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Educators' Perceptions of Best Practices for Increasing Literacy Among High-Poverty Students

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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2017

Abstract

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by

Giuseppe Di Monte, Jr.

MA, John's Hopkins University, 2005

BS, East Stroudsburg University, 2000

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The local problem addressed in this study was the low reading achievement of high-poverty fourth-grade students in a small rural school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The purpose of this instrumental case study was to examine the perceptions of the campus principal and teachers at a sampled high-poverty and high achieving elementary school to determine best practices for meeting literacy needs of high-poverty students. This knowledge is important because student success in reading achievement contributes to overall academic success. The neo-sociocultural conceptual paradigm of Wertsch, del Rio, and Alverez, which links cognitive and cultural learning processes, was used as the conceptual framework for the investigation. The research questions centered on educators' perspectives of micro and macro sociocultural practices that contribute to high-poverty literacy. Interviews were conducted with 9 purposefully selected teachers and the principal. Inductive and comparative data analysis was used to elicit 15 major themes identified as micro and macro literacy improvement practices for high-poverty students. These practices included high quality professional development, instructional equity, and professional coaching. Using study results, a training program was designed for literacy specialists on how to implement inclusive literacy coaching strategies through the use of equity-based practices. The project study may contribute to positive social change by providing educators with strategies for increasing high-poverty students' literacy success in elementary schools. Improved literacy may increase high-poverty students' graduation rates, college preparation, career readiness, and chances for upward social mobility.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my family who made great sacrifices and contributions to my strength as a researcher, practitioner, and scholar. I also dedicate this study to my students, staff, and community; may you always reach your goals.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge and thank the Walden University faculty members and student colleagues, professional colleagues, family members, and the many friends who helped me reach this point in my academic career. I also acknowledge and thank Dr. Pamela Harrison, my committee chair; Dr. Kathryn Swetnam, my committee member; and Dr. Anita Dutrow, URR committee member for the support they provided me in completing my project study.

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Section 1: The Problem

Children living in poverty in the United States experience challenges to literacy learning. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP, 2015), 16 million U.S. children live in families with incomes below the poverty line of $23,550 a year for a family of four. Children living in poverty may experience reduced health, nutrition, working vocabulary, and cognition and more stress and depressive symptoms compared to other children (NCCP, 2015). They may be exposed to food, for instance, with less nutritional value due to their families' low income and limited food options (Morgan, 2011). Children living in high poverty have been found to have more untreated ailments, greater exposure to lead, and a higher incidence of asthma than middle-class children (Gorski, 2013). It may well be that each of the factors associated with poverty influence literacy learning for students.

Researchers have found that the health factors associated with living in poverty have the potential to negatively influence poor children's learning (Reglin, Akpo-Sanni, & Losike-Sedimo, 2012). Darling-Hammond (2013), for instance, found that these factors were correlated to lower attention, reasoning, learning, and memory among poor children. Lower attention, reasoning, and memory may be cursory for poor achievement in literacy.

Children living in high-poverty environments are particularly at risk for failure in school (Gorski 2013; Morgan, 2011; Vera, 2011). They may be less engaged in the social, instructional, and environmental opportunities provided by their schools (Gilboy, Heinerichs, & Pazzaglia, 2015). Because of stressors from living in high poverty such as

high stress, poor nutrition, and poor health conditions, children may carry cognitive problems that can make school more of a challenge (Morgan, 2011). Typically, by fourth grade, high-poverty students score well below their more advantaged peers on national assessments (Morgan, 2011; Vera, 2011). Additionally, students who live in high-poverty school districts particularly experience poorer facilities (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, & Schellinger, 2011) and have less equipped human and physical resources available to them (Ecker & Sifers, 2013). Lack of human resources may include a higher staff to student ratio and/or teaching staff with lower experience levels when compared to more affluent schools (Morgan, 2011). Ill-equipped physical resources include a lack of technology, poor building infrastructure, lack of media resources, and other physical needs for teaching and learning (Ladd, 2012). Ill-equipped and lower-resourced schools compound the achievement gap for high-poverty students, according to Ladd (2012). Compounded achievement gap pressures may be a contributing cause for the problem.

Reducing the achievement gap and improving student literacy can foster social equality, which should be the goal for all learning institutions, according to Mohamed, Petras, Ismail, and Eng (2013). Social and physical conditions present in schools can influence student achievement, both positively and negatively (Ecker, & Sifers, 2013; Ladd, 2012; Morgan, 2009). Educators often struggle to address the achievement gap between high-poverty students and more advantaged students (Mohamed et al., 2013). According to Morgan (2011), however, educators can facilitate, mediate, and eliminate the effects of the social implications of high poverty on students' academic achievement. Cognitive capacity, literacy, and intelligence are teachable skills that students, regardless

of their socioeconomic background, can achieve (Willingham, 2011).

High-poverty students may experience learning environments that do not regularly address or meet literacy learning needs that some schools provide for students. Ashby, Burns, and Royle (2013) posited that children deserve access to a rich and diverse literacy curriculum with the expectation that they will obtain the necessary literacy skills for lifelong learning and success. Roe, Smith, and Burns (2011) affirmed that schools provide students with the foundational reading skills, fluency skills, analysis proficiencies, and comprehension abilities necessary for proficiency in reading. In order to do this effectively, educators must identify the specific problem. In the following subsection, I discuss the problem I researched as part of my project study. The local problem is discussed with background supported by archival data at the national, district, and local level.

The Local Problem

The local problem addressed in this study was the low reading achievement of high-poverty fourth grade students in a small rural school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Despite small class sizes, highly qualified teachers, and a Common Core-curriculum, high-poverty students' literacy proficiency levels were more than 20% below that of the general student population, as reported on the 2015 Partnership of Assessment for Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) literacy subtest as reported by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE, 2015). In 2011-2015, high-poverty students at the local setting were, on average, 10% less proficient on state level literacy achievement measures when compared to their more advantaged peers (MSDE,

2015). The data suggest a gap in performance that depict high-poverty student literacy concerns at the local school.

Background of the Problem

In comparing the achievement of high-poverty students and low-poverty students, free and reduced-price meals student (FARMS) identification was used to identify high-poverty students. Students receiving federal meals live in households with a substantially lower income when compared to the national income median (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). In 2015, children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level were eligible for free meals; those with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty line were eligible for reduced-price meals (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014). To be consistent with national and state level statistics, I designated students who fell at or below 130% of the poverty level and who received FARMS support as being high-poverty in my study.

At the local setting in 2015, 50% of high-poverty students scored 3 or greater on a 5 point scale on the PARCC literacy assessment as compared to nearly 70% for the general population. In removing Level 3 tier scores during data scrutiny, the percentage of high-poverty students scoring proficient dropped to 25% compared to 55% for the general population. Fourth grade high-poverty students demonstrated poor performance on literacy measures with less than 45% of students meeting 3 to 5 tier scores.

International student assessment data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study suggest that school location and the median wealth of a school location affect how much students' socioeconomic status affects their test results (Marks,

Cresswell & Ainley, 2013). The problem of low literacy achievement for high-poverty

students in high-poverty educational settings was also recognized in the 2015 U.S.

national data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015). High-

poverty literacy achievement gaps evidenced in state level archival data, local archival

data, and the current literature represent a problem in the achievement of students and

may be the result of the teaching and learning process in U.S. Schools. (Ladd, 2012,

MSDE, 2015; NCES, 2011). A call for schools and school policy to address and renew

efforts that incorporate strategic and purposeful pedagogy to remediate literacy

instruction for high-poverty students surfaced in educational discussion and emulated the

discussion at local school settings (Ladd, 2012). The low student literacy achievement

represented in the data suggest an expansive problem exists for high-poverty students.

National Assessment of Education Progress's (NAEP) Nation's Report Card from

2015 (NCES, 2015) showed that 9-year-old students' reading scores had increased since

1970. However, other U.S. data indicate that not all 9-year-old students in the country

are achieving federal reading standards. NAEP data from 2007-2015 highlight

significant discrepancies in scores for students in poverty when compared to more

advantaged student groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The data

indicate over a 25-point deficit in scaled scores for high-poverty students when compared

to all students.

In several national studies, researchers identified fourth grade as the critical point

in which student future literacy success can be predicted (Richards-Tutor, Baker, Gersten,

Baker, & Smith, 2016; Willingham, 2012). For the purpose of this study, I compared the

high-poverty achievement gap for Grade 4 on the NAEP. The NAEP is administered in

school districts across the United States every other year (NCES, 2015). NAEP reading

scale scores range from 0- 500. Scores reported from each demographic indicate

significant discrepancies from year to year. The data collected from the National Center

for Education Statistics website are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Grade 4 Literacy Achievement Proficiency for All Students as Compared to High-Poverty Students (NAEP Scaled Scores-U.S. Averages)

Year	All students	High-poverty students
2007	232	205
2009	232	206
2011	235	207
2013	236	207
2015	237	209

The high-poverty achievement gap is also evident in the Maryland state level data

collected from the NCES (2015) and is depicted in Table 2. On average, a 27.4 scaled

score deficit by high-poverty students from 2007-2015 is evident.

Table 2

Grade 4 Literacy Achievement Proficiency for All Students as Compared to High-Poverty Students (NAEP Scaled Scores-Maryland)

Year	All students	High-poverty students
2007	235	207
2009	236	210
2011	242	215
2013	242	216
2015	237	207

Similarly, the local district struggled to address high-poverty student reading needs by the end of fourth grade, as evident in reading assessment scores. I used the PARCC assessment system data to demonstrate trends (MSDE, 2015). A student score of 3-5 on a 5-point scale indicates literacy proficiency. A review of PARCC data indicates that high-poverty students were less likely to score in the upper 4-5 tiers (see Table 3).

Table 3

District Comparison of Grade 4 Literacy Achievement Proficiency for All Students and High-Poverty Students-PARCC

	Scoring 3, 4, or 5	Scoring 4 or 5
All Students	77.3%	49.4%
High-Poverty Students	57.4%	25.7%

Note. 3=Partially Met Expectations; 4=Met Expectations; 5=Exceeded Expectation

(MSDE, 2015)

Longitudinal analyses of data show an increase in the number of high-poverty students from 2011-2014 combined with an overall decrease in elementary school literacy performance. Poverty rates at the district level increased from 10% to over 25% in this 5-year span (MSDE, 2015). The decline in literacy achievement was greater for high-poverty students (see Table 4).

Table 4

District Longitudinal Literacy Achievement Proficiency for All Grade 3-5 Students and High-Poverty Students Grade 3-5: State Assessment

Year	All students	High-poverty students
2011	93.9%	86.4
2012	93.8%	87.4%
2013	92.5%	83.7%
2014	91.9%	83.0%

The decline in scores during the 5-year span decreased at similar rates (by approximately 3%) for both student groups. Declines in literacy proficiency, with close to an 8% drop in average literacy assessment scores from 2011-2015 indicate trends and patterns of lower performance.

Rationale

Evidence exists for the problem at the local level from several data sources. The problem is also evident in the research literature. The compounding poverty factors that impact literacy achievement provide the rationale for the problem.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

U.S. demographic family income trends and projections suggest that U.S. schools are significantly challenged with meeting the needs of a growing impoverished student body (National Education Association, 2014). With increased poverty rates for children in the United States, and shifts in geographical demographics that transformed middle income locales to low income locales, the task of effectively closing learning gaps and promoting positive achievement outcomes for all learners is more urgent (National

Education Association, 2014). In the United States, an increase in economic inequality exists between high-income families and low-income families (Putnam, 2015), with a majority (51%) of public school students coming from low-income families (Putnam, 2015). The local school exhibited growing poverty rates from 2011-2015, with the number of students receiving FARMS increasing from 12% to 40% (MSDE, 2015).

The problem for this study existed at a rural mid-Atlantic elementary school serving close to 400 students. During the 2015-2016 school year, the demographic population of the school was 85% White, 10% Hispanic, 7% Black, 5% Multiple races, and 3% other races. In 2015, 15% of students received special education services, and 3% received English Language Learning (ELL) services (MSDE, 2015). Nearly 41% of students lived in high poverty and received FARMS. Table 5 provides a breakdown of high-poverty demographics by grade-level.

Table 5

2015-2016 Demographics of High-Poverty Local School Environment by Grade Level

Grade level	High-poverty population
PK	62.07%
K	54.85%
01	33.96%
02	39.13%
03	31.03%
04	42.08%
05	31.11%

(MSDE, 2015)

From 2013-2016, the local setting focused its school improvement efforts on reducing the literacy achievement gap for students from high-poverty backgrounds. During this 3-year period, the FARMS population of students increased from 29% to over 40% (MSDE, 2015). At the local setting, in each year from 2011-2014, the subgroup of fourth grade high-poverty students scored far below all students on state reading assessments; 64% scored in the proficient range in reading as compared to 90% of the general population (MSDE, 2015). School leaders recognized that literacy achievement for high-poverty students was below the performance of grade-level peers from more advantaged groups. In 2014, state assessments identified the current status of school achievement among students in the state. Similar to national, state, and district trends, as the percent of the local student population that is considered high-poverty increased (MSDE, 2015), literacy achievement for all students declined. The decline has been at an even higher rate for high-poverty students as indicated from the MSDE (2015) school assessment results (see Table 6).

Table 6

Literacy Achievement Proficiency for Grade 3-5 Students (All Students as Compared to High-Poverty Students) at the Local Site

	All students	*High-poverty students*
2011	95.2%	91.9%
2012	94.4%	87.9%
2013	91.6%	78.1%
2014	88.3%	76.9%

Note. State assessment

The percentage differences for both groups (general and high-poverty) from 2011-2014

indicate a 15% decrease in scores among high-poverty students during this time. The data

reinforce the trend of negative changes in literacy scores.

As the high-poverty student population grew, the collective performance for all

students on literacy measures declined. The data from Table 6 suggest that the gap in

performance grew quickly and influenced the entire student population. For example, a

5% or greater decline in scores occurred each year from 2011-2014. Moreover, FARMS

students' literacy scores declined at a greater rate compared to the general population (see

Table 7).

Table 7

High-Poverty Demographic and Local Longitudinal Literacy Achievement Proficiency

for Grade 3-5 High-Poverty Students: State Assessment

	Percent population high-poverty	Literacy achievement high-poverty students
2011	12.4%	91.9%
2012	18.6%	87.9%
2013	22.4%	78.1
2014	33.3%	76.9%

(MSDE, 2015)

School leaders identified apparent themes and strategies and uncovered specific

learning prerequisites as part of professional development for staff. District and school

leaders hoped that job-embedded professional development consistent with effective community of practice design could remediate the problem (Mayer, Woulfin & Warhol, 2015). The local school performance paralleled that of the larger educational community: the achievement gap for high-poverty students remained despite a renewed effort and attention to the data. Stakeholders drilled down to determine trends and possible solutions with PARCC assessment data. The data further substantiated the achievement gap in fourth grade literacy where students demonstrated 74% proficiency while only 48% of high-poverty students scored proficient (MSDE, 2015).

The NAEP and state data suggest that poverty possesses a strong negative influence on achievement at the local setting. Despite the strategies the school community employed from 2012 to 2015, the local institution demonstrated an achievement gap for high-poverty students. Notwithstanding small class sizes of no more than 23 students for reading, 100% highly qualified teachers, and common core implemented curriculum, high-poverty students by the end of fourth grade struggled to meet literacy achievement standards. This trend depicted a substantial gap in practice that validated this study.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Krashen (2011) stated, "Poverty is clearly the most serious problem. In fact, it may be the only serious problem in American education" (p. 18). The literature suggests that the gap in literacy achievement is the result of compounding poverty factors, which reinforces exploration of additional solutions, strategies, or practices to remediate literacy needs (Rosenberg, 2012; Willingham, 2012). Some researchers found that differential

educational risk factors exist in rural areas for high-poverty students that are not considered factors in urban settings (Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Ullici & Howard, 2015). Therefore, the problem has unique rural nuances that required attention. Rural nuances include generational factors that may not be typical in the urban setting as well as monolithic community issues that give rise to cycles of poverty (Ramalho & Urick, 2013).

When students do not possess comprehension and fluency skills by the end of third grade, students can become tracked in intervention systems that have not always worked to meet their individual needs (Richards-Tutor et al., 2016). Little intervention, if any, is as effective as ensuring students reach literacy standards through early school years (Hagans & Good III, 2013). Ladd (2012) documented that children from disadvantaged households perform less well in school than those from more advantaged households. Through qualitative case study measures, Loyd and Hertzmans (2010) found that high-poverty rural settings maintain high residential instability and mobility, which leads to worsened literacy scores over time and lower fourth-grade scores compared to more affluent surroundings. Also, in a review of experimental studies, poverty is associated with lower test scores in reading achievement (De Marco & Vernon, 2013).

A review of the literature indicates that most research on poverty is typically focused on major urban settings (Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Ullucci & Howard, 2015). It is significant, however, that across the United States more than half of high-poverty students in elementary school live in nonurban settings (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014). Using less typical socioeconomic characteristics such as immigration

status, race, and parent education, Lloyd and Hertzman (2010) found that schools with higher affluence regardless of diversity make greater literacy gains. Concentrated urban neighborhood affluence is associated with better fourth-grade outcomes and improvement in scores over time. Lower rural wealth concentrations result in lower test scores and lower improvement over time. The empirical correlation between poverty and underachievement suggests that poverty is a stronger demographic influence than the other demographic descriptors of race or special services (Loyd & Hertzman, 2010).

The empirical relationship between poverty and lower literacy scores for elementary students was also apparent in the literature review (Hagans & Good III, 2013; Krashen, 2011). The research suggested that many low-income children struggle to acquire early reading skills (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2015). Studies focused on the individual student, the school, the district, the state, and/or the country used various measures of family socioeconomic status or different definitions of high-poverty including income-related measures such as family income, education level of the parents, occupation type of the parents, or employment status. In each, poverty negatively influenced student achievement (Ladd, 2012). Poverty as a socioeconomic factor is the strongest predictor of low performance for students (Hagans & Good III, 2013; Krashen, 2011). Moreover, the research substantiates that poverty negatively influenced student achievement for over 20 years (Korenman, Miller, & Sjanstad, 1994).

Preferences and behaviors of teachers may contribute to the problem. Some teachers with strong credentials are reluctant to teach in schools with large concentrations of high-poverty students (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011). Colclough (2012)

discovered that teachers today are not lower performing or less committed when compared to teachers of the past; instead, gaps in teaching and student performance grew over time based on socioeconomics of the school environment. Moreover, the gap in performance for high-poverty students persists at rates much greater in high-poverty schools as compared to schools with higher affluence and could be the result of variance in teaching practices and teaching capacity among the different environments.

In a quantitative study that discussed early school skills for high-poverty students, 60% of children from high-poverty households scored below even a basic level in reading at the end of the primary grades (Hagans & Good III, 2013). For high-poverty students in rural areas, the achievement in early school years remained low despite more than 3 decades of federal investment in programs to remediate or prevent reading failure (De Marco & Faegans, 2013). The evidence of low achievement surfaced on nationally normed literacy assessments and interventions, where minority status and poverty linked to lower oral reading fluency scores (Paleologos & Brabham, 2011). Hagans and Good III (2013) discovered that students in high poverty underperform regardless of monetary investment or prescribed research-based interventions. Likewise, Colclough (2012) determined that students from well-funded schools with higher socioeconomic backgrounds outscore schools with lesser monetary resources.

The inequities resulting from poverty in learning environments cause students to struggle and disengage from school (Wang & Machado, 2015). Possible sources of disengagement include rural factors such as geographical isolation and other neighborhood disadvantages. Wang (2011) discovered that rural students need more time

to learn the same amount of knowledge and skills than counterparts in urban settings. In a correlational study, De Marco and Vernon-Faegans (2013) discovered that disadvantage in rural communities can influence child learning development. To measure children's lowered receptive language abilities, De Marco and Vernon-Faegans (2013) explored impeded language acquisition and discovered that lower neighborhood safety in poor areas correlated to lower childhood vocabulary. Low performance also resulted from poor early reading development in low-income rural homes (De Marco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013; Dinehart & Manfra, 2013; Hagans & Good III, 2013). Thus, rural high-poverty low-language childhood experiences negatively influence childhood literacy (De Marco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013).

The influence of high-poverty on academic achievement was significant in the case of language and literacy competence (Hartas, 2011). Moreover, the data, findings in the literature base, and scope of the problem globally, nationally, and locally suggest that high-poverty teaching and learning factors contribute to the identified gap in practice. High-poverty literacy gaps could contribute to future school and societal problems, such as lowered graduation rates and unpreparedness for college and careers (Mette & Scribner, 2014). This phenomenon is of great importance for the education profession as teaching, learning, and social change actions continue to target and address high-poverty achievement gaps.

The review of the problem of lower literacy achievement for high poverty learners in the literature provided me with extensive and well-documented evidence of the problem in the global context. Tivnan and Hemphill (2015) suggested that educator

urgency in closing the achievement gap for students in poverty be made priority for school reform. In the literature, school officials are called on to ensure educational equity for the underprivileged (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2015). While educational institutions and researchers alike have worked on intentional processes that readdress school policies for disadvantaged students, the literature suggests dramatic changes in the way that schools do business to meet high-poverty learning demands (Stone-Johnson, 2013).

Definition of Terms

The following list includes key terms and definitions used in my project study:

School culture: The assumptions, beliefs, routines, practices, and norms that influence the teaching and learning process at a school (DuFour & Marzano, 2012).

Communities of practice: A group of people who share a history of experience. Although a systemic vision for the community of practice may be in place, not all members share a common trajectory or agree on a collaborative mission (Wenger, 1998).

Collaboration: The work that teachers do with time and tools that engage them in life-long learning that improves teaching and learning practice. Collaboration typically occurs in the form of teaching teams, but individual members must be committed to working together to change long-standing assumptions, expectations and practices (Carrol, Fulton, & Doerr, 2010).

Emergent literacy: The process of acquiring reading-related skills during the formative pre-school years beginning with a pre-kindergarten child's awareness of language, understanding and recognizing letters as symbols, foundations of print, and

naming and sounding letters by the end of pre-kindergarten (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Learning community: The school community inclusive of students, teachers, instructional support staff, support staff, parents, school leaders, and other stakeholders who work directly or indirectly with the teaching and learning process (DuFour & Marzano, 2012).

Learning systems: The curriculum implementation, professional development processes, teacher actions, leadership actions, school goals, student expectations, student engagement, collaborative processes, decision making systems, and stakeholder relationships in a school (Mette & Scribner, 2014).

Learning structures: The physical school facility, school schedule, team meeting structures, leadership structures, and lesson plan structure and delivery that support teaching (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2015).

Macro factors: The global historical, political, and societal structures that influence student learning (Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood, and Parkhill, 2013).

Micro factors: The institutionalized historical, political, and societal forces that regularly influence day-to-day classroom interactions between the teacher and student (Fletcher et al., 2013).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the educators at the local site because it addresses the problem with plausible changes in practice that may benefit student literacy learning. Moreover, the study has significance for the broader educational profession, including

teacher and administrator preparation. Finally, positive social change is possible as a result of the findings from this study.

Significance of the Study for Educators at the Local Site

This study is significant to the local teachers and school leaders in their reform efforts toward reaching higher literacy achievement for students by the end of fourth grade. Reforming an established learning community where collaborative practices regularly address the specific needs of each and every student is a monumental undertaking (DuFour & Marzano, 2012). The pursuit of student excellence in literacy achievement regardless of student socioeconomic status proves to be difficult for many schools (De Marco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013). Regardless of such difficulties, schools discover ways to meet high-poverty literacy needs. Schools possess the capability to enhance practices that improve the literacy achievement of students regardless of high-poverty factors (De Marco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013; Krashen, 2011). This project study contributes to the local learning community and provides best practices to consider for continuous reform efforts that may improve high-poverty literacy.

Students at the local school can benefit from the study. The study outcomes potentially influence instruction and increase reading achievement for high-poverty students as well as the general population. Students who meet literacy standards by the beginning of fourth grade are more likely to succeed in school and in future college and career pathways (Foorman, Koon, Petscher, Mitchell, & Truckenmiller, 2015). The local community of educators may be able to implement strategies discussed in this project study to increase the achievement for high-poverty students who are typically

underserved. In meeting the reading achievement needs of the local fourth grade students, future success in school, college, or careers is increased (Mette & Scribner, 2014).

While the reduction of poverty in society is beyond the scope of educational institutions, mitigating the influence of high poverty on academic achievement is within educational means (Ladd, 2012). The overall significance is that the local school can do something to eliminate or reduce achievement gaps caused by poverty. With the learning of literacy skills for students, especially by the end of fourth grade, considered highly complex and measured as a strong predictor of future communicative, cognitive and social capacities (Ferraz, Pocinho, Pereira, & Pimenta, 2015), it is the responsibility of educators to meet student literacy needs. This study and the suggested outcomes may provide local school leaders and teachers with the effective protocols for meeting such literacy needs for students.

At the local setting, the ability to use the project outcomes to enhance its community of practice could be beneficial for student literacy achievement. Administrators may be able to use the outcomes for improved professional development and instructional leadership. Classroom teachers may be able to use the project for improved instruction. Local teacher specialists may also find the project outcome useful in delivering improved adult professional learning strategies. Finally, students would benefit through enhanced instruction that correlates to greater literacy achievement. Overall learning community improvement could increase the likelihood that eventually all high-poverty students would meet literacy standards by the end of fourth grade.

Significance of the Study for the Education Profession

Educator capacity is described as the most effective measure to close test score gaps for high-poverty students (Lauen, 2013). Further study in methods to improve educator aptitude for high-poverty students improves educator capacity (Darling-Hammond, 2013). The implications and findings discussed in this study for the education profession comprise of a contribution of information to the research base and in the field for implemented practice. The findings and project are of benefit for local teachers, district leaders, school administrators, teacher preparation programs, and other school districts for improved capacity in meeting high-poverty student literacy needs. Teachers are afforded additional strategies, practices, and reflective opportunities. District leaders and administrators could use the findings to support future decision-making for curriculum implementation, literacy interventions, and other fiscal and physical resource decisions. Teacher preparation programs may use the findings to increase teacher preparation competencies. Moreover, schools in the United States confronted with high-poverty literacy achievement gaps, could use this research to enhance their communities of practice.

The pursuit of pedagogical best practices that address the needs of an ever-changing student population, especially students who were typically underserved, is a primary responsibility of the education profession (Kaniuka, 2012; Tam, 2015). The implications from this project study contribute to the education profession and support the pursuit of additional pedagogic best practices. Teachers need the information to continue to grow in teaching and instruction practices in their classrooms. Teacher

preparation programs need this information to maintain excellence in the field and provide new teachers with more competency and experience before entering the classroom. Administrators who are leading teachers need the information to support informed decision-making that close achievement gaps. Finally, schools in the United States need this information, to further support, implement, or transform communities of practice to meet ever-changing high-poverty student literacy needs.

Implications for Positive Social Change

Quality education creates positive social change by providing a foundation by which members of society can minimize the effects of sociocultural and opportunity disparities and differences (Gorski, 2013). The achievement gap for high-poverty students as well as other disadvantaged student groups requires critical dialogue and a search for the best practices that school communities can use to defend students from disadvantages (Philpott & Dagenais, 2012). Providing structures and effective tools for communities that promote increased teacher collaborative capacity and student literacy performance enhances the education of students and enhances future social change. Therefore, the resultant positive social change from this project study include potential expansion of college and career readiness, a rise in graduation rates, an escalation in earning power, and upward social mobility for all students and especially high-poverty student in local, national, and global learning communities.

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Research Questions

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The local problem addressed in the study was the low reading achievement of high-poverty fourth grade students in a small rural school in the Mid-Atlantic region of

the United States. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceived best practices at a learning environment that support high achievement for high-poverty students and gather an understanding of the educator perceptions of the mechanisms that can solve the literacy achievement gap. The guiding research question to determine the design, methodology, and scope of the study was: What are principal and teacher perceptions of best practices that increase fourth grade literacy achievement for high-poverty students in a high-achieving elementary school? At the local level, this addresses the specific problem of low-literacy achievement for high-poverty students. Moreover, the overarching question also aligns to the problem at the global, national, and district level. Ambiguity exists in the literature on the specific school-based strategies in support of increased achievement for high-poverty students (Ferraz et al., 2015; Ladd, 2012). Various instructional interventions have led to little impact of chronic achievement gaps. Therefore, an exploration of the perceived best practices at a learning environment experiencing high achievement for high-poverty students was necessary to provide specific practices for other school communities. An understanding of the educator perceptions of the mechanisms that can solve the literacy achievement gap was a strategic goal for this study.

Schools exist that demonstrate success in raising literacy achievement for high-poverty students. A qualitative study that explored the perceptions of current practice in such a school, specifically a high-poverty, high-achieving learning community, influences future practices at the local learning community. An examination of effective professional practice in the high-achieving elementary school environment promotes

professional growth for teachers and increases literacy achievement for low-income students in the local setting. The research to determine which best practices were essential for increased teacher capacity also leads to improved student literacy achievement. Researchers and practitioners suggest that the instructional decisions and opportunities for students that occur in schools are the result of institutionalized micro and macro social, cultural, and political factors (Fletcher et al., 2013). An analysis of principal and teacher perceptions of these micro and macro factors at a high-poverty high-achieving learning environment delivered plausible outcomes to reshape and redesign future best collaborative practices as a solution to low reading achievement. Specific research questions were as follows:

RQ 1: What are the campus principal's perceptions of the classroom best practices (micro factors) that contribute to high levels of literacy achievement for students in poverty at a high achieving elementary school?

