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Abstract

The purpose of the multi-case qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of Grade 5 teachers after professional development using a guided reading training model. The study district, a suburban district in South Texas, serves over 600 Grade 5 students. Four Grade 5 teachers from four elementary schools in the same school district were selected to participate. The teachers were trained in the methodology of guided reading based on the protocols and research recommendations by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. Prior to training in the methodology of guided reading, Grade 5 teachers were not required to teach guided reading. The key findings of the study indicated the belief of the teachers of benefits to using guided reading as an instructional model in Grade 5 classrooms. Although weaknesses were noted, the development of student confidence and growth suggested guided reading should be a methodology of instruction in Grade 5 classrooms.

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**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF GUIDED
READING AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL FOR FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS**

by

Codi Fowler-Freeman, B.S., M.Ed.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

Stephen F. Austin State University

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Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the multi-case qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of Grade 5 teachers after professional development using a guided reading training model. The study district, a suburban district in South Texas, serves over 600 Grade 5 students. Four Grade 5 teachers from four elementary schools in the same school district were selected to participate. The teachers were trained in the methodology of guided reading based on the protocols and research recommendations by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. Prior to training in the methodology of guided reading, Grade 5 teachers were not required to teach guided reading. The key findings of the study indicated the belief of the teachers of benefits to using guided reading as an instructional model in Grade 5 classrooms. Although weaknesses were noted, the development of student confidence and growth suggested guided reading should be a methodology of instruction in Grade 5 classrooms.

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DEDICATION

As a wife of over 26 years to my high school sweetheart, I could not have even begun this adventure without his utter patience and generosity with our time and finances. Wesley never questioned my decision or suggested anything but completion of this journey, as did our children, Andrew and Cassidy Freeman, Rachel Freeman, and our almost son-in-law, Sean Lamb. They are my heart, and I wanted to demonstrate to them that personal development is necessary and attainable regardless of the life situation.

I have been a pastor's wife all 26 years of our marriage. Our church family at First Baptist Highlands encouraged me and allowed me the opportunity to focus on my research and over two years of study. For FBCH, I am forever grateful. Lastly and most importantly, I have to thank my Christ for providing the strength, determination and perseverance to complete this work.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Over the past several decades, the methodologies of teaching reading and the pedagogy necessary have changed multiple times. These pedagogical changes have not changed the need for children to be provided with the opportunity to learn to read. In our highly literate society, the ability to read is vital for a person's quality of life (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). For children to increase their opportunity for a successful life, their success should begin in the classroom with the ability to read. It is known that children must be readers to be successful in school, yet not all children are successful readers, and a large percentage of children and adults across the United States struggle to maintain the basic skills of literacy necessary to demonstrate success in daily life and the workplace. In a report for the National Center for Education Statistics, Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad (1993) discussed the findings of the National Adult Literacy Study that 21% of Americans tested demonstrated the lowest literacy level defined by the National Center for Education Statistics. This is interpreted into population terms of between 40 and 44 million adults nationwide performing at the lowest level of literacy proficiency (Kirsch et al., 1993). Results from 2003 remained the same (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). This atrocity of illiteracy in our nation has been the focus of

governmental officials for decades, yet the trend of illiteracy is not improving. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), teaching the pillars of literacy—alphabeticity, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary—leads to improved performance and literacy for children. School districts across the nation have chosen how to teach the pillars with great variance from district to district, school to school, and even classroom to classroom. The dissimilarities can be attributed to the continual change in methodologies as directed by administration, typically as a result of weak standardized test scores. These changes are initiated by administration, and teachers often consider the change a challenge rather than an opportunity for open discourse based on teacher expertise and student needs.

The continual changes in methodologies and the continued trend of illiteracy result in the need for teacher training for effective implementation of methodologies of instruction. Fullan (1993) wrote, “You cannot have an educational environment in which change is continuously expected, alongside a conservative system and expect anything but constant aggravation.” (p. 13). Linn, Gill, Sherman, Vaughn, and Mixon (2010) noted that due to the high-stakes accountability demands, effective teachers are the direct indicator of successful students. Therefore, quality teacher training models must be implemented to ensure students learn to read. Teachers who are trained to have a deep understanding of their content can shift their focus to improving instruction so more students are successful (Knight, 2007).

However, one of the issues for teachers in their attempt to improve instructional practices and develop successful readers is that in the average classroom students are reading on various independent and instructional reading levels, requiring a myriad of teaching skills to effectively reach each reader. The skills taught by the effective teacher foster the student's ability to focus on information from different sources within the cue system (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Not all students can read on the grade level in which they are studying, requiring teachers to employ a plethora of strategies to ensure students are being taught at the level of text in which they can read. The strategies are used within the classroom and employed in whole-group and small-group instruction.

Background of the Problem

In 1985, a report was disseminated that explained that children who read well in early grades are far more successful than those who fail to learn to read and/or fall behind in their ability to read. The Report of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985), stated, "Reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child's success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost" (p. 1). Fountas and Pinnell (2017) contended that our communities are welcoming immigrants from other countries, cultures, and languages, increasing the number of students who are learning to speak English. This diversity in classrooms requires teachers to have a large playlist of strategies and skills to effectively

meet the needs of all students as well as an abundance of resources to teach reading at each level of text and within each modality of instruction.

Teachers struggle to implement vital strategies to teaching reading. Connelly, He, and Phillion (2008) indicated that failing schools is a result of teachers within the schools who are not able to teach their students. Roller (2001) noted that teachers admitted to the profession are often not prepared for the demands of the profession, which includes managing student behaviors, planning, diagnosing reading deficiencies, and differentiating for the various levels and needs within and among students.

Understanding reading comprehension and teaching the many related facets have been issues open to debate for many years. Researchers have identified that using a variety of reading groupings and strategies is critical in developing successful readers. However, the National Reading Panel (2000) noted that many teachers lack the solid foundation of teaching the various groupings and strategies.

Illiteracy remains a growing concern for educators serving students in Texas. In the 2017-2018 school year, of the 391,795 fifth-grade students tested on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), 78% were labeled as approaching grade-level proficiency on the accountability measures (Texas Education Agency, 2018). On said assessment, approaching grade-level proficiency is defined as students scoring between 32% and 59% accurate. Although 78% of the students scored at the “approaching” level, students only scored a maximum of 59% correct, and the accountability standards for each STAAR assessment increase yearly in every grade level

and every content area, including reading. For this reason, many districts around the state are actively looking for new instructional methodologies to revolutionize their reading instruction and reverse the trend of illiteracy (Urquhart & Frazee, 2012).

For district leaders in Texas, training programs and the implementation of instructional methodologies must become a piece of a long-term effort for school improvement rather than an “in by day, out by night” cycle, not resulting in immediate or long-term results. Fullan and Miles (1992) noted that serious educational reform will not occur until significant numbers of people in the educational environment have internalized the basic knowledge of how successful change takes place and how the change creates lingering practices, rather than “superficial first-order changes” (p. 745). However, when school leaders see the newly adopted program failing, leaders often begin exploring the reasons for failure and new programs to institutionalize with the hopes of success rather than failure (Knight, 2007). This trend of Band-Aid or temporary solutions to the lack of student success in reading illustrates why training and modeling of instruction are paramount in developing successful readers, and the Band-Aid effect will not patch the enormous gash in students’ inability to read well. Knight (2007) noted that when teachers receive support in professional learning from each other and through training and modeling, a large percentage of teachers embrace the change and implement practices that improve students’ learning.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study concerns the lack of effective small-group reading instruction by new and veteran teachers in elementary schools. Inadequate reading instruction transfers through secondary school, resulting in adults entering society and the workforce lacking literacy skills employers seek. Motley (2016) wrote, “Approximately eight million young people between the fourth and twelfth grade struggle to read at grade level” (p. 17). This staggering number translates to a population who are

. . . far more likely to 1) to leave school before graduating, 2) to fail a grade, 3) to be placed in special education, 4) to become a teenage parent, 5) to commit a juvenile criminal offense, and 6) to remain less than fully literate. (Allington & Walmsley, 1995, p. 2)

Trelease (1995) concurred as he aligned the lack of literacy resulting in criminal offenses to the number of inmates considered illiterate. Trelease wrote, “Among those who don’t succeed, a major portion end up in poverty and/or prison. Sixty percent of American inmates are illiterate” (p. xiii).

Mandated by No Child Left Behind (2002) and the subsequent Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), students in Grades 3–8 must show proficiency in reading and math (Stecher, Vernez, & Steinberg, 2010). However, as noted in 2018 STAAR data for fifth-grade reading, proficiency is limited.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine whether professional development focused on guided reading for fifth-grade teachers and the subsequent model lessons and coaching rounds within a balanced literacy framework (training model) increased teachers' understanding of the guided reading cycle and their perceptions of guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms. The study was also intended to advise school and district leadership of the effects of quality guided reading implemented due to training and modeling of the guided reading lesson cycle. Guided reading is an instructional methodology where the teacher uses various reading strategies with small groups of children at the same instructional reading level (Wilde, 2000). The anticipated outcome of the study was to continue the training model to include teachers in prekindergarten through fifth grade as well as affect decision-making for funding, selecting, and adopting instructional materials for guided reading instruction.

The idea of the balanced literacy framework incorporating guided reading originated in California in 1996 (Honig, 1996). California students' low results on the national reading assessment required a mandate of balanced literacy, or balanced reading instruction, which included an understanding that phonics is foundational to comprehension and higher order thinking, phonics should be taught systematically and explicitly, and instruction should include regular periods of explicit skills instruction and literature experiences (Asselin, 1999). The idea of balanced literacy differs from the

whole-language reading approach, which is based on the belief that phonics acquisition will occur through the process of investigating texts rather than from systematic, direct teaching found in traditional instruction.

Balanced literacy was designed for strong implementation of systematic and systemic skill and strategy use to increase students' reading ability and level of text in which students can read proficiently. A quality teacher knows the uniqueness of each student and the course of action needed to effectively change reading behaviors (Carroll, Barger, James, & Hill, 2017). Balanced literacy encompasses both explicit instruction in phonetic knowledge and the immersion in literary and informational text necessary to teach children to learn to read and to read to learn, which are simultaneous processes. Additionally, a balanced literacy approach to instruction regularly offers students with several types of experiences in both reading and writing (Richards, 1998). As noted by Fountas and Pinnell (1996), guided reading leads to independent readers and is the "heart of a balanced literacy program" (p. 1). Guided reading is an instructional methodology where the teacher meets with small groups of children, six or fewer, who are all reading on the same, or near the same, instructional reading level. The teacher employs a myriad of reading strategies to help students progress through leveled text, building competencies to every additional text they read (Wilde, 2000).

Research Question

A single research question guided the study. What are the teacher perceptions of using the guided reading methodology of instruction in a fifth-grade classroom following the professional development and model lessons of guided reading (training model)?

Significance of the Research

Beginning in the late 1970s, researchers began to study the effects of reading achievement on student graduation rates. Following work by Lloyd (1978), additional research suggested that students' reading ability in third grade is a possible early indicator of high school dropout. Hernandez (2012), in his study, *Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*, found, "One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate four times greater than that for proficient readers" (p. 1).

Reading is important for society as well as for individuals. R. C. Anderson et al. (1985) stated that schooling is an investment that forms human capital as individuals learn knowledge, skills, and problem solving that have an enduring value for society. R. C. Anderson et al. noted,

While a country receives a good return on investment in education at all levels from nursery school and kindergarten through college, the research reveals that the returns are highest from the early years of schooling when children are first learning to read. (p. 1)

Reading is vital to ensure students are successful and graduate high school to add more value to our society; therefore, the study could inform district personnel of the appropriate manner of spending funding for the advancement of students' reading ability. As state testing expectations increase almost yearly, and school and district leaders determine the implementation of instructional models, statistical data are reviewed to provide the grounds for execution of the guided reading instructional model as well as the evidence suggesting how district monies are used to purchase necessary materials for the instructional model of guided reading. After the installment of No Child Left Behind, Title I appropriations increased 51%, with the largest share of Title I funding going to districts of high poverty (Stecher et al., 2010). School districts have been offered substantial funding for instructional materials, at which time district administrators determine funding of these materials based on data.

