers throughout the county are understanding and coping with change. Through participant interviews five themes emerged; lack of training, disconnect, need for a model, teachers overwhelmed, and passion for change. These salient themes are further explained in further detail.

Theme 1—Lack of Teacher Training

Participants indicated that they did not feel adequately prepared to teach reading in their college programs. Doug wondered "Why do we do this to teachers? Why are we having to put them through theory classes and all of that?" Indicating that time spent on theory did not prepare him for what he was facing in the classroom. Leah supports Doug in her statement, "I feel like when I got out of college, I just had no idea about anything I was doing." This was a common thread as participants reflected on their own reading instruction and their evolution through their own teaching careers. Sophia shared that years into her own teaching career, as she was teaching fifth grade, she learned that the letters corresponded with letter sounds. She revealed, rather exacerbated, "I honestly didn't know that the letters have sounds until I started teaching, and that blows your mind right there." Sophia responds with passion as she discusses her journey from college to early career in which she was fully entrenched in balanced literacy, and then her transition to research-based literacy instruction.

While Sophia first began teaching, she threw herself into balanced literacy as all of the places that she worked were fully on board with the approach. She bought a copy of a Fountas and Pinnell guided reading book that focused heavily on read alouds, saying it was her "bible." She "latched" on to balanced literacy and this book. She would ask herself "How do I do this? How do I teach reading?" She was tasked with teaching kids how to read and had no background of how to accomplish that. Sophia felt at a loss in helping her struggling students, "We're going to look at these words. We're going to do fluency passages. We're going to read. And we're going to just reread, thinking if you reread, that they're going to know the word eventually."

Participants reflected on their shift and their realization of their lack of understanding of reading components and how to teach kids to read. Leah who also experienced balanced literacy early in her career and was given very little guidance on how to teach reading. She remembers being given posters with cueing strategies on them to teach students to read. There was no direct guidance on how to teach kids to read. Participants felt as if they were "all on their own" which led to the full immersion to an approach that was pushed on them.

Leah's' school later pushed all of their teachers to go to summer institutes through teachers' college, a balanced literacy hub. She remembers that during her week-long institute they were giving teachers inconsistent information. "I remember that the whole week they would just tell them to "add this phonics and just add other things, and it felt really clunky. It really didn't make sense" Sophia also felt herself question the validity of the teaching practice she was immersed. An impetus for her realization that the prevailing approach that she has immersed in doesn't work was seeing her own daughter struggle with reading and nothing she knew how to do was helping.

> I felt powerless. And it wasn't until here and having my own daughter who's dyslexic, and seeing that no matter what I did, no matter how many books we read, that this poor child was never going to be able to tell the difference "and" and "can" unless there is something more. And that's when my journey really started.

Participants reflected on their frustrations and their struggles to remedy the lack of training they received both in pre-service and in-service. When discussing the specific components of word reading such as phonemic awareness and phonics, participants

demonstrated a varied understanding. Janet's responses indicated that she does not grasp the differences between phonemic awareness and phonics and often uses the terms interchangeably. When discussing her track of understanding of phonemic awareness Leah reflects,

> I didn't really know what it was before. I didn't realize how important it was. I wasn't looking for that as a marker of them growing in literacy. I guess I'm still missing a little bit. I know it's important, I know it's a piece of the puzzle. I don't know if I could explain it to you in any depth.

There are some similar responses from participants regarding their understanding the role phonics plays in word reading. All participants spent a substantial time in their career teaching reading under a balanced literacy model. As Sophia was working with her students who were struggling in reading, she remembers "there was zero to do with phonics or phoneme awareness." Leah didn't consider phonics much at all "I think I didn't grasp it as important. I think I knew deep down that it was important that they had these pieces to puzzle together." She goes on to reflect that her school was communicating information that was very confusing and really contradicted themselves, "we were teaching phonics at this time of the day, and then we would teach reading at different times of day (following a balanced literacy cueing system)." When she would encounter struggling students her plan of attack would be entirely focusing on those cueing strategies and her students wouldn't move forward. She admits "I didn't give as much care or attention to whether they could read the decodables as whether they could read the leveled readers in their book bags." Looking back, she remembers that she was "confused," and "really felt like it was disconnected."

Participants have communicated that they feel frustrated that they were even put into the situation that they are in right now. They have done training and various professional development early in their careers to learn how to teach kids to read. And they are now coming to grips with the realization that they were taught wrong or not taught at all. Leah calmly reflects,

> If I am annoyed at anything, I'm annoyed about the people who created this program that didn't do it in a research-based way, and then it's just really scary how big it got and how into it people got. It feels like a bit of a waste. I think about the hours I spent in trainings for it and that whole week I spend in New York learning about this and listening to Lucy Calkins speak and all this stuff and yeah, it feels like I wish I had those seven years that I spent at becoming really good at that program, apart from the kids that went through that program because that a whole separate thing, but I wish I had those seven years learning the correct way to teach because I wouldn't feel the way I feel about teaching literacy right now.

Theme 2—Disconnect/Balance with Leadership

Participant discourse around the disconnection and delicate balance of leadership within the participating school system is nuanced. Participants communicated that there is a lack of understanding by people who are making decisions. The policies and programs are put out without many considerations of teachers at the classroom level. Participants feel as though there is a hierarchy within the school system and the dialogue from the top down is lacking, inconsistent, and spotty. Sophia posits, "what's being given to our reading leaders, I don't think that is fully coming down to us." There are inconsistent

messages that are making their way down to teachers often diluting the information. The lack of clear communication from knowledgeable leaders is resulting in teachers receiving inaccurate information about what reading instruction should look like in first grade mudding up the waters of this important transition to research based reading instruction. Victoria's school has been told, "basically what we were told is k, one, and two is just doing that phonics piece. That's what matters, nothing else matters." This makes her worry that this is just another "pendulum swing" and incredibly cautious.

Teachers are trying to learn and do what is best for students however the lack of streamline communication makes it difficult. Doug says frustratingly, "Give me one thing, and let me learn that one thing." Instead, he says, "I keep hearing from literacy coaches that we kind of still don't know where we are in terms of developing an overall program. Right now, we're literally throwing programs in the air and seeing which one we like best." In a similar reflection Victoria wonder, "am I really going to invest my time and energy and mental capacity into something that will be gone in a year?"

Teachers are making a monumental transition in their instruction and do not feel as though the decision makers are fully knowledgeable about what the change entails. Victoria states, "It's like that thing where it's like if you haven't been in the classroom and you don't really know what is going on, can you really sit here and say that you have to teach grade level material." Victoria believes that decisions are being made and that there is a "trickle-down effect and it doesn't get down to the teacher." This disconnect has resulted in participants feeling unheard, in the dark, and ultimately untrusting of leadership and the information being put out. Sophia asks, "who writes the curriculum that teachers use? What are their credentials?" This question responds to the district

created materials that are put out for teachers to use. Janet feels very strongly about giving her students what they need and meeting them where they are. She does feel like if she were to use the district created curriculum, she would not be teaching the students in front of her each day. She asks, “Am I wasting my time and wasting their time, or I am pretending and putting on a show?” she further exclaims, “time is very precious. So, I’m not putting on a show for anybody. I’m just teaching for my own kids.”