RQ 2: What are teachers' perceptions of the classroom best practices (micro factors) that contribute to high levels of literacy achievement for students in poverty at a high achieving elementary school?

RQ 3: What are the campus principal's perceptions of the systems and structures (macro factors) that influence high-level literacy instruction for students at a high achieving elementary school?

RQ 4: What are the teacher perceptions of the systems and structures (macro factors) that influence high-level literacy instruction for students at a high achieving elementary school?

Review of the Literature

To find relevant current studies to support the problem, I searched the literature using the following databases: Academic Search Complete, ERIC and the Simultaneous Education Research Complete, Open Library, ProQuest, SAGE Research Complete, and the Google Scholar engine assigned to the Walden University Library. By combining keywords and Boolean phrases such as *literacy achievement*, *high-poverty*, and *learning community* with the terms *best practices*, *shared leadership*, *collaboration*, *educational leadership*, *school reform*, *school renewal*, *teacher capacity*, and *reading interventions*, I yielded significant results. In the second stage, I reviewed the abstracts of the works and narrowed the scope of literature by selecting the most relevant works to the research question. Seminal works were chosen for inclusion in the literature review based on their potential contribution to the conceptual framework of the paper, relevance to sociocultural principles, school literacy improvement, learning community best practices, and high-poverty implications for student learning. Works addressing attempts by practicing educators to promote school literacy reform efforts through learning community best practices based on social change values were reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized in a self-designed matrix to elicit themes. Works that addressed the interdependence of micro and macro sociocultural factors in schools as they related to the research question were reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized in a similar amalgamation matrix. The combination and synthesis of the descriptive studies established a connection to the conceptual framework and suggested approaches for improving literacy instruction.

The literature review begins with a discussion of the sociocultural conceptual framework that grounds the study. This is followed by an analysis of the problem through thematically grouped and organized review of the sources in terms of theoretical constructs and topics of importance: high poverty as a factor in inhibiting achievement; literacy learning; micro factors that influence school literacy improvement; macro factors that influence school literacy improvement; and a discussion on the suggested best practices. By organizing the review in this way, the scholarly literature is funneled from higher-level concepts and broader problem implications to the specific studies and critical analysis where literacy learning for high-poverty students is based.

Conceptual Framework

The professional research of scholars and the opinions of practitioners suggest that the instructional decisions and opportunities for students that occur in schools are the result of institutionalized micro and macro social, cultural, and political factors (Fletcher et al., 2013). Researchers indicate that the lower achievement of high-poverty students is related to such dynamics and worthy of a scholarly endeavor (Dexter & Stacks, 2013; Kaniuka, 2012; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Shippen, Miller, Patterson, Houchins, & Darch, 2014). Originally discussed by Vygotsky (1978) as part of the social constructivism theory and expounded by neo-sociocultural theorists (Wertsch, del Rio, & Alverez, 1995), the conceptual framework driving this study is the sociocultural framework. The framework is summarized as an awareness of circumstances surrounding individuals and how their behaviors are affected by their surrounding specific social and cultural factors (Fletcher et al, 2013). Wertsch et al. (1995) described

teaching and learning as an empathetic art that relates the social and cultural differences

of students to curriculum. Teaching must include the prerequisite knowledge of students

and a hyper-awareness of sociocultural factors to plan learning pathways that meet

student sociocultural needs. The sociocultural framework combines teaching practices

alongside knowledge of students' high-poverty backgrounds and cultures to support

engaged practitioners in self-reflective learning that improves both teaching practice and

student achievement (Fletcher, 2015). Derivatives of the framework as discussed in the

literature include the socioecological theories, social constructivist, socioemotional

theories, and other wider socially derived theories (Berkovich, 2013; Colclough, 2013;

Fletcher et al., 2013; Lam, 2014; Lenters, 2013; Wilcox, 2013).

Students and adult learners make meaningful connections with school

environments when commonality exists between school cultural contexts and the

experiences of personal lives. The ability to improve reading instruction for high-poverty

students requires an exploration of the explicit skills of competent reading with wider

school and community structures that influence reading achievement (Fletcher et al.,

2013). Fletcher et al. (2013) postulated a sociocultural systematic learning model

framework that isolated the conditions in which children can improve reading

achievement among the macro factors and micro factors that contribute to the social

milieu that is present in school. Wertsch et al. (1995) posited that learners, adult or child,

must be immersed in this social milieu before anything can be learned and materialized in

the brain. The construction of knowledge is an active participation of collaboration

between learner, teacher, and environment within the attributes micro and macro factors (Lam, 2014; Wilcox, 2013).

The micro factors relevant to this project study included: educator efficacy, beliefs, teacher capacity, student expectations, instruction, and decision-making (Berkovich, 2013; Colclough, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2013; Lam, 2014; Lenters, 2013; Wilcox, 2013). The macro factors relevant to the study included: school culture, school climate, political forces, social positioning, organizational conditions, and accountability measures (Berkovich, 2013; Colclough, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2013; Lam, 2014; Lenters, 2013; Wilcox, 2013). The sociocultural macro and micro factors regulate student literacy achievement through the relationships between school, student, and community (Fletcher, 2015). In order for students to achieve at a high level, micro and macro factors must be situated around high quality instruction that emphasizes sustained connected learning opportunities for both students and staff (Matsumura & Wang, 2014). School improvement initiatives concentrated on social practices inherent to individuals and communities correlate to significant achievement outcomes (Jesson & Limbrick, 2014; Lenters, 2013).

The logical connection among the key elements of the framework includes the research on teacher perception and beliefs in regards to student expectation and achievement (Banks et al., 2013; Griffith, Massey, & Atkinson, 2013; Kaniuka, 2012; Wilcox, 2013). A sociocultural comfort zone exists for learners and teachers (Banks et al., 2013; Ferguson, 2014). Moreover, in order for student achievement to rise, both teachers and students need to step outside of this comfort zone. In doing so, educators

and students make use of the sociocultural or social practices in the teaching and learning approaches to literacy (Lenters, 2013). Literacy is best conceptualized socially as an ideological process encompassing skills of learning to decode print and comprehend written language through connections. These connections are the direct result of the social, political, cultural and linguistic complexities inherent to the beliefs of individuals, schools, and communities that shape perceptions and the use of literacy skills (Lenters, 2013). High-poverty students and teachers interact in ways that are symbolic of these complexities. Teachers and students influence each other as expectations for achievement are built in the teacher-student relationship. For example, low expectations may lead to lower achievement while high expectations may lead to higher achievement.

In a longitudinal qualitative case study grounded in the sociocultural framework, Fletcher et al. (2013) discovered influential factors that affect school improvement and postulated that professional perceptions leading to high-level literacy achievement are rooted in the sociocultural components. Learning community collaborative practice, ongoing professional development, and implementation of reading programs derived from school data, school wide support, and many others were included. It was of significance that researchers discovered that elementary reading instruction and sociolinguistics permeate each of the influential factors (Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2013). Effective reading instruction was presented as the most important sociocultural factor in elementary student achievement and teacher professional development (Broadley, 2012). Thus, literacy instruction for students in high poverty is influenced by sociocultural forces inside instruction (micro) and forces outside of instruction (macro). To fully

understand how micro and macro factors inhibit literacy learning, the sociocultural factors explicit to high poverty must be examined.

High-Poverty Factors That Inhibit Literacy Achievement

Educators' views toward poverty and the systematic decisions made based on subconscious biases were found to further perpetuate low achievement for high-poverty students (Banks, Dunston, & Foley, 2013; Sparks & Reese, 2013). In an exploratory mixed-methods study, Banks et al. (2013) found that negative attitudes existed about the expectations of achievement for students who live in high poverty. In a like study, Sparks and Reese (2013) examined sources of variation for language development and discovered that lower verbal abilities in high-poverty students hindered academic progress. Variations in language correlated to increased identification of high-poverty students for speech language and special education services. Moreover, high-poverty student literacy learning is linked to complex systematic and institutional norms that may perpetuate bias and false identification of students for special services (Sparks & Reese, 2013).

In a study of school and socioeconomic social factors, Reglin et al. (2012) found that indirect factors related to high-poverty inequalities in education are related to the social and cultural disparities between the richer and poorer segments of society. Parental involvement, parent-child interactions, along with the family's general attitude towards learning and academic success bears a negative influence on student performance (Topor, Keane, Shelton & Calkins, 2010). Data indicated that teaching quality and resources spent in high-poverty areas were reduced when compared to more

affluent neighborhoods or school districts (Ladd, 2012). Students who live in high-poverty homes typically attend high-poverty schools and are further disadvantaged from social and fiscal inequality factors. Furthermore, the literature recommended that special attention be given to high-poverty students and high-poverty schools to further reduce disparities and barriers to learning and achievement (Kaniuka, 2012; Tam, 2015).

A longitudinal study completed by Dexter & Sacks (2013) linked a lack of pre-school learning development as a negative influence on literacy. Children who have underdeveloped literacy skills experience difficulty in catching up to their peers. Dexter and Stacks (2013) quantified that early kindergarten students who possess low emergent literacy skills have greater than an 80% chance of being a low reader with low comprehension by third grade. Children not reading well by the end of first grade have a 90% chance of remaining low readers (Dexter & Stacks, 2013). Early comprehension delays increase the likelihood that high-poverty students will encounter more learning problems in school as the initial reading gaps continue to widen over time (De Marco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013).

Several important indirect contextual factors contribute to the phenomena of the low academic achievement in high-poverty students. Elements include pre-literacy gaps from social and contextual poverty factors, social diversity challenges, negative social influences of student poverty, and inadequate teacher preparation, experience, or professional development to address substantial need in high-poverty schools (Dinehart & Manfra, 2013). There was also evidence that the low literacy performance of high-poverty students results in low engagement and lesser fine-motor skills in early

elementary years (Dinehart & Manfra, 2013). Low engagement and reduced fine-motor skills from early life poverty indicate that the early indirect literacy factors relate to later lower engagement in the learning process.

A review of the research also suggests that rural schools have challenges in maintaining a faculty of highly experienced teachers compounded by limited access to high quality professional development (Porche, Pallante, & Snow, 2012). The social attributes of professional development were reported to be of high value for teacher growth (Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2013). The absence of such professional social attributes for high-poverty rural schools compound improvement efforts, because the sociocultural factors that underpin an informal network for educators typically provide for a continuous cycle of growth significant to student and school sociocultural needs (Ramalho & Urick, 2013). Moreover, rural teachers may not be adequately prepared to effectively collaborate with one another due to prohibiting sociocultural factors like lack of trust, which was indicated as a typical characteristic of rural high-poverty locales (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Ramalho & Urick, 2013).

Collaboration amongst teachers was empirically addressed and considered a strategy to improve teacher capacity and instructional repertoire (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Lenters, 2013). For example, in an explanatory mixed methods study, Broadley (2012) investigated a model that provided collaborative connectedness for rural teachers in Australia. The connectedness allowed faculty to experience a cycle of social growth that resulted in improved professional development and capacity building. The research of Porche et al. (2012) indicated that teachers were more willing to try new

methodologies when collaborative opportunities were included as a macro factor in school professional development. D'Ardenne et al. (2013) indicated that teachers crave a high level of collaboration with each other to share critically and interrogate practice through reflection. Such collaboration could potentially shift learning community culture and build individual teacher capacity (Anderson, Mascall, Stiegelbauer, & Park, 2012; Fletcher et al., 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014).

Outcomes of education are mediated by the local, social, and economic contexts of the school community (Colclough, 2013). The literature indicated that poverty's adverse effect on quantity and quality of instruction further reduces and prevents high-poverty students from the social benefits of public education (Jesson & Limbrick, 2014). The complex interactions between the social and cultural circumstances of poverty among the same social and cultural contexts of school are barriers to high-poverty student learning (Jesson & Limbrick, 2014). This is a contradiction in the belief that the education system should serve as a social allocation that breaks down inequality (Colclough, 2013). Moreover, the literature suggests that education's influence on reducing social inequalities is no longer as strong as it once was, and the positive influence that once existed has been degraded due to social and political factors (Elliot, 2014 Lenters, 2013; Paleologos & Brabham, 2011).

Literacy Instructional Factors

The broader problem of low achievement for high-poverty students in schools is underpinned in sociocultural factors that influence literacy instructional factors. Literacy learning, which includes fluency and comprehension, was presented as a concurrent

theme throughout the literature base. Furthermore, five domains of literacy were discussed: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Ferguson, 2014; Ferguson, 2013; Fletcher, 2015; Foorman et al., 2015; Jesson & Limbrick, 2014, Lenters, 2013). By isolating the five domains in both quantitative and qualitative methodology, researchers found that high poverty's social and cultural contextual factors influence student achievement in these literacy domains (Ferguson, 2014; Ferguson, 2013; Jesson & Limbrick, 2014, Lenters, 2013). The experimental studies of Richards-Tutor et al. (2015) and Shippen et al. (2015) focused on strengths of reading intervention that used literacy domains as the diagnostic measurement. In each study, it was discovered that high-poverty negatively influenced literacy scores. Therefore, high poverty's social and cultural complexities must be considered when programming for literacy instruction.

De Marco and Vernon-Faegans (2013) discovered that inadequate explicit reading instruction within the literacy domains results from minimal professional conversation focused on generational and situational poverty implications. Tam (2015) suggested that isolative teaching practice, inadequate use of formative assessment for explicit feedback for students, and inexperience analyzing student achievement data leads to unfocused instructional conversation. Isolationism by teachers with a lack of targeted instructional decisions was listed as a contributing factor for lowered student literacy (Kaniuka, 2012). Isolationism and the absence of explicit teaching practices might contribute to the phenomenon of low literacy achievement for high-poverty students.

Increased professional competence was empirically correlated to the augmentation of sociohistorical and sociocultural barriers to student achievement in reflective professional development for teachers (Hargreaves & Harris, 2011). Researchers found that professional development derived from reflective and collaborative approaches result in increased positive literacy performance (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Hargreaves & Harris, 2011; Stone-Johnson, 2013). When educators align culture and collaborative tasks to address and explore complex student literacy learning phenomena, equitable plans of actions with improved teaching practices result (Mette & Scribner, 2014). The implications of teacher collaboration toward equity may be the pathway to greater competence for teaching literacy to students.

Collaborative discourse as a learning community practice has also gained attention at the U.S. national level (DuFour & Marzano, 2012). With the arrival of the Common Core and Race to the Top legislation, a new mutual level of accountability is expected for student performance in global 21st century literacy skills. Older educational technologies and strategies combined with new 21st century literacy tools have forced schools and districts to rely on strong collaboration, partnerships within and among teaching teams, and egalitarian approaches for professional growth (DuFour & Marzano, 2012). The implications of low literacy achievement for high-poverty students in the education profession were grounded in these heightened ethical responsibilities and accountability measures.

Macro Factors That Influence School Literacy Achievement

I synthesized the literature to determine the macro factors that influence school literacy improvement. The macro factors are school culture, school climate, social/political forces, social positioning, organizational conditions, and accountability measures (Berkovich, 2013; Colclough, 2013; Fletcher et al., 2013; Lam, 2014; Lenters, 2013; Wilcox, 2013). Education is described as an open system, embedded in a complex social context with macro factors within and outside of district boundaries (Berkovich, 2013). Macro factors are represented in the state and national political forces that drive educational decision-making. Macro factors affect the many hidden institutional distinctions that perpetuate the work that schools do, in both high performing and low performing schools (Berkovich, 2013, Colclough, 2013, Lam 2014). In fact, in regression studies that addressed higher-performing low-income students, the school ecosystem and societal macro system were reported to influence all facets of instruction (Wilcox, 2013).

The research indicates that several interrelated school climate factors make a difference in school literacy achievement: (a) a high understanding of student populations (b) intensive literacy instruction; (c) technology rich instruction; (d) a collaborative approach to curriculum; and (e) the ability to adapt and deploy resources, (f) the use of performance data, and (g) connections with families (Berkovich, 2013, Colclough, 2013, Lam 2014 Wilcox, 2013). Empirically, school culture was considered an influential constituent in all areas of student achievement because learning expectations result from the lived and hidden culture that exists in a school (Wilcox, 2013). Lam (2014) reported

that before high-poverty students even interact with teachers, expectations are being

formed as a result of macro processes. Lam (2014) discovered that teacher expectations

of students was a distal variable that exerted influence on the overall school climate and

suggested that school climate and culture contribute to high-poverty students being

exposed to a tracking system due to low academic and literacy performance. Thus, many

social and political complexities inherently shape structures and cultures of schools.

Reading is the fundamental skill that is critical to success in society (Shippen et

al., 2014). Although accountability measures have been adopted and laws have been

passed to ensure all children gain adequate reading skills, a large number of socially

disadvantaged communities, congested in rural and urban areas of high poverty continue

have not met reading standards (Ladd, 2012). The social positioning or the variability in

income levels of schools in disadvantaged communities and the students these schools

serve, contribute to children's literacy performance (Morris, Halliburton, Morris,

Robinson, Myers, Keyes, & Terranova, 2013). Reading ability indirectly relates to social

positioning. For example, researchers report that higher income and elevated social

positioning lead to better overall achievement for students (Jesson & Limbrick, 2014;

Marulis & Neuman, 2013; Morris et al., 2013). Moreover, greater health risks, both

physical and psychological, were indicated as factors that reduce literacy achievement for

students in disadvantaged areas (Marulis & Newman, 2013). Thus, lower human social

position contributes to increased chances at reading failure.

Parental education, which is a component of social position, was also addressed

empirically. Although there are numerous studies that do correlate parental education

(especially the mother's level of education) to academic achievement (Baker & Vernon-Feagans, 2015; Barr, 2015), Dexter and Stacks (2013) posited that parent education has little influence on household reading. Dexter and Stacks (2013) found that higher levels of parent education supported success in school because the extent in which pre-school children gained vocabulary and academic language is greater in higher educated households. In several studies, the early language prerequisites of students were quantitatively studied through pre-post-test-designs with early intervention strategies and measured with standard forms of assessment (Jesson & Limbrick, 2014; Marulis & Newman, 2013). The success of the intervention was entirely dependent on the literacy strengths and base vocabulary of the student. The social attributes or position of the students, their parents, and the schools they attended thematically correlated to future literacy strength (Shippen et al., 2014), which suggests that high poverty as a sociocultural phenomenon negatively influences learning. Thus, social context is a macro factor that influences student learning before students are even exposed to classroom instruction. In summary, educators are not only responsible for understanding sociocultural macro influences, but should consider such factors when determining school structures and systems to strategically reach the literacy needs of all learners by the end of fourth grade, especially those in high poverty.

Micro Factors That Influence School Literacy Achievement

Self-efficacy is a component of the sociocultural conceptual framework and is considered a micro factor in student achievement (Fletcher, 2015). In several studies, teacher or learning community self-efficacy surrounded transformation and social action

in school improvement (Anderson et al., 2012; Kaniuka, 2012; Vaughn, Roberts,

Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Stillman-Spisak, Mohammed, & Leroux, 2013). For

example, Banks, et al. (2013), researched efficacy through a quantitative p-square

analysis and discovered a correlation that teacher experience with high poverty and the

ability to make sociocultural connections could raise expectations for disadvantaged

student populations. The efficacy results in pedagogical strategies that recognize student

weaknesses and plan for students according to increased cultural content. Also,

considerations existed for self-examination of classroom literacy goals, instructional

methods, and delivery. Furthermore, the ability to learn and negotiate new and

unfamiliar social and cultural constructs advances educator practices and awakens a

renewed sense of self-reflection and heightened efficacy (Colclough, 2013). Therefore,

real-world actualization of learning community efficacy may be one best practice that

improves literacy achievement for students.

Educator beliefs, capacity, expectations, and decision-making were also prevalent

as micro factors that influence student literacy achievement. In using a qualitative

survey, Griffith, et al. (2013) found that educators, who skillfully balanced decision

making with beliefs and expectations of greater student performance, produced better

achievement. Ferguson's (2013) research suggests that when teachers possess higher

capacity or a repertoire of knowledge and pedagogical skill, expectations for students are

greater. Anderson et al., (2012) found that such micro factors directly influenced the

effectiveness of school reform efforts; the individual teacher and his or her practices as a

micro factor contributes as the greatest differential influence for student literacy learning.

Several researchers empirically discovered that learning community expertise, efficacy, experience, and commitment to greater achievement substantially influences student progress (Anderson et al., 2012; Matsumura & Wang, 2014).

Best Practices That Influence School Literacy Achievement

Best practices that influence high-poverty student literacy achievement existed in the seminal works for students in high poverty. Viable methods for improved practice include literacy coaching and derivatives of professional coaching models. (Ferguson, 2014; Matsumara & Wang, 2014; Miller & Stewart, 2013). Also, effective learning community collaborative practice remained linked as a high yield strategy for school reform (DuFour & Marzano, 2012, Wilcox, Murakami-Ramalho & Urick, 2013). Researchers indicated that high quality sustained professional development (Richards-Tutor et al., 2015), explicit literacy instruction (Shippen et al., 2014), and analysis of student achievement data (Vaughn et al., 2013) are differential as best practices in raising literacy achievement. Although no causal relationship has been established for professional learning community (PLC) effectiveness, such collaborative practices may contribute to improved student achievement in learning communities because effective collaboration has the potential to influence literacy instruction and the academic achievement of high-poverty students (Fletcher et al., 2013). Fletcher et al. postulated that the collaboration of teachers and other school stakeholders might result in structures that improve student achievement. Researchers discovered that the implementation of non-isolative practices could reduce teaching factors that contribute to less achievement, lower graduation rates, and inevitably less future opportunity for career and college for

under advantaged students (Slavit, Nelson, & Deuel, 2013). Thus, effective school reform cannot be performed in isolation.

In a case study that examined a critical friends approach for teachers, Moore and Carter-Hicks (2014) shared that teachers learn best when, "they open their work to the insights and perspectives of others-a trusted group of colleagues" (p. 14). As such, literacy-coaching models were reported to maximize the effectiveness of professional development while solving collaborative challenges and empowering teachers to make authentic transformation (Lenters, 2013; Miller & Stewart, 2013). The sociocultural collaborative coaching procedure included modeled guided practice, interactive dialogue, and espoused best practices in professional development topics that drove coaching conversations and regular sustained professional development. Although no causality exists, researchers indicated that student outcomes tended to be greater in schools that implemented such coaching strategies (Elliot, 2014; Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2012), especially when the professional development included the expansion of literacy instruction designed for improvement (Porche et al., 2012). Such professional development and coaching examples suggest that collaborative purpose and shared school-wide structures for literacy instruction could provide the responsive strategies needed to improve literacy achievement for high-poverty students (Elliot, 2014; Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2012).

A number of approaches exist throughout the literature to address the problem of low literacy achievement. The research is limited in a specific strategy, model, practice, or assessment tool. Many of the studies conducted, included settings where achievement

gaps were so substantial that major adjustments to school processes and practices caused researchers to constantly question their effectiveness and state that generalizability was limited (Berkovich, 2013; Colclough, 2013; Ferraz et al., 2015; Porche et al., 2012; Wilcox, 2013). Therefore, the validation of reform efforts and the lack of probable causation of student achievement present several implications for next steps, especially in relationship to the local settings needs.

In summary, the literature review described a sociocultural conceptual framework that grounds the study with social psychological phenomenon related to teaching and learning implications. The social, historical, political, and institutional forces that contribute to student literacy achievement are both explicit and implicit in the education field. The social, historical, political, and institutional forces exist in the micro and macro factors that contribute to literacy teaching practices in school, society, and within children's social environments. The micro and macro factors also contribute to learning community practice and the work that teachers and school leaders do to make a difference in student achievement.

Implications

Considering that quality literacy education provides a foundation by which members of society can minimize the effects of sociocultural and opportunity disparities and differences (Gorski, 2013), it is the responsibility of school as a social institution to further analyze the problem and determine promising solutions. For the local community and the context of this project study, an exploratory focus on perceived best practices like enhanced communities of practice, social responsibility, collaborative leadership, shared

district support, and learning community collaboration, further supports improvement efforts. Therefore the examination of a school with similar poverty demographics to the local setting but with greater literacy achievement provided the next steps to address the gap in practice. Identified best practices provide relevance to Walden's mission of social change by potentially enhancing other communities of practice.

The project informed by the findings of this study not only addresses the problem, but also provides schools with more tools to indirectly improve student performance through high yield collaborative strategies and practices among professional educators. The project (see Appendix A) is a professional development program designed to provide literacy specialists with leadership skills and a strategic framework that enhances local school literacy improvement through professional coaching for instructional equity. Potential project pathways were plentiful, but the current research base and the data analysis from this study determined the specific scope and design of the project. The project is discussed in detail in a later section.

Summary

The problem of below standard literacy-achievement for high-poverty students by the end of fourth grade is detailed in the achievement data of the local setting. Furthermore, a review of the research base suggests that high poverty negatively influences student literacy achievement. High-poverty literacy learning is a substantial area that deserves additional scholar and practitioner attention. The global, national, state, and district achievement data offer evidence that the problem exists outside of the local environment. Moreover, reading and writing are critical life skills and substandard

literacy performance from high-poverty students has far reaching implications for students' future life success.

Themes that detail the constructs for lower achievement of high-poverty students were presented. These included disadvantage and barriers from social, political, economic, institutional, and educational contexts. Regardless, scholars and practitioners indicate that schools have a moral responsibility to reduce such disparities and build opportunities for high-poverty students (Cavanagh, Vigil, & Garcia, 2014). Districts and schools already have the tools needed to make substantial differences. High-poverty schools exist where impoverished students have met and exceeded literacy achievement standards. Scholars and leaders in the field call for educators to examine such schools and engage in further study and action in eliminating the high-poverty achievement gap for students.

As a response to the local problem and for further study and action, I examined a school environment and explored which practices educators find most useful in meeting high-poverty student literacy needs. The inquiry contributed to a project design for the local setting and provided more information for the field. The discussion of the methodology appropriate for this research is detailed in Section 2.

Section 2: The Methodology

The local problem addressed in the project study was the low reading achievement of high-poverty fourth grade students in a small rural school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The purpose of the project study was to explore the campus principal's and teachers' perceived best practices at a learning environment that supports high achievement for high-poverty students. I also sought to gain understanding of educators' perceptions of the mechanisms by which the literacy achievement gap can be solved. The guiding research question to determine the design, methodology, and scope of the study was: What are principals' and teachers' perceptions of best practices that increase fourth grade literacy achievement for high-poverty students in a high achieving elementary school? Due to the nature of the research question, the research method of a qualitative research paradigm (specifically, an instrumental case study) was chosen. The purposefully selected sample was demographically similar to the school identified in the local problem. The purposefully selected sample studied differed from the local setting in that it demonstrated high literacy achievement on state archival assessment data.

A discussion of the sample and participants in the study with ethical treatment parameters and data collection and analysis procedures follows. I describe the ethical treatment, Institutional Review Board (IRB), and permissions gained for the sampled environment. The section comprises of data collection and analysis procedures that support reliability, credibility, and validity of research methods. Finally, projected limitations in the collection and analysis of data are discussed.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

Merriam (2009) stated, "Qualitative research is not conducted so that the laws of human behavior can be isolated. Rather [it is performed] to explain the world from those who experience it" (p. 238). Researchers in the social sciences of sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, humanities, and economics originally implemented qualitative research approaches (Creswell, 2007). Some educational researchers adopted the use of qualitative inquiry because research in education is defined by a topic of study rather than by a particular discipline. I designed this study for inquiry in the topic of high-poverty student literacy achievement rather than an examination of the discipline of reading. The study of education includes the study of individuals (educators and students), and considerable efforts make the results of educational research applicable to improving practice. I designed this study in hopes to contribute additional knowledge and improved practice in the field. Educational researchers have studied teaching and learning in diverse sites, which have included micro sociocultural contextual factors that affect learning. Sociocultural learning factors, themes, concepts, and frameworks have been effectively examined through qualitative inquiry (Giorgi, Estepp, Conner, & Strippling, 2013). This study investigated a diverse school environment with micro sociocultural contextual factors from high-poverty.

Inquiry and experimentation in education have a long history with traditions rooted in quantitative studies, with qualitative inquiry gaining more attention, justification, and practice in the 20th century (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative inquiry is largely an investigative inductive process, where the researcher uses collected data to

explore a phenomenon through a social frame of reference (Creswell, 2007). To explain

a phenomenon, the researcher immerses him or herself in the everyday life of the setting

and seeks perspectives and meanings from the participants. Creswell (2007) said that

perspective-based research questions that uncover the opinions and perspectives of

participants in the study are best explored through qualitative methods. As a result, I

constructed perspective-based questions for this study. Hatch (2002) indicated that

inductive exploration is best done with qualitative inquiry. This project study's purpose

and research questions were rooted in inductive methods to uncover best practices from

the perceptions of campus educators. Merriam (2009) suggested that qualitative

measures be used in educational research when the researcher wants to learn about one

particular phenomenon. I designed the study with exploratory methodology to collect

data to explore high-poverty positive literacy achievement phenomenon from the

educators' perspectives.

My justification for selecting a qualitative research design over a quantitative

approach for the study was grounded in the work of Creswell (2012), Hart and

McLaughlin (2012), and Yin (2008). According to Creswell (2012), qualitative design

allows the researcher to investigate the phenomenon of the study with greater depth. Hart

and McLaughlin (2012) stated that qualitative research is more open-ended and flexible

than quantitative research. Moreover, Yin (2008) submitted that case study methodology

is best to determine perceptions and beliefs. Case study methods with well-established

protocols in a bounded system contain the opinions, perceptions, and beliefs of the

individuals in the bounded system (Hatch, 2002). To effectively discover, remain open-

ended, and explore bounded perceptions, I selected case study methodology because it provided the proper method of collection of data to answer the perspective-based research questions. The subquestions for this study were:

RQ 1: What are the campus principal's perceptions of the classroom best practices (micro factors) that contribute to high levels of literacy achievement for students in poverty in a high-achieving elementary school?