Additionally, systematic and systemic, research-based methodologies of instruction are needed in the elementary classroom for literacy instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Across Texas, teachers are thrust into classrooms with the mission to develop successful students. However, teachers are not always well trained in the methodologies needed to differentiate instruction for each individual student (Urquhart & Frazee, 2012). Teaching reading is not dependent upon one specific strategy but on a variety of strategies readers can apply in the reading moment—moment by moment. Guided reading provides the space for readers, through coaching and guiding, the

opportunity to exercise the appropriate strategies for the specified need in learning to read and processing the text.

Independent School District (ISD) 21 teachers have had limited training in guided reading; the guided reading instructional model has not been implemented in fifth-grade classrooms, and teachers have not been trained in writing guided reading lesson plans that focus on the strategic action needed for differentiated instruction. The study benefited the district by allowing teacher voice in their training opportunities and the effect of the literacy plan training model, evaluation of the implementation of guided reading from teachers' perceptions, assistance in designing future professional development opportunities, and a curriculum focus for the upcoming school year. Additionally, the study added to the plethora of research in support of guided reading instruction as a methodology for not only primary grades but into intermediate and secondary schools, as reading skills acquisition is developmental.

Assumptions

The study was conducted within one school district educating approximately 600 fifth-grade students on four different campuses. There was an assumption that the expectations of the guided reading instructional model for ISD 21 were followed. The expectations were (a) attendance of all fifth-grade teachers at one day of guided reading training, (b) each teacher meeting with two groups of fifth-grade students per day, (c) each group lasting 20 minutes, and (d) groups containing six or fewer students based on the instructional reading level of students.

A second assumption was that teachers understood the process of reading and how to provide a context for responsive teaching. Even the most veteran teacher can struggle with understanding the various aspects of teaching children the intricacies of how to read specific to the strategic action necessary to process text (Carroll et al., 2017). The tools necessary for successful reading instruction include a teacher's understanding of the reading process, observation of students as noted in anecdotal notes, ability to analyze the demands of texts, and a strong repertoire of teaching actions that empower readers to develop self-initiative and self-regulating reading behaviors (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017).

The gap between theory and practice is an additional assumption. Roth, Lawless, and Tobin (2000) noted a divide between the theories taught at the university and the actual application in the classroom, and the gap continues to expand due to the short student-teaching experience and the moment the real work as a teacher begins. All four teachers graduated with a degree in education, yet the level of theory in guided reading provided each teacher during preservice training is unknown. Guided reading was not a required methodology of instruction in the school district. Teachers had not been trained in the guided reading lesson cycle or the theories supporting the structure of the lesson cycle. Therefore, an assumption was the potential for a gap between the theories of guided reading and the actual application in the fifth-grade classrooms.

Limitations

Limitations to this multi-case qualitative study included the possibility of researcher bias related to identifying themes that align to the desired outcome of the study. A further limitation is the understanding that reading is a complex content area to teach. Teachers might be overwhelmed with the various levels of student ability within each classroom. An additional limitation is that data were gathered from only four fifth-grade teachers in regards to their perceptions after guided reading training and modeling (training model), resulting in a small sample size. One last limitation is the management of students in the classroom, whether effective or ineffective, to implement guided reading. Quality classroom management of all classroom students is essential for successful guided reading.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were utilized throughout the research process. The terms are defined to assist in the understanding of the study. The conceptual definitions provide the reader with an understanding of the terms used in the study.

Balanced literacy framework.

Reading instruction implementing interactive read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading to encourage reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Wren, 2001).

Guided reading.

A teaching approach within the balanced literacy framework that operates to help students gain a processing system of strategies of increasingly challenging texts over time that are leveled in the student's' instructional reading level (Richardson, 2009).

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR).

The state-mandated set of assessments in Grades 3–12 used to assess students' knowledge and academic readiness (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Independent reading level.

A text level at which students score 95% or greater accuracy rate when assessed using a running record (Richardson, 2009).

Instructional reading level.

Text level at which students score a 90–94% accuracy rate when assessed using a running record (Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, & Kosanovich, 2007).

Frustrational reading level.

Text level at which students score an 89% or lower accuracy rate when assessed using a running record (Richardson, 2009).

Running records.

A tool that informs teachers of student reading behaviors focusing on the cue system (Clay, 2000).

Cue system.

The coding of miscues made on running records indicating the strategic action readers are attempting in their reading, such as meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005).

Anecdotal notes.

Written records of a student's reading behaviors noted as a prompt and a praise and can be used to assess student achievement in the attainment of strategic actions (Clay, 2000).

Tier 2 intervention.

An instructional setting and format for students not making adequate progress in essential curriculum areas involving intense instructional practices that vary from classroom instruction (Dougherty Stahl, 2016).

Error rate.

The ratio of errors to words read in a running record (Clay, 2000). *Accuracy rate* is the percentage accurate a student reads 100 words in a running record (Clay, 2000).

Strategic actions.

The reading behaviors students demonstrate in reading, including thinking within the text, thinking about the text, and thinking beyond the text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017).

Organization of the Study

Chapter I provided an introduction and overview of the study. The problem and purpose statement as well as the research question were presented. Chapter II presents a

review of the related literature on the understanding of constructivism spanning into cultural-historical activity theory in an elementary classroom, the structure of the instructional model of guided reading, foundations of teacher reading, and experimental studies reviewed. Chapter III presents the purpose of the study, qualitative research design and methods, specifically the interview, participants interviewed, the setting, role of research, and procedures used for analysis of the research study. Chapter IV presents the findings of the research study. Chapter V includes a summary of the study, conclusions, implications, recommendations for further study, and researcher reflections of the process and data.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Chapter II provides a review of the literature related to the instructional model of guided reading, additional specificity of the guided reading process, statistical data, qualitative data, and experimental studies that assisted in grounding the study. School districts across Texas strive to meet the ever-increasing performance indicators on the STAAR. Current fifth-grade data indicated 78% of students were labeled as meeting the standard of approaching grade-level proficiency on the accountability measures, meaning those students scored between 32% and 59% (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The lack of success of so many students highlighted the importance of discovering an instructional methodology that would meet the needs of all readers, provide personalized and individualized instruction within the classroom to support students, and help readers who need small-group differentiated instruction (Richardson, 2016). Fountas and Pinnell have been leading researchers in the field of literacy for decades (e.g., Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001, 2017). Fountas and Pinnell's approaches to literacy instruction framed much of the philosophical aspects of guided reading instruction employed in the study. Additional studies of balanced literacy and guided reading were explored.

Historical Perspective

Over the decades of reading instruction, many literacy approaches, from systematic, isolated phonics instruction to a more whole-language approach, have been introduced. Teachers have been trained on said approaches, and instructional materials were purchased to support the approaches—only to have the methodology replaced with the “next best thing” practice. District officials tend to look for the next best product or program that will shift the trend of weak STAAR scores in reading. However, the puzzle of which instructional methodology is paramount is not easily answered, as each approach has strengths and weaknesses (Allington & Cunningham, 2007). Furthermore, often novel programs are introduced to teachers, teachers are trained, and implementation occurs with strong immediate results, only for the programs to weaken over time, granting students just a couple of years of success (Allington & Cunningham, 2007).

Schmoker (2006) wrote of two additional problems resulting in failing standardized test scores: mediocrity and inconsistency. School districts appear to have allowed mediocrity to be an accepted practice in many classrooms. The business of school leaders does not allow for effective feedback to teachers; often, teacher evaluations are meaningless, as school leaders are not experts in each of the fields of study being executed under their watch (Schmoker, 2006), resulting in millions of students being inadequately educated. An addition to allowing mediocrity, school districts are known to reward mediocrity. The basis for teachers to be awarded “rookie of

the year” or “teacher of the year” accolades often has little to do with the teacher’s ability to teach but is more aligned to, as Schmoker wrote,

. . . how many committee meetings we [teachers] are willing to endure; how many forms we can fill out; how many unproven, attractively titled or brand-name programs we are willing to launch and describe in florid detail—a tremendous distraction from authentic instructional improvement efforts. (p. 32)

Teacher performance and student success as a result of teacher performance should be the driving force for any accolades received by educators. If student success is at the heart of what educators do, school administrators and parents should not accept mediocre instruction.

Educators spend at least four years being taught how to teach. Often the methodologies of instruction and use of materials vary from university to university. These varying ideals are then brought in the classroom and often do not match the expected curriculum from the school district hiring these new teachers. These inconsistencies continue as school districts frequently change the program, making it a challenge to observe long-term success (Allington & Cunningham, 2007) as well as to provide the opportunity for teachers to become masters at their craft. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) indicated that student achievement is directly correlated to what is taught in the classroom. Marzano et al. wrote, “Individual teachers can have a profound influence on a student learning even in schools that are relatively ineffective” (p. 2). However, many classrooms have a variance between what is taught and what is

tested. All these factors of mediocrity and inconsistency have resulted in teachers and administrators failing students. Schmoker (2006) contended that inconsistent curriculum and ineffective instruction do not address the lack of student success in literacy.

Historical Perspective of Balanced Literacy

With the development of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, many approaches to teaching reading have been suggested and tried by educators all over the United States. Additionally, the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) sent a sizeable number of potentially struggling readers into programs to provide specialized instruction from a special reading teacher (Allington & Walmsley, 1996). Research has determined that reading instruction is not a one-size-fits-all approach; rather, due to the various backgrounds and experiences students bring into the classroom, a variety of instructional practices should be implemented for students to demonstrate success in reading (Richardson, 2016). This aligns to the study by Bond and Dykstra (1997) that concluded children learn to read by reading a variety of materials implemented through a variety of instructional methodologies. Cunningham and Allington (2007) noted that children need a variety of reading and writing experiences and should not be limited to one instructional methodology. Balanced literacy, which includes interactive read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading, provides an array of instructional methodologies and settings. Cunningham and Allington continued that children learn to read when allowed to read real books. Schmoker (2006) asserted the same ideal:

Generous amounts of close, purposeful reading, rereading, writing, and talking . . . are the essence of authentic literacy. These simple activities are the foundation for a trained, powerful mind—and a promising future. They are a way up and out of boredom, poverty, and intellectual inadequacy. (p. 53)

Schmoker continued that students must be given ample, multiple opportunities to engage text to read and reread “from the moment they can decode the simplest texts” (p. 58).

Routman (2018) encouraged teachers to use text with authenticity that connects to students’ lives and cultures to lead to deep, meaningful thinking.

Moreover, Dorn, French, and Jones (1998) suggested simply immersing children in a literacy-rich classroom is not enough to build successful readers. Dorn et al. continued that children become successful when their teachers are knowledgeable of literacy practices and methodologies, thus becoming the most important part of a child’s literacy learning process. In the most effective classrooms, teachers provide a balance between reading and writing (Cunningham & Allington, 2007). Exceptional teachers provide time each day for children to write as well as read, and when teachers embed genres and purpose of teaching, students are likely to learn at a deeper level (Routman, 2018). The implementation and utilization of reading and writing skills in the classroom are the essence of balanced literacy—teaching reading and writing across multiple platforms (whole group, small group, independent work), allowing students to be engrossed in literature they can read.