As a result of the feelings of disconnection within the participating district a subtheme emerged within interviews. Participants reflected on some challenges navigating leadership within schools and the larger county. Leah reveals “I don’t feel very supported in that by the county. I feel like the county just throws out resources at us and I haven’t gained a lot from them throwing resources at me.” She further states that the county hasn’t even been clear in the transition itself saying, “I feel like they’ve been trying to be kind of under the table about it and it’s a huge switch and we don’t need just kind of watery information.” She goes on to say, “There like these scattered PD’s. We had PD last year where they’re like “Here, learn about phonics” but it’s all very piecemeal. It doesn’t feel like anyone has said, “hey guys, we’re changing this. Here’s what you need to know.” It hasn’t been straightforward at all; it’s been very subtle.” Sophia recognized that even the literacy leaders/coaches in her school are themselves not knowledgeable about reading. This has presented some conflicted feelings on her place within the school, and since she has taken it upon herself to read reading research years ahead of the transition, she is often the more knowledgeable person in the room,

> It’s hard though because when you are more knowledgeable than the people that are supposed to be your leaders in a subject matter, you have to be careful,

> because you don't want to make them feel inadequate in front of their leaders. But at the same time you don't want the wrong information to get out.

Leadership is moving through this transition as well; however, as people who are tasked with guiding classroom teachers there are some expectations of expertise which are not always evident. Sophia believes that resources and professional development opportunities are not being allocated to the most vital stakeholders, the teachers. She asserts,

> Here I am, a willing teacher willing and wanting to, but not offered. If all the people that are being offered and taking these courses are not people in the classroom, but people sitting in offices, and that is NOT trickling down. There is not a trickle down happening.

Theme 3—Teacher Overwhelm

The nature of a paradigm shifting transition such as changing, not only the way reading is taught, but also the fundamental understanding of reading invites a lot of feelings of overwhelm and stress in an already overwhelming job. Overwhelm and stress were a prevalent theme in interviews with participants. There were feelings of "powerlessness" when reflecting on their inability to help struggling readers. Leah shares "I remember a time in the first week of school sitting with a little girl on the carpet and kind of teaching her the cueing system to guess the words." She shares soberly that she really "hates" to look back on things because it doesn't feel good. She goes on to say, "I have been teaching for seven years, it felt like I should know how to teach a child to read, and now I started feeling like I don't know how to teach a child to read."

The unlearning and relearning process can be a painful and long process. Deconstructing long standing beliefs has proven challenging for participants. When reflecting on that time that she was in the early stages of transitioning Leah shared,

> I think that I was overwhelmed, there were a lot of words and things that were getting thrown around, and I was like "I don't know what that means. And I have never heard of that program, and I have not heard about the science of reading.

Victoria believes that "There needs to be a sense of grace" when school systems are managing roll out and expectations. She goes on to say, "and that's not just for me but for administration, because when they put pressure on administration, obviously that pressure comes down to us and they wonder why there is a teacher shortage."

When reflecting on the county's implementation and rollout of research-based reading instruction participants were clear that this contributed to their feelings of overwhelm. Janet adds, "Countywide we have a lot of policies and paperwork, and it takes a lot of teacher's energy." Doug shared "It brings on a lot of anxiety. A lot of anxiety. Especially for somebody that already is an anxious person anyway. I don't like dealing with uncertainty." Sophia believes that the county's aversion to purchasing a reading program makes more work for teachers. "When teachers have to make everything up you have exhaustion and burnout." She believes that teachers need resources that are ready to go. "We are using Heggerty for our phonemic awareness. It's clear cut, the words are there. It's no prep. It's only engagement, and that's what teachers need." She frustratingly speaks on teacher equity and how the lack of good quality resources and intervention across the county is a contributing factor in teacher overwhelm. She says "If

we are not provided the tools, you can't get mad if the end product doesn't look good. Because you can't build without the tools."

This was similarly felt by Doug reflecting on the uncertainty of their interventions and their schools push to implement structures within their reading block. "It's just so many different avenues that we're just nervous about, we don't know if it's going to be the same timeline or it's going to be the whole entire year. We just don't know." He goes on to express his frustration with the counties and his schools lack of urgency in providing answers to teachers before the school year begins saying, "You do realize we start school in less than two and a half weeks, and we don't know what we're doing for literacy instruction?" He goes on to reflect, "I like to know right off the bat, just tell me what I'm doing so I can go do it. And I'm good." Even though there is an ever-shifting list of resources and programs he feels the pressure "you still have to be perfect."

The lack of tools to teach students is often felt when teams are collaborating and discussing students during meetings. Doug remembers, "We were doing literacy collaboration and bringing in kid's samples and things like that, and we're talking about them, but we are not really dissecting what the problem is." Teachers were however still expected to address these reading gaps. Doug didn't feel like he was in position to give students what they needed. "I have to keep this train moving. I am going to help them, but at the same time, I can't spend two, three, four, five weeks addressing them."

As teachers discussed their evolution through this process and their subsequent overwhelm there has been a sub theme that has emerged. The need of models or leaders in this transition. Some participants indicated that knowledgeable models and leaders

have pushed them through and given them an understanding of what this transition really looks like while others are still in schools where there is a vacuum of good models.

Sophia indicated that the lack of a model has slowed progress in her school and in other schools. She asserts that "there are not good models of lower or upper grade teachers" within the district. It gives her a sense that the idea that information is trickling down to teachers is a myth. She goes on to say, "I don't feel as if you're looking at leadership within a school that our schools are equipped with a science of reading leader. Our district is moving in that direction however, it's taken really too long for that shift to happen." She does admit that she does have models and collaborators on a personal level saying,

> I have that on a personal level, not at the school level. I don't know that all of our reading coaches are passionate about what I'm passionate about. I have surrounded myself because I do the trainings and I do the professional development. I have surrounded myself with people who are like-minded.

The benefits of models in making such a huge transition have been vital to Leah's work in her classroom. She joined her first-grade team after they had already begun making the switch to research-based reading instruction. That came with some complicated feelings for her as she remembered feeling like she was "on an island" at times. She felt conflicted because.

> I think the rest of the team had really evolved in this area a lot more. And so I was feeling like I was the only one who cared about guided reading and all these things that I've been taught were really important.

She went on to share that it was a really "hard process." Through the journey she came to really lean on her teammates as they had already demonstrated what it looked like in the classroom adding,

> I think that I would have been dragging my feet into changing the way I taught reading. I think that the only reason I've really been convinced that the way that I taught reading was not helpful to children and I really needed to change my practice was because I was already around people who had already done it. That was huge. And if not, the school would not have influenced me to change because they seem hesitant about it still.

The will and process to change is riddled with challenges and transitioning an entire education system has many such challenges. Those challenges trickle down to individual teachers who, themselves, must make the decision to hear and absorb information that contradicts their current paradigm. Victoria shares "I'm trying not to be that old teacher who holds on to something too much."

Leah shares that her growth in her reading approach has been partially due to being on a team with people who pushed her thinking sharing, "I think that if I had been on a team of people like me who had come from the same type of background and environment, I would just be slogged down in not wanting to change."

Sophia, herself, is seen as a leader and model in this transition. She admits, "I also have a strong reputation of being knowledgeable and being a learner and doing the things. I do my homework. I'm not going to come into a conversation and speak unless I actually have something to bring to the table."

Theme 4—Passion for Change

Throughout our interviews, participants spoke about their impetus for change and where they are in their own process. Participants spoke about their passion for change and the urgency that holds. Within the conversation with participants regarding change, a subsumption theme began to emerge. Participants spoke of their new understanding of reading and more specifically reading instruction. Their growth and new learning were an important theme within the larger theme of passion for this change.