RQ 2: What are teachers' perceptions of the classroom best practices (micro factors) that contribute to high levels of literacy achievement for students in poverty in a high-achieving elementary school?

RQ 3: What are the campus principal's perceptions of the systems and structures (macro factors) that influence high-level literacy instruction for students in a high-achieving elementary school?

RQ 4: What are the teacher perceptions of the systems and structures (macro factors) that influence high-level literacy instruction for students in a high-achieving elementary school?

Each research question required personal contact with sampled participants. Personal contact permitted worthy examination of the research questions and systematic collection of data. Furthermore, I gathered quality amounts of descriptive information for analysis and interpretation and established a holistic picture from the inductive process and the open structure. Creswell (2007) indicated that the use of case study methods gives researchers the opportunity to look for particularity. Case study methods ensure the development of themes in the context of the specific site. Case study methodology

provides the best opportunity to inductively analyze the natural setting through emergent

design with a theoretical and interpretive lens. In this project study, I used case study

methods to explore the complex interlinking aspects and conditions of different systems

within which high-poverty students engage in reading development. This case study

design also afforded me with detail and perspicuity into the many co-occurring

phenomena, factors, and best practices of the selected sampled environment.

Stake (2005) suggested that an instrumental case study in which the researcher

examines the practices at the learning environment provides insight into an issue. An

instrumental case study is used to accomplish discovery of insight into an issue or helps

to refine a theory (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this project study, an instrumental case study

was used to facilitate the examination of one instructional setting that has demonstrated

high levels of literacy proficiency for its high-poverty students. Instrumental case study

methods inform practice through the exploration of perceptions of best practices by the

professionals working with children on a daily basis. The tradition of qualitative

instrumental case study permitted an open-ended procedure and system to remain

bounded by time, place, and context (Creswell, 2007). The emerging variables and

perceptions examined were looked at in depth while the contexts were scrutinized.

Baxter and Jack (2008) indicated that such scrutiny allows the researcher to pursue the

external interest. For this study, the external interest was the perceptive best practices to

inform project directions.

Other possible qualitative methodology choices included narrative research,

phenomenology research, and ethnography. These choices were deemed less effective

because they did not provide the required direct contact or intensive study within the bounded system. Narrative research requires chronological restudying of themes. This is not sufficient for examining educator perspectives and developing themes of best practices from such perspectives. In fact, narrative research is too narrow a design because most cases specifically study one or two individuals or groups.

Ethnography and phenomenology were ruled out as methods because the research questions were situated in exploration of educator perceptions of best practices for literacy achievement of high-poverty students. Phenomenology, narrative, grounded theory, or ethnography were not appropriate, because the research questions were not purpose-based. Instead, the research questions were problem-based and designed to resolve the issue of a lack of understanding of the perceptions of the participants, which again suggested case study methods be used (Ellis & Levy, 2008).

Instrumental case study as the chosen methodology offered the appropriate exploration of the complexities of professional relationships to answer the research questions. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) asserted that instrumental case study embodies the belief that humans are complex and that schools are multifaceted environments. The complexities of schools and human interaction are rooted in the sociocultural conceptual framework that underpins the methodology choice. As an example and model for design, I used Giorgi et al.'s, (2013) case study research. The study inductively uncovered understanding of perception based educator dispositions for disadvantaged student growth. In a comparable manner, I appropriated the same methodological strategies in the empirical study for this study's data collection and

gathered the necessary perspectives to answer the research questions through

sociocultural conceptual understanding.

Participants

Case study methodology explores a bounded system or single setting. One school

community served as the bounded system and allowed for a theoretical lens to be used

that was grounded in the sociocultural framework (Wertsch et al., 1995). In emphasizing

a holistic approach at a single sample site, I explored and examined the phenomenon and

engaged in research to uncover the perceptions of participants in the learning community.

I used the following procedures for gaining access, criteria for selection,

researcher/participant relationships, and protection of participants.

Procedures for Gaining Access

The study occurred in a school setting. I completed the school district's process

for gaining approval and request for research. Also, a letter of cooperation with the

school district was obtained from the school district's system of accountability, research,

and strategic initiatives offices. After approval was given by the Walden IRB—

2016.08.1616:37:18-05'00', I scheduled a meeting with the building principal to

determine a non-intrusive interview schedule. I also invited volunteer teacher

participants to a general meeting to explain confidentiality, safeguards, and potential

risks.

Criteria for Sample Selection

One elementary school community was purposefully sampled to engage in the in-

depth case study. The selected study site had similar demographics to the setting of the

local problem. The school will be referred to as School A throughout the study. The

school's FARMS population was used as the priority in the selection and is within 5% of

the local problem based setting. The high level of literacy achievement as measured and

illustrated by formalized state archival assessment data (MSDE, 2015) was also utilized

in the selection process. The literature of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) indicated that

qualitative research requires purposeful sampling of participants to ensure rich and

thorough data collection. Therefore, I selected another rural Mid-Atlantic school with a

42% FARMs rate (similar to the local setting) that currently has over 90% of high-

poverty students meeting literacy benchmarks as measured by the 2015 PARCC

assessments (MSDE, 2015). Table 8 provides the overall demographic comparison.

Table 8

*Demographics of High-Poverty Sampled School Environment (School A) Compared to
Local School*

Demographic	Local School	Sample School
Total Population	388	402
FARMs Rate	41%	42%
White	85%	82%
Multiple Races	5%	4%
Black	7%	10%
Hispanic	10%	12%
Special Education	15%	13%
ELL	3%	3%

Table 9 provides a breakdown of high-poverty demographics by grade-level as compared

to the local school environment.

Table 9

Demographics of Local School Compared to High-Poverty Sampled School (School A)

by Grade Level

Grade level	High-poverty population local school	High-poverty population sample School
PK	62.07%	75.00%
K	54.85%	53.04%
01	33.96%	44.96%
02	39.13%	37.13%
03	31.03%	31.03%
04	42.08%	33.08%
05	31.11%	42.11%

(MSDE, 2015)

Table 10 provides literacy proficiency comparisons on the 2015 administration of the

PARCC assessments for all students and high-poverty populations.

Table 10

Literacy Proficiency of Local School Compared to Sampled School (School A)-PARCC 2015

Demographic	Literacy proficiency local school	Literacy proficiency sample school
All Students	74.0%	93.6%
High-Poverty Students	30.2%	56.5%

(MSDE, 2015)

Table 11 provides literacy proficiency comparisons on the 2015 administration of the

PARCC assessment for all 4th grade students and 4th grade high-poverty students.

Table 11

Literacy Proficiency of High-Poverty Grade 4 Students: Local School Compared to Sampled School (School A)-PARCC 2015

Demographic	Literacy proficiency local school	Literacy proficiency sample school
4th Grade High-Poverty Students	63.5%	85%

(MSDE, 2015)

Sampling of this particular environment congregated purposeful and homogenous selection of a bounded system of participants to answer the research questions. As indicated in Table 10 and 11, the sampled school was demographically similar with greater literacy achievement than the local school.

Criteria for Participant Selection

Lodico et al. (2010) indicated that the overarching criterion for participant selection be that the individual possess similar attributes or experiences that support exploration of the research questions. For the project study, the criterion was: participants are educators who have familiarity working with fourth grade rural, high-poverty, high literacy achieving students based on the archival state assessment data or PARCC scores. The sampled group included 10 participants for interviews (Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002) suggested that interviews be conducted with participants of varying experience levels to support saturation and credibility of findings. To align with the problem presented in fourth grade literacy and to provide data to answer the research questions, interview participants included: the principal, four fourth grade teachers, one fourth grade literacy teacher specialist, two fourth grade special education teachers, and

two fourth grade reading intervention teachers. At the time of the study, the campus

principal had 14 total years of experience as an educator, including 9 years as a classroom

teacher of multiple grade levels, 2 years as an assistant principal, and 3 years as principal

of School A. At the time of the study, teacher participants possessed varying experience

levels at the school. See table 12 for years of experience and assigned pseudonyms used

for teacher participant description of findings.

Table 12

Teacher Interview Participant Pseudonyms, Position Title, and Experience Levels

Pseudonym	Position Title	Years of Experience
Teacher A	Special Education	18
Teacher B	Special Education	2
Teacher C	Reading Intervention	20
Teacher D	Fourth Grade	18
Teacher E	Fourth Grade	10
Teacher F	Fourth Grade	21
Teacher G	Fourth Grade	6
Teacher H	Literacy Teacher Specialist	17
Teacher I	Reading Intervention	10

Researcher Participant Relationship

Methods of establishing a researcher-participant working relationship included the

use of Patton's (2003) Qualitative Checklist and adherence to the ethical issues portion of

the checklist. This included an explanation of the purpose of the qualitative inquiry and

methods to be used. I built a strong rapport and maintained enough distance from the

sampled bounded system to maintain credibility. I made sure that School A was out of

my district feeder area and that I had little contact with the school. Before interviews, I

met with participants to discuss the purpose of the study and shared expectations for the

interview process. I shared personal information about me as a researcher and built trust

through empathic listening and responding to questions or concerns. I discussed the

possibility of the project portion of the study, a professional development plan or

outcome for implementation in other school environments. This exposed my awareness

of School A's success and built excitement for participants and ensured a risk-free

interview environment. I told participants they had the opportunity to share best practices

that make the greatest difference for students at their school and share the many great

strategies that contribute to the literacy achievement. This created interview sessions that

allowed for open shared perspective and risk-taking from participants.

Protection of Participants

I provided participants, all over 21 years of age, with risk assessment through

clear informed consent. Participants had access to transcribed interview data and coding;

it was made clear that all collected data was confidential. I also adhered to school system

boundaries for data collection and maintained all ethical and legal expectations. Because

interviews were recorded through a digital recording device, participants' permission for

recording was obtained. Participants were provided with the semi-structured interview-

protocol prior to the interview. The interview protocols were preplanned.

To adhere to Walden IRB approval and ensure ethical practices, only the principal and teachers were included. Students were not included. Prior to collecting data, participants signed the Informed Consent document electronically. All data collected was kept confidential and pseudonyms were used to identify participants in the final report of the study.

<center>**Data Collection**</center>

Creswell (2012) indicated that qualitative research requires an in depth understanding from multiple perspectives while sampling. I conducted interviews with the principal and teachers. This method of data collection was necessary to answer the research questions. It was also preferable to engage in multiple interviews in case study methodology as a provision for triangulation during the data analysis portion (Creswell, 2012). For ethical purposes, the interview method supported maintenance of researcher credibility and preserved the fundamental appreciation for qualitative inquiry while sufficiency of data collection was established to answer the research questions.

Research Questions and Data Sources

RQ 1 was examined and answered from a campus principal interview at the sampled setting. Responses to questions 1 through 7 on the Interview Protocol for the Principal at the Study Site provided data relevant to RQ 1 (see Appendix B). RQ 2 was examined and answered through teacher interviews at the sampled setting. Responses to questions 1 through 7 on the Interview Protocol for Teachers at the Study Site provided data relevant to RQ 2 (see Appendix C). Responses to questions 8 through 11 on the Interview Protocol for the Principal at the Study Site provided data relevant to RQ3.

Responses to questions 8 through 11 on the Interview Protocol for Teachers at the Study

Site provided data relevant to RQ4.

Interview

Interviews as a method of data collection are highly valuable in qualitative

research (Merriam, 2009). In fact, interviews are one of the most used data collection

methods in education research (Creswell, 2012). Because it is difficult to observe

specific perspectives, behaviors, and feelings regarding best practices for literacy

achievement of high-poverty students, interviews were necessary as a method of data

collection for this study. Interviews were one-to-one semi-structured. One-to-one semi-

structured interviews provide qualitative researchers the most effective route to saturation

(Lodico et al., 2010). Self-developed interview protocols based on the work of Joyce and

Ferguson (2012) guided the interview process. The protocols were designed with

descriptive information about the phenomenon and questions designed to elicit

perspectives of best practices (Joyce & Ferguson, 2010; Merriam, 2009). I designed one

interview protocol for the principal interview (see Appendix B) and one for the teacher

interviews (see Appendix C).

Access to interview participants included voluntary participation from the sample

location. I collaborated with the principal to determine specific timeframes outside of

instructional time, which eliminated interruption to the instructional program or teacher

duties. I collaborated with the principal to determine a location, the office conference

room, for comfortable interviews and minimal disruptions. Participants voluntarily

agreed to the interview timeframe prior to scheduling.

First, I interviewed the campus principal. After gathering demographic information at the start of the interview, interview questions that aligned with the research questions were used. Appendix B details the campus principal interview questions. Teachers were interviewed next. I gathered teacher demographic information at the start of the interview and then asked interview questions that aligned with the research questions. Appendix C details the protocol design with teacher interview questions.

I utilized interview strategies as suggested from the literature to maintain and control bias (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). Step one included a prepared and organized interview process with questions that prompt experience, behavior, opinion, values, feelings, knowledge, senses, and background. Probes were utilized to expand upon answers. Multiple questions were avoided. Leading questions were not used. The interviews were 30 to 60 minutes in length. Throughout the interview process I maintained neutrality, was respectful, nonjudgmental, and non-threatening. As the interviewee responded to the open-ended questions that were posed, I carefully listened for the opportunity to ask one or more of the following probes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007):

What do you mean?

I'm not sure that I am following you.

Would you please explain that?

What did you say then?

What were you thinking at that time?

Give me an example.

Tell me about it.

Take me through the experience.

Is there anything else that you would like to add? (p. 104)

Turner (2010) shared that qualitative research is complicated and can be strengthened by utilizing research guidelines from other studies and by employing an expert panel in interview designs. I first developed questions in collaboration with my doctoral committee chair at Walden University. I then developed an interview protocol and guide based on the review of the literature and used model case studies as examples. Research to support the use of these questions derived from primary inquiry completed by Giorgi et al. (2013) where teacher perceptions were identified through verbal and nonverbal expressions used in the classroom. Mahiri and Maniates' (2013) framework for first grade reading and Pecore's (2013) mixed-method study that utilized interviews to gather teacher perspectives regarding constructivist problem based learning strategies were used to support interview protocol development. Second, to extend credibility of research findings, I utilized experts' opinions in developing and modifying the interview research protocol. The expert panel probed for biases, sought meaning, and clarified the interview questions and found all questions to be acceptable as written. For this project study, I sought experts who knew a great deal about both the substantive area of inquiry and the methodology. Veterans in the education field participated as members of the panel, each with over 17 years of experience working in schools or at the district level who have participated as researchers while practicing. Joyce and Ferguson, (2012)

indicated that quality research utilize each of these characteristics of expertise for the question review to enhance findings.

Interviews were recorded with an audio electronic recording device. I took written notes to record my reactions. Upon completion of each interview, I completed verbatim transcription with word-processing software. Interview transcripts included identifying factors, line numbering, and margin areas for coding as recommended by Merriam (2009).

Data Management and Storage

I maintained a case study database that was explicitly organized as described by Yin (2008) and cited by Merriam (2009). I recorded field notes in an electronic journal/tablet and transcribed notes into a word-processing for future coding. I collected interview data using the electronic tablet. This allowed for a convenient means to transcribe notes. I kept transcription of all qualitative data collection organized in the form of field-notes and transcripts from audio recordings. While in the field, I maintained an electronic research log to collect data, reflections, and interpretations. I designed a qualitative database and created a computer folder to house electronic transcripts and collected data.

Data were kept confidential and secure with encryption and password locks for access on my personal laptop computer. Again, all transcriptions included pseudonyms to protect participants. Data were and will be stored for a period of 5 years following the completion of this study and expunged thereafter.

Role of the Researcher

I identified personal values, assumptions, and biases at the start of the study. I shared with all participants the purpose of the study and that the study was a requirement of my doctoral program. I also conveyed that this case study was an opportunity for me to grow both personally and professionally. I shared that as a researcher and as a practitioner of educational leadership, I would use the learning from the study to make adjustments to my own leadership practices and dispositions.

Past roles. I have served as a classroom teacher in elementary school and middle schools. Each of the teaching experiences was in an urban school environment. I also served as an assistant principal in an urban high socioeconomic elementary school and at an urban elementary school receiving federal funds to support high-poverty students. My first principalship was at an urban charter school with high poverty before transferring to the rural school district at which I am employed. Most of my career has been spent in the mid-Atlantic greater Washington D.C. area, but in my early years I worked in northeastern Pennsylvania. The myriad of experiences working with different populations of students and learning communities provoked preconceptions that required reflection and bracketing during data collection. A discussion of biases is detailed later in this section.

Current role. At the time of data collection, I served as the principal of a rural mid-Atlantic school in the same district of the sample. The school location was 20 miles from the sample location and is considered a separate school region. According to Hatch (2002), this was enough distance for the study to be credible.

Relationships to participants. I did not have any personal or professional relationships with the teacher participants; however, I had a collegial relationship with the principal. I did not have supervisory capacity over the participants, which further supported credibility and reliability. My role did not affect data collection while interviewing. Because I examined what was working at the school related to high literacy achievement, participants willingly shared effective strategies and practices. The project study could lead to greater collaboration and cohesiveness amongst schools, which is one of the initiatives that the district has pursued.

Potential bias. Due to my role as a school leader, I sometimes observe adult learners actively "not-learn" due to a fixed mindset, even when they have self-assessed gaps in their practice. The resistor typically does not possess the intrinsic motivation to make future goals and has trouble finding relevance in new and innovative strategies. This led me toward a pursuit to gather more knowledge about positive phenomena that supports the growth of educational leaders. I brought this assumption to the research and actively utilized reflexivity to address this bias throughout the research process.

Merriam (2009) indicated that qualitative researchers want to know the meaning people apply to their experiences. To maintain credibility of findings, I utilized bracketing as a method to reduce bias. I addressed specific biases throughout the collection and analysis of data. These researcher biases evolved from personal and professional experiences and include reflection on the inequities in system resource allocation, institutionalized norms, and perceptions of contributors to the achievement gap, social tensions, and sociohistorical contexts. Dispositions surrounding personal bias

and reflection required substantial bracketing which is further discussed in the credibility section.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred throughout the research process concurrently and systematically based on inductive holistic process (Hatch, 2002). For example, after I transcribed data into word processing documents, I used the process of coding to gather a sense of themes and detailed thick description, which is recognized in the literature as standard practice in qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). I replicated the method of coding from the empirical work of Giorgi et al. (2013). I managed data by hand, through codes and categories attached to meanings from the data. I searched for results that subdivided the data into developed straightforward categorical labels (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). The inductive coding process concluded when 40 codes emerged. While coding, the analysis included replication, category, and response patterning to uncover underlying perspectives from generated responses.

Creswell (2012) indicated that effective coding elicits themes, so I organized learning and reexamined the sub questions and data using categories to develop themes as the organizational framework. I continuously looked for patterns to generate themes. I found recurrences in the transcripts and field notes. Themes developed from the shared perspectives and based on the pattern of responses and words or themes expressed most often. Responsive, sensitive, mutually exclusive, and conceptually congruent themes emerged to answer the research questions.

Evidence of Quality

To assure accuracy and credibility, I incorporated quality procedures based on the methods discussed by qualitative experts (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Quality procedures included member checks, cross checking, triangulation, discrepant case analysis, bracketing, and clarification of researcher position. First, I engaged in the method discussed by Creswell (2012) as member checking. Member checking involved asking the participants to review the accuracy of my findings. For the study, I took the findings back to the participants to check for accuracy. Keeping my own bias or values out of the observational data supported validity. I employed member checking immediately following data collection and at the completion of theme identification after coding. Each teacher interviewee, as well as the participating principal, had the opportunity to review transcripts of his or her individual interview session, data transcribed, and my analysis and interpretations of the sessions. This process was completed electronically through email with confidentiality disclaimers provided. Return dates for completion of data review were provided to participants to ensure completion of the member checking process.

After coding and theme development, a second round of member checking ensued. I completed member checking electronically through email with confidentiality disclaimers. Return dates for completion of data review were provided to participants to ensure completion.

Another qualitative researcher audited the data analysis to provide credibility and validity and to justify the coded data themes. The qualitative researcher completed an

EdD Program at the University of George Mason and at the time of this study, held an executive level research position at a neighboring school district. This person signed a confidentiality agreement. I provided the peer a copy of transcripts. The peer checker applied thematic searching to the data. Afterward, we compared and discussed codes to stipulate adjustments and facilitate reflective dialogue. Once completed, we pooled data into the agreed upon themes.

Triangulation and Discrepant Cases

Merriam (2009) indicated that qualitative inquiry is not used to examine objective truth or reality. Therefore, multiple sources of data used for triangulation elicited mutually exclusive categories that were conceptually congruent. The emergence of multiple themes required discussion and validation during peer review. Triangulation of interview response data validated themes that emerged and ensured comprehensive thematic review. According to Hatch (2002), perspective analysis that maintains a qualitative tradition requires a triangulation of the data sources that examines the consistency of different data sources from within the same method. I triangulated interview data to cross-verify and validate findings. Triangulation occurred after completion of data collection methods to establish common themes. During triangulation, I reread and re-examined the data to be sure codes, categories, and themes were labeled correctly. Bogden and Biklen (2007) indicated that this method of dependability offers the detailed thick description and analysis necessary to confirm tentative explanations in the triangulation process.

I examined data that supported alternative explanations and purposefully looked

for these variations by completing discrepant case analysis. I used discrepant case

analysis to search for and discuss elements of the data that did not support or appear to

contradict patterns or explanations that emerge (Creswell, 2007). I looked for data that

supported alternative explanations and purposefully reviewed data for variations from the

coded themes (Merriam, 2009).

Researcher Bias

To further substantiate credibility I included bracketing throughout the data

analysis and interpretation phase of the study. Bracketing is a method used in qualitative

research that mitigates the preconceptions and biases that reduce credulity of findings.

Coming from phenomenological origins it does not have a uniform definition or process,

but has the potential to enrich data collection, research findings, and interpretation

through an ongoing process of self-awareness (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Bracketing

included writing memos or reflexive notes while engaged with the data. Tufford and

Newman (2010) indicated that bracketing is best saved for the analysis process.

Therefore, all bracketing of preconceptions and presuppositions occurred during this

process to allow for greater levels of engagement with the raw data.

To facilitate the bracketing process, I reflected on myself as a researcher

throughout data analysis and interpretation. I utilized the conceptual framework as

described by Tufford and Newman (2010) to simultaneously enter and withdraw from the

data to obtain clarity of interpretation and compare the data to the sociocultural

framework that grounds this study. This phase of bracketing was no way linear and was

emergent based on outcomes that the analysis uncovered. As part of the bracketing

process, I engaged in researcher position and active reflection during the analysis. Because bias remains a naturally occurring human characteristic, researcher position and active reflection is to be used during inquiry as an exploration of the investigator's reflection on one's own beliefs during the research process (Creswell, 2007). During the data preparation, organization, and coding phase, I wrote my reflections and position on the data through filtered personal assumptions and beliefs.

Merriam (2009) shared that qualitative inquiry, "is not conducted so that laws of human behavior can be isolated. Rather to explain the world from those who experience it," (p. 238). Therefore, I maintained reliability of the study through consistency of the examination or the consistent findings that were represented in the data. The study outcomes did not search for replication. The reliability and dependability were substantiated from the internal validity and credibility methods that included participant review of transcripts, triangulation of data, investigators position, peer examination, member-checking, and external audits of data methods, collection, and analysis (Creswell, 2007).

Merriam (2009) indicated that adequate external validity requires sufficient data description so the context of the study can be accessed elsewhere. Trustworthiness and authenticity are necessary in qualitative methods. I utilized maximum variation of participants to ensure adequate external validity. I shared the negative and discrepant information in the findings and reported bias as indicated above. Particularity or the development of themes in the context of the specific sampled site emerged rather than the onset of generalizability. Hatch (2002) suggested the use of outcome particularity as an

adequate external validity measure. In this study outcome particularity maintained authenticity and eliminated my judgments or opinions regarding the data.

Limitations

The study followed a qualitative inclusive-case study research approach, involving the use of the semi-structured interview as the primary method. The study involved a preliminary descriptive examination of the perceptions of the principal and teachers of one learning community and was limited to 10 subjects at the school because the number was sufficient for saturation (Hatch, 2002).

The circumstances that affected or restricted methods of analysis of research data included personal bias from self-reporting of the data. Similarly, relying on pre-existing data and conducting a qualitative research study where data were self-gathered rarely can be independently verified and can contain several potential sources of bias that require levels of bracketing (Hatch, 2002). In the data collection portion of this study, I prioritized collection of perspective data to maintain authenticity. By keeping perspective-based data a priority in collection, I eliminated researcher judgments and opinions regarding the data.

Shortcomings included longitudinal effects. Due to personal limitations, I was unable to stay within the bounded system for an elongated time frame. Due to the varied responsibilities that school staff members had at different times of the school year, it was difficult to build the necessary trust to gather honest perspective from participants. Conditions or influences that could not be controlled that resulted in restrictions on methodology included confirmation of bias. Gilovich and Ross (2015) indicated that

researcher bias can influence the research in both positive and negative ways and discussed human tendency to evaluate information that leads to perseverance in initial beliefs. To overcome this pervasive bias, I challenged propositions, especially when they confirmed current views and preferences. This condition required high-level advocacy throughout the research process to avoid confirming bias and effectively evaluating the data. In qualitative research, these limitations might mean that the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population (Hatch, 2002). Once again, the overall goal in in this study was not transferability, but rather the ability to acquire a richer understanding of the phenomenon of study (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis Results

Collection of data occurred over a 2-week time frame. After gaining consent and following procedures specifically outlined in the methodology section and IRB application, I met with the participants and interviewed each before and after school hours. Recorded interviews were transcribed and sent via email to members for member checking. Once transcripts were checked for accuracy, the data were analyzed and the analysis was sent to participants again for a review. Bracketing occurred throughout the investigative process. Once the participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts, transcripts were coded to elicit themes. Triangulation was completed and furthered credibility of elicited codes, categories, and themes. Member checking and peer review were utilized to ensure correct and detailed labels. Another qualitative researcher audited coding and reviewed themes to ensure dependability and credibility of findings. As a result of the methodology, themes resulted relative to the sociocultural conceptual

framework. The micro factor themes are described in the findings for research sub-questions 1 and 3, and the macro factor themes are described in the findings for research sub-questions 2 and 4.

Generation of Data

After an initial meeting with the campus principal to discuss project study purpose and confidentiality, I asked for an opportunity to sample teacher participants in a voluntary manner. The campus principal provided a schedule and dates for which I could visit the school to complete interviews. I invited volunteer teacher participants to a general meeting to explain confidentiality, safeguards, and potential risks. Interviews occurred over a 2-week period, before and after school instructional hours. The principal interview was conducted first. After concluding the principal interview, I interviewed the fourth grade teachers. Teacher interview participants included the fourth grade reading specialist, fourth grade reading intervention teacher, fourth grade special education teachers, and the fourth grade classroom teachers. A total of 10 interviews were completed. Interviews were transcribed with transcripts member-checked, coded, reviewed, and audited. Hand coding elicited particular themes as presented in the findings.

According to Hatch (2002), the perspective analysis that was used in coding required a triangulation of the data sources to maintain consistency. Interview data were triangulated to cross-verify and validate findings. Codes were reread and re-examined to be sure all categories and themes are labeled correctly. The design included a plan for the triangulation of data sources. As a result, interview data were triangulated to cross-

verify and validate findings. Triangulation occurred after completion of data collection methods to establish common themes. During triangulation, coded transcripts were re-read to be sure codes, categories, and themes were labeled correctly

The interview transcripts were presented in double spaced formats. Open coding was utilized as I analyzed the data and highlighted key terms and phrases. Analysis was done by circling and highlight specific sections of the text. I then assigned codes and labels. The primary codes used were descriptive and included code labels such as*: coaching*, *professional learning*, *collaboration*, *cultural competency*, *equity*, *equitable strategies*, *outreach*, *student-centered*, *vocabulary acquisition*, *discourse strategies*, *peer coaching*, *self-reflection, instructional goals*, *professional learning goals*, *schedule*, *technology,* and *access*. Comprehensive lists of the code labels for sub-questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 can be found in Appendix D, Appendix E, Appendix F, and Appendix G, respectively.

I used brackets to the right of the transcribed text to include self-reflexive notes and indicate codes. After the initial phase, I reviewed the large number of codes, synthesized larger chunks of the raw data, and combined codes into groups through axial coding (Hatch, 2002). I analyzed the raw data with the initial codes to illicit themes and particularity of the perspectives generated in the interviews. Analysis generated specific shared perspective of strategies and the meanings, participation, relationships, and conditions attached to the statements. Decontextualized data were synthesized into combined categorical codes.

The categorical codes were synthesized and condensed according to the

sociocultural conceptual framework micro factor categories and macro factor categories.

Following the categorical labels, I further synthesized the analysis and generated several

themes for each research sub-question. To maintain particularity, during the peer review

process a mutual decision was made on which findings were most relevant to the research

sub questions. Discrepant findings were categorized through the removal of codes that

did not answer the research question or contribute to themes. Discrepant cases included

discussion of specific ineffective teaching strategies and descriptions of perspectives that

did not answer the research questions. The majority of these data were removed because

they focused on perceived negative factors that did not directly influence classroom

instruction in a positive manner. The off codes were not aligned as a best practice and

expunged from analysis. Transcripts were analyzed several times to ensure the

description and themes chosen were credible and aligned to the guiding research

question.