The National Reading Panel (2000) confirmed the importance of teaching literacy with a balanced approach. The panel was charged to review instructional methodologies and their effectiveness in kindergarten through Grade 12. This process was completed through the evaluation of thousands of research studies. The second charge was to allow public input on the research and recommendations. The National Reading Panel heard from over 125 organizations and individuals who would be the beneficiaries of the findings of the panel. The National Reading Panel decided on the following topics for their research:

1. Alphabets includes (a) phonemic awareness instruction on the ability to attend to and manipulate phonemes and (b) phonics instruction on understanding letter–sound correspondences and spelling patterns and applying patterns to reading.
2. Fluency means reading with speed, accuracy, and expression.
3. Comprehension involves cognitive processing complex skills that operate simultaneously with vocabulary development and acquisition. In vocabulary instruction, readers decipher unfamiliar words. In text comprehension instruction, readers make meaning of text as they read and maintain meaning in memory. Instruction in teacher preparation and comprehension strategies increases comprehension by instructing students to use specific strategies as they read.
4. Teacher education and reading instruction includes preservice teaching training and on-the-job reading training.

5. Computer technology and reading instruction require use of technology for reading instruction.

The research by The National Reading Panel (2000) placed each component within the structures of balanced literacy. Balanced literacy includes the instructional methodologies of interactive read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, writers workshop, interactive writing, shared writing, guided writing, phonics, and workstations. Although the findings by the National Reading Panel indicated students will be more successful if they are taught well on the aforementioned areas, if the areas are not truly implemented, they are of little benefit to student success (Cunningham & Allington, 2007).

Guided Reading Defined

A vital component of an effective reading program is early, systematic intervention in the form of small-group instruction (two to six students). The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 tasked each educational organization to improve outcomes for all students. The National Research Council (1999) noted that more needs to be done to determine not only that all children can learn, but also how all children learn. Often the intervention requires teachers to scaffold text complexities and differentiated strategies for each child. Therefore, teachers must provide the array of experiences and direction necessary to help children become good readers early in their education (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Utilizing these experiences allows rigorous instruction to accelerate students' development in reading to grow their reading ability, allowing

striving students to read at the same rate and level as their peers (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). Guided reading is one methodology of instruction within the balanced literacy model defined as an early intervention program, working to prevent reading problems rather than remediate reading problems.

Guided reading, as defined by Fountas and Pinnell (2017), is an effective form of small-group instruction. Students provided with small-group instruction have more opportunity to develop analytical skills and add depth to understanding (Pianta, Belsky, Houts, & Morrison, 2007). Students' uses of strategic reading actions is assessed through running records and recorded in anecdotal notes. Through miscue analysis, teachers are able to determine the reader's proficiency as well as knowledge about the reading process (Goodman et al., 2005). Based on the students' use of strategic reading actions, the teacher pulls the students together to teach reading skills and strategies. Although guided reading has been a reading pedagogical practice for many years, intermediate teachers have not embraced the practice as readily as primary teachers. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) defined guided reading as "an instructional setting that enables [teachers] to work with a small group of students to help them learn effective strategies for processing text with understanding" (p. 189). This definition, taken from the context of all learners, is considered most vital in the primary grades. However, the development of reading applies where any readers resides – even through intermediate grades and into middle school.

Small-group models allow the teacher to target specific reading needs; provide scaffolding; and, as students gain the use of more strategic reading actions, gradually release control of the text to the student, encouraging the student to independently process the text (Richardson, 2016). The teacher supports the readers by teaching students how to problem solve efficiently by reading an instructional level text. The reading process is complex, and students need ongoing instruction in reading skills and strategies, even after they gain initial understanding of reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Several goals for guided reading are the following (Collins, 2004):

1. Students understand a variety of concepts about print.
2. Students use a variety of reading strategies.
3. Students make certain their reading makes sense.
4. Students self-correct miscues.
5. Students become more fluent.
6. Students read with expression.

Lipp and Helfrich (2016) noted that within guided reading groups, intense differentiation can occur because skilled teachers teach intentionally within the guided reading lesson cycle. Richardson (2016) identified teaching moves to implement during the guided reading lesson and established the before-read, where skilled teachers introduce the text and give students a purpose for reading, including, at lower levels of instructional text, a decoding strategy. The during-read of a guided reading lesson cycle involves the teacher listening to the student's reading behaviors, noting the use of

strategic action, and prompting and praising as the student progresses through the instructional level text. Instructional level text is identified as text in which students read at 90% accuracy (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). As students read instructional level text, strategic reading behaviors are rehearsed to be able to process new text independently.

This suggests that effective reading instruction, resulting in successful reading ability, is not a single skill or strategy but is multifaceted, occurring simultaneously as the student attacks text (National Reading Panel, 2000). Keene and Zimmerman (1997) identified six cueing systems that must develop for a student to learn to read. This is juxtaposed to the three cues of meaning, structure, and visual introduced by Clay (2000) but alludes to the difficulty in teaching children to read. Keene and Zimmerman delineated the cueing systems as follows:

1. The grapho phonic system introduces the letter and sound relationship.
2. The lexical or orthographic system is instantaneous recognition of words.
3. The syntactic system teaches the structure of language.
4. The semantic system associates meaning with words.
5. The schematic system is how a reader's prior knowledge is involved in the reading process.
6. The pragmatic system is the purpose for reading.

In addition to Clay (2000) and Keene and Zimmerman (1997), Fountas and Pinnell (2017) have reiterated the idea that when students read, processes occur as reading within the text, about the text, and beyond the text. These processes are

identified as systems of strategic actions, which include students vacillating in and out of routes to make meaning. The research on guided reading indicated that although there is no quick fix to illiteracy in elementary students, there are plenty of examples of methodologies that are successful when implemented with fidelity; effective methodologies include the processes of strategic action for text-level acquisition and development (Allington & Walmsley, 1996; Fountas & Pinnell, 2017).

The processes of strategic action for reading-level acquisition and development is noted by the teacher while listening to each child read an instructional level text. As students read the instructional level text, the teacher takes anecdotal notes of the strategic reading behaviors used by the student. The analysis of anecdotal notes determines the strategic actions and metacognitive strategies being used during reading (Kragler & Martin, 2009). The information gleaned from listening to the child read and assessing the student's use of strategic reading actions and metacognitive strategies provides valuable information for the teacher. The teacher then can match the instructional level text to the reader, striving to provide the student with text on the appropriate gradient for student readability. Teachers should remember that although a child may demonstrate the use of strategies for a specific level text, students cannot be categorized solely by a level of text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017) but rather an understanding that a child's reading success is also based on background knowledge, interest in the topic, and organization of the text. However, as a generalization, the characteristics of text aligned in a text gradient offer

strategic reading actions for students to move from instructional reading within that text to independent reading of the text with fluency, prosody, and comprehension.

Following the before-read lesson cycle, the during-read activity of listening to student reading behaviors and recording anecdotal notes is the after-read of a guided reading lesson cycle. During this point in the lesson, the teacher relates questioning back to comprehension and ends the lesson with word study (Richardson, 2016). Because reading is not just an action of decoding words or word calling but includes the process of applying metacognitive strategies as well as strategic reading strategies, metacognition is taught and expected throughout the guided reading lesson and is finalized in the after-read portion of the guided reading lesson cycle. Metacognition is supported through the type of questioning implemented by the teacher. Routman (2018) noted, “The quality of teacher and student work and talk is largely determined by the questions we ask as well as the questions students raise” (p. 161). The conversation that occurs following the reading of the text is the pinnacle of the guided reading work, as the teacher strives to allow students to make meaning through discourse (Perez, 2016). Through quality questioning after the reading of the instructional level text, teachers can adjust and modify instruction to best meet student needs (Routman, 2018), continually pushing students to more fluently use strategic reading actions and metacognition to become more proficient readers.

The next component in the guided reading lesson cycle is the use of letters and words to gain strength in word study. Word study is an additional avenue for systemic

phonics instruction to be incorporated in a balanced literacy model of instruction. Fountas and Pinnell (2017) outlined essential goals and skills that contribute to a child become a more proficient reading and literate person. As readers and writers, students need to be able to (a) understand and use features of print or concepts about print, (b) maintain a base of high-frequency words, (c) understand the letter–sound relationships in simple and complex application, (d) utilize patterns in words, (e) employ a plethora of strategic reading actions, and (f) revise their reading through other skills. The aforementioned goals should result in students being able to automatically and fluently use phonics and spelling patterns while reading and writing (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2000).

To conclude the guided reading lesson cycle, Fountas and Pinnell (2017) included an extension to the lesson by requiring students to write to synthesize and extend the meaning of the text. Their noted extension supports the National Research Council’s (1999) recommendation that students need learning activities that help them think, talk, and write about their reading. Motley (2016) determined that teachers should provide regular opportunities for students to write, because the practice of writing provides students a moment to process and reflect on the content and their learning within. Student can then become more articulate and literate. Routman (2018) concurred that embedding reading and writing connections encourage substantial growth in students’ ability to become established readers and writers. A child who can write his or her understanding can internalize and synthesize the information.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism grounded the study, as within constructivism is the idea that learners are not simple vats in which information is poured and later regurgitated; knowledge is not independent of the mind and cannot be “mapped” onto a learner (Ertmer & Newby, 1993, p. 16). On the contrary, constructivism allows the learner to acquire knowledge through tasks that hold meaning to the learner (Ertmer & Ertmer, 1998). From this viewpoint, guided reading is best used to teach students the metacognitive strategies needed for understanding. D. J. Ertmer and Ertmer (1998) wrote, “Constructivists employ authentic tasks so that learners become adept at applying their knowledge under conditions that are similar to naturally occurring situations” (p. 68). Naturally occurring scenarios in a balanced literacy classroom would include the continual use of authentic texts and application of real-world questioning to build metacognitive skills as well as reading strategic actions. Authentic literacy tasks deeply affect students’ life and career and their understanding of society (Schmoker, 2006, p. 52).

Gagnon and Collay (2006) determined six characteristics demonstrated by learners who were offered real-life educational opportunities:

- Learners think individually to make personal or self-meaning about learning events.
- Learners think collaboratively with others to make social meaning of learning events.

- Learners connect their schema and background knowledge to learning events.
- Learners propose and answer questions as they think together about a collaborating learning event.
- Learners present their think about learning events to others making meaning among collaborators.
- Learners reflect on learning events collaborating with the teacher to make meaning. (p. 13)

The six characteristics defined by Gagnon and Collay indicate that constructivism challenges teachers to create instructional environments where students are required to think and apply metacognitive strategies to be successful in the classroom (Fosnot, 1996). Fosnot (1996) continued, “Teachers informed by the new constructivist theories seek to support learning, not control it” (p. 101). Teachers create this environment by collaborating with students and encouraging students to collaborate with each other.

The instructional model of guided reading requires students to do just that: read, think, and apply metacognitive strategies independently and collaboratively to become more thoughtful, strategic, successful readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). Guided reading within a balanced literacy framework provides more opportunity for equity among learners as teachers become more aware of the social and cognitive elements of classroom activities that facilitate real learning (Fosnot, 1996). Thus, guided reading incorporates the idea of Vygotsky (1978) that children utilize a variety of reactions including social and cognitive attempts when attempting to solve a problem that is

marginally too difficult. Guided reading helps bridge the reading gap between attainable and unattainable.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

Just as Gagnon and Collay (2006) noted that constructivism challenges teachers to create instructional environments, cultural-historical activity theory focuses on how humans transform in an “ongoing culturally and historically situated, materially and socially mediated process” (Roth, Radford, & LaCroix, 2012, p. 23). The process provides a structure for interactions with humans that not only involves the interpersonal facet of the interactions but also includes economic, cultural, historical, and political aspects. R. Engeström (2014) and Y. Engeström (1987) illustrated how the different tenets of cultural-historical activity theory work with and within each other (see Figure 1). Figure 1 demonstrates the connection to training and implementation of guided reading in fifth-grade classrooms.