Sophia jumped into this change several years before the county made the switch. She explained how she gradually had experiences that revealed the holes in the balanced literacy approach. She remembers, "There must be something better. Then we went to Lucy (Calkins) where one lesson was 17 pages long, but it was just all fluff." adding, "Let's try things. And the world is rainbows, and all of this nonsense." She remembers realizing that "this is not helping them." She recalls when she fully jumped in, "five years ago, six years ago, that I really started researching and trying to understand the world of phonics and phonemic awareness." She jumped into training, books, podcasts, saying, "yeah. I'll take this training because I didn't know the letters made sounds, so sign me up." She admits that she enjoys reading the literature on various reading aspects because "I am passionate for change and love reading the research." Even though this work is hard and has resulted in some discomfort she reveals "when you are passionate about something, you're more ready to jump in." Leah comments on what she has learned in this process, "I feel like I'm learning things all the time. I just feel like I'm still on a really steep learning curve." Leah's passion is evident even in her quiet reflection. She

understands that this process of relearning is hard and takes time but continues forward in her learning.

Participants also indicated that they are further fueled when they can see the results. They see it in the confidence in their students with Doug reminiscing about how a particular student's whole demeanor changed once he could read, "he was just so excited that he could read those letters. And be able to spell his name." The process that he experienced with this student helped him to see those possibilities saying, "okay this could be the change." Janet communicates a similar feeling, "I can see the smile on their face, they can read and have confidence to read."

Leah has seen progress with her students as well saying,

> I'm actively seeing they're getting better and better and better at decoding. I am watching the growth and I see it's a firm foundation, and I think it's really encouraging because it feels like it's not a question anymore of how the pieces fit together.

The proof is in pudding so to say. Sophia reflects on how initially her leadership wasn't completely supportive of her new revelations she had made in reading, so she took the matter into her own hands. She bought the resource, shut her door and did what is best for her students. She goes on to say that her leadership is now on board "there is evidence in our reading scores, you can't deny."

Doug reflects that he can see the evidence saying, "I think that what we're doing now is going to give students the tools they need to be successful because it's giving them a foundation that they need now." Similarly, Leah states,

> I definitely think that the cueing system is really detrimental to them in the long run. And I think that having a firm foundation of phonics and phonemic awareness and being able to decode is really really important in addition to being able to comprehend what they read.

Doug sees that this instruction will have a positive effect on students. He has seen his students' confidence grow saying that "students' confidence has changed so much." He sees their excitement in taking their reading home and showing their parents all that they have learned.

Janet's passion for her students is evident when she talks about reading and her students. When thinking about her approach and why her passion fuels her in teaching her kids she says,

> I think I have a very important job, especially for this population…So I think I, as a teacher, have a lot of things to teach them, especially reading and writing. Those are the foundations of them growing up, but they need to learn physics, science, chemistry. All these are based on reading. So, this is like the soil. You make the soil nutritious for them.

Both Sophia and Leah continued to reflect on their new learning and discussed where they need to go next. They both mentioned where they need to continue to branch out and keep learning. Sophia feels confident in her ability to present information to her colleagues. She is, "also not afraid to say. "I don't know. I'm not sure about that." She goes on to reflect,

> The one area that I have not gained enough confidence in yet. There's two really. The one is the fluency piece and how I am delivering fluency…. And then the

other area is movement of students within the sequential phonics continuum. I don't feel like I have a great grasp of when they're ready.

She acknowledges that she doesn't have enough training on that yet.

Leah has similar reflections as she thinks about where she still has holes in her understanding, "I think the biggest area I see is with small groups and doing intervention, especially how to meet the kids who have the most needs." She admits, "I want to use what's effective, but I don't know how to pick amongst those. I guess. And now I'm starting to have more tools in my tool belt, but not the knowledge necessary to choose this tool for this and this tool for this."

Sophia and Leah's ability to reflect on what steps they need to take next are notable because they have made substantial jumps in their understanding of reading in this transition.

Synthesis of Themes

Changing the fundamental understanding of how kids learn to read in a large school system is a daunting task. There are many pieces that must be considered and understood. Through interviews with first grade teachers the preceding themes emerged as being of importance and worth considering. Each of these themes can be considered as separate considerations; however, they do intertwine and impact each other.

Participants indicated that there was a lack of training in their teacher preparation programs. They began their teaching careers with limited understanding of how to teach kids how to read. They spent years "latching on" to reading instruction that they were told was the correct way to teach reading. This has caused some upset and emotional reactions to their impetus of their desire to change. Some participants came to this

realization on their own and others have moved with the district movement. They indicated that their unlearning and subsequent relearning how to teach reading has been a journey that has been challenging and has led to some clarity that has ultimately benefited their instruction.

The feeling of disconnect in various facets was a resounding theme amongst participants. Teachers felt that the school system is not adequately supporting their work in this transition. They felt that they haven't received adequate communication or clear expectations which results in confusion and distrust. Feelings of disconnect with participants have impacted teachers' feelings of overwhelm through this process. Despite feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion teachers are pushing through and working through this transitional change. Participants are in different phases of this transition, with some beginning this process years ago and others very much in beginning phases of the transition. Teacher perspective is necessary as other school systems begin to make the switch from balanced literacy to research based reading instruction.

CHAPTER 5 IMPLICATIONS

Teaching is a multifaceted and complex profession. Teachers are tasked with providing a safe and positive learning environment for a class full of students. The students that fill up classrooms come with different experiences, backgrounds, and abilities. Considering the multitude of challenges that the students alone can evoke teaching is one of the most difficult professions on which a person can embark. American psychologist, Shulman (2004) said, "After some 30 years of (analyzing teaching), I have concluded that classroom teaching is perhaps the most complex, most challenging, and most demanding, subtle, nuanced, and frightening activity that our species has ever invented" (p. 504). I would concur with this analysis of teaching. Teaching is ever changing and difficult, and teachers, who are mere mortals, must manage and adapt to every possible scenario that working with small humans may present. The changing of the very fundamental understanding of reading acquisition is another iron in an already overrun fire.

As districts are making this transformational change teachers are on the front line. Teachers are trying to figure out this change in real time, with students in front of them. Their perspectives on this change should be a prioritized variable when determining the progress and efficacy of this change.

Over the past decade state after state, thirty one to be exact, have passed laws that bring reading policy in line with what the research has unequivocally determined how reading acquisition develops (Schwartz, 2023). This shift has created a monumental feat for local school districts and specifically teachers.

The participants in the present study provided valuable data that will contribute to the understanding of a teacher's perspective as many districts across the country are grappling with the same changes. They allowed me, as the researcher, into their understanding, thoughts, and perspectives of the transition, their classrooms, and their feelings.

Overview of Findings

This study illuminated findings that are representative of participants as they reflected on their perspectives through the transition from balanced literacy to research-based reading instruction.

Theme 1—Lack of training

Participants indicated that they did not receive training in college or on the job that would adequately support them in their monumental job of teaching students how to read. They indicated that this lack of training and subsequent feelings of inadequacies has been challenging. They have gone through the discomfort of realization, unlearning, and then the inevitable relearning. This has created feelings of hesitation and some mistrust for participants.

Theme 2—Disconnect

All participants expressed the disconnect that they experience as they are grappling with this change. The communication that they do receive from the district has been unclear, unfocused, and confusing. This has resulted in teachers feeling like they are flying blindly. They believe that they are not receiving clear guidance from their leadership which makes this transition even more challenging. Participants indicated that

they do not believe that the people who are tasked with providing information to them regarding reading instruction have sufficient understanding of reading themselves.