Findings

The guiding research question to determine the design, methodology, and scope

of the study was: What are principal and teacher perceptions of best practices that

increase fourth grade literacy achievement for high-poverty students in a high-achieving

elementary school? The findings are presented in perceived strategies as themes derived

from codes. They are presented by sub-question in narrative description, with detailed

and salient qualitative data described. See Table 13 for findings illustrated for each

research sub-question labeled by themes.

Table 13

Themes Generated for Perceptions of Best Practices that Influence Literacy

Instruction

Research Question	Themes
RQ 1	Language Acquisition
RQ 1	Guided Reading
RQ 1	Instructional Equity
RQ 1	Positive Teacher and Student Relationships
RQ 1	High Expectations for Literacy Achievement
RQ 2	Language Acquisition
RQ 2	Positive Teacher and Student Relationships
RQ 2	High Expectations for Literacy Achievement
RQ 3	Collaborative Leadership
RQ 3	Positive Professional Relationships
RQ 3	Instructional Coaching
RQ 3	High Quality Professional Development
RQ 4	Instructional Coaching
RQ 4	High Quality Professional Development
RQ 4	Positive Professional Relationships

Note. RQ 1=Principal perceptions of classroom instructional practices (micro factors); RQ 2=Principal perceptions of systems and structures (macro factors); RQ 3=Teacher perceptions of classroom instructional practices (micro factors); RQ 4=Teacher perceptions of systems and structures (macro factors);

Hatch (2002) indicated that narrative description of findings is suitable when results are described from case study methodology. Because findings were the result of extensive coding, triangulation, and removal of discrepant cases, the data were synthesized into emergent themes that represented particular answers to the research questions. Detailed description and analysis to confirm tentative explanations in the triangulation process supported expression of these findings. Examples from the data to illustrate findings were chosen based on connection and fidelity to the research questions. The discovered and amalgamated themes are listed as answers to the questions.

Research Sub-Question 1. The first sub-question asked: What are the campus principal's perceptions of the classroom best practices (micro factors) that contribute to high levels of literacy achievement for students in poverty in a high-achieving elementary school? The themes as answers to this question were language acquisition, guided reading, instructional equity, positive teacher and student relationships, and high expectations for literacy achievement. Each theme presented as a best practice for RQ 1 is further described with narrative description as follows.

Language acquisition. The campus principal shared a perspective that educators can significantly make a difference in high-poverty student literacy by providing opportunities for students to gain greater language. This included incorporation of strategies that built vocabulary in the classroom as well as the prior knowledge that is required for successful use of text. The campus principal shared that conversational instruction or routine discourse must be purposeful and prescribed. She said, "Kids don't just talk here. They are involved in conversations that are directly related to the acquisition of new knowledge and languages."

Best practices shared within the instructional and classroom environment particular to fourth grade included building vocabulary through language using schematic experiences to increase conversational vocabulary. The campus principal indicated that teaching environments that include more opportunity for conversation and vocabulary acquisition regularly maintain higher levels of achievement for high-poverty students. She said, "We do everything we can to teach children how to have purposeful and engaging conversations about what they are reading. We also focus a lot on writing

about reading."

During the discussion, the campus principal discussed language acquisition. The campus principal shared that student vocabulary acquisition and construction must be part of each classroom culture for high-poverty literacy success. Strategies such as sentence starters and exposure to knowledge gaps increase purposeful conversation in the classroom and are critical for high-poverty rural learner language acquisition. The principal shared that conversational strategies are the instructional strategies that stimulate dialogue between peers and between teacher and students. While discussing conversation and discourse she stated, "I think some of the vocabulary development is far more purposeful and prescribed in this kind of setting. Some of the conversations are far more purposeful and prescribed in these settings. Kids don't just sit on the carpet and talk here. You have to build that culture you have to build the vocabulary. I don't think you have to do the same in other settings."

Additional best practices for language acquisition perceived by the principal included the creation of real-world opportunities for writing about reading and vocabulary acquisition through schema that build conceptual experiences. Piaget (1952) defined schema as the building blocks of mental models and cognitive functioning. Schema can also be viewed as a cognitive function that organizes knowledge for understanding. In this study, the campus principal discussed schematic strategies for students to build conceptual knowledge of language through real-world experiences. Also, provisions for equitable instruction, or giving each child exactly what they need regardless of background, and differentiation were perceived as best practices for greater

language acquisition. The principal indicated that pedagogical and instructional

provisions made for purposeful conversation influence student engagement. Student

engagement for high-poverty student literacy achievement equated to greater language

acquisition at the site. Greater language acquisition also was related to greater comfort

with difficult texts and rigorous content for high-poverty literacy learners. Increased

language acquisition and experiences with texts equated to greater achievement on

formative and summative assessments for high-poverty literacy learners.

   Guided reading. First defined by educator and researcher Clay (1989), *guided*

reading is defined as the intensive small group instruction provided to students based on

reading ability. The teacher works with a group of students who demonstrate similar

reading behaviors and read similar levels of text. Students work with the teacher to read

text that is at their instructional level, which is slightly above levels of independence

(Pinnell, 1989). The campus principal described guided reading as, "explicit

differentiated small-group classroom pedagogy for literacy." As a classroom instruction

micro factor, the many opportunities for writing about reading, vocabulary acquisition,

schematic development, and creation of student conceptual experiences at the case study

site are delivered in small group instructional-guided reading process. The campus

principal shared that guided reading instruction in every classroom was a 2-year

professional development process. It required a large amount of time and specialist

resources. The principal stated, "So let's say I am new teacher and I am learning guided

reading. I am going to have a veteran teacher come in and teach me guided reading.

Then another dose of PD is going to come from a literacy specialist about guided reading practices."

The principal indicated that the level of ownership and the knowledge of student reading abilities are a direct result of formative benchmarking and individualized instruction from the guided reading process. The small group instruction was said to be high yield and effective for high-poverty learners. The fluency, comprehension, phonetic awareness, and vocabulary needs of high-poverty students are effectively addressed through the small-group guided reading sessions at the setting. Some students with greater needs were able to participate in guided reading more often. Small group guided reading allowed for double and triple doses of small group and one-on-one directed instruction. The campus principal shared that guided reading as an instructional step made a great difference for high-poverty learners. She stated, "When I got here we were not doing guided reading. We implemented it and have seen great gains in literacy achievement, especially for our fourth grade students."

Instructional equity. Equity in the classroom directly correlates to the teacher's ability to meet student need and build a purposeful learning environment that values differences of experiences, backgrounds, and cultures (Gorski, 2013). The campus principal indicated that instructional equity as a micro factor best practice gives staff the ability to design instruction that meets the needs of all learners. For the case study site, the campus principal shared that teachers use student experiential factors to design literacy instruction. An example is finding text that is highly relevant to the students' personal lives. She indicated that staff regularly utilizes knowledge of student life

experiences to determine effective instruction that create schema development for students. Schema development is employed when experiential content is used to prime students and build background knowledge for literacy instruction. The principal suggested that teacher to student instructional effectiveness is related to the knowledge a teacher has about student backgrounds. The campus principal stated, "I think building the capacity of staff is huge; and I think part of building the capacity of staff, is not just the instructional strategies it is also knowing your demographic."

The campus principal specified that teaching environments that build more opportunities from equitable practices, typically exhibit classroom cultures conducive to increased risk-taking and conversation. Such classroom cultures exhibit greater literacy achievement because student vocabulary and language experience needs are met. In a discussion about equity in the classroom the campus principal said, "Effective instruction is the result of teacher self-reflection on the beliefs they have about children. When we think about our interactions with students and why we make the choices we do, we can uncover our own biases about teaching and learning."

Positive teacher and student relationships. The principal submitted that the relationship that teachers build with students during instruction and other times in the school building is of significance for literacy learning. For example, the use of experiential factors of students and the knowledge of lack of life experiences are critical prior knowledge concerns for designed instruction. The campus principal said, "All teachers need to know their children, understand their experiences, and design instruction with some risk taking that places the ownership of learning on the student." Teachers use

learner empathy to determine instructional schema as deemed critical for effective instruction. While discussing learner empathy, the campus principal stated, "Another thing we focus on is building a culture of kindness so students are not victims. They are empowered to take control of the learning environment and we are hoping to shift their thinking where they no longer think, 'this always happens to me,' instead they think, 'I have control over my environment.'"

The campus principal indicated that instructional strategies for literacy must include high levels of trust between teacher and student. Phonemic and comprehension strategies as instructional approaches are impossible without high levels of instructional trust, especially when students are struggling. The campus principal expressed her perceptions and beliefs that quality instruction is essential for all students in poverty. She said, "All of our students deserve to learn and grow." She also indicated, "Students come to us hungry. All of these pieces impact learning, so relationships that are built on quality instruction is necessary." She indicated, "Effective literacy instruction places the role of the teacher in the classroom as more of a facilitator. This takes trust between teacher and student." The principal indicated that teachers who know their students and provide a safe and welcoming environment offer students a better chance to achieve at high levels.

High expectations for literacy achievement. The campus principal shared that a vision of excellence and high expectations is highly related to the elevated levels of literacy achievement at the school. The campus principal expressed perceptions that literacy achievement is directly related to the professional belief that quality instruction is a fundamental right for all students in poverty. The campus principal explained that

students "come not ready to learn in many ways." She explained that high-literacy achievement for high-poverty students is directly influenced by the school culture beliefs and norms. The campus principal said, "All of our students deserve to learn and grow." The principal also shared, "If you are not willing to learn and grow, how can you expect your kids to learn and grow. This is what we do every day all the time, all of us. All of us are in this. That is the message we send. High expectations everywhere." Moreover, the principal signified that every staff member is responsible for each student's achievement regardless of where or with whom a child is placed. Regardless of student background, disability, socioeconomic status, culture, race, or learning gaps, students will learn at a high level. The principal affirmed, "Our kids deserve it!"

Research Sub Question 2. The second sub-question asked: What are the teachers' perceptions of the classroom best practices (micro factors) that contribute to high levels of literacy achievement for students in poverty in a high-achieving elementary school? The themes as answers to this question were language acquisition, positive relationships with students, and high expectations for literacy achievement. Each theme presented as a best practice for RQ 2 is further described with narrative description in the sections that follow.

Language acquisition. Similar to the perspective of the campus principal, teachers revealed that additional emphasis on language acquisition for students led to greater levels of achievement for high-poverty students in reading and writing. Teacher F shared that high-poverty strategies differed for language acquisition: "The guided reading group with the vocabulary background and learning how to decode words in the small

group setting is more effective for high-poverty learners." Teachers expressed the strategy of building student knowledge of high frequency words and planning instruction that use abundant vocabulary for accountable, purposeful conversation during lessons as effective. For example, Teacher F said, "Literature groups, literature circles. It is one way to hold kids accountable for actually reading and talking about reading because a set of kids are reading the same text and help each other with it. They use lots of vocabulary in their talks." Also, best practices of discourse or conversational strategies during classroom instruction contributed to the high levels of literacy achievement and language acquisition for fourth grade students. Questioning and clarifying techniques used for student language acquirement regularly influenced literacy instruction and achievement. For example, Teacher G shared, "I clarify information, or I help them structure their answers a little bit better. So mapping it out for them so they have a little more success."

Through the support of the literacy specialist, teachers use common practices that incorporate student conversation about text and experiences. The teachers specifically mentioned several instructional strategies for daily literacy instruction. The strategies discussed included connections to prior knowledge, language literacy opportunities, literacy circles, feedback loops, sentence starters, vocabulary awareness strategies, context clues, prediction, characterization, text feature instruction, and thematic analysis. While sharing the explicit strategies used in the classroom, Teacher D said, "Just getting students to think deeper about what they are reading has been helpful. All of them have the strategies as a reference when they are writing about reading. To go back and kind of think step-by-step." Teacher D also shared specific student centered labels for the

strategies listed, "*RACER*, *PALM*, *Sign Post*, *Notice and Note*, *Where is the Text Evidence?*; *Reading with a pencil*…I give them a small visual. Sometimes we will copy them and put them in their reading journal so they can refer to them there."

Teachers also shared that visual representations of content, often viewed as cognitive models, or cues in visual formats for word recognition or acquisition of required comprehension, support high-poverty students. The visuals provide context for new vocabulary and new experiences while students read unfamiliar text. Visuals maximize instructional sequences and support greater language acquisition. One example was shared by Teacher E: "Just making sure that you are giving them models if they are having difficulty or lower level reading. Giving them models of t-charts and Venn diagrams to go along with it." Teacher G shared another example: "It is more about making sure students are engaged and understand. Clarifying information and re-teaching with visual representations or other models if they need it. Usually those that are not in high poverty get it the first time and don't need extra structure or visual representations."

Teachers discussed maximization of time during the student day. Maximization of time included maintenance of student engagement through high levels of interest in text, purposeful intensive instruction and conversation, and prominence on student interests in instruction designed to build experiences with language. For example, Teacher B said, "We use all times during the day, even arrival and dismissal times. They are not necessarily instructional times, but we meet with students to maximize the time we have with them." Finally, conversational opportunities for students are planned for

and designed throughout small group and whole group instruction. Much of the talking that occurs in the classroom between and among students was said to be purposeful and related to text and connections to student experiences. The teachers perceived that personal connections to text built stronger more fluent readers and critical thinkers.

Positive relationships with students. Similar to the perspective of the campus principal, teachers perceived positive relationships with students to be an influential micro factor best practice in achieving greater levels of proficient literacy for high-poverty students. Experiential factors from student home lives were shared to influence student learning in both positive and negative ways. Teachers perspectives were comparable to the statements in the literature in which researchers stated that students in generational or situational poverty experience lower health, lower nutrition, lower working vocabulary, higher stress, lowered cognition, and increased depressive symptoms (Reglin, Akpo-Sanni, & Losike-Sedimo, 2012). Lower health, nutrition, working vocabulary, cognition, and greater levels of stress and depression were listed in the data of this study as a negative influence to student learning and a strain to the school community. Teacher A said, "More than 50% of our students come from difficult home lives. Parents are more worried about putting food on the table. This means they do not have time to worry about school or read to kids. Many times I need to coach parents on how to parent a school-aged child." Teacher G said, "When kids are more worried about difficulties at home they aren't ready to learn at school. We need to work through that."

When students have home lives that do not always meet their physical, nutritional, medical, and emotional needs, school and learning to read and write are not a priority.

The data suggest that teachers with the ability to build relationships and develop an awareness and empathy of student home factors can build responsiveness for literacy needs. Such learner empathy results in deliberate instruction and created schedules of learning that meet the prerequisite instructional and literacy acquisition needs of high-poverty students. Teacher B shared, "Sometimes it is as simple as bringing a child to get breakfast in the morning or taking them to the library to find a book that they are interested in. Or even finding community resources to buy them some new books."

The data suggest that maintaining positive student relationships is also achieved through an openness and awareness of students' strengths and weaknesses. This requires teachers to regularly engage in conversation about students. Through perceptive analysis of student strengths and weaknesses, teachers can build environments that are trusting and allow for risk-taking. Also, the awareness and ability to self-reflect about the interactions teachers have with children can support an environment focused on growth. Teacher C shared, "When students know you care about them, and you are in their corner…they will work hard and do their best." Teachers can script lessons based on knowledge of student backgrounds. Such scripted lessons that factor in student experiences potentially result in greater engagement.

High expectations for literacy achievement. The literature indicates that high expectations communicated from the adults in a learning community for student success are fundamental in raising achievement in any school setting (Gilboy et al., 2015). High expectations were an apparent theme in the synthesized teacher perception data as a micro factor influence in instruction. Teachers shared that higher expectations for

literacy achievement led to students achieving substantial growth on literacy measures.

Regardless of student circumstances, the communication of high expectations from staff

members in the learning community has sustained improved achievement, especially

during the guided reading block. For example, Teacher H explained, "Just getting to

know the kids and doing guided reading the right way has made a huge tremendous

difference for our kids, regardless of poverty or not poverty they all deserve the chance to

meet high expectations." This statement was further corroborated by the statement of

Teacher I, "So when you are reading a text in your group and you all read the same thing

and reading at the same level that builds a level of confidence. It places greater

expectations on students."

Examples of high expectations in the guided reading process were depicted. High

expectations required instructional flexibility especially with student grouping.

Participants at the setting defined *flexible-grouping* as a practice where students are

expected to change instructional groupings throughout a quarter, semester, and school

year based on learning standard attainment. Teacher D stated, *"Provisioned hot-seats*

during instruction ensure that each child is held accountable for literacy growth. Hot-

seats are a strategy that guarantees students read to the teacher at least once a week as a

formative check for understanding. Hot-seats allow for moment-to-moment

differentiation and adjustment of reading instruction. The hot-seat strategy also provides

for individual attention and conversation from teachers to students with specific

individualized and customized high level expectations for literacy learning

communicated on a daily basis."

Hot-seat instruction is a strategy similar to customized instruction and assessment indicative of *one-to-one* guided reading instruction. Valiandes (2015), discussed one-to-one instruction as a differential tactic in meeting the needs of students in reading and writing instruction. Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, & Cummins (2015) also specified that one-to-one instructional methods afford explicitness for greater reading and writing achievement for students. At the sample setting, anecdotal data collected during one-to-one instruction is applied to future flexible grouping of guided reading groups. The one-to-one design propels an expectation of explicitness, excellence, and accountability for every student. The data from the interviews also suggest that one-to-one instruction and assessment ensure growth and achievement in literacy is measured.

Research Sub Question 3. The third sub-question asked: What are the campus principal's perceptions of the systems and structures (macro factors) that influence high-level literacy instruction for students in a high-achieving elementary school? Campus principal responses and the resulting themes for RQ 3 were representative of system and structures of the human resources and development of human resources. The themes as answers to this question were collaborative leadership, positive professional relationships, instructional coaching, and high quality professional learning.

Collaborative leadership. Supports and structures that are the result of shared leadership decision-making were reported to be an influential macro factor system and structure that influenced instruction delivered in classrooms. Best practices in collaborative leadership depicted in the data include collective leadership in support of a vision for systemic organizational learning and shared decision making for instructional

practices. Campus reading specialists at the sample site are considered experts. Specialists regularly collaborate with campus leadership to deploy human resources, professional learning, and other resources for increased teacher capacity. In discussing shared leadership, the campus principal said, "I lead, but I lead from the background. It is sort of *The-Wizard-of-Oz* kind of thing. I trust my specialists to drive the bus."

The collaborative leadership is most effective because of a shared vision of improved literacy achievement. For example, "We have certain school focuses [sic]. Our school leadership, we all work together to lead our school to achieve these goals." The perceptual interview data indicate that shared leadership with campus reading specialists, teachers, and other members of staff increased teacher capacity, collaborative practice, and data based decision-making. To that end, the campus principal felt that increased collaborative practice influenced the high achievement in literacy for high-poverty students.

Positive professional relationships. Learning community trust appeared as a macro factor in the analysis of the campus principal interview transcript. For example, "I can learn from you," was shared as a common message to increase openness across the learning community. The data reveal that the ability to engage in professional dialogue and routine examination of practices indirectly influenced literacy instruction. The trust created through supervisory practices presented opportunities for positive relationship building. In discussing professional supervision of teachers, the principal stated, "They trust me that I don't come in and do the 'got you' thing. They get mad sometimes. We put data up and we talk heart-to-heart about what that data means and why it looks the

way it does. But, they trust me and I think it is because I am in their rooms all the time.
We have conversations all the time. It's been huge for building trust and relationships."

The collaboration amongst grade level teams, institutional collaborative norms,
and the implementation of a culture of respect were represented as structures that effect
literacy learning. The campus principal shared, "The capacity of my staff is creating a
culture of trust in this building. That is a big job. Really opening their classrooms to
each other and taking the time to reflect and talk about what they do well." As a result,
positive school culture and expectations of commitment to student growth were noted,
especially for students in disadvantaged population, which included the high-poverty
student demographic. The principal also established strong professional relationships by
providing choice and autonomy in the professional learning process. While discussing
the professional relationships of staff, the principal said, "I give them the ownership.
They are driving their own PD. It is risky, but it builds trust."

Instructional coaching. Instructional coaching appeared most often in the data
analysis as a macro factor influence of high quality literacy instruction in the principal
interview. The campus principal regularly placed monetary, human, and scheduling
resources toward effective implementation of coaching for staff. Supervisory feedback
and teacher learning processes comprised of instruction coaching was shared as a best
practice. The principal indicated best practices in which veteran and novice teachers
working and learning alongside the expert literacy specialist occurred. Coaching models
included grade level team collaboration, peer observation and classroom visits with
reflection, teacher driven professional development, and reflective journaling.

The campus principal described differences in coaching paradigms. Some grade levels had greater professional learning ownership in the coaching process than other grade level teams. According to the campus principal, the time and monetary investment in coaching had a direct influence on literacy scores. For example, "You can see the difference. You can see the data and although you are not pointing fingers you can say there is some kind of magic that is happening here." The campus principal indicated that data analysis that resulted in celebration of achievement in coaching conversations led to greater teacher and staff ownership and participation in the coaching process. Success was contagious and supported increased coaching in other school teaching teams.

The literacy based peer coaching and instructional coaching is based on teacher reflection. An effective measure to increase teaching capacity included a high regard for the literacy specialist as an expert. Expertise led to increased teacher capacity for literacy teaching and learning and established high levels of trust among the professionals in the building. For example, the principal asserted, "My specialists drive the coaching. They are seen as the experts." In discussing the guided reading coaching that takes place during professional learning, the principal explained that the literacy specialist was the expert in the building and driver of excellence, adding, "The literacy specialist was instrumental in pushing it forward."

High quality professional learning. A final macro-factor identified by the campus principal as a best practice for literacy learning was the attention to professional learning of the staff for improved instructional capacity designed for reading, writing, and discourse. The principal first discussed the onset of high quality professional

development in the guided reading program as a 3-year professional learning plan. For example, "We started guided reading 3 years ago when I got here, because we really knew we had a need. We needed a better system to know where are students were. What they could read and couldn't read. We started this process three years ago. I feel like we have far more buy in."

Collaboration amongst grade level teams was an effective strategy for improved instruction. The principal shared a detailed discussion about collaborative and peer coaching models. The ability to share the leadership with specialists and team leaders in the school building resulted in ongoing professional learning opportunities. The campus principal expressed opinions regarding high quality professional learning in the interview. For example, "We use our resources and money. I really have set-aside time…the literacy specialists and math specialist are scheduled to deliver PD every Thursday."

An important aspect of the professional learning relating to high-poverty literacy achievement was the direct result of self-reflection. The campus principal modeled self-reflection and expected it from the staff of the school. Case in point, "We reflected using rubrics this year. Where we are in our teaching…Self-reflection is difficult but it improves instruction and enhances teacher growth." Strengthened teacher capacity was a major factor to improve instruction. The campus principal shared visionary and reflective strategies, cultural competence, and language acquisition as major components for professional learning that related to literacy achievement at the setting. These major components are of significance because the research in the literature indicates that highly

effective institutional professional learning positively influences school literacy programs and increases productivity of teachers and students during literacy instruction (Ferguson, 2014).

Research Sub Question 4. The fourth sub-question asked: What are the teachers' perceptions of the systems and structures (macro factors) that influence high-level literacy instruction for students in a high-achieving elementary school? The evidenced themes as answers were instructional coaching, high quality professional development, and positive professional relationships. Themes were consistent with the campus principal findings and overlapped in instructional coaching and high quality professional development.

Instructional coaching. Instructional coaching was represented most often in the teacher interview data. The teachers indicated that this practice was highly influential in meeting the learning needs of staff for improved literacy instruction. For example, Teacher B, who was a novice teacher shared, "I like it. It gives me a chance to see teachers and take ideas. I like to learn from others." The ability to engage in reflective observational practice with colleagues in a non-supervisory manner supported learning community efforts in improved instructional capacity. Teachers explained that the campus principal highly supported the use of instructional coaching and adjusted the master scheduled to include time for effective implementation of coaching for staff. Teacher G reiterated the strengths of instructional coaching and said, "It was great to be involved in the coaching sessions. We get to see little things that teachers are doing.

You can also see the things that you aren't doing that you can improve on. I think it is really a real growth for some of us."

Lead learning specialists, including the literacy specialist, supported the teacher learning process. Often the literacy specialist modeled coaching for grade level teams and worked alongside teachers to share best practices for literacy instruction. The teacher interview data also suggests that grade level team collaboration and peer visits enhance coaching sessions. For example, Teacher B said, "I like it. I can watch others teach and I learn so much. I get more ideas. I also like when others provide me with feedback about what I do well and where I can improve."

The teachers explained that literacy based coaching was significantly meaningful for teaching and learning of the entire community and could contribute to even greater literacy achievement in the future. In school A, coaching led to greater implementation of differentiation in literacy instruction. The differentiation of instruction was targeted toward high-poverty learners to support reduction of the achievement gap for high-poverty students. Coaching sessions included data analysis and regular reflective opportunities and conversations positioned on strengthened instruction.

High quality professional development. In each of the nine teacher interviews, participants opined high quality professional development as a macro factor best practice for greater high-poverty student literacy achievement. The campus leadership designed a schedule that permits all classroom teachers to participate in professional development on a weekly basis. The professional development is designed and based on teacher interest and school improvement plans; the professional development is related to high-poverty

student literacy achievement and school climate. The literacy specialist is viewed as an expert in providing the professional development and shares in leadership and facilitation with the campus principal and other members of school leadership. Teacher H, one of the lead literacy experts at the school specified, "I wear so many different hats. I think the biggest thing, even speaking about the guided reading piece, is training teachers to be consistent in their practices…I think that just helping teachers to know how to listen to a kid or look at the data. How do I take the data from a benchmark assessment and use it? How do I teach a student to make meaning of the text? How do I teach kids to think beyond the text? What type of questions do I write? How does the student read? How does the student comprehend? How can I make my instruction better to meet my kid's needs?"

Teacher G shared perceptions of professional learning, "We are doing the new guided reading group lesson plans. It is making us think more and getting those higher-level questions. It gets us more involved in our teaching. A lot of teachers here continue their education, taking classes constantly." Substitute coverage is provided for teachers to self-reflect and engage in peer conversations about professional development topics. Professional development is thematic, focusing on one or two concepts for the entire school year. An example of influential professional learning topics for high-poverty literacy learning is the guided reading professional development that occurred from 2014 through 2016.

Positive professional relationships. The data reveal positive professional relationships based on trust, specifically the supervision process and literacy specialists'

expertise, as perceived macro factor best practices. The effective peer coaching at the setting required a great deal of trust with colleagues. For example, Teacher H shared her perspective on trust and risk, "Teachers have to try something new and be willing to take risks. I think eventually that will make the most difference because they are going to have, you know someone to do it with…It is ok to grow, it is ok to make mistakes, it is ok grow from our mistakes. That's how we learn best; by doing it, by trying, by not feeling you have to be perfect." The data depict professional learning communities and teacher coaching inquiry groups as additional supports for teacher growth that require positive professional collaborative practices and relationships. The data also illustrate positive trusting professional relationships evident in the instructional coaching practice at the setting. The teachers value instructional coaching and collaborative practice. The collaboration and coaching built a climate of trust and professional risk taking which strengthened capacity for teaching reading and writing at the school. Teachers felt that strengthened capacity improved instruction with direct influence to student literacy achievement. For example, Teacher I said, "I trust my team. I trust this staff. I trust our leadership. This has led me to growth as an educator and as a teacher of reading. I am not afraid to try something and fail. I never say 'I can't'. I say, 'I can't yet.'"

Teachers at the site regularly share in the day-to-day instruction of students. Through collective collaboration, data analysis, and flexible grouping, students are placed into reading groups based on success toward reaching standards. In some cases, students may move from group to group several times a year. As a result, students may see several reading teachers in one school year. Teacher I said, "We use data and discuss it to

determine groupings." Teacher A said, "We work together to determine the best placement for students during the reading block."

Flexible grouping requires substantial collaborative conversation. At times, teachers will combine efforts and co-teach in a single setting. The co-teaching requires regular professional meetings to collaborate and co-plan the instruction that will take place. Teacher B discussed planning alongside the literacy specialist as effective. She said, "She sat down with me a lot to share how the guided reading block would be structured differently and what to expect. And…she gave me resources to look through and to use. The cooperation really helped the kids." Additionally, co-planning affords distinguished levels of differentiation for the neediest students. Many of the neediest students are in the high-poverty designation. Such collaborative processes create strong levels of trust among the professionals in the building. Teacher H shared, "Working together has become a great success for us. We do a lot of collaborating and working together."

Connections to the Literature

Classroom best practices (micro factors). The findings resulting from the data collected during the campus principal and teacher interviews and the subsequent analysis demonstrate significant association and connection to other existing literature for micro factor themes. The best practices identified as micro factor themes were language acquisition, guided reading, instructional equity, positive relationships with students, and high expectations for literacy achievement. To reiterate, each theme was derived from

perception data and represented synthesis of high quality instructional practices from the data.

In a quasi-experimental study, Valiandes (2015) evaluated the effects of instruction for student literacy learning. Similar to the campus principal and teacher perceptions, Valiandes (2015) found that the quality of instruction in the classroom led to greater literacy achievement for students. Comparable to the data collected in this study on themes of language acquisition, positive teacher and student relationships, guided reading, and high expectations for literacy achievement, Valiandes (2015) suggested that the quality of differentiation in the classroom was influenced by teacher knowledge of students, their experiential factors, teacher cultural proficiency strengths, and the quality of the relationship between teacher and student. Willingham (2012) submitted that intensive instruction provisioned for increased language acquisition may reduce disadvantage in literacy caused by poverty for students. Thus, literature confirms the data collected at the sample site; language acquisition, high expectations for literacy learning, and guided reading instruction are regarded as best practices that may influence greater literacy achievement for students in high poverty.