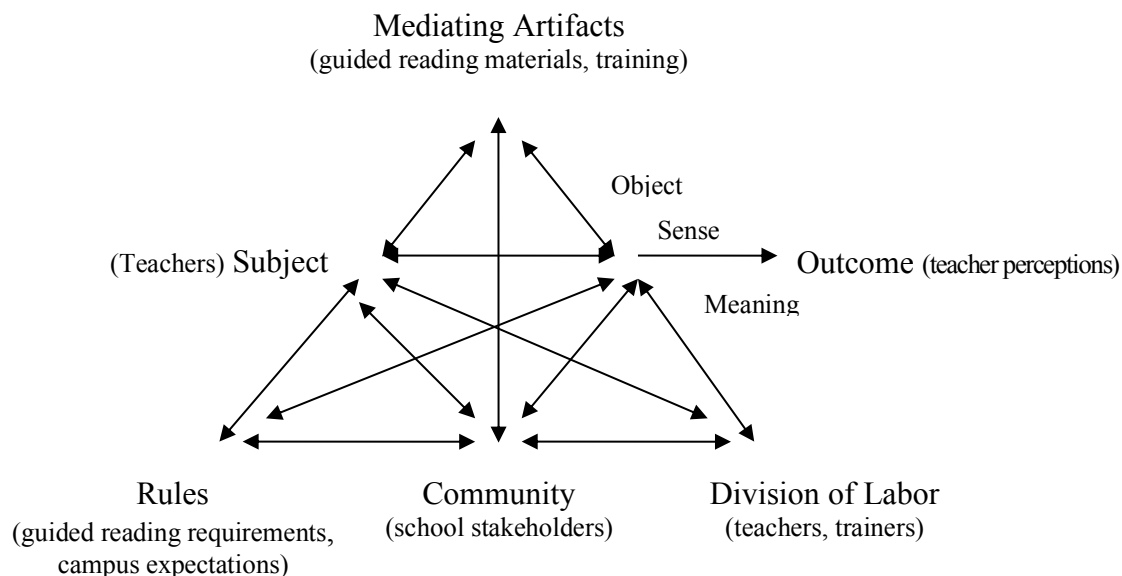


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of cultural historical activity theory. Note: adapted from *Learning by Expanding*, by Y. Engeström, 1987, p. 78, Helsinki, Finland: Orienta-Konsultit Oy.

Activity is a collaborative ideal that, although maintaining its own functioning, maintains “longitudinal-historical” aspects (Engeström, 2014, p. 139). Actions result from those whose goals can develop into action, linking operations as a response to continued activity (Engeström, 2014, p).

Foot (2014) identified three fundamental beliefs of cultural-historical activity theory: “Humans act collectively, learn by doing, and communicate in and via their actions; humans make, employ, and adapt tools of all kinds to learn and communicate; and community is central to the process of making and interpreting meaning” (p. 330). All three beliefs link back to Vygotsky’s theory that students learn together as they collaborate and reflect on guidelines (Wink, 2004). This learning can occur in the school

environment as educators collaborate and reflect on their own instructional practices and the effectiveness of said practices. Wei (2017) wrote,

There is no doubt that teachers are not only knowledge owners or transmitters, but also learners in their workplaces. The term “lifelong learning” has become mantra for in-service teacher education programs, refer[ed] to in most political and academic polemics about the future of society and the role of professionals in a changing world. (p. 35)

Job-embedded or workplace learning leads to greater ability to implement into practice the skills being taught. Wei (2017) tied this perspective back to Y. Engeström, writing, “Cultural-historical activity theory takes dynamic activity systems as its starting point and seeks to understand motive directed social activity through the interactions of different but interrelated, aspects of the systems” (p. 36). Therefore, the cultural-historical activity theory reiterates that professional learning occurs as humans interact, allowing for differences but returning to the process of discussing, observing, reflecting, and problem solving as a means of workplace professional development.

Professional Development

This study focused on professional development with follow-up modeling of the instructional model of guided reading. Teachers often use the one-size-fits-all approach to teach reading, demonstrated through a whole class approach to teaching reading with identical materials for each child. However, growth in struggling students has been noted to be significantly less than on-grade level students (Allington, 2013, p. 522). No Child

Left Behind (2002) instigated the intense scrutiny of state assessment scores across the nation. Educational leaders became increasingly interested in how students performed and what instructional models were contributing to the successes and failures. Additional attention was focused on instructional practices deemed unsuccessful and the process to turn the methodologies around to increase test scores (Knight, 2007). Knight (2007) concluded that traditional professional development opportunities were not as effective as teachers participating in professional development as well as job-embedded development by means of an instructional coach. The instructional coach works to enable teachers to implement proven instructional methodologies.

In 2017, Learning Forward, with Corwin Press and the National Education Association, measured the experiences of teachers who had been provided professional development. Over 6,300 teachers responded to the survey establishing that the most accessible way of developing new knowledge and skills is through job-embedded, standards-based professional development (Learning Forward, 2017b). The job-embedded professional development also included instructional coaching where the coach provides ongoing support through modeling, observations, and debriefing conversations of the model of instruction being implemented (Learning Forward, 2017b). Professional development opportunities have altered teachers' knowledge and subsequent behaviors in the classroom, positively impacting student success (Marzano et al., 2001).

Learning Forward (2017a) delineated seven characteristics of professional learning that precede effective teaching, supporting leadership and advancing student

results. The seven standards are learning communities, resources, learning designs, outcomes, leadership, data, and implementation. Although many of the seven areas apply to student growth and teacher development, the idea of adult learning designs speaks to the professional learning that occurs to increase educator effectiveness. Professional learning does not occur in a traditional approach where teachers spend time with an expert, returning to their classrooms with the impetus to implement; this assumes change occurs with a single event (Knight, 2007). On the contrary, change occurs when the design of the professional development affects educators in a multifaceted fashion from face-to-face, whole school, job-embedded learning that engages teachers and includes follow-up professional learning in the trenches, where the teachers operate daily (Learning Forward, 2017a).

Teacher Perceptions and Student Efficacy

As policy makers and educators navigate an educational system that is tied to high-stakes standardized testing and teacher performance, they often overlook the most important part of planning: the student (Griffin, Eury, & Gaffney, 2015). Unfortunately, schools are ingrained in politics which continually create an educational pedagogy that is underdeveloped and unproven or is based on the banking method of education described by Paulo Freire (1970/2000): “It turns [students] into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher” (p. 72). As the “filler” of knowledge, the teacher assumes a dominant power role in the classroom. As the teacher serves as the banker of information, student choice is not allowed because the teacher is in complete control of

the class. When students are provided the opportunity to choose their reading materials and activities, motivation increases, which in turn increases student success (Heibert, 2009). The idea that students are cans to be filled decreases student success.

One avenue for education to reform is through increasing student agency, which is a student-centered approach that seeks to increase student voice in the classroom (Griffin et al., 2015). Foucault's (1979) model of the panopticon demonstrates that power does not necessarily have to be acted upon someone, like an act of force. Rather, "power is exercised through institutional relations that discipline our ways of thinking and acting through self-regulation" (Anderson & Grinburg, 1998, p. 334). According to Foucault, power is wielded at all levels; thus, both students and teachers have agency. In the banking method, "teachers are, in essence, 'technicians of behaviour', or 'engineers of conduct' . . . who have absorbed (or, rather, are formed by) a set of disciplinary norms which they, in turn, impose upon their charges" (Leask, 2012, p. 58).

Student agency is the single most important ingredient in the education process (Jackson, 2003). Students who demonstrate agency in the classroom utilize strategic planning and action that develop control of their educational decisions (Griffin et al. 2015). Student agency is "a psychological need and human right, essential to becoming an autonomous, goal-directed, and responsible person" (Goodman & Eren, 2013, p. 125). Moreover, students who demonstrate agency will be motivated, engaged, and resilient in working toward their goals (Goodman & Eren, 2013; Williams, 2017).

In a culture where teacher performance is evaluated largely by standardized test scores, teachers may lean heavily on the banking method. Within the banking method, a teacher will deposit or transfer the knowledge to the students and then test them on the information (Bahou, 2012; Williams, 2017). Since teacher performance is dependent on tests, teachers will “force-feed” the students the information to help them become successful (J. F. Goodman & Eren, 2013). The banking method has led many students to become passive learners, who do not seek knowledge (Bahou, 2012). Many schools will use this top-down authoritative approach to enforce a scripted pedagogy that limits the opportunity for student expression.

While Foucault’s (1982) belief that “a society without power relations can only be an abstraction” (p. 343) may hold true, those power relations are contextually relevant and representative of current instructional trends. If administrators and policy makers are to create reform and introduce the student voice, they must address the power shift between the educator and the student. When evaluating power in the classroom, Foucault (1982) maintained that power was “relational, situated, circulated, negotiated and constructed rather than a possession to be given or claimed” (Bahou, 2012, p. 235). Furthermore, Foucault (1982) claimed, “One must analyze institutions from the standpoint of power relations, rather than vice versa” (p. 343). As teachers are usually the dominant power in the classroom, it is vital to examine their perspective of agency in the classroom to better understand attempts to change methods of instruction.

Summary

Chapter II presented a review of literature to examine research related to guided reading within a balanced literacy model, professional development, theory of constructivism, teacher perceptions, and student efficacy in today's classroom. Six beliefs of Allington and Cunningham (2007) are reiterated by the research:

1. Not all children learn at the same rate at the same time.
2. Children's ability to read can be measured.
3. Children learn well in homogenous groups of students with similar learning abilities.
4. Reading involves increasing complex skills that are to be used simultaneously.
5. Struggling readers need slower paced, small-group instruction to become successful readers.
6. Special programs are optimal in identifying and addressing students who struggle to read.

The six beliefs of Allington and Cunningham align to the ideals of constructivism, that teachers seek to support learners rather than control learners; teachers and students reflect on their practices in collaboration with each other and other students; and educators create real-life literacy events where children can engage and learn at the appropriate rate in the development of strategic reading actions and metacognitive strategies in their reading ability (Fosnot, 1996). Chapter 3 presents the design of the qualitative study including the participants and setting of the study, data collection, and analysis

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The design selected for this research was a multi-case qualitative study. The purpose of this multi-case qualitative research study was to examine whether professional development focused on guided reading for fifth-grade teachers and the subsequent model lessons and coaching rounds within a balanced literacy framework (training model) increased teachers' understanding of the guided reading cycle and their perceptions of guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms. The study was intended to advise school and district leadership of the effects of training and modeling of the guided reading lesson cycle.

This chapter presents an overview of the qualitative research method. The next section presents the participants and setting of the qualitative study. The role of the researcher follows, including a discussion of research bias and the responsibilities of the researcher. Data collection procedures and analysis follow with a discussion of the descriptors utilized to organize and analyze the data. Chapter 3 concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness, the findings, and a final summary section.

An Overview

The study was conducted using a qualitative multi-case study research design. Creswell (2014) noted that although qualitative research is similar to quantitative, qualitative researchers “rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs” (p. 183). Qualitative research serves as a tool to change systems and policies, and the use of qualitative data has become increasingly respected (Watkins, 2012). Qualitative research focuses on research as a humanistic or idealistic approach (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013). The focus on the human aspect allows the researcher to interact with people in their setting, addressing the focus of the study yet allowing the participants less restraint and focusing on the subject rather than numbers alone. Merriam and Simpson (1995) wrote, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 13). Qualitative research gives a voice to its participants, allowing their perceptions to be heard, studied, and discussed, which can build a reflective practice between researcher and participant.

Creswell (2014) explained, “Case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p. 14). Case studies include the examination of many features of individuals, groups, and organizations over time. Neuman (2006) noted, “Case studies help researchers connect the micro level, or the actions of individual people, to the macro level, or large-scale

social structures and process” (p. 41). However, the researcher should be cautious in selecting the cases being studied. Research studies are designed with varying goals, research questions, and assumptions. Therefore, case study selection plays a vital aspect in the findings reported. Elman, Gerring, and Mahoney (2016) identified the facets of varying case studies. Case studies serve different purposes, only related to the case being studied. Furthermore, the case study allows “examination of a [single] example of a class of phenomena . . . useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses, which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases” (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1984, p. 34). Neuman (2011) continued with the definition that case study research results in a comprehensive examination including a large amount of information for a few cases.