Theme 3—Teacher Overwhelm

Participants expressed the overwhelm that they have experienced as they are coming to terms with being misled and growing pains that have experienced as a result. Participants feel like they approached reading trusting what they were told and learned. They dove into their jobs and tried to do right by their students only to be abruptly stopped in their tracks and to receive the mind-blowing news that what they were doing was wrong. Now, they must go through the process of unlearning and learning which has caused teachers to be overwhelmed.

Theme 4—Passion for Change

Participants shared that during the process of change that they are going through they have had realizations and experiences that have provided a light and passion for this change. Participants have been able to see the benefits of this change in their students which has given them motivation and passion for moving forward in their new learning.

Discussion of Research Results Related to Theoretical Framework

The present study is guided by both Bandura's (1989) Social Cognitive Theory and Mezirow's (1978) Transformational Learning Theory. These two theories worked together to interpret teachers' perceptions and perspective on the transition in reading instruction in the district that they work. Self-efficacy, a core tenet of social cognitive theory, is used to examine teachers' perspective through this change. Teachers' perspectives were examined through the four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal through

interviews. Teacher efficacy within the process of transformational change provides valuable insights to teacher training and instruction. This research also analyzed the first four phases of transformational learning theory which include disorienting dilemma, self-examination of assumptions, critical reflection of assumptions, and recognition of dissatisfaction. The following is an examination of the participants as uncovered through the present study.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy, as a tenant of Social Cognitive Theory, examines the impact that teachers' perceptions and beliefs about their abilities impact student achievement. Teacher self-efficacy is a vital variable to probe through the process of changing the fundamental understanding of reading and subsequent reading instruction. Teachers who experience high levels of self-efficacy are better prepared to move through change and challenge, promoting longevity and greater satisfaction in their job (Coladarci, 1992).

Participants shared that they experienced some challenges to their self-efficacy regarding reading instruction. Through this "unlearning and relearning" some have felt a disruption in their perceptions and their abilities to properly teach their students how to read. Mastery experiences, as the most important tenet of self-efficacy, could no longer hold up (Goddard et al., 2004). Participants revealed that they had to scrutinize their past experiences, and perceived successes, through a more informed lens. As they were shifting through their new understandings of how students learn to read, they came to realize that they had been misinformed, leading to some teaching practices that did not best serve their students. Some participants revealed that their overall feelings of

themselves as competent teachers was on shaky ground as a result. Emotional arousal, another tenet of self-efficacy, was being challenged. Participants expressed feelings of guilt, confusion, anxiety, and general overwhelm. They had believed that they were doing what was best for their students only to be told that now that was wrong and now, they need to completely change.

Over time, participants have been able to build up their self-efficacy in reading. Some were able to rely on past feelings of mastery experiences, believing they could reexamine their previous paradigm to provide better instruction for their students. Some participants discussed their ability to rely on knowledgeable teammates or colleagues, to provide them vicarious experiences. It was through this peer-modeling participants were able to acknowledge that this paradigm shift was possible. They were given a front row seat to possibility of something different and it made them believe that they themselves could do the same.

Disorienting Dilemma

Disorienting dilemma is often the first phase of transformational learning as developed by Mezirow (1978). This first phase refers to the experience that throws people into transformational change. Disorienting dilemma often occurs as people are "confronted with knowledge that directly contradicts previously accepted knowledge" (Cranton, 2016, p. 49). Regarding reading instruction, teachers were taught ideas about reading that were not in line with the decades old body of research that was generally agreed upon by neuro and cognitive science. Despite this general understanding, teachers were not provided proper preparation, leading them to build an inaccurate understanding

of reading. This understanding has been widely criticized over the past five years leading to teachers experiencing paradigm shifting disorienting dilemmas.

Participants expressed their "disorienting event" in a myriad of ways, ranging from blatant to a more gradual realization. One participant explained how she had been gradually dipping her toe into this process but surprisingly found herself experiencing an unexpected disorienting dilemma. Her daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia. This moved her much more quickly and with greater urgency toward transformational change. Others described their own experiences with teammate pressure or a realignment in reading assessments and programs provided a window toward their disorienting dilemma. It was through this they were able to grapple with the idea that their previously held assumptions in reading were not correct. Each participant described this experience differently. Some participants felt an instant passion and drive in their realization while others felt deep sadness, grief, and loss.

Participants in the present study are experiencing this disorienting dilemma along with thousands of teachers across the county as the push for research-based reading instruction is on the forefront of education policy.

Self-Examination of Assumptions

Mezirow (2000, 2012) puts self-examination of assumptions as a key aspect of transformational learning theory. Examining one's own beliefs and assumptions can be difficult. It calls for people to be aware of these assumptions and make them explicit. They can reexamine these assumptions only after they are able to reflect on them and understand the sources of these assumptions. It is challenging to look at one's assumptions, bring it to the forefront, and see it from different angles (Cranton, 2016).

Participants expressed their assumptions on how they understood reading instruction. Many attended mandatory, or encouraged, professional development that shaped the building of their assumptions in reading. These assumptions were cultivated and shaped by leaders, graduate schools, and school systems. Although these assumptions about reading were out of line with how students learn to read, the presence of a power dynamic must be considered. Mezirow (2003) acknowledged that "asymmetrical power relationships" exist. Teachers were not making these decisions in a vacuum, or really making these decisions at all. They believed in good faith that they were learning and provided the necessary knowledge to teach their students. Mezirow (2003) stated, "beliefs are justified when they are based on good reason" (p. 58). Teachers had every reason to hold the assumptions that they held as an entire system was pushing these assumptions.

Participants acknowledged that they did, at times, question, if not to leaders, then quietly to themselves, these assumptions and believed that they didn't feel or seem right. They were beginning to question these assumptions however, until they experienced a more substantial dilemma, they couldn't jump in completely.

Critical Reflection of Assumptions

Mezirow (2000) posits that once people have conducted a self-examination of assumptions, they move into a phase in which people look deeply into those assumptions. They begin to question how and why they held their beliefs and assumptions. Where did their understanding come from? Within this phase people are coming to understand their internalized assumptions which can cause feelings of alienation of what they knew and their peer group who held the same assumptions. Some participants admitted that they

felt challenged and alone as they were moving through this change. Feeling like they knew enough to question their previous assumptions while also not fully grasping where they are headed. This realm of purgatory made some participants feel as though they were on an island, confused, and uneasy. Although this phase is uncomfortable it can allow participants to be able to see through to a path forward. Within this phase there is space to begin listening to others and engage in discourse surrounding reflecting on their past assumptions and building new understanding. One participant described her feelings through this phase, expressing that the time in which she was unlearning and relearning at the same time was very difficult. Unlearning is a more difficult process than just choosing to think in a different way. These assumptions are deeply held and part of who we perceive we are (Cranton, 2016). Untethering themselves from their assumptions on the fundamental understanding of reading was challenging.

Recognition of Dissatisfaction (Shared Problem)

Mezirow (2003) asserted that a vital phase of transformational learning theory is the acknowledgement and understanding of the shared problem with others. Connecting with others and noticing that there are others who have or are currently experiencing that same transformation is empowering and important to the process of change. Through this phase people are engaged in connection and discourse surrounding their challenging their assumptions and subsequent rebuilding of assumptions. Mezirow (2003) defined discourse as "dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings and values" (p. 59). Participants expressed that having colleagues who have gone through this transition was a source of encouragement for them. They conveyed that having models and people to talk to talk to and problem solve with has been very helpful. They have found these

connections through personal means, within schools, though acquaintances, and at times online.