The literacy functions of fluency, decoding, vocabulary acquisition, and phonemic awareness were represented in the data as a component of the guided reading theme for campus principal and teacher perspectives. Fletcher (2015) indicated that each of these literacy functions are greatly influential in literacy instruction. Guided reading instruction described by the campus principal encompassed descriptions of fluency, decoding, vocabulary acquisition, and phoneme strategies. Roskos and Neuman (2014)

indicated that effective literacy instructional planning includes an awareness and attention to fluency, decoding, and vocabulary development for individual students. The principal reaffirmed that the achievement of students was the direct result of the attention teachers gave to literacy factors such as phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and fluent reading practices.

Naraian (2016) indicated that inclusive educators advocate for students regardless of experiences. Naraian also specified that instructing students with the intellectual schema of prior skills ensure equitable success in a literacy environment for students. This literature is of significance, because the data collected in this study also revealed instructional equity and positive relationships with students as influential best practices for literacy achievement.

Teachers' instructional practices are influenced by social consciousness capacity (Lazar & Reich, 2016). Teachers who approached students through personal relationships and full ownership over their learning were described in the literature as highly influential in moving achievement. Social equity was also evidenced in the collected data. The data revealed that effective classroom literacy instruction for students in high-poverty included elements of high expectations for student performance. Relationship building and cultural competence brought about greater achievement in students from high-poverty at the case study site. Therefore, the social consciousness capacity was demonstrated in the data in the form of instructional equity and high expectation themes as described. Several studies indicated that implementation of equitable strategies and direct compassion for student experiential factors from educators

improved student achievement (Anderson et al., 2012; Fletcher et al., 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Tam, 2015). In a like manner, the campus principal discussed the need for staff to focus on experiential factors for students, because part of improved literacy achievement is the ability to ensure student physical and emotional needs are met prior to entering the classroom, "Are students fed, did they sleep, and are they in a positive place to learn?" Thus, the perceptual data and the findings in the literature are comparable. Language acquisition, guided reading, instructional equity, positive relationships with students, and high expectations for literacy achievement are potential practices to consider in efforts to improve high-poverty literacy achievement.

Systems and structures (macro factors). The richness and depth of the campus principal and teacher perceptions from the interview data resulted in macro factor themes of collaborative leadership, positive professional relationships, instructional coaching, and high quality professional development. The themes represented the instructional and professional learning capacities of the teachers in the school sample and demonstrated the ownership by leaders for the growth of the learning community. The themes revealed in the data resembled the research base on PLC practice (DuFour & Marzano, 2012; Tam, 2015; Wilcox, Murakami-Ramalho & Urick, 2013). The data revealed a vision and purpose to achieve increased levels of literacy achievement with shared leadership, ownership, and expertise. The data were representative of the examples of highly effective PLC practices discussed in the literature (DuFour & Marzano, 2012).

The literature substantiates the themes of high quality professional development collaborative leadership, and instructional coaching. The collective leadership and self-

reflective attention of teachers and other education professionals aligned the work of classroom instruction in coaching conversations. Collaborative coaching conversations were considered examples of best practice for improved literacy instruction at the sample site and in the literature. For example, Lazar and Reich (2016) suggested that leaders who collaborate, share, model, and demonstrate student and self-learning ownership strengthened teacher growth and instructional capacity. The data collected in this study suggests that collaboration in the learning community influenced the literacy achievement of students. Other researchers concluded that school leaders who take collective responsibility for teacher improvement have schools that demonstrate greater collaboration and achievement (Anderson et al., 2012; Fletcher et al., 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014). The data and the literature suggest that the collaborative commitment of adult and student learning directly benefits literacy achievement.

The research of Vanblaere and Davos (2016) corresponds with the theme of positive professional relationships. Vanblaere and Davos indicated that an entire learning community is mutually responsible for strengthening teaching practices. The data collected in this study indicate that collective practice and peer and self-reflection for teachers' improved pedagogical craft. Likewise, the literature suggests that collective practice is influential in self-reflective work because it prompts teachers' introspection and fosters professional growth (Hairon, Goh, & Chua, 2015). Although no causal relationship has been established for collaboration or PLC effectiveness to increased literacy achievement, such collaborative practices may contribute to improved student achievement in learning communities because effective collaboration has the potential to

influence literacy instruction and the academic achievement of high-poverty students

(Fletcher et al., 2013). Fletcher et al. also postulated that collaboration of teachers and

other school stakeholders result in collaborative and professional learning structures that

improve student achievement. Rather than a direct relationship of collaboration

increasing literacy, the instructional practices teachers use while engaged in collegiality

provide for more intensive conversation, planning, and instructional methods for literacy

instruction (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). Effective collective practice and collaboration

may be the result of positive professional relationships.

The data from this study depict instructional coaching as a priority best practice at

the case study site. This finding is significant in relating the data collected in this study

to the current literature. The literature indicated that peer coaching provides models for

instructional practices (Lazar & Reich 2016). Literacy coaching and derivatives of the

professional coaching models were suggested as viable methods for improved practice

(Ferguson, 2014; Matsumara & Wang, 2014; Miller & Stewart, 2013). Also, the

literature denoted that peer coaching prompts teacher questions, prompts self-reflection,

and raises teachers' consciousness about social justice, instructional micro factors, school

macro factors, and cultural awareness and competency (Fletcher, 2015; Lazar & Reich,

2016). The data from the current study depict professional learning communities and

teacher coaching inquiry groups as additional supports for teacher growth. The data from

the current study site also depict instructional coaching practice as a best practice to raise

teacher capacity. Although no causality exists in the research for coaching to increase

literacy achievement for high-poverty students, the literature endorses instructional

coaching as a best practice due to its pragmatic application for improved instruction, especially in schools that have minimal professional development budgets (Kohler-Evans, P., Webster-Smith, A., & Albritton, 2013; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

Researchers indicate that best practices of high quality sustained professional development (Richards-Tutor et al., 2015), explicit literacy instruction (Shippen et al., 2014), and analysis of student achievement data (Vaughn et al., 2013) were differential as best practices in raising literacy achievement. Each of these were represented in the data collected at the case study site as labeled codes and were included in the thematic synthesis. The perceptual data collected in this study and the findings in the literature were comparable. Therefore, collaborative leadership, positive professional relationships, instructional coaching, instructional equity, and high quality professional development should be considered as potential practice to improve high-poverty literacy achievement.

Project Deliverable Based on Findings

The project, a professional development program for literacy specialists entitled *Literacy Coaching for Equity*, is designed to provide school based literacy specialists with the leadership training to consistently implement literacy coaching and equity conversations in their respective local school communities. This project is grounded in the sociocultural framework and designed for both the micro (classroom instruction) and macro factors (systems and structures) of the school as the primary learning institution. In this study, best practices depicted in the data encompassed instructional equity, high quality professional learning, relationships that professionals have with each other and

the students, and instructional coaching. Research suggests that schools possess the capability to enhance practices that improve the literacy achievement of students regardless of high-poverty factors (Demarco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013; Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005; Krashen, 2011). The data collected in this study suggest that literacy achievement is influenced by the quality of instruction delivered. The data also suggest that quality instruction is the result of high quality professional learning delivered through individualized coaching. Furthermore, the outcomes from this study designate that individualized coaching is highly effective when delivered by the literacy specialist. The discoveries from this study also stipulate that instructional equity infused with relationship building processes potentially create environments where exceptional language and literacy acquisition occur. Based on the literature and study discoveries, I concluded that coaching and equity should be considered for future practice.

The literature reinforces the findings and fortifies the effectiveness of positive school culture, instructional equity, and instructional coaching as operative strategies for school improvement (Anderson et al., 2012; Fletcher et al., 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Tam, 2015). The research also reinforces the findings from this study; learning community literacy coaching and inclusive and equitable learning environments are best practices for sustained and substantial improvement (Griffith, Massey, & Atkinson 2013; Matsumara & Wang, 2014). Therefore, a professional development program for literacy specialists that prepares literacy experts as leaders for instructional coaching and equity is well suited for future practice and supported by the findings of this study and the literature.

The crosscurrents of societal, political, and historical factors influence the quality of education that students receive (Colclough, 2012). It may be that teachers who possess a more critical lens in equity and literacy factors can identify the norms in school culture and work with stakeholders to determine if these norms create barriers for student achievement. The findings from this study suggest that professional conversations that occur in schools directly influence instructional practices, which validates that teachers' knowledge of students enhances such conversations.

It may be that in a rural school setting, school staff must first examine much of the rural poverty nuances and culture to understand high-poverty learning implications. Banks, Dunston, and Foley (2013) indicated that teachers should become more knowledgeable about the diverse population they serve and immerse themselves in the cultures represented in their classrooms. Coady, Harper, and De Jong (2015) suggested that the lower achievement in literacy learning for students is a cultural phenomenon based on inequities from the social, political, and schooling context. Thus, a professional development project for literacy specialists preparing them to coach staff in providing equitable learning experiences for students from rural poverty areas may move learning communities toward greater excellence in high-poverty literacy achievement.

Summary

Due to the nature of the research questions, instrumental case study research methods were employed as the method of data collection and analysis. The setting displayed high levels of literacy achievement as indicated in state archival performance data. The sampled environment had similar demographics to the local setting. The data

collection and analysis procedures that supported reliability, credibility, and validity of research methods included interview, transcripts, member-checking, coding, and peer-review.

Findings included coded analysis of micro and macro factors of literacy instruction into categorical codes in each sociocultural factor. The categorical codes were further synthesized into major codes resulting in themes. The micro-factor themes combined from campus principal and teacher data are *language acquisition*, *guided reading*, *instructional equity*, *positive teacher and student relationships*, *high expectations for literacy achievement*, *and positive teacher and student relationships*. The macro-factor themes combined from campus principal and teacher data are *collaborative leadership*, *positive professional relationships*, *and instructional coaching*. Based on the findings, a professional development module for literacy specialists with instructional coaching and equity proficiency as the primary objectives is considered as the project deliverable.

Section 3: The Project

I designed my project, a professional development program for literacy specialists entitled *Literacy Coaching for Equity* (see Appendix A), to provide school-based literacy specialists with the required training to implement literacy coaching and equity conversations at the local school. I included detailed objectives, overarching goals, training sessions, timeframes, and training materials to prepare literacy specialists for instructional coaching. The professional development training plan outlined in this study may strengthen literacy specialists' capacity for literacy coaching. As I reported in section 2 of this study, the interviewed participants indicated that improved classroom teaching and learning practices for reading and writing resulted from effective literacy specialist coaching. Moreover, the improved classroom teaching and learning practices that resulted from literacy coaching influenced positive achievement for students in high poverty.

The project's overarching goal is to provide school-based literacy specialists with the leadership training they need to consistently implement literacy coaching and equity conversations in their local school communities. My objectives for the project are for literary specialists to (a) build leadership capacity to lead as experts in peer coaching at their respective learning community, (b) gain the prerequisite knowledge to coach and equip all teachers of reading with equity and cultural proficiency strategies that encompass cultural responsiveness for literacy instruction, and (c) gain expertise in peer coaching models that incorporate conversations about high-poverty students and their literacy learning needs.

Rationale

The problem addressed in this study was the low reading achievement of high-poverty fourth grade students in a small rural school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. As a response to the problem, I created a literacy specialist professional development program. The professional development considers equity standards that address literacy improvement. I selected a professional development genre to create possible systemic and local change based on content and adult learning factors.

The project is based on my data analysis of participant responses in which they asserted that professional training (literacy coaching) was necessary to help solve the problem of low high-poverty literacy. Moreover, the literacy specialist at the study site possessed capacity in effective coaching techniques. Qualitative data collected in this study demonstrate that school leaders, including the literacy specialist, made a pronounced difference in literacy programs. Leadership structures inclusive of literacy and equity of instruction led to greater levels of achievement. The data from this study also indicate that effective schools employ responsive pedagogy, factoring in student backgrounds and experiences. Such responsive pedagogy is the direct result of increased capacity and awareness among the members of the teaching staff (Davis, 2012). Therefore, this study's findings suggest that improved literacy instructional practices resulted from literacy coaching.

Findings of this study illustrate that instructional coaching strategies result in literacy achievement gains. It may be that a school-based strategy that ensures school-centered coaching sessions may remediate the problem. Also, a school-based strategy

embedded with cultural responsiveness and literacy instruction may support high-poverty learners. The project I developed corresponds with my study data because instructional coaching and instructional equity are represented in these data as strategies that led to greater levels of achievement in reading.

Professional development is an improvement practice that contributes to school transformation (Parker, Wasserman, Kram, & Hall, 2015). It affords educators the ability to engage in adult learning that enhances teaching and learning for students (Briesch, Briesch, & Chafouleas, 2015). The provision of this development also supports school communities in the pursuit of higher quality education (Neuman & Moland, 2016; Stack, Moorefield-Lang, & Barksdale, 2015). Ongoing professional development that regularly meets the learning needs of teachers and education professionals contributes to greater achievement and advancements in teaching quality and student engagement (Neuman & Moland, 2016; Stack, Moorefield-Lang, & Barksdale, 2015). Quality professional development supports positive and long-lasting school cultural change (DuFour & Marzano, 2012).

When replicated, the sample school's strategies, practices, and success with peer coaching and intensive guided reading professional learning may provide similar results for other campuses, especially among students in underserved populations. To address and build such strategies into the regular practices at other schools, educators and instructional leaders must remove barriers that inhibit learning and create educational opportunities for high-poverty students (Tour, 2016). The design of the project portion of this study may help educators remove sociocultural barriers and inequities that inhibit

learning. The training described in the project responds to the problem of low high-poverty literacy by using the findings of this study for literacy specialist professional development. In meeting the needs of current and future high-poverty students, the training detailed in the project offers literacy specialists, through instructional coaching training, the tools to identify, demystify, and appreciate differences in approaches to learning and performance that raise awareness around high-poverty student literacy needs (Costa & Garmston 2015; Lofthouse & Leat, 2013). Literacy specialists will collaborate to explore and review skill sets and strategies to narrow the gap for high-poverty students. I hope that they will form a more creative and productive literacy teaching experience with effective outcomes for high-poverty learners.

Review of the Literature

To find relevant and current studies for my project development, I searched the following databases: Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Education Research Complete, Open Library, ProQuest, SAGE research complete, and Google Scholar. I accessed these resources via Walden University Library. By combining keywords and Boolean phrases such as *literacy achievement*, *high-poverty*, and *learning community* with the terms *best practices*, *shared leadership*, *collaboration*, *equity*, *school improvement*, *literacy coaching*, *improved teaching, adult learning, educational professional learning, professional development*, *teacher training,* and *educator training,* I was able to yield significant results. In the second stage, I reviewed the abstracts of the works and narrowed the scope of literature by selecting the most relevant works to the project genre and design. Seminal works were chosen for inclusion in the literature review based on

their potential contribution to the project genre, relevance to findings, school literacy

improvement, literacy best practices, and strategies to meet the needs of high-poverty

literacy learners. Works that address the attempts by practicing educators to promote

school literacy reform efforts through literacy coaching and best practices based on social

change were reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized in a self-designed matrix to elicit

themes. Mechanisms and solutions from the literature that include micro and macro

sociocultural literacy factors in schools as they related to the data analysis and findings

were reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized in a similar amalgamation matrix. The

combination and synthesis of the descriptive studies established approaches that support

the project direction. The literature was funneled and synthesized through an

interconnected analysis of the theory and research that support the genre, theory, and

content of the project.

The literature review begins with a discussion of theory related to the genre of

professional development. The development of the project from theory is discussed.

Next, the literature that provisions for the content of the project is synthesized. The

project content includes a discussion of equity, literacy theory, and collaborative practice.

Project Genre

To support the selection of professional development as the project genre

appropriate as a solution to the problem, the literature was synthesized to include

importance and relative effectiveness of professional development related to school

improvement. Equity and literacy professional development literature supported the

genre choice for the project. Professional development is considered a significant and

effective strategy that schools and districts regularly use to improve student learning (Gravani, 2015).

The professional learning genre recognizes the characteristics of literacy specialists as adult learners. As adult learners, literacy specialists require unique learning experiences. The professional learning plan was designed with Knowles's (1984) andragogy approach. The literature indicates that professional learning plans prescribed to the learning of the educator, with an overarching goal of student success, improve student-learning outcomes (Gilboy et al., (2015). To guide literacy specialists, several adult learning needs were considered: literacy specialists as individuals, literacy specialists as school leaders, and literacy specialists as representative of district vision. Additionally, the coordinated learning experiences designed to achieve common outcomes for high-poverty students were established with the following adult learning theory principles: (a) self-direction of learning, (b) experiential, (c) goal oriented, (d) relevant to participant needs, (e) practical in design, and (f) collaborative (Roessger, 2015).

The findings of this study and the literature suggest that the thematic identified learning community practices inclusive of literacy coaching and teaching equity through professional development activities directly influence the achievement of students in literacy (Mayer et al., 2015). Literacy learning is complex, influenced by interactions between sociocultural, cognitive, and pedagogical elements (Jesson & Limbrick, 2014). The review of literature suggests that professional development engage staff in the collaborative inquiry required to address complex structures in literacy learning (Neuman

& Moland, 2016; Parsons, Malloy, Parsons, & Burrowbridge, 2015; Stack et al., 2015; Whorrall & Cabell, 2015). Complex analysis of school literacy structures is possible through the creation and construction of professional development that address social complexities (Murakami-Ramalho & Urick, 2013). In fact, professional development with teacher collaboration and coaching sessions, defined as *communities-of-practice,* are highly effective (Stone-Johnson, 2013). Professional development has the potential to provide the fundamental catalyst toward overall school improvement, especially when educators work together to share in a vision of what they want students to learn and be able to do. Therefore, a professional development project as the genre should positively influence school performance (Parker et al., 2015).

Danielson (2013) indicated that improved practices that enhance learning in the classroom result from teachers engaged in professional development. Older educational technologies and strategies combined with new 21st century tools have forced schools and districts to rely on professional development for strong literacy coaching, equity coaching, collaboration, partnerships within and among teaching teams, and egalitarian approaches (Lazar & Reich 2016). While there is evidence that effective teaching leads to improved reading comprehension (Boyd, 2015; Voss, & Lenihan 2016; Whorrall & Cabell, 2015), especially for high-poverty students (Boyd, 2015), to be effective, instructors must set up the classroom environment in an equitable manner (Briesch et al., 2015; Ntelioglou et al., 2015). The literature indicates that such practices are rarely possible without explicit professional development that enables teachers to collaborate and engage in acquisition of new pedagogical skills (Briesch, et al., 2015; Cribbs &

Linder, 2015). Cortes (2013) discovered significant instructional change in educational

organizations where professionals were engaged in regular professional learning

opportunities. Neuman and Moland (2016) suggested that improved teaching capacity

from professional development activities potentially shift respective learning

communities in support of change. Naraian (2016) postulated that major school cultural

thinking for literacy teaching and learning is possible through professional development

of staff. Daniel, An, Peercy, and Silverman (2015) also suggested that professional

development prompts literacy specialists to promote inclusive literacy for high-poverty

learners. Therefore, professional development as the genre choice is a significant

strategy and problem solution that could lead the local school, district, and learning

organizations toward exceptional instruction for high-poverty learners.

In a multi-methods study, Hargreaves and Harris (2011) indicated that culturally

responsive professional development increased awareness of sociohistorical cultural

nuances and barriers to student achievement from teaching practices. Increased

awareness of cultural nuances and barriers resulted in improved teaching quality and

strategies that enhanced student engagement. Also, in several other studies, professional

development led to enhanced teacher capacity and heightened collaborative approaches

that positively affect high-poverty literacy challenges (Collie et al., 2012; Hargreaves &

Harris, 2011; Stone-Johnson, 2013). Roessger (2015) suggested that reflective

components in professional learning and coaching settings strengthened instructional

capacity.

Mayer et al. (2015) indicated that school reform is impossible in isolation; rather, improvement requires effective professional development amongst teams of educators. Subsequently, for school communities, professional development provides opportunity to focus on the extraneous factors like enhanced communities-of-practice, social responsibility, collaborative leadership, shared district support, and learning community collaboration. All of which support changes in school culture (Denton et al., 2015). Moore and Carter-Hicks (2014) found that literacy and equity professional development programs promoted growth for teachers and led to increased literacy achievement for low-income students. Hence, a professional development program for literacy specialists to prepare them as instructional literacy and equity coaches is essential for increased teacher capacity and improved high-poverty student achievement.

Demarco and Vernon-Faegans (2013) stated that schools already possess the people and resources to improve the literacy achievement of students regardless of high-poverty factors. The literacy specialist, as a school human resource, is already a standard professional position for most school settings (Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015). Therefore, literacy specialist training in the leadership required to examine social responsibility and equity in literacy instruction is appropriate for the professional learning genre (Ntelioglou et al., 2015).

In several examples from the literature, researchers found that teachers and instructors embraced layered professional development designed by the curricular specialists and school leaders (Phillips, Nichols, Rupley, Paige, & Rasinski, 2016; Powers et al., 2016; Tour, 2016). On the other hand, when professional development was

mismatched to staff needs with ongoing inability to significantly improve student

achievement, the stagnation or sliding of student achievement gains were detrimental to

staff morale (Collie et al., 2012). The decrease of staff-morale often yielded a school

culture dominated by teacher autonomy rather than by collaboration (Bruns & Machin,

2012), lowered morale among staff members, and a message that it is acceptable for

students to fail (Collie et al., 2012). As reinforcement for school improvement planning,

Means, Paddilla and Gallegher (2011) suggested that bringing district staff together to

engage in meaningful and purposeful professional development about students and

student literacy could thwart stagnation in school culture. Thus, the genre of professional

development is justified as an appropriate solution to the problem.

Change is required to solve the problem in this study. The literature indicates that

effective school leadership teams use professional development processes to create

change (Powers et al., 2016). The literature suggests that effective professional

development supports school efforts in change through enhanced social responsibility,

increased engagement of all learners, and increased achievement for high-poverty

students and other disadvantaged groups who are typically underserved (Mette &

Scribner, 2013). Anderson et al. (2012) suggested that effective professional

development balances centralized expectations, accountability, and resource management

with flexibility and support. Professional development also enables school personnel to

adapt district goals and plans to the local circumstances. Moreover, professional

development in the form of collaborative practice was more effective in improving high-

poverty student achievement than any other strategy (Kanuika, 2012; Naraian, 2016;

Stack et. al 2015). Thus, professional development may be the catalyst that creates the required change.

The scholarly literature indicates that teachers who deliver instruction directly to students are the most influential factor for student improvement (Calo et al., 2015; Clotfelter et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Ferguson, 2013; Lauen, 2013; Morgan, 2012; Owen, 2015). Therefore, a professional development program designed to train the people that work directly with students is well suited for improvement. Professional development with explicit demonstrations of skill is highly effective for increased teacher and leader capacity (Gilboy et al., 2015). The theoretical and empirical literature base supports the professional development genre as a solution to increase literacy specialist capacity in leadership and coaching for increased student literacy achievement.

Project Content

To reform schools, education professionals and experts must narrow the learning gap for students with learning weaknesses from disadvantaged backgrounds (DeCuir & Dixon, 2012). To narrow learning gaps, the content of the professional development project incorporates equity practices, literacy achievement, and collaborative training in literacy coaching. The findings from this study indicate that collaborative practice through literacy coaching sessions support student achievement gains. Therefore, an andragogical approach to support adult learning content (Gravani, 2015) was chosen for the professional development content. As a result of the data in this study, which revealed the importance of collaborative coaching in literacy improvement, the project content includes collaborative practice, literacy theory, equity, and cultural competence

with inclusive coaching techniques. Collaborative practice, equity, and literacy

proficiency through professional development content substantiates improvement in

student achievement and perpetuates literacy achievement for underserved high-poverty

student populations (Ntelioglou et al., 2015).

The findings from this study indicate that learning community collaborative

practice is effective in improving high-poverty student achievement. In support of this

study's findings, the literature indicated that learning community collaborative practice is

effective in improving high-poverty student achievement (Fletcher, et al., 2013; Kanuika,

2012). Therefore, the project content includes an emphasis on collaborative

opportunities.

The findings from this study suggest that student achievement data be utilized to

support coaching conversations. Philpott and Dagenais (2012) indicated that

achievement gaps and the data to support such gaps provide a springboard for critical

dialogue in collaborative conversation or school improvement. Such discourse on

equitable education for all student groups stimulates dialogue about the implications for

teaching reading and writing in today's diverse schools. Training the literacy specialist

as a leader in data analysis and discourse is advantageous in the continued search for the

best practices in defense of high-poverty disadvantage

Due to the theme of collaboration and trust discovered in the findings of this

study, the professional development content is saturated with learning community

collaborative processes for adult learning. Learning community practices that result from

inclusive literacy and equity models create a heightened awareness of student

achievement data as well as professional awareness of the social and historical constructs that readily influence high-poverty students in school culture (DeMarco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013). Likewise, the data from this study indicate that effective collaboration focused on equity factors related to literacy, potentially shifts literacy instruction and positively influences high-poverty student learning. Fletcher et al. (2013) suggested that collaboration focused on literacy and equity features increases achievement in reading and writing. Through collaboration on literacy and equity features, the professional development project content provisions for improved school culture and future practice to deeply influence student achievement.

The findings from this study demonstrate that effective practice include the literacy specialist in shared leadership models. The project content includes structures and tools to promote increased literacy achievement through literacy specialist leadership and expertise. The most vibrant and successful lead educators are those that recognize the essential benefits of professional learning, reflection, and refined practice (Ferrier-Kerr, Keown, & Hume, 2015). Literacy specialists typically serve as the lead literacy learner in schools and routinely provide school based professional learning. The professional development of literacy specialists enhances the leadership of the position (Wilcox, 2013). Such renewal and strengthened skills for the literacy specialist perpetuate improved school culture (Willis, 2015). When school communities view the literacy specialist as the conduit of excellence for professional learning and collaboration, other educators in the same community are influenced to improve (Wilcox, 2013). Providing structures and effective tools for communities that promote increased teacher

collaborative capacity and student literacy performance enhance the education of students and social change (Costa & Garmston, 2015). Thus, literacy specialists possess the ability to support learning communities in even greater examination of literacy instruction as it relates to equity. Literacy specialists possess the leadership potential to lead others in improved practice.

The findings from this study suggest that teachers can increase student reading motivation by providing authentic literature experiences. Findings further submit that student motivation is an influential marker of improved achievement. Motivation for reading is dramatically influenced by student reading success (Denton et al., 2015). Literacy motivation is a factor in instructional equity professional development, because motivating a diverse range of students to find success is inherently challenging (Willis, 2015). The correct selected text to meet the individual needs of students improves reading motivation (Naraian, 2016). Literacy specialists trained in inclusive literacy and equity may be able to lead teaching teams toward exceptional selection of text for instruction of high-poverty learners.

The development of cultural competency for educators should occur through open-ended ongoing reflective conversation (Hagans & Good III, 2013). To support reflective open-ended discourse, this study's professional development project contains cultural competence discussions and strategies as a learning component to enable educators to be effective with students from cultures other than their own (Cortes, 2013). Furthermore, a pathway for literacy coaches to foster and facilitate conversations that over time develop culturally proficient school literacy is addressed. Pathways include an

ongoing discussion of culture, race, and under-privilege that is present in school communities (Willis, 2015).

Naraian (2016) posited two effective instructional practices to raise student achievement: (a) direct modeling of reading and (b) explicit demonstration of cognitive reading strategy. Other explicit instructional components critical to literacy learning include modeled metacognition of decoding strategies, clarification strategies, summarizing, self-monitoring of errors, understanding of context, organization of writing, and putting thoughts to paper (Denton et al., 2015). The findings described in Section 2 of this study also illustrate that student background knowledge is cursory for effective instructional planning and delivery. Knowing student background leads to explicit instruction that contributes to proportional achievement. To be effective for students, the teacher recognizes prior knowledge of these interrelated skills and uses it to program effectively for literacy instruction. Gilboy et al. (2015) theorized that active-teaching and instructional design considerate of student background is highly effective for students. The extensive reading experiences from explicitness in instruction foster reading independence and confidence in students. Through such explicit reading experiences, students can transfer and determine which structured practices to use while engaged in independent reading (Gilboy et al., 2015). Transfer of modeled skills is done successfully for many reading purposes: reading to learn, reading to perform a task, or reading for information (Naraian, 2016). The professional development content will train literacy specialists to lead and coach others in these consistent explicit practices for instruction.

The campus principal perceptual data from this study suggest that regular assessment to monitor reading and writing skills is effective practice. At the sampled site, the monitoring of skills led to greater instructional focus and supported improved student performance. The literacy literature indicates that achievement based assessment and adequate monitoring of student growth leads to greater achievement (Lazar & Reich, 2016). Assessment of literacy is complex, requiring assessment of effort and improvement. Working with students to determine start-points and end-points during the school year supports greater student achievement (Naraian, 2016). In a qualitative case study of existing teaching and learning practices in literacy instruction, Waniganayake and Shepherd (2015) discovered that rubric based assessment and evaluation positively improves achievement for students. Moreover, transparency in success-criteria supports student ownership of achievement and fostered further growth in literacy (Stack et al., 2015). The professional development content incorporates opportunities for literacy specialists to review assessment theory and assessment best practice during the instructional coaching and equity training sessions.