The researcher selected the qualitative multi-case study research design allowing for the researcher and participants to reflect on the implementation of the training model of guided reading and the effect on teachers’ perceptions after the training and modeling of guided reading instruction. The ISD 21 coordinator of English language arts, or literacy coach, was responsible for each activity, conducted with all four teachers in the study. August 2018 involved back-to-school professional development on guided reading. September and October 2018 involved modeled guided reading.

The reflections of participating teachers, in the form of interviews, were developed into explanatory themes of the experiences of the participants. The review of the data was organized into themes and analyzed across all cases involved in the study.

The study investigated teachers' perceptions of the use of guided reading as an instructional model to teach reading skills and strategies to students in the fifth grade. As well, the study was designed to advise school and district leadership of the effects of quality guided reading implemented due to training and modeling of the guided reading lesson cycle. The following research question guided the study: What were the teacher perceptions of using the guided reading methodology of instruction in a fifth grade classroom following the professional development and model lessons of guided reading? Pathak et al. (2013) noted that qualitative methods are used to “. . . understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior and interactions” (p. 192), and are recognized for the ability to add a “dimension to interventional studies that cannot be obtained through measurement of variables alone” (p. 192).

The Participants and the Setting

This multi-case qualitative research study focused on four teachers of fifth grade in a South Texas school district. The study was conducted over six months and included one fifth-grade teacher from four of the five elementary schools in the district. Initially, five teachers were selected to participate in the study. However, the teacher selected from the fifth elementary school opted out of the study due to personal and campus responsibilities. The teachers were selected based on their experience in the classroom, experience teaching fifth grade, and lack of previous implementation of guided reading in their classrooms. Specifically, the teachers selected had completed at least one year of teaching in the fifth-grade classroom and had no prior knowledge of guided reading as a

methodology of instruction in the fifth-grade classroom. Teacher 1 had three years of experience, Teacher 2 had 19, Teacher 3 had 10, and Teacher 4 had seven years of experience.

The district coordinator for English language arts or literacy coaches implemented a one-day back-to-school professional development session focused on guided reading. Teachers were selected based on attendance at the back-to-school professional development and their role as a fifth-grade teacher. Merriam and Simpson (1995) wrote, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 13). The perceptions of fifth grade teachers would be analyzed to offer a voice to the participants, allowing their perceptions to be heard, studied, and discussed, building a reflective practice between researcher and participant.

The researcher spent time in each participant’s classroom becoming acquainted with each participant as well as becoming familiar with guided reading instructional practices implemented in the classroom following the professional development. While in the classroom, the researcher had no contact or discourse with students. The purpose was to observe the teacher in his or her natural realm, noting any discrepancies in the guided reading methodology and classroom management. Conversations ensued regarding the instructional practices of each participant specifically in regards to guided reading instruction.

The Role of the Researcher

The essence of this study required the researcher and participants to develop and maintain a trusting relationship. Relationship building can contribute to building trust among participants rather than scrutiny resulting in a lack of trust. Bloom (2006) explained, “Our intelligence, our skill, our knowledge, our interpersonal relationships, even our physical appearance and fashion sense are subject to unceasing public scrutiny” (p. 26), yet a trusting relationship built on “sincerity, reliability, and competence” (p. 27) can impact those involved in the relationship in a positive manner. This positive relationship then allows for change to occur through conversations and reflection on instructional practices (Costa & Garmston, 2002, p. 5).

The researcher in this study collected the data through participant interviews and observations of each participant. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with member checking for validity continuing with follow-up interviews with participants, allowing an opportunity for additional insight into the findings (Creswell, 2014). The trusting relationship between researcher and participants offered additional protection for data not to be biased toward participants or investigator. Self-reflection establishes a narrative based on honesty and openness (Creswell, 2014). As the study delved into the lived experiences of individuals, a sense of transparency was essential. Tracy (2010) explained transparency as the researcher being honest and vulnerable, requiring methodical note-taking with clear intentions of the researcher and any researcher bias.

In this multi-case qualitative research study, the researcher selected four teacher participants in ISD 21 and collected the data through interviews. The study occurred at the participants' natural setting with “. . . face-to-face interaction, over time . . .” (Creswell, 2014, p. 185). All agreements and documentation were secured prior to the commencement of the study. Permission was obtained from the Office of Research and the Institutional Review Board to perform the study, and permission was granted from the superintendent of ISD 21 (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

In this multi-case qualitative research study, the researcher collected data to develop the individual case studies. Interviews were performed at three different times and served as the initial data points for the study. The interviews were unrestricted, using open-ended questions. Creswell (2014) noted that questions are “few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 190). The researcher maintained focus on understanding the participants' perspectives about the problem to alleviate any researcher bias. The researcher gathered multiple sources of data in addition to interviews, including observations and documents that were categorized into themes that align all sources of data.

Data collection for the study ensued with a request for participation. Once participants were selected, an initial meeting occurred informing the participants of the scope of the study including participant information, consent form (see Appendix B), schedule for interviews and observations, and a question-and-answer opportunity for

participants. Notes from the interviews were recorded using audio-visual tools, and the researcher recorded information on an observational protocol form “to separate descriptive notes from reflective notes” (Creswell, 2014, p. 194). Documents and participants were selected based on the foreseen contributions to the practice under investigation (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Qualitative research data collection requires the researcher to design questions that do not allow surface answers but require the participants to reveal more of their experience. Knox and Burkard (2009) noted, “A foundation on which the interview is built [is] one that allows creativity and flexibility to ensure that each participant’s story is fully uncovered” (p. 566). The selected participants were interviewed in three sessions. The first set of interview questions (see Appendix C) was standardized for each participant; questions developed for the subsequent interview were based on participant’s first interview responses. The two following interviews were semi structured with a list of predetermined questions that would outline areas of experience but allow the investigator or participant to delve deeper into an idea or experience in more detail (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Polkinghorne (2005) suggested,

The focus of the first interview [should] be on getting acquainted, developing rapport, laying out the area that the researcher would like the interviewee to explore, and trying some initial forays into the topic. Between the first and second interview, the participant will have had time to think more deeply about

the experience, and, thus, the second interview should be more focused and should allow time to explore the experience in depth. (p. 142)

After completion of the initial interview, the researcher transcribed the interviews of all participants, allowing for member checking. The researcher analyzed and coded the first set of data to develop the second set of interview questions and consequently the third set of interview questions.

Data Analysis

Data in this multi-case qualitative study were collected from interviews. The data “are in the form of text, written words, phrases, or symbols describing or representing people, actions, and events in social life” (Neuman, 2004, p. 438). Just as the retrieval of the data is vital, the analysis and process of analysis are paramount in determining the findings from a qualitative research study. Sofaer (2002) wrote that qualitative data analysis “. . . should be highly deliberate and systematic” (p. 334). Creswell (2014) identified six steps to ensure accurate data analysis, providing a deliberate and systemic approach in qualitative data analysis: (a) organizing and preparing data, (b) reading and rereading all the data, (c) coding, (d) developing a description of the context as well as themes, (e) creating a narrative, and (f) interpreting the findings. In analyzing qualitative data, researchers organize and prepare the data by revisiting the research question, transcribing interviews, and categorizing data depending upon the sources of information. If the six steps identified by Creswell are completed with fidelity, the research study’s findings should be cohesive and valid.

The researcher reviewed the data for coding. “Coding is a process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category [or theme] in the margins” (Creswell, 2014, p. 198). Codes are then assigned to the categories or themes in the initial review of the data, with the coded term “based in the actual language of the participant (called in vivo term)” (Creswell, 2014, p. 198). Coding data makes qualitative data analysis different from quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data analysis coding is an arduous task, yet coding “frees the researcher from entanglement in the details of the raw data and encourages higher-level thinking” (Neuman, 2004, p. 441).

Creswell (2014) noted the data findings may be presented in a qualitative narrative, deciphering the information and identifying the learning gleaned through the qualitative research study. Creswell wrote,

These lessons could be the researcher’s personal interpretation couched in the understanding that the inquirer brings to the study from a personal culture, history and experiences. It could also be a meaning derived from a comparison of the findings with information gleaned from the literature or theories. (p. 200)

Sofaer (2002) concurred. Sofaer wrote, “The discovery-oriented character of qualitative methods can persist even when conducting research in a systematic and purposeful manner” (pp. 334-335). The discoveries unveiled in qualitative data analysis provide a vast learning opportunity for the researcher and participants in the qualitative research study and often provide the impetus for further research.

The process of data analysis in this qualitative multi-case research study encompassed several analysis techniques to analyze the data with validity. Data analysis occurs within the interviews that devise the data (Green et al., 2007) and includes immersion in the interview data, coding and categorizing the data, and developing themes for interpretation and findings (Creswell, 2014).

The investigation required three interviews with each participant. Participant responses were transcribed and coded to disaggregate the data. The lens of constructivism allowed the researcher to “. . . focus on big ideas” (Fosnot, 1996, p. 92) as interviews transpired, allowing interaction and questioning to develop themes related to how people construct their own understanding of an experience.

Provisions for Validity

Reliability and validity are considerations for both quantitative research and qualitative research, although the characteristics and applicable tenets vary between quantitative and qualitative reliability and validity. Qualitative researchers employ a variety of research techniques, gaining a vast array of data, some – or all – of which could be considered subjective. Qualitative researchers seek “to be consistent in how, over time, they make their observations” (Neuman, 2004, p. 184). The “benefits of having a variety of researchers with many approaches” allows the study of “key aspects of diversity that exists in our social world” rather than quantifying diversity within the natural setting (Neuman, 2004, p. 185). The notion of the need of objectivity in research and systematic research protocols for qualitative research ensures “that the researcher’s

approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). In relationship to reliability is the credibility. Tracy (2010) noted that credibility refers to the trustworthiness of the research findings as determined by a systematic, objective research design. Therefore, qualitative credibility is founded in data configuration and analysis through member checking, triangulation, rich description and sometimes an outside auditor to ensure trust in the qualitative research study findings (Creswell, 2014).

As reliability speaks to dependability or consistency of the research design and findings, validity speaks to authenticity. Qualitative researchers are less determined to match data to concepts but are concerned with “giving a candid portrayal of social life that is true to the experiences of people being studied” (Neuman, 2004, p. 185).

Authenticity necessitates a fair, honest account from the perception of the individual living the life each and every day. Neuman (2004) continued, “Qualitative researchers adhere to the core principles of validity, to be truthful” (p. 186).

Qualitative research studies are designed to discover the truth according to the participants involved in the study, with the participants’ experience uncovered through interviews and observations. The idea of validity in qualitative research is solely founded on the plausibility of the data and the strength of the defense when challenged (Bashir, Afzal, & Azeem, 2008). Strategies to ensure validity must be operational within the qualitative research study to protect the trustworthiness of the study.

Multiple validity strategies were implemented to ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative study. Creswell (2014) recommended “. . . the use of multiple approaches, and these should enhance the researcher’s ability to assess the accuracy of findings as well as convince readers of the accuracy” (p. 201). Ensuring the validity of the study, each interview was recorded, and the researcher took hand-written notes to annotate the observations of the participants. The interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions were verified by each participant confirming the participant’s meaning was clear and not influenced by the investigator. The data sources were triangulated, which established themes based on the perspectives of the participants (Creswell, 2014).

Communicating the Findings

At the conclusion of the qualitative multi-case research, the researcher analyzed the data and determined the findings to be reported. The findings are communicated in a rich narrative encompassing the experiences of the participants as revealed through observations and interviews. Developing a concise narrative is paramount to “effectively illustrate the concepts presented in the findings” (Kline, 2008, p. 210). The narrative may be utilized to communicate to participants, teachers, and district personnel the effects of guided reading training on the perceptions of fifth-grade teachers in ISD 21.