Critical Self-Reflection

Mezirow (2000) has determined that critical self-reflection is a cornerstone of transformational learning theory (Cranton, 2016). It is not a phase of transformational learning as it is woven through the entire process. Mezirow (2000) believed that self-reflection was central to transformative learning theory (Cranton, 2016). A person must be able to ask themselves difficult questions to come to understand themselves and their positionality in the content. Cranton (2016) states, "Self-awareness is an important building block for good teaching" (p. 139). Participants in this study revealed their varying levels of self-reflection of where they are in the process of change and in their understanding of reading. Two participants are in a place within this transition to articulate their next steps in their journey. They both have pinpointed their next steps and are making steps to pursue that knowledge. There seems to be a drive to push them forward toward better understanding that was not evident with all participants. According to Cranton, some variation in tendencies toward self-reflection can be attributed to individual differences and psychological types.

Discussion of Research Findings in Relation to Literature

A review of the literature revealed substantial research of self-efficacy and how it impacts teachers' work. The research also provided substantial clarity in the history of reading research as well as the deficits evident in prominent reading approaches. There is also significant research supporting how word reading develops in children. There is, however, minimal evidence in understanding teachers' self-efficacy as they are moving

from balanced literacy toward research-based reading instruction. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap by examining first grade teachers' self-efficacy as they go through transformational change in their literacy instruction. The following will examine the research findings through the lens of the literature to understand the contributions to the existing literature.

Lack of Training for Teachers

Teachers spend hours upon hours in training and professional development each year, including coaching, workshops, and professional learning meetings. This training is most often compulsory and pre-determined, controlled by leadership well above classroom teachers. A study by the RAND corporation surveyed 8,000 kindergartens to twelfth grade teachers to better understand the professional development they are engaged in (Zuo et al., 2023). They found that the teachers' needs were not being fully addressed by the professional development that they were receiving. The number of hours spent in professional development vary by state mandates, school policies, and strength of union. Professional learning is an expectation in teaching. Most states require extended professional learning for recertification or movement on the salary schedule. There is an expectation of continued education for teachers. Like doctors, teachers are expected to keep abreast of new information in their field so they can employ researched instructional practices.

Despite the training they have received, participants admitted that they have, historically, felt completely unprepared to teach students how to read, let alone students who struggle. In-service teachers are often unaware of the basics of linguistic knowledge needed to adequately teach students how to read (Joshi, Binks, Hougen, et al., 2009).

Studies on teacher knowledge of language and reading knowledge indicate that teachers' understanding is minimal (Moats, 1994; Moats & Foorman, 2003). Spencer et al. (2008) found that teachers of early grade often do not possess basic phonological awareness understanding to adequately provide their own students the interventions they may need. Bottom line, teachers have received many hours of training over years of service, it is however, not guaranteed that the training will prepare them to be good reading teachers. There is even evidence that more experienced teachers are more skeptical and less responsive toward professional development (Brady, et. al., 2009) They have been exposed to so much professional development in the past and now they are beginning to understand that it was based on a reading approach that just doesn't work for all kids.

Participants in the present study are no different. They have all participated in professional development that they trusted was what was best for their students. Leah vocalized her frustration as she reflected on her weeklong professional development during the summer. She discusses that even during the training she remembers questioning the validity of their approach and feeling like it wasn't clear. These types of experiences led participants to feel unprepared and even more confused than before. They felt that much of the prior training connected to balanced literacy practices didn't give them the tools they needed to address their students' needs. Sophia disclosed that after being a teacher for many years, didn't realize that letters and sounds were connected. It just wasn't a part of her training so consequently when her students (fifth grade at the time) would struggle, she had no plan of attack. She admitted it was just to fall back on the read and read again, not having the tools in her tool belt for anything else.

Now that the participating district is moving toward a research-based reading approach there is still much to be desired in the professional development space. Participants have felt that the message that they are hearing from leadership is obscure and is coming out in pieces keeping them from seeing the whole picture of where they are headed. Participants revealed that they have not received the training that they need to move forward. Often the staff that is charged with providing the professional development are lacking in their understanding of reading. According to a RAND study of professional development, teachers reported that they have low access to subject matter experts during professional learning (Zuo et al., 2023). People who have not acquired the correct knowledge themselves are often tasked with teaching others. Janet is still unclear of the difference between phonological awareness and phonics and uses the terms interchangeably even a couple of years into the transition.

Despite the challenges around teacher training, there is some progress being made. Participants are aware of the growth in knowledge with several expressing intentions of what gaps they still have in their own learning. This kind of reflection can only come when a person is aware of what they know and what they still need to learn, which to me is a sign of a great teacher.

Teachers' Feelings of Disconnect

The shift from balanced literacy towards a research-based reading approach is a monumental task. There are many challenges in making such a foundational transformative change at the teacher or school level. Switching an entire school system is akin to turning a giant ship, it takes time, planning, clear expectations of jobs, and communication.

Participants in this study expressed the disconnect that they have felt through their own individual journey in this transition. Several can trace their feelings of disconnect to their own disorienting dilemma. They felt like something just didn't match with what they were being told and what was happening in their classrooms with their students. Doug remembered, silently questioning what he was being told to do but felt as though he had no clout to bring up any questions, expressing that he was a "new teacher, what can I do." Leah echoes similar questions, remembering when she brought up inconsistencies with her students being told "they will get it, they just need time." The message that some kids just need more time is a popular adage in balanced literacy which allows for kids struggling in reading to be passed on until their deficits are momentous. This is often seen at third grade which has been referred to as the pivot point, a critical transition (Wennersten, 2013). Students who are unable to read proficiently in third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school (Wennersten, 2013). Teachers who do not possess the necessary knowledge to address student needs are more susceptible to faulty instructional practices (Moats, 2020). The sense of disconnect that participants were feeling during this time was well founded as they were in the classroom and were keenly aware of the challenges some students were facing. Even with these lingering questions some participants shook it off and trusted what they were told.

A contributing factor to the disconnect that participants are feeling is the lack of clarity surrounding this transition. Leah shared that she sees the district's approach to the roll out as "subtle" and a watery version of what she thinks should be a much bolder and clear display of change. Education Weekly, a publication focusing on various issues in education, published an article focusing on educator understanding of the phrase "science

of reading" (Schwartz, 2023). They found a wide variability of educator knowledge and the science of reading. The ambiguity of the change can lead to viewing this change as "just another pendulum swing" as Victoria mentioned in her interview.

The idea of the pendulum swing was mentioned more than one time by participants, indicating that there is some interpretation of how skilled reading develops. Of course, this is not true, the science is largely settled (Castles et al., 2018).

Sophia recalls when she challenged the ideas that she was being told and did her research, shut her door, and did what she thought was best for her students. She often spent her own time and money on resources that her leadership wanted no part in. Now, years later, they have agreed with her and purchased the resources leaving the very people who were against the changes to lead it. This has not really sat well with this participant as she has been put in positions in which she is more knowledgeable than leadership and has had to correct them during collaboration meetings. It is not enough for teachers to be experts on early reading skills although it is vital for student success (Snow et al., 1998). School leadership should be striving to be subject matter experts in literacy as student scores increase as a result (Stein & D'Amico, 2000). Moats (2022) has suggested that teachers who have knowledge of the language systems are reading development are less susceptible to reading approaches that do not work.