Aligned literacy coaching, equity, and cultural proficiency addresses achievement gaps through analysis of disadvantaged student learning phenomena (Foorman et al., 2015). The professional development content explores complex student learning phenomena and instructional complexities through instructional coaching practice. Mette and Scribner (2014) indicated that instructional coaching must be taught to school based leaders. In a qualitative case study of three school sites, Ferguson (2013) discovered that literacy coaching aligned professional capacity building across school teams, which led to

consistent and improved literacy teaching practices for students. In Ferguson's study,

effective literacy coaching included consistent collaborative practice focused on specific

learning outcomes and data analysis. The collaborative data-based practice had direct

improvement on student literacy achievement. Accordingly, the project includes content

to support literacy specialists in development of learning quality and data analysis

through effective coaching skills.

Summary of Project Genre and Content Literature

The theory and literature base supports the selection of the professional

development genre for the project. Several theoretical and empirical examples postulate

substantial district and school improvement as the result of employed professional

development. The problem of this study will be addressed through similar professional

development methods. The project content is reinforced by literature and theory

surrounding adult learning concepts, instructional equity, literacy achievement, and

learning community collaborative practice.

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Project Description

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The project's overarching goal is to provide school based literacy specialists with

the leadership training to consistently implement literacy coaching and equity

conversations in their respective local school communities. The professional

development design is a trainer-of-trainer model. Improved literacy coaching (trainee as

trainer) will support increased teaching capacity at respective learning communities to

change major school cultural thinking. As the primary participant engaged in this

professional learning opportunity, the literacy specialist will gain the skills to implement

equity proficiency during coaching sessions. Literacy specialists are the appropriate

targeted audience and possess the potential leadership skills to coach and influence

literacy teaching and learning factors for high-poverty students (Owen, 2015). Many

school districts regularly employ lead literacy specialists, coaches, or other forms of

professional development personnel for school based literacy improvement (Calo et al.,

2015). Literacy specialists are typically responsible for implementing a comprehensive

literacy program and coaching, supporting, and guiding teachers in best practices for

literacy instruction (Calo et al., 2015). Calo et al., indicated that school based literacy

specialists or literacy leaders are highly influential in improving school literacy programs.

To establish the most strategic and effective professional learning program for literacy

leadership capacity, the school based literacy teacher was selected.

In respect to high-poverty student learners, the literacy specialist is the school-

based leader with the most direct influence on classroom reading teachers' planning and

instruction. By the nature of the role, the literacy specialist is best suited to build a

school based literacy program focused on the elements of an equity learning culture. The

adult learning from the project is purposeful and planned as the constructed support

system to achieve identified goals for the literacy specialist as the lead school-based

coach and equity leader.

The professional development model is designed based on the data collected at

the sample school as well as the salient literature base. Both the literature base and the

relevant data from this study support the program for literacy specialists as the primary

audience to achieve project goals. The collected data in this study signify that

instructional coaching and instructional equity strategies are the potential best practices to use in other learning communities to raise literacy achievement. Instructional coaching is effective practice and contributes to high levels of literacy achievement for all students, especially for students in underserved populations including students in high-poverty living conditions (Eady, Drew, & Smith, 2015; Ferrier-Kerr et al., 2015; Gilboy et al., 2015).

Project Objectives and Structure

The objectives for the project are: (a) literacy specialists will build leadership capacity to lead as experts in peer coaching at their respective learning community; (b) literacy specialists will gain the prerequisite knowledge to coach and equip all teachers of reading with equity and cultural proficiency strategies that encompass cultural responsiveness for literacy instruction and (c) literacy specialists will gain expertise in peer coaching models that incorporate professional discussion about high-poverty students and their literacy learning needs. Each objective is rooted in the professional learning, literacy, equity, and coaching findings in the literature base.

The initial sessions assist school literacy specialists to determine culture structures of literacy achievement gaps. Second, literacy specialist participants gather multiple perspectives from each other and other educational leaders. Third, participants examine cultural beliefs, values, and norms. Finally, literacy specialists engage in preliminary coaching and strategic professional dialogue alongside their own school community engaged in the work of collaboration with school teams.

The first objective is supported by several prominent examples from the research base. In an exploratory qualitative study, Matsamura and Wang (2014) discovered that literacy coaching effectiveness was related to the level of leadership expertise of the literacy specialist as a coach. Training literacy specialists in strategies for school literacy leadership influenced coaching capacity for literacy specialists. Training literacy specialists in literacy leadership also facilitated their growth as effective leaders and expert coaches in the local school. Calo et al. (2015) suggested that the role of the literacy specialist adapt to the demands of 21st century learning environments to situate the literacy specialist as one of the experts in proficiency for learning environments. The findings from the current study suggest that transformation of the role should include equity proficiency for high-poverty student literacy achievement.

The second objective is relative to improved practices for increased literacy achievement in schools (Fletcher et al., 2015). In a case study of literacy coaches, Griffith et al. (2015) discovered that teachers trained as literacy coaches exhibited teacher professional knowledge, influenced positive decision making, guided reflections that were responsive to student need, and balanced required standards and macro factor forces outside of the educators' control. Instructional coaching improved school culture and produced greater literacy achievement for students. Willis (2015) suggested that poverty, race, and literacy significantly influence success for individuals. Willis also indicated that training school leaders to effectively engage in dialogue that engages educators in practice from a sociohistorical context could lead to greater student improvement. This professional development project will allow literacy specialists to gain the prerequisite

knowledge to coach and equip all teachers of reading with equity and cultural proficiency strategies through sociohistorical dialogue for literacy instruction.

The third objective is supported by this study's data that is demonstrative of learning community practices, professional conversations, and collaborative school culture. The third objective includes a heightened awareness of student achievement data as well as professional awareness of the social and historical constructs that readily influence high-poverty students within school culture. DeMarco and Vernon-Faegans (2013) indicated that student improvement could result from heightened sociocultural and sociohistorical awareness. Effective collaboration has the potential to influence literacy instruction and indirectly influence the achievement of high-poverty students (Fletcher et al., 2013). Therefore, the project implementation encourages conversation and collaboration of professionals and revitalizes the learning community practices that review sociocultural and sociohistorical school structures. The professional discourse about each social factor in teaching and learning establish the framework of all the discussion activities during sessions.

The targeted long-term professional learning plans are grounded in inclusive literacy, equity, and coaching content. Sustained reflective activities and sessions where literacy specialists can collaboratively and continuously enhance their equity knowledge and coaching implementation are incorporated. Costa and Garmston (2015) stated that professional learning requires self-reflective opportunities to reach primary, long-term, and district level goals. The learning paths for each professional learning session contain many differentiated reflective opportunities.

Each training session includes opening and closing segments for self-reflection of practices related to literacy coaching for equity. During the beginning of each session, literacy specialists engage in self-reflection of the previous work completed for inclusive literacy and equity. At times, self-reflection will include analysis of informal coaching that may have transpired at their instructional setting.

The second portion of each session includes learning opportunities to collaborate with peers. Collaboration examples include practice coaching, practice of didactic and difficult conversations, and practice of equity dialogue. Participants will provide each other with constructive feedback. Collaborative activities and sessions to engage in conversation for relevant learning community questions are incorporated in the plan.

Each session concludes with a summarizer or closing segment for literacy specialists to summarize new learning and add it to their repertoire of instructional leadership and expertise. According to Lofthouse and Leat (2013), training professional coaches require summarization points to allow participants to construct pathways for newly attained knowledge. Lofthouse and Leat discussed staff resistance to coaching and recommended that trust-based management of coaching be instituted. Thus, thematic closure and synthesis of expert literacy leadership with activities to practice trust-based management are planned for each training session.

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

Implementation of the project requires needed resources and supports. Training facilities for sessions are required. Technology to support the audio and video portions of the training is necessary. In order for successful implementation of the professional

development program, full support is needed from district leaders and school principals.

This includes providing time for literacy specialists to be part of the training. A modified

school district budget to pay for training, materials, consultants, and substitute teachers is

essential for successful implementation.

School district leadership with expertise in literacy achievement and literacy

equity would support implementation. District employed professional development

specialists and outside consultants in adult learning theory and practice would also

support implementation. District personnel who completed training in cultural

proficiency can be relied on to support consultants to implement the training plans and

provide the specific professional development to the audience. In 2015, the district

created strategic plans and system wide goals to improve cultural proficiency for business

and instructional staff. The district strategic initiatives will support the work of

instructional equity and professional coaching for staff. The professional development

model is well situated for immediate implementation to meet school system strategic

goals.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

I identified several barriers to full implementation. Barriers include weaknesses

in previous cultural competency training by participants, length of training time needed

for effective implementation, and budgetary constraints. Limitations of the plan include

the selection of a proper facilitator or consultants for the study. Another barrier to full

implementation is the emotional readiness of literacy specialists for equity and coaching

training. Some stakeholders may view the opportunity as biased toward lower level

learners and wonder how opportunities are equitable for the more advantaged student. The historical context of disadvantage will be challenged and some stakeholders may not be ready to confront the difficulties of subconscious self-discovery. Trust amongst stakeholders will also take time to develop.

To address the barrier of participant readiness, team building and trust work is embedded in the training plan. Ground rules will be established and the element of non-closure from the process is incorporated. Davis (2012) suggested that potential conversation surrounding literacy and other school cultural inequities will require deep introspection. This includes examining personal stories in order to confront beliefs, perceptions, and biases (Singleton, 2014). Participants will self-assess where they are on the cultural proficiency continuum. The proficiency continuum is based on the work of Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones (2013) and requires that participants honestly reflect on their strengths and weaknesses for various educational factors and beliefs related to cultural proficiency. Participants will treat the continuum as a needs assessment and rate themselves on a 1(low) to 10 (high) scale of prior knowledge. Participants will rate their prior awareness and prior understanding of cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, cultural competence, and cultural proficiency.

To address possible limitations in facilitation, a consultant that does not work with literacy specialists on a regular basis should be chosen to support the lead facilitator; a neutral party without connections to the learning community (Singleton, 2014). This could include a professional development specialist within the district or a neighboring

district who typically works with other stakeholder groups. Facilitators with less connection to participants can provide the optimal risk-free environment needed for successful implementation.

The planned extended time frame and differentiation plans are potential solutions to previous cultural competency knowledge barriers. A 24-hour plan provides an adequate amount of time to ensure commitment from necessary stakeholders (Broadly, 2013). Differentiation for adult learning addresses the varying levels of expertise from participants and could prevent any level of resistance from stakeholders that may delay the process. Vanblaere and Davos (2016) indicated that effective professional development regularly assesses readiness of staff. Gravani (2015) submitted that professional development with strategic plans to address staff needs were more effective for school change. Therefore, facilitators will be required to factor in prior knowledge during each training session.

Budgetary limitations can be addressed through grant funding, partnerships from the community, and private organizations that partner with the school district. Threats to the successful implementation from stakeholder resistance can be addressed by district goal setting procedures. A review of student achievement data to show the extent of achievement gap issues for students from disadvantaged populations could be shared with stakeholders to demonstrate project need. Principals and district leaders can also support any possible resistant participants by creating a sense of urgency and establish the importance and relevance for literacy specialists as it relates to local school academic achievement.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Implementing the project portion of this study, a professional development program for literacy specialists entitled *Literacy Coaching for Equity*, is based on the results discussed in Section 2 and will take place during one school year in the school district. Broadley (2012) posited that professional learning based on institutional and instructional equity must be long-term; therefore, the project designed for this study incorporates a total of 24 hours of professional development delivered in 10 sessions for literacy specialists to prepare them as lead literacy equity coaches for local school communities. Training begins with a 6-hour retreat. The remainder of the professional development leadership training meets for 2 hours, once a month over the course of 9 months to provide literacy specialists the time necessary to address any diversity proficiencies.

A pathway for leaders to foster and facilitate conversations that over time develop culturally proficient schools require extended timeframes with outside time for reflection (Coady et al., 2015). To ensure trust with participants, and ongoing discussions of culture, race, and under privilege that may be present in the school community, participants will need to meet regularly and often (Lofthouse & Leat, 2013). The five-phase program creates opportunity to gather perspectives, build on the trust within and among local stakeholders, analyze structures, and develop deepened awareness through several levels of implementation.

During the first phase, a variety of methods are employed to establish trust of participants, assess knowledge, and establish norms. The second phase engages

participants in a broader understanding of equity leadership by using video, articles, and activities that provide participants with perspectives outside of their normal purview. In phases three, four, and five participants develop a framework to examine the issues raised in the first two phases and to identify and explore the beliefs, practices, and policies that contribute to inequity. The participants develop a shared message and create action plans. Action plans result in enhanced leadership capacity to lead discussions about inequities in literacy instruction.

Roles and Responsibilities

Various personnel would be involved in this initiative. School-based literacy specialists are responsible to participate in each training session. I will lead the facilitation of the professional development sessions and collaborate with district leaders, campus principals, outside consultants, building facility personnel, technology services, and audio-visual experts to ensure successful implementation. Each department's responsibilities were selected based upon current roles and responsibilities with other district professional development initiatives.

My role as lead facilitator of the project for the school district is to lead the training as an expert facilitator and provide leadership support to consultants. I will collaborate with the other personnel to ensure responsibilities are carried out, project content is implemented with fidelity, and design differentiation for adult learners where needed. My expertise and leadership will be available to support other department's responsibilities.

District leaders are responsible for communication of the professional development project to the system staff, alignment of strategic initiatives with the project's plan, acquirement of monetary resources, selection of the appropriate facilitator or consultant, outreach to the community outreach, analysis of formative and summative assessments of project effectiveness, and selection and securement of location. Campus principals are expected to support the attendance and engagement of the school-based literacy specialist in the training. Additionally, principals may need to procure substitute funding, align project objectives to school level improvement initiatives, and provide leadership for school based integration. The role of the outside consultants includes preparation of materials, review of the training plan, implementation of the training plan, development of rapport with participants, collaboration with campus principals, partnership with the district leadership, differentiation of content based on participant learning needs, and analysis of formative and summative evaluations

Building facility personnel are responsible for preparation of furniture and room arrangement. Audio-visual services will be expected to acquire and prepare software technology, media devices, wireless Internet, and any other media needs. Technology services may also be needed for maintenance of technological equipment and hardware, which includes laptops, wireless Internet hardware, and audio and video projection devices.

Project Evaluation

Timely professional development assessment addresses adult learner attainment and implementation of learned practices (Lodico et al., 2010). Project evaluation with

formative assessment during the training and summative assessment at the conclusion of the training is designed for participant completion. Formative and summative survey assessments are intended to determine effectiveness and implementation of learned practices. The formative survey assessment is administered at the mid-point of the professional development. The final summative survey assessment is administered at the conclusion of the professional development.

As an evaluation instrument, both formative and summative survey assessments are effective in evaluating the effects of professional development (Anderson et al., 2012; Gravani, 2015; Lazar & Reich, 2016). Closed and open-ended formative and summative surveys provide district leaders and professional development presenters the immediate input needed to make mid-point adjustments and revisions to training plans for future implementation. Moreover, effective professional development trainings apply summative assessment to scrutinize carry-over of skill and practices (Gravani, 2015). Open-ended narrative response evaluations were chosen for this project. Adult learning needs are surveyed, and professional training plans adjusted based on the input collected. For this project, formative and summative assessments were designed to evaluate carry-over and gather rich and extensive information.

The formative assessment instrument for the project is located in Appendix A. Open-ended formative assessment questions assess attainment of coaching techniques. The formative assessment checks for understanding in leadership learning and local school application. The questions ask participants to reflect on internal beliefs, changes in beliefs as a result of training content, and implications from such results. School and

learning community implications are assessed as well as participant requests for learning style provisions.

The summative assessment instrument is located in Appendix A as part of the project materials. Summative assessment gauges the effectiveness of the training objectives and content. Questions are used to determine the effectiveness of the professional development implementation for school implementation and improved student learning. Student achievement data is requested as a part of the assessment to examine evidence of improved practice, other successes, and challenges from the implementation.

Consultants and district leaders are required to review the open-ended evaluation data to determine training effectiveness. Adjustments to future training may be required. The content and process learning of participants is analyzed to determine success of the new literacy equity knowledge of participants. Principals are encouraged to review data from assessments to further support systemic efforts. Literacy specialists are invited to review formative and summative data to review successes and challenges of the professional development model. Input from assessments will be used to refine the project syllabus and scope and sequence for future professional development. Finally, assessments will determine the effectiveness of coaching practice implementation at schools.

Project Implications

The problem of low reading achievement for high-poverty students is addressed through professional development of literacy specialists. The professional development

influences the literacy specialist's capacity to coach learning community members. Coaching sessions will engage the local teachers in dialogue about high-poverty learning needs and increase school-based cultural proficiency and cultural responsiveness practice. Through the training, the literacy specialist will become the lead peer-coaching expert. The coaching sessions and literacy specialist expertise will influence a positive change in teacher practice for high quality literacy instruction for students. The ability to create understanding and respect of culture and family difference promotes the success of all students by confronting socioeconomic diversity challenges. Moreover, the conversations and actions that result from the coaching process will provide the local setting, as well as other settings, with the tools and strategies needed to confront learning barriers (Lindsey et al., 2013).

Quality education creates social change by providing a foundation by which members of society can minimize the effects of sociocultural and opportunity disparities and differences (Gorski, 2013). The achievement gap for high-poverty students as well as other disadvantaged student groups has provided a springboard for critical dialogue and a continued search for the best practices for school communities to defend students from disadvantages (Philpott & Dagenais, 2012). Such discourse on equitable education for all student groups stimulates critical dialogue about the implications for teaching in today's diverse and ever-changing society. Providing structures and effective tools for communities that promote increased teacher collaborative capacity and student literacy performance could enhance the education of students and augment future social change. Therefore, the resultant positive social change from this project could include increased

college and career readiness, increased graduation rates, increased earning power, and upward social mobility for students in many learning communities.

Local Community

Literacy gaps are a complex and multifaceted issue. As discussed in the first literature review in Section 1, a number of sociocultural factors contribute to the performance of children obstructed by achievement gaps (Fletcher, 2013). This project addresses the prerequisites of learners in the local community as a means to address the multi-faceted and complex gaps for high-poverty students. Each is addressed by training a leader (the literacy specialist) with the essential skills to address learning needs of stakeholders. Students benefit from the opportunity to engage in literature and textual material that are relevant to their cultural and individual needs as a result of newly acquired literacy specialist leadership expertise (Daniel et al., 2015). As a result of the project plans, literacy specialists attain the leadership skills required to support improvement in literacy programs. With improved school literacy programs, families benefit, because increased reading and writing awareness can benefit family structure and build additional opportunities for children; reading success leads to greater success in school (Gorski, 2013). Administrators benefit from the project because supplementary leadership structures and increased concentration on equity in the school literacy program challenges the current state of instruction and propels achievement (Hagans & Good III, 2013; Singleton, 2014).

Community partners benefit because enhanced literacy for local students adequately prepares a future work force. Teachers benefit from the project because it

provides literacy specialists with decision-making skills to determine teacher professional

development needs. The project focuses on current educational issues with the potential

to increase teaching and learning confidence and foster additional solutions to meet

student needs. Increased confidence and expanded teaching repertoire supports expanded

teaching expertise (Willis, 2015). Mastery of equity in literacy supports greater teacher

understanding of the social and cultural contexts that contribute to learning in schools

(Fletcher, 2013). Greater understanding of the institutional social and cultural extraneous

(outside of the school) factors of the student population may well prime enhanced

pedagogy and mastery in teaching, which furthers the professional knowledge base of

educators (Cortes, 2013; Ntelioglou et al., 2015).

Far-Reaching

This opportunity responds to cultural diversity in the larger social context. It

promotes cultural proficiency for the involved stakeholders because recognition of

institutional barriers can ensure educational opportunity for all students (Singleton,

2014). To reiterate what was discussed in Section 1, poverty rates from shifting

economic demographics are rising for children in the United States (NEA, 2015). As a

result, the task of effectively closing gaps and promoting positive achievement outcomes

for all learners is more urgent (NEA, 2015). Additionally in the United States, there has

also been a noticeable increase in economic inequality with a majority (51%) of public

school students coming from low-income families (Colclough, 2012). The project

responds to the demographic shifts in public schools and gives educators tools, strategies,

and best practices to develop high-poverty reading and writing skills to reduce academic achievement disparities.

The project influences the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context through a research-based district level response to each context by developing a shared decision making leadership paradigm shift for literacy specialists. The problem of inequity requires effective leadership attention in 21st century schooling institutions (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). In a discussion of new 21st century leadership standards, Galloway and Ishimaru suggested that reforming schools requires a prioritization of efforts to include narrowing the gap for students who already come to school with learning weaknesses due to the constraints of their disadvantaged background. The inequitable undercurrents of learning weaknesses from high poverty contribute to less achievement, lower graduation rates, and inevitably less future opportunity for career and college for under advantaged students (Ullucci & Howard 2015). To remediate such disadvantage and learning weaknesses, this project addresses learning factors from under privilege and challenges literacy specialists to review assumptions and institutional norms that contribute to lesser achievement with a shared leadership lens.

Conclusion

The project, a professional development program for literacy specialists entitled *Literacy Coaching for Equity*, is designed to provide school based literacy specialists with the leadership training to consistently implement literacy coaching and equity conversations in their respective local school communities. The data from this study indicates that effective schools factor in background experiences of students to make

connections with the concepts being taught. The data also suggests that the incorporation of responsive pedagogy that embraces student backgrounds and experiences improves literacy achievement. As a result, a project that focuses on strong professional capacity through professional instructional coaching training is recommended for practice.

The literature review empirically addressed professional development project genre theory, evidence appropriate as a solution to the problem, and theory and research to support the professional development project choice. Provisions from the research base for the project content include adult learning strategies to engage participants in collaborative equity, literacy, and culturally responsive professional learning experiences. Implications involve student, teacher, community, and administrator growth in learning abilities.

The project evaluation methods encompass formative and summative assessment of professional learning participants. Implications for social change comprise of influences to the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. Increased teacher collaborative capacity and student literacy performance enhances the education of students. Enhanced education and social change from the project includes increased college and career readiness, increased graduation rates, increased earning power, and upward social mobility for students.

A continuation of the project's implications for the future is described in Section 4. Reflections and conclusions of the research in this doctoral study as well as self-reflection and introspection of self as a researcher-practitioner is included in the next

section. The project's strengths, influence for social change, and implications for future

research are presented.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The ultimate goal of early elementary school is to successfully teach children to read and write (Littky & Grabelle 2004). Many high-poverty students enter school with language deficits and disadvantages in literacy learning (Darling-Hammond, 2013). In educator attempts to meet all student learning needs, high-poverty disadvantages make meeting education needs and standards more challenging (Fletcher, 2013). Children living in high-poverty environments are at an increased risk for literacy failure in schools, especially those with high concentrations of impoverished populations (Gorski 2013; Putnam, 2015). These students, like all students, need to complete fourth grade as proficient readers and writers as a prerequisite for greater opportunity in school and in life (Fletcher, 2013). I learned from the findings in this study, that educators have the ability to help students reach the prerequisite of proficient literacy.

Many U.S. schools with great concentrations of high-poverty students have failed to reach the goal of graduating competent readers (De Marco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013). But, some schools have accomplished this task (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Some schools regularly meet the needs and challenges of high-poverty student literacy (De Marco & Vernon-Faegans, 2013). I studied one such school. The school selected for this case study exhibited best practices of equity of expectations, a constructive and student-centered school culture, and a PLC immersed in professional coaching, cultural competency, and literacy leader expertise. As a result, the project, a professional development program for literacy specialists entitled *Literacy Coaching for Equity*, provides school-based literacy specialists with the leadership training they need to

consistently implement literacy coaching and equity conversations in respective local school communities.

In this section, the project's strengths for addressing the problem are considered. Several recommendations from the limitations of the project design are shared as well as alternatives for problem remediation. I analyze new learning from this project study and discuss my reflections as a scholar, practitioner, project developer, and researcher. Finally, implications and directions for the education field and future research are addressed and suggestions are made for educators.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The ongoing and long-term timeframe of the professional development training plan is a strength. The professional learning plan I developed may create consistency for the local school district by creating shared common language and expectations for professional coaching. The project is a flexible starting point for reducing literacy achievement gaps that result from institutional factors. Schools can use the leadership learning from literacy specialists and work as individual teams with other key stakeholders to develop strategies and frameworks that meet the unique needs of each campus. Professional learning that allows for autonomy in implementation and flexibility based on organizational needs stimulates organizational improvement (Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, in my design, I considered flexibility, autonomy, and individual campus organizational pace, which should positively influence systemic change.

Realistic and experiential practice sessions for participants are another strength in the project's scope and design. Participants will engage in authentic practice exercises to

refine instructional coaching capacities. Gladwell (2008) indicates that to become an expert in any one behavior or skill, one must have 10,000 hours of practice. The professional development project incorporates extensive practice sessions with self-reflective exercises. Practice coaching sessions and self-reflective components are designed to offer participants a safe and risk-free environment. Differentiation is provisioned through participant practice that integrate the needs of students at each individual setting.

A limitation is that study data collected at one site may not be sufficient for generalizability of results. Although use of a single case study site may offer deep descriptive pragmatic knowledge, it does not allow a researcher to prove causation for other environments (Hatch, 2002). To further reinforce themes and findings from this study and reinforce project training plans, additional research at other schools is required. Regardless of data limitations, the present study provides other educators and researchers with a framework to recreate the inquiry at additional sites and engage in further exploration of inclusive literacy and equity practices for student reading and writing achievement. The interest, peer-to-peer professional conversation, and pending research in the field could lead to greater development of pedagogical or professional development practices that further improve school communities and contribute to future successful achievement by high-poverty students.

Also, the selection of a narrow audience (literacy specialists) can be considered a limitation. Entire school leadership teams could engage in this training. To make systemic change and truly engage in professional conversation about inclusive and

equitable practices in literacy instruction, a common language for educators is needed (Singleton, 2014). To be more effective and systemic, administrators and classroom teachers may also require this training to develop a common language about literacy improvement. A risk-free environment may need to be replicated for all school-based stakeholders to establish a common framework and professional vocabulary.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

I considered several alternative solutions to the problem. A community-based equity study that affords the local school an opportunity to discuss the problem and create additional solutions in partnership with local business and other community agencies was considered. Such a program would require additional monetary resources to compensate professional staff for time outside of the business day. Remedial intervention programs were considered but were deemed impractical based on study data. Data from this study indicate that intervention programs were not as successful as high quality instruction derived from effective coaching and professional learning practice, so I ruled out interventions as a possible project.

Other alternative considerations include (a) training for administrators and teachers rather than literacy specialists; (b) a 3-day training module with supervisory follow-up; (c) an online training; or (d) a hybrid of online and in-person training. According to Gravani (2105), each of these adult learning options is beneficial for a myriad of stakeholder groups but is well beyond the scope of findings considered for this single project design. The practical choice was to train one highly capable staff member,

the school's literacy specialist, in effective coaching strategies and to infuse inclusive and equitable practices within the literacy program through an immersive year-long process.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

During this project study I established new skills as a scholar. The active pursuit of knowledge at a scholarly and doctoral level was achieved through the proposal stage, research and synthesis of the literature, data collection, project development, and ongoing self-reflection. I gained intellectual experience and knowledge from critical and constructive feedback of my committee members. The coursework prepared me for the project in terms of research and reaching saturation with published literature. Moreover, the application of coursework learning, coupled with the expertise of my committee, granted me the familiarity required to complete a substantial scholarly project such as this. I learned how to identify a gap in practice and how to use archival data to identify a problem. I assembled new techniques and strategies to develop research questions and study methodology from scholarly questions. I gained knowledge on how to design a study to answer research questions and use the findings to inform practice. I became well-educated on the requirements of effective professional learning adult curriculum. I gained more learning on leadership and social change. I also learned that my decisions and study are far-reaching and important; they will potentially influence students, teachers, leaders, and communities in many positive ways.

Project Development and Evaluation

During the review and analysis of the data collected in this study, I learned how to consider an educational project as a solution to a gap in practice. I chose a professional

development project as the genre after careful consideration of the findings from this study and the literature base that I reviewed. I learned that professional development planning, development, and evaluation require extensive knowledge in data analysis, current educational research, and adult learning theory. I refined my literature search skills to ascertain research that supported professional development as an effective strategy to improve teaching and learning. I also gained knowledge on the importance of evaluation in professional development and discovered that both formative and summative evaluations are required to assess the strength and limitations of professional training.

The knowledge, conceptual understanding, and thinking skills of adult learners are significant to consider in developing a professional learning plan. I learned how to use data from the study and literature to design a project with adult learning considerations in place. The data provided a direction for the project choice. The data offered a catalyst for the literature search related to both the project genre and the project content. The literature reaffirmed the choice of genre and content. I became well-read in scholarly literature and gained the ability to select scholarly and credible literature to support project vision, ideas, objectives, plans, material creation, presenter selection, and audience selection.

I learned that professional learning plans require flexible designs with provisions for facilitator elasticity and decision-making. The instructional outcomes for adult learners must reflect the learning needs and professional capacity to support viable results for improved teaching (Tam, 2015). The audience must be considered in the

development of professional learning plans (Gravani 2015). I discovered that flexibility

in project development requires that professional learning activities remain central to the

overarching objectives. For successful implementation of professional learning,

overarching objectives are to be designed based on data analysis and district need. Upon

reflection, I realized that the political undercurrents in school improvement and district

resources also drive the decisions in professional development trends.