Summary

Qualitative research provides complex contextual descriptions of how people experience a phenomenon and their perceptions of a research issue, providing the “human side” of the issue including but not limited to “behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and

relationships of individuals” (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p.

1). Creswell (2014) explained qualitative research as

. . . an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. . . . Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meanings, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. (p. 4)

Although quantitative and qualitative research varies in a myriad of methods, each type complements the research process and the outcome data, as “. . . all social researchers systematically collect and analyze empirical data and carefully examine the patterns in them to understand and explain social life” (Neuman, 2004, p. 139). Ellis (2007) recorded that “good qualitative methodologists conduct research in the way they conduct themselves in their personal lives and ‘Seek the Good’” (p. 23).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this multi-case qualitative study was to examine whether a training model focused on guided reading for fifth-grade teachers increased teachers' understanding of the guiding reading cycle as well as their perceptions concerning guided reading. In this chapter, the researcher describes the process of data analysis, beginning with the research question – What are the teacher perceptions of using the guided reading methodology of instruction in a fifth-grade classroom following the professional development and model lessons of guided reading (training model)? The ISD 21 superintendent of schools granted permission for the research study. Once permission was received, the researcher sought four teachers willing to participate in the study. The researcher interviewed participants three times each; an initial set of questions (see Appendix C) was used for the first interview. Results from that interview led to follow-up questions for subsequent interviews with each participant. The interviews were transcribed, and the data were analyzed and coded.

Presentation of the Findings

The researcher reviewed interview transcripts after interviewees member checked each transcript. The analysis revealed patterns across interviews, developing themes

based on repetitive responses provided by the four teachers interviewed. The three emerging themes were (a) preparing and planning for guided reading, (b) perceived strengths in utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms, and (c) perceived weaknesses in utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms. The themes were based on repetitive or similar responses from each of the interviewees.

Responses from all four teachers revealed the theme of preparation and planning for guided reading. For example, Teacher 1 stated, “They want us to have children at the small-group table so that we could do guided reading and build up their fluency and their comprehension and get them above grade level or at least on grade level for sure.” Teachers 3 and 4 addressed the theme of perceived strengths in utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms as they noted how guided reading helps build students’ confidence. Teacher 3 remarked, “I think the students are feeling a little bit, they’re feeling more confident, and it’s their progress they are seeing.” All four teachers interviewed contributed to the emergent theme of perceived strengths in utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms. Teacher 2 noted, “I just think at times it’s kind of time constraining because in order to see all the students, we can’t give them the amount of time they need, but we can only give them the time allotted, if that makes sense.”

These themes reflect the perceptions and opinions of the four fifth-grade teachers who participated in the study. The researcher describes the perceptions of the teachers in

a qualitative narrative using direct quotes from the interviewees that supported the development of themes of the study. Table 1 presents the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the interview data.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes of the Study

Theme	Subthemes
1. Preparing and planning for guided reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency • Comprehension • TEKS/student expectations • Vocabulary • Genre of text • Lesson cycles/planning documents
2. Strengths in utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one • Small groups • Student confidence • Individualized/personalized • Differentiation • Student engagement
3. Weaknesses in utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Struggling readers • Lack of resources

Theme 1: Preparing and Planning for Guided Reading

The initial theme was determined by multiple responses from each of the four teachers interviewed based on the initial questions and follow-up questions in all three interviews. The teachers were specifically asked questions regarding planning for guided reading, such as, “How do you plan for guided reading?” Although each teacher gave an

answer from an individual perspective as well as recognizing the group of students in the classroom during the 2018-2019 school year (each teacher was from a different elementary school), all answers were very similar. All teachers referred to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum standards. For example, Teacher 1 explained, “I look at data a lot and I try to determine who’s not excelling at a TEKS that we focused on for a particular amount of time.” Teacher 4 noted her planning for guided reading begins with the TEKS that had been taught in whole-group instruction, and she links the same student expectation to guided reading. She noted, “I look ahead at our TEKS. I strategically plan the TEKS and how I’m going to introduce that.” Teacher 3 described her process of moving her thinking from preparation to planning even the selection of text for her groups. Teacher 2 addressed the need for a strong support of foundation skills teaching. She remarked, “I think reading is one of the foundational skills. You can’t go forth with other subjects [like you can reading]. . . . I definitely would spend more time with the practicing of reading, . . . guiding them through the questioning and the vocabulary.” This statement by Teacher 2 emphasized the great need for fluency practice within guided reading. Teacher 3 supported the need for fluency when she spoke of her work with students using high-frequency words as well as the specific genres of text. She said, “I think with those kiddos, even giving them the practice of the words they like, the frequency words, words that we do that, that’s helping them because they’re actually practicing and reading.” She continued in regards to

fluency within genres, “[We are] really being able to increase their fluency and comprehension” within each and every genre mandated by the Texas standards, or TEKS.

Within the training model in which each teacher participated, a specific, systematic guided reading cycle and lesson plan was encouraged. This lesson plan, as noted by all four teachers, assisted in structuring their time at the small-group table with students, ensuring that all components required by the district and necessary for student improvement were met each time the students were at the small-group table. Teacher 1 was explicit in explaining his use of the guided reading lesson plan and cycle, which was introduced to him during the back-to-school guided reading session and reiterated in observing guided reading lessons. He stated, “The professional developments I’ve been to are very good about allowing us to see the resources that are at our disposal and also just best practices that you should do to model guided reading effectively—How long you should take to intro the book to create that schema for them—How long it should take when you’re doing the reading yourself.” Teacher 4 concurred, noting the observation of guided reading lessons being modeled as well as the template for guided reading greatly supported her understanding and implementation of guided reading. She said,

I’m basically taking guided reading, having it modeled, having a template of the flow of it so that you have the guide in front of you every day. Honestly, modeling—having it modeled for myself—has been the biggest thing, and being able to refer back to what was done and having notes and then implementing it.

Having someone else give me feedback on how I've had to implement it, because I may not realize them missing a component, or it's a lot to get in in a short amount of time. And sometimes you might miss something, and if you don't know, if [it wasn't] brought to your attention, then you can't fix it. And so I just think the modeling and the consistent going over in professional development over and over and looking at the layout of a lesson plan template of everything you're supposed to hit, and the focus is really what makes you think about it in a strategic way, and has really helped me to plan and implement my guided reading. It's just been, it's been the plan itself is just, it's really helped me go through the flow. Okay, I've done this. I've done this. It's almost like a checklist.

Teacher 3 explained the strong support the modeled lessons were for her. She remarked, "We were able to see it modeled several times, and we actually saw a video twice. It's not a difficult thing, if you don't make it difficult. It can be broken down to where it's, it's comfortable for the teachers."

Based on each teacher's responses related to preparing and planning for guided reading, the researcher was able to identify the vital subthemes that support preparing and planning for guided reading: fluency, comprehension, TEKS/student expectations, vocabulary, genre of text, and lesson cycles that support preparing and planning for guided reading. In reflection, the researcher was able to determine the perceived value each subtheme held when the teachers are preparing and planning for guided reading.

Theme 2: Strengths in Utilizing Guided Reading as an Instructional Model in Fifth-Grade Classrooms

Theme 2 evolved from various questions asked during the three interviews. The researcher asked, “What do you see as the benefits of utilizing guided reading?” and “What components within the guided reading lesson cycle appear to be most effective at this point in your school year?” All four teachers noted strengths of using guided reading as a methodology of instruction in fifth-grade classrooms. The teachers used similar terms such as *individualized* and *personalized instruction*, *differentiation*, *student engagement*, and *student confidence*. These terms suggest a positive perception of guided reading as a tool for fifth-grade teachers.

Teacher 4 remarked on the individualized and personalized instruction, “It [guided reading] helps you work on building better readers—the fluency, the comprehension on a more individualized basis. I’ve seen the growth from the kids.” Teacher 2 reiterated this idea as she addressed the small-group opportunities. She stated students need small-group instruction and “individual attention, especially when it comes to reading.”

The individualized and personalized subtheme leads to differentiation, which the teachers noted as vital in their ability to reach all learners, both striving and successful readers. Teacher 3 appreciated that guided reading allows the teacher to work with “different kids at different levels” rather than all instruction at one level in Tier 1, which

does not address striving or advanced readers. She continued, “It [guided reading] allows you to see individually where the student is,” and with those “individuals, you actually are able to sit next to them, to hear them and kind of troubleshoot anything as it’s happening versus after an exam.” Guided reading also allows “free rein to pick your books” that can be adjusted from group to group, as noted by Teacher 1.

Teacher 2 observed that teachers serving in districts with a larger number of English language learners seem to have more struggling readers, requiring more groups of students eligible for guided reading and necessary differentiation. As a dual language teacher, she recognized that guided reading “does help. It’s just sometimes being able to really focus, hone in on exactly what they are missing with reading. It’s just spiraling, so it’s hard to just stay focused on one particular skill without overwhelming them.” Yet, she reiterated multiple times in her interviews that guided reading provides that opportunity for her to provide the attention needed at each student’s ability level.

The final two subthemes indicated by the participants were student engagement and student confidence, resulting in a more conclusive dissection of the strengths in using guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms. Teacher 1 stated,

I love that one-on-one time, even five, six kids at a time, like I said, that develops, that helps them develop confidence because they are amongst their peers. They see that they’re struggling too, so they don’t have to be as hesitant to read. They don’t have to feel like a fear of reprisal. . . . We’re here for the same reason.

Teacher 2 addressed the idea that her students enjoy guided reading because “they get that opportunity to get that one-on-one with help rather than having a struggle in reading and being in small group, there’s, you know, less attention on them.”

Teacher 3 was passionate about her students’ developing confidence in their reading. Teacher 3 noted, “I think the students are feeling a little bit, they’re feeling more confident and as they progress, they’re seeing that ‘Oh, I’m getting better’ and I think that, you know, that’s an ego boost that any person needs.” Teacher 4 concurred:

We are starting to build more confident learners. At the beginning, it was very much hand holding, taking on the process. They hid themselves. I have to give them, like, every step of the way, and now I’m about to release a little bit more, and they’re working a lot more independently and thinking for themselves.

Based on all four teachers’ responses, the researcher was able to identify and explain the subthemes of (a) individualized and personalized instruction (through small-group and one-on-one work), (b) differentiation, (c) student engagement, and (d) student confidence. These four subthemes indicated the teachers’ perceptions of the strengths of utilizing guided reading as an instructional methodology in fifth-grade classrooms.

Theme 3: Weaknesses in Utilizing Guided Reading as an Instructional Model in Fifth-Grade Classrooms

Theme 3 addressed the perceived weaknesses of utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms. The researcher, in the interview process, asked the participants, “Do you notice any deficits with guided reading? Has there been

anything that has hindered the implementation of guided reading in your classroom? What difficulties have you encountered with guided reading?” The participants demonstrated strong opinions related to the weaknesses of guided reading. The researcher delineated the participants’ perceived weaknesses into three subthemes: (a) time, (b) struggling readers, and (c) lack of resources.

In all three interviews, Teacher 2 stated the challenge of time in her classroom. She stressed that the lack of time is constraining and does not allow for the necessary time her students need. She said, “I think just at times, it’s kind of time constraining, because in order to see all the students, we can’t give them the amount of time that they need, but we can only give them the time allotted.” Teacher 2 returned to the subtheme of time in two interviews; even though she believed her students were progressing during guided reading, she still desired more time with each group, especially the two groups with the lowest proficiency. Her answer to the researcher’s follow-up question, “What would make it easier for you to effectively use guided reading in your total reading program?” was “Time. I need more time.”

Teachers 1 and 3 both addressed the lack of time for guided reading. The guided reading lesson cycle requires teachers to pull students for 20 minutes per group. Teacher 1 noted,

I feel that sometimes, it’s just not enough time. I mean, you could see them four days a week, and some of them are just so low that those 20 minutes that you have with them, by the time you get done checking some of the comprehension

questions off, you kind of don't have enough time to dedicate to the student that probably needs it the most.