Participants feel as though there is a hierarchy in their district, which is relied on to filter information down. They do not feel like they are getting the correct information. Victoria expressed that she felt confused because she was told that kindergarten, first, and second grades should only focus on phonics and nothing else. Emphasis on word reading is present in the early grade but that is certainly not the crux of it all. Reading is dynamic

and combines many processes which includes phonics (Castles et al., 2018). This could be addressed with quality professional development focusing on knowledge (Podhajski et al., 2009).

Participants did not feel like they have received the professional development that they need to move forward in their knowledge building. Leah admitted that the professional development has been very piecemeal, not useful and very sporadic. She feels unsupported and largely like she is on her own to learn what she needs to learn.

Teacher Overwhelm

Teachers across the country are feeling collective grief in the realization that their own time, energy and money was wasted. Add in the understanding that some students in their classrooms did not get the instruction that they needed. Teachers are overwhelmed. Participants in the present study are overwhelmed. Sophia described herself as feeling "powerless" in her inability to help her students. She had not received the professional development that would have opened the window for herself and her students. Many educators have not received the professional development that focuses on teacher knowledge of linguistic structures and early reading (Moats, 2020). Increased teacher knowledge is strongly linked to increased student achievement (Podhajski et al., 2009). At the time she just didn't know what she didn't know.

Leah shared the internal struggles that she was feeling as she was navigating this transition. She shared that she once felt like she was a solid reading teacher. She followed what the leaders at her school had instructed her to do and she thought that she was making all the right choices. Leah had a high self-efficacy leaning on mastery experiences in which she felt as though she had a bank of positive experiences that built

up her self-efficacy. Goddard et al. (2000) indicated that mastery experiences are the most powerful influences of self-efficacy. These experiences carried her forward and she would admit "I thought I was a really good reading teacher." She suddenly found herself losing her footing and that feeling of being a good teacher was no longer within grasp.

All participants share their sense of overwhelm and anxiety related to this transition. Doug feels like teachers are not given enough time to work in a program before they are moving on to a different program. These sentiments are supported by Moats (2020) which explains, a foundation of teacher knowledge would aid in the uncertainty of the transition teachers are going through in the participating district. He feels like he is just getting the hang of one program before they are moving to another program. This program whiplash has been seen in places such as Oakland and New York City in recent years (D'Souza et al., 2022). This reaching for the next new program creates more anxiety for him. Sophia similarly asserts that not having one reliable good quality program is a cause for frosting. It leads to teachers having to cobble together tier 1 and tier two reading lessons. "If we are not provided the tools, you can't get mad if the end product doesn't look good. Because you can't build without the tools."

Victoria shares that there needs to be some grace as teachers and educators are working through this transition, which she does not feel like is happening. She goes on to admit that this pressure leads to teacher shortages. She shared that she is trying to make changes saying, "I'm trying not to be that old teacher who holds on to something too much." Brady et al. (2009) found that more experienced teachers felt more skeptical and less receptive to big changes in instruction.

Through analysis of participant interviews a sub theme emerged related to teacher overwhelm. Participants' lack of good models is a contributing factor to their overwhelm and the presence of good models as a guiding light through overwhelm. Sophia shared that she does not see any good models in her school and does not believe that there is any science of reading leaders in her school at all. Donohoo (2016) indicated that vicarious experience is the second most effective influence of building self-efficacy. Teachers are more likely to overcome obstacles if they can see the success in other teachers in similar experiences (Donohoo, 2016). The ability to look at people who have been successful and are knowledgeable can increase teachers' feelings of competence (Donohoo, 2016). Leadership in schools should be on the front line of this change to ensure that it is benign done well (D'Souza et al., 2022). Otherwise, teachers get the feeling that leadership is communicating "do what I say not what I do."

Sophia shares that her community of support lies in her personal connections, as she has a group of colleagues outside of her school whom she can connect with and work through this change. Leah similarly shares that the only reason she has been able to progress in this transition as she has is due to her models. Her team has been ahead of the transition which at times has been overwhelming for her, however they have been able to model for her the way forward. Her witnessing her teamwork through the change and move forward was a positive influence on her self-efficacy. This sentiment is supported by Donohoo's (2016) work on collective teacher efficacy, which found that success of teams can be a great source of teacher efficacy. Leah states, "I think that the only reason I've really been convinced that the way that I taught reading was not helpful to children and I really needed to change my practice was because I was already around people who

had already done it. That was huge." The dip of self-efficacy through changing instructional methods has been examined and researchers found that the dip can be remedied by reinforcing teacher knowledge of the content (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). The findings in this study further support the need for content knowledge professional learning to support teachers in their transition from balanced literacy to research based reading instruction. Studies that have explored content knowledge's impact on self-efficacy have concluded that as teacher knowledge increases so does their feelings of self-efficacy (Sharp et al., 2016). Leah shares that had she not had the team she has had through this transition acknowledging, "I think that I would have been dragging my feet into changing the way I taught reading."

Findings in the present study conclude that working through transformational change is difficult and has resulted in an overwhelmed work force. They explain some barriers and challenges that they have felt as a result. This research can lend insight to school systems that are moving through the same transition. Teachers need clarity, communication, supportive leadership, and models to buttress their work on the frontlines of transition.

Teacher Passion for Change

Participants in the present study were fully immersed in the balanced literacy approach of teaching reading. This approach was supported by district professional development and expectations. Despite this full on embracing of the balanced literacy approach, participants had some notion that things just didn't make sense. If this was THE way to teach reading, why were there so many students not getting it? Shanahan (as

cited in Luscombe, 2022), prominent reading researcher, stated that balanced literacy was up to interpretation and left instruction up to teachers.

Sophia knew that the "fluffy" "everything is rainbows" approach just wasn't working for her students. She could see that it wasn't working, and she didn't have the tools to help them. Seidenberg (2017) concurs that balanced literacy was obscure and there was virtually no guidance for teachers to rely on. Even Sophia, an established teacher, did not know that letters made sounds. She is hardly alone in her lack of early reading skills and understanding. There is ample research to conclude that teachers do not possess the necessary knowledge of reading skills (Bos et al., 2001; Moats, 1994; Moats & Lyon, 1996). This realization was the first crack in her balanced literacy foundation which was completed once her own daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia. She could no longer teach in the dark and she propelled herself into this reading journey. She sought out podcasts, books, classes that would shine light into what she was missing. She has explained that although this work is hard, she dove in, "when you are passionate about something, you're more ready to jump in." She acquired new learning and began to use it in her classroom. Her confidence in her classroom instruction increased. The feeling that Sophia felt was substantiated by Parrila et al. (2023) which concluded that increased teacher knowledge positively impacts the quality of teacher instruction. Teacher knowledge fuels student achievement, and the consistent mastery experiences she was now experiencing impacted her self-efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000).

Leah sees that she is still on a steep learning curve, realizing that she has learned a lot but still has a long way to go. Her quiet reflection allows her to think deeply about this transition. Interestingly, there is research to suggest that teachers who have a higher

linguistic understanding tend to underestimate that knowledge (Cunningham et al., 2004; Moats, 2009). This is an interesting phenomenon, pointing to once a person knows what they didn't know they understand their deficits more. She has been able to see the growth that her students have made which has contributed to her feelings of self-efficacy. These sentiments are mirrored in Donohoo (2017), in which mastery experiences are highlighted as the more influential source of self-efficacy. She mentioned that she no longer questions the validity of the transition because she can see the growth, "I think it's really encouraging because it feels like it's not a question anymore of how the pieces fit together." Doug makes similar reflections on seeing the foundation of the students and as a result seeing them gain confidence, "students' confidence has changed so much." These sentiments are mirrored by McCutchen et al. (2002), who found that increased content knowledge increases student scores.