Leadership and Change

Leadership and change require humility, perseverance, and trust when engaged in

the process of research design and project development. Humility came in many forms,

which included: (a) the ability to use critical feedback from my committee to enhance my

writing; (b) the ability to reflect on lack of research or scholarly knowledge, which

created feelings of vulnerability; and (c) the ability to accept fluid goals and timelines. I

learned that humble, perseverant, and trusting leadership can support the work of

investigative inquiry for data driven solutions to gaps in practice.

Perseverance was learned when challenges surfaced. Challenges included

schedules for data collection, revisions for writing, transcription of data, analysis of data

to determine themes, synthesis of current literature, and time management. I learned to

trust the research process and ask questions. Often I wanted to develop conclusions or

rush to judgments based on my own thoughts, values, and experiences before the

adequate applied research was completed. I paused and reflected during such times of

supposition to be sure I minimized biases and bracketed predispositions. This ensured

greater validity and reliability of themes developed from data collection.

Through the process of project development, I learned that leadership and change in education requires a strong scholarly knowledge base and the ability to critically review scholarly dialogue, literature, and research for application in local school issues and needs. The 21st century educational leader possesses the ability to anticipate needs of stakeholders and utilize current information with specificity. The research base is expansive and compels leaders to critically synthesize the information to meet the needs of the local institution. From the synthesis of research and learning in this study, I was able to gain confidence and develop a project to meet local system needs. I also learned how to connect the project to other research-based practices while contributing new ideas to the education field.

Through the problem identification process, initial literature review, and methodology development, I discovered and integrated a four-step process that assimilates scholarship with leadership. The first step is to identify a problem or gap in practice based on data. Once the problem is identified, the second step is to search the field for the current knowledge in addressing the problem. The third step, based on the learning and scholarship of others, is to take action based on that knowledge and implement steps for change. The final step is to reflect and refine the actions taken in collaborative inquiry with shared leaders. Each step is in an effort to change and improve the teaching and learning process for every student. This process can be used for any gap in educational practice.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

My learning and practice as a scholar evolved throughout the doctoral capstone project study. I gained knowledge from my chair, committee, peers, and other professors throughout the writing of this study. I learned how to review the current status of school achievement data to identify a problem. I gained expertise in the articulation of a problem statement driven through trends and public archival information. I learned to strategically narrow my problem statement so that it could be researched through scholarly methodology.

As a scholar, I learned how to use a problem statement to design specific research questions for study. It was a challenge to design specific research questions that aligned to the problem statement. I learned and reminded myself throughout the capstone process, that alignment to the problem statement was fundamental in scholarly study.

During the literature review portions, I learned the challenges of scholarly exploration with online databases. It required tenacity and consistency to find appropriate credible literature. I discovered how to use expert Walden librarians to help me refine searches. During synthesis of the literature, I often questioned and reflected on whether I reached saturation. I grew in self-awareness and learned to pay close attention to my thinking to recognize patterns in literature. In recognition of patterns, I learned how to synthesize research and find themes. Synthesis of the current knowledge base was challenging. I realized early on in the capstone process, that I needed to develop strategies to gather information, recognize salient information, reflect on how it related to the problem of study, and use it to build a proposal. I acknowledged that my own self-

directed and self-developed amalgamation strategies were necessary in completing the research and project development.

I discovered that choice and design of methodology to effectively answer and align to the research question is a challenge. I had to determine and select which methodological choices were best suited to research the questions. I also learned how to narrow down methodology to determine the best design for the study. I became better educated on qualitative methodology and components of effective case-study research. This includes the ability to choose an appropriate sample, design data collection instruments based on literature, transcribe data, and analyze data for emergent themes. I also learned that conclusions drawn from this study require critical reflection and connection to other current literature sources.

I improved as a scholarly writer and learned how to be more succinct and scientific in my syntax. My desire to improve the learning situations for high-poverty students propelled my exploration. The scholarly passion for finding solutions to the local problem gained the interest of peers, family, and executive level district leadership. I anticipate that other scholars and researchers will use findings from this study and the project for additional study and practice for meeting high-poverty literacy needs. The excitement from others in the educational field has clarified the pursuit of excellence in the project design.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As a campus principal practitioner, I learned the importance of sharing leadership with others to improve the teaching and learning process. I also learned the importance

of collaborative and shared decision-making process based on data. The role of campus principal is complicated and overwhelming; one cannot do everything needed in isolation to meet the needs of an ever-changing student population. The role requires tenacity, resiliency, and the ability to delegate and mobilize others. The findings in this study indicate that a vital professional partner in school leadership is the literacy specialist. This doctoral study reaffirmed for me the requirement of a trusting professional partnership between the administration and the literacy specialist. I learned that school improvement and change in literacy programs are more successful when instructional literacy leaders are part of shared strategic decision-making. As a practitioner, I will create stronger foundations with leadership teams that regularly incorporate the literacy specialist as the expert for school literacy instruction and improvement.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

The design of a project based solution substantiated by literature and problem based original research offered me the chance to learn how to develop an innovative project to address educational trends. I learned how to incorporate the literature and the findings from this study into a project as an effective solution. In doing so, I gained critical thinking strategies that applied the findings from this study to a project genre that best meets the needs of teachers and students. I discovered how to use the findings to influence a literature search. Once I completed the literature search, I learned how to funnel the literature and compare research-based concepts to findings from this study. I discovered relationships that guided project content. While in the midst of project creation, I gained evaluative skills to review and reflect on both the findings and

literature to ensure project objectives and content were solution based and connected to the problem.

Previous to the project in this study, I had little experience in professional learning development for adult learners. Meeting the needs of adult learners is different from meeting student learning needs. Professional development is a major factor in improving the quality of education for students (Gravani. 2015). In order to improve education quality, professional learning for adult learners needs to be sustained during and after professional learning sessions. As a result, I learned to develop sustained professional learning to meet adult learning needs.

I learned that individual learning needs of participants must be considered. Leaders who systemically provide professional learning objectives to meet individual learning needs create greater effectiveness in professional learning (Hadley, Waniganayake, & Shepherd, 2015). Time management of professional learning and established systems of support are also required for effective professional learning systems. Ongoing and long-term time frames are required to establish embedded practice. For professional learning to be most effective, projects and plans require participants to be immersed in sharing ideas, stories, tips, and resources, in overcoming obstacles. The project for this study maintains this premise and regularly incorporates idea sharing and collaboration to overcome high-poverty literacy gap challenges.

I learned that the challenges and problems of the local school are similar to other school communities. I also learned that commitment to student learning requires data based planning for improvement. To change standard operating procedures in schools, a

sustained and effective professional learning plan is required for teacher and educator

integration. Collaborative school environments built on professional trust and inquiry

can be developed through such professional learning plans.

Stakeholder relationships are the foundation for competency-based education in

complex educational environments. For example, the relationships educators make with

leaders, students, families, and each other are cursory for equitable practice that promotes

greater achievement. I learned that educational projects as solutions to identified gaps in

practice compel educators to share responsibility in influencing social change. I learned

that project development, regardless of audience, genre, or content, is a collaborative

process where social change results from the shared work of a myriad of educational

stakeholders. In the design of the project portion of this study or professional learning

plan, I learned that leadership can influence others and provide educators the tools to

plan, teach, and learn in such a way that makes a difference through school culture and

shared human interactions. My leadership in project development could potentially help

other educators to upgrade the teaching and learning that takes place in classrooms, thus

improving high-poverty student literacy achievement.

Reflections on the Importance of the Work

The importance of the project design and the developed practices for improved

literacy achievement for students is far-reaching and necessary. Too many failing

schools exist in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2013). National assessments

illustrate that achievement gaps exist for high-poverty learners. Beginning in the year

2008, a trend of shrinking human and fiscal resources for public school districts

developed (Berkovich, 2014). Therefore, a project that requires minimal fiscal resources but addresses achievement gaps with self-reflection and concrete practice for educators is important for sustained improvement of public education.

This study and the developed project are one solution to an expansive problem. Project outcomes are significant, in that teaching staff will grow and reach more learners. By reaching more learners, high-poverty student literacy rates could increase that may result in increased graduation rates and future college and career opportunities for impoverished students. This project study places educators in training plans to work collaboratively to ensure every student succeeds in literacy. It promotes advocacy, literacy specialist coaching expertise, and quality instruction to ensure that high-poverty student needs are targeted and adequately planned and provisioned for in literacy instruction.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The project's implications for social change are a substantial element of this doctoral project study. The potential impact for positive change exists at several levels. Implications within the study's boundaries are at the individual, family, organizational, societal, and policy levels.

At the individual level, the student in high poverty will benefit from the increased awareness that educators have on meeting individual literacy needs. Increased awareness will positively impact the individual student's literacy achievement with increased opportunity for student success. Increased literacy achievement will give students greater confidence and opportunity for academic, social, and emotional success in school. With

enhanced literacy, the individual student possesses greater opportunity for college and career preparedness (Fletcher et al., 2013). Such preparation will lead to opportunities for upward social mobility.

Family literacy is vital in supporting early child language and reading development (Topor et al., 2010). Implications from the project in learning environments could support increased literacy for the family. Increased social mobility for the student may provide additional opportunity for the family to experience success and foster increased parental involvement. Family activities that reinforce, strengthen, and build family literacy skills could foster greater reading and writing motivation. Success with literacy could foster school and home partnerships that supports increased student achievement. Strengthened family and student literacy could result in successful graduation rates in later school years.

The organizational level is impacted at the local level and district level. Professional development will provide the capacity necessary to instill a heightened focus on literacy inequities that exist as part of school culture. Literacy specialist expertise in equity measures for literacy instruction will benefit local teachers and administrators. The local setting could use outcomes from the project to support future instructional decisions and practices. Decisions and practices that factor in equity for literacy instruction may lead to greater achievement for high-poverty students in reading and writing. The project engages professionals in uncovering the context of achievement gaps to support school-based coaching. An increased understanding of the contexts of disadvantage is a catalyst for school communities to begin the collaborative work that

brings all students to literacy standards by the end of fourth grade. An increase of student readers and writers by the end of fourth grade could create greater levels of achievement throughout students' public school careers in a myriad of subject, content, and social, areas.

At the district level, social change is addressed through practices that increase the capacity of the members of the entire organization. A culture of understanding and cognitive focus on student literacy needs will enhance decision-making for district level leaders. The pursuit of greater achievement for high-poverty students essentially reduces or eliminates the achievement gap and bridges excellence and competency for disadvantaged learners. Increasing competency for learners may mitigate the influence of high poverty on district resources.

At the societal level, the project can be used to improve teaching education programs and higher-level certificate and degree programs. In order to further reduce achievement gaps due to disadvantage, especially for high-poverty literacy improvement, teacher preparation programs and specialist certification programs must reconsider program outcomes and include elements of equity training. Components of the project can be used by other school districts and education organizations to further advance their workforce capacity in teaching high-poverty learners.

At the policy level, equity discussions and improved competencies support future executive policy making regarding curriculum implementation, school staffing, scheduling, calendar decisions, literacy interventions, and professional learning plans. Policy making centered on equity of literacy instruction, could instill the indirect support

needed for student literacy achievement and provision for increased opportunity for current and future students. Social change in the form of increased graduation rates, workforce development, and career readiness for students could result from such policy changes.

Overall, enhanced equity capacity of education professionals, regardless of title or organization, could provide the tools to address high-poverty literacy achievement gap undercurrents. Policy may be able to address undercurrents such as bias, belief in student ability, and micro and macro factors that institutionally cause further disadvantage. The project builds awareness of the sociocultural disadvantage phenomena. A more equitable education system may lead to improved social outcomes for present and future students (Gorski, 2013). With awareness, the adults working for and with children can begin conversations and actions to build a better and more equitable system of education.

Recommendations for Practice

The project can be applied to other schools, school districts, higher education institutions, and in policy making. Although the project was designed with literacy specialists as a primary audience, the project can be applied to other school and district educators. The project can be replicated with other school systems, individual school campuses, school staff, and district personnel. Higher education institutions educational leadership programs could implement the project. Educational organizations that regularly establish standards or complete field research can measure project effectiveness in school districts to improve methods and practice. The same organizations can use project content to develop policy or teacher training curriculum.

Applications of this project study and the potential for the education profession exist in PLC practice. When used to train other school leaders and staff, equitable teaching and learning strategies could be used in PLC improvement efforts to reduce disparities in literacy achievement. Project genre and content could be used to enhance PLCs and to build greater learning community trust. The project content can be used to build a consistent common professional equity language and vocabulary for staff to use when engaged in dialogue about equitable teaching and learning practices. When applied to a greater educational audience, the project content and genre instigates the restoration of PLC practices. Refined practices could include the collaborative, strategic, coherent, inclusive, shared, and equitable school culture frameworks for improved student performance.

Recommendations for Future Research

An implication for future research includes the consideration of several methods of additional study. Quantitative studies on professional coaching to measure the effectiveness of equity and literacy coaching paradigm shifts in local settings could support this study's findings. Possible experimental studies that measure student reading achievement before and after the project's implementation will garner more information of project effectiveness. Quantitative experimental methods, which measure instructional coaching effectiveness related to literacy achievement, could determine the effectiveness of professional coaching development. A quasi-experimental study that surveys staff on instructional coaching as it relates to increased teaching capacity could support greater understanding of coaching effectiveness. A quantitative investigation for rural student

literacy and rural student language acquisition from specific research based interventions would also enhance the learning from this project study and could provide other plausible solutions for meeting student literacy needs.

Also, using a similar design, methodology, and sampling at other high-poverty rural school sites could support this capstone project's findings and outcomes. Phenomenological studies that explore the phenomena related to barriers in professional learning communities as they work toward high-poverty literacy remediation could support future scholar and practitioner improvement efforts in high-poverty literacy achievement. Finally, mixed methods research that explores the effectiveness of coaching on high-poverty literacy achievement through quantitative measures followed by in depth qualitative inquiry at several schools or districts could uncover additional solutions.

Conclusion

The local problem addressed in this study was the low reading achievement of high-poverty students in a small rural school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of a campus principal and teachers at a high-poverty and high achieving elementary school to determine best practices in meeting high-poverty student literacy needs. The sample school selected for this study was characterized by equity of teacher and student expectations, a constructive and student centered school culture, and a PLC that was steeped in professional coaching, cultural competency, and literacy leader expertise. The data collected in this study depict practices that can be replicated for other school settings as a solution to the problem.

The project, a professional development program for literacy specialists entitled

Literacy Coaching for Equity, was designed to address the problem and to provide school

based literacy specialists with the leadership training to consistently implement literacy

coaching and equity conversations in their respective local school communities. Such

coaching could propel literacy success for high-poverty students. Project strengths

include the ongoing nature of the professional development program and the practical and

simplistic elements of coaching practice and self-reflection. The inability to train all

school stakeholders or develop common language for the entire school community are

limitations in the project design. Providing similar professional development to

administrators and other members of the learning community are alternative solutions to

the problem and address the limitations in the project.

I learned about scholarship, gained high-level knowledge, and developed my

skills as a scholar. I achieved scholarly practice through regular self-reflection during the

proposal stage, research and synthesis of the literature, data collection, project

development, and ongoing collaboration with my committee. The knowledge, conceptual

understanding, and thinking skills of adult learners are the ultimate factors in developing

a professional learning plan. Leadership for change is a four-step process of problem

identification, analysis of current knowledge, action planning, and reflection. I grew as a

scholar during the capstone project through more effective writing and scholarly research

exploration.

As a practicing campus principal, I learned that school improvement and change

in literacy programs are more successful when instructional literacy leaders are valued for

expertise in leadership and improvement. As a project developer, I learned how to meet the needs of adult learners and plan sustained and authentic professional development. The project's potential for systemic social change includes educational leadership development for equitable policymaking and enhanced equitable teaching capacities that lead to greater graduation rates and workforce preparation for students. Educator preparation programs can increase public education student success, through inclusion of project elements for future practitioners. Enhanced student success will lead to greater social outcomes for present and future students. The project portion of this study is a collaborative, strategic, coherent, inclusive, shared, and equitable professional learning structure for high-poverty literacy performance with potential to create a positive difference for students at the local setting and for many other teaching and learning organizations.

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Appendix A: Project

Literacy Coaching for Equity

Literacy Specialist Training for
Inclusive Literacy Professional Coaching

Professional Learning Project
Designed by: Giuseppe Di Monte

April, 2017

Literacy Coaching for Equity

Literacy Specialist Training for
Inclusive Literacy Professional Coaching

Professional Learning Overview

Professional Learning Overview

Overarching Goals:
The goal of this professional learning training plan is to develop literacy specialist expertise as literacy coaches. Mastery of literacy coaching with an equity lens will positively influence local school literacy training and teaching practices.

Objectives:
Objective 1: Literacy specialists will learn to build leadership capacity to lead as experts in peer coaching at their respective learning community.

Objective 2: Literacy specialists will gain the perquisite knowledge to coach and equip other teachers of reading with equity and cultural proficiency strategies that ensembles cultural responsiveness for literacy.

Objective 3: Literacy specialists will gain expertise in peer coaching models that incorporate professional dialogue about high-poverty students and their literacy learning needs.

Summary:

Sessions will require that participants to examine how educators have been influenced by culture and experiences and how an individual's background and experiences influence one's work and interactions with others, including students. Also, focusing efforts primarily on students, families, and others will help participants understand and explain differences in literacy achievement. As issues surrounding achievement gaps are addressed, an environment of trust must be established that fosters candid and open conversations. The commitment to effectively talk about possible aspects of culture, ethnicity, race, biases, and stereotypes should lead to a discussion about the achievement gap and the individual and collective efforts to continue closing the literacy gap.

Participants will engage in learning activities that involve self-reflection of personal practices, organization of practices, collaboration/discussions with others, analysis of journal articles, observation of incidents of bias and stereotypes, analysis of literacy teaching and learning practices, practice of instructional coaching, and participation in discussions from various community members.

Core-Learning Outcomes for School Communities

By the completion of the professional learning sessions, participants will be able to coach the following learning outcomes for their respective literacy communities through an equity lens. By the completion of the 24 hours of training, participants will have implemented each of these objectives on their assigned campus in at least 1 coaching session for each grade level or subject level team and integrate objectives in future literacy specialist led professional development and coaching sessions.

- Support staff in understanding reading as a complex process
- Support staff in exploration of the purpose and importance of leveled reading behaviors
- Plan and organize an efficient and effective guided reading program based on equitable practices and student reading behaviors
- Use equitable structures and practices in guided reading to help individual readers construct an effective process for reading
- Engage in peer observation of guided reading across grade levels and provide peer feedback
- Use systematic observations and assessment to form equitable groups and guide teaching
- Observe and assess readers to inform teaching decisions
- Analyze data and assessment
- Respond to the precise learning needs of individuals
- Utilize effective decision-making during the guided reading lesson that promotes equity in the culture of the school and classroom
- Identify the high-priority of shifts, in relationship to achievement gaps in learning to focus on at each text level
- Create a learning environment within which literacy and language can flourish regardless of student socioeconomic, culture, race
- Understand the role of facilitative talk in supporting readers across grade levels
- Utilize effective decision making during the guided reading lesson
- Collaborate with a school community focused on raising the achievement of all students in reading and writing

<u>**Phase Implementation**</u>

- Phase 1- A variety of methods will be employed to elicit input from stakeholders about families, students, community members, and partnerships. The participants will develop a shared message and begin to create a plan to include the entire school community.
- Phase 2- Participants will engage in a broader understanding of the issues by using video, articles, and activities that provide participants with additional perspectives of literacy-based achievement.

- Phase 3- Participants will develop a framework to examine the issues raised in the first two phases and to identify and explore the beliefs, practices, and policies that contribute to inequity in literacy achievement for learners.
- Phase 4- Participants will develop a framework to examine the issues raised in the first two phases and to identify and explore the beliefs, practices, and policies that contribute to inequity in literacy achievement for learners (focused on high-poverty students).
- Phase 5- Using the outcomes from the previous phases, participants will create action plans for school communities to begin the journey and work toward a change in policies, actions, and behaviors for literacy instruction of students.

Coaching Outcomes for Participants

- Literacy specialists will develop coaching practices and content knowledge to include co-teaching, collaboration, and facilitation of instructional strategies, modeling, observing, and providing feedback.
- Literacy specialists will identify equitable literature for use in selected content areas in support of the curriculum.
- Literacy specialists will develop coaching strategies for curricular support
- Literacy specialists will model and coach instructional methods in a variety of settings (whole group and small group) and provide follow-up support.
- Literacy specialists will collaborate with and coach teachers on the use of assessment data to plan equitable instruction; analyze school literacy data and plan for future literacy needs.
- Literacy specialists will collaborate with school teams to select instructional materials to meet student needs.
- Literacy specialist will actively lead and participate in collaborative equitable instructional planning.
- Literacy specialists will work with school teams to assess students using a variety of measures to determine appropriate placement and specific instructional needs.
- Literacy specialists will conduct classroom visitations for peer coaching.
- Literacy specialists will remain grounded in content standards and objectives in order to facilitate integrated and concept-based instruction.

Instructional Methods

Demonstrations
Guided Practice
Inquiry
Reflection
Journaling
Explanation with Examples
Whole Group collaboration
Small Group activities
Individual self-reflection

Professional Learning Framework

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT
Grow professionally in current literacy topics

⇩

INTEGRATION FOR THE ELA CLASSROOM
Differentiate content for teaching, learning, and professional development

⇩

CONNECTING INTERVENTION TO CLASSROOM
Meet the needs of struggling student groups (high-poverty)

⇩

INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING FOR THE ELA CLASSROOM
Connect with and empower others during coaching and professional learning

⇩

COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS
Collaborate in small groups discussing current issues with language arts instruction
and/or assessment

Literacy Coaching for Equity

Literacy Specialist Training for
Inclusive Literacy Professional Coaching

Professional Learning Schedule

Professional Learning Schedule

AUGUST	
6 Hours Phase 1	➔ Introductions -Year Long Plan ➔ Cultural proficiency -Definitions ➔ Telling your story ➔ Cultural structures in schools ➔ High-poverty implications for literacy learning ➔ Literacy coaching for equity ➔ Peer coaching strategies ➔ Self-reflection

SEPTEMBER	
2 Hours PHASE 1	➔ Examining individual values ➔ Analyze school institutional culture and its influence on literacy achievement ➔ Coaching implications for school institutional culture
*Participant practice	Reflection Journal

OCTOBER	
2 Hours Phase 1	➔ Instructional tools for coaching equity ➔ Coaching as a culturally proficient leader ➔ Leading teams in text and material selection
*Participant practice	Reflection Journal

NOVEMBER	
2 Hours	→ Measuring school cultural proficiency and readiness → Cultural proficiency and the achievement gap: Influences on instruction → Coaching for examination of perspectives
Phase 2	
*Participant practice	Reflection Journal and practice coaching session

DECEMBER	
2 Hours	→ Cultural proficiency: Coaching for student literacy assessment → Cultural proficiency: Coaching for writing instruction
Phase 2	
*Participant practice	Reflection Journal and practice coaching sessions

JANUARY	
2 Hours	→ Explore beliefs and practices that schools implement that contribute to inequities → Explore policies that contribute to inequity in literacy achievement for learners → Explore student, staff, and community perceptions for literacy instruction
Phase 3	
*Participant practice	Reflection Journal

FEBRUARY	
2 Hours Phase 4	→ Explore the beliefs, practices, and policies that contribute to inequity in literacy achievement for learners (focused on high-poverty students) → Explore student, staff, and community perceptions for literacy instruction (high-poverty learners)
*Participant practice	Reflection Journal, practice coaching with prompts for dialogue.

MARCH	
2 Hours Phase 4	→ Cultural proficiency and the brain: Stereotypes and biases → Begin to develop a coaching framework to examine the issues raised in training sessions for the local school
*Participant practice	Reflection Journal, reflect on framework

April	
2 Hours Phase 4	→ Mindsets and the power of the word "yet" → Complete coaching framework for local school
*Participant Practice	Reflection Journal, practice coaching with framework

May - ACTION PLAN	
2 Hours	➔ Develop action plan for school based initiatives: change in policies, actions, and behaviors for literacy instruction of students
Phase 5	Action planning

School Implementation	
Ongoing	➔ Review and revise action plan for school based initiatives based on local setting needs: change in policies, actions, and behaviors for literacy instruction of students
Phase 5	Collaboration with school leadership teams

Literacy Coaching for Equity

Literacy Specialist Training for
Inclusive Literacy Professional Coaching

Formative Evaluation

Professional Development Evaluation Form

Formative Evaluation

*1. Workshop Title

Literacy Coaching for Equity

*2. Please rate the following-place an X in the box:

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am satisfied with the content of the sessions					
Handouts, web links, videos, and other materials were engaging					
Time in the professional development was sufficient to allow learning and practicing new concepts					
The PD sessions were well planned and interactive					
The presenters were effective					
The atmosphere was enthusiastic, interesting, and conducive to a collegial professional exchange					
Content and strategies are useful in my work					

*4. How prepared do you feel to implement equity literacy coaching at your school?

[text box]

*5. How has this training prepared you to lead others in equity work?

[text box]

6. How has this training changed your ideas about coaching practices?

[text box]

7. How has this training impacted your beliefs about teaching literacy?

[text box]

8. How do you plan to use these practices in your school community?

[text box]

9. What other content would you like to see included in the second half of these trainings?

[text box]

10. Additional comments:

[text box]

Literacy Coaching for Equity

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Summative Evaluation

Professional Development Evaluation Form

Summative Evaluation

*1. Workshop Title

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Handouts, web links, videos and other materials were engaging					
Time in the professional development was sufficient to allow learning and practicing new concepts					
The PD sessions were well planned and interactive					
The presenters were effective					
The atmosphere was enthusiastic, interesting, and conducive to a collegial professional exchange					
Content and strategies are useful in my work					

*4. How did the materials that were provided support your facilitation of instructional coaching?

*5. How did the content and objectives meet your learning needs?

[text box]

6. How have you implemented equity and literacy coaching in your local school?

[text box]

7. What successes from literacy coaching for equity have you seen at your local school?

[text box]

8. What evidence or data from student learning can you share that depicts success?

[text box]

9. What further support is needed?

[text box]

10. What challenges to full instructional equity for literacy coaching still exist at your local school?

[text box]

11. Additional comments:

[text box]

Literacy Coaching for Equity

Literacy Specialist Training for
Inclusive Literacy Professional Coaching

Presenter Notes

Literacy Coaching for Equity

Literacy Specialist Training for
Inclusive Literacy Professional Coaching

Presenter Notes

<u>Overview</u>

The materials and links listed in the PowerPoint serve to address the professional development content. With the direction of the lead facilitator, consultant facilitators are free to adapt content to meet the needs of the adult learner participants. Content and learning task adaptation must meet the objectives listed for each.

<u>Retreat</u>

- **Materials**
    - **PPT slides**
    - **Syllabus**
    - **Journals for reflection**

- **Procedures**
    - **Review slides with participants**
    - **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- **Considerations**
    - **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
    - **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
    - **Model and encourage risk-taking**

<u>September</u>

- **Materials**
    - **PPT slides**
    - **Syllabus**
    - **Journals**
    - ***Culture Questionnaire - Copied for each participant***
    - **Materials to design diversity wheels (construction paper, paper, post its, markers, etc.)**

- **Procedures**
  - o **Review slides with participants**
  - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- **Considerations**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
  - o **Model and encourage risk-taking**
  - o **Presenters should consider developing a model of the diversity wheel**
  - o **Presenters should consider demonstrating cultural questionnaire conversation to stimulate dialogue for participants**

October

- **Materials**
  - o **PPT slides**
  - o **Syllabus**
  - o **Copy of disposition rating scale adapted from Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones (2013) for each participant**
  - o **Journals for reflection**

- **Procedures**
  - o **Review slides with participants**
  - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- **Considerations**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
  - o **Practice coaching techniques prior to presentation and modeling**
  - o **Model and encourage risk-taking**

November

- **Materials**
  - o **PPT slides**
  - o **Syllabus**
  - o *Five Why's Worksheet-copied for each participant*
  - o **Journals for reflection**

- **Procedures**
  - o **Review slides with participants**
  - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**
  - o **Choices, Beliefs, and Actions Activity - Engage participants in reviewing how choices, beliefs, and actions are interconnected. One way to do this is to think about a thanksgiving menu. Why do we choose to have turkey? What beliefs contribute to it? What actions do you take on Thanksgiving holiday as a result of these beliefs? What is another way to look at this? Is there a different narrative or perspective that someone else has?**

- **Considerations**
    - o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
    - o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
    - o **Model and encourage risk-taking**

December

- **Materials**
    - o **PPT slides**
    - o **Sample literacy formal and informal assessments for review and discussion**
    - o **Syllabus**
    - o **Journals for reflection**

- **Procedures**
    - o **Review slides with participants**
    - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- **Considerations**
    - o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
    - o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
    - o **Model and encourage risk-taking**

Formative Evaluation

- **Materials**
    - o **Formative evaluation – electronic version**

- **Procedures**
    - o **Provide time for participants to complete assessment**
    - o **Collect assessments and collect data**
    - o **Analyze data to adapt and adjust training where needed**
    - o **Design a way to share data with participants at next session**

January

- **Materials**
    - o **PPT slides**
    - o **Syllabus**
    - o **Poster paper and markers for brainstorm lists**
    - o **Journals for reflection**

- **Procedures**
    - o **Review slides with participants**
    - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- **Considerations**
    - o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
    - o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**

- o **Model and encourage risk-taking**

February

- • **Materials**
  - o **PPT slides**
  - o **Syllabus**
  - o **Journals for reflection**

- • **Procedures**
  - o **Review Slides with participants**
  - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- • **Considerations**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
  - o **Model and encourage risk-taking**

March

- • **Materials**
  - o **PPT slides**
  - o **Syllabus**
  - o **Journals for reflection**

- • **Procedures**
  - o **Review slides with participants**
  - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- • **Considerations**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
  - o **Model and encourage risk-taking**
  - o **Consider collecting coaching framework models so they can be easily retrieved for next session**

April

- • **Materials**
  - o **PPT slides**
  - o **Syllabus**
  - o **Coaching framework models from previous month**
  - o **Journals for reflection**

- • **Procedures**
  - o **Review slides with participants**
  - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- • **Considerations**

- o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
- o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
- o **Model and encourage risk-taking**

May

- **Materials**
  - o **PPT slides**
  - o **Syllabus**
  - o **Action Plan templates (many are available online) - choose which ones appropriate for the learning needs of the participants**
  - o **Journals for reflection**
  - o **Certificates of Completion**

- **Procedures**
  - o **Review slides with participants**
  - o **Model activities prior to participant participation**

- **Considerations**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions and reflect often**
  - o **Offer opportunities for participants to work with several different partners**
  - o **Model and encourage risk-taking**
  - o **Consider leaving some time at the end of the session for a celebration (you may want to engage participants in some of the celebratory planning)**
  - o **Prepare certificates ahead of time (templates are available in word or online free of charge)**

Summative Evaluation

- **Materials**
  - o **Summative assessment-electronic version**

- **Procedures**
  - o **Provide summative assessment to participants**
  - o **Have participants complete Likert section**
  - o **Provide a due date for the questionnaire section (typically this is 3 months following the completion of training - during the beginning of the next school year)**
  - o **Provide submission directions**

- **Considerations**
  - o **Consider how you will require completion of the summative evaluation**
  - o **Consider methods to engage the most participants in completion**
  - o **Utilize assessment for analysis of effectiveness and possible adjustments to professional development program**

Literacy Coaching for Equity

Literacy Specialist Training for
Inclusive Literacy Professional Coaching

Materials

<u>Five Whys</u>

The Five Whys helps to drill down and identify the root cause of a problem. The question "why" is asked five (or more) times.