This statement indicates that students, especially striving students, may need more time with the teacher than the 20-minute guided reading lesson cycle.

Teacher 3 noted a couple of reasons why time is an issue. She first noted that because of the assessments required by her campus and the district, her guided reading time is being utilized to review the assessments. The subtheme of time continued in all three interviews. She remarked in the first interview, when asked about deficits in utilizing guided reading,

I think that's the time is probably always a problem, but practice makes perfect. . . . You practice it every day and the kids get into the routine. That hopefully alleviates a little bit, but it seems like time, in general, is one of those things.

As the interviews progressed and follow-up questions were asked, the subtheme of struggling readers was reiterated throughout each teacher's interviews. The teachers did not say that the students' reading difficulties caused problems within the guided reading methodology. They expressed that because there are so many struggling readers, reaching each one at his or her point of need was a predicament. All four teachers addressed this issue in their interviews.

Teachers 2 and 4 conveyed that with large class sizes and the number of striving readers, guided reading could be a struggle to implement. Teacher 4 said,

The only thing that I would say has hindered [guided reading] is the amount of students in a classroom. When you have five groups of six students or six groups of five students, it's a lot of students to hit. Also, the various levels when you have a lower level, like an extreme low and an extreme high, and then the rest of them are scattered throughout.

Teacher 2 agreed in her responses as she addressed the reading gaps between many of her students. She noted some of her fifth-grade students were reading on a first- and second-grade level. The subtheme continued to be addressed with Teachers 1 and 3. Teacher 3 indicated that in her large classes, with a large number of students reading below grade level, she is struggling to reach every reader consistently and thoroughly. Teacher 2 described her classroom by stating if time permitted, she would “definitely spend more time with the practicing of reading. Like I said, the kids are first and kindergarten [levels of text], so I would definitely spend more time practicing because they take the books home, but they don't practice.”

The subthemes of Theme 3 describe the weaknesses of utilizing guided reading as a methodology in fifth-grade classrooms. The final subtheme determined from the interviews is the lack of resources needed for guided reading, specifically, a variety of genres of text that students can access. Teacher 1 stated that although he feels the freedom to select books his students will enjoy, because his campus has been identified as an innovative, technology school, access to materials via technology is lacking. The other teachers did not face the same hurdle in utilizing technology but did address the

idea of a lack of resources for their students. Teacher 4 was concerned about the lack of culturally relevant text and the opportunity for students to see themselves in the literature they are reading. She noted,

For us, it's more resources, like a better variety of genres . . . many more cultural and more, like different stories. . . . Fortunately, the world we live in is changing and is very, very diverse, and a lot of the things that we are using, they are not exposing kids to culture and things around us, so they're not able to build on that background knowledge, and background knowledge is huge.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine whether professional development focused on guided reading for fifth-grade teachers and the subsequent model lessons and coaching rounds within a balanced literacy framework (training model) increased teachers' understanding of the guided reading cycle and their perceptions of guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms. The study utilized cultural-historical activity theory to analyze the connectivity between the five components of rules, subject (teacher), artifacts, division of labor, and community to yield the sixth component of the outcome: perceptions of fifth-grade teachers regarding guided reading. Cultural-historical activity theory encompasses the idea that collaborators and the variables within the activity intersect to make meaning of the community in which they operate, as a result of reflection and discourse as the activity progresses (Engström, 2014).

In this study, the six core components of cultural-historical activity theory were employed resulting in various themes related to the fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of the use of guided reading. The subjects were the teachers participating in the training model and implementing guided reading in their fifth-grade classroom. The artifacts were represented by the guided reading materials; teachers indicated their practice lacked sufficient relevant texts for their students. The rules applied to this study included guided reading requirements and campus expectations, both of which limited the amount of time teachers had to implement guided reading in their fifth-grade classrooms; lack of time was a common subtheme. The community, as a whole, was not addressed strongly by the teachers in the study, although they noted that guided reading was becoming an expectation for schools and all teachers teaching reading. The division of labor included the teachers, the trainers for back-to-school training, and the coaches modeling guided reading in the classroom. The outcome was the perceptions of fifth-grade teachers about using guided reading as an instructional tool for teaching in fifth-grade classrooms.

The findings indicated that all four teachers believe guided reading is a beneficial instructional tool in fifth-grade classrooms. The teachers in the study indicated that the observation of modeled guided reading greatly supported their perception that guided reading should be utilized in fifth-grade classrooms.

The researcher asked one final question regarding the utilization and sustainability of the methodology of guided reading in their classrooms: "If you had a choice, would you utilize guided reading instruction in your classroom?" Each teacher identified factors

determining why he or she would continue to use guided reading as an instructional model in the classroom, even if the district did not mandate its use. Teacher 1 discussed his love of the one-on-one time with his students. He said,

I would because I love that one-on-one time, even five, six kids at a time. . . . It [guided reading] definitely has its benefits, and I think they far outweigh anything that would preclude you from using it in your classroom.

Teachers 3 and 4 indicated strong growth in the reading ability of their students due to the guided reading lesson cycle and instructional model. Teacher 4 noted guided reading “reinforces what we are learning. . . . It really helps you work on building that better reader.” Lastly, Teacher 2, although she struggled with the time constraints of guided reading, said,

Yes, because I think it works. I think it helps, and I think it works, and I’m a reading teacher. I love reading, so I’m going to do what my students need to learn to read on the level that they need to be on our way to make progress.

The interview data collected from each of the four participants disclosed themes that epitomized their perceptions of utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in their fifth-grade classrooms. The first major theme indicated the importance of preparing and planning for guided reading. Each teacher explained how they plan to ensure they address all student expectations and cover the state standards and basic reading skills. The second and third major themes identified the teachers’ perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of the methodology. The final research question asked if teachers would

continue to utilize guided reading; each teacher perceived guided reading as beneficial to students, and each would continue to utilize guided reading as an instructional methodology in the fifth-grade classrooms.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

In an attempt to determine teachers' perceptions regarding the use of guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms, the researcher interviewed four teachers who varied in teaching experience and taught in four of the five elementary schools in a school district in South Texas. Although the teachers were dissimilar in their experience and methodologies of instruction in their reading classroom, following the training model of guided reading and their employment of the guided reading lesson cycle, their common responses established themes and subthemes.

Summary of the Study

This multi-case qualitative research study addressed the lack of effective small-group reading instruction by new and veteran teachers in elementary schools, a problem that continues into secondary school and results in a lack of literacy among adults entering the workforce. The purpose of this multi-case, qualitative research was to investigate the use of guided reading as an instructional model to teach reading skills and strategies to students in fifth grade and the perceptions concerning guided reading by new and veteran fifth-grade teachers. The study also intended to advise school and district

leadership of the effects of quality guided reading implemented due to training and modeling of the guided reading lesson cycle.

Four fifth-grade teachers from four campuses in the same school district were selected participants. The four teachers agreed to be interviewed in their space on three separate occasions, with approximately a month between each interview. The first interview was based on an initial set of questions, with follow-up questions developed for the second and third interviews.

The interviews were coded for themes and patterns across each of the four participants' interviews. Three major themes evolved, with each major theme containing subthemes to describe the perceptions of the participants. The researcher offers conclusions concerning the pedagogical practice of guided reading as an instructional model for fifth-grade reading classrooms.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study are delineated into three sections. The section on preparing and planning for guided reading illustrates the process and considerations each participant described to ensure quality implementation of guided reading. The section on strengths of guided reading as an instructional model discusses the positives the participants suggested as participants received training in guided reading and implemented guided reading in their classrooms. The third section highlights the weaknesses indicated by the four teachers interviewed for the study. When determining

the themes, the six components of the cultural-historical activity theory were used in the activity system, as described in Chapter V.

Preparing and planning for guided reading.

Preparing and planning for guided reading was a major theme in the study.

Teachers suggested considerations when preparing for guided reading, including fluency, comprehension, standards, and genre. Each guided reading lesson should encompass all those elements: teaching students the process of how to read, which includes fluency and prosody; along with the interpretation and understanding of what the student is reading, meaning comprehension; as well as the genre. However, comprehension considerations are at the forefront of successful guided reading planning. Comprehension skills are mandated by the state within the TEKS standards statements, resulting in a potential focus on assigning reading rather than teaching reading, as noted by one participant. Yet, comprehension is vital in teaching students to read. Beers and Probst (2013) addressed how learning to read and reading to learn intersect in a reading experience:

We still decode symbols to make sense of the text; we still must interact with the text, bringing our own experiences to the words; we still must question what was written, must infer what wasn't written, and must make connections between the text and ourselves and others and the world around us. (p. 15)

This intersection occurs in the guided reading setting when teachers have prepared and planned guided reading well. The participants in the study stated that preparing and

planning leads to a well-implemented lesson cycle, and students demonstrate growth in both the process of reading and understanding of what is read within each genre.

Strengths in utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms.

A second theme that emerged from the research study was the identification of strengths in the use of guided reading as an instructional tool in fifth-grade classrooms. The subthemes indicated an understanding that guided reading provides teachers and students with a vehicle to take risks in the one-on-one or small-group setting, increasing student engagement and confidence in their ability to read. The confidence derives from students being similarly grouped based on text they are successful in reading. Students have little fear of derision or embarrassment, as each student in that guided reading space is learning at approximately the same level. As student reading confidence increases, students begin to see themselves as readers, and this self-perception can affect a child for his or her entire life. Miller and Kelley (2014) wrote, “Children who love reading and see themselves as readers are the most successful in school and have the greatest opportunities in life” (p. xix). Miller and Kelley continued,

Students develop confidence and self-efficacy as readers through their relationship with other readers in reading communities that include both their peers and teacher. Whether students read below grade level, meet grade level goals, or surpass grade level expectations, all of them fully participate in activities and conversations that value individual strengths and viewpoints. (p. xxvii)

When student voice is heard, when student agency is employed, student confidence increases, and engagement becomes the normal activity in the reading classroom.

Two additional subthemes were differentiated instruction and personalized and individualized instruction. At the small-group table with a group of homogeneously grouped students, teachers realized that even though students might read on the same text level, their needs varied by student in regard to the process of reading and the understanding of their reading. The participants noted that having the space for guided reading allowed them to more quickly identify needs and differentiate instruction for their students. The guided reading space allowed teachers to “nip reading problems in the bud,” whether a reading strategy or skill. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) described differentiation as the teacher being aware of the diverse needs of each student and striving to align instructional practices and instructional content to each student’s needs.

However, the teachers who participated in this research distinguished differentiated instruction as a variant of personalized and individualized instruction. The teachers were quite aware of the cultural variances within their classrooms and endeavored to ensure the needs of their students were met by choosing texts that students could connect with and might enjoy. Cavanagh (2014) addressed this practice as personalized instruction. Cavanagh described such practice as taking into consideration not just student need but also student interests and motivation. Personalized instruction results in personalized learning.

Weaknesses in utilizing guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms.

A third theme emerging from the analysis of the teachers' interviews addressed the perceived weaknesses related to guided reading as an instructional methodology in fifth-grade classrooms. The teachers spoke of three areas, which were developed into subthemes. The three subthemes related to weaknesses in utilizing guided reading were lack of time, number of struggling readers, and lack of resources. Teachers face a myriad of responsibilities that encompass their entire school day and even after-school hours. The obligations required of teachers limit the time teachers can spend planning, designing curriculum, preparing resources, grading assignments, and attending to the needs of each student in the classroom. This lack of time, as noted by the interviews, is caused by a stringent classroom or master schedule being implemented and the large number of students needing guided reading support.