Sophia reflects on her own journey in this transition. She was ahead of the curve in her school, she gained the knowledge that she was missing all on her own, and her students' made gains. Her school leadership eventually jumped on board due to her students' growth. Her leadership finally got on board because "there is evidence in our reading scores, you can't deny."

Leah and Sophia both contemplate where they need to go next. They have seen the light on what they did not know which opened them up to a whole new world of understanding. Their progress in acquisition of reading knowledge has made it possible for them to fully understand what they do not know.

Recommendations for Practice

Districts across the country are transitioning from balanced literacy to research-based reading instruction. This transition is paradigm shifting and requires teachers to unlearn old unproven ideas about reading and relearn instructional approaches backed by research. Shifts of this nature do not happen often in education, certainly not in a complete about face manner. As participants in this study have shown, teachers may approach this transition in different ways. Some coming to the shift before the district mandates and some coming to the realization along with the district. The findings of this study suggest that there is a wide variance in teacher knowledge related to research-based reading instruction. Teacher knowledge is paramount in moving schools forward in this transition. The following are recommendations for practice based on findings of the present study.

- There is a need for clear professional development that addresses the deficits teacher knowledge in reading. There is some evidence that much of the professional development provided is not a requirement, although the participating district did provide some surface skimming professional development, it was not comprehensive enough to provide participants adequate reading knowledge, as some participants weren't not clear on some early reading skills.
- Professional development should include all elementary school teachers. The participants in this study indicated that the limited professional development offered for teachers was concentrated at the primary grades and upper grade teachers have been kept largely in the dark about the changes.

- All leadership within schools should be responsible for the same knowledge and professional development as teachers. As many principals are responsible for being instructional leaders in school, their level of content knowledge should reflect that responsibility.
- School systems that are moving through this transition should be clear and upfront about the steps and timelines to change. All participants communicated the disconnect they have felt in this transition thus far, leading to some negative feelings regarding themselves and the district.
- Teachers need quality coaching with subject matter experts that can guide them through the transition. Knowledge coaches can provide teachers with support in not only the unlearning of balanced literacy but provide support in research-based reading instruction. Knowledge building is vital; however, classroom implementation is key to progressing student achievement.
- Peer cohorts should be developed to provide teachers with models of change and implementation. Participants indicated that the lack of models was a hindrance to their progress and a source of frustration. Not surprisingly, participants also indicated that the models that they did have are a tremendous amount of support for them and gave them a picture of what it looked like in the classroom.
- Lastly, colleges of education should be held to the same, if not more stringent, then classroom teachers. College professors should be held accountable for the same state tests as teachers are for licensure. The problem should be addressed at the top. Colleges should be equipping their preservice teachers

with the knowledge necessary to teach students to read which is after all what they are expecting out of their preservice education. As study after study has indicated that teachers and teachers of teachers do not have the knowledge to teach students how to read the system needs to be addressed. A quote by Tutu (n.d) illustrates this pressing need, “There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in”. Preservice teachers are paying good money to institutes that are metaphorically pushing them in the river waiting for them to be pulled out down the river, if ever. Being pulled out down the river is much more costly to districts but especially for students who are the true beneficiaries of the flawed system.

Each one of these recommendations is centered in teacher support. The system of education from preservice to in-service has landed teachers in the precarious position that they find themselves in. Having to grapple with unlearning their previous paradigm in reading, which was ingrained into them since the beginning of their education, is no small feat. It comes with anger, sadness, guilt, and other emotions that impact their self-efficacy as educators. Participants of this study, who are in the middle of this transition, have been able to reflect on these feelings giving insight to what supports teachers need in this transition and avenues of future research that would further inform this work.

Implications for Future Research

Teachers across the country are making their way through transformational change in their reading instruction. Some are arriving at this change through their own quest for answers and some are pushed towards this change through state and district

mandates. Regardless of the impetus of the change, teachers within the weeds of change are slogging through uncharted territory. Educators are being asked to shift their paradigm of how reading develops as well as their instructional practices. The perceptions of teachers during this shift demand research. The present student provides insight into how five first grade teachers are engaging in this change and their new learning through this change. The small sample size, supported by the qualities of the IPA framework, provides a window into a diverse set of voices that illuminate insights to educator perspective through change (Smith et al., 2009). This study focused on first grade teachers as an entry point in this area of research. This research may be elevated with a wider participant pool crossing multiple districts, to cast a wider net on teacher perspectives. Understanding how research-based reading instruction is being rolled out between school districts can be prescriptive to districts that are yet to move forward.

Additionally, this research can be further substantiated by use of surveys. Conducting survey research would be valuable to ascertain information on teacher knowledge in early reading. Understanding teacher knowledge throughout this transition would provide valuable data for further professional development. Findings evident from the current study indicated that teacher knowledge is vital in their abilities to teach all their students. Teacher knowledge also contributes to feelings of self-efficacy as teachers are figuring out ways to approach students who experience reading challenges.

Participants in this study indicated that peer models or the lack thereof can impact their self-efficacy, respectively. Findings in this study have indicated that teachers are able to gain self-efficacy through change by observing and interacting with other teachers as models. Teachers that are moving from one paradigm, that they thought worked,

towards a completely different way of thinking may lose a source of self-efficacy. Mastery experiences are built over time to give teachers confidence in their abilities. Through transformational change those experiences may now be suspect and upon deep reflection, flawed. Further research on transformational change and the impacts it has on sources of self-efficacy is needed. Do self-efficacy teachers look to other sources of self-efficacy if one wanes during transition?

Furthermore, the role that collective teacher efficacy plays in transformational learning requires research. As schools and entire school systems are looking to make this change, more research is needed to understand how collective efficacy can be leveraged to hold teachers up and to support student achievement. Participants espoused ideas of feeling alone or on an island through their journey which is an area of concern.

Lastly, teacher preparation programs should be investigated further to gain insight to how programs are run and to what extent programs are subject to oversight to ensure research-based practices are being taught. Additionally, further research is warranted of the knowledge that teacher educators process regarding research-based reading instruction.

Reciprocity With Participants

Transformational change is complicated and challenging for any person to engage in. It is not merely just a change but "a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions" (Transformative Learning Centre, 2004, p. 1). Teachers in the participating district and across the country are experiencing these changes with little understanding of teacher self-efficacy. The present study aimed to investigate this pressing matter. Participant experiences and reflections were paramount in this research

as their individual perspectives were sought out to better understand this phenomenon. Participants in this study gave powerful insight to how they are managing through change and their perceptions can be informative to school systems moving toward change. Four out of five of the participants were unknown to me at the start of the interviews. In depth semi-structured interviews gave participants the opportunity to articulate their perspectives in a setting that encouraged reflection and honesty. Participants expressed relief throughout interviews to be given the chance to vocalize their individual struggles as well as the missteps they feel the district has made. Through their reflections they were able to better understand what they have learned and their next steps in this journey. Participants expressed gratitude for this research as they believe that it is important that teachers' voices be heard as decisions are being made. Participants did not receive any material goods, but they all expressed appreciation in their inclusion in this research. Their perspectives will contribute to research of transformational change in literacy instruction and self-efficacy that can inform their own district and other districts across the country.