Why are our team meetings unproductive?

Answer: We spend too much time talking and sharing stories about things that happen in our classrooms.

Why do we spend too much time talking about personal things and sharing stories about things that happen in our classrooms?

Answer: We don't have a focus for our meetings.

Why don't we have a focus for our meetings?

Answer: We aren't organized with an agenda.

Why aren't we organized with an agenda?

Answer: We don't have a process for developing an agenda.

Why don't we have a process for developing an agenda?

Answer: We haven't taken time to look at our data to assess our needs.

What is Culture?

A Cultural Questionnaire and Discussion

Within the last 3 years, approximately how many movies have you seen depicting

_____?

Approximately how many books have you read concerning the thought and life-styles of

_____?

List some of the books written by _____ that you have read. Which

ones would you recommend? Why?

List periodicals with which you are familiar that are _____ in origin and

content.

What _____ events have you attended?

Do you have close friends who are _____?

Name three television shows depicting _____ and or themes about

their lives.

List 10 nationally known _____ and explain their achievements.

List and describe the achievement of five _____ in your local

community.

 How do you believe the learning style of _____ differs from that

of European American children?

What do you believe are some things that enhance a(n) _____ child's

performance in the classroom? Please elaborate.

Action Plan

Who	What	Resources	When

Literacy Coaching for Equity

PowerPoint Slides

Literacy Coaching for Equity

Literacy Specialist Training for

Inclusive Literacy Professional Coaching

Day 1-Retreat Agenda

- ➔ Introductions-Year Long Plan
- ➔ Cultural Proficiency-Definitions
- ➔ Telling your story
- ➔ Cultural structures in schools
- ➔ High-poverty implications for literacy learning
- ➔ Literacy coaching for equity
- ➔ Peer coaching strategies
- ➔ Self-reflection

Today's Objectives-We will…

- Review school year professional learning plan for this module
- Participate in trust builders to introduce and develop our learning community.
- Define and discuss common terms and definitions to build a shared professional language
- Reflect on your current school cultural structures and discuss implications for high-poverty learners
- Practice peer-coaching for equity
- Self-reflect on today's learning

Courage & Commitment

- You are about to embark on a courageous journey. One where you will routinely challenge your assumptions about teaching and learning. You may feel unsafe, inpatient, uncomfortable, or frustrated. Consider this all part of the learning process. The more open you are to learning, the more you will grow. By engaging and reflecting on these feelings, you will be able to support teachers in their own professional and personal growth as they strive to meet every student's literacy needs.

- Reflect-How can you commit to the courage needed for this work?

Today's Objectives-We will…

- Review school year professional learning plan for this module
- Participate in trust builders to introduce and develop our learning community.
- Define and discuss common terms and definitions to build a shared professional language
- Reflect on your current school cultural structures and discuss implications for high-poverty learners
- Practice peer-coaching for equity
- Self-reflect on today's learning

Risk Talk-"Thinking Partners"

- To develop the best possible learning community, we will ask you to engage in conversation often. We ask that you work to gather as much perspective from your colleagues as possible.
- We all come with a different story, different experiences and perspectives.
- Use the risk and relationship model in choosing your comfort level.

Risk-Talk

Job Role	Same or Similar	Different
Same Race	Low Risk	Moderate Risk
Different Race Group	Moderate Risk	High Risk

Adapted from: (McDermott, Raley, & Seyer-Ochi, 2009)

Safety Circle-Creating Comfortable Risk Zones

Trust and Ground Rules

- Complete modified Jigsaw to explore each ground rule
  - Take Risks
  - Stay Engaged
  - Speak your truth
  - Experience discomfort
  - Expect and accept non-closure

Adapted from: (Singleton, 2014)

Introductions & Trust Exercise
(Two Truths and a Lie)

- Introduce yourself by sharing two true statements about yourself
- Share one detail that isn't true
- Pair with others
- Try to guess what the two truths are
- Try to guess the lie
- Have fun

Year Long Plan

- Review the syllabus for long-range planning

- Pause and Reflect

- Questions?

Definitions

- Work with table partners to define the following:
    - What is culture?
    - What is nationality?
    - What is race?
    - What is ethnicity?
    - What is socio-economic status?

Definitions

- Culture-

- Nationality-

- Race-

- Ethnicity-

- Socio-economic status-

Stories

- Danger of a Single Story-Chimamanda Adichie~TED Talk

- https://www.ted.com/playlists/67/the_quest_to_end_poverty

    - Review videos

    - Use reflection tool to write your reactions to the video?

    - How does it relate to you and your school?

    - Now take a few moment to begin to draft your story?

Schools Structures

- What is the story of your literacy program?
- Who succeeds? Who does not? Why do you think this is so?
- Pause and Reflect Activity

Pause and Reflect on the following

- How do educators make judgements and decisions for the following?
  - High expectancy…
  - Low expectancy….
  - Punishment for misbehavior
  - Allocation of resources/time
  - Teaching talent

Pause and Reflect on the following

- We connect with students through many contexts-think about each context as it relates to your role as a literacy specialist
  - Race
  - Class
  - Gender
  - Sexual orientation
  - Language
  - Ability

School Structures-Implications for High-Poverty Learners

- Explore instructional beliefs
- Examine hidden biases
- Explore expectations and instructional behaviors
- Explore literacy instruction and how it may be influenced by core beliefs and values

Coaching for Equity-What does it mean?

- Challenging the status quo
- Courageous conversation based on data
- It's all about relationships
- Offering research based solutions

Coaching for Equity-Framework

- The process we will use in our coaching simulations:
  - Conversation Starters
  - Empowering Questions
  - Trust Moves
  - Positive and Constructive Dialogue
  - Closing

Adapted from: Singleton (2014)

Coaching Strategies

- Practice coaching session: prompts
  - These kids wont' learn
- Practice coaching session: reviewing data
  - Coaching review-achievement gap data from informal literacy assessments
  - Coaching review-

Simulated Coaching Experiences

- Work with a table partner
  - Partner A will coach 1st
  - Partner B will coach 2nd

Self-Reflection and Planning

- Work with your colleagues to discuss the following:
  - What did you learn today that challenged your thinking?
  - What did you learn that motivates and inspires you?
  - What did you experience that disagreed with your values?
  - What is one thing you can do tomorrow to lead others?

September-Focus Areas

- Examination of our own teaching and learning values
- Analysis of school institutional culture and its impacts on literacy achievement
- Coaching Implications for school institutional culture

September: Objectives-Today we will…

- Complete a cultural questionnaire and discuss the importance examination of values

- Analyze institutional culture by designing dimensions of diversity

- Determine coaching implications for each tool

What is Culture Questionnaire

- Review questionnaire and answer questions

- Discuss responses in your table group

- What implications does this have for coaching teachers of reading?

Diversity Wheel

- Review diversity wheel models on pinterest
  https://www.pinterest.com/pin/2744449747706929/

- Design your own wheel that best represents your school or classroom instruction as well as what you believe about teaching and learning

- Share your wheel with others and discuss coaching implications

Pause and Reflect

- How can you use these tools to coach teachers in planning and instructional delivery?

- What will you add to your coaching repertoire as a result of today's session?

October-Focus Areas

- Instructional Tools for coaching equity
- Coaching as a culturally proficient leader
- Leading teams in text and material selection

October: Objectives-Today we will…

- Explore tools that will help us coach professionals for equity in literacy
- Explore our cultural proficiency and discuss how our proficiency influences coaching
- Learn how to lead teaching teams in effective decision making for text selection.

Coaching Tools

- Review coaching article:
  http://www.ncte.org/library/nctefiles/resources/journals/vm/0124-may05/vm0124coaches.pdf
- Complete the disposition rating scale
- Discuss in teams your thoughts and feelings about this work
- Participate in coaching modeling and practice-Taking a learning stance

Coaching-Taking a Learning Stance

- Participate in coaching modeling and practice-Taking a learning stance
- With a "thinking" partner
  - Choose a facilitator and mentee (you will alternate roles-20 Minutes each)
  - The facilitator will be the coach and the mentee will take on the personality of a staff member who is hesitant about instructional coaching. The mentee also has shared with you that they are nervous about this process.
  - Facilitators-use the disposition guide as a conversation starter
  - Coach-Use the Coaching for Equity Framework

Cultural Proficiency and the Coach

- Reflect on the cultural proficiency scale for your organization (Excerpted from: Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2013)

- Where would you place your organization?

- Amongst your teams discuss how you can employ the coaching methods to enhance the cultural proficiency of your staff

Text Selection

- Text selection procedures for lessons
- Using an equity lens in text selection
- Coaching for text selection that is equitable-beliefs influence choices

Coaching Practice

- Coaching practice-please choose *Cultural Proficiency Continuum* or *Text Selection* as your conversation starter.
- With a "thinking" partner
  - Choose a facilitator and mentee (you will alternate roles-20 Minutes each)
  - The facilitator will be the coach and the mentee will take on the personality of a staff member open to instructional coaching. The mentee also has shared with you that they think that equity work is valuable.
  - Facilitators-use your choice of conversation starters
  - Coach-Use the Coaching for Equity Framework

Pause and Reflect

- Coaching practice-Using the sample coaching practice, engage in a coaching session with your cohort-please choose one lens to focus on
  - Cultural Proficiency Continuum
  - Text Selection
- Pause and reflect
  - Do you feel confident to try this coaching practice at your school setting?
  - Why or why not?

November-Focus Areas

- Measuring our school cultural proficiency and readiness
- Cultural Proficiency and the Achievement Gap: Impact on Instruction
- Coaching for examination of perspectives

November: Objectives-Today we will…

- Reflect on and discuss school cultural proficiency and readiness and use each other as sources of knowledge to help our schools begin the journey
- Define Achievement Gaps and determine the impact on the instructional climate of schools
- Practice coaching sessions for examination of perspectives

School Readiness

- Open discussion on school readiness
- Prompts for discussion
  - What do you see as your learning community strengths/weakness in cultural proficiency?
  - What will be the greatest challenges?
  - How ready do you think staff is to look at literacy achievement through an equity lens?
- What can literacy coaches do to help learning communities get ready?

Achievement Gaps

- What are achievement gaps?
- Why do they exist?
- What can we do about them?
- How do achievement gaps and the beliefs educators have about them impact the instructional climate of a literacy classroom?

Coaching-Examining Perspectives

- Coaching to uncover perspectives and beliefs-The five whys
- Using data to prompt conversation-Data-based conversation and coaching
- Making collaborative plans of action-Choices/Beliefs/Actions Activity

Coaching-Examining Perspectives

- With a "thinking" partner
    - Choose a facilitator and mentee (you will alternate roles-20 Minutes each)
    - The facilitator will be the coach and the mentee will take on the personality of a staff member open to instructional coaching. The mentee also has shared with you that they think that equity work is valuable.
    - Facilitators-use school based data and the five whys as your conversation starter
    - Coach-Use the Coaching for Equity Framework

Pause and Reflect

- How could you use "The five whys" in your work?
- How would data enhance coaching conversations?
- What are your collaborative strengths? Weaknesses?
- What are some next steps?

December-Focus Areas

- Cultural Proficiency-Coaching for student literacy assessment
- Cultural Proficiency-Coaching for writing instruction

December: Objectives-Today we will…

- Review and practice coaching strategies for cultural proficiency in literacy assessment design and analysis

- Review and practice coaching strategies for cultural proficiency in literacy writing instruction and planning

- Complete a formative evaluation of the professional learning experience.

Coaching-Assessment

- Reviewing assessments for bias
- Making sure assessment measures the appropriate literacy skills
- Creating common formative assessments
- Answer the questions:
  - What do we want our students to be able to do?
  - How will we know they can do it?
  - What do we do if the already know it?
  - What will we do if they haven't learned it?

Coaching-Writing Instruction

- 30 Ideas to get us started:
  http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/922
- Mechanics
- Craft
- Writing strategies
- Student writing struggles

Coaching-Writing/Assessment

- With a "thinking" partner
  - Choose a facilitator and mentee (you will alternate roles-20 Minutes each)
  - The facilitator will be the coach and the mentee will take on the personality of a resistant staff member to instructional coaching. The mentee also has shared with you that they think that equity is a waste of time.
  - Facilitators-writing tools or assessments as your conversation starter
  - Coach-Use the Coaching for Equity Framework

Pause and Reflect

- What surprised you about assessment design and implementation?

- How will you use your new learning about literacy assessment to further your coaching skills?

- How will you use the writing information to support teachers in improved instruction?

Formative Evaluation

- Complete formative evaluation

January-Focus Areas

- Explore beliefs and practices that schools unconsciously implement that contribute to inequities

- Explore policies that contribute to inequity in literacy achievement for learners

- Explore student, staff, and community perceptions for literacy instruction

Reviewing School Practices

- Brainstorm some school culture norms

- Brainstorm some classroom instructional norms

- List some hidden norms (example-Girls get called on more than boys).

- Examine your lists and compare with others at your tables

- How do these norms benefit students? Which students? Why?

- How do these norms

Reviewing Policy

- Review sample classroom reading/writing syllabus or curriculum doc.
- Do you see any elements of bias or inequity?
- Where?
- Why?
- How do we confront this?

Learning Community Member Perceptions

- You may be able to identify areas of implicit or explicit bias that undermines the performance of students, but other learning community members may have difficulty with this type of analysis and self reflection.
- Our jobs as coach is to lead others to their own analysis of these instructional factors
- How can we begin the conversation?

Learning Community Member Perceptions

View video
https://www.ted.com/talks/linda_cliatt_wayman_how_to_fix_a_broken_school_lead_fearlessly_love_hard

Learning Community Member Perceptions

- Choose a "thinking" partner
    - How did this principal address race and poverty?
    - What did she believe? What was her perception?
    - How did she challenge others…the status quo?
    - What elements can you use to support others…to coach?

Learning Community Member Perceptions

- Create a Position
  - Reject color blindness
  - Race matters
  - Poverty does not innately impact a child's ability to learn

Learning Community Member Perceptions

- Create an Approach
  - Identify and discuss problems
  - Identify and discuss possible causes
  - Identify possible solutions
  - Create a plan of action

Pause and Reflect

- What are your thoughts, feelings, and concerns regarding today's content?
- How can you support the leadership in your school in creating a *position*?
- What coaching implications result from your learning today?

February-Agenda

- Explore the beliefs, practices, and policies that contribute to inequity in literacy achievement for learners (focused on high-poverty students)
- Explore student, staff, and community perceptions for literacy instruction (high-poverty learners)

February: Objectives-Today we will…

- Participate in an activator to review and rediscover our thoughts about school policy, change, and literacy achievement.

- Participate in practice coaching sessions to develop our repertoire in challenging institutional norms and perceptions that may perpetuate inequity in literacy instruction.

Activator-Video Review and Reflect

- https://www.ted.com/talks/geoffrey_canada_our_failing_schools_enough_is_enough

- https://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_heffernan_dare_to_disagree

Coaching-Using the Video as a Start to a Conversation

- With a "thinking" partner
  - Choose a facilitator and mentee (you will alternate roles-20 Minutes each)
  - The facilitator will be the coach and the mentee will take on the personality of a resistant staff member to instructional coaching. The mentee also has shared with you that they think that equity is a waste of time.
  - Facilitators-use the video as your conversation starter
  - Coach-Use the Coaching for Equity Framework

March-Focus Areas

- Explore Cultural Proficiency and the Brain (Stereotypes and Biases)
- Begin to develop a local school based coaching framework to examine the issues raised in training sessions for the local school

March: Objective-Today we will…

- Read and reflect on an article about the brain and bias
- Use current research to develop local school based coaching framework to discuss subconscious bias during coaching sessions

Brain and Bias

- Review the following article about brain and bias
- http://www.kornferry.com/institute/understanding-bias-and-brain
- Discuss with "thinking" partner
- What implications does this have for instructional coaching

Disrupting Bias

- Disrupting Bias-What we can do as coaches

- Review the following article:

http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol12/1206-leslie.aspx?utm_source=ascdexpress&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Express-12-06

- Discuss implications

Creating Coaching Schedules and Frameworks

- Working with your "thinking" partner design coaching schedules and frameworks to implement in schools

- Model (this is one online model-you may search the web for more)

http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol12/1206-leslie.aspx?utm_source=ascdexpress&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Express-12-06

April-Focus Areas

- The Power of Yet
- Complete coaching framework for local school

April: Objectives-Today We Will

- Review "The Power of Yet" and discuss coaching implications for equity
- Complete development of coaching framework for local school

The Power of Yet

- Review Dweck (2006)-Mindsets as a coaching tool
- Watch video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_X0mgOOSpLU
- Implications? Thoughts?
- Disrupting Silence-Review some of these questions to help coach those who are not ready "yet". (Access link below)

http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol12/1206-gibson.aspx?utm_source=ascdexpress&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Express-12-06
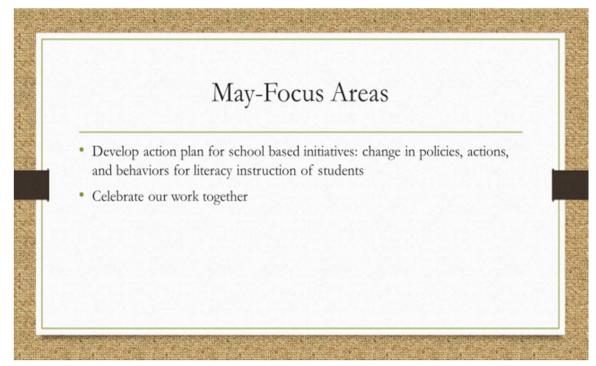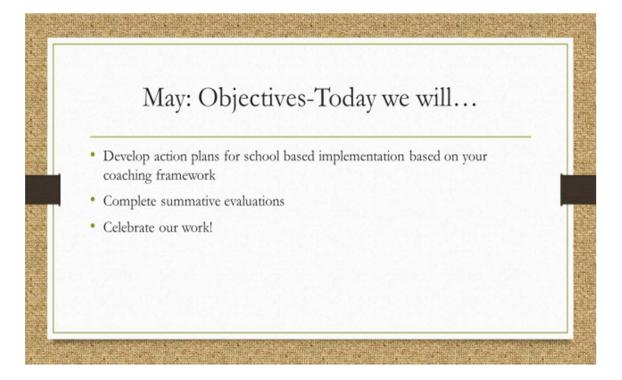
Complete Framework

- Complete framework that we began last session
- Facilitators are available to support

May-Focus Areas

- Develop action plan for school based initiatives: change in policies, actions, and behaviors for literacy instruction of students

- Celebrate our work together

May: Objectives-Today we will…

- Develop action plans for school based implementation based on your coaching framework

- Complete summative evaluations

- Celebrate our work!

Action Planning

- Action Plan (SMART GOALS)
- Who, What, When (Where do you begin?)
- Supports
- Timelines
- Outcomes

Conclusion

- Review and revise action plan for school based initiatives based on local setting needs: change in policies, actions, and behaviors for literacy instruction of students

Celebration

- Certificates of completion

Summative Evaluation

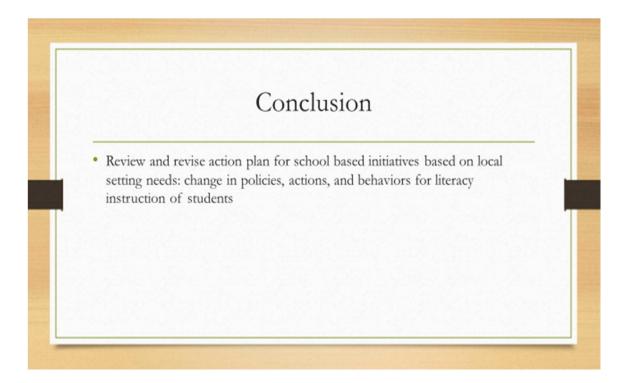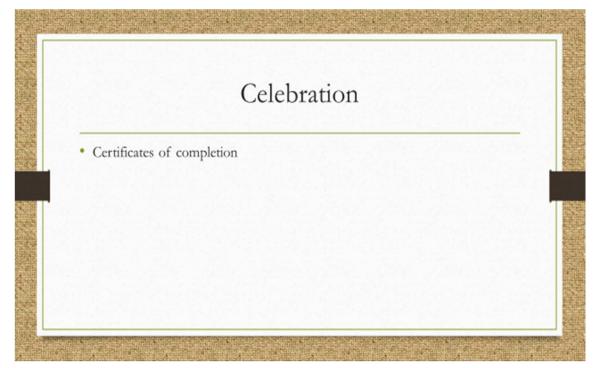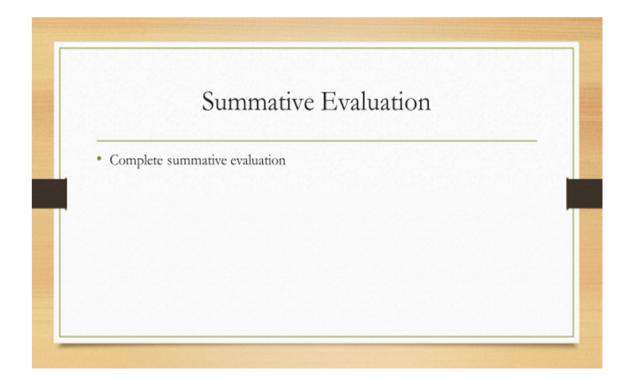- Complete summative evaluation

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol for the Principal at the Study Site

Interview Protocol Form

Project: Examining principal and teacher perceptions of literacy instruction for high-poverty students

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Interviewer _____

Interviewee _____

Consent Obtained? _____

Notes to interviewee:
Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping grow all of our professional practice.

Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed

Approximate length of interview: 30 to 60 Minutes

Purpose of research: Examine the perceptions of the campus principal and teachers at the sampled setting to determine best practices in meeting high-poverty student literacy needs.

RQ 1: What are the campus principal's perceptions of the best practices that contribute to high levels of literacy achievement for students in poverty?

1. Approximately, what percentage of your students would be considered high-poverty?

2. Does this create a unique set of needs related to literacy (reading and writing) for these students?

3. What specific instructional strategies have you observed teachers use to meet these unique needs?

4. How do the strategies used with high-poverty students differ from those used with non-poverty students?

5. Which of the high-poverty strategies have you observed to be the most effective? Please name as many as you wish.

6. Why do you find these particular practices to be the most effective?

7. Can you share some specific examples (no student names) of how these particular practices have led to literacy growth with your high-poverty students?

RQ 3: What are the campus principal's perceptions of the systems and structures that influence high-level literacy instruction for students?

8. What leadership strategies have you implemented to meet the literacy needs of these students? Examples might be the allocation of resources, allocation of personnel, scheduling, staff training, etc.

9. Which of these supports has been the most helpful to instruction?

10. Can you share some examples (no student names) of how these supports have helped students?

11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about how your learning community has achieved success in teaching reading and writing to high-poverty students?

Response from Interviewee:

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Teachers at the Study Site

Interview Protocol Form

Project: Examining principal and teacher perceptions of literacy instruction for high-poverty students

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Interviewer _____

Interviewee _____

Consent Obtained? ____

Notes to interviewee:
Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping grow all of our professional practice.

Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed

Approximate length of interview: 30 to 60 minutes

Purpose of research: Examine the perceptions of the campus principal and teachers at the sampled setting to determine best practices in meeting high-poverty student literacy needs.

RQ 2: What are the teachers' perceptions of the best practices that contribute to high

levels of literacy achievement for students in poverty?

1. Approximately, what percentage of your students would be considered high-

   poverty?

2. Does this create a unique set of needs related to literacy (reading and writing)

   for these students?

3. Do you use specific instructional strategies to meet these unique needs? If so, what are they?

4. How do the strategies you use with your high-poverty students differ from those you use with non-poverty students?

5. Which of the high-poverty strategies do you find to be the most effective? Please name as many as you wish.

6. Why do you find these particular practices to be the most effective?

7. Can you share some specific examples (no student names) of how these particular practices have led to literacy growth with your high-poverty students?

RQ 4: What are the teachers' perceptions of the systems and structures that influence high-level literacy instruction for students?

8. How has your campus leadership helped you in meeting the literacy needs of these students? Examples of ways might be resources, personnel, scheduling, training, etc.

9. Which of these supports has been the most helpful to you in your classroom?

10. Can you share some examples (no student names) of how these supports have helped students?

11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about how you have achieved success in teaching reading and writing to high-poverty students?

Response from Interviewee

Appendix D: Codes for Campus Principal's Perceptions of Microfactors that Influence

Literacy Instruction

Codes	Codes continued
Decoding	Cultural Competence
Writing about reading	Small group instruction
Vocabulary acquisition	Comprehension strategies
Conversational moves	Co-teaching
Strategic discourse instruction	Individual attention
Purposeful conversation	Classroom Expectations
Student Connections	Student Expectations
Teacher Beliefs	
Teacher and Family Trust	
High student expectations	
Phonetic awareness	
Fluency intervention	
Differentiation	
Student efficacy	
Equitable strategies	
Conceptual experience	
Student Ownership	
Phoneme instruction	
Instructional Strategy for Literacy	
Guided Reading	
Reading Comprehension	
Listening Comprehension	
Technology literacy	

Appendix E: Codes for Teachers' Perceptions of Microfactors that Influence Literacy

Instruction

_____

Codes	Codes continued
Decoding	Language literacy
Writing about reading	Small group instruction
Vocabulary acquisition	Comprehension strategies
Purposeful conversation	Co-teaching
Knowing students	Maximized instructional time
Connecting with students	Classroom culture
Backfilling instruction	Questioning
Analyzing formative data	Clarifying
Strategic discourse instruction	Literature circles
Purposeful conversation	Visual representations
Student expectations	Feedback
Student and family trust	
High student expectations	
Phonetic awareness	
Fluency	
High frequency words	
Differentiation	
Student efficacy	
Equitable strategies	
Student ownership	
Phoneme instruction	
Guided reading	
Hot seats	
Reading comprehension	
Listening comprehension	
Technology	

Appendix F: Codes for Campus Principal's Perceptions of Macrofactors that Influence

Literacy Instruction

Codes	Codes continued
Collaborative practice	Instructional coaching
Professional learning	Peer coaching
Shared leadership	Specialist coaching
Data analysis	Trust
Data-based decision making	Relationships
Sociolinguistics	Shared leadership
Positive school culture	
Social positioning	
Accountability	
Shared ownership in school climate	
Self-reflection	
Knowledge of students	
Student culture	
Leadership	
Culture of kindness	
Experiential factors	
Shared leadership	
Literacy specialist expertise	
Cultural competence	
Extra-curricular structures	
Technology	
Digital learning	
Student ownership	
Supervisory feedback	
Culture of learning	
Leadership collaboration	

Appendix G: Codes for Teachers' Perceptions of Macrofactors that Influence Literacy

Instruction

_____

Codes	Codes continued
Collaborative practice	Instructional Coaching
Professional learning	Peer coaching
Shared leadership	Specialist coaching
Collective decision making	School Improvement Plan
Data analysis	Trust
Data-based decision making	Relationships with staff
Positive classroom culture	
Schedule for PD	
Choice in professional learning	
Shared ownership in school climate	
Self-reflection	
Knowledge of students	
Student culture	
Literacy specialist expertise	
Cultural competence	
Extra-curricular structures	
Technology	
Digital learning	
Student ownership	
Supervisory feedback	
Peer feedback	
Culture of learning	