To effectively utilize guided reading as an instructional tool, teachers must have the time granted to them to identify students' reading levels, to pull the necessary resources (text), and to prepare and plan lessons. When teachers' time is monopolized by meetings, parent conferences and data discussions, the time needed to be an effective guided reading teacher is greatly shortened. Merritt (2016) recognized the challenges teachers face in the plethora of requirements required, writing, "Teaching is more complex in this decade than ever before as educators adapt to new curricular reforms and assessments, implement social and emotional learning programs, and plan learning for an increasingly diverse student population" (p. 32). Therefore, the lack of time becomes a

major issue for teachers attempting to employ any instructional model but especially guided reading with the necessary preparing and planning for small groups.

The second subtheme identified by the researcher was, in this particular district, the large number of fifth-grade students reading below grade level and needing differentiated guided reading support. The large number of students needing this support limited the amount of time teachers could spend with each group of readers. Although the vast number of students needing guided reading might be a result of weak Tier 1 phonics instruction in the lower grades, this does not change the fact that many students are not reading on grade level. In ISD 21, each classroom has a large number of students whose first language is not English; almost 30% of the students in the district are considered English language learners. English language learners often struggle with accessing text, decreasing their ability to increase reading comprehension and gain skills needed to be proficient readers. Heibert (2009) identified two factors contributing to struggling English language learners or emergent bilinguals; traditional Tier 1 instruction does not often allow for student agency for English language learners and “. . . tends to suppress or ignore the first-language literacy” (p. 195). English language learners struggle with oral proficiency in reading English. Heibert concluded that English language learners “. . . are in triple jeopardy in that (1) they have to learn to read; (2) they have to learn the content from reading; and (3) they have to learn the language fluently to express the content of their reading” (p. 195). Teachers require additional time to investigate the cultural spaces of students to prepare lessons that attend to

students' background knowledge, particularly among English language learners. Both factors of students reading below grade level and the intersection of two languages contribute to the amount of time needed to meet the needs of struggling readers in fifth grade.

The last subtheme discovered related to the resources needed for guided reading: texts. The teachers interviewed stated that appropriate leveled, themed, and culturally relevant texts are deficient on their campuses, limiting their ability to utilize guided reading as an instructional model in fifth-grade classrooms. To fully implement guided reading in fifth grade, teacher must have texts in which their students can see themselves. Too often, texts presented to children focus on the majority culture rather than the silenced minority cultures. School districts or campuses should allocate funding to purchase culturally and historically relevant texts, which are a necessity for successful implementation of guided reading. Luke (2012) noted that texts should be analyzed for more than which races are represented in the text but also for situational critical literacy ensuring advocacy and citizenship of diverse students. Luke indicated that critical literacy must heed cultural, historical, and ideological aspects for students. When these are considered, students adhere more quickly and readily to the skills of a reader.

Implications

This study generated implications that may benefit the participants in the study as well as other struggling readers. Utilizing guided reading as an instructional tool in fifth-grade classrooms may increase student engagement and interest in literacy activities.

The first implication is the importance of preparing and planning guided reading lessons based on a lesson cycle. Serravallo (2018) suggested that because the teacher is working with a small group of students who are practicing reading in a text slightly above their independent reading level, strong organization and teacher support are needed. The lesson cycle used in the training and implementation of guided reading to provide structure and teacher support is the following:

1. Before reading, include work on high-frequency words, the book introduction, introduction of vocabulary, strategic action, and comprehension focus.
2. During reading, teachers listen in as students read and take anecdotal notes to hone instruction.
3. After reading, teachers and students discuss the comprehension focus, conduct word work and study activity, and write about reading.

This preparing and planning for guided reading lessons may encourage specificity in instruction and support necessary for student success in developing as a reader.

The second implication noted by the researcher is the significance of personalized and differentiated instruction to build students' confidence and engagement as a reader. Students' proximity to the teacher, access and support to instructional level text, and the scaffolding provided by the teacher assisted students in applying strategic actions and comprehension skills to their text. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) identified principles to consider when teaching guided reading at the intermediate level. Recommendations by Fountas and Pinnell (2001) were (a) to work with students individually or in a small

group to build student confidence and agency, (b) to allow students to see themselves in their text, and (c) to ensure the teacher provides tasks that are achievable by the struggling reader.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

Based on the result of the multi-case qualitative study, the researcher developed two recommendations. The first recommendation would be to encourage district personnel to provide a training model for fifth-grade teachers including more professional development opportunities as well as in-class modeling of guided reading on various levels for fifth-grade teachers. Professional development should be aligned to the initiatives of the district, which, in turn, should be based on student needs and expected outcomes (Linn et al., 2010). The professional development could focus on the structure of the guided reading lesson cycle, selection of appropriate level text for students, and the strategic actions and comprehension skills to be implemented during guided reading. Following the professional development, the modeling of the guided reading lesson cycle will allow for personalization and differentiation, which teachers in this study noted resulted in student growth in reading.

Another recommendation for future study and practice would be to ensure students in guided reading are provided historically and culturally relevant text. When students are offered text in which they can see themselves (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), students adhere more readily to the strategic action or comprehension skill being taught. Serravallo (2018) noted that when culturally and historically relevant texts are selected

for students, teachers allow students to “co-author” the text as they “. . . construct meaning alongside the author’s words” (p. 7). Teachers can identify the histories and cultures of students by conscious conversations, reading histories, and reading interviews (Serravallo, 2018). These two recommendations may encourage further research on guided reading in the fifth-grade classroom.

Final Reflections

In 2003, 14% of American adults were below the basic level of literacy (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). The proportion of illiterate adult American remained unchanged from an earlier assessment in 1993 (Kirsch et al., 1993). A shift is long overdue, and that shift is the responsibility of classroom teachers across the nation in both public and private schools. Teachers, however, face challenges to their ability to make systematic and systemic change in the reading lives of children. Teachers are thrust into ever-changing instructional methodologies, lack quality professional development, and teach in classrooms with vast discrepancies in reading level among both first-language English-speaking students and English language learner students. Routman (2018) provided encouragement to teachers, writing,

If we want our students to be excited about literacy, they need to have teachers who love coming to work, who are literacy learners themselves, who find ways to make curriculum relevant to children’s lives, and who can put high-stakes testing into perspective. (p. 3)

In reflection, results of this study yielded common, long-standing challenges among teachers, but perhaps the factors needed for student success must be reiterated before teachers and administrators can implement change. Lasting change takes time and cannot be a quick fix to a student's reading struggle or to a district, campus, or school's methodology of instruction. Teachers should be provided with quality professional development with continued modeling and discourse surrounding the learning, rather than being intimidated by standardized tests and accountability ratings that often do not take into consideration the variances of languages and reading levels within a classroom. Systematic and long-term training models that include staff development as well as in-class modeling of instruction are vital for the longevity of a methodology of instruction to help students learn to read. Such long-term dedication may have more positive results than a pendulum swing approach to pedagogy in the classroom. Time is a factor as administrators and teachers consider the most important facets of classroom instruction. Guided reading takes time, and striving students need time to process text and grow as readers. Lastly, as district leaders make decisions to implement guided reading in fifth-grade classrooms, administrators must consider the resources for teacher use to support guided reading. Instructional leveled text is the vehicle for implementing guided reading, and, as the teachers in the study noted, culturally and historically relevant text allows students to see themselves in their reading, providing opportunity to make connections and allowing students to apply their background knowledge to the reading. Therefore, future sustainable, positive results will require additional professional development,

culturally and historically relevant materials, and continued support for fifth-grade classroom teachers in their efforts to utilize guided reading as an instructional model.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form District

From: Freeman, Codi L
Sent: Saturday, January 13, 2018 3:44 PM
To: [Superintendent]
Subject: doctoral program

[Superintendent]

This semester, I am beginning the data retrieval and work toward my dissertation in my doctoral studies. I am interested in analyzing the DRA2 data of 5th grade students from the DRA2 just given and impact of quality guided reading instruction for the reassessment of DRA2 in May. There is an official form that I need to present to you but wanted to get an initial approval to utilize the data of our 5th grade students.

I see this research problem as a benefit to our teachers and students in ISD 21 as the data will indicate the growth of students' reading levels assessed by DRA2 due to the training, modeling, and implementation of guided reading. I would appreciate your consideration in allowing the use of DRA2 data from our 5th grade students.

Live life well,
Codi Freeman

From: [Superintendent]
Sent: Thursday, January 18, 2018 9:49 AM
To: Freeman, Codi L
Subject: RE: doctoral program

Yes, the use of this data is fine. Thanks.

[Superintendent]
XXXXX I.S.D.

From: Freeman, Codi L
To: [Superintendent]
Subject: RE: doctoral program

Thank you for your approval to utilize the DRA2 data for my dissertation. I would also request permission to interview five fifth grade teachers in their practice of guided

reading. The interviews will not occur during school hours and will not affect the teachers' ability to fulfill their daily job requirements. May I interview five fifth grade teachers?

Live life well,
Codi Freeman

From: [Superintendent]
To: Freeman, Codi L
Subject: RE: doctoral program

Yes, that'll be fine.

[Name]
Superintendent
XXXXX I.S.D.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force of coercion consent to participating in the research study entitled “A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF GUIDED READING AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL FOR FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS”.

The research is being conducted by Codi Fowler-Freeman, a doctoral student at Stephen F. Austin State University. I understand the purpose of this study is to record the perceptions of fifth-grade reading teachers in using guided reading as an instructional model for fifth-grade students and that the study timeline is from May 2018 and could extend to May 2019. I understand that my name, the name of my school, or the name of my district will be used in the final report. I also understand I can withdraw my participants from this study at any time with no penalty or loss.

I understand that I will be face-to-face interviewed on three separate occasions allowing me to express my perceptions of guided reading used as an instructional model for fifth grade students. I understand the interview will be in my classroom after instructional hours are completed on the day(s) of the interview(s). I understand that the interviews will take time, approximately thirty minutes per interview. I understand there will be no compensation in any way for my participation in the study. I understand there are benefits to participating in this research study. The results of this study will allow you to express your perceptions concerning guided reading as an instructional model for fifth-grade students.

I understand I will have the opportunity to approve my statements from the interviews and can resend any misrepresentation. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and understand that I may contact Codi Fowler-Freeman at [phone number], or Dr. Patrick Jenlink, Coordinator of Doctoral Program, at (936) 468-1756 to address any further questions or concerns regarding this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this informed consent form.

Signature of researcher

Codi Fowler-Freeman
8630 Willet Street
Baytown, Texas 77521
[Phone]

Signature of participant

Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink
Coordinator, Doctoral Program
Stephen F. Austin State University
Nacogdoches, TX 75962
(936) 468-1756

APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Before we get started, could you tell me your name, position, and your years of teaching experience?
2. Do you feel that your school uses guided reading as an instructional model? Why or why not?
3. How have you implemented guided reading in your classroom?
4. What are the benefits to guided reading instruction?
5. What are the deficits to guided reading instruction?
6. What has helped you implement guided reading instruction in your classroom in regards to professional development?
7. What has hindered implementation of guided reading instruction in your classroom?
8. If you had a choice, would you continue to utilize guided reading instruction in your classroom? Why or why not?
9. How is guided reading working in your classroom?
10. What components within guided reading appear to be effective?
11. What difficulties have you encounter with guided reading?
12. In observing other teachers teaching guided reading, what areas were strengthened or realized for your students?
13. How do you plan for guided reading?
14. What would make it easier for you to more effectively use guided reading instruction in your total reading program?
15. What successes can you cite as a result of using guided reading instruction?
16. Do your students enjoy guided reading instructional groups? Why or why not?

VITA

Codi Lee Freeman graduated from Houston High School in Houston, Missouri in 1993. She received her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education in 1999 from Southeast Missouri State University. Codi began teaching kindergarten through fifth-grade music in Warrenton, Missouri. After moving to Holden, Missouri, Codi completed her master's degree in Educational Administration from University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg. Codi's family relocated to Highlands, Texas in 2008, where Codi has served as a district instructional specialist, assistant principal, and English language arts coordinator. She was accepted into the 2016 Cohort 20 at Stephen F. Austin State University, where she earned her Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership in May 2019. Currently, Codi works for a major publishing company.

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