Direct Application of Research

Findings of the present research study garnered themes that gain insight into teachers' experiences through transformational change in literacy instruction. Participants' generous and candid perspective provide a window into how this change impacts teachers on the front lines. There is an impetus in this research as teachers across the country are in similar positions. Teaching is a profession that is fraught with turn over due to teacher overwhelm. It is vital that the school system approach changing literacy instruction with care and armed with research that focuses on teacher perspective. In the

next coming months, I will share this research with the participating district. I will be available to work with them to develop systemic structures that will support teachers. I aim to provide support and coaching to teachers directly in the participating district and surrounding district. This work already informs my work as a classroom teacher and literacy leader in my school as I have guided teammates and colleagues through change.

Conclusion

States across the country are passing laws that mandate the use of research-based reading practices in schools. This has proved challenging for many school districts. Despite the decades of research that undergirds this change many districts were approaching reading with practices that not only didn't align with research but were in opposition to skilled reading. As a result, students' reading scores nationwide remained stagnant. This latest push for researched based instruction is widespread and in many cases grassroots in which parent groups are championing, propelling this issue to the forefront of education. Teachers, who are on the front lines, are left to do the work necessary to pivot from one paradigm to another.

The present study aimed to garner teachers' perspectives as they are transitioning in their understanding of reading and their instructional practices. It is important to be cognizant of teachers' self-efficacy as they move through such a paradigm shifting change. This study also endeavored to understand teachers' knowledge of early reading skills. It is vital that teachers build their knowledge of early reading skills through this change as there is research that links to teacher knowledge and student achievement (McCutchen et al., 2002; Snow et al., 1998). Educators must understand the reason for the shift in reading instruction to truly transition. This is arduous work that has been

placed on teachers. It requires them to grapple with the injustice that has been done to them and as a result their students, while simultaneously relearning how to teach students to read. This is a big ask of our already overwhelmed teachers. The least we can do is provide them the needed support while they are endeavoring this momentous feat.

It is important to understand district level roll out of directives that support the transition and to be cognizant of teachers' perspective of those directives. Findings indicate that there are some adjustments that are needed so that teachers feel more supported. Clear communication is crucial to illicit teacher buy-in to transformational change. Leadership who is knowledgeable and strives to listen to educators is necessary in moving schools and teachers forward in this transition. Teachers' voices are crucial as this transition is taking place. Leaders need to listen to the challenges that teachers face and acknowledge the part that they may have played.

In time there needs to be a reckoning to acknowledge this injustice. Teachers deserve to understand how it is possible to be in the precarious position that they find themselves in. There is no telling what that reckoning will look like and how we as a profession grapple with the effects and possible fallout. It all remains to be seen as this transformation unfolds before us in real time. In the meantime, teachers, as usual, must dust themselves off, pick up the pieces and forge on doing what is best for the students in front of them who deserve to learn how to read.

APPENDIX A CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

A study is being conducted to better understand first grade teachers' self-efficacy during transformational change in reading instruction. This study is being done by Amy M. Arnold for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree at St. John's University in New York. The researcher specifically aims to investigate teachers' understanding of foundational reading skills and how to provide support for teachers as they engage in a changing literacy landscape.

In order to participate, individuals must have been teaching first grade for a minimum of 3 years in the district that the study is taking place.

The study consists of a one-on-one interview (45-90 minutes), which can be conducted at your convenience and at a location of your choice. There may be a possibility of a follow-up interview if any clarification is needed.

If you are eligible and willing to participate or know someone who may be interested in participating please email amy.arnold18@my.stjohns.edu or call (307)277-0163 for more information.
Confidentiality of all parties is guaranteed. No identifying information will be published or shared with others.

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Institution: (pseudonym)

Interviewee: (pseudonym)

Interviewer: Amy M. Arnold

Research Question: How do first grade teachers perceive their self-efficacy as they are going through the transition from balanced literacy to research-based word reading?

Part 1: Introduction to Interview

Good morning. You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has much to contribute to the discourse around the implementation of research based early reading instruction being implemented throughout the district. I aim to understand your experiences with this transformational change as you implement new instructional practices. The purpose of this research is to better understand how implementation of instructional change impacts teacher self-efficacy. The research will provide teachers with the voice and forum to share their insights and inform leaders of what they need to support them through transformational change.

Your responses are important, and I want to ensure that I accurately capture everything you say during the interview. Do I have your permission to record this interview? I will also maintain written notes to promote accuracy and give me the ability to cross-reference information. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue at any time. All of your personal details will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used. I will be the only individual with access to recordings and once they are transcribed, they will be destroyed. Do you have any questions about the interview process or data obtained?

This interview will last between 45-90 minutes in length. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part 2: Interview questions

I am interested in the events surrounding changing reading instruction that has been implemented in this district. I would like to hear about your experiences with this change and your perspective of implementing this change in your classroom. I am going to ask you some questions about experiences that you may have encountered in this change.

1. Describe your role in the school and how you came to arrive at your current position?
   a. What is your educational background?
   b. What inspired/brought you into teaching?
   c. How long have you been teaching?
2. Describe your teaching philosophy.

3. How does this philosophy fit within literacy? What is your philosophy about literacy instruction?
a. What informs your philosophy about reading instruction?
b. How has your understanding of literacy instruction evolved?
4. Think back over the last 6-12 months as a teacher, how has your literacy instruction evolved?

a. How has your understanding in Phonological awareness changed in the past 12 months?
b. How has your understanding of word level reading changed in the past 12 months?
c. If a student is struggling in word reading, do you know how to help that student?

5. Describe your perceptions of self-efficacy with literacy instruction?
6. To what extent do you have control over your literacy instruction?
a. How are literacy practices and policies rolled out within your school?
7. What opportunities do you have to grow your literacy instruction knowledge?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me regarding literacy instruction?

Closing

Thank you for taking the time to have this discussion with me today. I will continue by transcribing the interview for analysis. I may contact you with follow up questions to provide clarity if necessary. Please contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

APPENDIX C INFORMED CONSENT

Participant Consent Form

St. John's University, Department of Education

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Rachael L. Helfrick (Principal Investigator), Amy M. Arnold (Student Researcher)

Title of Project: First Grade Teachers' Self-Efficacy During Transformational Changes in Literacy Instruction- An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study: We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the research will inform you of the particulars of the study first. You may ask the researcher any questions you may have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may let the researcher know if you would like to participate or not. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask that you sign this statement and will give you a copy.

Request to Participate in Research: We would like to invite you to take part in this research because you have participated in county wide literacy change, and you have valuable insight to that process.

Why is this research study being done: The purpose of this research study is to understand first grade teachers' self-efficacy while in transformational change in reading instruction. This study will provide insights that may further teacher self-efficacy feelings.

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview to answer questions and to provide background information. The interview should last approximately 45-90 minutes. You will be interviewed at a time and location that is convenient for you. Please note, your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me? There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research? There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, this research may provide teachers with a voice and place to share insights that teachers have that may help leaders in the area of reading and teacher growth. Your participation may provide insights and understanding for

professional development around reading, with a special understanding of teacher self-efficacy.

Who will see the information about me? Your participation in this study will be confidential. Principal Investigator and Student Researcher will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will not identify you or any individual as being part of this project. Pseudonyms for names, locations, and institutions will be used throughout to protect the identity of all participants.

If I do not want to take part in this study, what choices do I have? The decision to participate in this research is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems? If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Amy Arnold (Tel: 307-277-0163, Email amy.arnold18@my.stjohns.edu), the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Rachael Helfrick (St. John's University helfricr@stjohns.edu) , the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant? For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuesppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

You will receive a copy of this consent document to keep.

Thank you,
Amy M. Arnold
Student Researcher
St. John's University

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Student Researcher Date

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